

Challenge to London unity

It seems that previous reports carried in this paper of unity breaking out amongst the London left in advance of next year's Greater London Assembly elections may have been a little premature. As it stands today, there is a possibility of three left slates competing for votes in the capital - the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation, the London Socialist Alliance and Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (see report p3). Readers will not be surprised at the news that Scargill's rump organisation has announced its intention to stand regardless of what the rest of the left - let alone Livingstone - is doing. This degenerate little sect has no goal in the workers' movement than servicing the meglomania of its leader, regardless of the wider harm this may cause.

Militants should treat it with contempt and use the publicity around the election to discredit it.

But what of the CATP? On December 2, we reported that "the CATP is prepared to offer four positions to the LSA" on its slate. Judging from subsequent meetings, this now seems less likely.

The CATP met on December 14 to discuss its plans for next May's elections. This gathering of the campaign was an important stage in the struggle for a united left electoral bloc in the capital. The LSA - composed of the main revolutionary and socialist organisations in London, the SWP, CPGB, Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook, etc - is already well advanced in its preparations to stand. Obviously cooperation between the two is needed. Yet it now seems that this is not possible.

Fundamentally, this sad situation is fallout from the equivocation and lack of self-belief shown by most sections of the alliance in June's European elections. Back in the summer, the LSA collapsed in the face of the SLP decision to stand in the London Euro constituency. The CPGB was left to fight alone, despite being hampered by our lack of preparation and by the legislation which bans us from even standing under our own name. If the LSA had had the courage of its convictions then, it would have laid down an important marker for future contests. The pressure would have been on initiatives such as the CATP to gravitate towards cooperation with it, rather

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than simply striking out on its own.

This June debacle and the LSA's fitful and unenthusiastic preparations for the GLA elections have opened the door for others to take a lead. A thin layer of militants in and around the RMT union decided on November 9 to stand - under banner of the CATP - against the Blair-Prescott plans for the partial privatisation of London underground.

Although the situation before the December 14 CATP meeting was still unclear, there still seemed some room

for optimism. Oliver New, chair of the CATP had attended an LSA meeting on November 24. The CATP was standing the full 11 candidates for the proportional representation party list slate. Support from the LSA would be welcome and, as mentioned above, there was also talk of behind the scenes negotiations producing four LSA candidates on a joint slate.

LSA organisations were invited to attend the December 14 CATP meeting to discuss the matter further. However the clear message LSAers took away from that fraught gathering was that the CATP intends to press ahead alone. Despite calls for principled unity from LSA secretary Greg Tucker and others, the general mood of the CATP meeting indicated that there is little spirit of cooperation and compromise towards the LSA amongst its dominant figures.

Leading off the meeting, Oliver New, made it clear that the thrust of the whole evening's agenda would be biased towards organising practical activity around the agreed perspective of standing a full CATP slate of 11 candidates. He reported that he had attended the LSA meeting on November 24 - pointedly describing the LSA several times as an alliance of "small groups" - and suggested that the issue could be further aired. Yet time for discussion of cooperation between the LSA and CATP was given very low priority on the agenda. This was no accident, but underlined a simmering resentment from a number of prominent CATP activists against the presence of the left, a hostility that bubbled over into occasional uproar. (Comrade Pat Sikorski - former Scargill sidekick and witch hunter - seemed particularly irked by the arguments of the left - "Sabotage! Sabotage!" he shouted at one stage.)

An indication of the generally uncooperative mood is given by a discussion on the order of agenda items. It was proposed that relations with the LSA be taken before the 30-strong meeting was divided into four workshops to discuss organising the campaign in north, east, west and south London. The obvious point was made that clarifying relations with the LSA would have a direct bearing on the content of these workshops - if LSA representatives were

included on the CATP slate, then the component elements of the alliance would be active participants in the campaign. If not, our relationship to the CATP slate would be very different. This logical proposal to re-order the agenda was rejected. This placed LSA supporters in a difficult position in the various workshops - how could they take a full part in the planning the campaign when they did not yet know whether the alliance was to be allowed places on the slate?

If effect, the CATP displayed a contemptuous attitude to the LSA.

The determination of the majority of the meeting to press ahead confirms that the mood is against cooperation with other socialists. This was underlined in the north London workshop by Pat Sikorski of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus.

Comrade Sikorski assured the group that funding for the project was more or less *dependent* on the exclusion of the organised left from the slate. Amongst some in the CATP this attitude may reflect an honest semi-syndicalism, a sincere but wrong impatience with the revolutionary left. For the likes of comrade Sikorski and his Fiscite co-thinkers, it represents the expression of a worked out sectarian project they have been pursuing at least since the mid-1980s. In furthering this narrow schema, the comrades have committed some disgraceful actions - including wrecking mass delegate conferences organised in solidarity with the striking miners rather than give the floor democracy and most recently, being instrumental in the anti-CPGB witch hunt in the SLP which was eventually to leave it a wizened, semi-Stalinite husk. (And which also ended up claiming their scalps also, of course.) The sites of these disgraceful Fisc interventions change over the years, but the themes are consistent - most notably a haughty sectarian disdain for the left and an absolute contempt for the democracy of the workers' movement.

Having made concrete plans for the CATP campaign in the various workshops, the meeting was hardly in the mood for a full discussion of cooperation with the LSA when it reconvened for its last ten minutes. Some desultory debate took place, with the assurance given that officials from CATP and LSA would meet to explore

matters further. There is however little optimism amongst leading LSAers that this will produce anything positive.

The position of the CATP is not strong. It must guard against the impression that may form in some people's minds that what motivates its intervention is not genuine concern about the issue of privatisation, but more narrow ambitions. After all, it is at pains to emphasise that it is a *single* issue campaign. It currently has no other agreed policies. Yet there are at least two left organisations standing in the GLA contest who are committed to their demand of opposition to Prescott's tube privatisation - the LSA and the SLP. Similarly, if Livingstone is an independent candidate for mayor, his associated slate is bound to take a similar stand on this issue. He has made clear that this is the central plank of his campaign. What will the CATP do then?

The fight for principled left unity in London to present an electoral challenge to Blair's Labour has received a setback. The determination of the CATP to press ahead regardless of the plans of others is wrong. Whatever motivates it - the impatience of trade union militants with the schismatic left, or the more cynical machinations of the Fisc - such an approach does not aid the fight for independent working class politics and we urge the comrades to re-consider.

The LSA on the other hand must not surrender. The very fact of its existence is a powerful blow against the sectarianism that has plagued our movement. Whatever our differences with its agreed platform, it represents an attempt by important sections of the left to present a range of politics to masses of working people. This is an important move in the fight to break the hold of Labourism not only over wide swathes of society, but also over much of the British left itself.

The LSA must take a lead. Thankfully the December 15 LSA meeting decided to do just that. The SWP in particular needs to be singled out - it donated £1,000 and has put forward leading members for important positions in alliance. The door remains open to co-operation, but the LSA has work to get on with ●

Mark Fischer



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

Party notes

Harry's game

In *The Guardian* of November 27, the writer and ex-secret service officer John le Carré (real name David Cornwell) bade an affectionate farewell to an old informer of his. The recently deceased 'Harry' was a long-term member of the CPGB, a stalwart of Party work and a deep entry mole in our ranks, attending weekly debriefing sessions with the likes of le Carré and other MI5 controllers.

Le Carré's valediction is deliberately obtuse. He teases us with the idea that "it is even possible that what I am telling you is fiction, and it never happened at all". However, even through his veiled comments, we are able to discern the outline figures both of 'Harry' and, more usefully, of state agents as a type.

First, in general they are often extremely useful - to the Party, that is. In order to be effective as an agent, they must work hard at being a communist. Thus, they tend to make themselves useful, valued and trusted Party comrades. For example, le Carré reports that 'Harry' "had taken on all the dirty jobs, in the evenings and weekends, that other comrades were only too glad to be relieved of ... Gradually, through diligence and devotion to the cause - you might say both causes - he rose to become an influential and valued comrade", even apparently being entrusted with "semi-conspiratorial errands".

The most famous agent in the ranks of the revolutionary workers' movement - Roman Malinovsky of the Bolsheviks - made himself far more useful than the lowly 'Harry'. As leader of the Bolshevik in the Tsar's duma, he was responsible for rousing tens of thousands, perhaps millions, of Russian people to revolutionary action through his speeches. Despite himself, he made new communists by the score - a byproduct of diligently carrying out the instructions of the revolutionary party which was necessary if he was to operate as a state agent. Of course, we do not keep a moral ledger of these things. We do not forgive Malinovsky the hundreds he sent to imprisonment, banishment or death when we set it alongside the thousands he attracted to our movement. Justifiably, the Bolsheviks put a bullet in his head when he gave himself up after the October Revolution. Other 'Harrys' take note.

Second, the quality of the information most such agents divulge in a country like Britain is, frankly, crap. Le Carré admits that the errands 'Harry' was given "seldom amounted to anything of substance in the intelligence marketplace". Indeed, a great deal of effort appears to have been expended in keeping up the poor man's spirits. His MI5 controllers would pat him on the head and generally be nice to the chap: "... this lack of visible success didn't matter, we assured Harry, because he was the right man in the right place, the essential listening post".

In order to bolster this poor dupe's morale, the security professionals and hapless 'Harry' would stage dry run exercises, preparing for the day when the sky grew black with dastardly Soviet paratroopers and 'Harry' was installed as the local commissar. "That's when you'll become the linkman for the resistance movement that's going to have to drive those bastards into the sea," they assured him in all seriousness.

Clearly, it was necessary to shore up the egos of agents such as 'Harry' with this type of childlike nonsense. After all, the man was being paid a pittance, was unable to supply worthwhile intelligence and - apparently - had been engaged from "late childhood" in crass duplicity against a group of people that even he recognised as "idealistic". His controllers needed to supply the man with a moral framework in which to locate and justify his actions. It is worth noting that even those trapped into spying against the Party through financial or sexual embarrassment had to be assured what they were doing had a certainly 'morality', that it prevented a greater harm being done.

Finally, and most encouragingly, we are given yet more confirmation of what is perhaps our greatest strength as a political movement. The class enemy and its servants such as le Carré are simply *incapable* of understanding our politics.

For example, le Carré describes 'Harry's' motivation for becoming an agent thus: "[He] was one of the poor bloody infantry of honorable men and women who believed that the communists were set on destroying the country ... and felt they had better do something about it." Yet he locates his handling of 'Harry' 40 years or so ago. The notion that the CPGB by the late 1950s into the 60s - riddled with reformism, crystallised in the abject *British road to socialism* - was bent on anything as radical as "destroying the country" should have been enough to raise doubts about MI5's and 'Harry's' sanity, let alone his worth as a paid state asset.

I am reliably informed that part of the induction for new MI5 employees used to be a study of the *BRS*. This alone should have been sufficient to convince them that the Party as then constituted politically represented no revolutionary challenge to the state. Apparently not, though. It is worthwhile remembering in this context that through the offices of Malinovsky, the tsarist secret service actually thought it a good idea to work hard at exacerbating the divisions between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, reasoning that a split party was *de facto* a weaker party. With hindsight, they probably regretted that.

We are not indifferent or blasé to the activities of the 'Harrys' of this world. However, the only real defence against them lies in the arena of politics, not any counter-surveillance measures we adopt as an organisation.

First, we are *open*. Despite themselves, the sects on the left that run political police regimes internally to discipline the views of their members create ideal conditions for the state agents to flourish.

Second, we are fighting for politics that accord with the development of humanity and world society. It is this which ultimately lends our ideas their vital strength and means that those who disseminate them - whatever their personal motivation - do us a great service. Marxism is powerful not because of the money it generates, the hordes of secret agents at its disposal or the brilliant technical measures it may adopt to fight state surveillance.

It is powerful, Mr le Carré, because it is *true* ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Blank cheque

Jim Blackstock has thrown out previous categorical statements. Instead he substitutes a new one: Ken's word is a cast iron guarantee. Livingstone will leave the Labour Party and stand as an independent if he loses the Labour election to select a candidate. But the comrade also writes that I should not take Livingstone's word that he will not fight as an independent. There is nothing like a principled candidate for political clarity (*Weekly Worker* December 9).

In Jim Blackstock's cynical opinion, Ken's place in the New Labour election process is secure: "It would be clearly foolish, while he [Ken] has the chance of winning the party mandate to express anything other than the most committed loyalty to Labour." These unprincipled words and Livingstone's principal actions are in Jack Conrad's phase, "miserable recipes for the opportunist art of the possible" (*Weekly Worker* June 12 1997).

If Ken does win the gerrymandered election in the Labour Party, comrade Larsen is already laughing at the prospect of the Socialist Party voting for Ken as the representative of a bourgeois party (*Weekly Worker* December 2). But if that is amusing, what about the chance for some fun at the CPGB's expense when they vote for a representative of a bourgeois workers' party in which the bourgeois aspect is dominant? Or a party which, in the opinion of Stan Keable, is the bosses' Trojan house in the workers' movement (*Weekly Worker* May 1 1997). A fine line there, comrades.

But comrade Blackstock does raise a serious question: what kind of break is on the cards? So let's ask a few questions. How many Labour MPs are ready to split? How many unions are prepared to follow Livingstone out of the Labour Party? How many trade unionists are pledging to join his alternative party? Where is the alternative party? What is Ken's anti-Blairite programme? In another political life, Jim considered Livingstone as a maverick career politician ... but not any more.

The comrade even claims Livingstone threatens a catastrophic split from Labour. But he can only say, "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." The word "likely" is not very strong, nor poses a catastrophic threat to Blair at the moment. Whatever happened to Don Preston's point that the Blairisation of Livingstone summed up the terminal crisis of the Labour left and was an indication of the success of the Blairite revolution inside Labour (*Weekly Worker* April 17 1997)?

Whatever happened to Mark Fischer's points about not relying, like pro-Labour Trotskyists, on the Labour left to do something? In his previous political reincarnation, the comrade refused to give the Labour lefts automatic blank cheques and stated categorically that Ken Livingstone did not deserve the support of the CPGB (*Weekly Worker* May 7 1998). The political wager that Ken could use his undeserved reputation as a socialist as a focus for the anti-Blair mood does sound rather like a programmatic blank cheque to me. **Barry Biddulph**
London

Auto-leftism

Real, concrete, specific *politics* decides whether at any one particular time we support, critically or otherwise, "one side" or "personality" against another in an election campaign - whether it be the Labour Party (which still remains a bourgeois workers' party of sorts despite every-

thing), the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Party or any other working class organisation. To deny this is abstentionist auto-leftism and hence effectively a form of apoliticism.

Serious communist politicians acknowledge and *welcome* the possibilities latent in the anti-Blair, left-leaning illusions that a politically significant layer has in 'Red Ken'. Far from passively looking on, the CPGB is *consciously* combating spontaneity, in order to give these mass (democratic) sentiments a communistic and revolutionary democratic shape. A very practical and impeccably Leninist example of merging the communist programme with a mass movement in society.

Danny Hammill
South London

Imagined

Comrade Steve Riley talks about "the frivolous mindset" of the "new CPGB" which jauntily "casts old truths away without regard for the consequences" (Letters *Weekly Worker* December 2). In particular the comrade refers to Northern Ireland.

I must have imagined the acres of polemical space devoted to the British-Irish debate in the *Weekly Worker* and the endless hours of discussion at Communist University 99, day schools, seminars, etc.

Eddie Ford
Middlesex

Essence

The latest letter by Phil Sharpe (*Weekly Worker* December 2) constitutes a plea for revolutionaries to de-commission our minds and bodies, our hearts and souls, to reconcile ourselves with the world as it is and always shall be, to retire to our armchairs and content ourselves with incessant navel-gazing.

Of course it is true that voluntarism has constituted a problem for Marxists in the past. Our attitude to the problem can be captured in the aphorism, 'Man makes history, but not in circumstances of his own choosing.' It is in this sense, and this sense alone, that we have to 'recognise' the law of value and other facts of life - the contemporary state of the class struggle, the economic climate, and the political consciousness of our class. Yet not one of these facts are determined absolutely by rigid and immutable laws.

Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Lukács, Gramsci, etc all stressed that even the law of value only operates as a consequence of an historically conditioned set of social relations. These have not always existed, and they can be consciously transcended. Not by the action of isolated individuals of course, or even of a large sect. This is going to take the combined efforts of the entire working class.

Consider the poll tax. It could not have been defeated by any number of scattered individuals taking a moral stance to refuse to pay it. Had it not been for the farsightedness and courage of a very small number of activists, had it not been for their determination to subject to a practical test their hypothesis that circumstances existed to build a campaign of mass non-payment, John Major would not have abolished it.

