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# What kind of 'anti-capitalism'? From Seattle to London

**T**he protests around last week's World Trade Organisation summit in Seattle and the linked demonstrations around the globe underlined the profound weakness of working class politics as the millennium draws to a close.

There were anti-WTO protests in India, France, the US, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Canada, Australia, Pakistan, Holland, Argentina, Colombia, Bolivia, Bangladesh and elsewhere. While most appeared to be relatively small and low-key, the dramatic events in Seattle itself, along with violent clashes outside London's Euston station, attracted considerable media attention and the enthusiastic and practically uncritical support of most sections of the left.

Of course, there is no question that we must defend all those arrested by the rampaging police thugs. These filth were so brutal in Seattle that even the likes of Glenys Kinnock were moved to protest. In addition, we must raise the broader point about self-defence for our protests. We have consistently argued that the attacks of the police - or provocations which provide aid to them emanating from within our own ranks - must be countered by organised defence corps drawn from and accountable to our movement. The police should be made to think twice before deciding to launch violent forays into such gatherings.

However, it is vital that we sharply differentiate ourselves from the *politics* that informed these demonstrations. The bulk of the left have simply rejoiced at the fact that many of the protesters identified themselves with ideas that are in opposition to the way the world is currently organised: "The main trend in Seattle ... was firmly anti-capitalist," *Socialist Worker* assured us, and cited the comment of one marcher that "this feels like the 1960s" (December 4).

In fact, this is nothing like the 1960s, socially or politically. In that decade, world capitalism was confronted by a seemingly viable alternative - 'official communism' - organised as it was in mass parties and holding state power

in huge areas of the world. So strong was the apparent challenge from this ostensibly implacable enemy and from strong indigenous workers' movements that it actually prompted a remoulding of ruling class ideology post-World War II. Impressionistic theories of the 'convergence' of capitalism and 'socialism' abounded. Shallow nonsense was peddled that western societies were 'post-capitalist', that state capitalist 'planning' agencies such as Britain's National Economic Development Council (1962) and the dominance of interventionist Keynesian demand management economics somehow meant that capitalism had been superseded as a system.

The contrast with today could not be more stark. With the defeat and disintegration of working class politics since the 1970s - even in the distorted forms of 'official communism' and Labourite social democracy - the ideologues of capitalism feel no particular need for subterfuge or reticence. The class war general Thatcher rode into the field - and won - emboldened with the battle cry 'For capitalism!' The bourgeois commentator Anthony Sampson noted that by the time of the 1992 election, "Free market capitalism was again enthroned, with no idea powerful enough to challenge it" (A Sampson *The essential anatomy of Britain*, London 1993, p5).

Capitalism today is unabashed. The absence of a world alternative to its rule allows it to present itself unashamedly under its own brazen flag. Thus, it is more understandable that spontaneously generated protests against the effects of its rule should more easily adopt the mantle of *anti-capitalism*. Marxists should not simply take these pronouncements at face value, however.

The people on the streets of Seattle - well over 100,000 according to some estimates - are understandably recoiling from the ravages of the unbridled market, the growing inequities of the world economy. But what is their answer? It is simply inadequate - and miserably tailist - to just say that the "trade unionists, campaigners against

third world debt and greens ... recognise that the real enemy of the environment, both human and natural, is multinational capital ..." (*Workers Power* December-January). Nor can it simply be blandly stated that "the growth of links between groupings such as Reclaim the Streets and trade unionists working on the tube ... is a welcome development". The question is, whose politics are going to be hegemonic? Whose vision of the future will win?

Since the ascent of Marxism and its huge influence in the workers' movement, 'anti-capitalism' has been associated with an *advanced* form of thought, a *progressive* critique of the existing state of affairs. It has not always been so. Marx writes in the *Communist Manifesto* of *reactionary* socialisms - feudal, even *bourgeois* - that issued protests against the development of modern society. In much the same way, the 'anti-capitalism' on display on the streets last week was a protest against the *advanced* features of contemporary capitalism - primarily the developing global economy.

This took a variety of forms amongst the mix of protestors outside the Seattle summit. Legitimate protests against child labour and lack of workers' rights in countries such as China were easily marshalled by trade union bureaucrats as ammunition to support chauvinist calls for protectionism. The president of the AFL-CIO, John Sweeney, postured that he would oppose normal trade relations with China "until there are some rules that the Chinese are going to play by" (Reuters, December 5). Inside the WTO meeting, the attempt to link labour standards to trade negotiations was the repeated theme of US representatives. Understandably, this was vehemently opposed by underdeveloped countries, whose one advantage in relation to wealthier western competitors is cheap labour.

The other characteristic theme of the protest - even more pronounced in the much smaller demonstration on November 30 in London - was a strand of liberal/anarchistic green 'third



WTO protests: hands tied

worldism'. In truth, it is stretching the meaning of the term almost to breaking point to define this element as "anti-capitalist". Certainly, such groups oppose the barbarism associated with the rapid development of the global economy and the human misery and havoc it is wreaking in poorer countries. But for many, the answer appears to lie in a return to 'local economies', self-sufficient communities trading *limited* ranges of commodities in a *limited* geographical area.

Such a perverse and inherently anti-human vision frankly has more in common with Proudhonism, a revolt against *big* capitalist property in defence of *small* capitalist property. In the proposals of many of today's anti-debt, pro-'third world' campaigners it is easy to hear echoes of his reactionary and utopian notion of the organisation under capitalism of a "just exchange" between individual commodity producers.

It is symptomatic of the degeneration of contemporary working class politics that the left has sought to tail such petty bourgeois 'socialism', to make its own programme practically indistinguishable from these strands. A recent pre-conference document of the Socialist Workers Party urged its members to make recruits amongst liberal campaigners for the cancellation of third world debt, with whom the SWP was "90%" in agreement. This

is precisely *not* the way for revolutionaries to intervene in such movements.

We do not argue for a sectarian boycott of these sorts of protests. Far from it. It is the glaring *absence* of a vigorous and effective communist intervention that allows the politics of the petty bourgeoisie to win hegemony unchallenged. If communists were able to engage effectively in the movement of Russian workers shaped by the politics of Father Gapon in the opening years of this century, why would we exclude ourselves from the tens of thousands of people repulsed by world capitalism on the march today? Our key point is that we need to cut across their current ideas with a *communist* programme, not just a tame left version of the backward-looking politics that currently befuddle people's heads.

The near universal, uncritical chorus of approval with which the left greeted the WTO protests underlines to Marxists the huge scale of the task facing us. The project of 'anti-capitalism' has to be rescued from the distorted, petty bourgeois form it assumes in the protests of green radicals and 'third world' campaigners. It has to be organically fused once again with the only body in society with the power and interest to win genuine socialism, the world's working class ●

Mark Fischer



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

## Livingstone

Comrade Jack Conrad concludes his draft theses, 'The Labour Party and Livingstone', with the observation, "Those who back Livingstone's right to stand but cannot bring themselves to vote for him as mayor if he is chosen by the Labour Party electoral college in London are either hopeless doctrinaires or put the interests of their sect above the interests of the working class as a whole" (*Weekly Worker* November 18).

This must have made shocking, or at least embarrassing, reading for a number of prominent *Weekly Worker* journalists who had forthrightly expressed exactly that view which is now denounced as hopeless doctrine and/or sectarianism by comrade Conrad. Notable amongst these contributions were those over the signatures of Maurice Bernal (June 24), Alan Fox (April 22) and Marcus Larsen (February 18). With one exception - comrade Larsen (*Weekly Worker* December 2) - none of these comrades have publicly resiled from their previously stated positions.

Indeed, prior to an apparent fulcrum date of October 21, the coverage of this issue contained exclusively the view that, whatever the outcome of the Labour Party mayoral candidacy saga, it was essential for the left to fight for a socialist candidacy for mayor of London. With the exception of a handful of letters and comrade Barry Biddulph's article (December 2), the tide has now fully turned. In addition to the draft theses, we have had four front-page leads, all hammering the 'back Livingstone' theme. Surely the *Weekly Worker* owes a duty to its readership and to the working class to bring forward a thorough explanation when 180 degree changes occur in the prevailing line which is appearing in its columns. No intelligent reader is going to be satisfied with being told that earlier writers were all doctrinaires or sectarians.

Comrade Fox, in the article I have cited above, made an observation that is absolutely critical to the proper prosecution of this 'back Livingstone' debate and no honest working class newspaper can afford to let such challenges slide under the carpet: "Previously the CPGB did not rule out completely the possibility of giving Livingstone critical support in the unlikely event of his name being on the ballot form for mayor next year. But we said: 'The left should consider backing him only if he breaks with Blair and stands as a socialist' (February 18). Having now placed himself well and truly in the camp of social-imperialism however, Livingstone has ruled himself out as a candidate that any socialist, democrat or anti-imperialist could even think of supporting." I doubt very much that this comrade is cringing so much under the lash of comrade Conrad's theses that he has become unable to write. Comrade editor, such a principled objection is a bullet that must be bitten. I urge you to press this comrade to re-enter this debate.

I have previously written to the *Weekly Worker* expressing my support for the position espoused by comrade Maurice Bernal in the contribution I have cited above. The comrade's starting point was that of course the Communist Party should support Livingstone's democratic right to seek nomination and stand for Labour against the Tories, if this is what the Labour membership in London wants. The struggle for democracy in a workers' party - albeit in this case, a bourgeois workers' party, as comrade Conrad correctly characterises the Labour Party in the theses - is an essential arena for communist intervention. But I see no paradox, let alone a "lunatic paradox", as comrade Michael Malkin does (*Weekly*

*Worker* November 4), in backing Livingstone's efforts to win the candidacy ballot, but refusing to call upon the working class to vote for him as mayor of London if he stands for election next year on the official New Labour programme of anti-working class attacks.

The appearance of Livingstone's name on the ballot paper, as Labour Party candidate, will indeed have represented a major defeat for Tony Blair. But it is precisely in the context of such a defeat that the Communist Party should be seeking to prepare further working class victories, to stretch the class's political horizons as far as we possibly can. Surely, in such an event, our immediate perspectives would include the posing of the prospect of getting rid of the bourgeois workers' party in favour of a workers' party. This is hardly consistent with urging the working class to vote for itself to continue being attacked, just because the Labour Party name on the ballot paper is a man Tony Blair hates.

