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The LENINIST

Long live the Iraqi revolution

Imperialism can't bring peace

There might now be an imperialist peace in the Gulf. But it is only a matter of time before there is yet another war. An imperialist peace can only but be preparation for a new imperialist war

THE announcement by Iraq in the early hours of February 26 that it was willing to abide by UN resolution 660 and get out of Kuwait made not one jot of difference to the US-led coalition. The war continued for two more days. It is estimated that between 85,000 and 100,000 Iraqis have died.

The battle to 'liberate' Kuwait might have been over, it might have seen remarkably light casualties on the US-led side, but that was merely phase one of US imperialism's plan.

The aim of US imperialism was never limited to what it calls the 'liberation' of Kuwait, ie liberating Kuwait for the feudalistic emirs and the dollar. The Bush administration began to admit what we always knew. It said it wants to see Saddam Hussein removed from power in Baghdad and a pliant regime installed; that is phase two. But that's not all; there is a phase three. US imperialism wants to redivide the whole of the Middle East in its image to further its struggle to maintain world leadership - its position as the world's number one exploiter and robber - against its more dynamic German and Japanese rivals. What that means is that imperialism will not bring peace to the Middle East, but new and ever more bloody wars.

In an effort to undermine Saddam Hussein the US-led forces struck out in a massive flanking manoeuvre way beyond the borders of Kuwait. General Schwarzkopf wanted to do more than encircle Kuwait. Phase two of the Gulf War demanded that the elite Republican Guard - the pretorian guard of the Ba'athist regime - be destroyed. "There won't be any sanctuary" for them, said Dick Cheney, US defence secretary. Although a news blackout was imposed in the early days of the ground offensive, it was clear almost from the start that US, British and French forces had penetrated deep into Iraqi territory so as to cut off and then destroy the Republican Guard in the country's south east.

Having taken out the Republican Guard in the last hours of the war and secured Iraq's acceptance of all relevant UN resolutions, the US-led forces look intent on maintaining an occupation of the whole of south east Iraq, possibly including the city of Basra and the Remala oilfields. Reparations could then be easily extracted and a bargaining card used to secure Iraqi compliance to the will of US imperialism.

With victory in the Gulf War under its belt, the US hopes to achieve phase two of its plans using other (diplomatic/peaceful) means. The US is already 'consulting' its allies on arrangements for the long term pacification of Iraq: while this will most likely take the form of encouraging some sort of

civilian fronted military coup against Saddam Hussein, it could involve refashioning Iraq along the lines of post-1945 Japan and Germany, or carving it up. If Saddam Hussein did by chance manage to hang on after his military humiliation, there is always the option of simply dismembering the country, the pieces being given to US allies in the region, like Turkey, which has long had an eye on the oil rich northern provinces.

It is, as the old saying goes, easier to start a war than stop one. The US-led coalition might have been able in four days to smash the world's fourth largest army. But this was not merely because of overwhelming US technical superiority. It was because Iraqi troops were fighting for and mainly on what, in all honesty, they regarded as foreign soil, in spite of Saddam Hussein's 19th Province claims to the contrary. Attempts to secure Basra, let alone plant a new regime in Baghdad, could produce a very different and far more determined response.

More than that, though. It has to be remembered that the whole region is a cockpit of wars and revolution. Every country in the region is tied together in a dance of deadly antagonisms at the centre of which is Israel. The US attempt to impose its new world order on this powder keg could well produce a general conflagration: a Middle East version of the European slaughter of World War I. Today's triumphant talk of peace and long term security will, sooner rather than later, inevitably give way to another war.

Faced with a humiliated Saddam Hussein and the prospect that his days could be numbered, should communists call for workers to rally to the defence of 'poor little Iraq'? No, his difficulty must be our opportunity. The regime in Baghdad is a regime of reactionary monopoly capitalism. It is just as reactionary today in defeat as it was when it made its proto-imperialist oil grab for Kuwait, just as reactionary as when it tried to lop off a slice of Iran,



a class point of view. That is why we called for the defeat of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist regime and the equally reactionary regimes that made up the US-led coalition, above all because we operate in Britain the regime of the poll tax, mass unemployment, inflation, homophobic bigotry and homelessness, the regime of British imperialism fronted by John Major (the Tory Party's Clement Attlee).

Defeat is the mother of revolution. So, in the midst of a reactionary war, revolutionaries cannot but desire the defeat of their 'own' government. For communists this is axiomatic. It is disputed only by partisans of the ruling class or naive little England 'anti-imperialists'.

The most prominent labour movement partisan of the ruling class is, of course, the Labour Party. Not only the traditional and Kinnockite 'new right', but the overwhelming majority of the Labour left, which - like CND/CSWG - preferred imperialist sanctions to imperialist violence. Such pacifism is skin deep, though; these 'soft leftists' united almost to a man and a woman with Her Majesty's Loyal opposition (sic) to support 'our boys' as soon as the fighting actually begun.

The Gulf War proved yet again the thoroughly bourgeois nature of the politics of this party and the necessity for a revolutionary alternative, that is our reformed Communist Party.

The naive little England 'anti-imperialists' are made up of a rag bag of semi-detached 'official communists', Maoists and the Trotskyoid left, which paints Saddam Hussein's Iraq in semi-colonial, anti-imperialist, even non-capitalist colours. These elements, either openly or quietly, called for an Iraqi victory. For these types the fight to make proletarian revolution in Iraq during the course of the war was an act of treachery. The same sort of 'treachery' was perpetrated by Lenin and the Bolsheviks during the course of World War I.

Both the left Labourites and the little England 'anti-imperialists' got themselves completely confused by the call for revolutionary defeatism during the Gulf War. The former could only understand our call for revolutionary defeatism, our desire for the defeat of Britain, as a call for the victory of Iraq. For the latter, our call for the revolutionary defeat of Iraq could only mean a call for the victory of the US-led forces. To them all it seemed that either Iraq or the US-led coalition had to win, because one or the other had to lose. Whether deliberate or simply silly, such conclusions were completely wrong.

To help these people, let us recall the Berne resolution of the Second International. It made clear that in all imperialist countries the working class movement must fight for the defeat of its own government. Today in the light of two world wars and a century of capitalist development (along with the development of its proletarian gravedigger) it is clear that we must apply that defeatist line to proto-imperialist countries as well.

We in Britain had to fight, not for a victory for Iraq, but for the defeat of Britain. The struggle for socialism can only be the struggle for revolution - specifically, in war time, the conversion of the war between government's into a civil war, inevitably facilitating defeat. Events in Basra, Kurdistan and elsewhere as we go to press confirm our view that it is defeat, not victory, which breeds revolution.

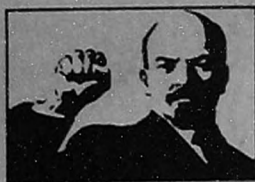
The reason why the Labour left could not understand this was because it is tied to the Labour right, and by that to British imperialism. The defeat slogan horrifies these people because they see the British state as their vehicle for socialism, as opposed to its biggest barrier. We are for the defeat slogan because *alone* it implies a consistent call for revolutionary action for socialism, which must be *against* one's own government in peace and, above all, during war. Without such a perspective, resolutions for socialism are not worth the paper they are written on.

The reason the little England 'anti-imperialists' were equally stupid lies in their inability in practice to see that socialism is part of a worldwide struggle, and will tend to manifest itself, first and foremost, not in the strong imperialist countries, but in the weak links of imperialism, like Iraq. These types can never do anything serious.

What is needed is a genuine anti-imperialist movement, led by a genuine Communist Party. That is the main lesson of the Gulf War.

Jack Conrad

We communists evaluate wars from



Central Organ of the
Provisional Central Committee of the
Communist Party of Great Britain

MARCH 8, International Working Women's Day, is one of the most important dates in the communist calendar. It is a day to reconfirm our unity across national frontiers and rededicate ourselves to the liberation of women. It is a day to remember the heroic women of past class struggles and to call forth a new generation to the cause of communism.

And rightly so. IWWD was the product, not of the feminist movement, as many today might suppose, but of the struggle of working class women. IWWD was first celebrated on March 8 1911, at the initiative of Clara Zetkin, leader of the International Women's Socialist Organisation. This date did not come out of the blue. It was inspired by a demonstration three years earlier when striking women machinists of New York's Lower East Side marched demanding better working conditions and the right to vote.

Their significance lay in the fact that they were protesting against both the bosses and the bourgeois women's suffrage movement, which considered the demand for votes for working class women 'premature'. Theirs was truly an independent, explicitly proletarian movement. That is why Zetkin saw it as a potent symbol with which working class women would identify, a symbol of working class militancy that should be generalised worldwide through annual demonstrations. These were to have a definite political line. With the example of the Lower East Side women in mind, the IWSO resolved that "socialist women must not ally themselves with bourgeois feminists, but lead the battle side by side with socialist men."

The Bolsheviks took this as their starting point in arguments with the Mensheviks during the early months of 1913 over how the first IWWD was to be celebrated in Russia. Through their women's paper *Rabotnitsa*, they insisted that instead of an all-woman affair in cooperation with the feminist movement, it should actively involve male workers.

This approach became that of the Communist International when it was formed in 1919. It opposed the debilitating idea that women's liberation should be left to women alone. Male chauvinism had to be overcome so that the *entire* working class could use its strength for women's liberation, a cause intimately bound up with the struggle to overthrow class society (the source of women's oppression). That is why communists, women and men, stand firmly against all sectionalist tendencies, including cross class women's movements. This is fundamental to our theory of the class struggle: "the women's world is divided, just like the world of men, into two camps" - bourgeois and proletarian.

The Gulf War proved this to be the case. According to feminist, pacifist and bourgeois mythology, women are biologically and psychologically opposed to war. This is patronising and blatantly untrue. In the countries of the US-led coalition, across the board bourgeois women rallied to support the aims of the imperialist war machine - which incidentally contains large numbers of women. Not surprisingly then, in the Tory, Liberal and Labour parties the overwhelming majority of female MPs came out for the war, just like their male colleagues. They belong to the bourgeois world. The same applies in Iraq. The wives, daughters and sisters of the Ba'athist rulers supported the proto-imperialist adventure of Saddam Hussein, and organised to support the annexation of Kuwait. They too belong to the bourgeois world.

War does not come from hormones. It comes from class society. It can only be ended by working class men and women turning capitalism's reactionary war into a civil war, unitedly fighting to smash the capitalist state machine, so as to begin the construction of communism, the only society which can guarantee the end of war.

Pacifism holds back both the struggle to end all war and the struggle for women's liberation. Working class women should treat with contempt the idea that because of biology they cannot take a full part in the class war.

History gives many, many examples of working class women leaders of the class war for socialism. On IWWD we remember Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Rosa Luxemburg, Inessa Armand and countless other women communists. Our Provisional Central Committee salutes their memory and calls upon working class women to follow their example. Women workers, take up your place in the front line of the class struggle, take up your place in the ranks of the Communist Party.

The Editor

LETTERS CPB: unity?

Having read comrade Michael Waters' excellent article in *The Leninist* No100 I thought it might be useful to add my own observations on the Communist Party of Britain's so-called 'consultative conference on communist unity'. Frankly I felt as if I'd been trapped in an opportunist time warp.

The 250 to 300 members of the CPB and the New Communist Party, plus some semi-aligned 'official communists', did, according to the *Morning Star* of Monday January 21, "unite to condemn the Gulf War" (oh, oh, how brave). Mike Hicks of the CPB, spick and span in his go-to-negotiations suit, even declared the war 'unnecessary' (tell that to the imperialists) and yet fulsomely supported the aims of the United Nations, if we can't starve 'em, shoot 'em, imperialism.

However, the Gulf War was not really in the audience's mind. Those minds were buried deep in the past. Not what was positive in our history, but what was negative. Not the Leninist politics that underlay our Party when it was formed in July 1920, nor the role of our members in the General Strike and the National Minority Movement, the front line physical confrontation with the fascists, the leadership communists provided for the most militant sections of the working class in Britain: the dockers, the miners, the London busmen, the carworkers, etc.

Instead their minds were set on the fleeting influence that comes with respectability. These comrades look back to the unhealthy traditions of our CPGB, the class collaborationism, the opportunism, the parliamentary cretinism. They are in fact the ageing children of the Popular Front and the Seventh Congress of Comintern who imagine that the sepia glories of the 1930s will return, if only we'd all drop our principles and put our political differences on the back burner. Then they imagine we could get stuck in, all together, on the reformist issues of the day, together with deans, bigwigs and trade union tops.

For these 'official communists', socialism was going to come, not on the basis of their own strength and ideological sharpness, but handed down from on high. All we were meant to do was to keep the faith and not exercise our brains. Ours was not to reason why, Uncle Joe and Comintern would explain all.

This was a replica of thousands of similar 'official communist' gatherings in the past. The same drum beats of if onlys, the same old tired illusions. Some speakers even thought there is a great phalanx of socialist countries out there waiting to subsidise 'us'. Not a hint of recognition that the socialist world has been swept by democratic counterrevolution and that capitalist reaction is riding high.

The seated ranks of the grey and greying with their grey ideas were steeped in the discredited ideas of the past. This extended to the lack of democracy in the past. From the very off, the chairman, Derek Robinson, set the tone by refusing to even acknowledge a point of order demanding that the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB be given time to put its views. Oh no, that couldn't be done at a 'consultative conference'.

Not a word of protest came from those 'official communists' who parade their past credentials as militant trade unionists and fighters for democracy. There was in fact nothing in Caxton House besides ourselves which could claim to be a living link with the positive tradition of our movement.

Speakers were organised on the basis of a strictly hand picked rotation; CPB, NCP, the occasional Euro organisation pro-*Morning Star* dissident, overseas fraternal. Every one of them spoke in platitudes.

In his opening, Hicks spoke of communists as the "rudder of Labour and the movement" and the need to "re-engage the rudder". That sums up the CPB; rudders are at the back of the boat, and of

course the CPB wants the Labour Party to do the steering. One NCP'er declared that peace had always been the foremost demand of communists. I thought it was social revolution. Another intoned that there was a need to "defend the nation state". There followed another NCP'er who "didn't want to make any political points, there are plenty of people here who know better than me" (You said it!).

And of course there were the usual sideswipes at the 'ultra-lefts'. Apparently young anarchists mess up the work of 'mature' communists when opposing fascism. The anarchists seem to believe in strong fists rather than mild words (on principle no bad thing).

Occasionally, though, a titbit of truth came out, as when the *Morning Star's* dull circulation manager let slip that since the defection of the Soviet Union from the 'official communist' newspaper market place, and the welching on its order, the daily sale of the paper had plummeted to 6,000 copies. In an attempt to put off its demise a collection was taken which netted £2,000 - about £10 a head.

All in all, a useless event. I wanted to speak about communist activity, but as a supporter of the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB I wasn't called. In any case I walked out because I couldn't take any more of their crap. I know I should have stayed to hear the fresh voice of our youth at the end when we staged our walkout. They are the future of communism in Britain, not the spurious unity of the dreams of Gerontius.