Those who built the anti-poll tax movement could not have predicted in advance whether or not they would succeed. It is only in the process of engaging with the struggle, in a practical dialogue with our class, that we make ourselves as Marxists, as fully conscious revolutionaries. And, in the process, we assist our class in winning the odd battle or two, giving them both the appetite and confidence to fight on more and more battlefields.

This, Phil, is neither pragmatism nor voluntarism, but the essence of Marxism, its revolutionary core.

Steve Bennett
Glasgow

SSP purge

My article 'Action stations' (*Weekly Worker* December 2) - in which I interpreted the Committee for a Workers' International in Scotland document 'Marxism in the new millennium' (*Weekly Worker* November 25) as a portent of a purge of the Scottish Socialist Party left - has elicited a response.

James Robertson (*Weekly Worker* December 9) reacts with a literary shrug of the shoulders. We ought, in James's opinion, to have patience. Our fate will be revealed at next February's SSP conference.

Alan McCombes's document argues that his CWI group cannot organise closed meetings, as this would cause "suspicion and resentment" amongst non-CWI members. But what is unacceptable is for Alan McCombes to imply that Socialist Outlook, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Republican Communist Network and Peter Taaffe's loyalist CWI supporters have to reciprocate. Not one of these aforementioned SSP factions would tolerate a situation where they can do nothing to stop Bill Bonnar, Hugh Kerr, Alan himself infiltrating their meetings.

I am far from impressed by the notion that we have nothing to fear on account of our being so small and ineffectual. James might want to express gratitude to Alan McCombes if he promises to leave revolutionary factions in peace, which he may well do - on condition, of course, that we fail to recruit in sufficient numbers, that we prove incapable of posing as a credible alternative leadership. While James might be so inclined, I most certainly am not.

I would urge all SSP revolutionaries to contact the Republican Communist Network with a view to joining it. The RCN, whatever its weaknesses, has the potential to serve as an umbrella group for all the existing factions, providing each and every one of us with the forum we so desperately need to hammer out a united position on questions of revolutionary strategy and tactics.

Tom Delargy
Paisley

Groundless

The hagiography offered by Royston Bull as a defence of the tactics of Sinn Féin and the IRA is erroneous to say the least (Letters *Weekly Worker*).

For example, the claim that 'no surrender colonialism' has been defeated by what he claims to be "the launch at last of the completely new cross border economic and political settlement is groundless. As the cross border bodies that have been set up are hardly representatives of revolutionary changes.

His position neglects many aspects of the 'economic situation' caused by partition. Does Royston really think that the IDA and the IDB will combine and seek a united approach to drawing in foreign investors? I think not.

Declan Carolan
County Down

Weekly Worker

This issue of the *Weekly Worker* is the last for 1999. The next issue will appear on January 13 2000

Simon Harvey of the SLP

Scargill's GLA slate

As I recently reported, Arthur Scargill has already ruled out any support whatsoever for Ken Livingstone's bid to become mayor of London (see *Weekly Worker* November 25). But now he has gone further, declaring that the Socialist Labour Party will stand candidates despite attempts to unite the left by the London Socialist Alliance and the possibility of an independent pro-Livingstone list.

The latest *Socialist News*, the SLP's bimonthly paper, announces that Socialist Labour "will contest all 11 party list seats in next year's London assembly election on May 4" (January-December). The article, penned by 'NM' (editor Nell Myers), then attempts to justify Scargill's position.

He is quoted condemning the three main parties, because they all "support privatisation and all are now firmly opposed to public ownership". By contrast the SLP calls for the London underground to "remain in pub-

lic hands", with investment to be "financed by the government, not through the private finance initiative (PFI) or gimmicks such as the issuing of bonds". Livingstone is the only candidate calling for bonds of course.

It is worth quoting from the piece at some length: "On BBC's *Any questions?* SLP general secretary Arthur Scargill was asked who he would support as a candidate for mayor of London ... When pressed about the candidacy of Ken Livingstone for the job, Arthur Scargill said: 'I would not support Livingstone if he was standing for mayor of Toy Town, let alone London.' He reminded listeners that Ken Livingstone has said he is not opposed to the 'free market', belongs to a party which openly supports capitalism, and also supported Nato's unlawful bombing of Yugoslavia.

"Prime minister Tony Blair had alleged that in the 1980s Livingstone, Arthur Scargill and Tony Benn had driven the Labour Party to the edge

of extinction. Scargill's response was that (a) the Labour Party was made extinct in 1995 with the death of clause four and fundamental changes to the party's constitution, and (b) it was wrong to bracket Livingstone with Tony Benn and himself."

It is difficult to know where to start in responding to this mixture of confusion, inconsistency and inanity. The party that won the general election by a huge majority and is still enjoying 50% plus support in the polls is described as "extinct". Presumably Scargill means that it ceased to be a vehicle for working class advance in 1995 - as if the removal of the fossilised clause four and the amendments to the bureaucratic constitution (transplanted wholesale by Scargill into the SLP) suddenly transformed Labour into a party of capitalism. It has been, at least since 1914, a *bourgeois* workers' party - totally useless in the battle for socialism.

And how is it that Benn is implicitly supported, when he too "belongs to a party which openly supports capitalism" and has recently made clear his continued loyalty to it? If it was Benn, not Livingstone, who was challenging for mayor, would Scargill back him? It seems to me that it is not only sectarianism that is behind our general secretary's outburst. He is surely also being influenced by some undisclosed personal clash that has occurred since May 1 1997, when he gave Ken tacit support.

As for Nato's "unlawful" bombing of the Balkans, if, for example, the imperialists had first declared war on Serbia, would that have made it OK? And what about the snide remark about "gimmicks" that Arthur puts in comrade Myers' mouth? Perhaps workers should flatly refuse to contemplate ever giving any support to the SLP, since it defends capitalist "public ownership". Is there really any fundamental difference between a nationalised industry financed entirely through taxation and a nationalised industry empowered to raise additional capital through issuing bonds?

Many comrades, including myself, joined Socialist Labour in 1996 - despite being only too aware of Scargill's bureaucratic and political failings - because we saw in it the possibility of a mass break with the Labour Party. It did not happen - largely due to Scargill's own anti-democratic

wrecking actions. But in 1999 a potential working class *movement* is on the cards. Livingstoneism is the most important challenge faced by New Labour - it is powerful because it is backed, albeit passively, by millions in London and beyond.

Yet, while making his own campaign against tube privatisation the key issue ("Public ownership's the policy for London," reads the *Socialist News* headline), Scargill ignores and shuns Livingstone. This is taking sectarianism to undreamed of depths, even for him. And it is putting leading SLP members in an impossible position.

Scargill's ludicrous attitude to this whole question was summed up admirably in the double-page report of last month's final annual congress (the constitution was amended to replace the annual event with three-yearly gatherings) in *Socialist News*.

After describing the congress as an "outstanding success" (despite the much reduced membership), and passing over in silence the controversy surrounding the constitutional amendment, the paper states: "General secretary Arthur Scargill pointed out that the party's constitution provides for SLP cooperation with trade unions and other organisations in joint political and other action - but this is a completely different question from that of forming electoral pacts or alliances with other parties or organisations. If people agree with SLP policies, he asked, why not join our party?"

Even ignoring the final sectarian stupidity, his position just cannot be logically sustained. Since when are electoral alliances not a form of "joint political ... action"? The article omits to mention that the constitution actually specifies cooperation with *socialist* organisations.

The SLP announcement on the GLA elections talks only of assembly candidates on the party list. Even Scargill knows that there is no chance of any local campaigning - the London party is reduced to a couple of dozen half-active members. So it is not surprising that there will be no challenge for the constituency seats. But why no announcement of an SLP candidacy for the mayoralty? For all his bluster, is Arthur awaiting the outcome of Livingstone's campaign to win the Labour nomination? ●

Faction ended

The Revolutionary Democratic Group has now formally ended its designation as a faction of the Socialist Workers Party, until circumstances make it possible to build a new faction. The RDG was formed in 1984 by ex-SWP members, the majority of whom had been supporters of an internal faction, known as the 'Republican Faction' (1980-81). Later the RDG adopted the designation of 'faction of the SWP' for three reasons.

First, it made clear that we had no pretensions to become a new party or new tendency. We aimed to become the main critic of the SWP from a position distinct among the SWP's other Marxist critics. We aligned ourselves with the SWP on the key question of the USSR, in opposition to the Stalinists and Trotskyists. We had no illusions in so-called bureaucratic socialism and recognised that farm, factory and service workers were a class exploited by the 'red' bourgeoisie. Third, it indicated our practical orientation to SWP members and activities.

In the early 1990s the RDG openly campaigned against the SWP leadership on the basis that:

1. It had no clear political programme
2. It refused or failed to stand candidates against the Labour Party
3. Its economist theory of politics led the SWP to tail the constitutional politics of Blair. Having no independent republican programme or perspective, it was and is reduced to being the trade union tail of Laboursim.

Since the 1997 general election the SWP has been forced to half consider some of these views as a result of objective circumstances in the class struggle. The SWP has begun to make the first tentative moves to break from Blair by standing its own candidates. Meanwhile the practical orientation of the RDG changed as a result of the rapprochement process with the CPGB and the attempt by Scargill to fill the vacuum on the left. Although the SWP was and is ideologically superior to Scargillism, the SLP was a more militant organisation in seeking to directly oppose Blair in elections. We had no illusions in Scargill, but unlike the more sectarian organisations of the left, we were ready to join and fight for a broad left (ie, communist-Labour) party.

Whilst Scargill was one of the few socialist leaders able to draw the left together, his own style and political methods proved fatal. The left wing of the SLP was unable to effectively challenge Scargill or win the party to a broader, more democratic approach to politics. The SLP lost its potential to unite sections of the left and became a small Stalinist sect.

During this period the RDG gave up its practical orientation to the SWP. In practice we are not a faction of the SWP. All comrades associated with us were aware of this. A gap has existed between our formal designation as a faction and political reality. We have decided to close that gap. Even if we were to reorientate to the SWP, our factional title would ring hollow after a period of absence. We would need to build a new faction from scratch rather than declare it to a surprised audience.

The SWP remains in a strategic position within the communist movement. Anybody who ignores this fact is not dealing with reality. We do not rule out relaunching or rebuilding a faction if and when circumstances are right. But over the last period our perspective has focused on uniting revolutionary democratic communists, eventually into a new tendency. With this in mind we are working with CPGB, our main allies, and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Communist Tendency and the recently formed Republican Communist Network. Here lies the potential for a more serious challenge to the SWP than anything the RDG was able to muster in the past.

Over the last period the RDG has contributed many articles to the *Weekly Worker*. It has become the main channel for our views, whilst assisting the CPGB's desire to create an open paper. We have now decided to make a regular financial contribution. Our comrades will also be prepared to sell the paper on appropriate occasions ●

Revolutionary Democratic Group

Fighting fund

Not promising

This is the final issue of the *Weekly Worker* for 1999. So comrades will have to wait until our next issue (January 13) to see if we have not only reached our monthly £400 target, but also cleared the backlog for the year - after last month's magnificent effort, an extra £88 will do the trick.

But, I have to say, the signs do not look promising. Only £90 has been received since last week, bringing December's total up to £155. With excessive delays for the

holidays in the pipeline, we could be in trouble. So, instead of waiting with bated breath for January 13, why not put a cheque or postal order in the post today?

That is exactly what comrades VS (£25), PM/HD (£20), WH (£10) and TD (£5) did. Thanks to all. Now it is up to you, comrades ●

Robbie Rix

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

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday December 19, 5pm - Jack Conrad on 'Jesus, his brother James and the origins of christianity'.

Sunday January 9, 5pm - 'The modern state, part 2', using Ellen Meiksins Wood's *The pristine culture of capitalism* as a study guide.

Manchester: Monday January 10, 7.30pm - 'Social degeneration and developing general crisis', in the series on crisis.

E-mail: CPGB2@aol.com.

■ Tameside

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

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It is always surprising to me that the question of capitalist crisis is an issue at all. I had always assumed that within Marxism the decline of capitalism was something which was generally accepted.

However, there is today a considerable argument about it. It seems to be a very strong viewpoint held in sections of the left that capitalism is not in decline. And of course one can understand it at a purely empirical level, because it is quite clear that the forces of production continue to develop. They are not going backwards at the present time. They have advanced very considerably since the 1930s, when Marxists were talking about absolute decline.

However, if you read Lenin, Trotsky or the classical Marxists, there is no question that they argue that capitalism was in decline. An excellent example of Marx's view can be found in the preface to *Capital*, where he talks of the growth, development and death of capitalism. His is a dialectical method: every phenomenon must experience a beginning, its maturity, decline and end.

The comparison has always been with organic entities. Today we have a much better understanding of particle physics and astronomy - we do not have to stick to an organic analogy. Marxists have historically used this organic analogy, taking examples of living entities that come into being, mature and decline. But it is now quite clear to us that this is true of any entity, including the cosmos itself. It came into being, and it will ultimately decline too. So it does not matter what entity you are talking about: a star, a plant or a human being - the same thing is true. It should therefore be obvious that there will have to be a theory of decline of social entities as well - including of capitalism, unless Marxism is to be exceptional as a science.

If one proceeds from there, one would have to argue that capitalism will not be eternal and must therefore come to an end. That cannot happen accidentally, in its maturity. Therefore the question is, why have Marxists often totally ignored this? I think the answer to that is that many are not Marxists at all. That is to say, they do not understand the dialectical method. One starts from the concept of contradiction, of polar opposites interpenetrating and being superseded.

The historical argument then has to be that there was an initial period of capitalism, which is bound up with its transition away from feudalism. The differences between transition and decline are themselves complex, and I have never seen anybody try to make the distinction. The amount of *Marxist* history, as opposed to an empirical history, that has been written is very little. There is not very much one can turn to when talking about it. Historically one is talking about a transition period from feudalism, an embryonic period, a mature period and then a declining period of capitalism.

One question one could ask is why has the period of decline lasted so long? And if this is a period like any other period, does it not also have a coming into being, a mature and declining phase? In other words, capitalism has its laws. And its various periods, including the declining period, also have their laws.

I think one has to make a distinction between decline and terminal crisis. Capitalism patently is not coming to an end right now. It might expire in 10 years time, but it certainly is not going to expire tomorrow. The point is that a decline can potentially last a long time. But a terminal crisis is something quite different. That will occur when capitalism is actually at the point of being overthrown. And of course no Marxist believes that capitalism will *automatically* be overthrown. The conditions may be ready, but the capitalist class itself must be overthrown; the working class must take

Capitalism and

Many in the workers' movement now accept what are erroneously called market values. So is capitalism set to dominate the 21st century? Did Marxism get it wrong about the decadence or decline of capitalism. **Hillel Ticktin** addressed the CPGB's Communist University earlier this year on these and other questions.



Ticktin: theory of decline

The overthrow of capitalism will only take place in the period of decline, but the decline can last a long time

power. So it is possible for all the conditions to be there - and I think they were there in 1917 - but for capitalism to survive, because the capitalist class is sufficiently strong.

In other words one has to make a distinction between the objective and subjective elements. Capitalism itself cannot be overthrown until the subjective aspect is fully integrated with the objective aspect - until the two are identical, as it were. That can only come into being when the working class is fully conscious of itself as a class. But that is not enough. The working class has to actually win a physical battle. Now, I am an optimist, but in principle one could imagine a whole series of defeats, and in a sense that is the epoch we are actually living in. An epoch in which the Russian Revolution, having succeeded, was actually defeated, and in which there have been a series of working class attempts to overthrow the capitalist class which have been thrown

back. One could imagine, for instance, that the ruling class is sufficiently ruthless, as in the case of the Nazis, that they physically wipe out large sections of the left, or of the working class itself. Of course, we see certain aspects of that existing today. One must therefore not make the identity between the overthrow of capitalism and the decline of capitalism. The overthrow of capitalism will only take place in the period of decline, but the decline can last a long time.

We have to look at the decline of capitalism not simply empirically, but theoretically too. Its decline can be absolute or relative. In the 1930s there was an absolute decline, when the forces of production were thrown back. Absolute decline became decay - the decay of social relations, the physical decay of the forces of production. There was a massive decline in the rate of growth, and in some places it was negative. If we look at the last 70 or 80 years, we see the way forces of production are being destroyed, we see the way agriculture is being held back, both in the European Union and in the United States. Sections of agriculture have been taken out completely, even though in large parts of the world people are starving. There has been an absolute decline in that particular aspect.

