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Centenary Event

London, Saturday 12 June and
Sunday 13 June

Saturday 12 June
Regents College, Regents Park, NW1
(nearest tube: Baker St)



6pm **WHY SOCIALISM IS STILL RELEVANT**

Speakers: Richard Donnelly and Bill
Martin
Chair: Pat Deutz

**7.30 - 12pm Social Evening,
Buffet, Music**

Details and Tickets from: Centenary
Committee, 52 Clapham High St,
SW4 7UN

Sunday 13 June

11pm Guided walking tour (2 hours)
of Clerkenwell and Holborn area of
places associated with the Socialist
Party and the working class
movement in general. Meet at
Farringdon station (rail and tube).
Guide: Keith Scholey.

3pm (till dark) Socialist Party rally at
Speakers Corner, Hyde Park (tube:
Marble Arch).

A century for socialism

Welcome to this special edition of the *Socialist Standard*, a commemorative issue marking one hundred years in the political life of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. When our Party was formed on 12th June 1904, in a hall in a little alley off Fetter Lane, Fleet Street, London, the founder members would rightly have viewed the possibility of our existence a century later in something of a negative light. The aim of the Socialist Party has always been 'socialism and nothing but' and the founder members conceived the Party as a mechanism through which socialist ideas could be rapidly spread and, potentially, through which the working class of wage and salary earners could come to political power. The subsequent creation of socialism would render the need for a socialist party redundant and so, one hundred years on, the very continued existence of the Socialist Party of Great Britain is indicative of the fact that the system of society the founder members were dedicated to overthrowing – capitalism – is still with us.

To this effect, today, ownership of the means of living (the factories, farms, offices, communication systems and so on) is still in the hands of a minority social class that can live a luxurious existence without having to work. Virtually all the useful work in society is being done by the majority, a class of people forced by economic compulsion to sell their working energies for a wage or a salary that is less in value than what they produce. It is a society characterised by extremes of wealth and poverty, by wars and chaos and by a meanness of spirit that undermines much that is decent about human beings.

For the last hundred years the Socialist Party has been waging a war of our own – against capitalism and for socialism. We have waged a war too against all the political parties who have supported capitalism, including those that have done so while paying lip-service to socialism. The achievement of socialism has been our sole objective, because our understanding of capitalist society and its working has told us that it is a system capable of change over time but not change that can abolish its fundamental defects. Capitalism *has* altered over the last century, but not fundamentally so and all the problems associated with it in 1904 are still present today, with some new and unforeseen ones too.

Technological powers

In one sense, capitalism is the most successful social system that has ever existed in that the working class, through its collective efforts, has been able to develop the powers of production to previously undreamed-of heights, from putting a man on the moon to mapping the human genome. But these powers of production are wasted and distorted by a system that puts profit before needs as a matter of course and where collective effort is destabilised by competition and division. A society that can now send spaceships to Mars but which cannot adequately feed, clothe and house the world's population despite the massive technological resources at its disposal is a society that is seriously and fundamentally flawed.

One hundred years ago the men and women who founded the Socialist Party came to a significant political conclusion, which is just as important now as it was then. This was that capitalism, through creating an interconnected world-wide division of labour and unparalleled leaps in productivity (whereby ten years in its lifespan is equal to one hundred years and more of previous systems like feudalism), has created the conditions of potential abundance necessary for its own replacement and also a social class of wage and salary earners with the incentive to organise for this. What pioneers of the socialist movement like Marx, Engels and Morris envisaged as socialism or communism, had become a practical possibility and tinkering with an inherently defective system like capitalism a waste of time and energy in the light of it.

The founders of the Socialist Party recognised that the time was ripe for the working class to organise itself consciously and politically to democratically take control of the state machine in countries across the world, dispossessing the owning class of capitalists and socialising production on an international basis. In doing so the working class would consciously create a system where human activity would be carried out solely and directly to meet the needs and desires of the population, and where all the defining categories of capitalism had been abolished: production for profit, money, national frontiers, the class system and – as a result – the enforcer of class society itself, the state.

Reformism

At the time of our Party's foundation other political activists agreed that this type of society was possible and desirable, but disagreed about how it could be created. Due to what they took to be the backward intellectual development of the working class, they thought that capitalism would need to be gradually transformed into socialism by a series of reform measures. They labelled the founder members of the Socialist Party and others who thought on similar lines 'impossibilists', people who were demanding the impossible when piecemeal and gradual reform was all that was realistic. This was the substance of our break in 1904 with our parent body, the Social Democratic Federation, and the basis for our criticism of other organisations of the time like the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society.

Organisations like the SDF that had a paper commitment to socialism were in practice swamped by people who were attracted by their reform programmes rather than their supposed commitment to abolishing capitalism. In these circumstances, those who viewed reforms as a stepping-stone to socialism were themselves swamped by people for whom reforms were simply an end in themselves, palliating the worst excesses of the system. The history of the Labour Party – formed out of the Labour Representation Committee in 1906 – is a case in point. More than any other organisation in Britain, the Labour Party developed as a body hoping to reform

capitalism into something vaguely humane. Today, in 2004, the modern Labour Party stands as an organisation which has instead been turned by capitalism into something rather more than vaguely inhumane. From Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald onwards it has steadily drifted towards where it is today – a party which has abandoned any hope of seriously changing society for the better but which now markets itself as the most efficient managerial team for British Capitalism PLC instead.

Over decades, millions of workers the world over have invested their hopes in so-called ‘practical’, ‘possibilist’ organisations like the Labour Party, hoping against hope that they would be able to neuter the market economy when, in reality, the market economy has successfully neutered them. As such, the damage these organisations have done the socialist movement is colossal. That they turned out to be the real ‘impossibilists’ – demanding an unattainable humanised capitalism – is one of the greatest tragedies of the last century, made all the greater because it was so utterly predictable.

Vanguard politics

Unfortunately for the socialist movement, the reformist distraction has not been the only one, however. Another political tendency emerged, principally out of the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia in 1917, claiming that they had found another route to socialism. However sincere some of their number may have been at the outset – and whatever their laudable success at curtailing Russia’s part in the First World War – Lenin’s Bolsheviks proved to be a political tendency that set the clock back for socialism at least as much as reformism did. In claiming that socialism could be created by a political minority without the will and participation of the majority of the population, and through their wilful confusion of socialism with nationalisation and state-run capitalism generally (a type of opportunism also shared – over time – by the reformists), they shamelessly distorted the socialist political programme.

The Socialist Party was the first organisation in Britain (and possibly the world) to foresee the disastrous state capitalist outcome of the Bolshevik takeover but we gained no satisfaction in doing so. Even now, years after the collapse of the Kremlin’s empire, the association of socialist and communist ideas with state capitalism, minority action and political dictatorship is one of the greatest barriers to socialist understanding.

Today, both reformism and Bolshevik-style vanguardism stand discredited. As ostensible attempts to create socialism they didn’t just fail, they were positively injurious to the one strategy that could have brought about a better society during the last century. The modern far left – by combining the two elements together in an unfortunate mix – have opted for the worst of both worlds and rightly are politically marginalized because of it.

Looking forwards

From our standpoint in 2004, the Socialist Party of Great Britain and our companion parties abroad in the World Socialist Movement regard our situation with both pride and sadness. Sadness because two political currents we warned against most vehemently – reformism and

vanguardism – succeeded in derailing the socialist project so spectacularly, but pride because of the part we have played in keeping the alternative vision alive.

The political positions of the Socialist Party were not handed down on tablets of stone in 1904. With the Object and Declaration of Principles as our guide we have developed our own analysis and political viewpoints as the last hundred years have worn on. Occasionally we may have made mistakes, but we are confident that our record over the last century stands for itself – of propagating the case for real socialism, in exposing the promises and trickery of the reformists and the vanguardists, in opposing the senseless butchery of the working class in two world wars and countless others, and in presenting a clear analysis of capitalism in language readily-understandable to those whose interest lies in socialism.

In the pages of this special issue you will read about the remarkable men and women who have been members of our Party over the last hundred years and about the political input they have had to make. Without doubt, their contribution has been an immense one and we pay public tribute to them for it, but there is a lot more work still to be done.

Capitalism today stands as a social system that bears with it little by way of a positive perspective for humanity. In the major industrial centres of the system, significant rises in productivity coupled with trade union action by workers to win a half-decent share of the gains, have led to rising purchasing power for many. But capitalism and insecurity continue to go hand in hand and in the so-called ‘Third World’ millions starve every year while literally billions now live in disgusting conditions with no hope in sight for them. Everywhere on the planet capitalism has spread its malignant influence: creating a society where everything (and everyone) can be bought and sold, where an ‘every man for himself’ culture leads to escalating brutality, crime and violence and where the social codes built up during the system’s formative years have been undermined by a rampant drive to commercialisation, fostered by a distorted and ruthless individualism. In 2004, nationalism, political gangsterism, religious fundamentalism and terrorist atrocities are the order of the day in a system that neither knows or cares where it is heading.

In the first edition of the *Socialist Standard* we called upon our readership to “help speed the time when we shall herald in for ourselves and for our children, a brighter, a happier, and a nobler society than any the world has yet witnessed”. One hundred years later we are still here, and make the same plea, with the same force and urgency. No matter how inconvenient it may be for our political opponents, we are not going away until our job is done.

That day will come when the working class has seen through the lies and false promises that have proved such a distraction this last one hundred years. And it will come when the supposedly incredible idea of creating a world without wars and worries, money and markets is accepted as not only necessary for the sake of humanity, but recognised for being just as realisable as other once ‘impossible’ projects are today . . . like a man on the moon, or a spaceship to Mars.

Fifty years ago

The birth of the Socialist Party

In the early days of the Working Class Movement, when advocates of better conditions were treated as felons, there was some ground for engaging in secret societies and for defending internal deliberations from prying eyes. Towards the end of the Nineteenth Century the fetters upon revolutionary activity had been so considerably loosened in England, and the path to power opened by means of electoral action, that secrecy was no longer necessary and only became an obstacle to progress.

But the tradition of secrecy still persisted in the social democratic parties, and, along with the fetish of leadership, placed in the hands of small groups of leaders power to influence the policy of parties in the directions they wished. The result of this was that policy was decided by a few people in prominent positions. This had a retarding influence upon the growth of the workers' understanding and upon the real progress of the working class movement. Those in the forefront of the movement felt that they were the nature-designed leaders of a great cause, and they were impatient to build up a large following, believing that this in itself would bring about the emancipation of the workers; the familiar picture of leaders selling out for pelf and place only existed in outline. Moreover, those who were at that time determining the policy of the movement in different directions were tied to reformist programmes; some of them denied the existence of the class struggle and saw in Socialism nothing more than the establishment of eternal principles of justice and morality.

Inside the Social Democratic Federation, the most advanced of the English radical parties, dissatisfaction with the reformist programmes and the temporary agreements with capitalist parties was growing and had already been responsible for an ill-fated breakaway led by William Morris, Belfort Bax, Frederick Lessner, and Marx's daughter Eleanor at the end of the eighties. They had formed the Socialist League which had the blessing of Frederick Engels. Unfortunately the "League" went to the other extreme and abandoned parliamentary action, eventually coming under the control of anarchists.