Reg Weston
Kent

CPB: regrets

We should like to express our regret over the incident at the CPB organised 'Communist Unity Consultative Conference' held in Caxton House, Archway on January 19 1991, in which members of *The Leninist* were asked to leave after repeated interruptions.

While we can understand why *The Leninist* was not granted an equal position on the platform with the NCP and CPB, we feel that as delegates your contribution could have been useful had you been granted a turn to speak. Fifty people spoke but there was not time for a further 23; however we feel that *The Leninist* should have been given a voice to express its opinion.

We believe though that your organisation tried to book a room within the building during the conference - if the reasoning behind this was to use it as a base to infiltrate the main meeting then this may well explain some of the attitudes of the organisers towards your group.

Mike Watkins
Gillian Weaver
Birmingham

David Sherriff replies:

Our Communist Party of Britain friends Watkins and Weaver regret that supporters of *The Leninist* were denied an opportunity to speak at the Caxton House 'consultative conference'. They are right to express regret, not for us we trust - we can and will publish our views openly without let or hindrance - but for themselves. After all, if the CPB denies our supporters even a modicum of working class democracy at a 'consultative conference', it will surely squash the rights of those who are prepared to take anything like an independent stance in the CPB, those like comrades Watkins and Weaver.

As to our fringe meeting, we booked a room with the best intentions - for honest debate. Clearly this was not something the CPB/NCP leaders were prepared to tolerate, not in their 'consultative conference' nor in the same building even after the conference had finished. Having expressed their regrets at the anti-democratic practices of the CPB

leadership, we trust that the comrades will draw the obvious conclusion that the CPB is thoroughly opportunist and irreformable.

CPB: idiocy

In the British communist movement today there undoubtedly exists a pathological capacity for opportunistic idiocy that is being tackled only by your organisation. It was therefore with some considerable interest that I read the last edition of your paper not least to learn of how the 'communist unity' conference transpired. Having slid from the CCG to the NCP and having a solid understanding of how these 'CPs' operate I think I already knew the outcome. It is a sad reflection on these organisations that their members should have to look outside their own organisations for information affecting the development (for want of a better word) of their own parties.

Jeff Thompson
Salford

Liquidation

As one who was once, long ago, associated with what you call Straight Leftism, as one who placed their faith in changing the 'official' CP let me now admit how wrong I've been. It is quite clear that the Euro organisation is in an advanced state of farce. While today's Straight Leftists - who have become totally attached to the 'tactic' of working in the Euro organisation - move ever further to the right in an effort to align themselves with disenchanted left Euros, the right Euros are steadily decamping ... and in the process the whole thing is steadily collapsing.

The latest splitlet to come to my attention is that of Only Connect - the name apparently coming from something to do with the novelist EM Forster. It has been launched by ultra liquidationist Mark Perryman, who has announced the winding up/liquidation of his local, Haringay, *Marxism Today* group. OC includes former London Euro secretary Dave Green and hanger on Paula Lanning, and has the declared aim of promoting tactical voting (the height of ambition). The 'association' has 'over' 150 on its mailing list (wow) and holds regular meetings at the London HQ of the YWCA (appropriate). There is no democratic structure (not surprising), nor definite relationship with the Euro formation (you don't say).

Meanwhile I see that the Euro EC has decided at its January 19-20 meeting to cut the budget of its awful *Changes* house journal and set *Marxism Today* up as a separate company, with the help of £25,000 of liquidated assets. Predictably Euro membership continues to spiral downwards, I for one will not recard. The 'transformation' card exchange has produced disastrous results and it seems that plans by Nina Temple and Co to reconstitute their organisation as an association, which operates as a loose 'network', are well advanced.

The sooner the better. And the sooner the Euros stop using the title of *our* Party the better. These liberals have no right to call themselves the CPGB. Only the Provisional Central Committee has earned that right. I am with you comrades.

Steve Stone
London

Ageism?

Congratulations to *The Leninist* on its 100th issue, still as youthful and wise as it was in issue No1. 'Youthful'? Surely that is 'ageism'? This ism, that ism. Let's have enough of fadism. To use the terms of life is not to slip into the rut of mindless prejudice. It is infantile not to recognise that youth has more energy (and often more enthusiasm) than age. It is senile not to recognise that age (and middle age) has

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IN STRUGGLE

often more experience, but often more caution, more cynicism and more excuses. Does not nature bring rottenness and decay as the years go by? Old people cannot do as much physically as the young, but they can contribute in their special ways and should do so.

Age is often used as an excuse to opt out when it should be the reason to take part even more actively - in one's own way - "from each according to his abilities". The cop out is "I've done my bit, now I'm retiring, I'll just mow the lawn and watch the telly." What a hoary old attitude for revolutionaries!

What about the specific article in *The Leninist* No98 which is attacked by Dave Douglass (Letters, *The Leninist* No100)? Criticising an organisation for being overwhelmingly elderly is quite distinct from beating old people for being old.

The Euros are an organisation of the old. That is a fact. Why should it not be said? Its lop-sided age distribution is a result of its opportunist politics. It has no politics to fight for the young (or the old for that matter). It's not just the Euros. I went to the so-called 'unity conference' of the so-called communist Communist Party of Britain and the New Communist Party.

Now in my 79th year I hope never again to see such a collection of aged and middle aged dropouts mumbling their mantras and dreams of what-was-once-long-ago.

My impression was of a bunch of intellectually crippled has-beens attempting to lean on one another to avoid the inevitable collapse they see before them. They jeered and heckled when they heard a youthful voice, just as these ranks of grey and white heads nodded in agreement when a middle aged ban was imposed on an elderly voice. There's 'ageism' for you!

Away with faddism. Let's use the English language to its utmost as a weapon in the struggle towards a revolutionary party. Let's recognise that while the old (people, not decaying parties) have still a lot to contribute, it is the young who are renewing our movement with their enthusiasm and energy and will be the main builders of our reformed Communist Party in Britain.

Harry Eastman
Kent

Italian Style

On December 16 1990, in Rome, there was a meeting of Marxist-Leninists which has given birth to the "National Political Committee for the Unity of Marxist-Leninists" (NPC). The aim of the NPC is to make contacts with all the groups and individual comrades who proclaim themselves Marxist-Leninists, in order to organise a National Conference of all Marxist-Leninists for the rebuilding of the revolutionary party of the Italian proletariat.

The NPC, besides giving its members specific duties, will be divided into four working groups. The first meeting took place in Rome on January 20 1991, and continuing activity has been arranged, together with the political road to follow.

After the first contacts - above all of an informal character - with all the comrades who are readers and militants of the monthly *L'Unguaglianza* (*Equality*), some of those involved in the making of the magazine organised the meeting on December 16 1990 in Rome. The number of comrades present at the meeting was more numerous than expected and at the end everyone declared that the meeting had been a notable step forward on the road to the rebuilding of the revolutionary party of the Italian proletariat. The most important statement over which everyone agreed, was that the road to unity must be strongly based on the revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism.

Some main points have been agreed upon:

1. The exclusion from this road to unity of all those groups who declare themselves anti-Leninist and represent a kind of continuation of the 'historical dissi-

dents' of the international communist movement, such as Trotskyism, anarcho-syndicalism etc.

2. The unity of Italian Marxist-Leninists in one revolutionary party of the proletariat can take place only in the course of a strong struggle, ideological and political, against modern revisionism, which at an international level means primarily Gorbachevism.

3. Unity is based on Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, giving an historical and objective judgement on the different experiences in the building of socialism and the working of the proletarian dictatorship, which must be studied and analysed scientifically, throwing light on all the limits and errors where they occurred, but above all to learn from the experiences of the past.

Within these general principles it is possible to arrive at the organisation of communists into one Leninist party, if the problem is addressed with willingness and dedication.

If this process is to make decisive steps forward, political and ideological unity based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and the necessity of the struggle against revisionism, is a necessary but not sufficient condition. The Marxist-Leninist party must have a revolutionary political content adequate to the present national and international situation - a content which must put the party in the position of being recognized, in the practice of the class struggle, as the real vanguard of the proletariat.

It is therefore necessary for the Marxist-Leninists to confront the real issues of the class struggle, not on an individualistic basis but on an organised one, according to the organisation which seems adequate to the present state of the process towards unity. The NPC has been elected for this purpose. It will work to make contacts with all the "committees for the unity of communists" already existing throughout Italy and with any other organised groups and individuals who uphold Marxism-Leninism, with the aim of arriving at a national conference of all the Marxist-Leninists ready for the rebuilding of the revolutionary party of the Italian proletariat.

The NPC will be divided into four working groups:

1. The crisis and situation of Italian and world capitalism; its consequences for class struggle, proletarian revolution, the proletariat today, the party.
2. Institutional problems: the state, criminal powers, crisis of the first republic, new fascism.
3. Workers struggles, factory councils, trade unions today.
4. Imperialism, Nato, imperialist wars, national liberation wars, proletarian internationalism, contacts with the parties or groups at international level that defend Marxist-Leninist views.

The NPC met in Rome on January 20, 1991 and has scheduled its activity for the next months.

This is a very difficult time for communists in Italy and all over the world. Let's hope the NPC will be able to work efficiently and constructively on the road towards unity. Communism is a science and therefore can't be dead, nor can it die in the future, whatever the capitalists and revisionists of every kind think. The future belongs to communism and the government of society will pass from the minority of exploiters to majority of the exploited.

Long live Marxism-Leninism!

Mario Jannuzzi
Italy

Jailed

On Monday September 18 after a week long trial at Wood Green Crown Court, three members of Anti-Fascist Action were found guilty of violent disorder and Grievous Bodily Harm with Intent. They were jailed for a total of 11 years. The charges arose from an incident involving one Nicholas 'Nicci' Crane after the Bloody Sunday commemoration in Kilburn last year.

Crane, a six foot heavily tattooed skinhead, was spotted in the vicinity of

the march (often a target for fascists in the past) as it was breaking up. Suspecting some skullduggery, he was challenged by some anti-fascists leaving the area. After a brief scuffle, Crane ran off. Shortly after, he was again spotted in the back of a taxi, heading back into the area. Once again he was confronted and this time a serious fight broke out which resulted in Crane being knocked unconscious. All three were immediately arrested.

Nobody, least of all the prisoners, would deny that the offence was political - what is equally clear is that the verdict and particularly the sentence were political as well.

Throughout history, to be effective in fighting the fascists usually means breaking the law and always means rejecting the power and legitimacy of the forces of law and order.

Thus the actions of the anti-fascist streetfighters will always be seen to be dangerously radical in the eyes of the state, especially when it involves a form of behaviour, ie physical violence, which the dominant culture avoids and condemns in everyday life on the part of everyone except itself.

The prisoners made no apology for their actions then, nor do they do so now. What they do need, and we on their behalf ask, is for your support, political, moral and financial.

London Anti-Fascist Action

Send letters of support to:

Tony David, NT 1338, Blundeston Prison, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR 5RG (4 years).

Mark Malin, NT 1335, The Verne Prison, Portland, Dorset DT5 1EQ (4 years).

David Phelan, NT 1337, Bisley Prison, Woking, Surrey GU24 9EX (3 years).

100

I write to congratulate you on the auspicious occasion of the 100th edition of *The Leninist*. If ever there were a need for a genuine communist paper, it is now. While the 'official communists' and their revisionist press prostitute themselves before Gorbachevite treachery on the one hand, and reactionary bourgeois social democracy on the other, the paper of proletarian revolution, *The Leninist*, rings out its Marxist-Leninist message in sharp and brilliant tone.

No one should doubt the importance of our paper. It is Britain's *Iskra*. It is the organ that will forge a genuine Communist Party of Great Britain. All genuine communists should support it. All genuine communists should recognise the authority and discipline of the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB.

Long Live Leninism!
Long Live *The Leninist*!
Alan West
Devon

Fresh air

I received, and read, today, *The Leninist* Nos98 and 99. May I say at once, what a breath of fresh air! I didn't realise that there were any significant revolutionary groups, particularly attached to the CPGB, in Britain. Even your Gulf slogan was refreshingly different from the SWP/SWM cant. Congratulations, and revolutionary greetings!

Liam O'Callaghan
Ireland

Note: Letters have been shortened due to lack of space. For reasons of political security we have changed certain names, addresses and details.

WRITE OR RING

If you wish to reply to any of these letters, raise questions or comment on articles in *The Leninist*, please write to The Editor, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, or phone 071-431 3135.

"Recessions don't last for ever," said a headline in a recent edition of *The Economist*. That is no comfort to workers who are being asked to pay for the recession today. Firms laying off large numbers run like a comprehensive list of British industry. Official unemployment figures are predicted to top 2 million by the end of April. As always with the Tories' fiddled accounting, which puts the current unemployment rate at 6.6%, the real figure will be much higher. And it will escalate, as production continues its downward spiral. In the recession of the 80s, 25% of Britain's manufacturing capacity shut down. As always, the workers paid. More will be required of us by the bosses today. Typically, the leadership of the workers' movement has gone along with this. Having given craven support to the imperialist war abroad, the TUC has underlined its commitment to a class truce at home. In stark contrast, the Unemployed Workers Charter presents an alternative anti-capitalist lead to the trade union tops. Unemployment is used by the capitalists to divide the working class and drive down wages. Only working class organisation that fights on the basis of what we need, not what the moribund system can afford, can defend the interests of the working class. The UWC aims to put this into practice. Contact the UWC on 071-431 3135, or write to BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX. MF

Clause 25 of the government's Criminal Justice Bill, is the most serious attack on lesbian and gay rights since Section 28. It covers homosexual 'soliciting', 'procuring' and 'indecenty'. The first can be picking someone up - even a smile or a wink. 'Procuring' can mean as little as letting two men sleep together in your home. 'Indecency' covers showing lesbian or gay affection in public, extending police powers in this field from those established in the Public Order Act. Lesbians and gays have been under greater attack in the recent period, from murders of gay men by 'queer bashers' to prison sentences. Arrests and convictions of gay men have escalated. The demonstration against Clause 25 in London on February 16 was an angry expression of resistance, when over 10,000 marched. This is encouraging. But there are lessons which still have to be learned from the Section 28 campaign. This was politically sanitised, as the campaign focused on 'big names' and parliamentary procedure at the expense of a fight within the working class, both gay and straight. This was illustrated by the restriction of the Section 28 campaign to lesbians and gays, excluding not only heterosexuals but bisexuals, on the grounds that they "had an option". But this is not just a question of an attack on individual choice - which even then can only be defeated through mass action within and without the lesbian and gay communities - but of a general attack on our rights, in which all workers have a stake. SQ



The IRA's bomb attack on Victoria station illustrates British hypocrisy on the Irish war. Days after defending the mass murder of civilians in Baghdad, the British state shed crocodile tears over the death of a civilian because it had chosen not to heed the 45 minute warning given by the IRA, precisely to avoid civilian casualties. One among many - 'justifications' given by police was that the time given was inadequate. This is an obvious lie, as they showed themselves by closing all London's major stations within minutes. We have no hesitation in defending actions by the IRA in its war for Irish freedom. The IRA's resistance is just, and is forced on the Irish people by Britain's dirty war. The blood of the civilian casualties at Victoria - of all the casualties in the Irish war - is on British imperialism's hands. The only way to prevent an interminable chain of death is not, as much of what passes for the British 'left' would have it, to condemn the supposed 'terrorism' of the IRA, but to break Britain's hold on Ireland. Hands Off Ireland! will be turning this into action on Saturday April 20, with its march to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Easter Rising, marching for troops out now (further details in the Action column, p11). Join the resistance: build the march and end Britain's bloody war. AM

Splendid

The carnage in the Gulf shows that the so-called 'New World Order' will not bring universal peace and prosperity, but war and barbarism. Against this, pacifism, 'official communism' and reformism have proved useless. None of these ideologies have the answer. In contrast our paper, the paper of communism in Britain, has given a clear lead. We exposed the imperialist nature of the war being conducted by the US-led coalition and the proto-imperialist nature of the war fought by the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad. Only the working class, fighting as a class for communism and the liberation of humanity, can bring peace and guarantee an end to war. Our stand won an increasing body of support, support that has taken the form of donations to our £600 monthly fighting fund. Last month we ended with a splendid £160 surplus and so far this month we have received £420, which gives us room for confidence that we can end February with a surplus as well. Special thanks to comrades KT, HD, WA, AS, FE and CC.