But, it is said, the forces of production have clearly developed, particularly over the last 30 to 60 years. However, that really should not be the major issue. When I talk about decline I am referring to the social relations of capitalism itself: that must mean the law of value. Capitalism above all, is the law of value. Capitalism after all is the expansion of capital: capital is itself the development of self-expanding value. So we are talking about the relative decline of

capital, the decline of value.

Value itself is being superseded as the controlling aspect of capitalism. If you think about it, this is a fairly obvious point. The prime contradiction within capitalism, according to Marx, is the contradiction between the socialisation of production on the one side, and the ever fewer number of capitalists, or controllers of capital, on the other. What is meant by the socialisation of production? The increasing integration of the forces of production in a greater complexity of the division of labour. Once you say that, you realise that the role of the law of value must be contracting - that is the automatic consequence of the socialisation of production. The greater and greater complexity and the greater and greater integration of the division of labour is a precondition for the coming into being of socialism itself. Production must be increasingly organised. It is not possible to run a society or an economy on the basis of the law of value or the simple market. This is fairly obvious, and it is a point Marx makes quite quickly in *Capital*, where he points out that in the factory itself value does not operate. Within the factory, what you actually have is a form of planning.

Today factories are much more complex, firms are very much bigger, there is greater integration between one firm and another, and the level of competition in real terms is very much lower. Consequently, the interrelationships between the different aspects of capital are much closer. Relationships are less based on value; more based on direct contact, organisation, administration. That does not mean to say that value does not exist. But the role of value is being reduced, squeezed out, supplemented. That will necessarily lead to the increasing malfunctioning of capitalism, which is above all an operation of value. If value is unable to operate, one has to ask, what is it that is actually operating? So unless one is going to argue - it seems crazy, but some do - that the more organised the society, the more capitalist it is, one has therefore to say that capitalism is becoming, as it were, less capitalist.

It is a fairly obvious point. It must be true that, as one enters a period leading up to socialism, there will appear various forms that will permit the coming into being of socialism, in a very much easier and direct form.

There have been those who have argued that the coming into being of socialism is very different from the coming into being of capitalism. There could be specific forms of capitalism already within feudalism - capitalism could already exist. In the case of socialism, quite obviously you cannot have the forms by which the majority can rule, or the forms by which the working class could abolish itself. Nonetheless there are forms coming into existence which are proto-forms of the future society, that presage its existence. This is not an argument for the prefiguring of socialism, which seems to me to be nonsense. These forms are not themselves socialist,

but are proto-socialist - let us call it that. Not in the sense that they are on the left - they may often be anti-working class - but in the sense that they contradict the essence of capitalism itself.

Concretely, I am talking about the growth of monopoly in giant firms, which play a relatively crucial role in the economy. The growth of needs-based sectors such as health, education and arms production; the increasing role of government in the economy - whether through nationalisation or through direct instruments of control, such as over price and profits, borrowing, money supply. All these forms of control stand in direct conflict with the form of value itself. Giant firms permanently control the market. Prices are arbitrarily set by them, not by the market.

Some of my opponents state that there is no growth of monopoly, or even that there is no monopoly. Well, again, how does one define monopoly? The Marxist definition simply relates to a situation where the price is controlled, not necessarily by one firm, in which value cannot operate as one would expect. It is closer to what orthodox economics would term an 'oligopoly'. In other words, a number of firms agree - either directly or indirectly, whether through cartels or simply by various understandings - to set the price, to set the amount of goods they are going to sell. In fact they go much further than that.

At various times there is talk of the European Union breaking up a chemical cartel, a plastics cartel or a pharmaceuticals cartel. But in fact to a considerable degree there is no way of breaking them up. For example Dow Chemicals has taken over Union Carbide, making it the second biggest chemical firm: there is really only Dupont and Dow Chemicals now. The situation with computers, where Intel virtually controls the market, is very similar, with just a few small competitors.

Within modern capitalism the firms which control the market tend to exist for a very long period of time. Phillips was founded over 130 years ago (by Marx's nephew, a history that they do not always shout about). It is a major monopoly, and not just in Holland. It is no longer the case that monopolies come into being and then go out of existence. In 1847 Marx talked of monopoly being replaced by competition, which again leads to monopoly, and so on. Today that occurs at a lower level, but the market is by and large controlled by giant firms which are not going to go out of existence. Nobody believes that Dupont - which after all was founded in 1807, and is still controlled by the Dupont family - is going to go out of existence. These giant firms are more than just monopolies: they exercise permanent control, which prevents the simple operation of the market.

Since an aspect of the socialisation which I mentioned was nationalisation and the important role of the state, one could point to privatisation. And one could also argue that the state sector - education and health, for example -

its decline

are using the market. Well, the answer is, they are not. In a certain sense they are more controlled by the state than they were before. The idea that Margaret Thatcher attempted to 're-introduce the market' is just nonsense. She certainly was not going to break up the large firms. There was no way she could. I think her role was something quite different.

Electricity, gas, water - they all have a regulator, who plays an important role, exercising a greater or lesser degree of control, depending on the industry. The regulator determines prices, in order to arrive at a particular rate of profit, which is not decided by the market, but by him. This has to be so, because obviously there is no real competition, which has been the case in the United States for decades. There is a form of control where consumers or consumer organisations go to court and the whole issue is fought out there. Nobody argues that the court is equal to market. But the utilities are controlled in that particular way in the United States, and in the case of Britain it is not very different. So, although the market was in theoretical terms introduced, in reality that is not the case. We are talking about a form of control other than value.

The *Economist* and other journals have made it quite clear that privatisation did not take place in order to expand the market: it took place for straightforward political reasons - in order to control the working class. Of course, it has had a degree of success in doing so. Obviously if you break up the coal mines, if you break up the railways, it becomes more difficult to unionise workers. It becomes easier for the state to control them. But the essential point is, whatever was actually done with privatisation, the market continued to decline.

In fact arms production is determined in the same way - by the needs of the state. If we look at the way the market has supposedly been introduced into health and education what we see is in reality just a muddle. There cannot be real competition within education or health; workers cannot be controlled by turning teachers or healthworkers into a proletariat, as they would be under the market. It simply does not work. Whatever the intentions, the result has been poorer quality education, poorer quality healthcare, and almost certainly something which is more expensive than it was before. One could not say that anything which could be remotely called a market was introduced, let alone the law of value. There are various forms of organisational control, with formal comparisons to the market. But an analogy with the market is not the market.

As a result of the decline in the law of value, in this period there is a very large gap developing between price and value. A watch, for example, almost certainly costs only a few pence to produce. But it will be sold for perhaps £20 - ie, many times its value, many times its cost - simply because the degree of control over the price, and therefore over the market, is so great. What has also happened over this period is the growth and great cheapening of the force of production, and of the goods that are produced.

If prices were reduced to the level of their value, or rather the price of production, prices, and profits themselves, would go right down. Now one of the aspects of the socialisation of production is a rise in the organic composition of capital and an auto-

matic decline in the rate of profit. That has not happened, primarily because producers have been able to keep prices up as against value, allowing them to make a very considerable profit. We are actually living in a period in which capitalism is becoming increasingly organised, but also increasingly arbitrary.

This gap between price and value implies a very high rate of surplus value. It does not *automatically* follow from that that there is a high rate of profit, which depends on the organic composition of capital invested. Part of surplus value is diverted into the state sector, into arms production, via taxation. Enormous sums are invested in various aspects of circulatory and decaying capital too: for instance, advertising. From the point of view of Marxism that is unproductive: as a matter of fact it is waste.

This is quite a complex issue, but one can say that this kind of gap cannot be sustained forever. We are now living in a period in which almost certainly there is going to be a massive crisis. The guardians of capitalism in the United States are doing their best to try to avoid it, but it is quite clear that in certain respects it is already taking place - most of the world now is in some kind of crisis, outside of the United States and maybe parts of Europe. The point is that this gap between price and value must close at some point. Clearly there is enormous overproduction throughout the world - whether in terms of car production, chemical production, computers or whatever. There is also an enormous gap between what could be produced and what is being produced. At some point it is going to explode. We are in a situation which hangs by a thread. It can be held off for a long time, but the gap between price and value must inevitably show itself in that kind of crisis.

There is an enormous surplus of capital. The United States has something like \$1.66 trillion of assets in pension funds, which have to be invested. Where are they going to be invested? In the period before the Asian crisis they went to various parts of the world. \$100 billion was actually withdrawn from Asia when the crisis took place there. This applied to a number of countries which were considered increasingly risky. In terms of the funds which are actually held this was not a very great amount. Nonetheless these funds must be invested somewhere.

What has held the crisis back up until now? Primarily the cold war. So long as there was Stalinism, it was possible for the United States to discipline the working class. The anti-communist ideology allowed the working class to be disciplined, allowed the unions to be controlled, allowed wages to be held down, for a long period of time. They have gone up in real terms, but in relation to total surplus value they were held down.

Much of the cold war propaganda was true. Not all of it of course - not the anti-socialism. But there was indeed terror in eastern Europe and in Russia. There was no question about the role of the labour camps. The working class was controlled in these countries. There is no doubt the standard of living was much lower than in the United States. It might not have made any difference if it was untrue, but, however much we may be opposed to US ideology, the fact is that the ideology that was put forward rang true - the United States of

course had substantial immigration from the Ukraine, Poland and so on. And that produced a degree of acceptance in the working class and permitted the kind of discipline that we saw in the United States for a long period of time. It was not the only reason, but the cold war certainly was crucial. World War II and fascism, as well as the McCarthyite period, were also factors.

Although the cold war was primary in holding back the crisis, the arms sector, which today accounts for \$250 billion, was also important. Arms production raised profits directly through the state sector, which under capitalism is inefficient, because it is corrupt. The state would necessarily pay a lot more for arms production than if it had been purely in the private sector. And, unlike expenditure on health and education or raising wages, arms production does not strengthen the working class. It is the ideal way to waste money - much better than just digging holes and filling them up again. Arms production constantly created its own demand. The forces of production require continuous improvements. Better arms, better bombs, better means of delivery.

Arms production raised the rate of profit; it prevented a disproportion between department one and department two: between heavy industry and consumer production. Many people - like the Socialist Workers Party in this country - see the ever expanding arms sector purely in technical terms. The SWP theory is so stupid, it is hardly worth a mention. But I am doing so in order to make the distinction between its theory and what I am saying.

The Soviet Union itself acted as a stimulus for demand. It needed wheat and so propped up the Canadian, United States and Argentinean agricultural industry. It needed machine tools on an increasing scale, which played quite an important part in relation to Germany.

The point then is that the cold war in its historical context is what allowed capitalism to continue in a period of decline. The very fact of the cold war was an indication of the decline of capitalism - the destruction of the world had to be threatened. It is a barbaric system that can only be maintained in this way.

Now that the cold war is no longer there, the gap between price and value cannot be maintained. The different aspects of crisis which have been held at bay all through this period can no longer be maintained either. That is why there is an enormous surplus of capital today which has no outlet. It has led to peculiar forms of investment, such as the hedge funds. Last year, in order to prevent a crisis from breaking out it was necessary for the US government to bail out the long-term management hedge funds - which owed \$1.3 trillion, but had assets of only \$600 billion. Hedge funds represent the gambling of huge sums of capital, looking for outlets. It has become increasingly more difficult for governments to control, as Greenspan managed to in this particular instance. It was impossible to supply \$700 billion. \$5 billion turned out to be enough and the banks agreed not to foreclose.

Such action has stopped the present crisis from breaking out in its full force. It is quite clear that in spite of the nonsense talked about private enterprise and the market, the authorities are always prepared to step in. The idea that 'you can't buck the

market' is just rubbish, and takes someone as stupid as Thatcher to propose. The market is always bucked; the market today never runs by itself. There are always a small number of people who are in control. But for how long will this be able to continue?

Some time ago I met a stockbroker who argued that crisis would break out, and that the government would not be able to control it, and I argued against that, rather paradoxically. But I now think that it is probably true that the surplus capital is so huge that governments will not be able to stop the crisis at a certain point. It will simply roll over them.

The development of capitalism to the point of finance capital is itself a very clear aspect of direct decline. Money is taken out of production and put into circulation, as a result of which the productive sector is starved. The unproductive sector grows; the productive sector declines. If one actually has the viewpoint, which apparently quite a few finance capitalists do have, that money makes money, then the logic would be that nothing at all would be invested in production and capitalism would effectively die. It would be like the behaviour of a parasite which did not understand the nature of its host.

However, the growth of finance capital represents not only a movement from the productive to the unproductive. It also represents the dominance of abstract capitalism - ie, abstracted from production, but able to organise the economy as a whole. That is a new phase of capitalism. The different aspects of monopoly, nationalisation and so forth are bound together by a finance capitalist class. However, finance capital, which itself is the final form, or the form of decline of capitalism, is itself in decline.

In the 1860s and 1870s, when finance capital began to develop in Britain, money was taken out of production and exported elsewhere, or put into the insurance industry, for example. That was done by big capital, by capitalists whose names were known. That is no longer the case. Today decisions as to where money is to be invested - which sectors, which parts of the world - is made primarily in the United States by something like 20 investment managers. These pension funds, the insurance companies and so on, hold shares on the stock exchange.

It appears that these investment managers meet every six months, possibly now more often, and agree - very broadly obviously - how they are going to invest. They are part of the capitalist class in the sense that they are rich and have some number of shares. But it is the fund managers, not the actual owners, who are responsible for accumulation today. Finance capital has therefore evolved to an even more degenerate stage. To a certain extent what is being used as capital are the pensions and savings of the working class. This is a very contradictory form of capitalism. It is not spontaneous capitalism in any sense. The capitalist class is standing at one remove. Marx made the point that joint stock companies make the capitalist otiose. Now of course this has been vastly extended.

At the present time, there are rising share prices, rising apparent values, yet a relatively low rate of growth within production. It is a major problem. France and Germany have redirected or at least maintained investment in industry. Even in the case of Britain, it is clear that the capitalist class is worried about the small size of its industrial sector. In order to survive it has to invest its unproductive capital. Capital understands that to the extent its industrial sector shrinks its finance capital is automatically reduced. Pension funds cannot grow if there are fewer workers. This cycle is

necessary, but the capitalist class is in insufficient control for that despite a higher degree of organisation.

When finance capital is in control, as it is in the United States and Britain, the nature of industrial capital also changes. Although it is in antagonism and direct conflict with finance capital, nonetheless it is managed in accordance with finance capitalist norms - in other words in a short-termist way. It is governed by the laws of finance capital, which is of course first and foremost directed towards making profit as quickly as possible, irrespective of the manner it is made. So industrial capital in Britain is of an inferior kind, as compared to the long-termism in Germany. It is not an accident that German capital has been superior to British capital: it is not governed in the same way by finance capital. For example German banks are prepared to invest for 20 years - unlike in Britain, where a return is demanded within two years. The banks are prepared not only to lend for a longer period, but to buy shares in the company, the result of which is that the Deutsche Bank virtually owns Germany.

This logically means that industrial firms will transform themselves, as Ford and Volkswagen are doing in Brazil. The headquarters and the marketing operations are maintained, and not the assembly lines, which are taken over by others. British Airways was talking the same way a year ago - concentrating on its marketing and finance operations.

Keynes talked about a return to industrial capital, and finance capital being put on the back burner. There is no question that that actually happened. Between 1940 and 1973, the standard of living for the working class rose three times in Britain. It was unprecedented within the whole history of capitalism. Nobody holds that capitalism acts in the interests of the working class. The capitalist class, realising that it could be overthrown, had to mount a retreat. It had to make concessions to the working class. However, from 1973 onwards finance capital has undoubtedly returned as the dominant form.

I have argued up to now - implicitly, if not explicitly - that the theory of decline put forward by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky is correct. But I am putting forward a more general theory of decline. The capitalist class, because it realised that it could be overthrown in this period, as it was overthrown in 1917, preferred to accept the cold war and a period of growth. And that did indeed maintain capitalism. But there was a limit to it and that limit has been reached. We are returning, as it were, to a previous period, not just of relative decline, but a period in which one has to raise the possibility of absolute decline. Clearly in much of the third world the standard of living has been dropping for some time. But the same may well become true in the first world.

In conclusion it can be demonstrated that capitalism is in decline in two ways. First, empirically: the gap between potential and actual productive forces is enormous and growing. Capitalism is not fulfilling its own function, as it were, of raising production. There are so many ways in which capitalism holds it back. Could not socialism vastly increase production, compared with the present day? I think the answer is obvious.