**John Pearson**  
Stockport

## SSP left

On the subject of Tom Delargy's article, 'Action stations' (*Weekly Worker* December 2), I could write a little or I could write a lot. I will opt for the former.

The Scottish Socialist Party is a non-revolutionary organisation. That means that revolutionaries are not guaranteed long life and prosperity in its ranks. It is also subject to pressures from the right, which might be another reason for carving out the left.

On the other hand, there were no 'gatekeepers' barring the entrance to SSP membership, unlike the Socialist Labour Party. At least in Falkirk and Lothian, CWI members seem happy enough to debate with members of other tendencies. Finally, members of dissident leftwing currents in the SSP are not very numerous and there are few signs that the CWI majority is worried by them, though a tendency to accommodate the right is noticeable.

The SSP conference (end of February 2000) may give indications of where things are going. I would say that if dissidents are well entrenched in the SSP (and there has been a fair amount of time to build a base in it) they will not easily be silenced or expelled.

**James Robertson**  
Linlithgow

## Trotsky

In his article, 'Permanent and national revolution' (*Weekly Worker* December 2), Gerry Downing is reluctant to criticise a serious political mistake by Trotsky when he failed to carry out Lenin's request to attack Stalin at the 12th Congress in 1923 for his policy on the national question in the Soviet Union, his role in Rabkin and his rude and disloyal behaviour as general secretary. Without even a cursory glance at the literature dealing with the issues he prefers to find excuses for Trotsky's political error.

Gerry suggests that Stalin's power over the apparatus was clear to Trotsky. This seems to imply the left opposition was over before it began. Stalin and Stalinism were inevitable. But Stalin's power was far from complete or dominant at this point. Hence the troika of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin. This was why Trotsky himself, some years later, described the 12th Congress as the last real congress of the Bolshevik Party. Indeed, the bureaucracy was on the defensive and offered token concessions to avert the danger of information about Lenin's *Testament* from being distributed at the 12th Congress or made public knowledge.

Trotsky made a rotten deal with Stalin. In return for paper concessions on inner-party democracy, which could and would be snatched away later, when the danger was averted, Trotsky agreed to stay silent and not raise the issue at the congress. Nor did he attempt to oppose Stalin's re-appointment as general secretary, despite Lenin's clear wishes to have him removed. The *Testament* was political dynamite. All Trotsky had to do was light the fuse and stand back. Instead, Trotsky left Preobrazhensky and Krupskaya to raise the issue in the party.

The reason Trotsky shared Lenin's view but not his will to remove Stalin was Trotsky's old political weakness: conciliationism. For years prior to 1917 Trotsky's conciliationism isolated him from the Bolsheviks and prevented him from forging a party to implement the strategy of permanent revolution. Now it returned. The reason Trotsky did not place a bomb under Stalin at the 12th Congress was not the belief that Stalin was in total control of the party, but an underestimation of the power of Stalin in particular and the party bureaucracy in general. He imagined Stalin would be compelled to honour the agreement or make real concessions. Instead of looking closely at the historically unprecedented situation of the degeneration of a socialist revolution outside advanced capitalism, Trotsky was haunted by the past and the French revolution - unlike Lenin, who had begun to recognise the bureaucratic danger. But as he was to concede at the end of the decade, Trotsky's use of metaphors from the French revolution served to confuse rather than clarify the issues of bureaucratic degeneration. It was a full decade before Trotsky finally recognised that the year 1924 was the beginning of the Soviet Thermidor.

Nor was it a case of one political error from Trotsky. There was pattern of conciliationism in the 1920s. He compromised on the concept of permanent revolution in the Left Opposition. Instead he adopted a version of the failed strategy of democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. He even publicly repudiated the theory of permanent revolution. And he did not openly apply the theory of permanent revolution in China until after the massacre of workers in Shanghai in 1927. Even in the higher reaches of the party, knowledge of his personal opposition to CCP entry into the Koumintang was not well known.

In addition, Trotsky fudged the issue of factions and generally kept his head down or failed to openly challenge Stalin and the bureaucracy, in the crucial period after Lenin's death. Trotsky did not raise the issue of socialism in one country until 1926. Surprisingly the political courage to raise the question was first demonstrated by Zinoviev in 1924. Gerry seems to agree with Trotsky's conciliationism or the seeking of unity with the party apparatus and Stalin. But Trotsky's political friend, Adolf Joffe, offered a better judgement of Trotsky's politics during this period, when he wrote, in his suicide note at the end of this terrible decade, that Trotsky lacked Lenin's unbending political will, his unwillingness to yield when he was convinced he was on the correct political path.

**Barry Biddulph**  
London

## Assimilation

Maybe we have another clue as to the origins of comrade Downing's anti-British-Irish, pro-Irish nationalist politics. In his latest contribution he seems to be pushing the novel doctrine - for Marxists anyway - that we should be indifferent, or at least very casual, as to whether the differ-

ent nationalities and peoples of our world merge or not (*Weekly Worker* December 2).

In defence of this, comrade Downing enthusiastically recommends the "correct" and "remarkably concise understanding of the national question" by the Bundist Vladimir Medem in 1904, reminding us at the same time that the "Jewish Bund had developed the most progressive and dialectical understanding of the national question, but the Bolsheviks were too little engaged with them to learn it".

According to the admiring comrade Downing, Medem espoused the theory of "national neutralism". This theory "allowed history to decide the eventual outcome" of the national question. What is more, Medem's "view of a nation was not territorial", but was "culturally and linguistic solely". Comrade Downing approvingly quotes Medem as saying: "We are neutral. We are not against assimilation; we are not against anti-assimilation."

This strikes me as antagonistic to Marxism. Communism by scientific definition is an organically global society which is stateless, classless, countryless and nationless. Therefore communists cannot be "neutral". We are positively and militantly for the assimilation of all peoples. But assimilation has to be on a democratic and voluntary basis. If not, any such 'union' will sooner or later turn into its opposite. The revolutionary struggle for consistent democracy is the optimum for genuine and full assimilation.

As comrade Downing is not "against anti-assimilation", then forcibly herding the one million British-Irish population into his ideal "all-Irish secular, democratic workers' republic" (*Weekly Worker* November 18) is not necessarily a detrimental step after all. If that is how "history" - and Gerry Downing of course - has decided to resolve the national question in Ireland, then just who the hell are the British-Irish to say otherwise?

**John Dart**  
Bristol

## Oh dear

Steve Riley demands that I pinpoint when the poles of oppression were reversed in Northern Ireland; when it was that the protestant people ceased to be the oppressor and became the oppressed (Letters, December 2). He goes on to ask how these "endangered unionists" are raising the demand for the right to secede.

Secede from what, exactly? The comrade might have noticed that there is no united Ireland for them to secede from. Indeed, by their continued and fervent support for unionists parties the British-Irish have made clear their desire to remain separate from the rest of Ireland. As for the reversal of the poles of oppression, clearly this has not taken place. And nowhere have I claimed otherwise. If the comrade wishes to take up cudgels against me I suggest he avoids making an idiot of himself tilting at imaginary windmills.

The point I made in my letter of November 25 was simple. There are clear similarities between events in Kosova and the situation in Ireland. Within the territory of Kosova there existed a Serb minority: some 200,000 people, I believe. The KLA was fighting a war of national liberation against Serb oppression. The struggle was just and revolutionaries were duty-bound to support its democratic content (with or without the intervention of imperialism).

Within the island of Ireland there exists a British-Irish minority: some 900,000 people. The IRA/Sinn Féin waged a national liberation struggle against the undemocratic partition of Ireland and the national oppression of the catholic-Irish minority within

the Six Counties statelet. The struggle was just and revolutionaries were duty-bound to support its democratic content.

Clear so far, comrade?

Returning to the concrete. If we are to believe the reports, the victorious KLA is now directing sporadic pogromist terror against the Serb and Roma minority. Tens of thousands have fled. Relations between the Serb and Albanian Kosovar working classes have been forced even lower. Self-liberation, comrade, demands the greatest unity of all workers.

The KLA seeks to defend the territorial integrity of its new state, not the democratic rights of the Serb and Roma minorities. It does not seek to include these workers in a revolutionary struggle against the rump Yugoslav state. Hardly surprising: the KLA was not and is not conducting the class war.

Perhaps comrade Riley can explain how the forced unity of Ireland, the purely formal unity of the Irish working class, will hasten the socialist dawn. And perhaps he can also declare his position on the actions of the KLA since the expulsion of the Serb army from Kosova. Why was the nationalist programme of the KLA inadequate in Kosova while that of the IRA/Sinn Féin is perfectly adequate in Ireland? And while you're at it, comrade, can you please explain the shortcomings - if indeed you see any - in struggles for national liberation when these are led by bourgeois and petty bourgeois forces?

Put the Action Man away, comrade Riley. And the balaclava. And the shibboleths. Time to start thinking.

**Andy Hannah**  
South London

## Bigots

It is becoming increasingly obvious to me that the Jewish/Israel question is the Achilles' heel of the British left. This is a great shame.

In reply to comrade Ian Donovan's trenchant criticism of the 'Statement on the British-Irish' by John Stone, Gerry Downing *et al* (*Weekly Worker* November 18), comrade Steve Riley says that "it is more than cogent" to "compare the situation of white slave-owners to protestant supremacists" - ie, the British-Irish. The comrade adds: "In fact we could also include the Zionists and the supremacist Afrikaners in the same round-up of bigots."

What an interesting conclusion. The entire historically-constituted Northern Ireland protestant population are defined, and dismissed, as "protestant supremacists". So therefore the same must go for the Jewish population within the existing territory of Israel, who must be nothing but "bigots" and "supremacists" - an irredeemably reactionary people.

**Brian Dee**  
Birmingham

## Socialist war

It is hard not to agree with comrade Andy Hannah when he says that the positions codified in the 'Statement on the British-Irish' (*Weekly Worker* November 18) amount to nothing more than pseudo-Marxist "nationalist crap" (Letters *Weekly Worker* November 25).