During the early days of the present century a group of young people began to form which aimed at clarifying the position and transforming the Social Democratic Federation into a genuine Socialist organisation, free from the fetters of reformism. They made fierce protests against reformism, leadership, private agreements and political trading at meetings and conferences. Their efforts, however were paralysed by the power, influences and secret arrangements of the official leaders, who dubbed the militant group "Impossibilists" on the ground that their proposals were unpractical, unsound, and would make the movement impotent.

About the same time the ideas of the American Socialist Labour Party, headed by a very able speaker and writer, Daniel De Leon, were making some headway amongst youthful radicals in England and Scotland in spite of the fact that this organisation was also crippled by a reformist bias and by a leaning towards industrial unionism.

In 1903 and 1904 the "Impossibilist" group made desperate efforts by "boring from within" tactics to head off the reformist policy of the leaders, but without success. The latter became so incensed at the attacks upon them that they finally arranged at a private meeting to deal with the opposition by persuading conference to give them power to expel those militants who would not toe the line laid down by the Executive. The militants refused to withdraw from the position they had taken up, in favour of revolutionary political action on the class struggle basis, and the expulsions by the Executive then commenced.

One section of the militants, in Scotland, had actually formed themselves into a section of the Socialist Labour Party in 1903; accepting all that was stultifying in S.L.P. policy. This secret action was not revealed by them to the rest of the militants until 1904. The other section held a meeting in London at which it was agreed that any further attempts to bring the Social Democratic Federation in line with a genuine class struggle policy would be fruitless, and the only alternative was to form a new political organisation.

At a meeting in London on June 12th, 1904, this new organisation was formed – The Socialist Party of Great Britain.

The new party was forced into existence without premises, a party journal, literature or funds. The members immediately set about framing a Declaration of Principles and a set of rules to guide them, and also collecting funds to publish a monthly journal.

In September, 1904, the first number of the new journal, the *Socialist Standard*, appeared and the editorial column contained the following statement.

"In the past two bodies of men have put forward the claim to be Socialist parties, viz., the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation. We who have for many years taken a share in the work of the latter organisation, and who have watched the progress of the former from its initiation, have been forced to the conclusion that through neither of them can the Social Revolution at which we aim be achieved, and that from neither of them can the working class secure redress from the ills they suffer."

This first number of the *Socialist Standard* also contained the Object and Declaration of Principles that had been drawn up and agreed upon by the membership.

The last paragraph of the Principles, in particular, was opposed to the practice of all the social democratic parties of the time, and yet the accuracy of this Principle should be obvious. There cannot be more than one Socialist party in any country because, if it is a genuine Socialist party, any other parties that are formed must increase the confusion in the minds of the workers and therefore retard the march to Socialism.

In spite of this obvious truth many, who claimed to be Socialists, were members of more than one organisation; some were members of the Fabian Society, the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation, as well as, later, the Labour Party. It was their mutual adherence to reform policies that enabled members of these parties to do this without finding anything contradictory in their conduct. When the Socialist Party of Great Britain was formed its members were so conscious of this weakness that they declined to accept anybody to membership who belonged to any other political party and refused to permit its members to speak on any other political platform except in opposition.

Owing to the bitter experience of the undemocratic methods of the Social Democratic Federation the new party framed rules that gave the whole of the membership complete control of the organisation, and, in order that workers could be under no delusion about the aims and activities of the Party, all meetings, whether Branch Meetings, Executive Meetings, or Conferences, were open to the public; anyone was free to enter these meetings and listen to the discussions.

This was a revolutionary departure from custom and a severe blow to the cult of leadership, as well as eliminating any suspicion that the Party was engaged in any secret or conspiratorial activities. This policy of open meetings the Party has adhered to ever since.

Such were the circumstances that gave birth to the party that this year celebrates its fiftieth anniversary; fifty years of the consistent advocacy of Socialism without turning aside for anything.

GILMAC

(From *Socialist Standard*, September 1954)

Minutes of Inaugural Meeting

Held at Printers' Hall, Bartlett's Passage, Fetter Lane, London, E.C. at 6pm
on Sunday 12th June 1904

In accordance with the instructions of the Provisional Committee, R. Elrick and C. Lehane acted as Provisional Chairman and Secretary respectively, and the other members of the Provisional Committee acted as stewards.

There was a good attendance, and the meeting opened with the singing of "The Red Flag".

The Chairman briefly explained the object of the meeting, read the notice convening same, and then moved the following resolution:

"That we hereby declare our membership of and thus form the new Party, the constitution of which it shall be the business of this meeting to formulate."

The resolution was carried, with three dissentients, who were requested to leave the building, as the invitation to attend was extended only to those who were prepared to cooperate in forming the Party. After these persons had left, the Chairman called on those present to give in their names and addresses for enrolment as members, and as a result the following one hundred and forty two names were handed in:

Miss H. Aitken, Mrs Annie Albery, A.S. Albery, Victor Albery, Arch. Alcock, E.J.B. Allen, Mrs Allen, T.W. Allen, Sidney T. Alston, A. Anderson, G. Anslow, Isaac Asher, Will L. Auger, J.T. Bacan, B.G. Bannington, A. Barker, William Bartlett, Hy. Belsey, John Beauford, W. Betts, J. Blaustein, A. Boggis, A.R. Brooker, R.J. Buckingham, H.J. Bull, A.H. Burton, F. Cadman, Miss L.E. Campbell, John Chislekoff, W. Chown, T.C. Collings, Robert Collins, R. Compton, Mrs E. Craske, F. Craske, Harry Crump, John Crump, R. Daintree, H.J. Davey, John W. Day, John Donovan, A.C. Dowdeswell, Paul Dumenil, W. Eayrs, Minnie Eden, Stanley Eden, R. Elrick, Edward Fairbrother, E. Fawcett, J. Fitzgerald, G. Fletcher, Haris Fagel, W. Fox, B. Galloway, John Gordon, C. Goss, A.J.M. Gray, A. Greenham, R.O. Gross, Edward Hammond, E. Hardcastle, G.R. Harris, H.J. Hawkins, Miss K. Hawkins, G. Hicks, Geo. H. Hobbs, G.J. Hodson, Mabel Hodson, William Holford, Mrs. Holford, Mrs. Holgate, Miss Homerton, H.E. Hutchins, A.W. Ingram, T.A. Jackson, A. Jacobs, Hyman Jacobs, S. Jacobs, A.E. Jacomb, A. Jones, A.C. Jones, G. Jones, Mrs L. Jones, J. Kent, R.H. Kent, W.G. Killick, G.T. King, Mrs King, William Lee, C. Lehane, F.S. Leigh, Hy. Martin, Valentine McEntee, J. McNicol, F. Meiklejohn, G.F. Moody, Moore E.C., A. Morrill, D.R. Newlands, H. Neumann, John Nodder, Charles Orme, J. Oxley, Alex. Pearson, Miss M. Pearson, H.C. Phillips, Alf Pilbeam, A. Pyrke, W. Pyrke, F. Quinney, D.A. Reid, G. Richards, A. Ridgewell, S.J.C. Russell, Walter Russell, Mrs L. Salomon, Hy. Salter, H. Severn, William Sills, T.G. Simco, Frank Sinfield, H.J. Smith, H.O. Sparks, C.V. Sparks, T. Spooner, G. Streak, G. Sweeting, T. Tarrant, L. Thurston, R. Triggs, C. Turner, Annie Walker, R.H. Walker, T. Wallis, F.C. Watts, T. Wilkins, E. Wilkinson, G.H. Wilson, T.A. Wilson, W. Woodhouse, Walter Wren, H.J. Young.

While the enrolment was in progress, one man refused to join the Party stating that he had not yet decided what to do in connection with the movement, and that he had an "open mind" on the matter. The Chairman again explained

the object of the meeting and stated that the persons who had been invited to come were only those who had made up their minds in connection with the object of the meeting, and gently but firmly requested this man to take his "open mind" outside. This being done, the business of the meeting was proceeded with.

The following letter was read:

"Socialist Society, Newcastle upon Tyne 10/6/04
Dear Comrades,

Our society has recently had its attention drawn to the controversy between the S.D.F. and a section of its members. Although we are not affiliated to the S.D.F., we consider that, as a Social-Democratic Society, and one in full sympathy with the principles of the S.D.F., we had a title to consider the dispute.

After much discussion of the question at issue, on information based on the two circulars of the dissentient members, the Report of the Burnley Conference, the Statement in *Justice* of a fortnight ago, the experience of those of our own members who, in other parts of the country, have been members of the S.D.F., and our own observation of the trend of affairs during the last few years, – we have arrived at the following resolution,

"That, believing that the basic principles of the S.D.F. have not been violated by the expelled members and branches, we regret the motion of the conference and executive in relation to these members and branches".

I remain, yours truly,

(Signed) **T. Kerr, Secretary.**

P.S. Am sending a copy of this letter to H.W. Lee. The resolution is as far as the bulk of our members are prepared to go at present. Permit me, however, to express my personal and, of course, *absolutely unofficial* sympathy with your comrades in the action that they have been compelled to take, and to trust that its result will be the rescuing of the S.D.F. from the dangers of opportunism and intolerance which at present beset it and the placing of that organisation on the absolutely straight and unswerving pathway of Social Democracy once again. Personally, I should be sorry to see a permanent second Social Democratic Party established in opposition to the S.D.F., but I quite agree that the action your comrades are taking is such as may well lead to the really closer unity of the Socialist forces in the near future. Would be glad if you would keep me informed of the progress of the agitation."

The reading of the above letter was met with loud applause, and the Secretary instructed to send a suitable reply.

The next business was the election of Chairman and Secretary of the meeting, and the election of tellers. On the motion of Fitzgerald and Anderson, the Provisional Officers, viz., Elrick and Lehane, were unanimously elected Chairman and Secretary respectively. Kent, Woodhouse and Killick were elected tellers.

Phillips read the minutes of the Battersea Meeting on Sunday May 15th 1904, and on the motion of E. Allen and Jackson they were unanimously adopted.

Phillips gave a verbal report on the work of the Provisional Committee elected at the Battersea Meeting to draft a constitution for the Party and to make arrangements for the holding of the Inaugural Meeting. On the motion of Hawkins and Lehane the report was adopted with unanimity.

Anderson and Lehane moved:

"That the name of the Party shall be 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain.'"

Neumann and Blaustein moved an amendment:

"That the name of the Party shall be 'The Social-Democratic Party.'"

A good discussion followed, Hawkins, Jackson, E. Allen, Turner and Kent speaking in favour of the motion, and Martin, Mrs. Salomon, Killick and Albery for the amendment. On a show of hands, there voted for the amendment 27 against 76. The amendment was therefore deemed lost.

Martin and Neumann moved a further amendment:

"That the name of the Party should be 'The Social-Democratic Party of Great Britain.'"