Secondly, in terms of the social relations of production. They have departed significantly from classical capitalism: that is to say, the expansion of value. There is an increasing role for decadent sectors such as finance capital, which pull money out of value, and sectors which are not actually governed by value, but which are governed by management, organisation, etc. It is still capitalism - the capitalist class is there - but this is hardly a more mature form ●

Red-brown cesspit

On December 19 Russia goes to the polls to elect a new state duma. To try and predict the outcome of the election is futile. Practically nothing about it has appeared in the western media, and even at home the campaign has been totally overshadowed by the war in Chechnya and by next year's much more significant presidential election.

Whatever the outcome, however, it seems probable that the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, at present the largest party in the duma, will continue to occupy an important place in Russian politics. The purpose of this article is to examine the ideology of the CPRF, not least because it is the only major party in the contest that lays any claim - albeit a false one - specifically to represent the interests of the Russian working class.

I hope to show that: first, the CPRF has nothing whatever in common with Marxism or (apart from its name) communism; secondly, that it cannot even be described as a social democratic party or a bourgeois party of the working class; thirdly, though dressed up in the rhetoric of communism its politics are thoroughly reactionary and chauvinist - in fact the category of 'red-brown' is, if anything, too generous: as we shall see, there has been a substantial and continuing shift away from the 'red' towards the 'brown'. In order to demonstrate these propositions, it will be necessary to look in some detail at the political and ideological evolution of the party in recent years and to summarise the platform with which it is entering the elections.

First, a few words about the party in general. With a claimed membership of some 500,000 people and a nationwide infrastructure, the CPRF is Russia's only real mass party. In the almost complete absence of any *organised* extra-parliamentary opposition among the working class, the CPRF has become the focus for opposition to the Yeltsin regime and thus appears to be a formidable political force. To some extent, however, this appearance is deceptive. In the first place, it is an old party (average age of membership is around 55) and its social class composition, far from consisting of workers, is dominated by a narrow stratum of pensioners, war veterans, some former members of the Soviet *nomenklatura*, and a heavy ballast of lower-level former bureaucrats, once employed in the party and state apparatus, many of them in the agrarian and military-industrial sectors.

What we are dealing with, therefore, is hardly a party of activists bent on revolution - not even an organisation demanding radical, left social democratic structural reforms of the economy and property relations, but a 'clientele' of the dispossessed, disaffected and despairing, for whom the collapse of the USSR and the rape of Russia by foreign and domestic capital under Yeltsin has meant not just a loss of status, but in many cases social degradation and crushing poverty.

The history of the CPRF in its present form began in February 1993, with the election of Gennadiy Andreyevich Zyuganov to the post of chairman of the central executive committee, in the process beating Valentin Kuptsov, a left social democrat candidate for the post. Born in June 1944, Zyuganov graduated as a maths teacher and later took a doctorate of philosophy in social sci-

Michael Malkin examines the Great Russian chauvinism and anti-semitism of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation



CPRF election emblem: Stalin's Order of Victory becomes "For the victory of Russian patriots"

The very phrase 'state patriotism' should by itself be enough to demonstrate that Zyuganov's politics have nothing in common with Marxism

ences. His party career in the CPSU involved work in the Orlovsk city committee of the party and culminated in his becoming one of the deputy directors of the ideology department of the CPSU central committee. Prior to the collapse of the USSR he was a political commentator on the daily newspaper *Sovietskaya Rossiya*. To call him a hack party bureaucrat and Soviet ideologist would not be unduly harsh.

In retrospect, we can see that Zyuganov began his leadership with two strategic goals: to make the CPRF a strong parliamentarist opposition and to supply it with an ideology to replace the (in his eyes) outmoded baggage of Soviet Marxism-Leninism. His first task was to consolidate the CPRF's position by dealing with rival organisations on his left (the Russian Communist Workers Party, headed by Viktor Anpilov) and on his right (the Socialist Party of Workers, led by Lyudmila Vartazarova). In this he was successful: Anpilov's organisation, even then a Stalinist party masquerading as revolutionary Leninists, lost many activists to the CPRF. A doggedly Stalinist rump of the RCWP still exists, but is of only marginal significance. The SPW, a moderate reformist organisation also lost much of its passive, elderly membership, attracted by Zyuganov's dynamism.

The first defining moment for the CPRF came in October 1993, when the

long-standing confrontation between Yeltsin and the duma culminated in the shelling of the White House by tanks and the collapse of the opposition led by Ruslan Khasbulatov and former Russian vice-president Aleksander Rutskoi. As the crisis mounted during the summer, Zyuganov distanced the CPRF from any involvement in the opposition's attempt at igniting a popular insurrection, making it clear that the party was embarked on an exclusively parliamentary road. Having destroyed the last vestiges of rebellion, Yeltsin lost no time in consolidating his victory: all leftwing organisations (including the CPRF) were banned; new elections were called for December 1993, to take place simultaneously with a referendum on a new constitution that endowed the presidency with dictatorial powers and more or less reduced the duma to a toothless talking shop.

At this stage the CPRF's left wing claimed that the only principled course was to call for a boycott of the polls, since to do otherwise would have meant giving *post facto* legitimacy to Yeltsin's bloody outrage. For a while Zyuganov followed this line, but as soon as the ban on the CPRF was lifted - at the instigation of the Yeltsinite Russia's Choice bloc, who knew a pliant and ambitious politician when they saw one - Zyuganov changed course to proposing a 'no' vote in the referendum. This set the CPRF apart from those other left organisations, whose adherence to a boycottist position forced them out of legal politics. Lacking the necessary cadres, resources and - most of all - a coherent theory, they were unable to partake in serious politics and to all intents and purposes fell apart.

Some might say that Zyuganov was saving the party - but saving it for what? The answer, which like everything else about the CPRF is full of contradictions, became clear after the 1993 elections and has remained constant. It was not a love of democracy that motivated Zyuganov - the internal workings of the CPRF make that abundantly clear. No, Zyuganov wanted to save the CPRF so that it could, he hoped, become a party of government committed not to the *dismantling* of Russia's new 'capitalist' polity and economy, nor even to its structural *reform* along social democratic lines, but to the creation of a strong Russian state on top of the disintegrating economic infrastructure.

The CPRF's record as the main party of opposition in the duma has also been marked by contradiction: on the one hand, vitriolic condemnation of Yeltsin and his successive prime ministers, but on the other, a marked degree of cooperation particularly on the state budgets of 1994-96, in which the CPRF acted essentially as a lobbyist for the sectional interests of its clientele. During the long premiership of Viktor Chernomyrdin and even more so that of Yevgeniy Primakov, the CPRF could point to some significant gains in terms of increased subsidies for depressed sectors of the agro-industrial and military industrial complexes. Under Primakov, the CPRF even had a deputy prime minister in the person of Yuriy Maslyukov, the last head of Gosplan and a full mem-

ber of the central committee of the CPSU, who was given charge of economic planning.

To be sure, there have been sharp confrontations between the CPRF duma fraction and Yeltsin over confirming the president's appointment of various prime ministers. Latterly, of course, there was the CPRF's unsuccessful attempt earlier this year to impeach Yeltsin for, amongst other things, his role in the "treasonable" dismantling of the USSR, his "criminal" war against Chechnya in 1994-6, and "genocide of the Russian people". The pattern has, however, always been the same - confrontation, sometimes to the brink of the duma's dissolution, followed by climbdown. Under the current premiership of VV Putin, whose standing has been dramatically enhanced by the current war against Chechnya, the CPRF, like almost all the main party blocs, has adopted a stance of unequivocal support for the government.

Within months of his election as leader, Zyuganov signalled a rearticulation of the CPRF's ideological past by promulgating his concept of 'state patriotism' (*gosudarstvenniy patriotizm*), which we examine below. His tactic was to produce a set of theses that marked a complete and unashamed embrace of nationalism and then get the party to accept them. At first, there was stiff resistance from such leftwing members as the veteran theoretician of Soviet Marxism-Leninism, Richard Kosola-pov, and the head of the CPRF in the Krasnodar region, Anatoliy Barykin, who complained that the new line had ditched any reference to communism. The dispute reached its climax at the April 1994 CPRF congress, but Zyuganov got his majority, even though he conceded the omission of any reference to 'state patriotism' from the platform for the 1995 duma elections, using instead the compromise formula of "soviet state patriotism" and calling for the "unity of patriotic and internationalist aims" (*Documents of the CPRF's 3rd Congress* pp96-118).

The background to the 1995 duma poll, from which the CPRF emerged as the strongest party, were particularly auspicious: there was yet another economic crisis and the war in Chechnya had started to go badly for the Russian army. Support for the CPRF rose markedly and Zyuganov scented the possibility of power. Hence, he backtracked on the new line to some extent, and larded the party's programme with references to Marx and Lenin, in the hope of harnessing the broadest possible support across the old left. At the same time, the CPRF conducted its election campaign in such a way as to guarantee that independent, revolutionary leftists were denied any possibility of success, even though that meant ensuring that Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin supporters gained the victory in the constituencies concerned.

Under the new constitution, the CPRF's power in the duma, strong on paper, was actually meaningless. The approach of the presidential elections in 1996, in which Zyuganov was the CPRF's candidate, marked the decisive ideological shift. He succeeded in having all references to socialism expunged from his platform - unless you include otiose references to the

CPRF's desire to bring in a constitution based on "genuine - ie, Soviet - people's power". Strenuous efforts were made to convince Russia's embryonic capitalists that their interests would be safe in Zyuganov's hands.

Hence, CPRF specialists, under the leadership of Tatiana Koryagina, produced an economic platform, *This can be done today*, that promised active state support for privately-owned financial-industrial combines, making repeated references to the example of China and Roosevelt's New Deal. The 3rd Congress's commitment that "property acquired in defiance of the law, the country's interests and the rights of labour" would be expropriated. Instead, the state's central goal would be "collaboration with corporations and their allies (financial-industrial groups, consortiums)". The creation of such groups would be encouraged by means of tax breaks, easy credit and state investment. In short, a promise of support for capital, albeit with the emphasis on *Russian* capital in the service of "Russia's national-state interests". Nothing could more starkly illustrate the CPRF's capitulation to the New Russians.

The very phrase 'state patriotism' should by itself be enough to demonstrate that Zyuganov's politics have nothing in common with Marxism. Its practical meaning became crystal clear during the 1994-96 Chechen war. At the time of the invasion, the CPRF actually voted to condemn the Russian military offensive - a sign that there were liberal voices which Zyuganov had yet to silence. CPRF duma deputy Leonid Pokrovskiy went to Chechnya with human rights commissioner Sergei Kovalev and worked alongside him trying to expose the reality of the army's war on Chechen civilians. Zyuganov was incensed, accused Kovalev of "one-sidedly" supporting Chechen separatists and intrigued to procure his dismissal.

When Russia's application to join the Council of Europe was later being considered, in January 1996, Kovalev addressed an open letter to Strasbourg warning that Russia's conduct in Chechnya made it ineligible for membership. Zyuganov's reaction? To side unequivocally with Yeltsin - his supposed sworn enemy - and uphold the right of Russia to bomb civilians in order to defeat "Chechen terrorists", arguing that any *weakness* on Russia's part - ie, any respect for human rights and human lives - would "help the growth of fundamentalism in the Caucasus" (*Segodnya* January 27 1996). The CPRF, needless to say, said not a word in protest at the clampdown which then, as recently, took place against Chechen and other Caucasian nationals living in Moscow and other Russian cities.

Small wonder that Zyuganov has been a firm supporter of prime minister Putin's latest Chechen adventure - in 1996 and thereafter Zyuganov was by far the most strident critic of Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin for surrendering. Somehow he manages to square this with wanting to impeach Yeltsin on the grounds of having conducted a "criminal" war in Chechnya. Perhaps the crime, in the eyes of Zyuganov, the 'state patriot', is that Russia lost.

'State patriotism' is of course just old-fashioned Great Russian chauvinism. However, in attempting to put some theoretical flesh on the bare bones of the concept, Zyuganov has concocted a poisonous mix of hysterical xenophobia and a touch of

paranoia. He starts by repudiating the idea of class struggle, and dismisses the obvious contradiction between Marxist class analysis and his "all-national world outlook" as more apparent than real: in his vision, "The whole Russian people, overcoming schisms imposed on it from without and within, will constitute itself as one unified conciliar personality, one family." The class approach must be "enriched by the cultural-historical and social-psychological" (GA Zyuganov *Derzhava* Moscow 1994, p39).

These "schisms", be it noted, are not the product of class society, but have been "imposed" on the Russian "family", in part by wicked foreigners. This is bad enough, but in his book *Russia - my homeland*, published two years later, Zyuganov goes much further, actually rejecting the idea of class struggle altogether, and *blaming* it for Russia's sorry plight: we are told that the main contradiction in Russian society is not between classes, but "between the ruling regime and the rest of the population". What is more, "The most powerful means for the suppression of Russian national self-consciousness, the main weapons for its break-up and the cutting off of its historical continuity, are the ceaseless attempts to antagonistically counterpose in people's minds the 'white' and 'red' national ideas" (GA Zyuganov *Rossiia - rodina maya* Moscow 1996, p218).

In developing his concept of what he calls the 'Russian idea', Zyuganov claims that it represents a synthesis between the 'white' and 'red' ideas: "Unifying the 'red' idea of social justice, which takes shape as the worldly hypostasis of the 'heavenly' truth that 'all are equal before god', and the 'white' idea of nationally comprehended statehood, perceived as the existent form of the things that have been sacred to the people for centuries, Russia has finally found its longed-for mutual agreement between estates and classes, its might as a great power" (*ibid* p219). Without this uniquely Russian synthesis, "national salvation" is impossible. To make it quite clear just where his ideas are coming from, Zyuganov tells his readers to study the works of Ivan Ilyin, the reactionary philosopher, whose anti-Bolshevik writings were very popular in white émigré circles, and whose tome *On resisting evil by force* - an incitement to counterrevolutionary violence - Zyuganov describes as his "best book" (*ibid* p63).

That Zyuganov, far from being a communist, or even a social democrat, is in fact a brazen counterrevolutionary and a propagator of virulent anti-communism should by now be obvious. In the turgid 'theorising' of such works as *Russia - my homeland* we discover a doctrine directed not towards the liberation of humanity from alienation and oppression, but towards its continued enslavement. In seeking to bolster his notion of Russian statehood, Zyuganov is not content with ransacking the works of such people as NA Berdyayev - the 'legal Marxist' turned mystic and god-seeking apostle of social inequality, or the theocrat VS Solovyov. He goes back to such reactionaries as S Uvarov, minister of education under tsar Nicholas I, whose formula of nationality-autocracy-orthodoxy, employed in the 19th century to underpin tsarism and serfdom, Zyuganov puts to a new use: this trinity, rich in "cultural-historical meaning", is adapted to the present day, comprising the CPRF (popular unity), the rightwing nationalists (Russian statehood) and the Russian orthodox church (*ibid* pp232-37). For this former ideologist of the CPSU, writing in a pamphlet entitled *Russia and the world today*, "Russian statehood grew and ascended from strength to strength as imperial statehood" and

the Soviet Union was the "historical and geopolitical continuator of the Russian empire" (GA Zyuganov *Rossiia i sovremenniy mir* Moscow 1995, p46).

In this pamphlet, Zyuganov treats us to a disquisition on the role of the Russian state that bears the unmistakable imprint of Great Russian messianism: Russia constitutes "a cultural-historical and moral tradition, whose fundamental values are conciliatory, great-powerhood and a striving to embody the highest ideals of kindness and justice"; as "a unique ethno-political and spiritual-ideological unity", it is the mission of a strong Russian state to save civilisation from the consequences of western dominance and the rise of islam (*ibid* pp65-6).

Such are the mystical and messianic vapourings of Gennadiy Andreyevich when he dons the philosopher's mantle. They reek of obscurantism and reaction and are evidently the product of a third-rate, perhaps slightly hysterical and paranoid intellect. Does that mean that we should dismiss them as mere bunkum, or as opportunistic pandering to the nationalist sentiments of the Russian electorate? Certainly not. To do so would be a serious mistake for two reasons. First, it is the duty of communists to fight against reactionary, proto-fascist ideology of this kind in all circumstances, but especially when it is propagated by so-called 'communists' themselves. Secondly, Zyuganov is not just a cranky Great Russian chauvinist - he is also an anti-semit.

It can hardly be a coincidence, for example, that Zyuganov has sat on the editorial board of *Zavtra*, a newspaper, edited by his close collaborator and mentor Prokhanov, that regularly publishes anti-semitic articles. Zyuganov's own remarks about the baleful influence of Jews on the history of Russia are well documented, as is the fact that, in a manner and tone worthy of the *Protocols of the elders of Zion*, he attributes Russia's catastrophic economic state to the machinations of international Jewry. His close colleague, Viktor Ilyukhin, chairman of one of the дума committees, states quite openly: "If there were less Jews in the Russian government, then Russia would not be in the state it is in today."

