

Trotskyism

TELLING LIES FOR SOCIALISM

ONE of the main factors in the rotten state of British politics today is the appalling nature of so much of what is currently going on in the British left under the direct influence of the Trotskyists. Their record stinks when it is considered independently of the rhetoric which they use to justify themselves.

At the worst extreme there is the Workers' Revolutionary Party which has split so often that it's a miracle it survives at all. For years, whenever the least opposition to Gerry Healy was voiced, the opponents were expelled and those who were expelled were often physically attacked as well. The only serious industrial grouping they had, around Alan Thornet in Oxford's Cowley Plant, was thrown out over a tiny difference of line. Those who remained in the WRP, like Cliff Slaughter and Michael Banda, joined in a chorus of abuse of Thornet and covered up Healy's weaknesses. Now it is even being suggested, by long-standing party hacks who ought to be in the know, that the WRP wrote favourable articles on various obnoxious Middle European regimes which enabled them to shoot opponents returning from Britain, and that Healy himself indulged in various acts of sexual exploitation of young female comrades. The suggestions sound very plausible, but what we are also asked to believe is that Banda and Slaughter, etc, knew all about these goings on and kept their mouths shut for years out of party loyalty — an astonishing confession.

The Militant 'tendency', by comparison, seems more reputable, but it is very hard to think of any positive contribution which Militant has made to the British left and very easy to think of negative ones. The whole thrust of Militant's activity has been to infiltrate the Labour Party, to gain positions of influence, to use these positions to further the aims of Militant rather than the people it claims to represent, and then to pretend that the organisation is no more than a grouping of free individuals. Whatever words spring to mind to describe a party which denies its own existence whilst extracting 12% of its members' wages for party funds, 'honesty' isn't one of them! They have created a reputation for themselves as sneaky operators who are out for public office and who pump local govern-

ment money into their own friends' projects. Derek Hatton is the sort of person who can engineer a well-paid job for himself which he doesn't have to turn up at because he's come to an understanding with his comrades that it's in the public interest to pay him a local government salary to be a professional politician. Militant preferred to move one of their members down from Brent to represent the Liverpool black community rather than risk placing power in the hands of a local figure who just might possess an independent spirit.

Militant are, of course, not the only group suffering from enteritis. The International Marxist Group, after years of claiming principled opposition to the reformists, appeared en masse in the Labour Party and pretended that they too had ceased to exist — they just happened to make the same decision to join the same Party at the same time and keep in contact for old time's sake! However, not all Trotskyist groups have caught the bug. The Socialist Workers' Party remains, to its credit, honestly outside an organisation whose ideals it does not share.

The SWP has, though, quite enough faults of its own. Being a Marxist Party, it believes in democratic centralism, and a lot of people have joined the organisation hoping to make use of this democracy. However, once they join they are faced with a list of things which they are not allowed to do. They are not allowed to criticise any SWP policies to non-members, so that the organisation speaks in public with one mind. They are allowed to form short-lived factions to argue for changes in policy at the national conference, but they must disband if they are defeated and not persist with 'damaging splits'. They were asked to participate in Rank and File organisations in unions regardless of local conditions — and were then asked to disband them all, regardless of success, thus dedicating people to years of furious activism and then admitting it was all a waste of time. They discover that certain work, such as support for a strike, comes first and that other work, such as fighting on women's issues, comes second, and that the Party will decide which is the priority. The result is a history of people entering the party with the best of

intentions and then leaving either over some minor disagreement over the correct line or because they are fed up with being bossed about by some arrogant local leader.

This brings me on to the worst product of the Trotskyist groups — members who cannot leave because they see their own lives as inextricably linked with that of the Party. This phenomenon can be observed in fringe religious groups as well as in political parties and essentially it consists of using groups as a prop for insecurity and isolation. The organisation provides an identity for individuals who are not sure of their own value as human beings, it gives them a sense of belonging, it provides them with a set of simplified explanations which make a complicated world capable of understanding and it gives the individual a 'home for the soul'. This set of emotional supports can be immensely powerful and give great comfort but it is also massively destructive of the individual's own personality. People become fearful of betraying the group by stepping out of line and cannot face the cold world outside its protection. The individual gains status by having proved loyalty over a number of years and is both keen to demonstrate this status to new recruits and afraid of losing it by speaking of something unpleasant about the group. In extreme cases the individual becomes incapable of expressing an opinion on any subject without first checking that it fits in with the party line.

