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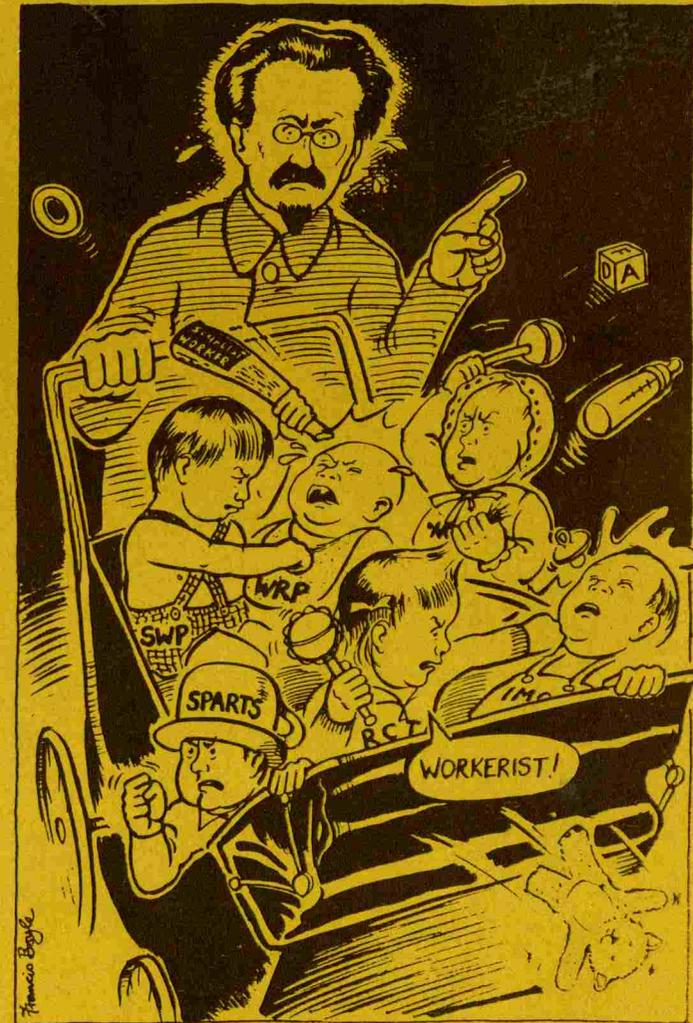
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GO FOURTH AND MULTIPLY

You are at a party and someone calls you a workerist- how do you reply? Could it be true? Yet your boyfriend says you are an ultra-left while your sister claims you have Pabloite tendencies so you dont really know what to say. Such social embassment can now be avoided with the aid of this guide. Now you can hold your own in the sub world of the left. Who knows, one of the groups might suit you. You might even spot a gap in the market coverage and form your own group.



The British Left in 1983 ~ Prunella Kaur

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PUBLISHERS WARNING

Failure to review 'Go Fourth' may result in your group/journal being included in future editions.

PART I

THE MAINSTREAM

THE MILITANT - GREY LIBERATION

You are at a meeting and someone with a fake Liverpool accent makes a speech demanding the nationalisation of the principal 253 monopolies.

Well, what's wrong with that? Why is everyone groaning? You'll soon see. Half a dozen other people stand up and make the same speech, with the same fake accent and the same curious hand movements. Are they clones? No, you have just met the 'Militant' - the largest organised group on the British Left. Militant's theory is simple. The working class needs a programme. The revolutionary party's job is to elaborate the programme and go out and win converts to it. So, for example, the basic weakness of the Wilson/Callaghan governments were its lack of such a programme.

Militant ideas would have been readily acceptable to most socialists before 1914 - indeed they were the orthodoxy of the Second International and its theoretician, Karl Kautsky. If they seem strange to most socialists today, it is mainly because they have themselves been influenced by some variant of Trotsky's ideas, stressing transitional demands and the need to unite political and industrial struggle.

History

When Fourth International supremo Michael Raptis (Pablo) split with G Healy in 1953, he placed an advert for a replacement in Tribune. Ted Grant replied, and was given the British Franchise. Grant's orientation to the Labour Party coincided with Pablo's theory that the mass Social-Democratic and Stalinist parties could be pushed in a revolutionary direction.

Grant's historic meeting with Pablo can be seen as marking the death of British Trotskyism, once one of the Fourth International's best sections. The meeting created British Pabloism, that strange mutation combining Trotskyist vocabulary with capitulation to whatever happens to be in fashion. The extent of the degeneration is shown by the fact that Grant who introduced Pablo's innovations to Britain is now seen as the orthodox Trotskyist in comparison with the revisionists of the IMG.

The relationship was a happy one until Pablo's successor, Ernest Mandel, discovered the student and youth revolt. The FI's British section was urged to throw itself into the anti-Vietnam war movement. Grant's consistent position was to argue inside empty Labour Party wards that Wilson should arm the Vietcong. This was to miss the boat of the youth revolt, so Grant's franchise was revoked and the IMG was formed and given the contract. Since then Grant's group has imperceptibly but constantly grown. They have never made any big intervention anywhere, nor suffered any real reverse. Their lack of interest in most features of modern life has saved them from the foolishness indulged in by other groups. Thus the Militant doesn't support individual terrorism, and, unusually for a modern Left Group, appeals for the working class to unite across sectarian, race and sex barriers. There is no significant opposition to the Militant in the LPYS although their domination keeps the LPYS small.

Militant are not worried about being declared a proscribed organisation. The Labour Party leaders do find them a bit of a nuisance, but are grateful that they, alone, among the Left Groups supported Mrs Thatcher's Falkland's War. Their patriotism is not in doubt, even if they can't match Michael Foot's chauvinism.

If Militant get a few M.P.'s elected they can be expected to act as a Right Wing influence, as M.P.'s generally do. They will be even more true when they enter the House of Lords.

Militant is here to stay - they will be writing 'Vote Labour' on the barricades. Much criticism of them is unfair or irrelevant. Their stereotyped hand movements and behaviour is hardly counter-revolutionary. Militant, in striking contrast to the SWP ensures that its members all have some knowledge of its basic ideas. The trouble with the Militant formula is that it is just that-a formula. Young people learn to recite it and feel no need of relating to the real world. Politics become as easy as a children's game.

Its rumoured that the Militant training committee is considering supplementing the basic programme (nationalise the 253 monopolies) with a more complex unit, which would programme operatives to make speeches linking this demand with other issues. I'm sceptical about this. The basic programme has the great virtues of simplicity and durability. Why complicate matters unnecessarily?

Go to, let us go down, and confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.
Genesis 11, 5

THE SOCIALIST WORKERS' PARTY (SWP)

PESSIMISM OF THE WILL

The SWP is generally assumed to be a split from the young Liberals. Its an understandable assumption given the group's strength on the PRO side and its political instability, but its nevertheless mistaken.

Surprisingly the SWP originated in the Trotskyist Movement. Its Guru, Tony Cliff and his supporters were expelled from the Trotskyist organisation in 1951 when they refused to take sides in the Korean war. Ever since then Cliff has been running his own troupe.

Its a long way from the serious politically motivated circles of self-educated working men which constituted British Trotskyism till the 1960's to 'Transvestites Against Nuclear Power'.

How did Cliff get from there to here?

You can read a version of the trip in the authorised history of the SWP - 'The smallest mass party in the world' by Ian Birchall, an historian who would have been at home in the court of the Emperor Justinian.

You may sometimes hear SWP'ers muttering 'State Capitalism' or 'Permanent Arms Economy'. Although they won't be able to explain what they mean by these phrases, they do provide a clue to Cliff's evolution.

Cliff maintained that Trotsky was wrong in categorising Russia as a Workers' State, albeit bureaucratically degenerated. Russia was essentially capitalist. Cliff also maintained that the capitalist system had been temporarily stabilised by spending on arms - so the final crisis was not coming any minute.