One of the authors, comrade John Stone, has recently treated us to an example of this nationalist-Trotskyism ('Defending revolutionary democracy' *Weekly Worker* November 4). Here comrade Stone states that communists were "obliged to support" the fascist Argentinean regime's "attempt to recover its former



islands" - ie, the Falklands, with its Argentinean population of zero. Why should we care if 2,000 Falkland Islanders are enslaved under fascist rule? After all, they are only "Kelpers".

What is more, comrade Stone euphorically tells us that "millions of Latin Americans were being mobilised in the streets" during the Falkland Island war - in support of the reactionary war aims of the Argentinean junta. The comrade also argues, with a hint of regret, that the junta "could have won the war", if only it had been interested in "transforming" the anti-British war "into a massive anti-imperialist struggle". Comrade Stone then ponders on how a victory for the anti-communist, CIA-backed Galtieri dictatorship "would not only have been a devastating blow against Thatcher, but would also have produced progressive radical change inside Argentina". How absolutely terrible of the CPGB to "to sacrifice the anti-imperialist struggle of tens of million of Argentineans and Latin Americans in order to defend a colonial outpost's loyalist population".

These sentiments are essentially a strain of Latin American/Argentinean nationalism. They are also demonstrably false. After the military defeat of the Galtieri regime, Argentinean society was wracked by political and social crisis, which quickly led to the downfall of the military junta and its replacement by a civilian/bourgeois democratic regime. (The same went for Iraq and Serbia, where military defeat instigated acute political turbulence and unrest.)

The wonderful irony of course is that the 'third worldist' views of comrade Stone are the exact obverse of those of groups like the Militant Tendency (now the Socialist Party). It argued during the Falklands Islands/Malvinas dispute that the labour movement should force a general election in order to return a Labour government which "could not just abandon the Falklanders" and "would continue the war on socialist lines". Sounds remarkably like an argument for "transforming" the anti-Argentinean war "into a massive anti-imperialist struggle" to me.

**Paul Greenaway**  
London

## IRA victory

The defeat of British imperialist positions in Ireland by the revolutionary national liberation war masterminded by Sinn Féin and the IRA has culminated in the humiliating climbdown by 'no surrender' colonialism and the launch at last of the completely new cross-border economic and political settlement for Ireland, effectively ending partition.

The *Weekly Worker's* conclusion, however, is: "Does this mean that the deal is a step forward in the interests of democracy and the working class? Clearly not" (December 2). Yet the same *Weekly Worker* article correctly first establishes some of the facts about the humbling of the colonialist-minded spheres of interest. Clearly the ruthless aim of the 30-year British imperialist police-military dictatorship in the occupied zone was to defeat the revolutionary national-liberation war fought by Sinn Féin and the IRA. Clearly it failed. Clearly the fall-back propaganda position was still to nevertheless try to make it look as if the IRA was surrendering. Clearly that failed too.

How can such colossal defeats for imperialist reaction not be seen as "a step forward in the interests of democracy and the working class"?

It is farcical for the *Weekly Worker* to parrot Trimble's embarrassed, dishonest excuses to *The Daily Telegraph* that "Sinn Féin is helping to run the Northern Ireland statelet". It temporarily survives in name only. Far from "the revolutionary situation for 30 years" having been "successfully negated ... by a deal which institu-

tionalises sectarian divisions", as the *Weekly Worker's* Trotskyist defeatism continues, the IRA and Sinn Féin's self-determination nationalist revolution has spectacularly triumphed.

Of course, the only possible immediate outcome is a bourgeois-nationalist 'solution' which in the long run is obviously no solution at all to the problems of the ordinary masses in a period of global imperialist-market crisis; but it was a national liberation struggle which the forces of imperialism did their utmost to defeat and frustrate for 30 years with the most vicious military, political and propaganda war that British imperialism could mount.

Communists should have been working wholeheartedly for that defeat and should welcome it now, explaining its tremendous importance to British workers in freeing them from the age-old racist superiority towards the Irish that dominated them for so long. Only the defeat of unionist domination could achieve that. Only a nationalist-Irish-revolutionary movement could have provided it.

As Marx, Engels and Lenin cheered on every anti-imperialist blow struck by Irish national revolt in the past, so will real communists cheer on this latest and greatest triumph by these national liberation revolutionaries.

**Royston Bull**  
Stockport

## Praxis

Phil Sharpe makes some acute observations on Delphi's philosophical musings (*Weekly Worker* December 2). Unfortunately (and the blame may lie with Delphi's lack of clarity), Phil seems to miss the main points. He concludes that Delphi "refuses to recognise that we are still only at the beginning of our necessary philosophical tasks: the development of revolutionary, dialectical philosophy". Far from refusing to recognise these tasks, herein lies the exact point that Delphi is trying to make. We do indeed need a "philosophical revolution" and "a return to the pre-1845 stance on Marx".

But then Phil proceeds to do what he accuses Delphi of and claims "an inherent truth of his philosophical stance" by stating that it must be premised "on the understanding that philosophy expresses the revolutionary character of the proletariat". Delphi must inquire, what is this "revolutionary character" separate from concrete, historical, practical revolutionary action - ie, praxis? How does it manifest itself? If, as Phil seems to be saying, it is predicated on a role assigned to the proletariat by the laws of capitalist development, then what is the scientific basis or historical evidence of this law?

The example Phil selects, in referring to "the importance and significance of the law of value", underlines this problem. There is in fact no scientific proof of the 'law of value'. The labour theory of value cannot be quantified and there is no mathematical way of demonstrating its application. And, more importantly, even if there was, how does being conversant with the labour theory of value enable socialists to intervene more effectively in the class struggle and bring the emancipation of the working class any closer? This does not mean that the theory of value does not reflect a fundamental objective truth about the real world - that all wealth is appropriated from nature, or created as commodities, by social human labour and that exploitation is based on the expropriation of the products of such labour. It is this reality, the alienation of the worker from creative work and the alienation of the product of labour from the producer, which is of vital significance in the struggle against capitalism.

It is not sufficient that socialist revolutionaries base opposition to capitalism merely on assumptions that

it does not work - due to the tendency of the rate of profit to decline, the immiserisation of the proletariat or any other inherent trend - but also on the ethical principle, that it is wrong, unjust, dehumanising, etc and that the growing alienation of the worker from the commodity, the reification of labour power, the crippling of human relationships and creativity, are potent arguments for a socialist transformation of the world.

Now Phil is quite right, as was Simon Harvey the previous week, that utopian projects can become a recipe for autocratic and authoritarian systems. Praxis, however, necessarily entails the self-liberation of oppressed peoples through actual struggle against immediate and concrete forms of oppression. Such struggles can only have a utopian expression which engenders and is engendered by the spirit of praxis. Historically, utopian figureheads - Owen, Saint-Simon, Cabet, Fourier, etc - have tended to be dogmatists and system-builders, rather than exponents of praxis, of direct engagement in the living struggle against capitalism.

In fact the high point of Owenism in terms of its influence in the British working class was in the period 1832-1834, when Owen was involved in organising the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union and the National Regeneration Society for an eight-hour day, both bodies which advocated direct working class strike action. Where they did fail was to have a clear goal of an alternative society to capitalism. Conversely the Owenism of the late 1830s/early 40s, which Engels was familiar with and helped shape his and Marx's criticisms of utopian socialism, had a clear vision of an alternative society, but not of the practical means of achieving it via the class struggle. For example Owen (but by no means all his followers) did not even regard the Chartists' struggle for political democracy as relevant to achieving social change - in fact it was seen as a diversion.

Therefore, to cut a long historical epic short, adding a utopian, ethical, humanist dimension to our vision of socialism is not synonymous with having an autocratic, reactionary attitude to the class struggle. Instead, they are vital ingredients, which do not deny the existence of objective laws of social development but, instead, complement them, enabling people to better grasp the nature of oppression and exploitation and see that there is a viable alternative.

We must also not confuse praxis with pragmatism. Central to praxis is struggle, change, empowerment of the oppressed. Pragmatism entails capitulation to *Realpolitik*, accommodation with the *status quo*, the establishment of new power structures. Praxis involves grappling with the changing nature of reality, while attempting to enact desired changes - it is a struggle for freedom. Pragmatism means accepting a reality which is perceived as inevitable and unchangeable, a reality governed by determined scientific laws - a bowing to necessity.

Hopefully this has clarified a little what Delphi means by the socialism of praxis and has earned an acquittal on Phil Sharpe's primary and most stinging charge - that of dogmatism.

**Delphi**

## Stalin's error

According to Simon Harvey of the SLP (*Weekly Worker* November 25), Bolshevism in the USSR can only be said to have failed in that "it allowed itself to be perverted and turned into its opposite from within. The Bolsheviks knew that without international revolution failure was inevitable. The fact that it did not happen ... does not disprove the Bolshevik method."

In this odd formulation, he bestows Bolshevism with a monolithic mind and he forgets that socialist revolu-

tion is a world process which can always fail at particular points and moments in its history.

According to Harvey, it was not the failure of revolutions outside Russia which left the Bolsheviks with no alternative but to introduce socialism in a single, backward country. Apparently, it was Stalin, who "persuaded himself" of that possibility and, in introducing it "from above", created "Stalinite bureaucratic socialism".

It seems that there are other examples of Harvey's 'bureaucratic socialism' and I would suggest that this could well include 'Leninite bureaucratic socialism'. After all, after correctly ensuring the demise of the libertarian party through the permanent banning of factions, Lenin still retained his faction within the leadership of the party, replete with its voluntarism, and it was, in fact, this political and organisational practice which Stalin inherited from Lenin.

'Socialism in a single country', firstly with Lenin and then with Stalin, was the only choice open to the Bolsheviks, until it was superseded by 'socialism in several countries'. The crucial political and theoretical error on the part of Stalin was not this. It was his claim, in the early 1930s, that the final victory of socialism had been achieved in the USSR and, consequent to that, his notion that it was possible to build 'communism in one country'.

The voluntarist practice of factions in the leadership has been a characteristic not only of communist parties, but of reformist parties throughout this century. With Scargill having a foot in both camps, it is hardly surprising that Harvey's SLP should be in such a dismal state of disarray.

**Dave Norman**  
London

## Non-violence

The riots against the WTO are a welcome development - the American left mobilising, according to *The Guardian*.