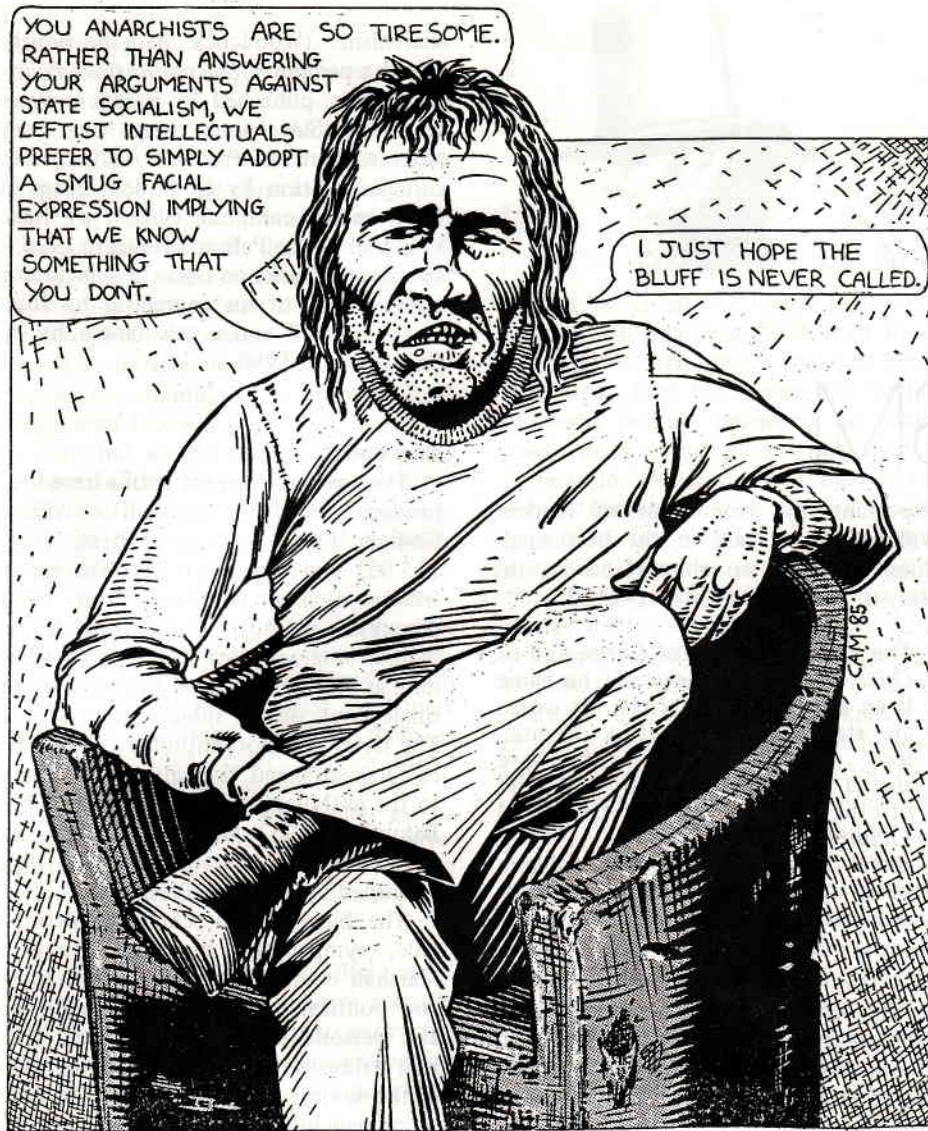
Faced with the cloned mind and the ritual chanting of the Spartacists, or the frantic paper-selling of some other Trots, most ordinary people's reaction is quite a sensible one. They don't want anything to do with it and they sure as hell don't want to live in a world run by such people.

However, it's not enough to just knock others. We need to continue the work of constructing alternatives. I propose that the way forward is to stick by a few simple organisational guidelines:

1. *Say what you honestly think, not what some theory says you ought to think. If the evidence of your eyes contradicts your theory (and I include anarchist theory under this), ditch the theory, don't go blind.*

2. *Don't join organisations whose ideals you don't share simply because they are bigger than you. Campaign openly and honestly whenever you can and if you can't form your own organisations and have to join someone else's (eg a union at work), don't try to take it over unless the majority agree with you and you want to help. Argue for your ideas instead.*

3. *Never ask for something you don't really want in order to take 'workers' through the experience. Campaign for things which are worth winning (and preferably which may be won soon).*



4. If you are in an organisation, don't be scared to disagree with each other in public and to accept varieties of opinions. You don't have to have a split every time you disagree over what's happening in Nicaragua.