Cliff's sceptism about the imminent collapse of the system allowed him to sit out the 1950's while other groups made premature bids for the radical market.

When the market revived in the 1960's, most political groups ditched Marx in favour of Mao, Marcuse, Fanon and Eldridge Cleaver. Cliff, in contrast, saw that some fashions would be short-lived and that any student daft enough to swallow Mandel's Student Vanguard theory would probably fail his exams. He realised that the best student radicals would be attracted to a group which stressed the crucial role of the working class.

During the late '60's, Cliff's success left rival entrepreneurs fuming. A very rapid growth after 1968 enabled him to build an organisation and recruit a number of industrial militants. He gathered a cadre which included Wendy Henry, John Palmer and Roger Rosewell. Where are they now? It was too good to last.

In 1974 when the miners threw out Heath, Cliff decided his hour had struck. He had cast Harold Wilson in the Kerensky role in the re-run of 1917, with himself re-enacting the role

first made popular by V I Lenin. Strikes and occupations would multiply. The then International Socialist (IS) group was transformed into the SWP, which was to become a mass party in the brief time available before the British October. This didn't happen. In the ensuing confusion most of the long-serving IS cadre and industrial workers absconded, leaving Cliff with a fairly demoralised collection of students, white collar employees and drifters.

When the revolution was seen to be unavoidably delayed, Cliff announced that the formation of the SWP had been necessary, not to lead the revolution, but precisely because the workers' movement was in such a bad way that it needed the SWP to prevent the retreat becoming a rout. (Cliff could always think on his feet).

The IS group had always been sceptical about middle class life-style fads, but it was clear that if the middle class members were not to lead the revolution, they would have to be allowed to indulge their personal fetishes; so Gay Lib, Ecology and Life-Stylism were authorised as politically relevant.

This removed one of the main boundaries between the SWP and the other groups and left the SWP open to a unity offensive by the IMG, who saw a merger being possible now that the SWP had abandoned its 'workerism' and 'economism'. This was naive of them: the IMG actually believe in Transvestism's revolutionary potential; Cliff merely looks at the market and provides what the punters want.

Women's Voice

In the early seventies women's journals were slow to catch up with higher educational standards and changing life styles. Cliff spotted a gap in the market and started Women's Voice; it was less daring than 'Cosmopolitan' more political than 'Spare Rib', but less demanding than 'Vogue'. It combined news, gossip and 'human interest' with just a hint of politics. Cliff knows we women can't take straight politics, so he tried to reach us through 'the politics of the personal'.

For 7 years 'Women's Voice' acted as a transmission belt between IS/SWP and the feminist milieu. The trouble was it carried SWP women out of the party and didn't bring anyone in. Cliff, who is nothing if not pragmatic, decided to wind it up in 1982, parting company with a few feminist SWP'ers as a result. 'Women's Voice' few fans have mainly switched to 'Company'.

In the late seventies most of the SWP's Rank and File groups collapsed, which presented them with a dilemma; what can a revolutionary general do when the troops refuse to march? Cliff hasn't yet come up with an answer, but it might be a mistake to conclude that he is no longer capable of dreaming up another crowd puller like the ANL.

For the moment the SWP is in the passive phase of the cycle formed by its ultra-left posturings in 1974-76, electoral opportunism of the late 70's, doctrinal degeneration and present passivity. Its unlikely to be the SWP's final ploy, but they do lack a popular campaign at the moment. Suggestions on a postcard to Socialist Worker.

Cliff is an admirer of Lenin, but its a Lenin viewed from a distinctive angle. His four volume Life of Lenin reads like a biography of John the Baptist written by Jesus Christ. Cliff has also been described as the thinking man's Ernest Mandel, but that's being a bit harsh on him.

The SWP now staggers between punch-ups with the National Front and chatting up vicars in the Anti-Nazi League. Its not going anywhere in particular, but a fairly efficient apparatus keeps it on the road.

Strength: 3,400 - 1,500 dues paying, declining slowly.

Papers: Socialist Worker, Socialist Review and International Socialism.

INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

WE HAVEN'T CROSSED THE CLASS LINE! OR WILL THE
REAL FOURTH INTERNATIONALISTS PLEASE STAND UP!

Watching the grey and balding IMG'ers sitting behind the nearly new stall at the Labour Party Jumble Sale next to a yellowing pile of 'Socialist Challenge' you may find it difficult to visualise them in 1968. What a brave sight they made charging to Grosvenor Square, banners flapping in the wind, chanting Ho, Ho, Ho-Chi Minh! Didn't they go like the clappers!

Even into the 70's, IMG leader, Robin Blackburn, could be seen with a suit carefully chosen to match the Vietnamese flag he carried - a striking exception to the generally low sartorial standards of the British Left.

The IMG politics at that time consisted of 'exemplary actions'. The vanguard was to take risks and throw off sparks which might detonate a popular explosion. The 1970 election was seen as irrelevant, because the Labour Party was really no different from the Tories.

Whatever happened to turn these dashing young people into the shambling figures we see today? What possible connection can there be between their politics then and now?

For the IMG these questions are not vital. Its defining feature is that it is the British section of the Fourth International (Mandel Tendency).

The IMG has subscribed to a bewildering variety of political positions since its formation in the late 1960's. When asked about this apparent lack of consistency they will reply that they are the authorised section of the FI and that none of their many and varied deviations amount to scabbing or counter-revolutionary activity (their opponents dispute this). The critics ought therefore to join them and make their criticisms from within. If the IMG was to lose the FI Imprimatur, critics would be entitled to form a group and put in a bid for the British franchise. Without the FI a political group is bound to succumb to national deviations. These can be nasty including as they do, workerism, empiricism and anti-intellectualism.

The bewildering inconsistency of positions which the IMG had adopted - Maoism, refusal to distinguish between the Labour Party and the capitalist parties, exemplary actions, etc., etc., make its history bewildering in terms of a development of political tendency, but an invaluable guide to what was turning on the radical youth at any given time. The lady who thought that the South African Pass Laws were doing a good job in abolishing the family was a good example.

In truth the IMG have always been too generous and impressionable. They respond to the spirit of the day. If bestiality became popular they would take that up too. At present they are happily escocned in the Labour Party where they continue their battle against their old bogies, workerism and economism. Currently their anti-economist/workerist line gets some support inside the Labour Party from middle class people who have always been unhappy with the Labour Party's working class base.

Its inaccurate to see the IMG as an aristocratic revolt against bourgeois dominance. True their best known ex-leader, Tariq Ali, is an out of work rajah, but most of the group is middle class. Tariq Ali didn't in any case, play the dominant role of a Cliff Healy or Grant.

The really ironical feature of the IMG is that it is probably the best section of the Fourth International, while it thinks itself one of the weakest.

Tariq Alis's defection and attempt to join the Labour Party in 1981 was part of a much wider movement within the IMG. Many of the group, including the present leadership, would be happy to sign on as Tony Benn's foot soldiers. However a substantial minority (they say 36%) wish to retain a Trotskyoid facade and are loyal to their co-thinkers in the American SWP.

The resulting internal conflict consumes enormous energy. I'm beginning to wilt after reading only eleven of the nearly fifty incoherent, badly written and badly typed internal documents which the conflict has produced. It might help if correspondents would send me originals, not photo-copies. This internal aggro might explain why you haven't seen much of the IMG recently.

To add to the confusion, the IMG has now decided to change its name to the Socialist League, while Socialist Challenge becomes Socialist Action. Surely they don't think that this will throw me off the scent?