In his writings, Zyuganov repeatedly maintains that there were in fact two parties within the old CPSU: a patriotic, Russian party - "the party of Sholokhov and Korolev, Zhukhov and Gagarin, Kurchatov and Stakhanov"; and the anti-patriotic "party of Trotsky and Kaganovich, Beria and Mekhlis, Gorbachev and Yeltsin, Yakovlev and Shevardnadze" (see *Rossiia - rodina maya* p327). The list is revealing: of the 'good guys', all are, of course, Russians and not a single one was a politician; on the other hand, Zyuganov's contemporary 'villains' are linked with the names of three prominent Bolsheviks - LD Trotsky, MM Kaganovich and LZ Mekhlis - whose could hardly have differed more from each other politically, but who just happen to have been Jews.

Needless to say, the CPRF denies that it is remotely anti-semitic. For example, on December 23 1998, the party's website carried a statement by Zyuganov intended to reassure us that in its ideology and composition the party is "internationalist". It states: "Any forms in which chauvinism and national intolerance manifest themselves ... are incompatible with communist convictions." But the language he uses to defend himself actually demonstrates his guilt. Accusations of anti-semitism are just "lies and slander" put about by "Russophobic", "non-national" and "anti-popular" forces in the mass media. It just so happens that these epithets, like the Stalinist code word 'cosmopolitan' - also much loved by

Zyuganov - are regularly employed in CPRF materials as euphemisms for 'Jewish'.

In time-honoured fashion, Zyuganov seeks to dissociate himself and his party from anti-semitism by drawing a sharp distinction between Zionism and what he calls "the Jewish problem". But the manner in which he attempts to do so is hardly convincing: not only is Zionism part of an imperialist world conspiracy, striving for "world supremacy", but, he claims, it is also actually worse than Hitler's national socialism, for "Hitlerite Nazism acted under the mask of German nationalism and strove for world supremacy *openly*, while Zionism, when it appears under the mask of Jewish nationalism, acts in a *concealed manner* ..."

Let the conclusion of his extraordinary tirade speak for itself: "Zionisation of the governmental authorities of Russia was one of the causes of the country's present-day catastrophic situation, of the mass impoverishment and extinction of its population. They cannot close their eyes to the aggressive and destructive role of Zionist capital in the disruption of the economy of Russia and in the misappropriation of its national property. They are right when they ask the question as to how it could happen that the key positions in several branches of the economy were seized during privatisation mainly by the representatives of one nationality. They see that control over most of the electronic mass media, which wage a destructive struggle against our motherland, morality, language, culture and beliefs, is concentrated in the hands of the same persons." And these are the words of a man trying to prove that he is *not* an anti-semit.

However painful it may be for some, we have no choice but to acknowledge that the ideological roots of Zyuganov's approach to the "Jewish problem" go deep into the history of the CPSU. It is a matter of plain historical fact that in the post-war years Stalin was planning a wide-scale purge of Jews. The ZIS case (November 1950) was a precursor - a number of doctors, executives and bureaucrats working in the Stalin Automobile Factory in Moscow were arrested and shot. They were all Jews. On January 13 1953 Tass issued a communiqué concerning the discovery of a "terrorist group of poisoning doctors" and the arrest of prominent Jews began. The February 8 *Pravda* article 'Simpletons and scoundrels' contained a long list of names - the 'scoundrels' (Jews) against whom the 'simpletons' (Russians) had relaxed their vigilance. Only Stalin's death prevented the purge, which reportedly included plans for the mass deportation of Jews to Siberia, from going ahead.

In this connection, it should come as no surprise that Zyuganov's reading of post-revolutionary Russian history is thoroughly Stalinist. He speaks of the "ideological Russophobia of the radical-cosmopolitan [ie, Jewish - MM] wing of the party" having been "seduced" by the idea of world revolution, and incidentally blames the "radical-cosmopolitans" for the "dekulakisation" and mass repressions of the 1930s. Stalin, however, "like no one else" understood the need for the revival of the "Russian idea" and in the post-war years initiated an "ideological reconstruction", with the patriotic teaching of Russian history and a new approach to religion and relations with the orthodox church (*Rossiia - rodina maya* pp141-143; p327).

Some might ask why I have devoted so much space to the question of the CPRF's anti-semitism. Because this vile and perverse aspect of the party's ideology should alone be enough to condemn it in the eyes of anyone calling themselves Marxist or communist.

Lenin's attitude to the question was absolutely clear: "Only the utterly ignorant and cowed can believe the lies and slanders against Jews ... It is not Jews who are the enemies of the workers. The enemies of the workers are the capitalists of all countries. The majority of Jews are toilers. They are our brothers as victims of capitalist oppression, our comrades in the struggle for socialism. Amongst the Jews there are kulaks, exploiters and capitalists, just as there are among Russians, just as there are in all nations ... the capitalists attempt to sow and to inflame hostility between workers of different religions, different nations and different races ... Rich Jews, like rich Russians, like rich people throughout the world, ally with each other and crush, oppress, rob and divide the workers ... Shame on those who sow hostility towards Jews, who sow hatred of other nations!" (VI Lenin, 'On the pogromist persecution of Jews', quoted in *Perspektiva*, journal of the Union of Marxists, Moscow February 1999).

On this occasion there is not sufficient space to deal in detail with the CPRF's programme - in every sense a heavy document - but the main plank of the platform on which the party will fight the December 19 дума election were clearly set out in an interview which Zyuganov gave earlier this year to *Pravda* correspondent Vladimir Bolshakov.

The party's campaign will be fought under the central slogan of 'Victory to the patriots of Russia', reflecting the fact that, while standing in its own right, the CPRF is also part of a block of more than 200 organisations comprising the People's Patriotic Union of Russia, a broad coalition of nationalist forces that came into being after the 1996 presidential elections, and of which Zyuganov was unanimously elected chairman. According to Zyuganov, the PPUR can be likened to "the resistance movement operating in France during World War II: it includes communists, agrarians, social-democrats, and rightwingers who have all united on the basis of patriotism ... Our motto is 'Order in the land - prosperity in our homes' ... We are all united above all by a common concern for our native land [and] share the same views about the protection of Russia's national interests and restoration of a unified federal state." Just in case this sounds rather too rightwing, Zyuganov adds that "Our primary concern is about social justice and the protection of the interests of the working people" ('When my country is in danger' *Pravda* February 9-10 1999).

The sycophantic Bolshakov is too polite to ask Zyuganov how the latter assertion about the interests of the working people, coming from a 'communist', can be squared with an economic platform that is almost unreservedly committed to stabilising the hybrid semi-capitalist, semi-bureaucratic socialist relations of production and circulation which at present characterise Russia. As Zyuganov puts it, "I'm for the market ... We have discarded many of the dogmas that used to be as untouchable as the sacred cows in India ... If we come to power, we will not move towards all-out nationalisation and egalitarianism. We are now in favour of state ownership and various other forms of ownership" (*ibid*).

According to the assessment of Mikhail Dimitriev of the Carnegie Centre in Moscow, this markedly understates the reality of the CPRF's *volte face*: "In 1995 a major aim of the CPRF was to alter the outcome of privatisation, including the long-run goal of renationalisation of major industries ... The CPRF is now talking about how to enforce property rights. In unambiguous terms it accepts that, where competition exists, private property should be the dominant form of own-

ership. Although the CPRF continues to support collective ownership, it now defines this term as it is defined in western economies, meaning private, employee-owned firms. The CPRF's economic programme supports state ownership only for natural monopolies and enterprises in need of long-term restructuring" (*Russian and Eurasian issue brief* October 28 1999).

When it comes to answering questions about the CPRF's relationship to its communist and Soviet inheritance, Zyuganov is necessarily ambiguous, because he needs somehow to reconcile the glaringly contradictory forces both within the CPRF and the broader PPUR.

On the one hand, he tells us that "the Soviet era was the heyday of Russia's prosperity and greatness, the acme of its history". When rather pathetically depicting himself and the CPRF as possible victims of future persecution by rightwing extremist oligarchs such as Berezovsky, he has the gall to claim that such persecution will be on account of the fact that Zyuganov and his comrades have "never renounced our credo and have remained communists." Asked why he has always resisted changing the party's name, he replies candidly: "We are using it to present our party as a political force capable of returning to the Russians all those social gains, social protection, the prosperity, greatness and power of our country which have been taken away from us by the 'democratic' traitors (*Pravda* February 9-10)".

On the other hand, "It's time we stopped dividing the left into true believers and infidels. Social democracy and the communist movement represent one political trend in the struggle for social justice, democracy and human rights. Today's communists should take and apply the best of the international experience of leftist movements. And not only leftist" (*ibid*).

What, we might ask finally, do "today's communists" in the CPRF actually represent? Despite the plethora of contradictions and absurdities in their writings and statements, the answer seems unequivocal: rank opportunism, counterrevolution and a poisonous brew of the most reactionary Great Russian chauvinism and anti-semitism. That is the reality.

It could be argued with some justification that Zyuganov is a true son of Stalin, that his 'state patriotism' is the natural continuation of that 'Soviet' - ie, *Russian* - patriotism which characterised Stalinism. Stalin, of course, however sweeping his power, was still obliged by the political character of the Soviet regime and its ideology of Marxism-Leninism to continue claiming adherence to the ideas of revolution, class struggle and proletarian socialist internationalism. Zyuganov is under no such constraint, and has repudiated the lot. Stalin turned Marx, Engels and Lenin into icons in the temple of Soviet state power and nationhood. Zyuganov has discarded the old icons and replaced them with the icons of Russian orthodoxy.

Whatever its precise origins in the realm of the history of ideas, 'state patriotism', like all ideologies, did not spring up from nowhere, but arose out of a complex of politico-economic circumstances, namely the vacuum created by the collapse of the USSR. It reflects not the interests of the working class of Russia, but the dashed hopes of that stratum of the Soviet bureaucracy that dreamt that the old system could work and would sooner or later dominate the world.

Either way, born of disillusionment, humiliation and despair, maturing in a climate of nationalism, xenophobia and racism, Zyuganov and his party represent the negation of every value which Marxists and revolutionary internationalists hold dear ●

Change and flux

Steve Jones **Almost like a whale: The origin of species updated** Doubleday 1999, pp402, £20

"How extremely stupid not to have thought of that!" So said Thomas Huxley on first reading Charles Darwin's epochal *The origin of species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*, which was published to an overwhelmingly sceptical and hostile audience in 1859. It is with these words that professor Steve Jones introduces his new work on evolutionary theory, alongside the very worthy injunction of Sir Francis Bacon that if a scientist begins "with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubt, he shall end in certainties".

It is perhaps quite extraordinary that 140 years after Huxley - known to his contemporaries as "Darwin's bulldog" - uttered this famous remark a hundred million Americans or more still subscribe to some form of creationism. In Kansas evolutionary theory is no longer a compulsory part of the school curriculum, on the grounds that 'it has not been proven'. Similarly in Alabama the education board wanted the following note to be pasted into school textbooks: "This book may discuss evolution, a controversial theory some scientists give as a scientific explanation for the origin of living things, such as plants, animals and humans ... No one was present when life first appeared on earth. Therefore, any statement about life's origins should be considered as theory, not fact" (quoted in *Almost like a whale* p1). Humankind is still trapped in its infancy.

This disturbing irrationalist, anti-evolutionary trend looks set to continue in the United States, and of course there are large parts of the world where a Darwinian explanation for the origins and development of life on this planet are treated as blasphemous and sacrilege. There are many battles yet to be fought.

Therefore the publication of an accessible text like *Almost like a whale* can only be welcomed. It conveys the grandiose yet magnificently simple nature of Darwin's theory which, Jones argues, amounts to nothing much more complex than genetics plus time - lots of time. Hence, Darwin's "one long argument", as he himself famously put it, essentially sees life as a series of successful mistakes - an oddly comforting thought for the non-theologically minded. Given the backdrop of aeons of time, as Jones aphoristically explains, evolutionary theory plus genetics "is the science of difference. Variety is the raw material of evolution, used up as natural selection takes its course. Once it has been consumed, the Darwinian machine comes to a stop. Diversity is renewed by chemical errors - mutations - made as DNA is copied." He adds that mutation is "the fuel" of evolutionary and biological advance. Naturally, this process "involves mechanisms undreamed of" when Darwin and his fellow thinkers were alive (pp120-121).

In many respects, who better than Steve Jones to bring the intellectual excitement of evolutionary and scientific discourse to a mass audience? As the professor of genetics at the University College London he belongs to the 'super-league' of articulate, high-profile and media-friendly scientists who have done much to take science out of the academic ghetto and into the mainstream of discussion - thus

... there are genes for criminality, homosexuality, mental illness, homelessness, musical, etc

joining other luminaries such as Richard Dawkins and Steve Rose. Jones has even been described, rather hyperbolically, as "the Charles Darwin of the television era". In this capacity Jones gave the BBC Reith Lectures in 1991, and in 1997 his book *In the blood: god, genes and destiny* was made into a very popular TV series - as well as appearing in appalling but lucrative television adverts. To many he will always be the author of the magnificent *The language of genes*, which poked a vigorous stick at the promulgators of the now very fashionable 'new science' of neurogenetic reductionism and evolutionary psychology.

Yet *Almost like a whale*, for all its undoubted positive virtues, is a curiously flat and unexciting work. The nature of Jones's project may help to explain why. He describes his new book as an attempt to "update" or "rewrite" Darwin's original work. Thus the title of Jones's work comes from the sixth edition of *The origin of species*, published in 1872, where Darwin boldly states: "I can see no difficulty in a race of bears being rendered, by natural selection, more aquatic in their structures and habits, with larger and larger mouths, till a creature was produced as monstrous as a whale." (As an interesting scientific adjunct, fairly recent fossil discoveries suggest that the distant ancestors of whales were hyena-like beasts called mesonychids, which were scavengers for carrion and hunters of fish.)

Jones's desire to "rewrite" *The origin of species* means that he endeavours - rather heroically, you could say - to make his work conform to the same methodological and intellectual structures of Darwin's work. Thus the contents pages of Darwin's work are reproduced at the front of *Almost like a whale*, with Jones following the same exact contours as recommended by Darwin. Each chapter ends with a summary which is directly lifted from Darwin. The entire last section, 'Recapitulation and conclusion' (pp356-379), is a straightforward reprint of Darwin's elegant concluding comments to *The origin of species*. In other words, to put it very crudely, *Almost like a whale* is a 'copy' - albeit with mutations - of *The origin of species*.

The immediate thought that might occur to some is, why not just read the 'original' instead? In reply to that Jones makes the frightening claim that he has never met a biology undergraduate who has ever read *The origin of species*. Then again, you can be even more sure that there are legions of politics graduates and professors - if not self-professed socialists - who have never read a word of *Capital* or *The communist*

manifesto, yet will happily denounce or wildly distort its contents till the cows come home.

Needless to say, Jones's 'Darwinophilia' lends his work a rather disengaged quality for the most part. This is compounded by the fact that Jones makes absolutely no reference to any contemporary or living scientist. Inevitably, this means that *Almost like a whale* has none of the polemical liveliness of Steve Rose's *Lifelines*, or almost any work you care to mention by Richard Dawkins. This is to be regretted as the 'Darwin Wars' are waging with a particular intensity at the moment. Biological or genetic explanations for almost every facet of social life are now on offer from the energetic and evangelical "ultra-Darwinists", to use Steve Rose's apt expression. We are being constantly told that there are genes for criminality, homosexuality, mental illness, homelessness, musical preference, business acumen, etc. No to mention the distinct impression being given that the Human Genome Project will provide the universal cure for virtually all of humanity's problems - ranging from alcoholism to poverty.

Indeed, hardly a stone's throw from Jones's office, is the Darwin Centre at the London School of Economics. The Darwin Centre is a redoubt of ultra-Darwinism. In regular and very well attended seminars - together with a steady flow of pamphlets and books - run by the philosopher and media-sassy Helena Cronin, genetic reductionist theories are merrily spun and pushed. For instance, the centre has recently published a book by top American lawyer Kingsley Browne, who maintains that the reason why women are less successful than men in rising to the top of corporations is because women have 'evolved' to be less interested in risk-taking than men - among our ancestors, the 'theory' goes, women were attracted to high-status males and males granted status by successfully taking risks. Ergo - thanks to nature, this is inevitably going to produce very strong selection for males who are good at taking risks. Unsurprisingly, such theories - of which there are innumerable variations - are eagerly embraced by those who want to prevent progressive and democratic change in society.