Pacifism and war



Bruce Kent and friends: no match for world imperialism

As the Gulf War showed, war is a terrible thing, full of horrors and senseless deaths. How can war be stopped? Pacifism says it has the answers, we say it hasn't

THE reactionary nature of the Gulf War and the revolutionary way to stop it was fully explained by comrade Jack Conrad in the last issue of *The Leninist*. As the comrade made clear, war is the continuation of *class politics* by other (violent) means, and peace is the continuation of *class politics* by other (non-violent) means. Hence, as the comrade put it, war and peace "should be looked at, not as simply two opposites, but opposites within a national, historical and class unity."

Taking this as our starting point, we communists do not denounce all wars, indeed we insist that if we are to rid humanity of the curse of war we must singlemindedly fight for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism - in other words, civil war.

As we well know, at the present time our view is very much a minority one (and will doubtless remain so until bourgeois society and the ruling ideas of the bourgeoisie are thrown into crisis with the emergence of a revolutionary situation). The majority who opposed the Gulf War adhered to pacifism, which, with seemingly eminent reasonableness, called upon both sides in the conflict to see sense, get down to talking and give peace a chance.

We do not question the sincerity of such sentiments. We do, however, question whether pacifism will bring about anything positive; in fact we are sure it will bring only disappointment. More, we are sure it acts as a barrier in the way of achieving the noble goal it is dedicated to achieve - ie the end of war. To show why this is the case it is essential to examine the ideology and history of pacifism.

Pacifism has, since around the time of World War I, been a definite ideology. Broadly, it can be summed up under three main propositions:

1. Violence is morally wrong. People should therefore

refuse to participate in wars of national liberation or violent revolution.

2. Military expenditure should be diverted to peaceful purposes.

3. Differences between states, classes and nations should be settled peacefully without resort to war.

Naturally there is a wide variety of interpretations when it comes to specifics. Underlying this is individual temperament, but more importantly, far more importantly, class interests. At the absolutist end of the pacifist spectrum are those petty bourgeois pacifists who say they will not use violence under any circumstances. The slightly more down to earth petty bourgeois pacifists are prepared to countenance a degree of violence, but only within definite limits, for example against a deranged individual, or to protect one's own home and family.

In contrast, the realo bourgeois wing of the pacifist movement is fully prepared to allow the state to use violence within a country, if it is legal and carefully controlled. Most take this to the point where they advocate a whole system of international law - including the possible use of violence, albeit often *platonically*, against dangerous, expansionist states, as long as it is under the auspices of the United Nations or some other pseudo world government body.

To those pedants who consider pacifism only in its most absolutist form, the call for such violence might seem a contradiction in terms. When the term 'pacifism' was first coined, however, at the beginning of the 20th century, it had exactly this sort of connotation: Pacifism was connected with those movements which sought peace through international courts of arbitration (which would make possible a gradual multilateral reduction of armaments and the dawn of universal peace).

Precisely because violence is considered a means of last resort against the international equivalent of an in-

sane individual and is almost always platonic, pacifism can still legitimately be defined as the principled rejection of organised violence as a way of settling differences between states, classes and nations.

Attempts to change humanity's supposed warlike nature without reference to social being, only to social consciousness, has a long history and has often taken the form of a religious movement from below; this was the case with the Anabaptists, Mennonites, Quakers and other pacifistic sects within the Christian cult. The ruling classes of the great imperialist powers have too, on occasion, pacifistically declared for universal peace. Invariably though, such pacifism is deeply cynical.

Although far from unique, this *imperialist pacifism* was most certainly taken to unprecedented depths by the Nazi regime. Nazi pacifistic propaganda was designed so that it "lulls the adversary by peaceful professions and thus tempts him to neglect his armed defence. The potential foe is thereby enveloped in a smokescreen of verbiage which serves the further purpose of concealing our own armaments" (Colonel Hierl - who was one of the leading military authorities in Nazi Germany - *Foundations of German War Politics*, quoted by R Palme Dutt in *World Politics 1918-1936*, p255).

Not surprisingly, given such cynicism, whenever it served its interests and reinforced its privileges, the imperialist capitalist class the world over has readily junked its pacifistic talk and turned to the most savage violence. Under such circumstances - when a country continues its previously peaceful politics violently - pacifist opposition from the lower orders has never been more than a minor irritant.

In Britain, when World War I broke out in August 1914, the ruling class cast aside its 'peace through trade' liberalism. The crude jingoism

that replaced it was effective enough to produce an excess of volunteers for military service, and only men over 5 feet 8 inches in height were initially accepted. But by the end of 1915 the supply of cannon fodder was drying up, and in January 1916 the Asquith government passed the Military Service Act, allowing conscription for the first time in British history. From March 2 1916 all single men aged between 18 and 41 who lived in Great Britain were liable to be called up. The result was a rapid growth of the No Conscription Fellowship, founded early in the war by Fenner Brockway to unite those who were not prepared to fight. During the rest of the war the Fellowship organised thousands against conscription, and supported hundreds of conscientious objectors confined in prisons and military barracks.

Most of the 16,000 registered conscientious objectors during World War I were Christians who refused to fight on religious grounds; but many were socialists. Revealingly, they were not supported by the Parliamentary Labour Party, which had voted for the Military Services Bill, nor by the TUC, which abandoned its initial vigorous objection to conscription when reassured that those involved in 'necessary work' would be exempt.

Such miserable social chauvinism was opposed in social pacifistic words by the Labour left ILP, and in deeds by a small militant minority, most notably the British Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party. However, it was the October Revolution in Russia which showed definitively that war, even a world war, could be stopped from below, if the working class is willing to see the defeat of its own country and its own ruling class, and is prepared to turn imperialist war into civil war. The example of Russia persuaded large numbers of socialists to drop their illusions in pacifism and recognise that as the source of modern warfare is in the capitalist system itself, to kill war one must kill capital.

Not surprisingly the necessity of proletarian revolution was not something members of the bourgeoisie or their middle class hangers on were ready to admit. As a result, following World War I - the war to end all wars - bourgeois pacifism came up with all sorts of detailed plans to "guarantee" world peace and "safeguard the people from Bolshevism". Bourgeois pacifism prided itself on its supposed rationality, and the alleged irrationality and futility of war. It based its arguments not so much on this or that isolated quote in the bible proscribing violence, rather the need to bring about a new world order of states through international law and institutions like the League of Nations.

Throughout the 1920s a mood of optimism filled the pacifist movement, both of the lower and bourgeois sorts. International conferences were convened to reinforce the belief that popular horror at the carnage of World War I, combined with the good intentions of the League of Nations, could convince national leaders to never again go to war. Such hopes were fuelled in part by simple wishful thinking, in part by cold fear. The gas, aerial and tank warfare of 1914-18 were being taken to new levels of perfection and horror in a general arms race between the great powers; if they were used, it was believed, civilisation itself would be snuffed out. All in all this combined by the 1930s to make pacifism a mass movement, particularly in Britain and the USA.

The Peace Pledge Union won millions to sign its pledge: "We renounce war and never again, directly or indirectly, will we sanction another." And under the guiding spirit of Lord Robert Cecil, over 11 million took part in the peace ballot sponsored by the League of Nations, the overwhelming majority voting against war and for peaceful methods of settling conflicts between states. Writing in the *Labour Monthly* of January 1935, R Palme Dutt, then the CPGB's leading theoretician, made the telling point that "however sincere" this anti-war feeling, "however widespread ... is useless and worse than useless so long as it is not united with revolutionary understanding."

So it was to be. Pacifism of all varieties came up against the brick wall of imperialist reality in the mid-1930s with the rise of fascist revisionism. The collapse of pacifism began in October 1935, when Italy, under Mussolini, invaded Abyssinia. The more intransigent and cranky pacifists, like George Lansbury, the crisis leader of the crisis ridden Labour Party, urged the Abyssinians to turn the other cheek.

Most Labourites, however, found his views increasingly embarrassing, and after a conference coup, "Labour reaffirmed that the needs of national defence stood as a priority above the class divisions in British society." (Geoffrey Foote, *The Labour Party's political thought* p162) In the name of this they fell in behind the National Government, which argued that League of Nations sanctions would stem the aggression (shades of 1991).

Having been swept aside from the leadership of the Labour Party, Lansbury stuck to his pacifist guns and the belief that an "international conference of heads of state" could secure an everlasting peace. With this thought urging him on he set about visiting the leaders of the revisionist powers (again shades of 1991, if we recall the visits of Bann, Heath, and all and sundry to Baghdad). After a warm meeting with Adolf Hitler, Lansbury referred to him as "one of the great men of our time". Privately he let it be known that if he had been able to stay longer and have a fireside chat with Hitler

at his Berchtesgarden country retreat he would have calmed and perhaps even converted him to Christianity "in its purest sense" (quoted by Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein, *The Labour Party - a Marxist history* p180).

Other hosts and potential converts to Lansbury's Christian pacifism included Mussolini, Dr Schuschnigg the dictator of Austria, King Carol of Romania and his 'patriarch-premier' Myron Christea and Admiral Horthy the butcher of Hungary.

As we know, Abyssinia was only the first example of attempted redivision which ended in a generalised slaughter between 1939 and 1945. Pacifism proved powerless in reversing the slide towards the world war and powerless to stop it once it had started.

The advice "to every Briton" from Mahatma Gandhi - to "invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want" - was seen to be absurd, even contemptible (quoted by M A Riff, *Dictionary of modern political ideologies*, p170). No wonder the pacifist movement came out of World War II a shell of its former self.

Nuclear pacifism

As comrade Jack Conrad said in *The Leninist* No49, we communists oppose capitalist militarism in all its forms: "We do not counterpose nuclear to conventional weapons, we oppose the system which gives rise to war." It was, though, precisely by doing this that pacifism was given a new lease of life ... again, it has to be said, with absolutely no effect in terms of bringing peace.

Nuclear weapons produced a sharp shift of emphasis within pacifism. Resisting conscription gave way to fetishising nuclear weapons, initially mainly to their testing and development. The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki produced almost no protest by pacifists. However, the explosion of the first Soviet bomb in August 1949 and the US response of developing the hydrogen bomb in 1950 led small groups of students and intellectuals to begin non-violent protests, the first action being a sit-down by 11 people on the steps of the War Office in Whitehall on January 11 1952. Several groups were set up in the 1950s, the most notable being the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, which had 25,000 members in 130 chapters in the summer of 1958, and the Committee for Non-Violent Action, who were followers of Gandhi.

Undoubtedly though, for the last 30 years the most important pacifist movement has been the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. It was founded in January 1958, on the basis of persuading the "British people" that Britain's best interests were served by "unconditionally" renouncing the use or production of nuclear weapons, and by bringing about negotiations at all levels "for agreement to end the arms race and to lead to a general disarmament convention".

On the basis of these essentially radical but implicitly pro-imperialist politics, CND grew rapidly; by 1961 it had 900 local groups. Whereas Easter Monday 1959 saw 20,000 people gather at Trafalgar Square, there were 100,000 the next year and 150,000 the year after that. Whatever differences there might have been between advocates of direct action - stunts courting arrest to gain publicity - and those who wished to restrict campaigning to legal methods, there was unity in the belief that a "short, sharp campaign" would be sufficient - all that would be needed to, in turn, convince the majority of the population that nuclear disarmament was a good thing, get the Labour Party to adopt this policy, and elect such a Labour Party to government.

CND has always been, in effect, a pacifist transmission belt into the Labour Party. Nevertheless it has to be said that CND's love affair with Labourism has often been stormy, usually one way and ultimately self-defeating. The failure of CND to win the support of the Labour Party was a decisive factor in its decline in the 1960s. Although the 1960 Labour Party conference voted for unilateral disarmament, this was fought, fought and fought again ... and reversed the following year; and when elected in 1964, Harold Wilson's Labour Party government continued to develop British imperialism's nuclear weapons in defiance of election commitments.

Yet, after a drawn out lull in the 1970s, CND began to grow rapidly again at the start of the 1980s, as a reaction to the intensification of the Cold War and specifically the deployment of cruise missiles in Europe, plans to develop the neutron bomb and later Ronald Reagan's brainchild, the Strategic Defence Initiative ('Star Wars'). CND membership increased tenfold in the first three years of the Thatcher years, and huge demos showed the extent of public support. 250,000 people filled Hyde Park on June 5 1982, and the demonstration on October 22 1983 was bigger still. Countless petty bourgeois socialist and liberal organisations supported CND and over 1,000 local groups were set up.

All this energy was still directed towards the election of a unilateralist Labour government. It did not happen, and after Thatcher's second general election victory a once pro-CND Labour Party - now under the leadership of CND member Neil Kinnock - began to shed its unilateralist, anti-nu-

clear shibboleths in an attempt to bring itself into line with the rationality of capitalist politics. Spurred, CND began another rapid decline. Membership plummeted, and the activity of local groups virtually ceased. Support for CND reached a nadir with the end of the Cold War - an end which CND did nothing to bring about and which, although many of its members thought lessened the danger of war, merely cleared the ground for inter-imperialist antagonisms to move centre stage in world politics.

Before the Gulf War demonstrated that the victory of capitalism in the Cold War actually made war more, rather than less, likely, CND tried to avoid marginalisation by broadening its sights from being simply anti-nuclear. Under this survival plan, as well as attempting to jump on the green bandwagon, former chair of CND, Bruce Kent, made clear CND's renewed faith in the potential of the United Nations to bring peace and an end to poverty and environmental destruction (see *The Independent* of January 2 1990).

Gulf pacifism

The illusion that the UN - which is dominated by imperialist powers and overwhelmingly made up of capitalist states - has anything to do with getting rid of war, has surely been shattered by its sanctioning of the Gulf War. The CND too, propelled by its implicitly pro-imperialist politics and its loyalty to the Labour Party, came out on the side of those seeking to restore the 'legitimate' feudal/capitalist government in Kuwait.