In what former fellow revolutionaries may see as his mid-life crisis, Eldridge Cleaver, former Minister of Information of the Black Panther Party, former Marxist who exiled himself in Algeria, now makes his living designing decorative flower pots and is planning to run for election as Mayor of Oakland, California.

THE WORKERS' REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (WRP)

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

If you were to stumble into a meeting of the Workers' Revolutionary Party Central Committee you might wonder for a moment why there are so many familiar faces, but of course! You've seen them on the telly! Vanessa Redgrave is the best known of this group of proletarian activists who have long fought a bitter struggle to win the toiling masses of Equity (the Actors' Union) to revolutionary position. Is real life merely an escape from the pressures of the stage? Its certainly true that if the CIA ever succeeds in eliminating the WRP leadership, casting directors everywhere will be in trouble.

The WRP's main star, Gerry Healy, has not himself trodden the boards of the legitimate stage, but his gifts as actor, producer and director are considerable. Laurence Olivier's shot at portraying him in the play 'The Party' was generally acclaimed as a brave try but not really up to the histrionic standards of the original.

Healy's fascination with drama started early. He was British Trotskyism's first superstar when Tariq Ali was still at school.

The WRP is the only group apart from the Communist Party, to have a daily newspaper, a remarkable achievement for a group with only 500-600 members.

Most of the paper 'Newline' reads like the Daily Mirror without the politics. Lots of sport and TV programmes and occasionally more news on the CIA's infiltration of the Fourth International, most of whose historic leaders it is suggested were and are CIA agents. Some of them doubled as KGB agents which might seem to be overdoing it a bit. However, the Stalinists traditionally accused Trotsky of working for all the Imperialist secret services, even when they were in conflict with each other. All other groups, including opponents of the American SWP, feel that this kind of allegation goes beyond the traditional, fairly robust polemics which enliven the tedium of most Left journals. (Its alright to say that a rival group behave as if they were working for the CIA, or that they are objectively counter-revolutionary, but to allege that poor old Joe Hansen actually set Trotsky up for Ramon Mercadon's ice-pick really isn't very nice).

The WRP's other main eccentricity is their support for Colonel Ghadaffi and the military rulers of Iraq.

Supporters of rival fragments of the Fourth International are highly embarrassed by the WRP and protest that Healy is just a meglomaniac who has nothing to do with the in tradition. This isn't quite so. Healy emerged as the dominant figure in British Trotskyism in the late 1940's, sponsored by the international leadership of the FI.

He remained the chief side-kick of the American SWP after the 1953 split, breaking with them when they reunited with the Pabloites in 1963. His group (then the SLL) was an important

faction in the Young Socialists in the early 60's and was probably the largest Trotskyoid group until about 1965.

Rivals who constantly predict the WRP's imminent collapse are almost certainly wrong. This show will run and run.

THE WORKERS' SOCIALIST LEAGUE (WSL) (DECEASED)

THE REVOLT OF THE SPEAR CARRIERS

In 1973 the WRP showed clear signs of going round the twist. The actors who till then had been decoration, were promoted to the leadership.

You can hardly blame actors for liking drama. They predicted a military coup and launched the group into a self-induced trance, where they feared assassination as the Heath Government tried to destroy the WRP - the tried and trusted leadership of the British working class.

The remnants of the WRP's once considerable industrial base (by then reduced to a sump in the Oxford/Reading/Swindon area) were taken aback. They didn't fancy being reduced to stage-hands supporting the new leading men and ladies.

Led by Cowley Shop Steward, Alan Thornett, and supported by some of the old style activists still oriented towards the Labour Movement, they protested and were duly expelled.

The WSL returned to the old Healy line of 'Make the Left M.P.'s Fight'. Apart from that they have nothing much to say. They survived for eight years because of Thornett's personal position and the strength of the group inside Oxford's Cowley plant, where they have considerable weight.

The pressures of geographical isolation and lack of direction have not made them collapse into the arms of Sean Matgamma's ICL. The marriage settlement includes a commitment to life-style politics. Some WSL'ers won't like this.

Strength: About 130

Paper: The 'Socialist Press' now merged with 'Workers' Action' into 'Socialist Organiser'.

Comment: It might have suited you, but its too late now. If you are thinking of forming a group to fill in the missing space, try to create a sharper profile.

SPARTACUS LEAGUE

Big fleas have smaller fleas,
Upon their backs to bite 'em,
And these fleas have still smaller fleas
And so ad infinitum

To hear the Sparts, go to some other group's meeting. Not the SWP, who won't allow them in. The Sparts vigorous polemics annoy meeting organisers who say it is organised disruption and when they really get rattled talk about CIA agents. (If they annoy you don't throw them out - they will have a demonstration within the hour, and denunciation in their Press in six languages within a fortnight). Nor will they be unhappy about being thrown out. It provides copy for their papers (Workers' Vanguard and Spartacist Britain) and material for their campaign.

Primitive Socialist Accumulation

Why do they do it? You have to look at their theory and history. The Sparts originated in a split within the American SWP. In the early 60's the SWP abandoned Trotskyist orthodoxy for Castroism, broke with their British associate, G Healy, and reunited with the Pabloites whom they had split from in 1953.

The Sparts maintained that a Trotskyist organisation and programme was essential so they were duly expelled. They see themselves as the continuers of the revolutionary Trotskyism exemplified by the SWP until its infatuation with Fidel led it to substitute the guerrilla band and the student vanguard for the working class. An examination of the SWP Press in the 1950's suggests the Sparts are far too kind. The SWP and the FI were pretty degenerate by the late 1940's.

The Sparts main energy is devoted to slagging off other groups which claim to be Trotskyist. Why? Well, these groups are incurably centrist or reformist, so their pretensions must be exposed so that they won't mislead potentially revolutionary workers.

If they are so rotten why bother with them?

Because the authentic Trotskyist cadres can, in the present period, come only from defecting members of the ORG's (Ostensibly Revolutionary Groups). To imagine that one can go directly to the masses now, is to engage in fake mass work - when Sparts utter these words their lips curl in the same way as does an IMG'er when he says 'Workerist'.

The Spartacists in the 21st Century

The British Sparts have grown since they were first established by American colonists some six years ago. They now number 90, having recruited from splits in other groups. They face the future with quiet confidence, and hope to rival the IMG by the mid 1990's and the SWP by about 2010.

They calculate that 'Militant' is too culturally conservative to adapt to the inevitable changes in life-style of the next

30 years, and will cease to attract youth. The Communist Party on present rates of decline will be smaller than the SWP within ten years, and will then be a suitable object for raiding.

Just as today's Trotskyists are often children of Communist Party members, so the children of the IMG and other Trotskyoid groups could provide recruits for the Spartacists, although survivors of IMG communes will include a lot of deeply disturbed individuals.

The Sparts' attacks on the ORG's, although sharp, are launched on quite a narrow front. They deny the early degeneration of the FI. In fact they vie with the SWP (US) in building up the personality cult of the late James P Cannon - a Healy who never found his Ghadaffi.

The capacity of the Sparts to take such a long term view takes the average Lefty, who doesn't think much further ahead than next week's demo, aback.

Only the mysteries of the dialectic can explain how this long term perspective of 'primitive accumulation of cadres' co-exists with a perspective of backward British capitalism collapsing shortly into some kind of authoritarian military regime.

At first sight the Sparts appear very different from the average Lefty group. They criticise the lumpen-bourgeois periphery of the SWP and IMG, rather than accommodating to them. In reality the Sparts have no intention of abandoning the lumpen-Left milieu which is their real constituency as much as it is that of the other Left groups. The inhabitants of this milieu like being flattered by the IMG and SWP, but most of all they like attention, so being insulted by the Sparts is quite acceptable.