5. Respect the rights of minorities. Listen to what others have to say and try to avoid imposing the majority will on them until there's no alternative.

6. Participate in campaigns and actions when you want to, not when others make you feel guilty. This will lower your political activity in the short term but enable you to be active for much longer and to be more effective (you will sound like you mean what you say not like you would rather be at home).

7. Accept that no one organisation has a monopoly on the truth. Just because other people belong to other organisations or tendencies doesn't make everything they say wrong.

8. Trust people who are putting forward sensible ideas now (they are the only leaders we need). Never trust anyone calling themselves a leader and thus assuming the right to have all their ideas treated as if they were all good ones.

If all these guidelines were stuck to by all the people currently arguing for socialism, there is no doubt that the socialist movement would temporarily shrink in effectiveness. It would control fewer councils, hand out less patronage, manipulate fewer front organisations, and sell a lot fewer papers. It would also cease to drive away in disillusion thousands of recruits a year and provide the basis for a libertarian socialist movement which could be trusted. We might then stand some realistic chance of helping to promote revolutionary consciousness. Some people might call this a dangerously anarchistic point of view; but then again, I can think of worse things to be accused of!

A K Brown

Free Puff

PLEASE can you put something in *Freedom* to let people know about the cafe we have opened at The Blue House, 2 - 4 Homerton Street, Hackney, London E9. Open 1:00 to 5:00, Tues, Wed, Thurs. Very cheap vegetarian food, needs more people to eat it. Also an art exhibition, contributions welcome. Parties every other Friday evening from 1:00pm. Come and see. Thanks,
Pinkie

STATE EUPHEMISMS



- A more pragmatic government:** Even fewer moral principles than the last regime.
- Not an iron fist policy:** A covert iron fist policy.
- Wage restraint:** The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.
- Government economic policy:** The means for fulfilling the above.
- Hawks and Doves:** Homicidal maniacs of varying degrees of blatantness.
- The Free World:** Those exploited by capitalists rather than communists.
- Denationalisation:** A sneaky way of replenishing government coffers and doing their propertied friends a favour at the same time.
- Recession:** An excuse for government incompetence.
- Industrial recovery:** A lesser form of recession.
- Nationalist:** Imperialist.
- N.A.T.O. member:** U.S. satellite.
- Nuclear power station:** Bomb factory.
- Military manoeuvres (especially off the coast of Libya):** Armed provocation.
- Dogmatic:** An obsessive ideologist.
- Reaganomics:** Increased poverty and unemployment for the poor.
- A government forecast of increased prosperity:** Upper-middle-class tory voters can buy bigger cars.
- Nuclear deterrent:** Suicidal revenge.
- A democratically elected leader:** Someone who less than 30% of the population voted for, and only then because most of them didn't like the other parties.
- A misunderstanding between secretaries of state:** A web of lies.
- The Labour Party:** The alternative Conservative Party.
- The S.D.P.-Liberal Alliance:** Ditto.
- An independent judge:** A paid state official.
- An internal police enquiry:** A white-wash.
- An effective policy against terrorism in Northern Ireland:** Terrorism by the English state.
- The latest unemployment figures:** About half of them.
- Curbing the unions:** Bashing them.
- Extra police powers:** Fewer public rights.
- An unemployment blackspot:** The whole country.
- A free country:** An oligarchy.
- A crucial commons debate:** Several hours of joke-cracking and self-aggrandisement.
- A government statement:** An excuse.

Johnny Yen

Some Syndicalist Shortcomings

The IWA Today — A short account of the International Workers Association and its sections by Col Longmore. Price 50p.

THIS pamphlet fell like a ton of bricks on the Direct Action Movement.

One reviewer in *Direct Action* accused Col Longmore of manufacturing myths and causing offence to some foreign sections of the International Workers Association (IWA-AIT). The publication has been challenged by many people I respect inside the DAM.

Yet *The IWA Today* is a perfectly respectable example of historical analysis. Quite openly it is story telling by a partisan of a particular political position, and none the worse for that, provided one makes the necessary allowances. Mr Longmore, it must be said, tells a good tale, and has produced an attractive, articulate and in some respects persuasive short pamphlet, which deserves to be read by anyone interested in the anarcho-syndicalist international.