The *Morning Star* had the same position and exposed the syrupy moralism of itself and pacifism when it said that the role of CND and the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf was to "once again step into the breach as the conscience of British politics and to make sure British people realise the scale of destruction and death which a war in the Gulf would mean." There is a logic here, and the *Morning Star* goes on to approvingly quote CND chair, Marjorie Thompson, giving the following advice to imperialism: "Instead of launching a military strike against Iraq, the US-British alliance should be starting the long process towards peaceful negotiations ... The United Nations rather than the US should have control of the forces opposing Iraq and there is need for an Arab-led peace conference leading to a regional conference which looks at setting up a long term security structure along the lines of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe" (November 24 1990).

Put another way, CND shares the political aims of imperialism, but due to its platonic attitude towards the realities of imperialist politics it refused to countenance the actual, and is opposed to the theoretical, use of force to achieve them. "Sanctions against Iraq should have been given longer," became the forlorn battle cry of CND. In effect CND wants the US-led coalition to pursue its imperialist politics only through peaceful means: it would have preferred imperialism to achieve its aims by starving the Iraqi people with sanctions rather than by bombing them.

Despite this, in the form of the Committee to Stop the War in the Gulf, CND has been given a new lease of life. Unfortunately its politics did nothing to stop the war or even build a really mass anti-war movement. Dominated by and committed to Labourism, CND/CSWG did everything it could to keep the anti-war movement safe as far as Kinnock is concerned; ie, it did nothing to damage the election chances of Her Majesty's openly pro-imperialist and pro-war opposition. This (and, no doubt, work by the government's dirty tricks department) led the CND leaders of CSWG coming to see the revolutionary left in Britain as more of a problem than the British government, and in the process running down and disrupting the anti-war movement.

CND's determination to stick within the bounds of pro-imperialist respectability was intriguingly manipulated by Alex Renton's 'sympathetic' and brilliantly (we presume deliberately) inaccurate article 'Strange bedfellows in the fight for peace' in *The Independent* of January 23 1991. In an effort to divide and rule, Renton would have it that the "lunatic fringe are making the running at the moment" in the anti-war movement. He painted a CND chair Marjorie Thompson driven to despair by the antics of those, "suspected" by some of her people as agents provocateurs, like the SWP, who were saying 'victory to Iraq'.

According to Thompson, these "parasitic" and "bacteriologically unsavoury groups" "piggybacked" the peace movement; if "only someone could find a way to get rid of them," she was quoted as saying in frustration. Renton came up with the 'final solution'. Tolerance must go. The enemy within should be purged. CND must, he insisted, "fight dirty" and stop the "lunatic fringe" from dominating the anti-Gulf War movement. Only then will news editors "distinguish" between the sensible peace movement which can "act as a credible, intelligent funnel for oppositional public opinion" and the "old hard left rabble".

Three weeks later, in the name of spiking an "attempt to take over the CSWG by small and unrepresentative groups", this is exactly what Thompson and Co did. On February 12, without a hint of even formal democracy, CND unilaterally "reconstituted" CSWG on the basis of a 15 point

programme which excludes all those *not* in favour of sanctions against Iraq and a UN "peacekeeping force" (the *Morning Star* of February 13 1991 headlined the anti-left coup as putting CSWG "back on course").

Even before that, in line with the craven desire to give "a decent war" a "decent peace movement" (Renton), CND had crudely banned, lied and split. Those petty bourgeois leftists carrying pro-Iraq banners have been attacked by pacifist stewards and lined up for police arrest. Demonstrations, which were to have been weekly throughout the course of the war, have been cancelled, and the one on January 26 was effectively aborted so as not to carry through an agreed link up with the annual Bloody Sunday demonstration.

Stung by criticism by the likes of Renton, CND/CSWG no longer wanted to be associated with those protesting against Britain's war in Ireland. Instead of openly admitting this, CND/CSWG leaders blamed the police for the fact that its demonstration, which was to have gone from the Embankment to Hyde Park, ended only a couple of minutes walk up the road in Trafalgar Square. Hundreds of CND supporters were left waiting in Hyde Park for the arrival of the march and were understandably angry and perplexed by its non-appearance.

Such sectarianism and fawning respectability did nothing to build a movement to stop the Gulf War. Indeed, as we have seen, the politics of CND actually demobilised the anti-war movement. Nevertheless, at the moment it cannot be denied that the CND/CSWG and pacifism were capable of mobilising far greater numbers than the revolutionary left.

Should communists have been indifferent to this? By no means. The slogans of the communist vanguard are one thing, the spontaneous demands of the masses are something quite different. The yearning for peace is one of the most important symptoms revealing the dawning realisation by increasingly large numbers in Britain that the war was not a war for democracy, for small nations, against a vicious dictator and other such lies used to fool the population.

So what should be the attitude of communists to CND and CSWG? It can be summed up under two headings: ideological and organisational.

Ideologically we emphasised that the Gulf War, and war in general, could be stopped, if we turned imperialism's war into a civil war for socialism. War has, after all, been a feature of all class society, and as *The Leninist* has explained on countless occasions, imperialism inevitably leads to wars of redivision among great powers. Only the destruction of imperialism and the triumph of communism can put an end to war.

The pacifism of CND/CSWG clearly represents an ideological barrier to the real struggle for peace, which can only be a struggle against the capitalist state. Its belief that peace can be achieved through appeals to reason leaves the state apparatus of organised violent oppression intact.

More, because its pacifism denies the need for the class struggle, which inevitably includes violent struggle to overthrow the capitalist state, because it is not committed to changing the existing (capitalist) order that actually causes war, it is in the final analysis a tool of the bourgeoisie. As Lenin stated: "Pacifism, the preaching of peace in the abstract, is one of the means of duping the working class. Under capitalism, particularly in its imperialist stage, wars are inevitable" (*CW* Vol 21, p162). The working class must therefore rid itself of all pacifist illusions before it can fulfil its historic mission to liberate humankind from exploitation and war.

Organisationally, however, we recognise that the mass movement for peace expressed, albeit incoherently, a growing understanding of the reactionary nature of the war. It was therefore the duty of genuine communists to utilise the anti-war movement and the masses' desire for peace. That is why we mobilised for all the anti-Gulf War demonstrations and have sought to provide a focal point for the anti-war movement through the Non-Stop Picket of the US Embassy in London's Grosvenor Square.

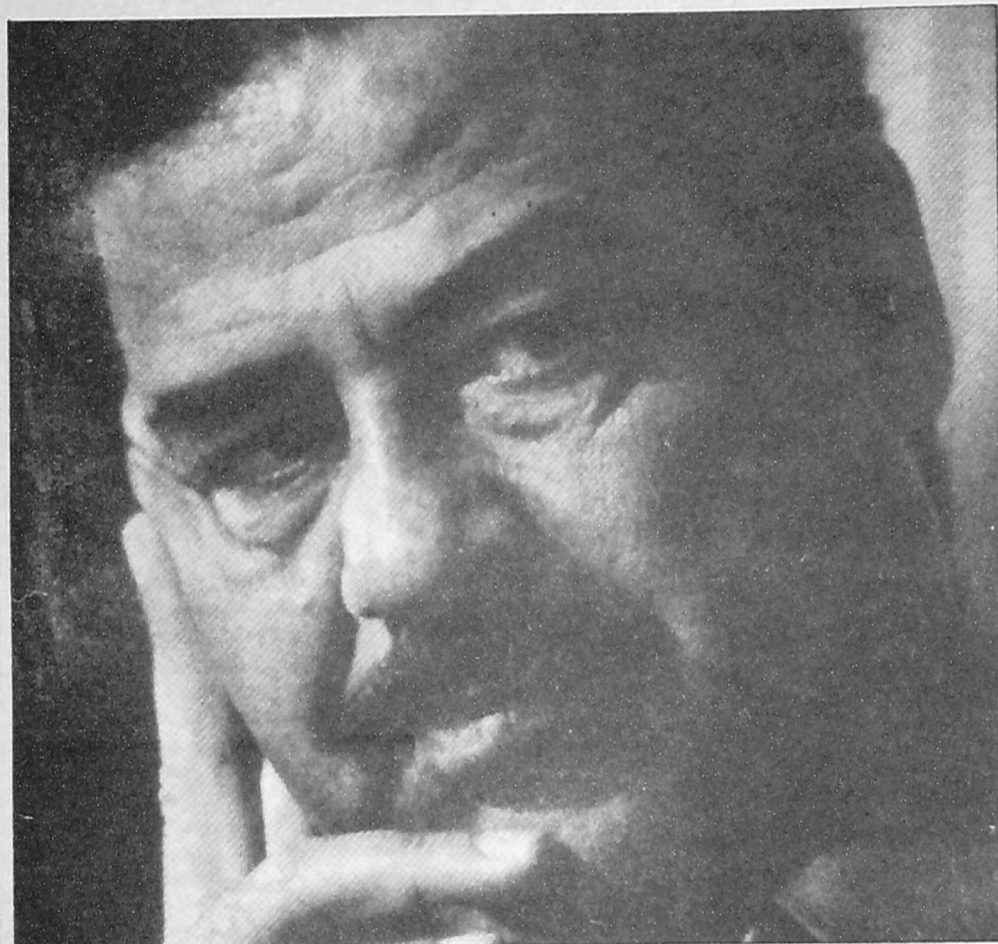
It has to be emphasised that in the course of this work we did not deceive anyone that a just peace is possible in the absence of a strong and growing revolutionary movement in all the belligerent countries. In fact we emphasise the necessity of reorganising the Communist Party of Great Britain and fighting for revolutionary defeatism, for the defeat of Saddam Hussein by the Iraqi masses and of our own government by the working class in Britain. This line of working for the defeat of one's own government did not necessitate arguing for the victory of another capitalist power - in the Gulf War the proto-imperialism of Iraq. It meant advocating fraternisation between the troops in the Gulf; it meant breaking the anti-war movement from pacifism and Labourism: it meant fighting for revolution.

The imperialists and the proto-imperialists could never have been persuaded to end the Gulf War by logical argument, nor by the strength of public opinion. They could only be 'persuaded' by a working class movement determined to overthrow capitalist state power, not only in Britain, but worldwide. That is the only way to abolish war and guarantee peace.

Mary Goodwin

It is claimed that the Trotskyite call for 'victory to Iraq' is an example of 'revolutionary defeatism', first developed by Lenin during World War I. Because they know this is not true, the Trotskyites have had to invent a whole series of justifications. We take on six

Six Trotskyite myths scotched



An unconscious ally of the world proletariat?

1

"We do not politically support Hussein, but enter into a military bloc with him, as Lenin did with Kerensky, to defeat imperialism."

Many Iraq defencists maintain that Lenin entered into a military bloc with the Provisional Government of Kerensky, against the attempted Kornilov military coup between the two revolutions of February and October 1917.

If these Trotskyites would only study Lenin's writings they would find that Lenin was against all blocs with the Kerensky forces. In *Rumours of a Conspiracy*, Lenin writes, in answer to those who suggest that the Bolsheviks were willing to cooperate with Kerensky's military forces, as follows: "that means there was a certain bloc, alliance or agreement between the Bolsheviks and the defencists on 'defence against the counterrevolution'" (original emphasis, *CW* Vol 25, p247).

Replying to this suggestion Lenin quotes a party resolution and states: "You do not conclude agreements or make blocs with people who have deserted for good to the enemy camp" (*Ibid*, p251). And further: "any Bolshevik who came to terms with the defencists ... or indirectly expressing confidence in the Provisional Government (which is allegedly being defended against the Cossacks), would, of course, be immediately and deservedly expelled from the Party" (*Ibid*, p251). He strongly rules out "making any kind of deal" with the defencist supporters of the Provisional Government.

And further still: "a Bolshevik would say: 'Our workers and soldiers will fight the

counterrevolutionary troops if they start an offensive now against the Provisional Government; they will do so *not* to defend this government, ... but to independently defend the revolution as they pursue their own aim." (*Ibid*, pp251-2). So much for Lenin and his military bloc with Kerensky.

2

"Military defence of Hussein does not mean political support."

This is a common argument of the whole Trotskyite movement. In *Socialism and War*, under the heading "War is the continuation of politics by other (ie violent) means", Lenin writes that: "Marxists have always rightly regarded this thesis as the theoretical basis of views on the significance of any war" (*CW* Vol 21, p304). Surely then, we must consider that this dictum applies to the war waged by Saddam Hussein against the imperialists; the Iraqi bourgeoisie was seeking a bigger slice of the profits extracted by exploiting the workers, and seeking to enhance its political, military and economic power at the expense of capitalist Kuwait and imperialism.

It logically follows that any support or defence of this politically motivated war inextricably entails support or defence of its political aim; why or how, on the basis of mere statements to the contrary, can defenders of Saddam Hussein's war be exempt from this dictum, which applies 100% to Hussein and capitalist Iraq? To defend Iraq

militarily is to assist it in *practice* in attaining its political objectives and is *in fact*, in *practice*, support for the Ba'ath regime politically, however much one may *verbally* criticise it.

Our armchair Trotskyites really have not considered the implications of their own slogan either: what does 'military support' entail? In the abstract, for what it's worth, you are supporting the Ba'athists armed bodies of men defending existing (capitalist) property forms. *Concretely*, military support is the sort of assistance given by the International Brigades to the Spanish Republic in the 30s. Odd, don't you think, that none of the Iraq defencists have raised this implication of their slogan?

3

"Our slogan, 'Defend Iraq', means to defend the Iraqi people from imperialist domination."

This is the most despicable act of chicanery practised by the Trotskyite movement to cover up its support, not for an abstract, classless Iraq, not for a poor little 'semi-colonial country oppressed by imperialism', but for a brutal, fascistic *proto-imperialist* Iraq that viciously suppresses all workers' democratic rights and puts to death militant leaders of the working class and Kurdish liberation movement in the name of preserving wealth and profits.

This is an attempt to assert an identification of interests between the working class and their capitalist oppressors: that the masses and the bourgeoisie have a common interest in defending the fatherland. This is not only an abdication of working class leadership of the masses, but also breaks down the whole concept of the independence of the working class in its struggle for socialist revolution.

Lenin, in *Socialism and War*, was quite explicit on this matter when he wrote regarding Marx's statement: "Anyone who today refers to Marx's attitude towards the wars of the epoch of the progressive bourgeoisie, and forgets Marx's statement that 'the working men have no country' - a statement that applies *precisely* to the period of the reactionary and outmoded bourgeoisie, to the epoch of the socialist revolution, is shamelessly distorting Marx, and is substituting the bourgeois point of view for the socialist" (original emphasis, *CW* Vol 21, p309).

Despite agreeing that the Iraqi bourgeoisie is reactionary, the Trotskyites persisted in declaring a common cause between the Saddam Hussein regime and the working masses, in the military conflict with imperialism, thus supporting and strengthening Saddam Hussein's opportunist manoeuvre of linking his struggle for a larger share in the exploitation of the workers with the Palestinian question, and the general democratic aspirations of the Arab masses. The Trotskyite movement aids and abets this anti-working class would-be imperialist and his class in deceiving the masses, in arguing that a victory for Iraqi capitalism is the key to their salvation.

We ask them quite simply: is the Iraqi bourgeoisie "reactionary and outmoded", and has Iraq therefore entered "the epoch of the socialist revolution"?