In 1981, the Spart tone became shriller, as they emphasised the danger of nuclear war. Their determination to be thrown out of public meetings became frantic. They took to arriving at meetings with their placards protesting at their exclusion already written. Many of their cadre left and their turnover increased alarmingly. Until recently Spart recruitment and losses have both been low. Their American parent has gone in for the long dismissed 'fake mass work'. The British Sparts have not yet found an equivalent to their American cousins' mass demonstrations against a largely imaginary rise of the Klu Klux Klan. If you have any ideas for a campaign (which must combine fringe policies with high media visibility) it would be a kindness to get in touch with them.

Membership: About 60.

THE STALINISTSTHE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The Communist Party didn't qualify for inclusion in previous editions of the guide. With 15,000 members and a real, if limited, influence in the labour movement it was still part of the real world.

Times change. The CP is fragmenting. Its Congress in November 1983 will probably spawn new groups which will make a new edition of this guide necessary. The main division is between Eurocommunists and diehard Stalinists, (or 'Tankies'). The Euro's gained ground in the 70's; they saw themselves as outriders of the mass Eurocommunist parties of Spain and Italy. Shares in Eurocommunism have slumped since Santiago Carrillo succeeded in transforming the once powerful Spanish Communist Party into a sect with only 5 M.P.'s.

Some Euro's, notably the former leader Sue Slipman have abandoned the Euro bandwagon for the SDP gravy train while Proletarian spokesman Jimmy Reid has left to become a lay preacher for the BBC. Others find the SDP theoretically callow, in spite of what they see as its courageous effort to break free of narrow class allegiances.

Many Euro's have stayed in. A prominent representative is the historian Eric Hobsbawm. Professor Hobsbawm is an impressionable chap. Have a look at his hymn to Stalin's cultural commissar, ZHDANOV, in the Modern Quarterly in 1947. In the 60's he was one of Hampstead's leading advocates of guerrilla war (in Latin America) before switching to Eurocommunism in the 70's. He now thinks we don't give Mrs Thatcher enough credit for her military achievement in the Falklands.

The formation of the SDP can be seen as either achieving the Eurocommunist aim, or making it disreputable. In either case it queers the Euro pitch. The Euro's are in retreat although they still control the Party's theoretical journal 'Marxism Today'. Two prominent representatives are father and son, Sam and David Aaronovitch. Can acquired stupidity be transmitted genetically? Was Lysenko right after all?

The Tankies now feel their hour has come and are preparing a return to the good old days when Uncle Joe was in the Kremlin and all was right with the world. Unfortunately, the Tankies are themselves divided into a number of factions, some more open than others who overlap geographically and politically. Some visible tips of the factional iceberg are the journals:

Straight Left

The Leninist

Proletarian

Straight Left is a fortnightly journal which combines 'Tanky' position with Labour Party entryism, much to the embarrassment of the Communist Party leadership, who don't want Transport House to think they are behind it.

Both Proletarian and The Leninist disapprove of Straight Left's entryism. They feel that it implies pessimism about the long term future of the Communist Party. Both criticise the NCP for its premature split from the CP in 1977.

Proletarian stresses the need for alliances with the 'pro-Party Mensheviks' - those who are not consistent Tankies, but don't want to collapse into the Euro swamp.

The Leninist will never get the Moscow franchise as it has actually made some criticism of Russian bureaucracy. The future of the Communist Party probably lies with an alliance of some of the more discreet factions which have not gone public. Some of these favour a gradual tactic which will slowly edge out the loonier Euros and allow the Party to regain its traditional niche on the Left. The existing leadership would be allowed to retain their places for the time being.

The existing leadership occupying a steadily shrinking middle ground think that the best way to preserve their pensions is to stay in the middle and avoid a major split of either Euros or Tankies. This may not be possible as either lot might at any moment upset the apple cart. Attacks by Euros on the trade unions recently provoked Mike Costello then Communist Parties industrial organiser to publicly attack Marxism Today. If the Party leadership splits Moscow will pull the plug on the Euros and reconstitute a traditional Stalinist Party.

If these quarrels had been going on ten years ago the various Trotskyoid groups would have been able to intervene. Not any more. Their rapid move to the Right and retreat into life-stylism, makes them unattractive to the Tankies, while the Euros will feel happier in the SDP.

THE NEW COMMUNIST PARTY (NCP)PAPER - THE NEW WORKER

If you enjoyed the 1950's you'll love the NCP. They split from the CPGB in 1977 over the CP's efforts to take their distance from the Soviet Union and repeat its line on anything. If they didn't exist the Russians would have to sign on as clients of Saatchi and Saatchi.

The NCP has difficulty in separating itself from the CP on most issues. Its not clear how revisionism on the Russian question links up with the CP's reformist line. Anyway the CP used to combine reformist politics with a slavish loyalty to the Kremlin.

The NCP has to walk the straight and narrow path between the reformism of the CP and the Leftism of the competing Trotskyoid groups.

At first the NCP simply repeated the CP on everything except support for the Soviet Union. In response to the pressure of small groups' politics and the competition of what they regard as the Ultra-Left, they now call for the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland and oppose import controls.

Sometimes when my kids have gone off to their noisy disco's, I put on my Mum's old Paul Robeson records. Reading the New Worker and listening to 'Old Man River' I imagine myself in a world where punk rock, video games and gay liberation don't exist.

Prospects: Are here to stay but won't grow much unless the Kremlin Breaks with the CP and gives the franchise to them.

Strength: 400

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF BRITAIN (MARXIST-LENINIST)

(CPBML)- FIGHT WHERE YOU ARE!

The CPBML is sometimes known as the Reg Birch Admiration Society, after its founder, a recently retired member of the AUEW Executive.

The CPBML, a product of British Maoism, was unusual in once having something of a working class base. For a time it controlled the North London District Committee of the AUEW - it originally represented some militants in the CP not merely seekers after Eastern Promise.

The Chinese sensibly never gave their Franchise to the British Market to any of the quarrelling Maoist groups as the groups' quarrels were so vicious that it would have been impossible to amalgamate them.

The CPBML, faced with their mentors' reluctance to tell them what to say, evolved a technique for saying nothing. They are against capitalism, imperialism, the Labour Party and for the workers' struggle. Otherwise their pronouncements are at so high a level of generality that controversy and errors are avoided. It's a good technique which other groups would copy if they weren't such intellectual snobs.

For a small party the CPBML had very heavy demands placed on it. It had to represent the British Proletariat at Party, Trade Union, Women and Youth Congresses of both the Chinese and Albanian parties. Leading members gallantly shouldered this burden, spending a considerable part of their lives on these visits. One wishes that the working class movement showed more gratitude for these efforts on its behalf.

The CPBML's reticent style protected it from getting embroiled in disputes over Peking's reactionary policies. When Albania split with China, the CPBML chose the Albanian franchise and continued attending the congresses.

A few years ago the Albanians wanted the CPBML to organise breakaway Red Unions. When the CPBML wouldn't and couldn't do so, their recognition was withdrawn and they had to face life alone.

The formula for survival has been to comment approvingly on workers' struggles, but refrain from attempts to generalise (if they did they might get it wrong).

Members work in their workplace and union branch, but form no linking organisation to implement the party line. So its uncertain what they actually do; fantasy flourishes. The party branch becomes a forum for general anti-capitalist propaganda and largely imaginative accounts of struggle at the workplace. Attempts to generalise the trade union struggle are denounced as Trotskyism.

The CPBML has moved from being one of the groups with most industrial base to one with the least. Its slogan - 'Fight where you are - down with Thatcher' - and its opposition to rank and file movements rationalise the situation.

Prospects: Not bright. If you aren't old enough to remember the Cultural Revolution, you won't appreciate the importance in CPBML folklore of Madame Birch providing the idea which sparked it off in her discussions with Madame Mao.

Stop Press: The CPBML have recently come full circle and now support Russia. Belief in Socialism in One Country does require one country to support.