If only the ultra-Darwinists were as modest and cautious as their mentor. *The origin of species* contains but one substantial line about humans and human development - saying "light will be thrown on the origin of man and history". When pressed more on this explosive topic by Alfred Wallace, Darwin retorted: "I think I shall avoid the whole subject, as so surrounded with prejudices; though I fully admit that is the highest and most interesting problem for the naturalist" (quoted in *Almost like a whale* p334). Eventually of course Darwin succumbed 12 years later - almost despite himself - to this "highest and most interesting problem" in *The descent of man*, where he boldly stated: "Man is descended from a hairy quadruped, furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in its habits, and an inhabitant of the Old World" (p344). But Darwin, wisely, resisted any attempt to directly apply his theory of natural selection to social society, though unsurprisingly he shared many of the Malthusian prejudices one would expect from a

man of his class and generation - as Marx was quick to point out of course.

Jones, to his credit, does classify as "more or less infantile" all attempts "to apply Darwinism to civilisation" (introduction). In the penultimate chapter, 'Interlude: almost like a whale', Jones goes a bit further and mocks the pretensions of the ultra-Darwinists: "For some, to explain any pattern of society all that is needed is to stir in a Darwinian nostrum. If the anthropological soufflé fails to rise - reach for another bottle. As in the kitchen, the ingredients can be varied to taste. Mix them with enough enthusiasm and, with a single bound, life is explained. Its infinite varieties are justified with adaptive stories to fit" (p353).

Such "vulgar Darwinism", continues Jones, reduces evolutionary theory to "a political sofa that moulds itself to the buttocks of the last to sit upon it" (p354). Referring to humans and human society, Jones trenchantly reaffirms that, "Much of what makes us what we are does not need a Darwinian explanation" (p355). These healthy sentiments are relegated to the concluding pages of *Almost like a whale*, which for the bulk of the text retreads the same ground as Darwin - but armed this time round with modern genetic science.

On the positive side, Jones's work reminds us how genetics, and Darwin's *Origin* - if comprehended in a truly rounded, materialistic and human way - fatally undermine all racialistic and separatist theories of human development by stressing the wonderful diversity and *interconnectedness* of all life on this planet. After all, humans do share 30% of their DNA with the humble lettuce - for which the creationists and anti-Darwinian eccentrics have no answers apart from lunatic ones. Jones writes: "DNA shows that what was at one time classified as a single form of life is in fact several" (p49). In biology the urge for nice and neat order has to defer to the reality of constant change and flux. To quote Darwin, "Species are not - it is like confessing a murder - immutable." For plants and animals even to discuss whether a particular form is a species or a variety of species is, quite often, "to vainly beat the air", as Jones caustically suggests (p52).

This comes across strongly in the first chapter on 'Variation under domestication' - ie, a discussion of domestic animals like cats, dogs and pigeons. Darwin, comments Jones, highlighted the then arbitrary distinctions between breed and subspecies, and how a subspecies may, through sexual choice, gain a personality of its own. The accumulative action of selection - whether applied consciously and more quickly (through domestic variation and breeding) or unconsciously and more slowly - will always cause life to change. There are no fixed frontiers between supposedly separate entities - everything is filled with variation. Surely an unnerving thought for conservatives and dogmatists of all hues, one would imagine.

Warming to his theme, Jones explains how Darwin's theories made taxonomists of the world shudder with horror: "Most members of most species do not look much different one from the next. Any fruit-fly is much like another, and even their best friends find it hard to tell mice apart.

In spite of some exceptions ... to share a Latin name imposes, almost by definition, a certain uniformity upon those who bear it. That comforts both creationists and experts on taxonomy. They like to see existence as set of ideals, each filled with some pure Platonic essence. However, a great deal is hidden within even the most uniform creature. Genetics shows that no one - not even the glorified chemists that most biologists have become - can any longer suppose that all the individuals of the same species are cast in the very same mould" (p47). Thanks to genetics, true 'individuality' is everywhere.

Usefully, Jones also emphasises how for Darwin - as it was for Marx - the present was the key to the past. We unlock the secrets of history, animal or human, by grasping the complex dynamics of our present condition. Darwin said his mind was "a machine for grinding general laws out of a large collection of facts" (preface) - ie, he laboured under a sometimes unbearable moral strain to develop a system or *theory of knowledge* rather than amass a collection of more or less arbitrary facts which are then eclectically welded together by some dogmatic flight of fancy. Darwinism, from this angle, is a form of historical materialism as applied to the non-human world. Engels made this connection explicit in his famous 1883 speech at the graveside of Karl Marx, when he stated: "Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history." For these remarks Engels has been chided by generations of academic Marxists for his supposed "positivism".

Marx vastly admired the way that Darwin focused on "the history of natural technology - ie, the formation of the organs of plants and animals". But more crucially, as the comment by Engels above indicates, Marx quickly grasped the 'revolutionary' implications of Darwin's theory, as did the Christian detractors of Darwin who hated the "dreadful hammers" of his "filthy heraldries" (John Ruskin). "Not only is a death blow dealt here for the first time to 'teleology' in the natural sciences, but their rational meaning is empirically explained," exulted Marx (quoted in J Rachels *Created from animals: The moral implications of Darwinism* Oxford 1991, p110).

Darwin's theory of natural selection could establish, without the need for any god-driven teleology or purpose, a *pattern* arising from events that are in themselves indeterminate with respect to the final outcome. Just as capitalism in England emerged as the *unintended* consequence of the clash between non-capitalist classes, so humanoid and pre-humanoid life itself was the accidental by-product of the complex interplay between multifarious factors, with Darwinian natural selection not necessarily playing the critical or determining role at any one time. Only a fool though would see nothing but a long series of unstructured or contingent episodes rather than an ongoing historical process that ultimately led to a 'final' result - ie, us.

This is of enormous significance for the Marxist project of universal human self-liberation, based as it is on the replacement of all closed, *a priori* teleologies with an inherently historical and open-ended understanding (liberatory determinism), where human history is defined in terms of the *immanence* of human development - namely, the realisation of 'humaneness'.

Whatever the sceptics may say, we can use *The origin of species* and works like *Almost like a whale* as heavy theoretical cudgels *against* the social-Darwinists and ultra-Darwinist reductionists. Because if we do not, who will? ●

Danny Hammill

Banal identity reasoning

Frank Kofsky **John Coltrane and the jazz revolution of the 1960s** Pathfinder, 1998, pp500, £15.45

This book by Frank Kofsky is an examination of black nationalism and the revolution in music. Although this work is highly readable, its navigations around the subject matter prove to be unrewarding and, at times, exasperating reading, in that we are always seemingly waiting for the evidence and logic that will clinch Kofsky's thesis beyond all reasonable doubt. Based upon a study of the role played by John Coltrane and his peers in jazz innovations of the 1960s, Kofsky's work provides us with a beautiful example of how *not* to investigate popular music.

Kofsky's point of departure is an examination of 'ideology and reality' in jazz. In the words of Archie Shepp, "Jazz is American reality - total reality", being "a gift that the negro has given" to white America (p25). Kofsky counterposes this to the 'ideological' stance of white jazz critics keen to deny the Afro-American status of the art form, its support from the black community and the fact that it has a distinct social content. On the surface such an approach seems entirely appropriate for a Marxist exploration of jazz music.

However, Kofsky's problem is a theoretical one, in that he takes the "camera obscura" metaphor of ideology (used by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*) too literally (p27). The outlook of jazz critics, even in obscuring the social origins of the music, can at least take account of artistic specificity, albeit in a crude and ahistorical manner. Therefore to sweep aside the claims of the aesthetic (even when represented in this vacuous way) is taking Kofsky down an erroneous road. This is reinforced by the attempt to equate jazz and 'reality'. Like all conscious products, art (even in its 'realist' guise) is fundamentally partial - an abstraction which has to vulgarise precisely in order to gain coherence.

This partialised understanding of art should bring us towards a realisation of the nature of artistic mediation, its precise form in 'reflecting' the world. Kofsky on the other hand merely opposes the "cross-pollination that takes place between jazz and the black community" (p80) to the purely aesthetic mode of the jazz critic. Kofsky sees a work such as Charlie Parker's *Now's the time* as a response to the growing confidence of Afro-American blacks in challenging racism in the 1940s.

The critic Ira Gitler denied "'the obvious social implication'. The title refers to the music and the 'now' was the time for the people to dig it" (p82). In reality both standpoints contain an element of truth that needs to be superseded in a higher dialectical totality. Kofsky's spirited emphasis on Parker's personal hostility to racism brings us nowhere near understanding *how* this became manifest in Parker's musical output, the author apparently being satisfied with positive assertion.

Kofsky argues: "There is, then, no reason whatsoever why we should not view the social aspect of bebop as a manifesto of rebellious black musicians unwilling to submit to further exploitation. Unfortunately [for Kofsky?], at the time of its origins this manifesto had to be proclaimed primarily in musical terms and its social implications left tacit ..." (p83). He goes on to note the "muted, symbolic or indirect nature of black protest within jazz" (p91).

It is Kofsky's insistence on the equation of 'reality' to jazz that prevents him from working out such contradictions fully towards an examination of jazz music's mediated relationship to an undoubtedly racist society. In short, what we are dealing with here is an idealist method that proves spectacularly unable to formulate the specific nature of historical determination.

These fundamental theoretical errors are writ large when Kofsky attempts to illustrate the various constituent elements of his thesis by using interviews with John Coltrane's 'classic' quartets of the mid-1960s (comprised of Coltrane, the pianist McCoy Tyner, drummer Elvin Jones and bassists such as Jimmy Garrison, Steve Davis, Arthur Davis and Reggie Workman). One becomes immediately suspicious when Kofsky supplements his own cross-examination of McCoy Tyner with italicised excerpts from a separate 1970 interview with the *Black scholar* (pp399-416) - almost an admittance from the author that his own analysis does not really stand up to examination in terms of his perspective.

The fact that Kofsky has to resort to this trick (we are denied access to the full transcript of the *Black scholar* interview) is unsurprising. After noting Tyner's "reluctance" to engage with "social questions" (p403), Kofsky asks Tyner the quite honestly banal question of whether "musicians spend time discussing ... social questions" (p404). Tyner on the other hand consistently stresses the relative autonomy of his art: "I feel that for me, as a musician, this is the primary thing - the music. If you want to, let's say, dedicate some time to discussing social problems, I feel that it's a different category, even though it's all related, but it's still a different category, it's a different subject" (p403).

Even when Kofsky quotes John Coltrane's opposition to the Vietnam war from a Japanese interview, the saxophonist's emphasis is on transcendence rather than the concrete: "The Vietnamese war? Well I dislike war - period. So, therefore, as far as I'm concerned, it should stop, it should have already been stopped. And any other war. Now as far as the issues behind it, I don't understand them well enough to tell you how this should be brought about; I only know that it should stop" (p455).

Now, if Coltrane's rather ahistorical musings were to be taken as the starting point for a manifesto on war then clearly that opposition would be vacuous. But if we take Coltrane's reasoning *aesthetically* we can see the expression of this transcendence (also represented by Tyner's statement that "music ... is universal" - p401) as growing out of the alienated nature of art in modern capitalistic society (this after all was also the major structural theme of Coltrane's *A love supreme*), in that its values come to be defined against the meaning of everyday life.

Nevertheless, there is a sublimated core of truth in this world view which cannot simply be brushed aside by playing it off against the imposition of the 'social question'. This should push us towards an understanding of how jazz music *mediates* the social world in terms of its own laws. The alternative to this approach (tacitly drawn by Kofsky) is to construct another fetish that proves unable to account for the specificity of social forms.

The most damning critic of Kofsky's method is perhaps the author himself who, in arguing that "the avant-garde movement in jazz is a manifestation of negro repudiation of the American consensus", writes of the "unwelcome but inescapable fact" that he is "reduced to using, for want of anything more serviceable, what the distinguished Norwegian sociologist Svend Ranulf called (with some disdain) 'the method of plausible guesses'". That the 'plausible guess' can never be wholly satisfactory, that it can readily lead one astray, I will not deny; my rationale for employing it nonetheless is that the risk of error pales beside the penalties we must unavoidably pay if we do nothing but keep a discrete silence on social questions of immeasurable gravity" (pp225-226).

Although one can at least admire Kofsky's honesty in admitting that his approach does not guarantee success, we are duty bound to point out that the issue behind the reliance upon so-called "plausible guesses" is the author's miscomprehension of art's mediated nature in relation to the social whole. It is this outlook that brings the entire edifice crashing down when Kofsky attempts to 'explain' jazz in terms of an exterior dynamic.

The development of John Coltrane's mature work in the 1960s should certainly be seen in context - not just of a negro revolt against the racist structures of the United States, but of a period where the values and structures of bourgeois society were up for question by increasingly large masses of people. If however we go on to transpose this *directly* into the

particular motifs of Coltrane's work then we end up with the method of the "plausible guess"; rather the question is how such factors are mediated aesthetically. In the words of Fredric Jameson, "Modern music finds itself at once deeply implicated in a social struggle without so much as straying from the internal logic of pure musical technique ..." (F Jameson *Marxism and form* Princeton 1974, p35).

Frustratingly Kofsky gives us some of the raw material for such an analysis when considering the way in which Coltrane sought to confront "the problem of how to infuse improvisation built on a foundation of chord sequences with new vitality" (p261). Coltrane's early attempts (replacing one chord with several - the three-on-one approach) only brought him back full circle to the relative stultification of bebop. Kofsky is unable to really do anything with this exposition, being precluded by his own logic.

Like Ornette Coleman, Coltrane moved towards a freer structure in terms of tonality in the years prior to his death in 1967, particularly on recordings such as *Ascension*. Clearly, jazz musicians were beginning to work out the contradictions of their age in terms of their own musical language. Of course, such solutions could only ever be partial. It is therefore interesting that recordings made by Coltrane shortly before his death from cancer (posthumously released as *Stellar regions*) show the saxophonist forced back into a dialogue with structure. Although the elements of Coltrane's 'late period' remain in evidence with the use of the high-

register and non-tonal notes, there are many moments of luminous beauty, given, in the words of David Wild's liner notes, "added coherence and impact through the reappearance of form, of relative brevity, of renewed control".

In this abstract sense, artists are forced to come to terms with their relationship to society as a whole. Thus the move towards freer composition was always going to lead Coltrane back to the pathways of *Stellar regions*, therefore reproducing "the structure of the alienated society in miniature in the intrinsic language of the musical realm" (F Jameson *ibid*). Coltrane's mature work thus foreshadows the closure of the 1960s, the manner in which those interrelated rebellions became frozen on the cusp of their own internal limitations.

Kofsky's book has the merit of posing serious questions, but it is difficult to think of another work that so miserably fails to answer the tasks it sets itself. All of this could have been avoided if Kofsky had dialectically cross-examined his initial concepts. 'Totality' should be used in an explanatory capacity, something to aid us in accounting for specific social developments. In Kofsky's lexicon such a category is entwined with a banal identity reasoning that mangles our appreciation of the sensuous world in a distinctly fetishised manner. Having said all that, this book reproduces some of Kofsky's beautiful photographs of Coltrane and other jazz musicians, suggesting perhaps that what was left unachieved in print was certainly realised on film ●

Phil Watson

Passion for change

Dave Douglass **All power to the imagination** Class War Federation, 1999, pp120, £5

This book is a strange mix of the crass and the insightful, whose theme is very difficult to pinpoint. It is in part a defence of the trade union movement against some of Dave Douglass's comrades within the anarchist tradition - those who are not only arrogant and elitist beyond belief, but are also stupid and ignorant. The author does a superb job in exposing all these qualities.

Comrade Douglass describes himself as an anarchist and a Marxist. This is problematic, to say the least. Marxism is concerned with class democracy, whereas anarchism has been opposed to all authority, including the most democratic. In practical terms comrade Douglass is a confused left communist, who recognises the need for some kind of minimum state (see p26). Although he throws around charges about being petty bourgeois, he fails to recognise that many of his own attitudes fall into that category. Despite his remarks about political correctness thrown in the direction of "tree-huggers" and "bunny-lovers", he himself is not immune to irrationality. For example, it seems that all southerners are rich bastards, and all

northerners are the salt of the earth, while the Celts sing lovely songs and exist as a political entity.