After some discussion a vote was taken, and there were 31 in favour and 73 against. The amendment was declared lost. Another amendment was moved by McEntee and Hutchens:

"That the name of the Party shall be 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain and Ireland.'" This amendment was also lost, only 6 voting in favour.

There being no further amendments, the motion: "That the name of the Party shall be 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain' was put to the meeting and carried by 91 votes to 3. The announcement of the result was greeted with loud applause.

Hawkins and Martin moved: "That the Object of the Party shall be 'The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.'"

There was no amendment and the motion was carried unanimously. The Declaration of Principles drafted by the Provisional Committee was then read:

*"The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds: –
That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master-class, and the subsequent enslavement of the working-class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.*

That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.

That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working-class from the domination of the

master-class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and the democratic control by the whole people.

That as in the order of social evolution the working-class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working-class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.

That this emancipation must be the work of the working-class itself.

That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working-class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

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, the party seeking working-class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action, determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working-class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom."

Fitzgerald and E. Allen moved: "That we adopt the Declaration of Principles as read". Martin and Blaustein moved an amendment:

"That the statement of Principles be printed and submitted to each member of the Party for consideration and that a Conference of the Party be called in one month's time to adopt same or accept amendments thereto."

Hawkins, Jackson and Leigh spoke against the amendment, and on a vote being taken only 3 were in its favour, all the other members present voting against. The amendment was therefore declared lost. Martin and Albery moved a further amendment:

"That the word 'hostile' be deleted and 'opposed' substituted". This amendment was also lost, only a few votes in its favour. The motion: "That we accept the Declaration of Principles as read" was then put to the meeting and adopted with unanimity and enthusiasm.

[The draft rules were read and discussed and the Party's officers and executive committee elected.]

The meeting closed at 10pm with the singing of the "Internationale" and cheers for the Socialist Revolution.



Jack Fitzgerald, one of the founders of the SPGB

The 'University of the Working Class'

Opponents of socialism have periodically attempted to undermine the plausibility of the socialist case by pointing out that some of the pioneers of the socialist movement were not people driven to become revolutionaries through an assessment of their own class interest. Although this argument is of little real import, Engels, William Morris and even Marx have received this kind of treatment, being portrayed – rightly or wrongly – as having been brought up in ‘well-to-do’ families with a privileged education to match. This is not a charge that could ever seriously be laid at the door of the men and women who founded the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

When the founder members broke away from the Social Democratic Federation in 1904 they were in most respects representative of the rank-and-file of that organisation. Unlike the SDF's figurehead, the wealthy old Etonian Henry Hyndman, the founder members had occupations and formal education typical of the working class of the time. A large number were skilled manual workers, including the core of the Party's most prolific speakers and writers. Jack Fitzgerald, for instance, was a bricklayer who went on to teach others his trade, Jacomb was a printer who – up until the early 1920s – designed and laid-out the *Socialist Standard*, Watts was a wood carver, while Anderson was a house painter. There were others though, of whom T.A. ('Tommy') Jackson was the most notable example, who drifted from job to job and into and out of employment, something typically not unrelated to their uncompromising advocacy of Marxian socialism.

What made these revolutionaries extraordinary was not just their implacable opposition to the poverty and iniquity of capitalism but their attitude to knowledge and to critical analysis. They had the keenest of senses that knowledge was power – or at least potentially so. Having no university education they were largely self-taught, prime examples of what has sometimes been called the working class 'autodidactic' tradition. Macintyre in his *A Proletarian Science* commented on how members of the SDF, SLP and SPGB were at the forefront of this tradition and of how – through engagement with classic texts on politics, economics, philosophy and anthropology – they searched for an understanding of the grim society around them:

“It is noticeable that the intellectual development of our working-class activists began as a process of

individual discovery . . . And in which ever direction their interests lay, these autodidacts exhibited a characteristic intellectual tone: they were great respectors of fact and intellectual authority; earnest, even reverential, in their treatment of the text; and they brooked no short-cuts in the search for knowledge. Alongside this deference to literary authority, one must put the fact that it remained *their* education, for they defined both the purpose and the boundaries of their intellectual exploration and the books they read assumed significance in this light.” (pp.70-71)



Moses Baritz

Not only did these autodidacts treat their own education with great seriousness and dedication, so, in the same manner, did they seek to transmit this knowledge to others. From the outset the Party spent much time in the training and education of its members, with classes on history, political philosophy and – above all – Marxian economics. Indeed, Fitzgerald was to claim that a key element in his own expulsion from the SDF had been that he had organised economics classes that had been conducted by workingmen like himself rather than by the Federation's leadership.

Fitzgerald was among a handful of early members who had attended classes on Marxian economics conducted by Marx's son-in-law, Edward Aveling, a man who had been part of an earlier 'impossibilist' revolt against the reformism of the SDF when the ill-fated Socialist League was founded in the 1880s. Attendance at such education classes and immersion in relevant texts was considered a vital part of the education of socialist activists, and we reproduce an example of a typical Party education syllabus after this article.

The autodidactic tradition was still visible in the SPGB long after its foundation. As the Party expanded over time so new waves of self-educated workers joined who honed their knowledge of society, together with their ability to dissect concepts and theories, in the Party's education classes. Some of these members were as good examples of the self-educated working class polymath that it is possible to find.

Adolf Kohn, who was to become a mainstay of the Party as both speaker and writer until the Second World War, fed his thirst for knowledge (and that of other members) by setting up his own bookselling business,

importing socialist classics from abroad that were otherwise unavailable to members, such as those published by the Charles H. Kerr company in Chicago. Moses Baritz, from Manchester, a fearsome Party speaker and one of its most colourful characters, travelled across the world spreading the socialist message to other English-speaking countries in North America and the southern hemisphere, becoming a recognised expert on classical music, eventually broadcasting on BBC radio and writing for the *Manchester Guardian*.

Other autodidacts in the Party had their lifetime pursuit of knowledge immortalised by the capitalist press: Gilbert McClatchie ('Gilmac') had an impoverished early upbringing in Ireland before emigrating to Britain and taking a job as a book-keeper among other things, being best known for his knowledgeable historical and philosophical articles in the *Socialist Standard* and his writing of Party pamphlets; on his death he was recognised by the *Times* for his contribution to political thought. No less an autodidact was Ted Kersley, who spent part of his childhood in an orphanage and had little by way of any formal education, but became an expert art dealer, featuring in one of the finest radio broadcasts of its kind called "The Art Trade Runner". He received the same accolade from the *Times* as Gilmac, though on this occasion his decades of activity as an SPGB propagandist went curiously unmentioned.

In most respects this autodidactic tradition was just as apparent among the large number of new members attracted to the Party in the 'hungry thirties', and then the period during and just after the Second World War, as it had been among the founder members. The ebullient tyros who joined the Party at this time were less likely to be in gainful employment than the Party's founders because of the effects of the depression, but their thirst for knowledge was no less. When not scratching around trying to eke out a living many spent their time productively elsewhere – in libraries, education classes or anywhere else that was warm, cheap and lent itself to mental stimulation. In writing of autodidact and one-time SPGB member Harold Walsby, the sociologist Peter Sheppard described this phenomenon well enough:

"Until about the middle of [the twentieth] century alternative arenas [to the universities] did exist, sometimes if perhaps briefly eclipsing the universities in brilliance. Probably the most enduring was that provided by the little nonconformist groups of the extreme Left - anarchists, dissident Marxists and others who were energetically active from about 1880 until the rise of the New Left in the 1950s, a movement that was, or soon became, firmly located in the universities. In the 1930s and 1940s, anti-Establishment politics was located in meeting-halls, in and around the outdoor speaking-grounds, and in cafes such as those of the side streets of Soho . . . A world in which brilliant, down-at-heel intellectuals and Bohemians mingled with prostitutes and petty crooks, and which fostered complex and passionate debate and nurtured polemical powers, [a climate which]

sprang into being for a short but heady time".
(www.gwiep.net/site/pshwit.html)

Until the 1940s very few Party members had the opportunity to attend university (disparagingly described by some in the SPGB as capitalism's "education factories"). Frank Evans, who had an economics degree and Hardy, who was something of a protégé of Professor Edwin Cannan at the London School of Economics before eventually becoming chief research officer for the Post Office workers' union, were notable exceptions. A handful of members after the Second World War attended the London School of Economics and other Higher Education institutions – mainly as mature students – but from the 1960s and 70s onwards the situation began to change more noticeably.

Technical progress under capitalism and the growth of productivity associated with it led to a decline in the number of unskilled and semi-skilled workers demanded by the system and a commensurate growth in the demand for workers with highly developed technical skills, such as engineers, scientists and researchers. Parallel with this went the growth of the administrative apparatus of capitalism – the civil service, local government, the health service and of course, the education system needed to produce such workers, all needing developed specialist talents but also the type of transferable skills supposedly provided by a university education.

The expansion of Higher Education necessitated by these developments led to a change in the composition of the Party's members that was entirely reflective of the wider changes in capitalist society. Even then, those with a developed educational background have typically become socialists despite their formal education rather than because of it and many are those who claim to have learnt more of worth about society inside the SPGB than outside it.

Perhaps today, the specialisation that characterised the knowledge of earlier Party members is not as pronounced as it was in the days when the Party would wheel out a Fitzgerald, Hardy or Goldstein to lock horns with aspirant politicians or pious academics on the finer points of economic theory. Now, the knowledge of members is probably more eclectic than it was, the product of wider reading and some advancements in knowledge associated with the growth of disciplines like computer studies and environmental science that were previously unheard of. But the underlying Marxist education of members has still been largely the product of the desire of individual men and women to make sense of the world around them, seeking out a holistic and coherent worldview which is absent from university curricula. In this, the Party, with its reliance on formal definitions, the application of logic, and its evaluation of world events over a century, still has an important part to play as a repository of knowledge, experience and analysis of capitalism. This is why, no doubt, more than one sage has commented that the SPGB has been "the university of the working class" in this respect, perhaps now – at least almost as much – as then.

DAP

INTRODUCTORY COURSE IN SOCIALIST THEORY: SYLLABUS OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Before many workers went to college, working-class organisations had to provide their members with a general education, which of course was all the better since those studying it were better motivated and what they studied wasn't biased in favour of the status quo. Below is an education syllabus in use in the Socialist Party in the 1930s and 1940s, plus further details on the first two courses.

1. History of Working Class Movement – Economic

Kautsky: From Handicraft to Capitalism.

2. History of Working Class Movement – Political and Ideological

Stekloff: History of the First International.

R. M. Rayner: Story of Trade Unions; or

S. Webb: History of Trade Unionism.

3. How to Study

S. Webb: Methods of Social Study.

4. Value

Boudin: Theoretical System of Karl Marx Part 1. Ch. 1.

Marx: Capital, Ch. 1.

5. Primitive Society and Early Civilisations

Engels: Origin of the Family.

Lafargue: Evolution of Property.

Bogdanov: Short Course of Economic Science Ch. 1-5.