An answer in the affirmative - the only true response - must mean the unequivocal rejection of defencism of this rotten regime.

"We support and defend Saddam Hussein to the extent that he fights imperialism."

The question arises here: was Hussein fighting imperialism? One could say that it is indisputable that he was, in view of the war that took place. However, the answer is not so simple. Imperialism is not a system in itself, but rather an extension of the economic, political and military power of the most advanced capitalist nations. In other words, imperialism, as defined by Lenin, is the highest expression of monopoly finance capitalism. As such, imperialism cannot be fought, let alone defeated, without attacking its base roots, ie monopoly finance capitalism - the social foundations of the Ba'ath regime, however distorted and weak these may be.

The harmony of interests between the national bourgeoisie and its imperialist masters is far greater than any sympathy the national bourgeoisie could ever have with the interests of the international proletariat. Each capitalist state fights the other like thieves, seeking bigger shares of the markets and wealth extracted from their oppression and exploitation of the workers, and Iraqi capitalism is no exception.

As anti-imperialists we rejoice in any and all defeats inflicted on imperialism, both economically and militarily, not from the standpoint of a Hussein victory, but from the standpoint of weakening world capitalism, which includes Iraqi capitalism. In the final analysis such defeats can only be inflicted on world imperialism by the struggles of the working class.

Such logic has been turned inside out by the Trotskyites, and has been presented of late in a polemic against us by the Spartacist League in the January issue of its paper, *Workers Hammer*: "The Leninist's refusal to struggle against imperialist aggression in the Gulf". And again: "Leninist's [sic] current idiot capitulation to British imperialism and social democracy over the Gulf".

As with their allegation that "Leninists defend Russian fascists", they produce no evidence even in the form of misquotes, hoping instead that if they sling enough mud, some will stick. The Leninist's record of calling for revolutionary defeatism against our 'own' bourgeoisie, of initiating the Non-Stop Picket of the US Embassy, of calling for and organising anti-imperialist demonstrations and meetings etc, is answer enough to these infantile allegations. So let us examine the position of the Spartacists.

Under the subtitle, "Lenin v The Leninist," they quote Lenin's 1915 pamphlet *Socialism and War*, in which Lenin declared in support of a war waged by Morocco, India, Persia and China against their respective imperialist oppressors, France, Britain and Russia. To draw the analogy with Saddam Hussein and Iraq, the Spartacists write: "When Lenin wrote this, Morocco was ruled by the Sultan Mulai Yusuf, Persia by the military dictator Ephraim Khan and China by the warlord Yuan Shih-kai - rulers just as bloody and reactionary as Iraq's Saddam Hussein." Again, the criterion for these so-called Marxists is not one of class, but the superficial question of being "bloody", but still the little guy.

Such a criterion may be Trotskyite, but Lenin's position is somewhat more profound than this playground philosophy. If they read Lenin in historical context they would find, in the same *Socialism and War*, Lenin arguing that communists always recognised the justice of a 'defensive' war ... "namely, a revolution against reaction and serf labour", enabling the development of capitalism and a proletariat, the precondition for the struggle for socialism.

How did support for Morocco etc, in a war against imperialist oppressors, aid this historical progress? It did so precisely because the so-called rulers of Morocco etc, quoted by the Spartacists, were feudal lackeys of imperialism, and not capitalist rulers of independent sovereign states such as Iraq is. Revolt there would break the back of feudalistic reaction and facilitate the development of a modern proletariat. Such a proletariat long ago entered onto the stage in Iraq. Lenin's accusation, directed at a Russian liberal, applies just as well to present day Trotskyism, which "drags present-day democracy backwards, ... to the slogans and the ideology of the old bourgeois democracy, to the dependence of the masses upon the bourgeoisie ... [instead of] the movement of which class is the mainspring of the progress possible" - which today is the proletariat, in Iraq just as much as in the west (*CW*, Vol 21, p143).

In Lenin's day, war between Morocco etc, and the imperialist masters who kept these countries in a state of serfdom, would lead to a democratic

bourgeois revolution once they were freed from imperialist oppression. To quote Lenin again, in his justification for supporting Morocco etc, in such a war, "before the overthrow of feudalism, absolutism, and foreign oppression, there could be no thought of developing the proletarian struggle for socialism." To compare a dependent, non-sovereign, absolutist, feudalistic Morocco etc, with the Iraqi state today is to distort the writings of Lenin and make a caricature out of Marxist historical concepts.

Let us finish with a quote from Lenin's *Socialism and War*, from the text which comes immediately after the Spartacists' quote, and which they have obviously ignored because it undermines their argument and confirms the Leninist policy of defeatism on both sides: "But imagine a slaveholder who owns 100 slaves [poor little Iraqi capitalists, for instance] warring against another who owns 200 slaves, for a more 'just' redistribution of slaves. The use of the term 'defensive' war, or a war 'for the defence of the fatherland', would clearly be historically false in such a case and would in practice be sheer deception of the common people, philistines, and the ignorant, by the astute slave-holders" (*Ibid*, p301). The Spartacists and Trotskyite movement to a tee!

5

"A victory for Saddam Hussein would arouse the Arab masses and create a mass anti-imperialist struggle throughout the Arab world leading to a revolutionary international struggle against both imperialism and the Arab bourgeois rulers."

This was a sure case of wishful thinking with no historical precedent to justify such a prognosis. In fact, if we study history, we find that the reverse is the case. Victory for the capitalist rulers of any nation enhances their influence and power over the workers, seriously weakening the revolutionary struggle for socialism. The essence of the strategy of revolutionary defeatism is that the defeat of the bourgeoisie in any country leads to the weakening and possible collapse (depending upon the development of the revolutionary alternative) of that capitalist state, so providing conditions for the revolutionary forces to realise a socialist revolution. That is why we declared: "our main enemy is at home - for revolutionary defeatism both in Britain and Iraq", in order to facilitate the revolutionary struggle for socialism in both countries.

"There", said the Trotskyites, "is the evidence that you support imperialism. With the present balance of forces your policy will lead to the defeat of the Iraqi military, and the victory for imperialism." Lenin was accused of being an agent of German imperialism because he advocated revolutionary defeatism in Russia; the Trotskyites would have been one of Lenin's greatest critics. These shallow simpletons, having no understanding of Marxism-Leninism, fail to comprehend the internationalist approach and the significance of revolutionary defeatism. As with Lenin, we called for revolutionary defeatism in all countries involved in the war.

Revolutionary defeatism is for the defeat of one's own capitalist state, through the revolutionary struggle of the masses of that country. If we had failed to call for, and to actively work for, revolutionary defeatism in Britain, and yet demanded that Iraqi workers follow this policy - or, on the other hand, if we had called merely for a military defeat of either side without the revolutionary perspective - we would have been guilty of social-chauvinism and pro-imperialism.

With Iraq as a weak link in the capitalist chain, it was more likely that the Iraqi and Kurdish workers would succeed in establishing a revolutionary force capable of overthrowing their capitalist class than the workers in the imperialist countries. It is highly possible that the act of revolutionary struggle and the undermining of the Iraqi bourgeoisie and its military machine would have assisted the military victory of imperialism over Iraq - but this would have been due, not to the successful revolutionary struggle of the Iraqi workers, who would have succeeded in their international revolutionary duty, by really fighting imperialism by taking Iraq out of the capitalist system, but to the failure of the revolutionary forces in the imperialist countries to develop and conduct a massive revolutionary anti-war campaign, forcing the imperialists to withdraw from Iraq; the blame would be 100% on our shoulders, if we failed to assist our Iraqi comrades in their revolutionary struggle.

Imagine the sympathetic reaction of the international working class if the workers of Iraq overthrew the butcher Saddam Hussein and established a socialist state. Without doubt, as with the

defence of the Soviet Union in the 1920s, it would inspire workers the world over to fight in their defence and against their own capitalist class. In actual fact, a victory for the Iraqi working class would be a victory for the revolutionary forces in the imperialist countries, as it would stimulate the anti-capitalist and anti-war struggles of the masses, and be a real step towards overthrowing imperialism.

Not to have taken the risk of imperialism defeating and occupying Iraq, or any other small and weak country, would have helped to disarm the workers of all backward nations from struggling for the socialist revolution - imposing a defeatist policy on the workers of other countries by our failure to fight effectively our own imperialist masters.

Who could doubt, even if the Gulf War had not blown up, that if the workers of such small weak nations succeeded in overthrowing their own bourgeoisie and taking state power, particularly in the oil rich countries, the imperialists, with the aid of the national bourgeoisie, would march in anyway to defend their imperialist interests. The policy of Trotskyism is a blind alley; lacking faith in the potential international workers revolutionary movement. No wonder Trotskyism, despite its rhetoric, has never even attempted a socialist revolution, and has always capitulated to the national bourgeoisie, even to the extent of entering the capitalist governments and assisting in the suppression of the workers movement, as in Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

6

"We demand that Saddam Hussein arms the workers to strengthen the fight against imperialism, and that workers fight shoulder to shoulder with, and even within, the Hussein army, against imperialism."

Such a demand was, for Leninists, the height of naivety, even criminality. Lenin, in attacking the Menshevik allies of Trotsky on the question of demands, wrote in *The Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution*, the following: "The most varied reforms must be demanded of the bourgeois governments, but without being guilty of Manilovism and reformism one cannot demand that people and classes who are entangled by the thousand threads of imperialist capital should break those threads."

To imagine that a fascistic butcher such as Saddam would agree to give the oppressed

masses arms is not only naive but creates dangerous illusions among the masses and diverts them from the struggle to arm themselves.

Many Iraq defencists agreed that Saddam would not arm the masses, but said that this was a 'transitional demand' which raised the question of arming the masses for revolution on the one hand, and, on the other, exposed Saddam as not being sincere in his alleged desire to wage all out war against imperialism.

We don't think that the Iraqi and Kurdish masses, who have been shot down, gassed and brutally oppressed, have any illusion whatever regarding Saddam's desire to arm them and give them the means to fight back. So far as raising the question of arming the masses, we believe in the Bolshevik approach which calls for the workers to seize arms from the armouries, fraternise with the military and win them over to the struggle for the forcible overthrow of the capitalist system. In other words, to wage an independent struggle for socialist revolution and not to depend upon the national bourgeoisie to assist them in struggle.

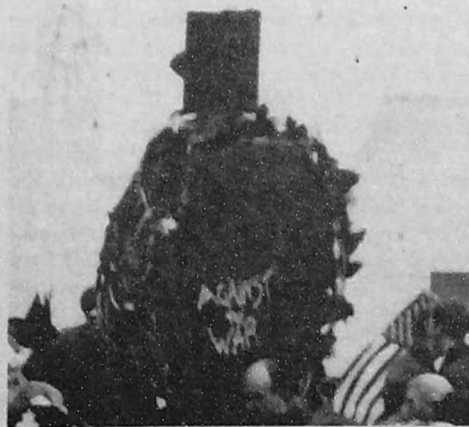
This Trotskyite policy of demanding arms from the national bourgeoisie to fight a 'common enemy' has, with disastrous results, also been applied in Latin American countries, such as Bolivia. The theory of Trotskyism is that the national bourgeoisie, when under threat of attack by internal or external reaction, will make common cause with the workers, and unite their forces in order to defeat this 'common' threat to their existence. Therefore, it is in the interests of the bourgeoisie to obtain the assistance of the armed masses, and it should arm the masses who should then fight alongside, and even within, the national bourgeois forces. History has shown that the bourgeoisie throughout the world has a greater fear of workers' revolution than it has of suppression by the imperialists or fascistic forces.

The historical stage at which the bourgeoisie had a common interest with the masses was when they fought for political power and economic freedom against the forces of feudal reaction. Since their emergence as rulers over sovereign capitalist states, the bourgeois forces have made common cause with reaction against the common enemy, the proletariat.

In fact it is this analysis of historical development on which Marx and Engels based their theory of permanent revolution, (which Trotsky later took up, along with Lenin, in his theory of uninterrupted revolution). To develop prognosis and policies on the theory of a coinciding harmony of interests between any section of the monopoly bourgeoisie and the workers in the imperialist era is to distort Marxism-Leninism and pave the way to catastrophe for the workers' struggle.

Paul Conlon

Artists Against the War



ARTISTS Against the War is an ad hoc body which arose from artists angered by the Gulf War and the growing censorship that emerged in the course of it. Following a successful launch meeting in London on February 17, AAW agreed a founding statement:

As cultural producers we are totally opposed to the reactionary war in the Gulf.

We are outraged by the invasive lies and propaganda constructed around the war. The war must be stopped by ordinary people in Britain and Iraq taking action against the main enemy - at home.

Art is a weapon in the propaganda war. We will use it to expose the media censorship and to help build a mass movement capable of stopping the war.

As reported in *The Stage* and the *Evening Standard*, AAW resolved to make March 15 - Red Nose Day - a day of cultural action against imperialist war. The charity mongering organisers of Red Nose Day have pledged to give half the money they raise to the Red Cross Gulf Appeal. AAW still intends to turn the day onto its feet by organising a series of anti-imperialist, anti-war actions. AAW prefers to devote its energies to stopping imperialism, not patching up its victims. AAW will be doing its utmost to encourage artists pledged to help Red Nose Day to come out against imperialism and its charity mongering stooges.

During the Gulf War, AAW acted as a coordinator for a wide range of organisations and anti-war events; Platform Arts, Workers Theatre Movement and Slides Against the War all staged actions under its umbrella. AAW recognises that artists alone cannot stop imperialist war, but that art is a weapon that can be used to break through media censorship and bring the truth about war to the mass of the population, above all to the organised working class.

AAW meets in North London every Sunday from 12 noon to 3pm. For more information contact Zibby Campbell on 071-528 6643.

The housing crisis



Decent housing is a human right. It is also a revolutionary demand

DURING the cold snap at the beginning of February there was much discussion, particularly in the liberal media, about one of the most rapidly growing social problems to beset British society in recent years - homelessness. There was a steady stream of social reformers who came forward with their own particular pet scheme to deal with the crisis. The problem with them all was that for all their claims to get at the core of the problem, none of them posed the necessity of doing away with the existing system.

Yet the fact of the matter is that it is impossible to do away with homelessness without doing away with capitalism. It is no exaggeration to say that the capitalist system itself produces homelessness; a point made a century and a half ago by Engels, who insisted, in his pamphlet *The Housing Question*, that homelessness is one of the "evils which results from the present day capitalist mode of production" (p17).

This fact is well proven by the chronic problem of homelessness throughout the 20th century and the dramatic increase in even the official figures over the last few years.

In Britain in 1989, 126,680 families were officially accepted as homeless by local authorities; moreover, by early 1990, there had already been a 20% increase in that figure. This picture is distorted further by the fact that local authority council housing provision has been slashed from 66,724 properties available in 1979 to 13,200 properties in 1989 - thus even further restrictions are placed on those who apply for homes.

Government statistics do not include single homeless people, of whom there has been the most dramatic increase. CHAR, a campaigning organisation for the single homeless, estimates there to be at least 2 million single homeless people in Britain; while Centrepoint, a hostel in central London, cites figures of more than 50,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 19 sleeping rough in Central London. Take a walk down the Strand late a night and count the cardboard box 'homes' - before the police clear them, anyway.