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST GROUP

-THE AGONIES OF BEING ENGLISH

The RCG are generally to be found heckling meetings on Ireland or racism.

They are a group which split from the SWP (then IS) in 1972 on the grounds that IS's militant syndicalism ignored the struggle for a Marxist programme. The RCG's guru is an academic, D Yaffe, who has done sterling work on the velocity of the falling rate of profit and has almost got it down to the nearest foot per second.

The RCG moves from a quite competent study of economics to a sub-CSE* political theory. Their ideas are simple:-

1. Imperialism has savagely oppressed colonial peoples. The British working class has acquiesced in this oppression. We can't get anywhere until this oppression is ended. As beneficiaries of this oppression, neither the British working class or the Left groups have the right to tell the anti-imperialists what to do. On the contrary, the RCG on principle, refuses to criticise nationalist movements. If Mugabe, for example, wants to break strikes, that's his privilege.

Left groups are castigated for their criticism, however timid, of the Provos, Mugabe, etc. This exemption from criticism is also granted to bourgeois representatives of immigrant groups. The RCG competed with the Home Office for the allegiance of the Southall Youth Movement. The RCG claims to have won the argument, and alleges that the Home Office's final winning ploy (a £20,000 cheque)

constituted foul play. Most fair-minded people would surely agree with them.

2. Capitalism causes racism, unemployment, etc. Therefore a movement such as the ANL which attempts to combat racism by attacking the NF is reactionary in that it tries to pretend that there can be a non-racist capitalism. (For an earlier more consistent form of this argument see the section on the SPGB).
3. Attempts to create movements around limited trade union struggles by raising demands which will carry the struggle forward, fall into reformism if the full socialist programme is not advocated. The attempt at a transitional programme is therefore deplored.

The RCG can be seen as a cross between the SPGB and an old-style Stalinist Party combining as it does maximalist positions with worship of anti-working class forces. It does also have some interesting eccentricities of its own.

Members will insist on using aliases in surroundings where they are well known and will complain bitterly when people inadvertently muddle their real and false names.

They make a great point of declaring loudly that they maintain secrecy about where they live and work. This must make them a secret policeman's dream. The RCG appeals to dedicated, serious and not very bright young people. Their speakers have the air of someone repeating a lesson by rote.

If your memory goes back as far as the 60's you will recognise the RCG's line as a 'Marxist' version of the 'white skin privilege' theories which were popular at the time.

RCG members feel terribly guilty about their privileges. There they are - young, white, beautiful and enjoying a student grant paid for by the exploitation of black or Irish people. Surely such good fortune can't be deserved.

Strength: about 40 members

Papers: 'Hands off Ireland', 'Fight Racism', 'Fight Imperialism', Revolutionary Communist Journal.

Prospects: for survival, good, although they probably won't grow much. The combination of possession of esoteric economic theory, an extremely crude political formula, the thrill of secrecy and the sense of importance of belonging to an elite group, should ensure it a small share of the radical student market.

*CSE - Certificate of Secondary Education, alternatively Conference of Socialist Economists.

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PARTY (RCP)

Formerly THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST TENDENCY (RCT)

Journal: 'The Next Step' Strength: Around 70

The RCT was expelled from its parent, the RCG, for challenging that group's grovelling before the CP and the anti-apartheid movement on its way towards becoming a consistent defender of anti-working class regimes.

The RCG was then conducting entry work in Anti-Apartheid. The people who became the RCT wanted to criticise the African National Congress. The RCT's interpretation of the group's propagandist orientation was that at a certain point once forces had been built up it would begin agitational work. Yaffe's response, predictably, was brutal and the RCT was expelled.

In reaction to the RCG's prostration before bourgeois dictators, the RCT has quite a sharply critical attitude to Mugabe, etc. (Logically they should extend this to criticism of the Irish Nationalists, but realise that this would make their product unmarketable).

Rebounding from the RCG's passivity, the RCT decided to become the vanguard and substitute themselves for the working class movement. They have formed a couple of anti-racist front groups, Elwar and SPTAC and have taken to dressing up in jump suits and making rather violent verbal contributions to meetings. I rather like them.

Prospects: There is a fair market for a group like the RCT for young people bored with the SWP's illiteracy, and the sub-reformism of the IMG.

THE SOCIETY OF DECEMBER 10TH

Alongside decayed rouses with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origins, alongside ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, were vagabonds, discharged jailbirds, womens' liberationists, escaped galley slaves, student dropouts, swindlers, mountebanks, militant homosexuals, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, black power entrepreneurs, gamblers, vegetarians, maquereaux, transvestites, brothel keepers, mystics, porters, visiting Americans, literati, sociologists, organ-grinders, rag pickers, ecologists, knife-grinders, tinkers, beggars - in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French term la bohème; from this kindred element Bonaparte formed the core of the Society of December 10th.

K.M. & P.K.

THE WILDER SHOREBIG FLAME - THE THINKING MAN'S MAOISTS

Big Flame is a hybrid group originating in an (originally) local journal in Merseyside in the early 70's. BF was Maoistic but consciously eclectic drawing back from the extremes of Little Red Book waving, and fusing Maoism with Anarchism and Populism, never subscribing to a Stalin cult. An unusual group for Britain but very similar to the now defunct Italian group - Lotta Continua.

BF seemed ideally designed to cater for the student market. While its actual practice was similar to the IMG it was unrestricted by Marxist theory even of the most formal kind.

BF was able to travel light and was well suited to take advantage of the new movements then arising. Absence of a theory ('dogma') meant it could almost simultaneously support Mao, Fidel, Allende, General Carvalho or whoever.

BF's quick-footedness soon made it abandon Maoism - most Maoist groups couldn't do so and didn't survive. Its sensitivity to the spirit of the time induced it to form an electoral alliance with the IMG during the Wilson/Callaghan Government (dumping Anarchism).

But why Liverpool? Until very recently Liverpool would have been considered a stronghold of the Labour Movement - much more militant than any city in the South. Yet the working class movement has been battered into apathy; unemployment has soared. Traditional strongholds have been destroyed, while the Liverpool Labour Party has often been singled out as one of the most corrupt, inactive and undynamic anywhere.

In these circumstances, the Liberals become a power by concentrating on community politics. BF represents a more radical version of this tactic. It has a really genuine community politics, free of the Liberals' cynical vote-catching and pushed to its radical conclusion.

It's no accident that the scene of the Liberal triumph produced the group which is furthest away from the Marxist tradition. BF until recently was hardly concerned with the questions of principle which occupied Marxist groups. With the collapse of Maoism, BF felt they needed a theory and hired clever Mosche Machover to write them a theoretical document outlining their line on Russia, China and the Third World, etc. The result published as 'The Century of the Unexpected' argues that the new bureaucratic regimes are progressive for a while, then they become a fetter on society. So Mao would be progressive but not Peng. With any luck this change will be marked by a dashing general being replaced by a grey bureaucrat, the Regime falling out of favour by middle class and student opinion in the West, leaving BF still swimming with the stream. Nice one Mosche!

Strength: About 80

Journals: Big Flame journal Revolutionary Socialism

THE REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS' PARTY (RWP) POSADAS

Strength: About a dozen people

When the two largest tendencies in the Fourth International united in 1963 (the American SWP and the Mandel tendency) this produced the (customary) splits within both groups. The SWP lost the British SWP and what became the Spartacist tendency. The Mandelites lost one of their most important South American leaders - Posadas.

The story of Posadism in South America is bloody, while in Europe its bizarre. The Belgium and Spanish sections flirted with the idea that flying saucers were emissaries for a higher socialist consciousness in some other galaxy.