6. Exchange, Money, Banking

Marx: Capital, Ch. 2-3.

Walter Leaf: Banking.

7. Feudalism and Merchant Capitalism

Bogdanov: Short Course of Economic Science Ch. 3-7.

8. Capital and Labour.

Marx: Capital, Ch. 4-9.

Boudin: Theoretical System of Karl Marx, Part 2, Ch. 1-10.

9. Industrial Capitalism

Beard: Industrial Revolution; or

Croome & Hammond: The Economy of Britain.

Communist Manifesto.

10. Notes on Social Credit, Crises, Capitalist Economics

F. C. Hood: British Economists.

11. Materialist Conception of History – Geographical Factors

Fairgreive: Geography and World Power.

12. Materialist Conception of History – General

A. Wolf: Essentials of Scientific Method.

Kautsky: Ethics and the M.C.H.

1. HISTORY OF WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT – ECONOMIC

1. Origin of the Working Class – the commodity 'Labour Power'

Technical and social background of 'absolute' Surplus Value.

Reform Act 1832, and the 'Rights of Man'; Luddites and Peterloo.

2. Reform Movements –

Four springs:-

Working class revolt; Dorchester Labourers; Tolpuddle Martyrs; Chartists.

Tory-Liberal conflict: Corn Laws and Factory etc. Acts.

Humanitarians and Idealists: Social Workers and Utopian Socialists.

Technical needs of expanding capitalism: Industrial Revolution.

3. Trade Union Movement

Purpose (price, etc. of labour power).

(Distinguish from Med. Guilds.)

Development:

Statute of Apprentices 1562 controlled wages; early unions during eighteenth century.

1799 prohibition of "all combinations" in restraint of trade" (fear of Fr. Revolt; absolute surplus value).

Relaxation 1824 – Owen's Grand Nat. Consolidated 1825.

Strength of movement diverted by Chartism. Co-op movement, and riots. Tolpuddle Martyrs 1834.

Revival 1850-80: Expanding capitalism ('relative' S.V.). Skilled and craft unions; non-revolutionary; Junta.

New Unionism 1880-90 brought in unskilled (depression 1876-86) – Booth, Hyndman, Tillett, Mann Burns; from Liberalism to Labourism.

Taff Vale decision 1906 legalised union funds. Osborne judgment 1913 legalised political activities.

'General Strike' followed by T.U. Disputes Act 1927, requiring "contracting in" for political levy.

C. 20 amalgamation into big unions (half membership in 12 big unions).

T.U. leaders backed wars 1914 and 1939, supported "more production" and brake on wage increases.

T.U. Act 1946 permitted "contracting out" Labour Government and the T.U. Congress.

4. Limitations of Economic aspect of movement

Value of commodity 'Labour Power'.

Industrial Reserve Army.

Political Machinery the means of class domination.

2. HISTORY OF WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT – POLITICAL & IDEOLOGICAL

1. Political power the means of class domination.

2. Need for 'democracy' in commodity society.

3. Two fold aspect of the class struggle.

4. Reform movements:

Trade Unionism.

Humanitarianism & Utopian socialism.

Political Labour Parties;

Labour Rep. Cttee 1896.

Labour Party 1906.

I.L.P., S.D.F., S.L.P., B.S.P., C.P.

5. Internationals

First, Workingmen's Association (1864-73)

Origins and promoters.

Constituent elements (conflicts).

Work:

Support of strikes, Communards, 'oppressed nationalities'.

Exposure of war-makers.

Education – spread of socialist ideas.

Decline: Crushing of Commune.

Hostility of Governments.

Disruptive work of Anarchists.

Backwardness of workers.

Second (1889-1914) –

Exclusion of Anarchists.

Rival 'Reformers' & T.U. Congress.

Attitudes of components to reformism, State, permeation, war, pacifism, nationalism, opportunism.

Rise of national political labour parties.

Lingering end in confusion and final treachery 1914.

Third (so-called) (1915-17) –

Effect of war on reform parties.

Third (Moscow) (1919) –

Bolshevik Manifesto and formation of communist parties.

Belief in imminence of world revolution.

Hotch-potch of every variety of opportunist movement and policy – revolutionary intentions overtaken by reformism.

Attitude of S.P.G.B. to Second and Third Internationals –

Need for international of socialists recognising class struggle and need for political power for Socialist Rev.

6. Revolutionary Socialist Movement

Scientific foundations (Marx, Engels, etc.) – L.T.V./M.C.H.

Isolated political revolutionaries compelled to adhere to reform parties.

Origin of S.P.G.B. 1904 – secession from S.D.F.

Object and Principles (lessons of history).

"Hostility" – reforms and reformism.

Democratic control and organisation.

Some Party controversies.

Mastering Marxian economics

Members of the Socialist Party wishing to be able to speak officially for the Party in a formal debate against a representative of another political group have had to pass a speakers' test. This has included such questions as "do peasants create surplus value?" and "what is the difference between value, exchange value and use value?"

Rival political groups may have mocked us for this but at the same time they were aware that Party speakers knew their Marxian economics. Many learned the hard way that, when debating with the Socialist Party, it was better not to claim to be a Marxist and talk about capital as a thing, or of workers selling their labour, or of commodities existing in socialism.

Admittedly, there is a certain irony in us priding ourselves on understanding the economics of capitalism when we want to see an end to economics – the study of the relationships that arise when goods are produced for sale – since we want to see production directly for use replace production for the market. But we have always taken the view that it is important to understand the way capitalism works since this explains how it can never be reformed to work in the interest of the working class. Economic theory underlies our case against reformism.

The labour theory of value

The labour theory of value is, rightly, regarded as the cornerstone of Marxian economics. Its importance to socialists is that it explains how the working class is economically exploited under capitalism.

In its Marxian form, it says that the value of a commodity is determined by the amount of labour time that has to be spent on producing it from start to finish under average conditions of production (what Marx called

"socially necessary" labour). The classical economist David Ricardo (1772-1823) explained that it is not just the labour expended at the last stage of a commodity's production – during which it is transformed into the finished product – that is relevant:

"In estimating the exchange value of stockings, for example, we shall find that their value, comparatively with other things, depends on the total quantity of labour necessary to manufacture them, and bring them to market. First, there is the labour necessary to cultivate the land on which the raw cotton is grown; secondly, the labour of conveying the cotton to the country where the stockings are to be manufactured, which includes a portion of the labour bestowed in building the ship in which it is conveyed, and which is charged in the freight of the goods; thirdly, the labour of the spinner and weaver; fourthly, a portion of the labour of the engineer, smith, and carpenter, who erected the buildings and machinery, by the help of which they are made; fifthly, the labour of the retail dealer, and of many others, whom it is unnecessary further to particularize. The aggregate sum of these kinds of labour, determines the quantity of other things for which these stockings will exchange" (*Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, Chapter I, Section III).

Marx's specific contribution to the theory was to point out that what workers sold to a capitalist employer was not, as had been supposed by earlier exponents of the theory such as Ricardo, their labour (i.e. the work they did) but their "labour power", by which he meant their capacity to work. This, like any other commodity being bought and sold, had its value determined by the amount

of socially necessary labour that had to be expended to produce it from start to finish, i.e. essentially by the value of the things workers had to consume to maintain their capacity to do work of a particular kind and to raise a family to replace them when they would no longer be capable of working.

This might amount to, say, 5 hours worth of socially necessary labour-time. The value of what the workers produced, when put to work by the capitalist in his workplace on materials supplied by him, depended on how much socially necessary labour-time was expended in the process. If it was 10 hours of socially necessary labour then 10 hours worth of value would be added. Naturally, an employer was only going to employ workers if they produced more than what he had to pay for the value of their labour-power, otherwise there would be nothing in it for him.

The period of time workers spent replacing the value of their labour power (in our example, 5 hours) Marx called "necessary labour"; the period of time spent beyond this he called "surplus labour" and the value created during it "surplus value", the source of the employer's profit. Capitalism was thus based on the exploitation of the working class for surplus value. This was later shared out amongst the capitalist class as ground rent (for the landowners) and interest (for banking capital), leaving the rest as industrial and commercial profit for the capitalist employer.

Taxes not a burden on the working class

Before the First World War, the Socialist Party had to spend much time arguing that it followed from the labour theory of value that taxes were not a burden on the working class but on the surplus value already extracted from them by the capitalist class.

When workers leave their workplace they have already been exploited for everything over and above the value of their labour power; nothing more can be extracted from them without reducing what they have to live on below the value of their labour power. Workers do sometimes physically pay taxes in the sense of handing over money from their wages to the tax-collecting authority. But to the extent that this becomes generalised it becomes part of the cost of production of labour power, so that wages are going to have to increase to compensate for it if the employers are to get the same quality labour power as before. Workers may pay taxes, but taxation does not fall on the working class as a class. In the end, it falls on surplus value.

That any taxes on wages would be passed on to the buyer of labour (power), i.e. the capitalist employer, had been recognised by Ricardo who made this specific point in chapter XVI of his book. Its socialist political implication was that taxation issues were no concern of the working class since they were essentially arguments amongst sections of the capitalist class as to how to share out the cost of running their state.

The same Marxian argument applies against so-called 'secondary exploitation' which some pre-WWI writers on Marxian economics claimed workers suffer when they

came to buy what they needed. Workers can certainly be overcharged or sold adulterated goods by cheating shopkeepers, but if this practice becomes widespread then, again, if the capitalist employer is to receive the same quality labour power as before wages will have to rise to compensate for this. The same argument applies the other way too: subsidised prices and rents tend to keep wages down and have often been introduced for just this reason.

Of course, the suggestion here is not that taxes, rip-off prices, or subsidies have an automatic and immediate effect on wages. We are talking about an effect that takes time to come about, through the operation of labour market forces, including the struggle of workers to push up wages and – in the case of price subsidies and state payments to workers – of employers to push them down.

The political conclusion – since these were not mere academic discussions – was that, while capitalism lasts, workers should concentrate on exerting maximum pressure on the wages front and not be diverted into struggling for lower taxes, price controls, subsidies or other such reformist measures.

Capitalism won't collapse

Between the two world wars the main economic issue was the slump. Here the Socialist Party applied Marxian economics to refute two fallacies. First, that the slump represented the final breakdown of capitalism and, second, that the way to avoid slumps was for governments to overcome a chronic shortage of purchasing power that was said to be built into capitalism.

The first view – that capitalism was collapsing – was put forward by critics of capitalism who wanted it to be true. The two main 'defects' that were identified to explain why capitalism would eventually collapse as an economic system were that it wouldn't be able to find enough markets to keep pace with rises in productivity and output, and that the rate of profit would fall so low that investment could dry up.

Detailed works had been written to argue both points of view, backed up by quotes from Marx. Most of them were in German and were not translated into English at the time so that they had little impact on political discussions in Britain. The Party's 1932 pamphlet *Why Capitalism Will Not Collapse* did not deal directly with these theories, but pointed out that capitalism had gone into big slumps before and that it had always recovered from them due to the internal dynamics of the system that made it cyclical in nature; there was no reason to suppose that the then current slump would not turn out to be a phase of capitalism's business cycle too, unless, that is, the working class organised consciously and politically to end capitalism.