Although the anarchists got the headlines, the demo did attract support from the labour unions. Sadly this is support that could be lost due to the anarchist minority who feel it is their duty to 'fight the power' - it all just amounts to sensationalist headlines and the obscuring of the reasons behind the protest, and cracked skulls and big bruises for the anarchists - "Anarchism is a game at which the police can beat you," as George Bernard Shaw put it.

The British political culture is such that violence does not win comrades and influence people, and I would suggest that demonstrations that remain non-violent are taken more seriously: all that 'by any means necessary' rhetoric alienates more people from the cause than it attracts.

I am not a pacifist, but the propaganda value of peaceful anti-capitalist demonstrators being attacked by the police is considerably greater than that of a violent response at the moment.

**Steve Green**  
Hertfordshire

## Jesus and the rise of christianity

Joint meeting organised by CPGB and Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Speaker: Jack Conrad

Thursday December 16, 7.30pm, ULU, Malet Street (nearest tube: Goodge Street), Room 2E.

## action

### ■ CPGB seminars

**London:** Sunday December 12, 5pm - 'The modern state, part 2', using Ellen Meiksins Wood's *The pristine culture of capitalism* as a study guide.

Sunday December 19, 5pm - Jack Conrad on 'Jesus and the origins of christianity'

**Manchester:** Monday December 13, 7.30pm - 'Contemporary international developments', in the series on crisis.

E-mail: CPGB2@aol.com.

### ■ Support Tameside

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

### ■ Free Zoor

Demonstration for the release of Zoor Shah, jailed for twenty years for killing an abusive partner. Wednesday December 15, home office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, 12.30-2pm.

### ■ Mumia must live!

Saturday December 11 - vigil at US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1, 2pm, to mark the 18th anniversary of Mumia's arrest.

### ■ Privatisation

Ealing Trades Council public meeting, with Bob Crow (RMT), John Lister (London Health Emergency) and speaker from air traffic control. Saturday December 11, 7.30pm, Ealing Town Hall.

### ■ Hands off Chechnya

Organising meeting to oppose Russian war: Saturday December 11, 2pm, Tower 1 room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London.

### ■ Republican communist

Quarterly discussion journal of the Republican Communist Network. £2.50 inc p&p. 1 year (4 issues): £10 inc p&p. From RC, c/o PO Box 6773, Dundee, DD1 1YL. Cheques payable to 'Record of Letter'.

### ■ Party wills

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

### ■ Hackney Socialist Alliance

To get involved, contact Box 22, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS.

### ■ Brent Socialist Alliance

To get involved, contact Galaxy News, Box 100, 37 Walm Lane, London NW2 4QU, or ring 0181-451 0616.

## Revolutionary Democratic Group

If you want to contact the RDG you can write to: PO Box 6773 Dundee, DD1 1YL

## Morning Star and Chechnya

# Russia's apologists

**C**hechnya's people are facing decimation at the hands of the Russian military. The capital of the Chechen 'Republic Ichkeria', Grozny, is nearly surrounded and under threat of attack by the massed forces of Russia's army.

On Monday of this week Russian jets dropped leaflets over Grozny ordering its civilian population to leave within five days ... or else. *The Times* (December 7) reported the leaflet's text as concluding with the chilling words, "Those who remain will be viewed as terrorists and will be destroyed by artillery and aviation. The countdown has started." Already the situation of Grozny's remaining population is perilous, as shells and bombs rain down: according to Guy Willoughby, an aid agency worker, "The city's an inferno" (*Today* BBC Radio 4, December 7). If the Russian army makes good on its threats we shall witness civilian casualties on an unprecedented scale in Grozny, a city the size of York or Swindon.

Despite the overwhelming and long-standing desire of Chechnya's one million people for independence, Russia insists that Chechnya remains an integral part of the Russian Federation. Russian nationalists, including the so-called 'communists', demand that the old semi-colonial relationship revived by Stalin and continued by his heirs should continue. Chechnya has oil - Russian Federation oil - and Russia will have it come what may. Chechnya's people are as nothing to these xenophobes and Great Russian chauvinists, whose military wants to punish the Chechens for losses in the 1994-6 war and for this week's casualties outside Grozny.

The *Guardian's* reporter in Chervlyennaya, Chechnya got it from

*The victims of Russian barbarism become magically transformed into 'tools of imperialism' and thus deserving of all the atrocities*

the horse's mouth: general Valeriy Shpak told him that Chechnya would be under Russian military rule for years to come. Shpak's political boss, Nikolay Koshman, deputy prime minister in charge of Chechnya, was even more forthright, saying: "There's no need to fear a partisan war. Chechnya is a subject of the Russian federation and will obey Russian laws" (*The Guardian* December 6).

Into this arena of denial of the Chechen people's democratic rights steps the Communist Party of Britain's *Morning Star* and its correspondent Jef Bossuyt, whose feature article

'Capital's grab for gas and oil' was published at the end of last week (December 2). The *Morning Star* vaunts the feature with the strapline, "Behind the war in Chechnya is the West's object of controlling oil supplies. Jef Bossuyt reports on capitalism's 'balkanisation' of the Caucasus."

We are treated to the following incredible justification for Russia's present attack on the Chechens, played up prominently by the *Morning Star* as a key element of his argument: "Ever since tsar Peter the Great incorporated Dagestan and other nearby ethnic regions into the Russian empire in 1722, Chechnya has been used as a crowbar to force a way into Russia from the south." What political bankruptcy. A more Slavophile statement would be difficult to concoct. Turning the truth on its head, the victims of Russian barbarism become magically transformed into 'tools of imperialism' and thus deserving of all the atrocities committed against them. Presumably Russia is considered worthy of support because it is sometimes at loggerheads with the leading imperialist powers. There is also, of course, more than a little nostalgia for the old USSR in all this. If this is anti-imperialism, then it's porcine aviator time.

Not content with this vile statement of justification, however, the *Morning Star* article revises history. First, the Chechens are apparently themselves to blame for being overrun by imperialist troops during the intervention against the Russian Revolution in 1919. Second, and criminally, Bossuyt passes over in silence the deportation of the Chechens under Stalin during World War II, instead slandering this whole people under the pretext that some joined Nazi vol-

unteer units (the justification used by Stalin for the deportations). He paints contemporary Chechens as bandits, islamists, and receiving weapons and training from "pro-western Arab regimes". Clearly in Bossuyt's eyes the Chechens are no better than vermin.

The article refuses to countenance even one mention of the rights of the Chechen people to self-determination - a disgraceful stance for 'communists', but par for the course for the *Morning Star*. It labels the Chechens "separatists", as if this is sufficient to deny them, after all the bloodshed at the hands of Russian forces, the right to form their own state. For three years the Chechens have established *de facto* independence. Yet Bossuyt, a member of the ultra-Stalinist Workers Party of Belgium, whose views are clearly in line with the CPB on this question, issues what amounts to a call for recolonisation.

It seems that any threat to the Russian state as presently constituted represents for Bossuyt, and presumably the *Morning Star* (since it gives his article so much prominence), the *ne plus ultra* which such 'communists' would defend to the death. Why? According to the article, merely because what the "Chechen warlords" want "fits perfectly the plans of US and European oil multinationals to control the petroleum fields and oil pipelines in the Caucasus and eliminate the pipelines on Russian territory." Yet everyone (except these paragons of perception, it seems) knows that Britain, USA, etc would be only too pleased if Russia could sort out its problems and impose a regional stability for capitalist development - as would Russia's present rulers, of course. Duplicitous as ever,

Bossuyt even complains that "since [Chechen warlord] Basayev invaded Dagestan last August, not a single petroleum company intends to invest there". This really is giving the real game away and destroys the article's whole premise.

Bossuyt goes on to regale us with a definition of 'anti-imperialism' that has more affinity with the desperate strivings of tinpot dictators anxious to curry favour among the less than politically literate. It is certainly not the genuine anti-imperialism supported and promoted by the international working class.

The *Morning Star*, presenting Bossuyt's article in a way that makes clear its agreement, is giving support to Russia's reactionary rulers. These 'communists' are clearly only in favour of self-determination for *states*, not nations or national entities. In other words only territories, not peoples, have rights. The *Star* stance, exemplifies the national socialism from above that became an article of faith for 'official communism'. The logic of oxymoronic 'socialism in one country' leads, as it did in Russia, to socialist revolution's opposite, to national chauvinism, the enslavement of peoples, and a denial of democracy in a new prison house of nations. The working class is grotesquely ill-served by such apologists.

The *Morning Star's* unfettered acceptance of Bossuyt's article marks another spiral down into the red-brown pit. The article first appeared in *Solidaire* (October 13 1999), the weekly paper of the WPB, a rabidly Stalinophile organisation with fraternal links to the Socialist Labour Party's Harpal Brar and his Communist Workers Association ●

**Jim Gilbert**

**T**he process of selecting a candidate for mayor of London is highlighting tensions within both main political parties. The Millbank machine's unsuccessful efforts to exclude Ken Livingstone have shown the Labour leadership to be both ridiculous and ineffectual, and the strong support for Livingstone among party members demonstrates how shallow New Labour's roots in the party really are.

However, the Tory leadership is also having difficulty finding a candidate who is credible and 'on message'. William Hague's original favourite, Lord Archer of Weston-Super-Mare, had to withdraw after admitting he got a friend to lie in court during his libel trial in 1987. The Tories still suffer the effects of the sleaze which blighted the Major government.

On Monday the man Archer beat in the original poll of Tory members, Steven Norris, announced that he will again be a candidate for the Conservative nomination. The Tory leadership backs him, despite his public statements contradicting official Tory policy, in favour of the planned abolition of the notorious section 28 of the Local Government Act. Yet only four days earlier the shadow minister for London, Shaun Woodward, was sacked by the Tory leadership from the front bench for voicing identical opinions to Norris.

Section 28 prevents local councils from funding any project which could be interpreted as 'promoting' homosexuality. Crucially, it bans schools and

## Section 28

# Tory confusion

colleges from discussing homosexuality in the context of a 'normal' family relationship. It was passed by the Tory government under Margaret Thatcher in 1988, and has been the object of protest by gay rights activists and democrats ever since.