Recent government legislation has added to the problem. Council cuts and pressure for working class people to buy their own council houses has reduced the pool of available housing, with little new construction. The pressure to buy is increased

by lousy to non-existent local council maintenance of their property. The logic behind this 'people's capitalism' has led to many of those who did buy their flats and houses being out on the streets when mortgages went through the roof. And the Labour Party has been as keen on this little scheme as the Tories: try getting a council property in a Labour controlled local authority and see what you turn up.

The Tories' 1988 Housing Act introduced even higher rents in the private sector and made it far easier for landlords to evict already vulnerable tenants. This act also withdrew the right to housing benefit for 16-17 year olds, while the recent Student Loan Scheme has meant that the majority of students can no longer claim either housing benefit or income support.

The poll tax, of course, has and will place a further burden on those suffering from cuts in already meagre social security and housing benefits, despite rapidly increasing rents. There is no doubt that the poll tax will increase the numbers sleeping rough or living in run-down bed and breakfast hotels and hostels, while making their chances of housing even more remote.

The Tories much hyped 'Care in the Community' scheme has increased considerably the numbers on the streets; 23,000 psychiatric hospital beds have been lost in the last 10 years but only 4,000 residential places have been provided in 'the community' - the rest of course are non-residential!

For that section of the working class which has been conned by government incentive schemes into thinking that owning your own home was a sure safeguard against homelessness, there have been severe financial disappointments and hardships. Soaring interest rates, coupled with a decline in house prices, have meant an increase in mortgage repossessions of 57% in 1989. Official sources quote the numbers made homeless because of repossession at 8% of the total, though it is apparent that the true figure is higher.

Finally, in early 1990, the government deigned to acknowledge the existence of a problem, and published a review where it proposed to spend £250 million over a two year period. This paltry sum would provide assistance to only 4% of those 'officially' homeless (as already stated, official figures don't include several million homeless people). As part of this package, £15 million was

to be spent on temporary low-quality accommodation in London - to provide any more than emergency night shelters would be to encourage homelessness, according to the then Housing Minister Michael Spicer.

Such cosmetic measures as the government employs to tackle the housing crisis are even more obviously tokenistic when seen against a backdrop of cuts in benefits, cuts in council housing provision, increased police powers to arrest for 'vagrancy' and 'loitering', and the most recent "clean-up campaigns" in London, where homeless people have been driven out of many parts of the city and their cardboard dwellings destroyed.

The alternative, following the lead given in the US, is to drive homeless people into compulsory shelters - something in between a return to the 19th century poorhouse and a cattle shed.

However appalled they might be, no-one should be surprised at the government's attitude towards homelessness. As Engels pointed out, "the state as it exists today is neither able or willing to do anything to remedy the housing calamity. The state is nothing but the organised power of the possessing classes against the exploited classes" (*Ibid*, p65).

Furthermore, Engels goes on, the capitalist state "at most will see to it that the measure of superficial palliation which has become customary is carried into execution uniformly" (p66). It has become very apparent that declining British imperialism is no longer willing to offer even the amount of "superficial palliation" which was available to the working class in the days of the welfare state. The Tories and their crisis ridden capitalist economy won't offer even the meagre concessions of the past.

There should, however, be no illusions that a future Labour government can, or would even attempt to, solve the housing crisis. It was, after all, the Labour Party in government which introduced housing policies now associated with the 'new right'. In 1951 a Labour government introduced market forces into the public sector which logically led to the sale of council properties. Furthermore, the recent cuts in council housing can be traced directly to the Labour government under Callaghan, which justified its slashing of the provision of housing for the working class with a green paper, which cited owner occupation

(privately owned housing) to be the most natural form of tenure.

Looking at the past record of the Labour Party, there can be no doubt of its inability and unwillingness even to tackle the housing crisis. The Labour Party, after all, as pointed out by Lenin, is a "bourgeois workers' party", committed to running capitalism. As it is capitalism which creates homelessness, a party pledged to the continuation of the system obviously cannot overcome the crisis.

It is, as already stated, within the capitalist mode of production that the conditions are created which give rise to such problems as homelessness. Because capitalism relies for profit upon the surplus value created by the workers, it needs a proletariat in order to survive. Thus a mass of workers are created, workers who depend totally upon wages, a class susceptible to the vacillations endemic in the system.

The working class are victims of a system "in which improvements of the machinery etc, continually throw masses of workers out of employment; in which violent and regularly recurring industrial fluctuations determine on the one hand the existence of a large reserve army of unemployed workers, and on the other hand drive the mass of the workers from time to time on to the streets unemployed" (*Ibid*, p41).

Moreover, because capitalism centres mainly around big cities, so workers continually crowd into cities in search of work, where they find themselves at the mercy of bourgeois property owners who, as Engels says, have "not only the right but, by reason of competition, to a certain extent the duty" to make as much as possible from their property.

Therefore, as competition drives the cost of housing up, and crisis within the capitalist economy results in growing unemployment, the housing crisis affects the working class even more acutely. It is no coincidence that, as British imperialism goes more deeply into recession, with the balance of payments deficit at over £1 billion a month, and unemployment figures officially (not including those on cheap labour schemes etc) nearing 2 million, homelessness has reached figures of over 2.5 million.

The contradiction between the tens of thousands of empty properties and the tens of thousands on the streets can only be understood through applying the principles of Marxism-Leninism to a system whose *raison d'être* lies within the unceasing drive for profit. The solution to the housing crisis can lie only in the overthrow of the system which creates it. As Engels argued: "the solution lies in the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and the appropriation of all the means of subsistence and instruments of labour by the working class itself" (p71).

In the immediate aftermath of the socialist revolution, homelessness can be resolved by the confiscation of the property of the bourgeoisie by the new workers' state and its allocation to the homeless and poorly housed. In the immediate situation today, as we shall see, the solutions are not that different, relying on the action of the working class.

In the long term, the complete eradication of the housing problem lies within communist society. With the development of socialism, the dichotomy between city and country becomes less and less until, in the higher stage of communism, it disappears completely. It is only through the withering away of the state, and the elimination of class society, that a complete solution can be found, as overcrowded cities created by capitalism are finally abolished.

Hence, it is important to be very critical of philanthropic societies, however well meaning, which, while they identify the housing crisis, look to solutions within capitalism. Shelter, a typical example, argues in its most recent pamphlet that homelessness and bad housing "are created by bad laws and unfair housing policies", and the solution lies in "an acknowledgement [by the government] of the reality of the present housing crisis with practical steps to increase the supply of good quality affordable homes" (*Homelessness - what's the problem*, p8). It criticises the government on the one hand, and pleads with it to solve the situation on the other. As Engels argues, it is in the nature of such petty bourgeois charitable societies to "want to maintain the basis of all the evils of present-day society and at the same time want to abolish the evils themselves" (p65).

The petty bourgeois ideology of these organisations must be challenged and the working class broken from any belief in them as a solution to the homeless crisis.

It is also vital for the working class to break with any illusions in those so-called 'Marxists' within the workers' movement, ie those like Militant Tendency, who claim that the answer to the housing problem lies in the election of "a Labour government with socialist policies" (P

Taaffe and T Mulhearn, *Liverpool - a city that dared to fight*). Militant, though it claims to be Marxist, conveniently chooses to forget one of the most basic premises of Marxism - that violent revolution, led by the party of the working class, is the only way socialism can be achieved. Instead, as comrade Jack Conrad points out in his 'Which Road?' supplement on Militant; these Trotskyites have become thoroughly Labourised. In an attempt to square their claim to be Marxists with their thoroughly reformist practice, "Militant fantasises about introducing socialism in one fell swoop via a Labour government and an enabling act" (*The Leninist* No94).

Armed with this fantasy, a Militant dominated Liverpool City Council in the mid 1980s decided that it could totally solve the housing crisis in the city with the introduction of an 'Urban Regeneration Scheme'. This slum clearance scheme could give "just a glimpse of what would have been possible on the basis of a national housing plan which involved the complete eradication of the slums" (*Ibid*, p284). Such a national plan would, of course, be carried out by a future Labour government.

The council borrowed extensively from Swiss and Japanese banks to finance the building of 5,500 'homes for people' in the period 1983-87, and of course it cannot be denied that many benefited from the scheme. However, in 1986 the Labour Party leadership decided to purge itself of its loyal left wing, and the Militant dominated council found itself in a precarious position. This, coupled with ratecapping, huge interest repayments and other financial difficulties, led to the collapse of its experiment in municipal socialism in 1987.

It left behind a desperate housing problem for the working class of Liverpool. As part of its slum clearance programme, the Militant dominated council had neglected other working class areas. Now the working class in these parts of the city found themselves living in appalling conditions, in damp and rotten homes, with no hope of rehousing. The 'Marxist' council had not solved the housing problem; it had merely shifted the slums to another part of the city. Militant's reformism was totally inadequate - not even 'left reforms' can solve housing problems while capitalism continues: again, Engels says: "The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place produces them in the next place also" (p71).

As already stated, what is necessary, in order to put an end to homelessness, is the overthrow of capitalism. This means the organisation of revolutionary action now. Those without homes and those in poor housing need to organise to fight for what they need - a decent home for every working class man, woman, and child.

Examples of working class action in the fight for homes can be taken from the civil rights movement in Ireland in the 1960s and from the organised homeless movement in the United States today, not to mention the housing movements in Britain in the 40s and, to a lesser extent, later.

In the north of Ireland in 1967, the banned local republican clubs helped organise squats for homeless Catholic families in empty council houses, denied them by Unionist controlled councils. These squats and occupations led to the first civil rights march in August 1968 from Dunganon to Coalisland. This was to spark off the civil rights movement which led to the revolutionary situation which gripped the north of Ireland from 1969.

In the United States, the decay of imperialism has resulted, among other things, in a total of over 6 million sleeping rough. But the homeless have started to fight back. Organisations such as the National Union of the Homeless have organised successful housing takeovers and occupations across the United States. Campaigns such as Cut the Locks involve mass mobilisations to seize housing for the homeless and badly housed.

The organised homeless in the United States are fighting back against the shelter system, and instead are beginning to take whatever steps necessary, 'legal' and 'illegal' to secure the housing they need.

Action such as this can be used to fight for decent homes in a revolutionary way. Revolutionary action for housing can gain decent homes for the working class in the here and now, while at the same time building a revolutionary movement which, combined with other workers' struggles, can fight to overthrow the system which perpetuates homelessness.

Mass movements of workers can be mobilised on this question, whether it be to squat vacant property - particularly that of the rich (how many vacant and well furnished rooms does Buckingham Palace have?), rent strikes, through to workers' control of our estates and streets.

This can be done, and has been done, many times. But to win, to secure our victories, we need the leadership of a Communist Party, committed to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a workers' state.

Siobhain McLoughlin

How to stop war: 1920



Workers action in Britain aided the beleaguered Red Army and stopped the war against the Soviet Union

WORKING-CLASS action can stop war. British workers have proved it. The grandparents of those who unsuccessfully protested in the streets and workplaces of Britain against the Gulf War showed how it can be done. They turned protests into action, stopped a war, and changed the history of the world.

The two years after the armistice of World War I in November 1918 had not been years of peace - certainly not class peace. Unemployment in Britain was at a horrendous level, and the threat of a new war was ever present. In 1919 and 1920 the capitalist powers, united after the battles of World War I, were together waging war on the infant revolutionary workers' state in Russia.

Some 14 capitalist powers, including the recent enemies Britain and Germany, together with France, Japan, and the United States, had their troops on Russian soil, trying to destroy the Russian Revolution. In 1920 the reactionary Polish regime was attempting to invade Russia. The British government sent an ultimatum to Moscow calling for surrender, or they would face an all-out war. Munitions and airplanes were sent from Britain to arm the Poles.

A small number of socialists united to campaign for Hands Off Russia! One particularly active group in London, led by working class women's campaigner Sylvia Pankhurst and boilermaker Harry Pollitt (later to become general secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain) was trying to win the East London dockers to stop loading arms on to ships bound for Poland.

Fifteen years later, Pollitt wrote about the hard work that had been put in to rouse the protest movement, and of the disappointments of the 'downturns'. "For two years", he said, "around the London docks meetings were regularly being held in support of the Russian Revolution under the slogan Hands Off Russia! These meetings were chiefly organised by the Workers Socialist Federation and the Hands Off Russia Movement!" These comrades working in the shipyards at Poplar, dropped leaflets down the ships' holds, pasted them on the quay sides, in the lavatories, calling for support for the Russian workers, and asking London shipyard workers and dockers not to load ships or repair ships that were meant for the war against Soviet Russia.

"I remember very well," continued Pollitt, "how the famous leaflet written by comrade Lenin, 'An Appeal to the Toiling Masses', for support of the Russian Revolution and which had been declared an illegal leaflet, was carefully hidden in our mattresses in the house where we lodged in Poplar, and copies regularly taken into the dock for distribution. It was not an easy job to get strike action taken. I recall how in April 1920, in the Blackwell Shipyard, big barges were being refitted to carry munitions for Poland, and we were unable to get strike action taken on the job, the workers did not consider that I was taking the right action. "How do you know these barges are for use of the Polish government?" was the question constantly being asked. I was ordered to go and work on these barges. I refused and got sacked. This particular job was being paid at very high rates. The workers were ordered in to work one

Sunday morning. We stood outside the shipyard distributing leaflets and urging the workers not to finish the job. We did not succeed."

May Day 1920 and the campaigning group came back from the London demonstration, downhearted that their efforts were showing no result. Shortly after they held a meeting to discuss the position, and agreed to campaign for another week or so, but then to call it a day.

Meanwhile on May Day itself the Danish steamer *Neptune* left the East India Dock for the nearest port in Poland with a cargo which included eight large aeroplanes. Shortly after another small steamer left the Dock, and among other cargo carried two heavy guns and six aeroplanes. When this ship reached Gravesend two firemen refused to work it unless these munitions were taken off. They were backed by the dock hands, and while heated discussions took place on the ship, she was struck by another vessel and so damaged she had to be towed into dock.

News of the incident spread and dockers working the East India Dock where the 'jolly' boats were loaded sent a deputation to Ernest Bevin (dockers' union leader and later as a Cabinet Minister in World War II and after a virulent anti-communist) and Fred Thompson of the Dockers Union as it then was. The workers received assurances that if they refused to load any munitions for Poland they would receive the full support of the union.

Pollitt told how: "In the first week of May 1920 coming home through the Docks, we noticed *The Jolly George* and on the quayside cases of ammunition openly marked for Poland. On Saturday and Sunday nights May 8 and 9 we held big meetings to win support for stopping the *Jolly George*. There was no indication from these meetings that any action would be taken. But on May 10 the dockers refused to load and the coalies refused to charge her bunkers."

On Thursday May 13 the *Jolly George* should have sailed but she was still held up. On May 14 orders were given for her to have what cargo had been loaded taken out. Fred Thompson who was then London Secretary of the Dockers Union stated: "We shall keep our eyes open to see that the munitions are not surreptitiously put aboard another ship." This action of the London dockers had an electrifying effect throughout the working class movement both at home and abroad. It led to the formation of Councils of Action on a local and a national scale which received very great support.