Curiously, for a 60's tendency, Posadism was never Maoist. It took the Russian side on the Peking/Moscow split. It argues that the proletariat and the oppressed generally are everywhere spontaneously moving towards Trotskyism. All that is needed is a revolutionary leadership to give this movement direction.

The RWP's line is reiterated in their paper, Red Flag, the core of which was always an article by J Posadas, allegedly shouted into a tape recorder in a suburb of Montivideo, and rushed to his supporters throughout the world (always the same article). Posadas has died but has left a number of tapes.

The RWP are Labour Party entrists. Another of their distinctive demands - that the Russian leadership must not be sidetracked by pacifist deviations but must launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike - is generally played down when canvassing.

Assessment: If you get frustrated with the Jehovah's Witnesses' reluctance to name the date for Armageddon, then the RWP might be your cup of tea.

One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England.

George Orwell
'The Road to Wigan Pier'

NEIGHBOURS

THE OFFICIAL IRA/WORKERS' PARTY

It was early on a New Year's Eve, as the shades of night
came down,
When a lorry-load of volunteers, approached a border town,
There were men from Antrim and from Cork,
From Derry and Tyrone,
But the leader was a Limerick man,
Sean South of Garryowen.

Sean South, the subject of this stirring ditty, was, apart
from being a hero, saint, poet and martyr, an IRA volunteer
killed in action during the 1956 border campaign.

Young Sean was no insular nationalist: he was greatly
concerned about the tide of pornographic American films
sweeping over Ireland (some Marilyn Monroe films were real
scorchers). He was also worried about Communism and Jewish
influence in the United States, now that Senator Joe McCarthy
wasn't around to defend Christian values.

The interesting point about Sean South's views was that they
were not at all unusual in the IRA at that time. IRA theory
favoured Catholic Corporativism of the type favoured by
Dalfuss, Maurrass or Gil Robles. Hitler's vegetarian and
pagan tendencies outweighed his positive qualities.

Yet Sean South's old comrades are now devout Marxists, some
of whom have not killed a Protestant for years. The Provos
call them the Rusty Guns. In 1972 at Aldershot Barracks the
Officials killed 7 cleaning ladies (and no army officers).
They are generally credited with the termination of Seamus
Costello who some years ago along with Bernadette Devlin split
with the Officials to form the Irish Republican Socialist Party.
The IRSP's military wing the INLA had killed several Officials,
so blowing him away was perhaps a necessary slap on the wrist
for them.

Still the Officials are rather reticent about their colourful
past.

Like the reformed cannibal who swears that he had never eaten
a whole person they tend to play it down.

As for the INLA they are the same as the Provisionals, except
that some have 'A' levels. Has higher education any real
value I ask myself?

The Official IRA/Sinn Fein, now transformed into the Workers'
Party is growing rapidly in the South and have several seats
in the Dail. Officially (sic!) the IRA doesn't exist.
Unfortunately if their supporters in the North did lay down
their guns the Provisionals and the INLA would shoot them down:
to the delight of the British Army and large sections of the
British Left: so they hold onto their Rusty guns. One of them

rather apologetically told me that in the North even the
Little Sisters of the Poor have to go in for the odd spot
of target practice.

The IRA had put great effort into the Civil Rights movement
of the late 60's when Southern Irish Government agents split
the Organisation to form the Provisionals. The IRA began
slowly to accept that killing Protestants wasn't the answer.

The fact that much of the British Left were cheerleaders for
the Provos has confirmed the IRA's moderate reformist bias.
Their policies now resemble the British Labour Party's of
about 1910. This puts the Workers' Party about two centuries
ahead of anyone else in Irish politics. Its transformation
into a non-sectarian Party isn't complete. They still
subscribe to the cult of the Blessed James Connelly but are
generally non-religious.

They may do well out of the current troubles of their rivals
in the Irish Labour Party, whose leader defected to the Tories
in 1982. The Labour Party's idealistic commitment to support
persecuted minorities led them to take the courageous step of
giving the leadership to Mr Dick Spring who is mentally
handicapped, and a native of Limerick. The voters may not be
ready for such a bold measure of positive discrimination.

Disciples of the first degree obey orders even when
they disagree with them. Disciples of the second
degree obey such orders enthusiastically. For
disciples of the third degree the possibility of
having an opinion of one's own does not arise.

St Theresa of Avila

GOLDEN OLDIESSOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN (SPGB)

(Founded 1904)

The SPGB, in some ways the most extreme of all left organisations, is the exclusive brethren of the labour movement. It reveres the archangels Kautsky and Dietzgen and abhors the demon Lenin. Its declaration of principles ('D of P' to members) has been preserved, with fundamentalist zeal, since it appeared in the first issue of the party's paper, the Socialist Standard, on 3 September 1904. To become a member you have to pass an entrance test - unless you are an atheist and understand and accept the D of P, you can't get in.

The SPGB stands for nothing less than complete socialism now, and has no time for Labour Governments, alternative economic plans, or any kind of transitional strategy. It sees itself as the only island of socialism in a featureless ocean of Capitalism and so refuses co-operation with any other group - clause 7 of the D of P says:

"That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class emancipation must be hostile to every other party".

On the other hand, the SPGB can be seen as moderate. As Socialism cannot be introduced without socialists, its main aim is to create socialists. This is seen as a process of cerebral conversion. Its activity therefore consists of contesting elections, selling its publications and giving lectures. It abhors violence and sees no reason why the socialist society should not be smoothly inaugurated once it gets a parliamentary majority. Its this legalism which has prompted the gibe that they are the SMALL PARTY of good boys.

The SPGB is sometimes ridiculed for having so few members after 79 years' work. (This gibe surely loses force as the groups formed in the 1960's settle into middle age without having found a way to the masses). Of course an organisation founded in 1904 will differ in many ways from one founded in 1968. The SPGB split from the main Marxist organisation, the SDF, over its reformism which led it to congratulate King Edward on his accession to the throne. The Left Wing of the SDF was outraged and formed an opposition tendency. Some comrades, mainly Scots, jumped the gun and split in 1903 forming the SLP, leaving the London based SPGB to go it alone in 1904. The SLP were then under the influence of James Connolly; his encouragement of their precipitate split was just one of his many disservices to the Labour Movement.

The SPGB has consistently maintained an anti-war stance. The Bolsheviks published an anti-war appeal in the Socialist Standard in 1915. The party suffered from its opposition to both world wars, members being forced to go on the run in World War I and having difficulty with tribunals when asking for conscientious

objectors' status in World War II. The party became the only one which could get such status for purely political reasons.

The major split in the past 50 years was based on Paddington branch and included the famous orator Tony Turner and Joan Lester, now a Labour M.P. The group wanted to drop references to class and began to formulate a new D of P which would express this point of view. To tamper with the D of P was heresy so the group was booted out in the mid 50's; but there have been rather few of such incidents.

The advantages of a long existence without major splits include being able to recruit from the children of members, rather than having to depend entirely on recruiting outsiders. This internal recruitment, in its turn, produces greater stability than exists among newer groups.

In private the older leaders of most Left Groups envy the SPGB's peace and stability, but they know that their younger members must be offered something more dramatic.

Strength: About 600.

SOLIDARITY

Some political entrepreneurs find even the faint trace of rank and file control over the leadership which orthodox structures impose too inhibiting.

Solidarity's leader devised an interesting way to free himself from any measure of control from below. He revived a feudal form of organisation based on a chief (himself) and his retinue. Solidarity didn't have members. People could associate themselves with the journal/organisation by joining the leader's retinue. The group's assets and printing facilities remained the leader's private property. A person's status in the group hierarchy was determined by his or hers proximity to the leader. The group was rigidly hierarchical. Everyone knew their place and everyone else's, yet none of this was written down.