Last month the shadow cabinet voted to oppose the government's plans to repeal section 28, but the Tory Party is divided on this question, as it is on many others, not least the key question for British capital - the single currency. Shaun Woodward, who is a director of the children's charity ChildLine, opposes section 28 because it prevents teachers from taking action to protect teenagers from homophobic bullying in schools. Suicides among gay youngsters are significantly higher than for their heterosexual classmates, and section 28 obviously increases their vulnerability. It has also been shown to hamper education about safe sex and Aids.

Woodward was sacked for his refusal to conform to the party's policy opposing repeal of section 28. Steve Norris, in contrast, was not disciplined by the party for stating that he too will continue to oppose the law, which

he described as "totemistic, homophobic, and unworthy of the Conservative government that introduced it" (*The Guardian*, December 4). The difference was that Woodward was on the opposition front bench, whereas Norris is not subject to the same 'collective responsibility'. Interestingly, Teresa Gorman, who backs the Hague line, was excluded from the short list to select the party's candidate for mayor, leaving Norris a virtual certainty to be chosen. Clearly the Conservatives do not rate their chances in next May's poll - no big-name Hague supporter could be found to throw their hat into the ring.

Alongside the campaign to end the ban on gays in the military and the fight for an equal age of consent, opposition to section 28 is currently a central focus of the struggle for gay equality. Section 28 is as much a denial of equality as an unequal age of consent, in that it stigmatises those gays who choose to live in long-term, committed relationships and/or raise children. It insists that in law their relationships are not as valid as heterosexual unions. This is of course nonsense: thousands of gay men and

women are competent parents despite the obstacles they face.

In October a gay couple from Essex, Barry Drewitt and Tony Barlow, made legal history when they persuaded an American court to allow both their names to be entered as parents on the birth certificates of their twin children, who were carried by a surrogate mother. Reactionary opinion was naturally outraged at this violation of conventional morality. The fundamental source of all the bourgeois moralising about the sanctity of marriage and the value of the conventional nuclear family is that, from the point of view of capitalism, having working class children raised in this way by their biological parents has long been the cheapest and most efficient way to reproduce the labour power capitalism needs. Yet Drewitt and Barlow, who spent £200,000 on arranging the surrogate birth of their twins, are clearly wealthy enough to raise them without 'burdening' the capitalist state, and will doubtless love them as dearly as any other parent. The objections are a living demonstration of the way ideas based on social control - in this case the idea that only

married heterosexual couples can be 'good' or 'real' parents - assume a life of their own and in periods of rapid social change can actually act in contradiction to the purposes of the ruling class.

Of course, ideology catches up with reality eventually. Single parents are no longer frowned upon in Britain, and 'living in sin' is now the norm. Openly gay relationships too have gradually won acceptance amongst the bourgeoisie - section 28 could be seen as a Thatcherite attempt to hold back the tide. The New Labour establishment, while preaching the virtues of 'family values', nevertheless is prepared to tolerate minority lifestyles. Only the right of the Tory Party is stuck in the old anti-gay mould. William Hague demonstrates his weakness by pandering to this irrationality in opposing the repeal of section 28.

Michael Portillo's calculated comments at the 1997 Tory conference in Blackpool about the need for a kinder, more caring Conservatism demonstrates that he understands well that the Tories need to reconnect with the mainstream of public opinion if they are to have a chance of regaining power. But for the moment he is prepared to toe Hague's line. Although the party is divided and Hague's leadership looks precarious, Portillo has no interest in making his bid for the leadership just yet. He is biding his time, waiting for his opportunity after the inevitable Tory defeat at the next general election ●

**Mary Godwin**

## How did the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation get off the ground?

Gradually, I suppose. You could see the writing on the wall for some time over tube privatisation. The Tories were muttering about it. Labour was making out they were against it, claiming during the privatisation of British Rail that it would be the 'poll tax on wheels'. Before the last election, they said that the railway system should be publicly owned.

When Labour was elected and started looking at options for privatisation, the first thing we had to do was to alert our own people. This is because trade unions in Britain are not politically oriented. But obviously, you've got to be, because that's where the problem is coming from.

The London Transport Regional Council (LTRC) of the RMT became focused on the issue of Labour's privatisation plans. The LTRC and branches in London started to campaign through the union and in cooperation with local trades councils. We did a lot of leafleting, petitions outside stations, and also organised some protests outside John Prescott's office in Victoria over various issues, particularly around the Acton works, which was facing its own variant of privatisation. They haven't yet been privatised, which is a partial victory for us.

About a year ago we decided to formalise our network by setting up a campaign which has been meeting monthly since then. The Campaign Against Tube Privatisation has attracted people from local trades councils, as well as various political activists, trade unionists - quite the broadest range of people involved in a campaign such as this that I've known about since goodness knows when.

### What has been the impact of the Paddington disaster?

That's been very recent. We had already been organising strikes around safety and privatisation and had some degree of success.

Part of the problem has been that the system of privatisation has been deliberately designed to confuse the issue. From the beginning Labour swore blind that what was being proposed wasn't privatisation - they said it was a 'third way', something completely different. But apart from that they are proposing separating out the infrastructure from the operating department. This allows them to claim that the system would still be run from the public sector.

But the other reason that they have done this is to divide the workforce. With this approach, they could pick off sections one at a time - first a threat to workers in engineering or in maintenance, with the threat to operating staff being more long-term.

This made it difficult for us to explain and mobilise workers. In particular, the Aslef union which is capable of taking industrial action and has done so from time to time, stayed out of our campaign. In fact, at the beginning, for quite a long time they did not even publicly say that they were against privatisation or admit that there was a problem.

### What is Aslef's relationship to the campaign now?

They aren't involved in the CATP. Possibly as a result of the campaigning by the LTRC, the Aslef union officials finally started some activity. Aslef has now set up a campaign - Listen to London - which we had hoped would become involved with the CATP, but is essentially a different campaign. But that is a big step forward, because they have actually committed some resources and money. And now all the three main rail unions (RMT, Aslef and TSSA) are publicly saying that they are against rail privatisation.

### What was the catalyst for this change in Aslef?

# Mass sentiment

**Oliver New** is chair of the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation and a London regional officer of the RMT. Marcus Larsen asked him about the CATP's decision to contest next May's Greater London Authority elections

Most probably, it was the election of [SLP member] Dave Rix as general secretary of Aslef. Before that, they weren't even saying they were against privatisation, whereas Rix is quite strongly opposed.

He got elected in reaction to the way in which the breaking up of the rail companies hit the rail drivers. Drivers did OK in terms of money, but due to the splintering of union strength Aslef were forced to give up quite a lot in terms of conditions, and that caused dissatisfaction among the rank and file.

In short, the election of Rix was a product of privatisation within the rail industry.

What I have covered here is hardly touching on problems of privatisation in the rail industry. Day-to-day problems of organising workers and trying to get workers to look at the big picture and unite together are things we need to talk about a lot more.

### Apart from elections, is there a strategy to involve passengers and broader forces outside the rail unions in this fight?

People have been giving out leaflets and petitioning the general public and we have usually got very positive responses - negative responses just aren't there. We were fully aware that the public were completely against it, we knew that from talking to people outside tube stations. But also, more recently, Listen to London carried out an opinion poll which officially confirmed what we already knew.

But you can't organise passengers as a group. There are millions of them scurrying around like ants in nest. It's similar to talk of organising consumers. Any movement like that has to be a mass sentiment from the passengers themselves. It wouldn't be for us to organise it - it's not feasible.

### What was behind the decision that led the CATP to stand in the elections for the Greater London Assembly?

Well, it's not possible for us to vote Labour, because they are privatising us, apart from Ken Livingstone, whom one could vote for. You'd be a bit of a fool to vote for somebody who's trying to privatise you. Livingstone wasn't making the running on tube privatisation at the time that we formed and moved towards an electoral challenge. But at that stage we were still trying to break through the barrier. The media were not covering the issue. So in a sense we thought that by standing for the GLA we could break the issue out into the public and break the press barrier on it.

### For the elections next May, do you think that standing on the issue of tube privatisation alone will weaken or strengthen the slate?

It's hard to say until the campaign gets going. If it captures the imagination and attracts whole layers of people, then that will be a strength. If it doesn't - and you have to remember we don't have a party machine - then we may not have a big impact.

But I think the CATP has the potential to make an impact. A lot of people didn't understand the centrality of transport as an issue in London - until the recent media interest anyway.



John Prescott - forced to retreat

Even before Thatcher abolished Livingstone's GLC, the first thing she did was to take transport out of its hands. Similarly, the current government - although it is putting some sort of London authority back - is trying to organise a fix on London underground before it does that.

### Events over the recent weeks have seen Blair and Prescott take away Railtrack's proposed monopoly for the public-private partnership of the Underground. What does this augur for the future in terms of the CATP's chances in the elections?

Withdrawing the proposed Railtrack franchise has certainly been a big blow to the government. There are no other companies capable of undertaking this business except for Railtrack. So they have all sorts of reasons for keeping Railtrack included. And because Railtrack is already there, they could sign something quite quickly. The government has been desperate to do this because they wanted something signed to take some bricks away from the bottom of the wall in the lead-up to the election in May. Now they will have to use some other ploy.

The trouble is that they are completely committed to it, even though no-one supports the process of privatisation but them. Some mainstream papers have argued that it is an ideological privatisation, but I see it as some sort of issue of ego.

### You could say that extending the PPP was one of New Labour's 1997 pledges.

But politicians can put forward their pledges in all sorts of ways. The PPP platform also contained a commitment to keeping the railways inside the public sector - which to me meant

something - yet it turns out to have been worth nothing. The PPP, which was a mystery to most people, is the bit that they really want to keep and is the bit that is going to steamroller over everything else.

### What do you think of Ken Livingstone's proposals to fund the underground through a New York-style bonds system - which is surely just another way to rely on private money?

Yes, it is private money - and in an ideal world you wouldn't rely on private money. But this is a different ball game. To have a publicly controlled railway that earns money on government terms is quite different to normal sort of privatisation. I'd rather not have it at all and for the government to come up with the dough. But bonds are an alternative to what we understand as privatisation.