The example of the British dockers was soon followed by those of Danzig (now Gdansk). The story is taken up in a pamphlet published by the Red International of Labour Unions. The first Polish steamer with equipment for the Polish army arrived in Danzig on July 23 1920. The dockers refused to unload it and threatened to stop the whole work of the port if strike breakers were employed to unload the ship.

"The representatives of the German and Christian Transport Workers Unions who declared their readiness to enter upon negotiations with the Polish representatives were forced to abandon their mediation. The work-

ers of Danzig staged a great demonstration in support of the Port workers, and were fired on, leaving one killed and many wounded.

"Despite the cruel terror the port of Danzig workers remained firm. Their example was not without effect on the British detachments of occupation who were quartered in the port. British soldiers followed the example of the port workers and were arrested on the orders of the commander of the Occupation Court. A state of siege was declared and an attempt to starve out the port workers.

"The railwaymen declared their solidarity with the port workers and replied to the decision of the Polish boycott by stopping all transport of goods including that of the supply of food to Poland. The example of the Danzig workers met with response in an international scale. The Swedish Union of Port Workers welcomed a campaign of solidarity with the Danzig workers and issued an appeal demanding the blockade of the Danzig port and international support for the fighting workers of Danzig."

The Red International went on: "The Italian Port workers declared their solidarity with Danzig. Antwerp Port workers stopped the loading and unloading of ammunition boxes for Poland."

Back in Britain an indication of the activities and feeling that had been generated comes from the minutes of the Gravesend Trades Council in Kent, where the spark which set the blaze of anti-war action alight was first ignited. During the discussion, councillor Rumsam stated that guns and munitions were stored at Gravesend. "We are keeping our eyes on them" he said and added that "the stuff would remain there a long time if it were left to the dockers." Some of it had been brought by rail. It was decided to send the resolution to the Lightermen's Union and the National Union of Railwaymen thanking them for what had been done and expressing the hope that they would continue their vigilance.

A Council of Action was set up, based on the Trades Council. As its minutes record working class activity was going from the word to the deed, not least with the railwaymen on the North Kent Line who stopped consignments of munitions bound for Poland. The same sort of blacking activity was going on in hundreds of places throughout Britain. As one person the working class movement was beginning to rise. On August 8 1920 there were mass, record breaking, demonstrations throughout the country. It was noteworthy that the special edition brought out by the left *Labour Daily Herald* on that Sunday gave prominence to the call for action against the war issued by the newly formed CPGB.

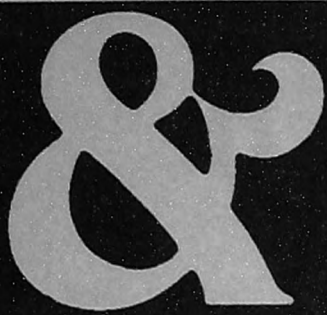
Faced with this mass movement from below the TUC and the Labour Party executive met on August 9 and unanimously decided to warn the government that "the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war". In the words of Lenin these "Mensheviks who are even more despicable than the Russian Mensheviks and even more servile towards the capitalists, even they had to unite because the workers demanded it, and the British workers said 'We will not permit war against Russia'."

As a result of the general strike threat the government caved in. Churchill informed the Polish government that the British government could no longer take action against Russia. The wielders of power had come face to face with power - the power of the working class, expressed not merely centrally by the TUC, but more importantly the network of Councils of Action that had sprung up, 350 of them, covering every important centre of population.

That the Council of Action did not proceed further, although many demanded it deal with other urgent matters (the war in Ireland and unemployment for example), does nothing to belittle its historical importance. For here was an organ, created in the heat of struggle, by which the working class in Britain could exercise state power.

As Lenin later said: "This Council of Action, independently of parliament, presents an ultimatum to the government in the name of the workers - it is the transition to the workers' dictatorship ... The whole of the English bourgeois press wrote that the Council of Action were soviets. And it was right. They were not called soviets but in actual fact they were such."

Harry Eastman



OUR HISTORY

Communist Unity Convention: resolution and opening on parliament

The formation of the CPGB and its early years: articles, documents and manifestos

New Communist Review Fourth Quarter 1990: "Initially, apologists for Gorbachev echoed his supporters' claim that the reform movement was somehow strengthening socialism and that it would inspire the socialist movement throughout the world." Which "apologists" is the NCP criticising? The New Worker, November 6 1987: "The wild predictions of Britain's media hacks and Trotskyite 'lefts' have been shattered. Their hope that the Soviet Union's openness and reconstruction mean some sort of return to capitalism in the USSR were dashed by Mikhail Gorbachev's report."

Dialectics and the British left ... on one of the anti-Gulf War demonstrations we picked up a leaflet from the Communist Workers Organisation, a remnant of the 'communist left' which Lenin polemicised against. The leaflet was fairly typical left communist fare. Then we got to the 'where we stand' type bit. The CWO is for a "stateless, classless" society. Then we were informed this "rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat". Armed with such 'theory' it's hardly surprising that they have failed to understand the nature and tasks of the epoch so massively.

The Morning Star of January 23 printed a statement by the Iraqi Communist Party. What was unusual was not the statement - which was predictable 'official communist' stuff, calling for the overthrow of Hussein, but putting the emphasis of its demands on Iraqi military leaders and not demanding western forces out of the Gulf. No, it was the reaction to it. The Workers Revolutionary Party (Workers Press), used to brown-nosing such regimes, accused the ICP of treachery. The NCP's New Worker equated any opposition to Saddam Hussein from within Iraq as a "surrender to imperialism". The merits or otherwise of the statement aside, such a response crosses class lines, reducing the working class to a support group of one reactionary bourgeois clique or another.

The Euro's flagging flagship, Marxism Today, carries an ad from the Euro organisation. This 'party' is about to formally dump the name 'communist'. MT readers are invited to suggest a new name. What a jolly idea! If you can think of something appropriate, pop it in the post - to us.



Delegates to the first congress of the CPGB: the debate on parliament was one of the most contentious at the congress

BOTH the British Socialist Party and the Communist Unity Group - the main organisations participating in the 1st Congress of CPGB over July 31-August 1 1920 - were committed to standing parliamentary candidates as a form of revolutionary propaganda. The resolution on parliamentary action had been included on the agenda mainly to facilitate merger with Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers Socialist Federation, now illegitimately called the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International); which was against revolutionary parliamentarianism as a matter of principle.

Despite the fact that it had, for the moment, dropped out of the fusion process represented by the Communist Unity Convention - later known as the 1st Congress of the CPGB - there existed a considerable degree of confusion among delegates, even ideological opportunism. This mainly reflected the political immaturity of revolutionaries in Britain and the fact that the writings of Lenin and other Bolsheviks in Russia on their work in the Tsarist Duma were still largely unknown and untranslated.

The resolution on parliament submitted by the Joint Provisional Committee of the CPGB by implication represented a repudiation and a challenge to the left-communist anti-parliamentarianism of Sylvia Pankhurst and others. It helped clarify the position of communists in Britain and laid the basis for highly effective parliamentary interventions during the early 1920s. Naturally it repudiated the sort of parliamentary cretinism now peddled by the likes of the Morning Star and Militant. As such it represented a significant and positive step towards the revolutionary parliamentarianism practised so successfully by the Bolsheviks. The resolution read as follows:

"The Communist Party repudiates the reformist view that a social revolution can be achieved by the ordinary methods of parliamentary democracy, but regards parliamentary and electoral action generally as providing a valuable means of propaganda and agitation towards the revolution. The tactics to be employed by representatives of the Party elected to Parliament or local bodies must be laid down by the Party itself according to the national

or local circumstances. In all cases such representatives must be considered as holding a mandate from the Party, and not from the particular constituency for which they happen to sit."

The chairman, comrade Arthur MacManus, said there were several amendments to this resolution, but they did not affect its general tenor and would practically be included in the discussion after the resolution was moved by comrade Tom Bell for the Joint Provisional Committee. This is how the official account of the congress reported Bell's speech:

So far as the Joint Provisional Committee were concerned, the Communist Unity Group and the BSP were in complete agreement upon the need for and the advisability of taking Parliamentary action, but the present resolution had arisen in the course of negotiations with the WSF and had been held very important at the time. After the defection of the WSF the resolution might have been cleared off, since there was no point of difference between the remaining groups that made up the Unity Committee; but, as there was still a considerable amount of hesitancy in many groups on the question of Parliamentary action, for and against, it had been thought better to allow the question to be ventilated at the Conference, that being the safest and simplest way to make the position clear, so far as Parliamentary action was concerned. It would be seen that the resolution from the very first repudiated the reformist idea that a sound revolution could be achieved by the ordinary methods of Parliamentary democracy.

In this respect its point of view was common to Communist Parties internationally at the present time. He and those who agreed with him did not believe that it was possible to effect a peaceful transformation in the Parliamentary bourgeois democracy as understood today, and thereby to work out the emancipation of the working class; they believed that the Parliamentary institution as it existed today, the constituency in itself, was entirely foreign to the purpose of the Communist state of society they had in mind. Consequently, in preference to the Parliamentary constituency, they rather looked to the more direct method of representation as expressed through the workers' committees whether in industrial or social life.

With regard to Parliamentary and electoral action as providing a valuable means of propaganda and agitation

towards the revolution, while they did not place any faith in the Parliamentary institution in itself, and did not believe it was capable of fitting into the scheme of things that they as Communists had in mind, nevertheless they thought it of considerable value to revolutionary propaganda not to shut the door on any avenue whatsoever that was going to liberate the minds of the masses from their superstitious faith in Parliamentary democracy. He thought the best policy to adopt towards that particular objective was to demonstrate inside the House of Commons that, so far as the working class were concerned, there was nothing to be hoped for in that chamber.

By breaking the Parliamentary precedents and conventionalities which played so large a part in shaping the minds of the workers, we could do a great deal to break down the reverence for Parliamentary institutions that so many of our fellow workers had. This was a bone of contention, he knew; the contention arising because it was thought by some that by going into the House of Commons we were sacrificing some great principle.

The first argument brought against participating in Parliamentary action was that before sitting in the House of Commons it was necessary to take the oath of allegiance. Speaking for the Provisional Committee, they had no dubiety on this point.

It was laid down in the resolution that the representatives of the Communist Party must be considered as holding a mandate from the Party executive, and that they would be at all times under the control, management, and supervision of the Executive Committee - that was what it amounted to.

If, in the course of our agitation, the Executive thought it advisable that members should be in the House of Commons, the oath should not stand in the way; it was a question of deciding in relation to the expediency of the moment, whether for our agitational purposes it was more valuable to refuse to take the oath, or to take the oath in order to gain some other objective more valuable for our revolutionary agitation. And so on with reference to all the questions as to precedents and conventionalities inside the House.

He suggested that Communist candidates only had allegiance to the principles of Communism and the movement now organised in the Third International. Our ethic and morality had to be drawn from our fundamental principles of Communism. In reference to action inside the House of Commons,

our policy all the time was a critical, destructive one, exposing the fraudulent character of our modern Parliamentary democracy - which was not a free institution at all, but was an institution controlled by high finance.

That being so, he suggested that it was the business of the Communist Party inside the House of Commons, in order to liberate the minds of the masses with regard to capitalist fetishes, critically to examine every situation that arose, and to criticise the points of view put forward by our opponents, whether bourgeois, semi-Radical or anything else, and generally speaking help to focus the attention of the working class upon the vital interests so far as the Communist agitation was concerned.

As to the clause, "In all cases such representatives must be considered as holding a mandate from the Party, and not from the particular constituency for which they happen to sit", those of us who had been identified with the political Labour movement for any length of time knew the hackneyed phrase used by the politicians of all shades of opinion, that once they went inside the House of Commons they ceased to have any connection with their particular organisation and represented the interests of all sections of the community. This was a pretence, it was impossible - and this was the inherent weakness of the Parliamentary constituency - for any representative to express the desires and wills of all the conflicting class elements that made up a constituency.

By this resolution we sought to make it emphatic that the candidate sent up by the Communist Party would contest his seat under the surveillance of the Communist Party Executive, and would go to the House of Commons with a mandate from the Party - that he would not draw his mandate from the constituency. This was the point of view sought to be brought out in the resolution - that we must have discipline to the Communist Executive from all members, whether outside or inside the House of Commons.

The resolution was seconded, and it was agreed, on the suggestion of the chair, that the discussion should take the form of a debate for and against parliamentary action, leaving till afterwards all question of amending the resolution. As we will see in the next issue, there were six speakers opposed to the resolution and 13 for.

REVIEWS

All Greek

Open Polemic, No1, pp34, £1.50; from PO Box 1169, London W3 9PF

OPEN POLEMIC is produced by a small group of ex-Proletarian and New Communist Party members who now find themselves bereft of a parent organisation due to the collapse of 'official communism'. After years of looking to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for guidance, the comrades producing *Open Polemic* have become ideologically adrift. Rather than being a solution to this, the journal is a crystallised example of such confusion.

Open Polemic introduces itself as supporting "the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism as applied to revolutionary parties" (p1). It does not, however, have an orientation to the forging of such a party. Instead, it sets itself up as a discussion journal which aims to "sharpen the polemic around contemporary revolutionary questions" (*Ibid*). On principle the journal "will not intervene"; or, if you will, gentle reader, this is a vessel for your thoughts. Fill it!

Or maybe not. The editorial board of the journal has rejected an article from our Provisional Central Committee on the basis that it is "promotional". In other words, we think we're right, and say so. I'd have thought any communist would. The editors of *Open Polemic*, it is clear, have a rather different view. Debate, sure - but do not reach any concrete conclusions. A sort of political coitus interruptus.

This - aside from being censorship - is a total retreat from the application of theory. It is an abstract and utopian 'unity project' that "differs from *Iskra* in that it advocates no one particular tendency" (p2). Wasn't this little nuance the whole point of *Iskra* - to form the party around its "particular tendency"?

Given the disintegration of the 'official communist' movement, *Open Polemic* poses the question "unity with whom?" Sadly, it never comes close to answering it.

To the best of our knowledge, the articles in *Open Polemic* are all written by adherents of its project. Within its pages, then, we get a flavour of the politics of our oh-so open friends. 'The Bellamy road' is a workmanlike critique of Communist Party of Britain 'theorist' Ron Bellamy's apologia for Gorbachevism, though the article is severely limited by its failure to concretely relate this to the situation in the Soviet Union, and - of course - what new demands this places on communists. There is also a rather weak and inconclusive article, 'Bureaucracy in context', on the question of bureaucracy under socialism.

But the article on which I wish to concentrate is the most substantive in the journal - 'Experimentia est optima rerum magistra'. Not having had the benefit of a classical Latin education, this is all Greek to me. In fact, the whole article comes across as being written by a smarter-than-thou leftist couch-potato. Hideously pretentious nonsense lurks beneath this hideously pretentious title. For instance, our author, 'Professor' Jan Wachla, tells us that what is needed, dialectically of course, "is not a mechanical adding of A+B+C etc, but a synthesis of A+Q+Z" (p20). Understand where you've gone wrong now?