Dave demonstrates his very considerable knowledge of the National Union of Mineworkers - although, I must say, he tends to think that familiarity with the NUM automatically gives him a knowledge of all trade unions. The book also wanders into other areas: imperialism, the state of world trade, sexual freedom, the Labour Party, world history ... All of this is quite legitimate insofar as such questions have a bearing on the main argument. They would have even more legitimacy if it were possible to see some thread of connection, for comrade Douglass leaps from twig to twig with the mastery and elegance of a rather large rhinoceros.

The book contains many statements that are either meaningless, quoted out of context or simply wrong. For example: "Ninety percent of the world's population has no access to electricity, and 1.3 billion people are denied access to drinking water" (original emphasis, p35). Although he claims to be citing a United Nations trade and development report, his figures are clearly

wrong. As the 1.3 billion people are alive, they obviously have access to water for drinking, so presumably he means *safe* drinking water. As regards access to electricity, the inhabitants of the EU and North America alone account for well over 10% of the world's population. Almost all have such access.

Why does comrade Douglass so consistently gets things only half right? The answer is clear: he is speaking out of the passion he feels about the oppressive capitalist system. But passion is not enough. We need a detailed and accurate understanding of the world, if we are to change it.

Comrade Douglass points out that he did not have much of a bourgeois education, which might have trained him in the necessary literary techniques, such as structuring the book, not to mention getting the spelling right. As a dyslexic myself who comes from a very similar background to his, I am sympathetic to him on this issue. However, I have learnt over the years that the services of a good proofreader and editor - or even a computer spellcheck - can be invaluable ●

John Walsh

Human.liberation.com

The international socialist revolution is the process by which the international working class transforms international capitalism into world communism. This period of revolutionary transition was called socialism, or the lower phase or stage of communism by Marx and Lenin.

For communists, socialism is not a new type of society, state system or national economy. It is an economic and technological revolution, which, regardless of where it begins, must be broadly international in scope.

Since Marx's time, we have the experience of the Russian Revolution. We have seen the practical results of 'socialism in one country' and various other forms of national socialism, including fascism. Given this history, it is dangerous and misleading to use the generic term 'socialism' without specifying its international and revolutionary character.

This was the argument I put forward in a paper submitted to the recent Republican Communist Network debate on 'international socialism' in Edinburgh. I consider myself to be an international socialist and had originally been one of the proposers of this slogan for the Network's platform. But I had shifted position in favour of 'international socialist revolution'. Whilst I consider the two slogans to be interchangeable, the latter is better because it draws attention to the revolutionary nature of international socialism as a process of transition.

In the debate before the launch of the RCN, there had been two opposed positions - 'international socialism and world communism' versus 'internationalism, socialism and world communism'. The latter is a variant of national socialism because it breaks the link between socialism and internationalism. When it came to voting on these, 'international socialism' received a minority of votes. This was more a reflection of the fact that some comrades were concerned that the RCN might split, before it was even off the ground, if 'international socialism' was adopted.

At the first full debate following the launch of the RCN, the fear of a split had receded. Comrades felt able to take positions without worrying about the consequences. Papers were submitted in favour of 'international socialism', 'international socialist revolution' and what I will call 'slogan X'. The latter is my short hand for the Communist Tendency's position. Its paper argued against 'international socialism', but did not put forward a slogan to summarise its alternative. At this point the CT had not considered the option of 'international socialist revolution'.

During the debate it became increasingly clear that the CT was in a minority of two. All other comrades lined up in support of 'international socialism'. Some false arguments were shredded. For example the argument that we should not use 'international socialism' because the Socialist Workers Party and the Committee for a Workers International in Scotland use it. So too was the argument that the slogan had been misused in the past. This was equally true of words like 'democracy' and 'communism'. The only real justification was whether any slogan was scientifically correct. Some comrades became a little frustrated on hearing the CT's arguments. They could not see why logically these arguments meant rejecting 'international socialism'.

At the end myself and Mary Ward called on the CT to spell out before the next round of debate what words

Economic and technology revolution lays basis for communism, argues **Dave Craig**

should replace 'slogan X'. In a letter to the *Weekly Worker* (November 18), Allan Armstrong identifies 'slogan X' as 'international revolution'. This should now enable us to move the debate forwards. Allan explains that the CT does not support the slogan 'international socialism' because "it suggests a fixed stage, without any movement". He says that this was acknowledged by me when I suggested 'international socialist revolution' as the intermediate slogan. He says: "This at least has the advantage of suggesting a process rather than stage, emphasising the transitional nature of socialism."

We should recognise three important components to a scientific approach. First are critical assessments of theory drawn from the past - insights from major theorists such as Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, etc. Second, we have lessons drawn from major experiences of the international working class: for example, the Russian Revolution and its aftermath. Third, there is scientific knowledge of contemporary international capitalism and developments within global capitalism.

The case for 'international socialist revolution' begins with world capitalism or imperialism and its opposite, world communism. In the *Communist manifesto* Marx explained the global nature of capitalism. He says: "Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way ...

"The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere." (K Marx, *F Engels SW* Moscow 1968, p37-38).

Marx continues to elaborate his point: "The bourgeoisie through its exploitation of the world market has given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country ... In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations" (p39).

Since Marx and Engels wrote these prophetic words the international and global nature of capitalism has neither been ended nor reduced. On the contrary it has been massively extended and deepened. At the beginning of the 20th century Lenin's theory of imperialism identified a new historical stage of international capitalism (or imperialism). Multinational corporations now dominate world production, finance, commerce and trade. During the 1980s a new period of globalisation began.

Communism is not a utopian scheme invented by ideologists. Lenin says that communism "has its origins in capitalism, that it develops historically from capitalism, that it is the action of a social force to which capitalism gave birth" (VI Lenin *SW* Vol 2, Moscow 1977, p299). International capitalism has already created the organisational structure and technological basis for communism. It has produced giant multinationals corporations able to plan production on a global scale. These corporations organise millions of workers across the world into huge cooperative ventures.

Capitalism is currently undergoing an immense technological revolution

on the basis of information technology. This technology, that has given us the worldwide web, is the technology of communism. Modern communism is surely www.human.liberation.com. The technological revolution already underway will be completed and transformed by the international working class into a means of social liberation. Commenting on the technological basis for communism, David Rousset points to the importance that Marxism gives to the "technological factor" - what Marx terms "the material conditions of production". It is fashionable these days to ignore the economic and technological basis for communism for fear of being accused of economic determinism. But in reaction to Stalinist determinism we have surely thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

Rousset goes on to say that, "Monopoly capitalism has created an autonomous reality: the world market. It is at the level of the world market that the full realisation of its potentialities occurs. It is also within the world market that its contradictions assume their greatest intensity. Because socialism is built on the basis of the highest level of development, the base of the socialist revolution is not and cannot be a national one" (D Rousset *The legacy of the Bolshevik revolution* London 1982, p2).

He says that the socialist revolution includes in its aims "the break-up of national frontiers". I take this to include the ending of pseudo-national economies. World communism or global communism is a more advanced form of social organisation than international capitalism. Global communism, fully exploiting the potentiality of information technology, will be a world of material abundance in which the social 'scarcity' of capitalism - poverty, famine, unemployment - has been abolished. A 'new world economic order' will provide the material basis for human freedom.

Communism is a classless society of associated global producers. This represents a massive leap forward for humanity. The superiority of communist civilisation lies in its ability to reduce working time, overcome the division between mental and manual labour and increase the level of human education and culture. A world without money or value, without wages, prices or profits will be organised by cooperative communities on the basis of social needs and wants.

World capitalism is abolished, not in a negative sense, but in the positive sense of being transcended onto a higher level of human society. The primitive form of globalisation already achieved by international capitalism will give way to a higher form of communist globalisation. The socialist revolution is the connecting process between world capitalism and global communism. It means the seizure of the commanding heights of the global economy by the international working class and its revolutionary reorganisation. Marxist dialectics understands the existence of transitional or intermediate stages in the movement between opposites - in this case between capitalism and communism.

Lenin identified imperialism (or international capitalism) as the highest stage of capitalism. Socialism was seen by Marx, Engels and Lenin as the lower phase or stage of communism.

Consequently the highest stage of capitalism is one step away from the lower stage of communism. To express this in another way, international socialism is one step beyond or one step higher than imperialism. Socialism is a higher form of internationalisation than already achieved by world capitalism.

Lenin argues that, "The first fact that has been established most accurately by the whole theory of development, by science as a whole - a fact ignored by the utopians, and is ignored by the present-day opportunists, who are afraid of the socialist revolution - is that, historically, there must undoubtedly be a special stage, or special phase, of transition from capitalism to communism" (VI Lenin *SW* Vol 2, Moscow 1977, p300). Lenin quotes Marx saying, "Between capitalism and communism lies the period of the revolutionary transition of the one into the other." Therefore the lower stage of communism is a period of revolutionary transition: that is, the socialist revolution.

In Lenin's debate with the 'imperialist economists' he sets out to clarify the relationship between economics and political democracy. He says: "Capitalism in general, and imperialism in particular, turn democracy into an illusion - though at the same time capitalism engenders democratic aspirations in the masses, creates democratic institutions, aggravates the antagonism between imperialism's denial of democracy and the mass striving for democracy. Capitalism and imperialism can be overthrown only by economic revolution. They cannot be overthrown by democratic transformations, even the most 'ideal'. But a proletariat not schooled in the struggle for democracy is incapable of performing an economic revolution" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 23, Moscow 1970, p25).

Socialism can thus be understood as an international "economic revolution". An economic revolution means radically changing the material, technological and social organisation of production, distribution and exchange. Of course such an international revolution would not be possible without the working class taking political power. The transfer of political power from one class to another is a necessary precondition for a radical economic revolution. Lenin explained that the Russian Revolution was "only the beginning of the international socialist revolution" (*ibid* Vol 26, p386). The Bolsheviks maintained that the development of the revolution inside Russia was dependent on the success of the revolution in other countries: "We, the Russian working and exploited classes, have the honour of being the vanguard of the international socialist revolution" (*ibid* p472).

Like Lenin, Trotsky uses the term 'international socialist revolution' in his theory of permanent revolution (L Trotsky *Results and prospects* New York 1969, p280). He explains that, "The international character of the socialist revolution, which constitutes the third aspect of the theory of permanent revolution, flows from the present state of economy and the social structure of humanity" (p133). He states: "Internationalism is no abstract principle, but a theoretical and political reflection of the character of the world economy, of world development of the productive forces and the world scale of the class struggle" (p133). In this quotation Trotsky links together the international character of the socialist revolution with the development of the productive forces.

Trotsky argued that socialist revolution was "grounded on an immense growth of the productive forces" and "could take shape in its fundamental aspects only on the soil of the worldwide division of labour which has been created by the entire preceding development of capitalism" (L Trotsky *The first five years of the Communist International* New York 1945, p55). Trotsky is entirely correct to link socialism to the economic or material basis of world capitalism.

What is the substance of the international economic revolution? Capitalism is an exploitative commodity-producing society. Commodities are not simply use values or useful products, but are the valued property of their owners. The value of this property is measured in terms of money by its price. Capitalism is regulated by value, expressed in the relationship of wages, prices and profits. The power of productive labour to produce socially useful goods and services is held back by the law of value. The socialist economic revolution can be seen as the liberation of use value from the constraints of value.

Communist society is a society without money or value. The international economic revolution does not so much abolish money as replace it with international time accounting. Rather than measuring value in terms of dollars, pounds, francs, euros and yen, the workers will measure costs of production in direct labour time. Direct labour time provides a universal measure of economic activity across the globe. It also provides a measure of the contribution 'from each according to his/her ability; to each according to his/her work'. The time taken for particular tasks and the time contributed by each worker will be calculated and known. Marx notes that the same principle applies in the lower stage of communism as exists under capitalism: "A given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labour in another form" - the principle of equal exchange (quoted in W Daum *The life and death of Stalinism* New York 1990, p112).

The move from a global economy based on numerous currencies to one based on the universal measurement of labour time constitutes a radical international economic revolution. At a stroke it would make economic activity transparent and open to democratic accountability, whilst radically altering the distribution of income. Abolishing world market forces or the law of value and replacing this with the universal measurement of labour time would finally break down the walls of economic nationalism.

After the collapse of USSR, the question of the nature of socialism and its relationship to communism is posed with renewed force and urgency. In face of difficulties and disagreements the RCN has had in coming to an agreed socialist slogan, it is tempting to drop the socialist slogan from the platform. That would be opportunism, a short-sighted approach to politics. We must fight this reactionary trend. We must have a scientifically based socialist slogan and defend it against all the enemies of the working class.

Whilst I can accept the slogan 'international socialism', the term 'international socialist revolution' most accurately gets us to the scientific truth. Whilst the fact that Lenin and Trotsky used this concept does not constitute proof of its correctness, I see no reason to jettison their slogan. Our task is to give it new or clearer meaning ●

Strategy and tactics

Has the *Weekly Worker* “collapsed into shabby opportunism” over Ken Livingstone’s bid to become London mayor? **Maurice Bernal** responds to some criticisms

I have great respect for comrade John Pearson. He is a staunch communist, passionately committed to the cause of our party and the working class.

There is nothing wrong with passion, but it can lead us into serious mistakes. It can blind us to the objective nature of the complex and ever-changing political processes taking place around us - our categories become ossified and our view of the world fixed and monochrome; we cease to think dialectically and, without our even realising it, we abandon the Marxist approach. Similarly, the intensity of our conviction can lead us to misapprehend positions adopted by comrades in the course of polemic.

Sad to say, I believe that comrade Pearson’s correspondence on the Livingstone question (Letters, October 28 and December 9) suffers from both these defects. In both letters the comrade quotes with approbation my position on the problem some six months ago (‘Livingstone for mayor?’ *Weekly Worker* June 24). In his latest contribution, however, he expresses dismay, even anger, at the “180 degree changes” that have occurred in the CPGB’s “prevailing line” - changes exemplified by a number of front page articles and most of all by the draft theses on ‘The Labour Party and Livingstone’ by comrade Jack Conrad (*Weekly Worker* November 18).

Comrade Pearson speculates that “a number of prominent *Weekly Worker* journalists”, including me, must have found the theses “shocking or at least embarrassing reading”, because our previous writings on Livingstone now consign us to the ranks of those doctrinaires and sectarians “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” as the party’s official candidate for mayor (thesis 12). The comrade is puzzled by our silence and contends that we “owe a duty to the readership and the working class” to explain what has happened. I shall do so, at least so far as my own position is concerned.

First, let me put the comrade’s mind at rest. I am neither “shocked” nor “embarrassed” by the content of the theses. After long and serious discussion, I found myself in agreement with them and believe that my own, albeit modest, contribution to the debate played a part in clarifying the issues on which the theses are based. In comrade Pearson’s view, this must mean that Bernal has joined the “collapse into shabby opportunism” (October 28).

As regards my silence on the subject, the two articles by comrade Michael Malkin (‘Ken ups tempo’, November 4; and ‘Back Livingstone’, November 18) exactly reflected my own thinking. There was no point writing an article that would only have restated Malkin’s assessment.

Now, however, at the risk of reiterating what has already been set out clearly enough by Malkin and others, let us try to get a few things straight - not, I fear, with any prospect of changing comrade Pearson’s thinking, but at least with the hope that we can eradicate some of the misapprehensions which his letters so patently exemplify.

What Blair hates (and fears) about the consequences of a Livingstone victory is that it would expose the ‘triumph’ of Blairism as a myth

The comrade maintains that the CPGB’s current approach - ie, giving (*critical*) support to Livingstone, *even if he emerges as the Labour Party’s official candidate for mayor* - means that we are misleading the working class into the “nauseating” position of “supporting a fight for ‘old Labour’ against New Labour”; that our support for Livingstone is founded on little more than the fact that he is a man whom “Tony Blair hates”. This amounts to treachery towards the working class and our commitment to communism.

On one level, these views simply do not represent serious politics, but they do touch on the nub of the matter. That Blair *does* hate Livingstone is incontestable: the increasingly desperate, farcically unsuccessful attempts to prevent Livingstone from reaching the short list prove this, as do the more recent - equally ill-conceived and counterproductive - efforts at vilification of Livingstone by the Millbank machine and by Blair personally. But the real question which the comrade should be asking himself is *why* Blair hates the man so much.

Blair’s claim that a Livingstone victory would mean a return to the days of the ‘loony left’ is an absurd smokescreen. What he hates (and fears) about the consequences of a Livingstone victory is that it would expose the ‘triumph’ of Blairism as a myth; that it would reveal the concept of ‘New Labour’ to be a merely epiphenomenal manifestation, fostered by a small minority, supported by the metropolitan intelligentsia; most damaging of all, it would confirm the existence of a sizeable and potentially powerful left wing so disenchanted with what they view as Blair’s betrayal of ‘socialism’ that they might be tempted to follow Livingstone out of the party altogether.