The Marxian economic analysis once again led to a political conclusion: that capitalism would stagger on from crisis to crisis until the working class decided to replace it with socialism, hence the importance of getting the working class to do this rather than counting on them being pushed into action by the automatic collapse of capitalism as an economic system.

Underconsumption and the cause of crises

Perhaps the most common theory amongst critics of capitalism – including the Party in its early years – as to why capitalist crises occurred was that “the workers can’t buy back all of what they produce” and that as the capitalists cannot use all their revenue for personal consumption the result is that stocks of unsold goods eventually pile up and production stalls until these have been cleared.

The theory that capitalism suffers from this particular type of ‘underconsumption’ ignores the fact that what the workers can’t buy the capitalists can, or could, out of their profits. Demand under capitalism is not made up simply of the demand for goods for personal consumption, but also of demand for means of production coming from capitalists wanting to re-invest their profits, which is also a form of spending. Crises occur, in which there appears to

be a shortage of purchasing power, not because there is not enough money to buy what is produced but because some of the capitalist holders of money choose not to spend it because profit prospects are not attractive enough. Crises, in other words, are not caused by the inability of the working class to buy back the entire product of industry.

The Socialist Party became increasingly critical of this “can’t buy back” view in the 1930s but it was not until the 1950s, in a series of articles by Ted Wilmott (‘E.W’) that appeared in the Party’s internal discussion journal of the time, *Forum*, and then in the *Socialist Standard*, that the Party definitively committed itself to the alternative view that capitalism’s cyclical crises were due to the anarchy of production leading to one sector of the economy expanding disproportionately faster than the other sectors. This initial sectoral overproduction, through its knock-on effects, would then be transmitted to other sectors of the market economy leading to the appearance of a more general crisis.

Banks and credit creation

One particularly crude type of underconsumptionist theory that the Party regularly had to deal with in the 1930s was that of the Social Credit movement started by Major Douglas. His argument was that there was a ‘chronic shortage of purchasing power’ due to the issue of money being in the hands of banks that had a vested interest in keeping money in short supply so as to be able to command a higher rate of interest on the money they lent out. Although, according to Douglas, banks had the power to create credit with the stroke of a pen they generally chose not to do so; this power should therefore be taken from them and vested in some public body which would make this extra purchasing power, supposedly needed to ensure the full use of productive capacity, available to all in the form of ‘social credit’.

Among other things what this theory overlooked from its deficiency of purchasing power standpoint was that



Edgar Hardcastle (‘Hardy’) at the post office workers’ union

interest charged by banks to capitalist firms is not an additional amount that is added to prices and which therefore cannot be paid for out of current income (wages and profits) generated in production. It is instead a part of the surplus value which the industrial capitalist has to hand over to the banking capitalist for the loan of their money and so is already included in total purchasing power.

In any event, as a series of articles in the *Socialist Standard* during the 1930s mainly by Edgar Hardcastle (‘Hardy’ or ‘H’) – which were developed from the arguments of both Marx and Edwin Cannan (1861-1935), the last of the classical economists – pointed out, banks do not have the power to create credit out of nothing by a mere stroke of the pen. They are essentially financial intermediaries that can only lend out money that has first been deposited with them. Of course, not all money deposited with a bank has to be retained as cash, but when a bank is said to have a cash ratio of 10 percent this does not mean that it can lend up to 9 times the cash deposited with it – a common currency crank view – it merely means that it can loan out 90 percent of the cash deposited with it.

Banks make their profits from the difference between the rate of interest they pay depositors and the rate they charge borrowers. There is nothing special about them; they are not wicked finance capitalists against whom the anger of workers should particularly be directed, just capitalists with their capital invested in a particular line of business, no more nor less reprehensible than the rest of the capitalist class.

Modern economics textbooks no longer claim that a single bank can create credit. They now attribute this power to the banking system as a whole, but this is just playing with words. Their argument merely demonstrates that they assume that money is continually re-deposited within the system, thus tacitly accepting that what banks can lend out is restricted by what has been deposited with them.

Enter and exit Keynes

Keynes, it used to be claimed in the 1950s and 1960s, had saved capitalism by showing how slumps could be avoided by state intervention. When a slump threatened, he taught, what the government should do was to increase its spending and/or run a budget deficit and take measures aimed at increasing investment and personal consumption.

Keynes agreed with those critics of capitalism who argued that, if left to itself, capitalism would tend to overproduce in relation to available market demand (he was a bit of an underconsumptionist in this respect, or at least was sympathetic towards underconsumptionist theorists). The solution he proposed of state intervention was welcomed with open arms by the Labour Party as it provided a theoretical justification for their reformist practice. In fact, Keynesianism can be said to have been the economic theory of modern reformism.

It wasn't until the post-war boom, which had been caused by other factors than state intervention, came to an end in the early 1970s that Keynesian theories were put to the test. They failed miserably: state spending (which had to come out of taxes that in the end fell on profits) could not make up for the fall in investment due to the diminished profit prospects; indeed, by increasing the tax burden on profits it tended to make matters worse.

In the end, governments everywhere were forced to abandon Keynesian policies. As James Callaghan, the then Labour Prime Minister, told his party's conference in 1976:

"We used to think that you could just spend your way out of a recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you, in all candour, that that option no longer exists and that in so far as it ever did exist, it only worked on each occasion since the war by injecting bigger doses of inflation into the economy, followed by higher levels of unemployment" (*Times*, 29 September 1976).

This confirmed the Marxian view we had been expressing that what drove the capitalist economy was not state spending but profits and that any government had to take this into account or risk making matters worse. Governments had to allow capitalism to function as the profit system it is. The economic theory on which reformism had based itself had been shown in practice, as well as in theory, to be wrong.

Non-stop inflation

As Callaghan hinted, the only lasting legacy of Keynesian economic policy has been continuous inflation. Keynes famously said, on one occasion, don't bother about currency policy, concentrate on tax policy and let the currency look after itself. The Bank of England (and its equivalents in other countries) took this literally and allowed the supply of currency (notes and coins), which had long since ceased to be convertible on demand into a fixed amount of gold, to increase at will. The result had been predicted by Marx himself:

"If the paper money exceeds its proper limit, which is the amount in gold coins of the like denomination that can actually be current, it would, apart from the danger of falling into general disrepute, represent only that quantity of gold, which, in accordance with the laws of the circulation of commodities, is required, and is alone capable of being represented by paper. If the quantity of paper money issued be double what it ought to be, then, as a matter of fact, £1 would be the money-name not of 1/4 of an ounce, but of 1/8 of an ounce of gold. The effect would be the same as if an alteration had taken place in the function of gold as a standard of prices. Those values that were previously expressed by the price of £1 would now be expressed by the price of £2." (*Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 3, section 2(c)).

What, in 1867, was only a theoretical possibility or an exception is today the general rule. All currencies are inconvertible paper currencies which have to be managed by governments and/or central banks but most governments and central banks have over-issued such currencies, with the result that Marx, basing himself on the labour theory of value, had predicted. In articles by Hardy and others, the *Socialist Standard*, with rising prices becoming a major political and economic issue especially by the 1960s and 70s, hammered home the Marxian explanation of inflation, while at the same time making the point that capitalism without inflation was no better than capitalism with inflation. Once again, the important thing was the political conclusion: that inflation was not caused by excessive wage increases but by government action to tinker with capitalism and that therefore workers would be misguided to soft-peddle the industrial struggle and agree to wage restraint – as often urged by governments of the period, especially Labour ones.

Finally, by the way, the answer – for any reader thinking of joining us and becoming a Socialist Party speaker – is that peasants do not create surplus value.

ADAM BUICK

Manchester

Monday 28 June, 8pm

**'The Socialist Party
changing the world'**

**Hare and Hounds,
Shudehill, City Centre**

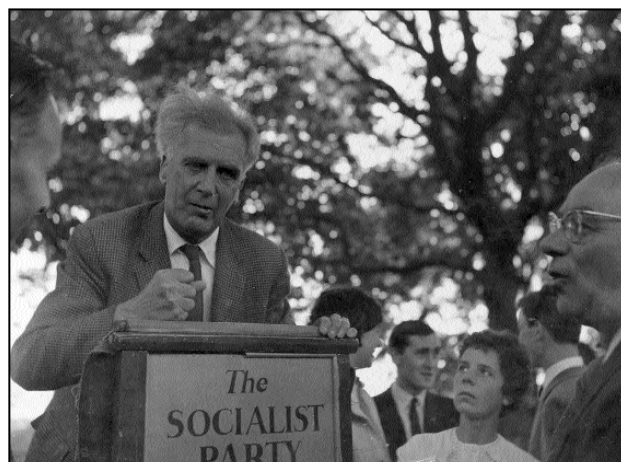
All welcome.

On the stump

A short history of SPGB outdoor speaking

When the name of the Socialist Party is mentioned something that springs to mind for many is outdoor public speaking. For much of its political life the SPGB has relied on outdoor meetings for a key part of its propaganda against the capitalist system, these acting as crucial aids to recruitment alongside the *Socialist Standard*, leaflets, pamphlets, indoor meetings and debates. Indeed, the proportion of Party members citing outdoor meetings as the means by which they first came into contact with the Party was significant until the 1950s when this form of propaganda went into something of a decline.

During the first few years of the Party's existence propaganda was mostly indoor, outside speaking only being undertaken in the summer months. In these early years the Party was almost entirely confined to London and its environs, with only Manchester in the provinces holding regular meetings, and from early 1908 a year-round London outdoor rota (the "Lecture List") was established. A range of stations were used across the capital increasing to no less than 22 sites on Sundays during the summer of 1914, before the outbreak of war. Street corners, especially outside pubs, were the favourite locations. Few of these sites were used exclusively by the Party and some had been in



Ambridge

for anything to entertain him, which is what the street meeting typically did. After his meal he might visit the local during the afternoon for some liquid refreshment. Afterwards speakers would again be on hand. The typical starting times of the street meeting were therefore 11.30 a.m. and 7.30 p.m. Meetings in public parks were usually held in the afternoon (3.30 or 4 pm), for a rather more 'refined' clientele taking their Sunday afternoon stroll.

The outdoor Party meeting was managed by the local branch whose 'turf' the site was on and the duty of host (meeting chairman) was highly competed for. In March, 1908, for example, a dispute arose over the 'ownership' of the Clapham Common meeting. Both Battersea and the short-lived Clapham branch claimed the meeting and tempers frayed so much that five Battersea members went so far as to hand in their resignations.

The big names of the era, most notably Jack Fitzgerald and Alex Anderson – whose main stamping grounds were Battersea and Tottenham respectively – featured prominently amongst the speakers but there was a wide range of others, many now forgotten (as with the membership generally there was a high degree of turnover during these years). It was by no means uncommon for a speaker to do two 'shifts', though three talks in one day would have been very rare even for Anderson.