Blind Alley Politics

The pamphlet defines the terms of the tendencies within the IWA as being Syndicalist, Revolutionary Syndicalist and Anarcho-Syndicalist. He rightly stresses that syndicalism/trade unionism generally lacks a long term view of how to change society, and that this is a serious shortcoming.

Clearly Col is out to put syndicalism in its place, something Mrs Thatcher has already done at a more practical level. Trade unionism (syndicalism) may not have been entirely seen off, unpublicised actions by workers may still be scoring successes since wage levels are rising rapidly, but it does seem mass unemployment has clipped the wings of the formal trade union movement at the top. Of itself even the strike weapon seems to provide diminishing returns in the present climate.

Of course the most shattering defeat of this kind of shortsighted syndicalism, which Col doesn't use in his pamphlet, has been the recent Miner's strike. Calls for solidarity and a General Strike fell on deaf ears.

Perhaps more than anything, the

miner's strike points to our own failure to build a broader vision of the needs of society. It is this general vision of society which Col is pushing for, against the sectional interests of certain organised groups.

When recently I spoke to Fidel Gorron, the IWA-AIT Secretary, he told me that the DAM in their honest enthusiasm to help the miners, had failed to analyse the miner's strike adequately. This lack of critical analysis of the strike and its consequences, shows up our unwillingness to consider calmly the social conflicts of our time. What must worry people like Señor Gorron is that while there is much to admire in Scargill — his courage; his willingness, unusual in a British union boss, to lead from the front; his dedication; his brilliant articulation of tactics; there is much to disturb us as anarcho-syndicalists: the executive's attack on federalism within the NUM; the attitude to Polish 'Solidarity'; the union's links with the Eastern Bloc and their membership of the communist dominated Miner's International; and finally the union executive's emphasis on centralism.

Clearly the spirit of syndicalism and the desire to back workers in dispute is decent and honourable, but without a social morality it is easily corrupted into a support for sectional interests.

Conservative by Nature

What then is Mr Longmore's position?

The theme of the pamphlet is to point out the limits of trade unionism as they occur in the member sections of the IWA, particularly in the French CNT and the Italian USI. He is critical of the old Syndicalist Workers Federation, which represented Britain in the IWA from 1950 to 1979, which he claims lacked 'direction'.

Yet has Longmore got a solution?

Well sincere ideologues, like Col, often tend to think that all we need do is get our ideas right. I agree that waiting for the workers while performing the service of cheer leaders in industrial disputes, as some syndicalists and marxists do, is a one-eyed approach, but clearly social change demands something more than an ideological change of mind. Surely the trick is that we must relate our ideas to

the practical world and this needs an anarcho-syndicalist program.

Because Col is so wrapped up in the ideology, he betrays fatalism when he says 'The British workers are by nature conservative, ..., they chose to stay with the Methodists (the traditional leaders of the British labour movement, according to Col), who have betrayed them at every turn since'. The idea that the British are easily misled is a controversial one — Dianne Phillips (1), a sociologist, has said '... the working class are not, at least in Britain, willing fodder for capitalist industry. They are the most obviously wised-up, cynical, politically and economically effective working class in the world.' The fact is the British workers are both 'conservative' and cunning, and both views can be reconciled. I believe that British syndicalism (trade unionism) has become short sighted, sectional, and selfish, and this has more to do with shopfloor attitudes than with the leaders 'Methodist' or otherwise. In times of 'full employment' this may, as Mrs Phillips says, have made sections of the working class 'politically and economically effective', in that they have been able to squeeze capitalism and the State by using economic muscle free from the incumbrance of an anarchist morality or even some simple socialist beliefs. Thus many of the employed have been able to embrace welfarism and the begging bowl politics of state subsidies, while calling for tax cuts and voting Tory.

Mass unemployment makes such bad British logic a luxury we can no longer afford.

Basically Col Longmore has the right idea; somehow our vision of the free society has to draw together the interests of the 'workplace and community'. But what I am saying is that the vision must be based on an analysis of the fragmentary nature of British society.

None of this means that either I, or Mr Longmore for that matter, are seeking to dismiss syndicalism as a social movement. Syndicalism and direct action is part of the everyday practice and practical reasoning of British workers, and must be at the root of any theory of social change in our society. Whether as a people, having been spoonfed for decades on State subsidies, we are capable of making the changes Mr Longmore wants is another matter.

Brian Bamford

1 Dianne Phillips (1984), 'Education: Success and Failure' in R J Anderson and W W Sharrock (eds), *Applied Sociological Perspectives*.