Even by itself, the struggle around Livingstone’s candidacy has already shown that Blair’s fears are well founded. There has been a significant, *qualitative* change in the actual and potential disposition of political forces that constitutes a new political *reality* - a reality undoubtedly complex and contradictory - that com-

rade Pearson seems unwilling or unable to recognise.

Contrast this with the situation nearly six months ago, when I wrote the piece that comrade Pearson approves of so much. Then, the situation as we *now* apprehend it had not even begun to mature; there was just ambivalence and ambiguity. On my desk there were two piles of cuttings: one contained pledges of loyalty from Livingstone to Blair, including the assurance that he would never stand as an independent; the other consisted of leaked reports from friends and associates to the diametrically opposite effect - ‘Ken might go it alone’.

What are the responsibilities of a Marxist journalist in such circumstances? I would say that his primary task is to examine the disposition of political forces in a given situation and assess what *tactical* potentialities it offers us to work towards fulfilling our *strategic* goal - namely, mobilising the currently atomised, passive and demoralised labour, trade union and working class movement, so that through *its* self-activity and through our *own* active intervention and struggle, we can win it to *our* communist, revolutionary politics. It is not, of course, about the futile undertaking of making exact predictions or categorical assertions, but about helping to determine as accurately as possible the nature of objective reality at any given moment, in order to contribute to the formulation of the correct tactics for the organisation to pursue. The mere mention of ‘tactics’ sadly leads some comrades to look for ‘trimming’, ‘tailing’ and a dozen other opportunist heresies or departures from the ‘true path’.

In the circumstances of June, where so much remained unclear, it seemed to me that there was still the real possibility of a cynical accommodation between Blair and Livingstone, whereby the latter, in return for the party’s official blessing - would be prepared to run for mayor on a totally Blairite platform, including acceptance of plans to privatise the tube, and generally ‘behave himself’.

Again, in the circumstances of June - despite the dismaying debacle of their collapse over the European elections - there still seemed a chance that the London Socialist Alliance had the strength and will to find a real socialist candidate for mayor. Given Livingstone that is now a dead letter.

Hence - at the time - I came to the conclusion, twice quoted by comrade Pearson, that “it is essential for the left to prepare itself to fight for an authentic *socialist* mayor of London ... In the unlikely event that Blair bites the bullet and allows Livingstone to contest the election as Labour’s official candidate, we argue it is the duty of the left to fight for a socialist mayoral candidate: ie, a candidate endorsed by a united front of socialist organisations, campaigning on a minimum platform acceptable to such a bloc, as a precondition for principled unity” (*Weekly Worker* June 24).

Even at this relatively early stage in the development of the situation, I did, however, make it clear that a decision by Livingstone to contest the mayoralty as an independent would bring about “a new and tantalising situation ... even if only 20% of Labour’s London membership chose to

follow Livingstone and break with Labour, they would constitute some 14,000 potential recruits for real socialism. In such circumstances, we believe that it would be the duty of communists and revolutionary socialists not just to engage polemically with the new grouping, but to struggle for socialism within it.”

A few months later, the situation was transformed, when virtual open warfare broke out between the Livingstone and Blair-Dobson camps. Every attempt by the latter to destroy Livingstone backfired and achieved its opposite. The struggle over the short list was already serving to galvanise wider opposition to Blair - witness the decision of the majority of unions in London to ballot their members individually. This decision was brought about *not* by the union bossocracy’s affection for democracy - everything suggests that many would have been content to fall in line with Blair’s choice of Dobson - but because they were aware of a firm and growing mood for Livingstone among their members at the grassroots. They simply would not be prepared to accept the usual bureaucratic block voting being decided by their leaders, if it were used as part of a strategy to keep ‘their candidate’ from gaining Labour’s nomination. Poll after poll began to indicate that support for Livingstone, both among Labour’s rank and file membership and the population at large, would give him victory, either as Labour’s official candidate or as an independent.

Comrade Pearson refers to a “fulcrum date” of October 21 as marking the point when the *Weekly Worker*’s stance changed: ie, in the article ‘Back Livingstone’ by comrade Jim Blackstock. But if he examines the situation more carefully, he will see that the paper’s position has been *constantly* evolving in response to the changing situation and that even now there are, and inevitably must be, aspects that might well change further. Constant throughout has been the recognition, most certainly promulgated by myself, that as an individual and a politician, Livingstone himself is a slippery, fundamentally untrustworthy and odious careerist, for whom the mayoral election represents in effect the last throw of the dice.

Does this mean that, following comrade Pearson’s advice, we must eschew any involvement in Livingstone’s campaign? No. On the contrary, it means doing our best to use the present situation as a means of bringing about *precisely* those “further working class victories” that comrade Pearson (and *we too*, comrade, believe me) see as intrinsic to our further progress along the road of struggle to working class self-emancipation. Can the comrade doubt that we share his goal of “getting rid of the bourgeois workers’ party in favour of a workers’ party”? I hope not. The question, therefore is how this goal is to be achieved? By washing our hands of anything that could taint the (dogmatic, as I would contend) ‘purity’ of our communist principle, or by involving ourselves in the struggle as it *is*, rather than as comrade Pearson - and, for that matter *ourselves* - would *prefer* it to be?

This is what we, as an organisation, will soon be debating. It is a matter of the greatest importance, not just to us, but to the working class as a whole - a class to which, whether comrade Pearson accepts it or not, we who are condemned as “shabby opportunists” pledge our wholehearted and total commitment ●

What we fight for

- Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.
- The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers’ movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.
- Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.
- We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.
- The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single Party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.
- Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs: ie, communism.
- We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.
- War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world’s problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

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

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Printed by and published by: November Publications Ltd (0208-965 0659). Registered as a newspaper by Royal Mail. ISSN 1351-0150. © December 1999

Left debates attitude toward Livingstone

50p/€0.7 Number 317 Thursday December 16 1999

Stakes are high

Christmas and the millennium new year have come early for us. The developing mass pro-Livingstone sentiments provide fertile ground for serious communists to plant their propaganda - ie, to merge our programme with a *real* movement in society. A victory for Livingstone - whether as the official Labour candidate or as an independent - would represent a massive blow to the New Labour leadership *from the left*. Exciting times indeed.

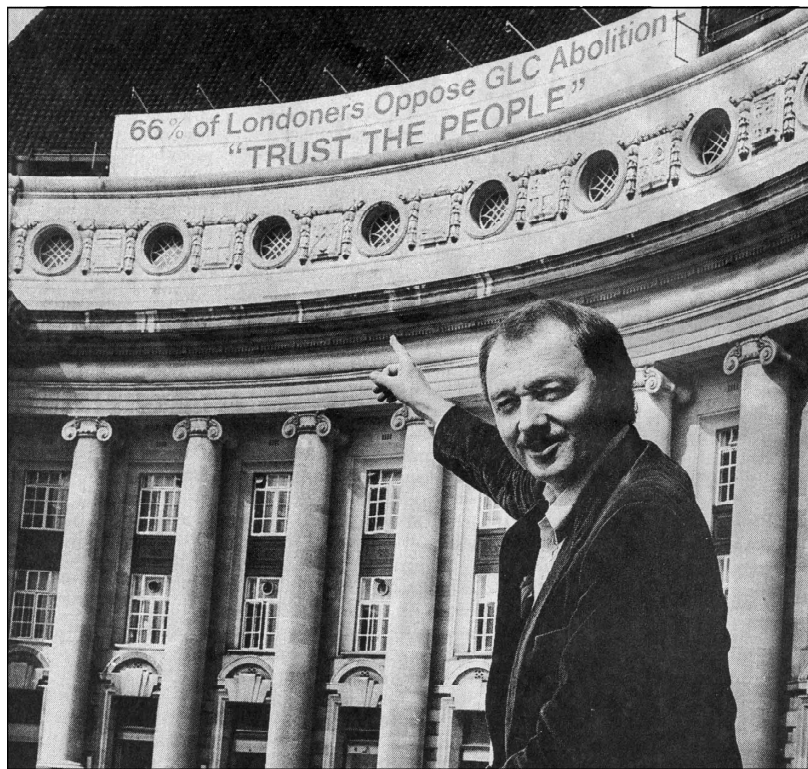
However, there are some who think communists and socialists should be aiming to put 'clear red water' between us and the pro-Livingstone movement. Stand up instead for pure revolutionary ideals. Any talk of backing, campaigning or voting for Livingstone is a sure sign of "opportunism", if not outright class treachery. Such anti-Leninist views have appeared in recent pages of the *Weekly Worker*.

These comrades, who seem instinctive sect-builders as opposed to Party-builders, appear to have fallen at the Livingstone hurdle. We hope they pick themselves up again soon - without too much damage. One way to do this would be reading the left press on Livingstone. Though the 'no to Livingstone' comrades might find it hard to believe, they could actually learn something on this matter.

Yes, that does not exclude the SWP. Quite the opposite. *Socialist Review* (December) features a perceptive article by Peter Morgan. The comrade declares that "the fight is on for the future of the Labour Party". A slight exaggeration perhaps, but it points to an essential truth. Of course, as we know, the SWP has historically adopted the 'first Labour - then us' approach to politics. It celebrated Blair's 1997 general election landslide as a 'class vote' and developed - along with a good part of the left - its 'crisis of expectations' thesis. We are still waiting eagerly for the official recantation of this erroneous line. Perhaps life itself is acting to help cancel out - or partially correct - the SWP's bad theory.

Comrade Morgan states that the Blairites' "pro-business, pro-market, pro-privatisation policies ... have little support among Labour voters, even less among the activists who have held Labour's machine together over the years". Quite true of course. Essentially the same point has been made in the *Weekly Worker* - New Labour as an ideological construct lacks deep roots in the party as whole.

Though leftists may deny it until they are very red in the face, comrade Morgan reminds them that "the campaign by Livingstone for mayor can become a rallying point for all those who oppose the Blair agenda in a way which goes *beyond Livingstone's actual politics*, which is why those on the left support him against Blair" (my emphasis). Comrade Morgan adds: "He represents the hopes and aspirations of tens of thousands of



Still in the collective consciousness

The democratic question has been crucial to the whole Livingstone versus Blair saga

old Labour supporters who feel betrayed and alienated from government policies ... Livingstone's popularity derives precisely from the fact that as former leader of the GLC he is seen to represent everything Blair hates and as someone who is prepared to distance himself from what Labour is trying to do." An accurate summation of the situation that faces us at this moment.

The democratic question has been crucial to the whole Livingstone versus Blair saga. Comrade Morgan writes: "But it was not clever talking that got Livingstone on the ballot paper - rather it was the pressure of ordinary Labour members and trade unionists who have invested so much hope in him." Our comrade from the SWP argues that Livingstone "is tapping into core old Labour support, people who have been pushed to the left under the Blair government. Many of them could not bring themselves to vote for New Labour in the Euro-

pean elections in June. Many also stayed away or voted for candidates who pitched themselves to the left of Labour in the Hamilton South and Leeds Central by-elections."

The pro-Livingstone campaign is important, says comrade Morgan, precisely *because* "people are investing their hopes in him because they want to see a break from Blair's whole approach. Many of them see in Livingstone a left electoral alternative to Blair."

Comrade Morgan concludes: "The stakes are high and Blair is prepared to go to any lengths to get Dobson selected. In part, Livingstone will be subjected to a torrent of personal abuse, but on top of this the lies will fly thick and fast about the record of the GLC and the Labour Party. Already it has been claimed [by Michael Cashman MEP, gay ex-East Enders star in *The Guardian* - DP] that Livingstone and the GLC were responsible for the anti-gay Section 28 passed by the Thatcher government ... Tony Blair has declared war. He has picked the battle over who represents Labour for mayor. The victor, however, has yet to be decided - and the fight is crucial for socialists in the coming months."

The Fourth Internationalist *Socialist Outlook* offers similar advice. Its front page statement militantly declares: "With the politics of New Labour increasingly exposed, the coming year must be a time for the left to build the fight, and organise a systematic challenge to the politics of Blairism, wherever they can be found" (Winter 1999).

The *SO* editorial points to the "key task of mobilising the biggest possible vote for Livingstone within the

electoral college". However, *SO* does complain that "it is wrong of Livingstone to suggest that there are no differences with the leadership" on other matters apart from tube privatisation - and also "his written submission to the reconvened [selection] panel on November 18 was, like too many of his previous statements, ambivalent - in this case about what he meant by saying he would stand on the manifesto agreed by the Labour Party".

Workers Power also wants to "back Livingstone" - which is interesting. As an organisation it has a near unblemished record of electoral auto-Labourism - to the point where it backed the official New Labour - an ex-Tory- candidate against Arthur Scargill in the 1997 general election. Oh well. What is past is past - we hope.

We are told by WP: "Those socialists still in the Labour Party and in Labour-affiliated unions must go beyond simply fighting for a Livingstone victory in the electoral college. On the one hand, it is vital to relate to the widespread illusions that large sections of London's working class have in 'Red Ken' as a champion of their interests. But we must also seize this opportunity to insist that Livingstone immediately halts his endless retreats on policy and to place our own demands on the man Blair fears so much" (*Workers Power* December-January).

WP's "own demands" include the abolition of all PFI/Best Value/Education Action Scheme, for a massive programme to confiscate empty private properties and build new social housing across London, sacking of Metropolitan Police officers guilty of racism, etc.

All quite worthy minimal reforms perhaps - but surely at this stage besides the point. What if - surprise, surprise - Livingstone does not commit himself to WP's policies? Will WP then prissily refuse to back Livingstone? In which case, perhaps WP will repeat its bad old practices and decide to back the official New Labour candidate *against* a Livingstone campaign - or maybe even abstain from the whole dirty and inconvenient business. In other words, will WP stick to its pro-Livingstone line or will it *turn its back on a left-inclined movement in society* just in order to preserve its own crisis ridden auto-Labourism?

For no-nonsense, old-fashioned leftist sectarianism, however, you can always rely on the petty bourgeois 'third worldists' of the Revolutionary Communist Group. Only interested in the dispossessed and 'exotic' fatigue-clad revolutionaries, *Fight Racism Fight Imperialism* grandly announces that the RCG will not be "licking the boots of Livingstone" in the fight for mayor (December-January). Voting for 'Red Ken' would demonstrate "the most

craven illusions" ... in the Labour Party and Labourism.

Indeed the RCG - in an eerie echo of the Revolutionary Communist Party's response to the collapse of bureaucratic socialism in 1989-1991 - cannot see what all the fuss is about. Perhaps the RCG should ask Blair. According to *FRFI*, Livingstone would not "present any serious challenge" to the New Labour leadership. Has not Ken "made that clear time and time again"? For Robert Clough of the RCG, "what is striking is how little separates Livingstone from Dobson as Labour candidate". He then informs us that "the idea that Livingstone is going to stop [tube privatisation] is completely absurd. To do that he would have to put himself at the head of a campaign against the Labour government. He would have to break from the Labour Party." This could never happen of course. Impossible. Livingstone would never tell a tactical porkie or do a political *volte-face* - would he?

The RCG has better advice. You cannot give Blair "a bloody nose in the ballot booth". That can only be done "out there on the streets", by "mass direct action". Much needed comfort for Blair, who is far more worried by what the ballot box may do to him next year than by the threat of "mass direct action" on the streets by the RCG or anyone else you can care to mention on the anarcho-left.

As for the biblical-Trotskyists of the Spartacist League, it concurs with the neo-Stalinists of the RCG. All the SL can see in Livingstone is a man who supported Nato's bombing of Serbia - a man who during the Balkans war was "falling over himself pledging his loyalty to Blair and British imperialism" (SL leaflet, November 4 1999). A moralistic line of argument which is more common on the left than it should be - even the SWP flirted with such nonsense in the summer.

Naturally, we wait with bated breath to see on which side of the fence the Socialist Party in England and Wales finally decides to jump. Its current doctrine is that the Labour Party ceased to be a bourgeois workers' party virtually on the day that Militant Tendency (now the SP) was kicked out - hence the Labour Party is now a bourgeois party pure and simple. Therefore if Livingstone ends up as the official Labour Party candidate for mayor (the nightmare scenario for SP tops, it seems), a vote for him can therefore only be a vote for a pure bourgeois party. Oh dear - what on earth can we do?

In the broader interests of the working class movement we sincerely hope that the SP - not to mention the other 'anti/non-Livingstone' comrades - manage to extricate themselves from their own self-created mire. We must fight to banish sectarianism of the left and right and all forms of r-revolutionary indifferentism ●

Don Preston