While no record exists of what exactly was said at outdoor meetings during this era it can be safely assumed from accounts of the time that the speechmaking was heavy on rhetoric, working perhaps just as much on an emotional as an intellectual level, and was most likely lengthy and littered with stock quotations from key texts on political theory and Marxian economics. The real importance of such meetings lay not just in the speech itself but in the small groups of young workers that gathered afterwards to argue points raised. In this way outdoor speaking acted as a valuable spur to working class intellectual self-



Sammy Cash

continuous use since the 1880s.

Sunday's best

Sunday was the most important day for outdoor meetings, although on most other nights a Party speaker would be on the stump somewhere in the capital. The pre-war Sunday meeting was an integral part of working class life. Typically the father would be evicted from the house while the Sunday meal was prepared. Since the pubs were closed he drifted around the streets looking



Harry Young

development.

All this came to an end with the outbreak of the First World War. Within a short time outdoor meetings stopped as a result of harassment by pro-war 'jingoes'. The last Party listing published during this period (December 1914) sarcastically noted that "Owing to various circumstances, including the peculiarly British sense of fair play of our opponents, the Party's Lecture List is considerably curtailed this month." The following month outdoor meetings ceased altogether.

In the summer of 1919 regular outdoor meetings resumed in London, although with a much lower level of activity than before the war. In August of that year there were just six Sunday stations. Only four of these proved to be of any long-term use: Clapham Common, Finsbury Park, Victoria Park, and West Green Corner in Tottenham. During the mid-1920s these were the only locations in the capital operated by the Party but towards the end of the decade a modest revival occurred with a few pre-war venues, such as Prince of Wales, Harrow Road, and several new sites, such as Beresford Square, Woolwich, coming into use. It was not until after the 1929 crash though that more widespread outdoor activity returned. The early 1930s saw a multitude of sites brought into use, the most important being the Cock Hotel at East Ham, Whipps Cross at Leyton and Brockwell Park. A peak was reached during this period in July 1935 with twelve Sunday stations in use and a further four on a Saturday.

Interestingly, the latter part of the 1930s saw something of a decrease in regular outdoor meetings. To some extent this was due to increasing motor traffic, which rendered certain street locations unusable but was also due to a relative (though temporary) shortage of outdoor speakers, this in part resulting from the introduction of more stringent requirements for those wishing to take the platform on behalf of the Party (the introduction of the so-called 'New Speakers Test'). At this time the Party increasingly moved its attention to

propaganda in parks, the focus being on five open spaces: Brockwell Park, Clapham Common, Finsbury Park, Hyde Park and Victoria Park.

Of these Hyde Park was king. For the SPGB the rise of Hyde Park was rapid as although meetings had briefly been held here in pre-war days and in the late 1920s these had not always been a huge success, and so it was not until 1937 that Speakers' Corner again entered the Party's itinerary. Hyde Park became fertile ground and by the summer of 1939 three 'shifts' were operating on a Sunday.

Prolific

The most prolific speakers of this era were Bob Ambridge, the idiosyncratic Sammy Cash, Solomon Goldstein (remembered by those in the Party as a particularly able exponent of Marxian economics), Clifford Groves, Sid Rubin and the grizzled old Canadian orator Charlie Lestor – all of them hugely capable outdoor speakers, though Tony Turner, with his deep rasping voice and thunderous delivery, was the most remarkable of all. Turner's greatest moment was on the day war broke out, when in Hyde Park he took and held a crowd of ten thousand or more as he railed against the impending imperialist slaughter.

The outbreak of the Second World War – in contrast to 1914 – did not bring an end to outdoor propaganda, even if for a time it was severely curtailed as a result of the 'blackout' and the Blitz. Until mid-war the parks continued to be the main venues, though as the war progressed street meetings resumed their importance. A big explosion of meetings then came after the end of the war and by 1949 the SPGB was holding over a thousand outdoor meetings a year. During this period regular Sunday meetings in London were held at:

Beresford Square, Woolwich
 Clapham Common
 Cock Hotel, East Ham
 East Street, Walworth
 Finsbury Park
 Heron Court, Richmond
 Hyde Park



Steve Coleman

Islip Street, Kentish Town
Regents Park
Warren Street station
West Green Corner, Tottenham

A further eight sites, including the long-lived Jolly Butchers Hill venue, were used on Saturday with several others – such as Trebovir Road, Earl's Court – used on week-nights. The most productive was always Hyde Park: these meetings alone accounted for over 10 percent of the Party's new members during the 1940s. Most of the orators who learnt to ply their trade in the Party during the 1930s continued to be active, Turner remaining a star turn, along with Wilmott, Dawe and a band of other speakers who had joined in the years before the war and who brought with them a characteristic platform style distinguished by quick-wittedness, aggression and self-confidence.

An important innovation around this time was the popular weekday lunchtime meetings at Tower Hill, Finsbury Pavement and Lincoln's Inn Fields, with the latter being perhaps the most rewarding in terms of new members. Outdoor speaking was a notable feature of the election campaigns during the immediate post-war era too. For the 1945 Paddington election, meetings were held every night outside the Prince of Wales, Harrow Road, and most nights at a selection of venues throughout the area, supplementing the big indoor meetings at the Metropolitan Theatre.

But if the 1940s saw continuous and rapid expansion in the SPGB outdoor speaking scene, the 1950s saw just as speedy a decline, especially in London, though Glasgow and some other provincial venues bucked the trend for longer. One by one the old haunts were shut down until by the end of the decade just four Sunday venues remained in the capital: Hyde Park, East Street in Walworth, Beresford Square in Woolwich and Clapham Common. In addition two Saturday stations, Rushcroft Road in Brixton and Castle Street, Kingston, were retained.

These last few outdoor speaking venues took a surprising time to die off and it was not until 1967 that the SPGB held its last regular street meeting in London. This left occasional meetings at Earl's Court, the regular weekday City meetings – such as those at Tower Hill – which lasted until 1979, and Hyde Park, where Harry Young, Steve Coleman and others habitually mounted the Party platform on Sundays and which still sees regular if ad hoc use today.

Outside London

Outside the capital SPGB outdoor meetings have been a feature at a large number of venues in towns and cities across the UK – with a peak in the 30s and 40s. Glasgow was a city where the Party's outdoor speaking activities were significant from the 1920s onwards, and they continued to flourish much later than in London, especially in The Barrows, West Regent Street, Blythswood Street and Exchange Square. Glasgow branch

produced many fine outdoor orators but Alec Shaw was truly outstanding.

Other regular provincial venues included Edinburgh (where The Mound was a regular venue into the 1990s), Bristol, Birmingham, Nottingham, Sheffield, Southend and even Welwyn Garden City for a time. A number of cities in the Midlands and the North including Coventry and Bradford saw periodic SPGB outdoor speaking activity, with many others seeing flying visits from Party speakers trying to drum-up interest. In the North of England though, only Manchester proved to be really consistent territory for speakers on the outdoor platform, with Baritz, Maertens and others regularly holding forth at Stevenson Square and Platt Fields.

Looking back, the reasons for the sad decline of street-corner meetings are not hard to find. It is no surprise that the start of the fall-off in these in the early 1950s, especially in London, coincides almost exactly with the removal of petrol rationing and in one sense street meetings during and immediately after the Second World War were a revival of a form already under sentence of death: as has been indicated they had been noticeably curtailed in favour of both indoor meetings and meetings in parks even in the late 1930s.

The decline of park meetings though is perhaps more complex. Local authority pressure to 'tidy up' the open spaces may well have been one reason and the related decline of street meetings another, as people simply got out of the habit of listening to – and interacting with – outdoor orators on a daily or weekly basis. In terms of entertainment, competition from radio, and later television, was obviously another factor, as was – most crucially of all – the role of passive receiver of information foisted upon the working class by the entire apparatus of the modern mass media.

KEITH SCHOLEY

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A brush with the fascists

Fascism was dead. Officially, it was dead. It had happened in the war, when the fascist countries had been occupied and their leaders, like Hitler and Mussolini, were killed. True, Franco was still alive and so was Stalin who was not called a fascist but was possibly worse than all the others put together. So, although there was some confusion about who was a fascist and who was not, the fact was that it was dead. Oswald Mosley and his wife had been interned in England because they were fascists and after the exposure of the barbarities of Nazi Germany no one in their right mind would ever again describe themselves as a fascist. Now we could all settle down with a Labour government in a fascist-free world.

But the brave new post-war world had hardly blinked its way into life when uneasy memories were stirred by the arrival of some new political organisations, in different parts of London and the rest of the country, with a membership drawn from Mosley's British Union of Fascists. In the western part of London there was the Union for British Freedom, led by Victor Burgess (whose swarthy complexion had not, apparently, excluded him from a white supremacist organisation). In the East End of London there was the British League of Ex-Servicemen, led by Jeffrey Hamm (who had been interned in the Falkland Islands). In Derby there was the Sons of St. George, in Bristol the British Workers Party of National Unity, in Manchester the Imperial Defence League.

All these groups claimed they had sprung into existence in response to a spontaneous, irresistible demand by the British people but it did not take a deductive genius to work out that there was some common ground between them – and a disreputable past. They were all aggressively nationalistic, all stridently warning of the urgent need for a defence of something called British racial purity against the encroachment of lesser, polluting, devitalising breeds. If some heckler asked what the speaker had done in the war (an obsessively common question at outdoor meetings in those days) the response would be a long lament about how unnecessary the war had been and how much better off Germany and Britain would be if they had been allies against the alien hordes. This was then developed into an attack on World Jewry, who had conspired to bring the war about by setting the British people against their blood brothers and sisters in Germany. This argument (if it can be called that) was bolstered by the fascists grouped around the platform joyously chanting about “. . . Asiatic, Mongolian, atheistic, communism . . .” The air trembled with the threat of violence.

43 Group

One victim of the fascist technique of emphasising their point with violence was the playwright Harold Pinter, who was an active anti-fascist. In the *Observer* of 6 January 2002 Pinter related his experience of being beaten up by fascists at a street corner meeting in the late 1940s. His

article gave the impression that the fascists were alone in using violence as a tactic. However, he wrote that among the crowd there were “some Jews, led by ex-servicemen.” This description fits the 43 Group, whose aim in life was to disrupt, or if possible break up, fascist meetings and in the process deal out some physical punishment to the fascists. Membership of the 43 Group seemed to be reserved to those who met certain criteria. First, to be Jewish; second, to be an ex-serviceman; third, to be thick-set and powerful and have a face which looked as if it had been hewed out of a rock face. In places like Ridley Road in the East End violence at fascist meetings was routine. Mosley's son Nicholas remembered going to one in 1946 or 1947: a man on top of a van shouting like some revivalist prayer meeting; a man charging at the restraining policemen; a paper seller kicked and punched by a crowd: “It was all, once more, quite like a crowd at a present-day football match”.