One of driving forces behind all of this, in my view, is the Maastricht criteria for public spending around European economic and monetary union. They are just accounting tricks - they are desperate not to spend money outside public sector borrowing requirements.

So they are prepared to take more money out of the passenger's pocket - and run a more expensive public transport system in the long term to stay within the limits of public sector borrowing. It reminds me of the deals the World Trade Organisation and World Bank try to impose on third world countries - but this time they are trying to do it to Londoners.

### Isn't the government also concerned with the short term and building up an election war chest, especially given that Britain is well within the

### Maastricht criteria anyway?

Well maybe. But it is illogical if it is short-term, because by sticking to these spending limits, they are losing support in the lead-up to the next election.

### The CPGB supports the idea of a joint electoral slate between the CATP and the London Socialist Alliance. What do you think is the way forward?

Firstly, the CATP doesn't really have a position on this. We are not a political party with coherent views. We are quite a broad range of people, so I imagine there would be quite varied views on this issue. It's quite good if the left get together, but sometimes I think you need to get together to do something specific, not just for the sake of it.

Within the CATP, I think people just feel that we should crack on and get on with our decision to contest the election. Being trade unionists, you have to be a bit hard bitten at times.

I think there is a bit of impatience towards having prolonged political discussions. We haven't got much time to do that. We meet once a month and if you are going to do anything, each meeting has got to move on to more practicalities.

### Do you think the meetings of the CATP and LSA later on in December will lead to some concrete cooperation?

I don't know. We are just doing what we are doing. That approach may be a bit clumsy, but there you go.

### There is a point of view which contends that limiting your intervention to opposition to privatisation of the tube is too narrow a platform on which to build a broad fightback against Blair. The approach could be described as syndicalist, despite the break into the electoral field.

I'm not sure I understand your line of questioning. Our strategy is to do with how to stop tube privatisation, and you seem to be asking about something else. I don't really think we are thinking about it in some sort of sophisticated or coherent way.

### What further developments do you see beyond the elections on May 4?

I think you need to have a campaign that captures people's imagination, and it is too early yet to start dreaming about other issues. If it does capture the imagination and others get involved, then those people themselves will have something to say about what you do next.

### Are you feeling optimistic about winning the battle?

I don't know if we can knock it back, but it is certainly on the cards. I'm sure that the government, as well as various financial institutions, must be re-examining their options very seriously. I think that they will pay a heavy political price if they do insist on pressing on with tube privatisation. It is similar to times when employers won't give in on a strike, even if it will cost them more, just to make a point. In a sense they are being irrational.

We have already had a very big impact, and we just need to keep on keeping on ●



## Aufheben and state capitalism

# Vacuous definitions

Recent issues of the yearly magazine *Aufheben* have seen an interesting attempt to develop a coherent theory of the USSR from a left communist perspective.

The comrades have been working "towards a theory of the deformation of value under state capitalism" through a detailed critique of Leon Trotsky and Tony Cliff (1997), Hillel Ticktin (1998) and various Russian, German and Italian left-communist thinkers (1999). Although readers will have to wait until around autumn 2000 for a fully worked out theory, the relative breadth of theoretical issues that the *Aufheben* collective has chosen to address, and the manner in which its logic is developing, make an initial critique a worthwhile exercise.

The 1999 issue contains an analysis of the various state capitalist theories of the USSR that arose from the ultra-left elements that were initially attracted to, and subsequently repelled by, the Russian Revolution and the formation of the Comintern - the German/Dutch left, whose main theorists were Pannekoek and Gorter, and the Italian left current around Bordiga.

Gorter took as his point of departure the works of Rosa Luxemburg in which she had argued that the Russian Revolution had degenerated into a Bolshevik dictatorship over the Russian working class. Gorter, however, hinged his analysis on Russian backwardness and the concurrent minority status of the proletariat, which had forced the Bolsheviks into 'bourgeois' political and economic measures. Ruhle developed this analysis into what the *Aufheben* comrades correctly call a "semi-Menshevik and fatalistic interpretation" (*Aufheben* 1999, p36), moving from Gorter's dualistic viewpoint toward arguing that the revolution had been bourgeois in character from the very start - all that could be objectively achieved in Russia was a bourgeois revolution. It was from this national-centred perspective that the German/Dutch left sought to launch their critique of the developing productive relations of the Soviet Union in the 1934 *Theses on Bolshevism*.

Unfortunately this pedantic schematism was used as the source for a thoroughly erroneous critique. The *Theses* went considerably further than either Gorter and Ruhle in arguing that the Bolsheviks had intentionally carried out a bourgeois revolution. This dubious concoction of conspiracy and objectivism only serves to highlight further the false appreciation in the *Theses* of the Soviet economy (in the period roughly around the fruition of Stalin's first five-year plan) as resting "on the foundation of commodity production: it is conducted according to the viewpoint of capitalist profitability; it reveals a decidedly capitalist system of wages and speed-up; it has carried the refinements of capitalist rationalisation to the utmost limits" (cited in *ibid*).

This essentially formalist approach is effectively debunked by the *Aufheben* comrades: "The problems with grounding the accusation of state capitalism on the basis that all the capitalist categories continued to exist soon became apparent. To say that production was oriented to capitalist profitability seemed questionable, when the immediate aim seemed to be the production of use-values, particularly of means of production, with no concern for the immediate profitability of the enterprise. Also to say that goods were produced as commodities,

when it was state direction rather than their exchange value which seemed to determine what and how many goods were produced, also required more argument. While the state unquestionably seemed to be extracting and allocating surplus products based on the exploitation of surplus labour, to say that it took the form of surplus value seemed precisely a point of contention. It was these apparent differences between Russian and western capitalism that led them to use the terms of 'state capitalism' and 'state socialism' interchangeably" (*ibid* p37).

Despite this riposte to the fairly desperate reasoning of the German left, careful readers will notice the insertion of an escape clause. Whilst questioning the extension of concepts such as 'commodity' and 'exchange value' to production under Stalin, the sub-text of this passage is contained in the argument that such theoretical positions "required more argument". What we are witnessing here is a careful rearguard action on which to hang *Aufheben*'s developing theory of 'the deformation of value under state capitalism'.

This thrust becomes even more apparent when the article in question moves on to consider the perspective of the Italian left, and in particular the writings of Bordiga. The foundation of Bordiga's position was his concentration on the agrarian question in the Soviet Union. He disagreed profoundly with Preobrazhensky's emphasis in the 1920s on the clash between the 'socialist' state industrial sector and a petty 'capitalist' agrarian economy in the countryside. Bordiga suggested that the Russian Revolution could only attack productive tasks in an essentially bourgeois manner due to its agrarian backwardness and peripheral position in the world capitalist market in the decades preceding World War I (although Bordiga classed the 1917 revolution as 'proletarian' due to the political prerequisite represented by the Bolsheviks). Hence, Stalin's bureaucratic counterrevolution was, for Bordiga at least, premised on the clash between pre-capitalist and capitalist forms - forced collectivisation and the five-year plans being an expression of a primitive capitalist accumulation.

Again, whilst the *Aufheben* collective shows itself willing to confront Bordiga's erroneous conflation of the appearance of forms such as the commodity and money with claims that the state sector was governed by a functioning law of value, the tendency is to extrapolate fall-back positions on which to hang a 'state capitalist' theory of the USSR. Therefore the comrades prove to be distinctly enthusiastic in relation to Bordiga's argument that "Russia was ... a transitional society, but *transitional towards capitalism*. Far from having gone beyond capitalist laws and categories, the distinctiveness of Russian capitalism lay in its lack of full development" (*ibid* p41).

Some of the more substantial theoretical foundations of *Aufheben*'s yet to be completed presentation of 'the deformation of value under state capitalism' are elaborated in the 1998 issue, which contains a detailed analysis of Ticktin's writings on the Soviet Union, recognising that the theory of the Soviet Union as a 'non-mode of production' "provides a formidable challenge to any approach which sees the USSR as having been in some sense a capitalist system" (1998, p38).

Indeed, as we have seen above, *Aufheben* is more than adept at using elements of Ticktin's approach to debunk some of its state capitalist compatriots.

For Ticktin of course, Soviet society did not represent an immense accumulation of commodities: rather buying and selling was subordinated to the central plan, prices being set by the bureaucracy. Therefore, exchange value and the commodity did not exist as under capitalism - money essentially performed the role of an accounting device. The bureaucratic plan was formally concerned with the delivery of use-values, not with the pursuit of profit (although the bureaucracy certainly attempted to extract a surplus from the working class). However, the alienated circuit of state 'planning' in the USSR meant that the reality of Soviet society was endemic waste and chronic shortage. From these seeds sprouted the Soviet Union's eventual decline and fall in 1991.

In attempting to provide a substantive critique of Ticktin's outlook, the *Aufheben* comrades broach the important epistemological issue of the relation between form and content: "Ticktin himself has to admit that many categories of bourgeois political economy appeared to persist in the USSR. Categories such as 'money', 'prices', 'wages' and even 'profits'. In capitalism these categories are forms that express a real content even though they may obscure or deviate from this content. As such they are not merely illusions, but are real. Ticktin, however, fails to specify how he understands the relation between the essential relations of the political economy of the USSR and how these relations make their appearance, and is therefore unable to clarify the ontological status of such apparent forms as 'money', 'prices', 'wages' and 'profits'. Indeed, in his efforts to deny the capitalist nature of the USSR, Ticktin is pushed to the point where he has to imply that such categories are simply relics of capitalism, empty husks that have no real content. But, of course, if they have no real content, if they are purely nominal, how is it that they continue to persist?" (*ibid* p39).

Implicit in this passage is Marx's exposition of bourgeois ideology in *Capital*. The problem with using this 'ideal type' in such a fixed manner is that the actual historical circulation of ideology can have many different outcomes than the grounding of a mystification with its original, 'real' content. In that sense it is perfectly plausible for ideological forms to become empty husks (which is precisely what happened to aspects of Marxist theory inside the USSR) or for them to take on a *different* content. Thus money, stripped of its status as universal equivalent in the Soviet plan, became something akin to an accounting device, facilitating the circulation of dubious use-values. M-C-M becomes C-M-C. Simply put, that is the 'real' content behind the continued existence of the money form. To imply, as *Aufheben* crudely does, that just because forms commonly associated with capitalism persisted inside the USSR, then that is somehow an argument for a state capitalist analysis, is to prostitute oneself before formal logic. In reality it is *Aufheben* which fails to provide an ontological clarification of categories by its undialectical and scholastic reasoning.