Solidarity hierarchy was justified by a ferocious attack on bureaucracy. Anyone who suggested that there should be an organised discussion or that the leader should be accountable to the group was denounced as a crypto-Bolshevik. It was suggested that attachment to democratic organisational forms was a form of masochism, produced by faulty child-rearing. The leader who had an 'o' level in Psychology could quote Wilhelm Reich to justify his theory.

The attack on bureaucracy in the trade unions concluded, logically enough, with an advocacy of the 'lump' system as the best way to eliminate bureaucracy.

Solidarity, unlike the SPGB, has not worn well. It was quite influential in the Committee of 100, the radical wing of CND Mark I, but rather bewildered by the 1968 revolt. By the time CND Mark II came round Solidarity was dying.

Curiously, Solidarity has produced some of the best accounts of industrial struggle. Its worth struggling through their rather specialised jargon to read their accounts of engineering disputes.

If Solidarity's leader had persisted with his psychology studies he would have discovered that informal elites cannot expand beyond about 30 people unless they adopt a formal structure. Such elites also find it difficult to evolve an effective succession mechanism, when age or exhaustion hits the cadre. When the dog dies its fleas die too. Solidarity was the ultimate in parasitism, so the decline of the Left groups killed it off in 1981.

STOP PRESS: February 1983 - Solidarity has re-appeared. Can Spring be far behind?

THE INDEPENDENTS

Dissatisfaction with the left groups has led a number of radicals to found independent journals. There are too many to list, but The Leveller, Spare Rib, Artery, Head and Hand and New Left Review are among the best known.

Some of the journals are aimed at specific feminist gay or group constituencies. Where this is not so, most numbers are special issues which are devoted to these themes.

The similar nature of all these journals has led to confusion. It was soon discovered that they are all produced by the same 'collective'. In fact the similarity is produced by the rise of the ecology movement. Re-cycling paper was found to be difficult and expensive, while re-cycling articles was much easier.

So, the same articles, ever so slightly altered, are produced again and again. I've counted 23 versions of the standard 'Women and the Trade Unions' article under various pseudonyms. Granted, several of them were not in independent journals, but in Socialist Review and Marxism Today organs of the SWP and Communist Party.

Although most people now realise that the various 'independent' journals are produced by the same people they do provide a useful service in reproducing a reassuring version of the radical world which shuts out disturbing reality. As a product of a discreet co-operation between ostensibly hostile members of rival groups they disprove the slander that the left are always quarrelling amongst themselves.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

CAMPAIGN FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT (CND)

"Russell and the parsons have done infinite harm, infinite harm".

Ludwig Wittgenstein.

PART VI

THE EX-LEFT

COOLING OUT - OR RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

THE CHARTISTS

The Chartists split from the IMG in 1968 urging a turn to the Labour Movement rather than the FI's line of tagging along with the new mass vanguard (i.e. the student revolt).

The Chartists evolved two distinctive views:-

1. The Labour Party wasn't a Party really, but a Soviet. The LP unlike Continental Social Democracies, had no real ideology or discipline, being rather a meeting ground of all tendencies in the Labour Movement. Therefore it could fairly easily be transformed into a revolutionary party.
2. The final crisis was near, and there was little time left to build the new party, i.e. Chartists before it came.

These twin theories gave the Chartists their distinctive character. Catastrophism combined with a commitment to the Labour Movement.

The Chartists did some good work trying to organise troops into a union (work in this delicate area was made even more difficult by the illusions which they shared with all of the middle class Left about Irish Nationalism).

Six years of work didn't get the Chartists very far. The LP hasn't become a revolutionary party whatever the Daily Telegraph says. The world economic crisis did develop steadily, but the workers didn't flock to the Chartist banner, so the cadre became rather demoralised.

The Portuguese revolution of 1974 gave them a fillip, and encouraged them to abandon the belief in the working class which had first led them to abandon the IMG. (The attraction of the dashing officer is like a virus. The Chartists seemed resistant to it in 1968 only to succumb in 1974, when the epidemic was on the wane). The Chartist was also smitten by the Eurocommunist bug. The decline of Eurocommunism in the late '70's left them rather at a loss. The group evolved to a traditional middle class Leftist posture; making a great deal of their commitment to democracy and rejection of 'authoritarian' Bolshevik models. (Those who objected were expelled in the ruthless manner which such democrats are so expert in).

They still exist but its not clear why. Their ideas are the accepted wisdom of the middle class Left. If the 'New Statesman' and the 'New Left Review' won't print your articles send them to the 'Chartist'. O.K. - its a bit down market but beggars can't be choosers.

THE ILP-(NOT THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY!)

The Independent Labour Party founded by Keir Hardy in 1893 was the main British socialist party before 1918 when the Labour Party became a membership organisation.

In 1932 the ILP split from the Labour Party after the disaster of the Ramsay MacDonald Government. It was able, until 1947,

to maintain a space to the left of the Labour Party.

The 1945 Government's reforms removed the ILP's constituency. Most members went into the Labour Party and the remainder, understandably, reacted defensively, conserved the organisation, but had no real idea where to go. They were afraid of takeover bids, as the ILP's considerable financial resources and control of the National Labour Press were very tempting.

Fear of being taken over had made them so cautious that they were unable to replace their dying members, as the Party ran into Catch 22. The smaller it got the more vulnerable it was to takeover bids, although by the 50's the ILP ceased to attract the attention of most Left groups. However, after 1956, ructions inside the Communist Party and YCL produced new political entrepreneurs and the ILP was again plagued by entryism.

The entrists moved slowly at first. The Esperanto column wasn't phased out till the late 60's. We all like to think that history is on our side, but there was no doubt that History and his accomplice, Death, performed sterling work for the ILP entrists during the 60's and 70's, when Death's scythe cut down the old ILP'ers like corn at harvest time. Well, we've all got to go sometime. Younger readers will have to take my word for it that whatever those old comrades' theoretical shortcomings, their commitment, generosity and tolerance made them a joy to know.

In 1978 a coup transformed the ILP (Independent Labour Party) into ILP (Independent Labour Publications) (the retention of the initials meant the outside world didn't twig, but some of the old members resigned). The controlling junta turned the new ILP into a pressure group inside the Labour Party. But which way should they pull? The group adopted the Eurocommunist ideas of the mid 1970's making some people think a CP takeover had finally succeeded after failing in 1921, 1932 and later during the Popular Front.

Some surprise was shown when the pamphlet 'John Macnair's Spanish Diary' by a former General Secretary of the ILP was published not by the ILP but by its dissident Manchester branch. The pamphlet was bitterly critical of the CP's role in the Spanish Civil War.

Why did it fail?

The ILP was, by the late 70's, just one of a number of pressure groups active in the inner Labour Party struggle. In fact, this ground became rather crowded and the ILP in '81 moved decisively to the Right in accordance with Kaur's Law*, became sharply critical of Benn, and lost its Left sympathisers. As time-served entrists they feel well qualified to witch-hunt more recent arrivals.

Now, like an Irish priest walking the narrow tightrope between vice and virtue, the ILP tries to keep a balance between Benn and Hattersley.

The old members? They died. It's been a long time since the 1932 split and a lot of younger members had left to join the Labour Party from the 30's to the 50's. The controlling junta has finally taken control after more than 20 years of patient entry

work. But what to do with the machine? No, definitely not the Independent Labour Party.

Strength: ILP members - old 40
- new 30

National Labour Press Assets not available

*Kaur's Law states that where there is an idiocy unvoiced, a Left group will step into the vacuum.

LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING

This decomposition product of the disintegrating Chartists quite strong in Brent Labour Party is remarkable for the lengths to which it takes "The Politics of the Personal". You can read all about the discrimination against transvestite comrades. Did you know that the supposedly progressive GLC doesn't have one transvestite councillor? There is helpful advice on choosing partners for artificial insemination.