Late in 1947 I had the opportunity of sampling some violence at a street corner meeting but not at the hands of the fascists. It happened one autumn evening near Trebovir Road, a side street off the Earl's Court Road. This was a good place for an outdoor meeting as there was unfailingly a large, vibrant crowd possessed of some lurid political theories. By a kind of informal arrangement various political parties – including the Socialist Party and the UBF – held meetings on different evenings. Our meetings there on a Thursday were thrilling and scary and mostly hugely satisfying. On Wednesday evenings, if we had nothing better to do, we might go along to listen to the hysterical ramblings of the UBF's Burgess and observe the 43 Group's frantic efforts to bring the whole thing to a chaotic end. We made a point of silently listening to it all; we knew that the more disorder there was the better the fascists' chance of recruiting members. (In the early 1960s the membership of the Union Movement went up to some 1,500, for some of which they credited the violence from their opponents).

Debate

One evening we left the UBF meeting early and mooched along the Earls Court Road looking for a coffee. We soon became aware that we were being followed and when we turned round we saw there a bunch of 43 Group members who were obviously not intent on wishing us a good evening. Like Pinter, we were cornered by a bunch of thugs whose pleasure it was to beat us up, except that they were not called fascists but operated on the assumption that anyone who did not heckle and scream at the fascists must be a fascist themselves and so deserved a bashing. We managed to avoid physical damage by gently informing our intending assailants that we were members of the Socialist Party, which was due to debate with the UBF at the Kensington Town Hall in a couple of weeks. Why didn't they come along – they might learn something about effective techniques of opposing



Tony Turner, West London, 1946

obnoxious ideas? It would have been a bit difficult, after that, for the 43 Groupers to attack us, although one or two were still clearly in favour of giving us a good hiding anyway. So we went for our coffee and spent a useful hour or so discussing the details of organising that debate.

And the debate was all we had promised them, on the pavement that evening. An audience of 650 crammed into the biggest meeting hall at the Kensington Town Hall, with another 200 or so turned away outside. The UBF had suggested that they supply some stewards to keep out "undesirables" but naturally we declined their offer of "help" and told them that all meetings of the Socialist Party were open to all members of the working class. Even fascists were welcome – they might learn something about socialism and about the benefits of a democratic meeting. We did not expect any trouble, although the 43 Group were there in force; they seemed to get all the excitement they wanted in the ruthless shredding of the UBF case by the socialist speaker. Raven Thompson, an ex-communist, represented the UBF (although he was not actually a member of it); he had the reputation of a fascist intellectual and in the BUF he had been one of Mosley's right hand men. He can be seen in a photograph, taken before political uniforms were banned, strutting behind Mosley reviewing a Blackshirt parade, looking ridiculous in his black uniform with his cap at a rakish angle as if it had been knocked sideways.

The Alternative

We could not claim that it was as a consequence of their verbal mauling in the debate but soon afterwards there was a perceptible change in the fascists' style of propaganda. A note of triumphant promise crept into their relentless harangues about the insidious influence of world Jewry. Have hope, they advised us: *The Alternative* is on the way. By that time anyone who took any interest in them knew that *The Alternative* was a book by Mosley, his manifesto which was supposed to carry the fascists into resplendent power. For some reason the book was greeted in some quarters as a serious contribution to political thought when it was no more than another attempt to unravel – or in this case to batter into shape – the chaos of capitalism. Mosley declared that fascism was dead – outdated, lost in the ashes of the war. The way forward now was a union in which Europe would become a nation, using (he did not say "exploiting") Africa as if it were its estate in trusteeship "on behalf of white civilization and not on behalf of a nominal stability of Barbarism".

Africa would provide the raw materials for a Euro-Africa closed economic system. But to operate this vast estate without the atrocities and repressions imposed in the past it would be necessary for a new type of man – a

Thought Deed Man – to evolve. This would happen through “breeding, selection and environment” supplemented by training. This crackpot idea was presented in impenetrably pompous verbiage about “the union of intellect and will . . . we must give robustness to the intellect and reflection to the will . . .The future is with the Thought Deed Man because, without him, the future will not be. He is the hope of the peoples of the world”. It did not take a particularly cynical mind to unravel the fact that the person Mosley had in mind as the world’s first Thought Deed Man, all intellect and will and hope, was himself.

Union Movement

In 1948 the various fascist movements dissolved themselves into the Union Movement and launched what they fictionalised as a spontaneous drive to persuade a modest Mosley to emerge from retirement and lead the nation to glory. After a predictable show of reluctance he began eagerly speaking at Union Movement meetings and parades and demonstrations. In the early 1950s the first immigrants arrived from the West Indies and Asia, sucked over by British industries keen to undermine working class bargaining power in the days of ‘full employment’. The immigrants, easy fodder for racist paranoia, overtook the Jews as targets for fascist mythologising and invective. Mosley’s son Nicholas remembers him speaking in the street from the top of a van, roaring about black gangs keeping teenage white English girls prisoner in attics where they were repeatedly raped. After satisfying their animalistic sexual appetites black men were supposed to prefer to dine on tinned pet food; a Mosley supporter was actually embarrassed to hear him tell another meeting that “Lassie (a popular dog food at the time) is for dogs, Kit-E-Kat is for wogs”.

Presumably convinced that this kind of mindless abuse would be popular enough to register in votes, Mosley stood for North Kensington in the 1959 general election. He claimed – another myth – that in doing this he was yielding to the irresistible demands of the people there when it was obvious that he was intent on exploiting the passions aroused in the previous year’s race riots in Notting Hill. Encouraged by his canvassers coming in night after night with stories about a massive upsurge of support for him, Mosley assumed he had victory in the bag and his supporters fantasised about the Union Movement sweeping the country. It was not quite like that when the votes were counted because Mosley, with just 2,821 out of a total of 39,912, was bottom of the poll and lost his deposit. It was, he said later, the biggest shock of his life and after the count, instead of rallying his supporters with a defiant, inspiring speech he went quickly to his car and was whisked away into the night. In 1966 he stood again, for Shoreditch, where the result was even worse for him; he polled 1,600 votes – 4.6 per cent of the total. After that he lost interest in being the Thought Deed Man, the implacable struggler against a powerful enemy. He withdrew from politics, to live in a succession of opulent houses, ending his days in a Paris mansion where he died in 1980.

BNP

Of all the words in the lexicon of politics fascism is among the most ill-defined and inappropriately used. If it has any meaning it is in the supremely escapist notion that there is a quick-fix remedy for capitalism’s shortcomings. It is also a nasty fix – the idea that political democracy is a feeble, useless way of running affairs and instead we should surrender to the dictates of strong men – the Führer, Il Duce, the Thought Deed Man. Parallel to that is the myth of national or racial supremacy, in whose baleful name so many atrocities and so much repression have been committed. If fascism is anything it is the very stuff of disillusionment, the response of workers who have tried other parties and other methods of running capitalism and have decided that, as each of them have failed, it is the democratic process which is at fault. That is what happened in post-1918 Germany and it is no coincidence that at present, with the Blair government exposed in all its helpless cynicism and the other parties promising nothing better, the BNP are winning council seats in places like Burnley and Kirklees. To complicate the lexicology further, the professed opponents of fascism are very often indistinguishable from the fascists themselves. If we hadn’t known it before then, that fact would have been brought home to us, that wintry evening on the pavement in the Earl’s Court Road.

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Freethinking logic

The Times of 12 November 1977 carried an interview with the op artist Peter Sedgley in which he stated that he was "formerly a member of the wholly unmilitant Socialist Party of Great Britain". We asked him if he would like to contribute something to this issue on why he joined the SPGB and his attitude to it now.

I was born in 1930 in Peckham, South London, son of Frank Sedgley and Violet, maiden name Dickey. Frank served in France in World War One and on demobilisation became trained as an electrical engineer in Southern Railway. I grew up with three elder brothers. My early years were very unremarkable leading up to the Second World War but quite a happy childhood living in stable working-class circumstances. The only political knowledge I had at that time was limited to the fact that my father paid his union subscriptions regularly every week to a man who came to collect them.

My class-consciousness was slowly developed in the war observing how accessibility to food, goods and comforts varied with different sections of the community, privileges that seemed to be arbitrarily granted. The war increased this distinction where money and the black market flourished and benefited a privileged few in the community. Bombs were generally targeted on manufacturing and industrial plants where the density of the working population was much higher than in the rural areas.

I had a Christian upbringing in the broadest sense and learned the basic ethics of Christianity at home and in school. Our family were not regular churchgoers, which seemed to be the preoccupation of the slightly better off people. I did however join the Boy Scouts, which was associated with the local Church. My mother spoke more about the ethics of living and, during the war, since she had three sons in the military, took comfort in associating with a spiritualists group who claimed to converse with the "other world" as they put it.

Religion, philosophy, sex and politics are usually subjects that are raised in young people's minds with a basic curiosity of what life is about and how one should orientate oneself to the conditions in which we live. So it was in my case. It wasn't until after completing my military service in Egypt that I began thinking that there must be a logical relationship between philosophy and religion and politics, a sort of scientific view that would satisfy our quest for knowledge. For example where we came from and what progress can we expect to experience as we continue to follow our fate as humans.

In 1954, I was working as an architectural assistant in Theobalds Road and lunchtimes were spent wandering in the charismatic quarter of the Inns of

London, Fleet Street, Leather Lane, etc. It was here in Lincolns Inn Fields that I had my first experience of the Socialist Party of Great Britain and it was from their platform that new ideas began to invigorate my thirst for knowledge. A revelation in freethinking and analytical logic. I became a regular visitor to the platform and whenever I had an opportunity to hear the message and the teaching I would be present. One political orator that stands out in my mind was Tony Turner whose wit and sharp repertory was an inspiration.

I am by nature fairly shy but on one occasion I plucked up enough courage to ask Turner more about the Party and its constitution. He invited me to go along to Clapham High Street on one of the meeting nights and introduce myself. That I decided to do and so transpired my first meeting at Clapham High Street. I had learnt that the Party was generally agnostic or atheistic and knew sufficient about the subject to argue the point. I was interested to join the party and as a result was required to answer some informal questions in the manner of a test as a novice.

There were usual questions of my role in society as a wage slave and to whether I saw the contradictions in the society between those who work for a living but own nothing and those who possess the means by which the former are obliged to work. There were no problems for me here. Then came the burning question of whether I believed in God.

I had at one time believed in the existence of god, that is until I began to question the evidence for such a belief. Already the answer is in the belief. What does God mean? Until one has a definitive description of it there is no way to measure this concept against our experience or to know whether God is likely to exist. Without it I could not logically declare my acceptance of such a concept as objective reality. The question surely should be whether I believe in god as an equation similar to that of the square root of minus one. An operator intended to act as a catalyst.

I counted myself as an agnostic, the 'not-knower', the unbeliever, a principle which in general most people hold in many aspects of life applying caution until a principle is tried and found to function correctly and dependably. This was seen as a denial of the apriori conditions of atheism (not an easy option with life after death). One cannot apply the same tests. One unforeseen ally to my cause came in the form of an ageing gentleman who seemed to be a member of the Committee on the podium, who, I discovered later, was one of the members of the early Party. 'Blind Mac', I think his real name was McLaughlin. He interjected against the assertions held against me.