These fundamental theoretical errors are carried over into *Aufheben*'s consideration of the wage form in the Soviet Union. The comrades argue that "for Marx the key to understanding the essential nature of the capitalist mode of production was the sale of the worker's labour-power and the consequent expropriation of surplus-labour in the *specific* social form of surplus-value by the class of capitalists" (my emphasis *ibid* p35), going on to note that for Ticktin workers in the USSR did not sell their labour-power, in that the wage was not a sufficient or exclusive means of reproducing the working class.

*Aufheben* attacks Ticktin for failing to grasp "the full complexities of the wage-form as it exists within the capitalist mode of production" (*ibid* p39), pointing to a consistent tension between the actuality of the wage-form and its real content - the sale of labour-power - under capitalism, an example being situations where the state intervenes (particularly in conditions of working class offensive action) to ensure the reproduction of labour-power. Following on from this, the comrades reason that just because the Soviet working class was able to resist "the full subsumption of labour-power to the commodity form" and assert considerable negative control in the workplace, it did "not necessarily mean that they did not sell their labour-power" (*ibid* p40). Thus "the USSR only appears as an extreme example in which the needs of social capital have become paramount and completely subsume those of the individual capital" (*ibid* p40).

This convoluted argument reaches a pitch with the statement that the "essence of capitalism is not the operation of the 'law of value' as such, but value as alienated labour and its consequent self-expansion as capital. In this case, it is the alienation of labour through the sale of labour-power that is essential. The operation of the 'law of value' through the sale of commodities on the market is then seen as merely a mode of appearance of the essential relations of value and capital" (*ibid* pp40-41).

As can clearly be seen, *Aufheben* is unable to account for the specific nature of capitalist production. The comrades prove unwilling to concede the qualitative shift away from capitalism in the USSR's exploitative social relations: rather their lack of dialectical

insight leads to an ever expanding (and quite vacuous) notion of what capitalist production is. Put another way, it is one thing to look at the manner in which class struggles constitute quantitative shifts in the extraction of surplus value under capitalism, but quite another to extend this to a scenario where money is stripped of its status as a universal equivalent and surplus value is not extracted on the basis of production for profit. Seen in this light, the wage form loses its function as a controller of working class subjectivity.

The 'clinchier' for *Aufheben* is the essentialist standpoint which emphasises "value as alienated labour and its consequent self-expansion as capital", as opposed to the secondary "mode of appearance" of the law of value. Therefore labour can be commodified in a capitalist sense without the intrusion of such value relations. This is but a short cut to a surface empiricism. Capitalism (or any other society) should be understood as a totality. Ripping this category apart from its mediating links actually changes its meaning. It becomes merely a tool for defining the USSR as 'state capitalist' in the most vacuous sense, blunting our *specific* appreciation of both capitalism and the productive dynamics of the Soviet Union. If we viewed the whole gamut of historical societies through the prism of a generalised "value as alienated labour" then we would undoubtedly find capitalism lurking in the most unlikely of places.

On the question of the Soviet Union, *Aufheben* appears to be letting itself get sucked into the formalist whirlpool that on occasion it itself appears ready to criticise. As with all state capitalist theories of the USSR, concepts are sliced into fragments and the 'reality' of Soviet existence becomes attenuated. Extending the boundaries of capitalism through an emphasis on ideological form actually ends up as an ahistorical ideology itself.

There is then a certain irony in the *Aufheben* collective's critique of Ticktin, in that it accuses him of reproducing a reified political economy and not Marx's *Critique*. Its own inability to puncture surface appearance in the USSR is perhaps an admission that it too might be the singer and not the song ●

Phil Watson

## Fighting fund

## Holiday worries

December's fund is lagging badly behind. Only £65 was received in this week's post.

With the long Christmas and millennium break looming, we need to build on last month's success and ensure we have a healthy surplus before the inevitable postal delays and extended holiday deprive us of our regular supply of donations.

One comrade bearing this in mind is PD, who not only sent us his regu-

lar contribution earlier in the month than usual, but also increased its size to a very welcome £25. Thanks also to BC (£15) and TR (£10).

If you were thinking of an extra gift to mark the occasion, now is the time to act! ●

Robbie Rix

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

# Autonomy irrelevant

## Alternative theses on the British-Irish

**1** Ireland has historically been oppressed by British imperialism. Initially the peasants were the main basis for colonial exploitation. By the 20th century the working class had become the main exploited class, and was potentially the leading revolutionary class, as was shown by the 1913 Dublin general strike. The working class of southern Ireland was increasingly influenced by the revolutionary leadership of Connolly and Larkin. Hence the British ruling class sought to strengthen the religious and ideological divide within the Irish working class through partition. The 1913-14 proposals for home rule outlined the creation of a catholic south and an Ulster/Northern Irish protestant state.

**2** Connolly acted to oppose partition

through the struggle for an all-Irish workers' republic (IWR). He effectively became the leadership of an anti-imperialist united front (bourgeois nationalists, petty bourgeois radicals and working class) in 1916. Consequently he advocated the necessity of an uprising that would facilitate the ideological and political conditions for achieving national independence and the IWR. The Easter Proclamation of 1916 was not a revolutionary socialist programme, but it did express the aim of national liberation and economic, social, and political progress. Hence the proclamation was a compromise formulation that united the various social forces of the anti-imperialist united front. Connolly's working class followers represented a politically independent and vanguard expression

of anti-imperialist national struggle. The Irish Republican Brotherhood (petty bourgeois radicals) had effectively accepted Connolly's revolutionary socialist leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle, and were not generally against his socialist aspirations.

**3** The defeat of the 1916 Easter uprising, and the murder of Connolly meant the anti-imperialist struggle lost its socialist direction, and its hegemonic leadership was now bourgeois nationalist. The Irish Republican Brotherhood (which essentially became the Irish Republican Army - the IRA) became the main military force of bourgeois nationalism. The struggle for national self-determination led to negotiations with British imperialism, which resulted in the partition of Ireland. The result was the establishment of a southern bourgeois clerical state, and a northern clerical and colonial state. The dispute about partition

within the south led to civil war. Without Connolly's political leadership the working class was disorientated, and vanguard elements tended to support anti-partition forces. A principled revolutionary stance would have been for the working class to refuse support for either side of contending bourgeois nationalism. For both of the rival wings of bourgeois nationalism were incapable of overcoming partition and uniting Ireland in a secular and socialist manner.

**4** The civil war led to splits within the IRA. The IRA that reorganised after the civil war was generally hostile towards the southern state, but was increasingly clerical nationalist, despite some leftwing tendencies. A physical force guerrilla ideology was hegemonic, and this was not consistently bourgeois democratic, and was not socialist.

**5** The existence of the clerical southern state only increased the fears of the protestant working class about a united Ireland, and this was expressed in the consolidation of the sectarian and repressive state of Northern Ireland.

**6** The development of the civil rights unrest, and mass communal strife, led to a split within the IRA, with the dominant tendency (Provisionals) placing emphasis upon the defence of the catholics through physical force. Thirty years of mass struggle and connected theoretical development has led the republican movement to advocate and emphasise the importance of political strategy. This emphasis is connected to the establishment of a secular, bourgeois democratic republican movement, which has a potential for socialist politics that is linked to its working class mass base.

The Sinn Féin peace initiative represents a significant attempt to democratise Northern Ireland, and is an important step towards a United Ireland. The development of the power-sharing executive represents a potential to develop a secular and non-discriminatory Northern Ireland. Hence, class politics in the north are in advance of developments within the south because of the greater influence of secular republicanism. Thus revolutionary perspectives are turned into their opposite. It now becomes both possible and principled to advocate that the movement towards the formation of a bourgeois democratic and secular Northern Ireland be transformed into the revolutionary class struggle for a Northern Irish workers' republic, as a crucial prelude to the struggle for a united IWR.

In other words, the development of a Northern Irish bourgeois democratic state is facilitating the possibility for working class unity, which enhances the ideological and political conditions for a Northern Irish workers' republic, and this will advance the struggle for an all-Irish workers' republic. This approach is not Menshevik and stageist, because the struggle to achieve bourgeois democratic gains becomes an integral part of the realisation of the Northern Irish workers' republic.

**7** Thus the necessity for a British-Irish autonomous state is irrelevant, given the progressive development of working class unity. The ideological fear of catholicism and republicanism is decreasing within the protestant working class in the context of the important role of secular republicanism. The conditions for working class unity, and the potential for socialist class struggle, are greater than ever before ●

# 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.**

# Obituary

## Rita Grant

**I**t is with great sadness that we report the death, on November 27, of comrade Rita Grant.

Rita died from a massive and unexpected heart attack, at her home in Rochdale. It appears that she did not suffer, but died instantaneously. Rita was a Communist Party supporter and had been active in socialist politics and in the trade union movement for much of her adult life.

Rita was born in central Manchester on October 26 1940, a birth date that she was subsequently to become very proud of, given its connection with the Russian Revolution. She began work at the age of 15 as a GPO telephonist, but was sacked four years later by a disapproving employer, after her elopement to Gretna Green with her Asian fiancé made the pages of the Manchester newspapers.

Returning to employment after a decade as a full time mother and housewife, Rita became active in her union, ASTMS, at Manchester's ICL factory. This was a famous period of working class industrial militancy and ICL was one of the sites where some highly successful strikes took place. Rita rapidly won election to the position of works convenor, and soon after she became the first woman representative to be elected to the Manchester committee of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions. Rita drew revolutionary political conclusions from her work during these times of heightened class struggle and in the mid-1970s she joined the International Marxist Group.

Rita's first marriage had ended and, in 1980, she met her future husband, Peter, a train driver and Aslef activist who was also an IMG comrade from London, when both were involved in the organisation of the Peoples March for Jobs. After ICL closed its two Manchester sites in a blatant union-busting exercise, Rita and Peter set up home in Southall.