Channel 4 are thinking of basing a soap opera on the 'Briefing'. In the meantime, why not get your Labour Party branch to subscribe?

VOLYA -

BULLETIN IN SUPPORT OF THE RUSSIAN WORKERS

Volya brings news of the libertarian struggle against Communist dictatorships not only in Poland and Russia but, in Mozambique and Angola, where guerrillas are hitting back at the Commies by blowing up schools and health centres and kidnapping welfare workers.

All this is being done with South African aid, so perhaps there is a libertarian tendency in BOSS.

The campaign of letter-bombs addressed to opponents of the South African State is not claimed as part of the libertarian struggle. Apparently these are the work of the regular South African security forces. I've heard of broad alliances, but Volya makes Garcia Oliver seem like an intransigent purist.

THE GOD THAT FAILED - HEALY'S STEPCHILDREN

When Healy split with his French partner Lambert in the early 70's, some of Healy's second line hacks signed on as Lambert's British agents.

The defectors started a bulletin (called 'The Bulletin') aimed at doubting Healyites. However, Healy promised the faithful 500 WRP Parliamentary candidates and a military coup, so his brightly coloured fantasies won out over Lambert's dull grey ones.

Lambert promised 'The Bulletin' group that the WSL split would join them. When this didn't happen they asked him what had gone wrong. Unused to such insolence he booted them out and gave the British franchise to the Socialist Labour Group (SLG) affectionately known as the SLUGS.

Masochists need a fair crack of the whip, so deprived of a master 'The Bulletin' collapsed, after publishing the only plea for genocide (of Northern Irish Protestants) I've ever seen in a Left journal.

Fragments of the group now run the Polish Solidarity Campaign. Its logical that they are attracted by Pope Wotjla who shares Healy's style. Its fascinating to see the old 'Newsline' fury aimed at slightly different targets.

Most of the Left can't go along with them in their admiration for Bishops. This is rather illogical as the same Left is so keen on the Mullahs in Iran and Afghanistan.

Individuals from this milieu will soon produce thick academic tomes castigating the British Labour Movement's irrationalism, intolerant atheism and lack of patriotism, providing a theoretical basis for Wotjla's practice.

Having nurtured Healy's fantasies for years, they consider themselves well placed to demonstrate that Marxism is the lie in the soul. It just shows how difficult life is if you share Healy's taste for drama without his subtlety and restraint.

THE SOCIALIST LABOUR GROUP (SLG - SLUGS)

UNITE AND FIGHT

The SLUGS, current Lambert concessionaires are based on Wood Green Labour Party and have found it difficult to expand into the proletarian heartlands of Hampstead and Islington. There isn't a lot more to be said about them. Their paper 'Socialist Thought and Action' is terrifically boring, but so is Wood Green, which is like Bournemouth without the glamour and excitement. Lambert can't be too pleased with the SLUGS performance, so he might as well be interested in bids for the British concession.

AFTERWORD by Chus. Aguirre

Prunella Kaur's affectionate portrayal of some harmless English eccentrics, pokes gentle fun at her victims; the jokes are seldom cruel, and her occasional irritation is shown only by her careful search for the right, cruel word. I wish she would try to overcome her compassionate nature and give a sharper criticism of the groups she describes, but those of us who know Prunella are not surprised that she doesn't. If a harsher picture needs to be drawn, it requires a less gentle, probably younger, comrade to do it.

Nevertheless, Prunella's compassion has the effect of leaving the reasons for the existence of the groups she describes unexplained. Clearly they are irrelevant to the struggle for socialism, so what is their reason for existence?

A Marxist analysis of most 'Marxist' or Anarchist groups must start with an examination of their composition and social situation. What most groups have in common is that their members are rootless, middle class, or lumpen. Students, ex-students and other confused and bewildered people thrown up by a disintegrating social system. Most of the members of the Left groups are passionately opposed to the existing set up, yet deeply contemptuous of the attempts of working people to change it. In the past such people could join Uncle Joe's fan club, but that has long since gone out of fashion.

Their distinctive social position explains much that is otherwise bewildering: the radical bookshops stocking books by Marx and works on the occult; the easy move from membership of a 'revolutionary' group to immersion in Buddhism or life-style faddism. These phenomena are ideologically bewildering, but make sense in the social context of the disoriented lives of many middle class people.

How do middle class radicals justify their outlook?

Mainly by borrowing from the populist ideology of elites in the Third World. Most Third World 'Marxism' is an ideology used by the native middle class to mobilise their own countrymen against the bosses in the metropolis. Once independence is achieved the same ideology is used to legitimise the defence of their material interests against their own working class, poor peasants and ethnic or religious minorities.

In some developed countries this 'Marxism' is a club which a dispossessed section of the middle class uses to bash their religious or ethnic rivals. The despairing violence of these people as the wheel of history rolls over them can take a nasty form as in present day Ireland.

In Britain the disoriented middle class has an even more marginal role. They don't fit in with Mrs Thatcher's nationalism, so they must act as cheer-leaders for their more fortunate brethren abroad and/or retreat into their own fantasies.

Some middle class people mistake their own distress for an identification with the working class struggle. For most of them time will clear up the confusion and they will become either ordinary conservatives or Scientologists.

Most members of 'revolutionary' groups are essentially consumers. Their audience consists of people like themselves and the purpose of their activity is the therapeutic value it has for themselves.

Most groups proclaim that the working class is the force which can change society. This doesn't, in the least, inhibit them from directing their efforts at their real audience: students and lumpen elements. The lack of fit between their ostensible and real audience is sometimes rationalised; for example in the 'last analysis' the working class is the decisive revolutionary force, but in the meantime objective circumstances make it necessary on other social milieu. (IMG) More often the paradox is simply ignored.

Membership of a 'revolutionary' group is often good value for money. Contrary to popular belief most of them don't demand an enormous amount of work from their members. The members gain a social life and enhanced self-esteem. If one compares time and money spent against satisfaction gained through involvement in a congenial milieu, then for many clients, political group membership is a better buy than tennis, religion, or football refereeing.

Tradition

Do some of the groups represent a Marxist tradition, albeit in a distorted way, as the Spartacists claim? One has only to observe allegedly Trotskyist groups acting as cheer leaders for sectarian murderers, to realise that their relationship to Trotsky's ideas is precisely nil.

The Market

Capitalism turns everything into commodities. The sad fate of Left Groups which set out to overthrow capitalism has a cruel irony. They have ended up selling a commodity and searching for a market, just as other entrepreneurs sell newspapers or plastic buckets.

Few groups started out with their present miserable commercial ambitions; they didn't want to sell a product, but make a revolution.

How did they degenerate? The groups adapted to their environment. After 1968 this meant adapting to the concepts and life styles of the balding generation of 1968, who were themselves becoming strongly influenced by well established English middle class traditions of self-fulfillment, vegetarianism, self-help, rejection of industrialism and the modern world.

The Left has become parasitic in this milieu.

As standard text on the invertebrates puts it:-

..... the effects of parasitism on the parasite are ever more marked.... it becomes so completely adapted to its peculiar environment that it usually loses many of the characteristics of its free-living relatives --- (Buchsbaum quoted by Duncan Hallas in the Socialist Register 1977).

Most of the Left Groups' capitulation to this milieu was pretty complete. It didn't end their differences with each other on such questions as the class nature of the Russian State, but traditional theoretical differences now look very minor among groups who have wholeheartedly embraced Feminism and life-stylism. Consequently unity manoeuvres are in the air and we may well get a reduction in the number of groups.

Does it matter? Time will tell whether a rising tide of class struggle will revive the groups' radical impulses or leave them stranded.

End

Chus. Aguirre





Title: Go Fourth and Multiply

Author: Prunella Kaur

Date: 1983

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