Along with this gobbledegook, of which the late Gerry Healy would have been proud (and not a little reminiscent of the nonsense *Proletarian* used to serve up), is some rather vulgar macho posturing. Rightly pointing to the pivotal nature of the Irish question in British politics, Wachla devotes much time to the merits and street cred of prison sentences. Let me give you a flavour: "When Britain's would-be Bolsheviks emerge from the bleakness of Britain's prisons ..." (p17). Flex those pecs! This goes along with a soft spot for Red Action, which "has perhaps made the greatest progress

in raising the 'revolutionary consciousness' of its members". Please don't laugh.

Our pink professor has a penchant for the silly. Proletarian, which in its eight year history produced two journals, we are told gave the world "a yet to be surpassed analysis of Ireland from a world communist perspective" (p12). This "yet to be surpassed perspective" was based on trumpeting the CPSU's undying allegiance to Irish liberation. Unfortunately for the Proles, the journal containing this unsurpassed truth appeared at the same moment as *Izvestia* denounced the Brighton bomb. *Proletarian* No3 never appeared, as the leaky Prole vessel was shipwrecked by the implosion of the 'official' world communist movement, washing up, we presume, Wachla on the beach, in a somewhat bemused state.

In the context of this, one can only smile at Wachla's attempt at polemic against us (an un-promotional polemic, we presume). We are, it seems "a small organisation that is distinguished by its 'neither Trotsky nor Stalin but...' approach" (p24). And what is Wachla distinguished by? Writing for a journal that has no editorial control, that abhors "exclusive" debates and is "open", yet censors our contribution; writing with his obvious lack of command of even the ABC (or is it AQZ?) of Marxist philosophy, Wachla accuses us of having "a hazy and undialectical vision of democratic centralism" (*Ibid*). Wachla is welcome to the last word on this one: I'm laughing too much.

The debate that *Open Polemic* hopes to engender is abortive. It is by definition abstract and ineffectual, unrelated as it is to political intervention. Political debate only has any force when carried through to the conclusion which the journal by definition shies away from, and which, when given organisational focus, it explicitly rejects. I am very much afraid that the pretentious and whimsical musings of Jan Wachla is the best-it can expect.

However, the necessary polemic and political debate has occurred - over the last nine years in the pages of *The Leninist*. In the debate against 'official communism' we conclusively won, in theory and in practice. Comrades, where were you?

Sean Quinn

Brecht

Pia Kleber & Colin Visser (eds), *Reinterpreting Brecht, his influence on contemporary drama and film*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp220, (price not indicated)

IT IS always surprising that so many books discussing the work of the communist artist Bertolt Brecht seem able to ignore the politics of his theatre almost totally.

Reinterpreting Brecht is no exception, with the words "communism" or "Marx" mentioned once or maybe twice in the entirety of the book. It is only Manfred Wekwerth, and Pia Kleber in the introduction, who even suggest the need for a reinterpretation of the political situation, as well as of the theatre, if we are to effectively address the urgency of changing society - the essence of Brecht's theatre.

The role of communism today, in comparison with the period in which Brecht was writing and directing, is not discussed. This question has now become increasingly important for playwrights, directors and not least for the Berliner Ensemble, who face the loss of sponsorship and existence within the dichotomy of western and eastern culture, in a unified Germany.

The only attempt at an analysis of today's society is by John Willet, who clearly shows how dull many recent productions of Brecht's plays have been due to a lack of communist commitment or even understanding. However, Willet only indicates in a vague way the political apathy of individualism which Britain faces during, and after, Thatcher's government; he too

fails to indicate the tasks facing communist theatre today.

Martin Esslin, on the other hand, separates communication of ideology from theatrical dynamism. He sees in the acting style of Brechtian theatre an aesthetic importance, but no ideological importance. It is difficult to see how he can come to this conclusion in regards to a form of theatre which developed specifically to find more effective and dialectical ways of communicating ideology: this is the aesthetic of Brecht's theatre. It is this attitude, as Maarten Van Dijk suggests, which has largely halted the progress of Brechtian theatre. To see his theatre as a style rather than a method is to reproduce old questions, rather than to use his methods to raise and examine new questions that today still indicate the necessity for change.

The lack of political analysis is to some extent due to a general fault with this collection of essays - their actual length. In trying to combine a variety of views into one book, the ideas never go beyond a very superficial descriptive level. Many of the writers raise interesting questions, but none of them are developed to the extent of providing any ways forward for today. The main theme of the book is in describing the development and decline of political theatre after Brecht, until the late 1970s. It does provide a very interesting analysis of theatre in this period, and the questions raised are provocative for theatre practitioners today, but actual reinterpretation is lacking: although this need is continually stressed. Pia Kleber says in the introduction, "The time now seems opportune to challenge his whole work anew to discover ideas which may have become hidden under the cumulative strata of scholarship."

I agree, and look forward to a book which is able to achieve this more concretely.

Bernard Dort stresses the importance of tighter focus on 'how to do it', in order that the mechanical museum productions of Brecht be replaced with modern theatre which produces the 'learning through shock' which Heiner Muller emphasises, rather than attempting to teach the same lessons but in a 'more friendly way', which Klaus Volker suggests is the failing of modern productions of Brecht. Productions which have attempted to teach political lessons today have degenerated into "pedagogical finger pointing" but have avoided a real demonstration of harsh reality. This is bourgeois entertainment at its best, easing the audience's conscience with a few moments of light reflection.

The transition to a rich and communicative theatre has too often been taken for granted in producing Brecht. Rolf Rohmer echoes Bernard Dort in reminding the reader that the model books were intended as a starting point for further development, not as historical documents.

The book then fails to show a clear understanding of the change in political struggles, both inside and outside of the theatre in the years since Brecht's death, and although recognising the need for a wide range of forms and genres essential to reach a highly diversified audience, does not offer any real alternatives or methods of breaking from bourgeois interests in the theatre.

At worst, sections of the book, as in the feminist perspective, fail to recognise Brecht's ability to communicate world issues by confronting the individual, and so turns instead to a discussion of reformist politics in the theatre, although actual political theory is discussed hardly at all, and revolutionary political theory even less.

At best, *Reinterpreting Brecht* is an interesting analysis of theatre since Brecht and a starting point in questioning the basis of dynamic rather than 'dead' theatre. The title, however, is not fulfilled, so the problems and future direction for communist theatrical communication today remain largely ignored by theatre critics.

Stephanie Ellis

ACTION

Communist Party,

International Working Women's Day:

Friday March 8: Invitation meeting with speakers from Communist Party of Turkey and Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran (*Rahe Kargar*). CPGB supporters welcome. 7.00pm Old Piano Warehouse, Hawley Road, Camden Town, NW1 (Camden Town tube).

London Seminars: 5pm Sundays. Details 071-431 3135.

Collective discussion towards the Draft Programme of the CPGB:

March 10: Nationalisation. Nationalise (with compensation?) under workers control those companies threatening large scale sackings. No business secrets; open the books; access to computers; independent experts (supervised).

March 17: Trade Unions - 1. The right to join a trade union. The right to strike. No state control or supervision of workers organisations.

March 24: Trade Unions - 2. Combating bureaucracy: average members' pay for officials; election, re-election and recallability.

March 31: Trade Unions - 3. Overcoming sectionalism: industrial unions; all-embracing workplace committees; uniting workers in all unions and no union.

Internationalist Committee

Imperialism out of the Gulf!

Peace through revolution!

The main enemy is at home!

One Day School - Lessons of the Gulf War:

Saturday March 16, 10am to 6pm, London.

Send registration fee £10/unwaged £2.50 to IC, BCM Box 928, London, WC1N 3XX.

London activists' meetings every week. Details: 071-431 3135.



Hands Off Ireland!

March! Saturday April 20 to commemorate 75th anniversary of the 1916 Dublin Easter Uprising. Assemble: 1.00pm Islington Town Hall, Upper Street, London N1.

Leaflets and posters available: £1 per hundred of each from our address.

HOI! paper No5. Bulk copies available at 5 for £1 including p&p.

London activists' meetings: 7.30pm every Thursday: Ring 071-431 3135 for details.

Workers Theatre Movement

WTM club *The Internationale*:

Celebrate International Working Womens Day

Friday March 8, 8.00pm: Venue: Old Piano Warehouse, Hawley Road, Camden Town, NW1 (Camden Town tube). Admission £3, unwaged £2. Theatre, music, dance, poetry.

Performers please contact Tam on 071-431 3135.

Rehearsals: Every Sunday in London. Phone Tam on 071-431 3135 or write to WTM, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX for details of WTM activities.

Unemployed Workers Charter

London: activist meetings and actions. Details 071-431 3135.

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Rally with the Internationalist Committee!

It is not only the forces of proto-imperialist Iraq that are in disarray. So too are the forces of CSWG/CND pacifist imperialism



THE Gulf War has been stopped. Tragically, instead of being stopped from below it was stopped from above, in the form of a US-led coalition victory. This is not surprising either. Those fighting from below against the US-led slaughter had to conduct a constant rearguard action against the 'official leadership' of the anti-war movement. The Committee to Stop War in the Gulf and CND, taking their lead from the gung-ho leadership of the Labour Party, demobilised mass protests against the war.

The promised every Saturday as-long-as-the-war-lasts demonstrations, which were minimal mobilisations anyway, were abandoned in favour of the after the event March 2 national demonstration. The effect was to demoralise and disorientate even the supporters of the CSWG. Their hopes were left relying on the diplomatic shenanigans being played out in Moscow. "We don't know what to do", some CND local leaders told us in despair. "After all, it could all be over by March 2" ... and it was. The idea that a Moscow peace conference was anything more than a diplomatic sideshow never seemed to dawn on the pacifist leaders of CSWG/CND. The armchair 'wait and see what happens in Moscow' attitude might have started at the top, but it spread downwards.

The despicable anti-democratic coup carried out by the CSWG tops against the likes of the Socialist Workers Party, and the other attacks and bannings staged against the revolutionary left (because they called for a victory for Iraqi proto imperialism as opposed to a victory for western imperialist sanctions) did nothing to build the movement. The miserably tailist SWP is hardly the reason why the mobilisations had not been as big as in Europe or America: the blame for that must be placed firmly at the feet of the 'official leadership' of the anti-war movement.

In protest against the anti-demo-

cratic and demobilising activity of the CSWG leaders, Mark Fischer, on behalf of the Internationalist Committee, wrote an open letter condemning attacks on sections of the movement and demanding a halt be called to the demobilisation. To underline our commitment to non-sectarianism in the anti-war movement, we insisted that there should be no political censorship - no anti-imperialist banners, placards or points of

view should be banned. Furthermore, we condemned the sectarianism displayed towards this year's Bloody Sunday demonstration as a result of CSWG's craven desire for bourgeois respectability. The failure of the CSWG leadership to reply speaks volumes.

In contrast to the CSWG, via the Internationalist Committee's exemplary Non-Stop Picket, the Provisional Central Committee of the Communist Party

fought to impart a sense of urgency, pointing to the level of mobilisation that was required to defeat the imperialist's war drive. We were pleased by its success and more than pleased by the dedication and determination shown by members of the Communist Party, who were the backbone of the picket.

Some sleepy 'has beens' and 'never will bes' on the left in Britain accused us of 'engaging in organisational gim-

micky, or simply activity for activity's sake. In fact, the Internationalist Committee and its main sponsor, the Communist Party, was clear that only working class action could have stopped the war from below, a point we have underlined time and again. The picket for us was a tactic we employed to raise the profile of our propaganda in general, to allow us to engage the mass influx of young and new forces that came into politics through the anti-war movement. And in that it was enormously successful. Despite the general 'downturn' in the anti-war movement when the war actually broke out, in total well over 3,000 people pledged support for the picket. The action was run in a principled, democratic way. No viewpoint within the anti-war movement was proscribed. The CND, for example, was consistently given a platform to express its views, despite our profound disagreements.

This was not a non-aggression pact with pacifism. In the pages of our Party's central organ, *The Leninist*, in our speeches, in the conversations and arguments on the picket, we confronted head on the illusions and soft pro-imperialism of CSWG/CND-style pacifism.

The practical implications of this peace-mongering approach were exposed in the rundown and demobilisation of the anti-war movement. Despite our lack of resources, the Internationalist Committee and the Communist Party fought tooth and nail against this demobilisation and fought to put the working class at the forefront of the anti-war movement.

The Gulf War might have ended, the Internationalist Committee will not. In one form or another it will continue, the nucleus of the proletarian anti-war movement we need to stop the next imperialist war.

Join the Internationalist Committee. Write to BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, or ring 081-459 7146.

Frontline workers

DURING the course of the Gulf War many hundreds of healthworkers attended meetings against imperialism's blood letting. A number of hospital workers branches heard representatives of the Internationalist Committee, invited not least because of the respect it earned through organising the Non-Stop Picket of the US Embassy.

We placed great emphasis on these meetings and did our utmost to develop our contacts with workers in this million-strong industry, in particular during the period prior to the land war starting in earnest. Then and now they are potentially a key section of the working class in Britain.

At the time of the healthworkers protests and strikes against the general rundown of the NHS in 1987, Tom Sawyer of Nupe told a public meeting in Llanelli that "the power of restraint is better than the power of force. With the power of restraint we will win." In other words, healthworkers had to shut their faces and get on with 'caring' in silence. The war in the Gulf once again exposed this type of clap-trap for the deadly nonsense it is.

From the moment war threatened, healthworkers saw how the government suddenly opened up its purse strings when it came to the armed forces. These are truly the priorities of a sick society, a society that has starved the health service of cash for decades, but spared no expense to kill people.

Bearing this in mind the Internationalist Committee and the Communist Party urged healthworkers to take a lead in the fight against the war around the following minimum set of demands. Strike Against the War! Healthworkers, despite their many practical difficulties in taking industrial action, could have become a spark for a wider mobilisation of the working class against the war.

For fraternisation! In contrast to some left groups that cretinously advised healthworkers not to treat Gulf War casualties - to boycott them as if they were a can of South Africa peaches - we said that workers in the industry should use every opportunity to fraternise with soldiers, who are overwhelmingly working class, and to get them to raise their voices against the war.

Full funding for working class health! If the ruling class can write a blank

cheque - totaling over £2 billion - for its military barbarism, it should be forced to fully fund the health care of the working class. In practical terms this would mean the abolition of all waiting lists. All wards that were opened in expectation of Gulf casualties must be kept open now that the fighting has stopped. If wards can be opened for the casualties of the Gulf War, they can be opened to treat the thousands of 'casualties' of the war waged on working class living and health standards for the last 12 years by the Thatcher/Major government. The demand for funds must include a massive wage increase for all healthworkers now: healthworkers should be paid what they need, not what this kill-kill-kill government says it can afford.

Workers' control in the industry! Many hospitals were militarised by the state. Workers were told that when war wounded were flown in, the police and army would take control of the switchboards, the wards - the whole hospital. This must be resisted and defeated. The running of the hospital and all within it - war and ordinary patients - must be overseen by healthworkers committees.