Around this time the IMG liquidated itself into the Labour Party. Rita and Peter split with their former comrades in a dispute over the entryist tactic and they then embarked upon several years of intense political work as Labour Party members. Rita took on the position of election agent for Sidney Bidwell MP, himself a former Trotskyist. They were also very much involved in anti-fascist work in west London. Rita worked in a number of factories on the Great West Road before she secured a telephonist job with the Independent Broadcasting Authority, only to be immediately sacked after this 'independent' employer was advised as to her unsuitability by the state security service. Finally she secured new employment as a telephonist at Ealing hospital, where she became active in the healthworkers' union, Cohse.

Rita was heavily involved in solidarity work during the Aslef strike of 1982 and the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85. The Southall Miner's Support Group supplied substantial physical and financial solidarity to the Kent miners. Rita was one of many comrades who drew immense encouragement and satisfaction, in particular from the enormous level of support for the miners that was won from the Southall Asian community. This was a very practical demonstration of the unifying potential of class struggle.

In 1986 Rita and Peter moved to Rochdale and Rita trained as a social worker. She worked in residential children's homes, as well as the juvenile justice field. Although the Nalgo union and its successor Unison were not to Rita's liking (she referred to them as "wankers' unions") in comparison with her

former militant organisations, her commitment to the class struggle once again led her to take up a shop steward position.

Politically, Rita and Peter continued at first to work in the Labour Party, and in the Labour left led the Rochdale Strike Support Group. Resolving finally that the scope for revolutionaries to make advances within the Labour Party was negligible, they left to join the Socialist Workers Party. Rita was, however, to become totally dissatisfied with the bureaucratic centralist regime of the SWP and soon resigned. A period out of political work followed, which was broken in 1997 when Rita, together with Peter, joined the CPGB.

In accordance with Rita's wishes, her funeral on December 3 was a secular and communist celebration of her life, and was attended by a very large number of relatives, comrades and friends, including a group of young people from the children's home where Rita ended her working days. The coffin was draped in a red flag and prominent amongst the wreaths was a hammer and sickle arrangement, in red and white carnations, from her Communist Party comrades. Three songs pre-recorded by Rita herself were played - *The Red Flag*, John Lennon's *Imagine* and, at the end of the service, *The Internationale*.

Rita was a committed working class fighter, who will be sadly missed. She will be remembered with great respect and affection by all comrades who knew her. We offer our deepest sympathies to Peter; to Rita's sons, Simon and David; to her mother, Hilda; and her sister, Norma ●

John Pearson

Peter has requested that comrades wishing to mark Rita's life should do so through donations to the *Weekly Worker*

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## Livingstone set for independent challenge

# Seize the moment

It now looks a cast iron certainty that Ken Livingstone will be on the ballot paper for the election for London's mayor next May. This week *The Independent* ran a story, confirming what has been common knowledge for those close to him, that the Brent East MP will stand as an independent if he is beaten by Frank Dobson in Blair's rigged electoral college vote to determine the Labour candidate.

According to the paper, Livingstone "told friends" that he "would also run a slate of independent candidates for the 25-member Greater London Assembly" and would expect to pick up "four or five seats". He was "confident of attracting a wide-ranging coalition, including business people, environmentalists and apolitical figures" (*The Independent* December 7).

Threats to stand against Labour have previously been leaked by Livingstone supporters in order to pressurise Blair to include him on the short list. Now that his place is secure, the latest disclosure should be seen not only as a continuation of the pressure - warning Millbank not to go too far in weighting the contest in Dobson's favour - but preparing opinion for his eventual break. In public Ken continues to deny that he has any such intention, but it would clearly be foolish, while he has a chance of winning the party mandate, to express anything other than the most committed loyalty to Labour, irrespective of the outcome of the election to choose the candidate.

Ken's justification for going it alone, despite his assurances to the contrary given to Labour's selection panel last month, is the blatant gerrymandering of the party's selection process. Livingstone is way ahead of an increasingly despondent Frank Dobson in all soundings of London Labour members. The Dobson camp is talking up its chances, claiming that its man is only a few percentage points behind, with both candidates returning figures in the 30s and a large number of 'don't knows'. In fact support for Livingstone is running at around twice that of his rival.

So there is little doubt that the former leader of the Greater London Council will easily see off Dobson in the ballot of individual party members, with Glenda Jackson a very poor third. It is also possible that 'Red Ken' will pick up a majority of votes in the 'trade union and affiliates' section despite Millbank's foul play. Blair's fixers have of course disqualified unions that were certain to back Livingstone, citing late payment of the political levy. The MSF is challenging this in the courts, while the RMT is appealing against its exclusion - and no doubt awaiting the result of the MSF action. The AEEU - controlled by safe Blairites who insist they will not permit a ballot of members and will support Dobson regardless - has upped its voting entitlements to 50,000, but



Just a maverick politician?

*Do all in our  
power to break  
workers from  
Labour as a first  
step to breaking  
them from  
Labourism*

the TGWU - whose members will be allowed a say - has more than halved its own to the same figure.

For all New Labour's swindling, a majority of union votes could still go to Ken. But Blair has further tilted the balance his way by ensuring that both the Cooperative Wholesale Society and Cooperative Retail Society cast every one of their combined total of

100,000 votes to Dobson - without a ballot of course. The 70 London MPs, MEPs and GLA candidates - almost entirely hand-picked by Millbank - will overwhelmingly back Blair's candidate too.

Despite all that, Livingstone's momentum is gathering pace, while Dobson's backers are constantly wrong-footed. In a particularly short-sighted move John Prescott announced last week that plans for a public-private partnership for the London underground would go ahead - but without Railtrack, the private company clearly best qualified to deliver results. This was a clumsy attempt to take the wind out of Ken's sails, who, in the aftermath of the Ladbroke Grove disaster in October, had used the unpopularity of this gang of profiteers to oppose PPP and argue in favour of his own alternative - a New York-style bond issue to finance the tube. Speaking at last month's 'Listen to London' public meeting, Ken declared: "I'm running against Railtrack - whose directors may go to jail for manslaughter."

But he was not at all phased by the efforts of Prescott to pull the ground from under his feet. His response to the deputy prime minister was: "If I can achieve this while I'm a candidate, imagine what I can achieve as mayor." As *The Daily Telegraph* commented, "Abandoning the plan for Railtrack to take over part of the underground handed a publicity coup to Ken Livingstone ... Mr Livingstone's strategy has been to stop Railtrack running the tube, leading him to claim his first victory over the government." The paper added that the change in plans had caused "enormous uncertainty" amongst groups tendering for contracts, and "raised fears that the terms of the scheme might continue to change at short notice as the London mayoral campaign progressed" (December 2).

Similarly charges by the Dobson camp that Livingstone had been guilty of making a "malicious" attack on the former health secretary have also backfired. Reports that appeared in the press to the effect that Dobson was "depressed" were put down by his spin doctors to Livingstone's "peddling rumours". This was based on Ken's mild but patently accurate remark that his rival did not "seem happy" at being forced by Blair to give up his ministerial position for what is looking more and more like a losing option with every day that passes.

All this makes one thing abundantly clear: Blair is facing a huge crisis, which threatens not only to undermine his control over the whole New Labour project, but a catastrophic split, which would almost inevitably spread way beyond the capital. Blair's desperate attempts to spike Livingstone's challenge is not simply "an organisational dispute", as comrade Barry Biddulph alleges (*Weekly Worker* December 2). Insisting in seeing only superficial appearances, comrade Biddulph seizes on Livingstone's public commitment to "stand on the manifesto agreed by the Labour Party, as must every candidate". Presumably Barry also believes Ken when he declares, hand on heart, that he will meekly accept the result of a rigged Dobson victory and back the official Labour candidate, come what may.

Yes, officially "Livingstone is effectively standing on a New Labour programme", to give another example of superficial appearances. But I am at a loss to explain how anyone who has observed the development of events can claim his campaign is "dependent on New Labour". Surely it is patently clear that Blair would give anything to thwart Livingstone. He has on more than one occasion said that he would permit a revival of Livingstoneism "over my dead body". Actually the corpse he would much prefer would be that of the Brent East MP.

So what sort of break is on the cards? Just a populist rebellion by a maverick politician seeking to promote his own career? Again, to state this is

to refuse to see more than what is in front of your nose. Livingstone has a base on the left - as a glance at those who have gathered around his campaign confirms. There is a space to the left of Labour which is there for the taking - and 'Red Ken' with his past reputation would be more than likely to mould his intervention with that in mind.

Livingstone is of course quite capable of making rightwing-sounding noises too, as many, including *Weekly Worker* writers, have pointed out. But to dismiss a potential movement on the basis of the inadequate politics of the person who gives rise to it is short-sighted in the extreme. Comrade Biddulph himself had no hesitation in joining Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party even though its leader's version of national socialism could never lead to human liberation - presumably because he thought that the changes the SLP set in motion would provide fertile ground for communist intervention despite Scargill. It is obvious to all but the wilfully blind that an anti-Blair split behind Livingstone would also be a break to the left - we can help make it "an independent anti-capitalist movement".

Comrade Biddulph seems to think that such a movement can be created without attempting to win away hundreds of thousands of workers from Labour. It is as though they do not exist. He does not accept that "New Labour as an ideological construct" lacks roots in the party. The rebellion around Livingstone, expressed already in massive support in every opinion poll, says the opposite.

Comrade Biddulph remarks that our "attitude to a vote for Livingstone is indistinguishable from the dogmatic critical support for New Labour of the SWP and Workers Power" in May 1997. This is bizarre, to say the least. The CPGB stood against Blair then; we are backing Livingstone against Blair today. There is a common thread here - the need to do all in our power to break workers from Labour as a first step to breaking them from Labourism.

Personally I believe that the statements of some *Weekly Worker* writers have in the past been too categorical, too final: in expressing positions that were largely correct at the time they appeared to rule out a new tactics in line with changed circumstances in the future. But there has been no "unacknowledged change of line". It was correct to refuse to back Livingstone when it seemed that he was simply manoeuvring in order to enhance his career - using his claim to the mayoralty as a bargaining chip to win some junior position in government.

It is clear today that Livingstone is playing for real. His stand against Blair is set to throw up opportunities that communists would be criminal to ignore ●

Jim Blackstock