Discussions in the Party were septic with marvellous debate some with so-called fellow

travellers, CP members, anarchist group and the like. Always the Party members seemed to hold the ground on the Marxist dialectic. During this time my wife and I made some very good friends in the Party, friends whom we entertained at home, that is prior to being kicked out from our apartment by the landlords. We banded together for a short time to ground a co-operative of artists intent on developing design and construction at its grassroots level. It survived for a short unparalleled six months in all. We were definitely misfits in the society searching for a new identity. Memorable, humane but sometimes sad times, being in the shadow of a nuclear threat.

And then came the rise of CND which began to take precedence over many political and ethical movements. Taking part in the Aldermaston march, the first of what one may call citizens' initiative in Britain, heralded the awakening of the population to the potential of personal political activation as a deviation from our passive role and what I saw as the apathy of Party members. I suppose this was a parting of the way for me with the SPGB.

Here I recall an ironical turn of fate. It came about that I was at one time required to apply for work as architectural assistant at the Atomic Research Establishment at Aldermaston. I reluctantly went for an interview with the Chief Architect who accepted me for the post subject to security clearance by the British and US authorities. I explained to him that I was a Marxist and a member of the SPGB and had been awarded a Discharge with Ignominy from the RAF, and I was therefore unlikely to pass their scrutiny. He was undeterred, and 3 months later I received confirmation that I had got the job including back pay. I was disappointed at the news and refused the job anyway. Nothing dangerous about the SPGB I discovered. Socialist Party of Good Boys, it had been said.

The image the Party propagates is that socialism will be capitalism with the depletion of all the unpleasant features it contains. The manifestos proposing classless society, the abolition of cash nexus, to each and from each, sexual freedom, withering away of the state, all wonderful Utopia ideas worthy of any Hollywood Oscar for a science fiction adventure. But its mission is driven in negative terms. The reality for most people of the working-class is the struggle to get and maintain a roof over one's head so that they had a reasonable chance of surviving in a hostile environment. The time when work will be held as a privilege is a long way off.

The SPGB was, and I imagine still is, the keeper of the flame of Marxist purity. Quite right, but as Joan Lestor once said, this is an elitist attitude which refuses to take part in the reforms of capitalism because, as we say, it helps capitalism to survive and makes it more acceptable. If the Party aims will only be fulfilled when the conditions are right for the establishment of socialism it will by that time be redundant since its justification will no longer exist. We are not even saving

the branch on which we are sitting. We suppose that somehow, somebody else will be doing that for us.

The proclamation that capitalism and the contradictions it precipitates will give rise to the circumstances for a socialist order has yet to be explained. Are they perhaps the contradictions which capitalism satisfactorily solves for itself? Or would the contradictions that might destroy capitalism therefore leave a vacuum for socialism to fill. My feeling is that the metaphor "in the womb of the old society are the seeds of its own destruction" is part of the perennial philosophy and that socialism arises out of the sophistication of a capitalist society. Marx said that with understanding we may lessen the birth pains. Where and what are those birth pangs that Marx referred to, are we as socialists able to identify them? If so, how can we help to alleviate the pain?

Consider for instance the change in attitude towards money. Credit and club cards, hire purchase, internet banking and purchasing, all introducing anonymity into the handling of money. This change in attitude towards the cash nexus and the nullity of money has been encouraged to avoid robbery or to make rapid money transactions, aiding commerce and facilitating banking. This tends to make ready cash unnecessary, changing the relationship of the individual to money and engendering a new concept for the public where money is now being considered in an abstract way (from each, to each?). It is in facts such as these where I perceive a metamorphosis in western capitalism/materialism. A reflection on the phrase "the administration of things".

We must review what features in capitalist society might be maintained or preserved in a socialist society, continue the analytical approach of Marx in relation to the reformed ideas of capitalist society that are worthy of adoption. The formation of a 'Marxist Think Tank' with a view to designing, as it were, a blueprint working policy for a socialist society and pointing to developments and changes in attitudes of a contemporary public for the kind of world we would elect to live in.

And, should we as socialists make prognosis on how global capitalism might develop into an international matrix of socialism that at present appears as Utopia, with ethical but non-moralistic conditions, new behaviour and codes of practice, accepting the need for a revision of taboos and relinquishing the old codes, and propagating the notion of the depersonalisation of property? These and many other factors led me to assess that my contribution to live politics is best served in a personal attempt to behave in accordance with my social ideas and conscience and in relation to this future human condition. A condition towards which I was attracted through my good fortune to meet with the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

PETER SEDGLEY

Northern Ireland: Our first election campaign

It was the early Sixties. Things were looking good in Northern Ireland. The province was as near to an economic boom as it ever gets; there had not been any serious sectarian rioting since 1935 and an IRA campaign that had commenced on the Border in 1956 was petering to an inglorious end with a statement from that organisation admitting the lack of support it had received from the Catholic nationalists of the north.

The World Socialist Party of Ireland had offices at Donegall Street in Belfast. There we spent a few late nights debating whether or not we should embark on our first electoral campaign. Money was an important consideration: £25 deposit – which, of course, we expected to lose; election addresses, 10,000 with the equivalent of 4 pages in each, around £65; posters, say, £35. The estimates were a headache for a small group. We probably needed over £200. And then there was the work: delivering the Election address, putting up the posters, holding two or three open air meetings every night for some sixteen nights.

There was the big consideration, too. The main core of our small membership lived in the widespread Belfast 15 area which constituted the constituency of Duncairn. It was the only constituency we were in a position to contest. Traditionally, it was a fiercely loyalist area, revered by Unionists because it was the power base of Lord Carson who led the fight against Irish Home Rule with an illegal army (the UVF) pledged to make war if necessary on Britain in order to stay British.

On the credit side there were all those meetings, those posters, the very comprehensive Election Address. Had to be worth it. We sat at our map of the constituency, marking out the sites for our meetings. Nowhere near pubs on Saturday evenings. First meeting of each evening at the hot spots, last meetings in the posher places where bigotry, like family skeletons, is usually well concealed.

The Loyalists would associate us with the Republicans because Republicans often showed their ignorance of socialism by claiming to be socialists. That could be dodgy. There were two small Catholic enclaves in the constituency and there would not be any Catholic candidate. The danger here was twofold: the priests might

speak out about “atheistic communists” or we might earn support because the Catholics, like the Protestants, might associate us with Republicanism.

On the first evening of our campaign we left our offices, which were marginally outside the constituency. We had a minibus, festooned with posters and with the single speaker of our crackling public address system affixed to the top. Our first meeting was to be at Adam Street, in a hard-line loyalist area, but to get there we had to pass through part of the Dock constituency, a tough nationalist area represented by Mr Gerry Fitt (now Lord Something-or-Other) where a mob attacked our van in the mistaken belief that we were bent on frustrating Mr Fitt’s anxious political ambitions.

The pitch we had selected at Adam Street was at a corner outside a Brethren Mission Hall. But there was a surprise for us there: the authorities had an audience-in-waiting for us. There was an open backed lorry (they were called “tenders”) fitted to accommodate fourteen or fifteen armed policemen, as well as two police cars and a cop motorcyclist.

Hardly had our meeting started when an irate ‘Brethren’ came out of the hall and shouted up to the speaker about the noise of our loudspeaker. His aggressive manner gave the distinct impression that he’d prefer a ruction to an apology, indeed, he seemed nonplussed when our speaker apologised, made a reference to a clap of thunder and agreed to move our vehicle further down the street. People stood at their doors, obviously not best pleased but there was no active hostility and, when we dealt with the single question that was put to us, about “communism” in Russia, there was even a mild flurry of interest.

After our last meeting, we were packing up to start distributing our Election Address. As we were removing our banners from the vehicle, the officer in charge of the police approached to confirm that the meetings were finished for that evening. Laughingly, he referred to the incident at the Mission Hall and then told us that, within his experience of Northern Ireland elections, our behaviour was unique. We seemed, he thought, anxious to



avoid trouble. We emphasised our educational role – and mentioned the integrity of our skulls.

Our revolutionary fervour might have been cooled the following evening for the armed force of the Crown was reduced to a single cop on a motorcycle. In the light of subsequent events, it would be wrong to mention this cop's name, suffice to say that he seemed at pains to remain aloof and unfriendly towards us.

On the third or fourth evening of our campaign, we held a meeting in a housing estate called Mount Vernon – now a hotbed of militant loyalist paramilitarism where a dog with a Catholic name could become seriously dead. Even back in those more peaceful times, we were somewhat apprehensive, strategically planning our meeting place at a spot from which escape could most easily be facilitated.

In the event, we had no trouble. A few people came out of their houses and flats to listen and, when we came to questions, the meeting lapsed into a question and answer session between one man and our speaker. None of us read any significance into the fact that the persistent questioner was frequently exchanging words with the motorcycle cop who had a one hundred per cent enforced attendance record at all our previous election meetings.

That evening, after we had concluded the last of our meetings, the cop approached one of our members and asked him if we had any literature additional to our Election Address. Whether by virtue of his personality or the nature of his job, the policeman seemed a man of few words but he became quite animated as he told us that he and his wife had discussed the contents of our Election Address the previous night. He didn't think we would ever get it – Socialism, that is – but, "Jasus! wouldn't it be great if we did!"

"It was me, you know, who was getting that fella to ask the questions at Mount Vernon", he instructed us. "You understand that I daren't openly . . ." Indeed, we understood.

After that we had a very friendly cop accompanying us each evening. He wasn't an especially garrulous individual but he did talk occasionally and seemed to include himself in our activities when he said "we" – he even got to appreciate our shared sense of raucous humour.

There were three other candidates in the field, representing the Unionist Party, the Labour Party and a Paisley sponsored 'Protestant Action' candidate. The counting of votes took place in the magnificence of Belfast City Hall. Worth recording were the words of the Labour candidate, a decent man called Bob Stewart. He enquired about how we thought we "had done" and when we said we had no expectations of retrieving our deposit, he said, "I dunno; your Election Address was the finest piece of socialist documentation I have ever read". When asked why he had stood in public opposition to us he opined that "I don't think it's your time yet". Not too clever perhaps but, as we said, a decent man.

Then there was the highpoint of the evening: we got 824 votes and saved our deposit. We exited the august portals of the City Hall as though we were walking on air

– wondering what it would be like after *that* first fateful election.

But there was another surprise for us. As we approached our van, illegally parked in May Street, there was a motorcycle cop in attendance. "Well . . .?" It had nothing to do with parking and the cop was well off his beat. He was genuinely interested in how our vote had gone and he told us that our total included the votes of himself and his wife.

Sometime later, one of our members had taken his kids to a public park on a Sunday morning. There were very few people about and, of course, in Belfast at that time Authority deemed that their remorseless God would be gravely offended by children playing on Sunday so officialdom locked the swings in the playground. But religious ingenuity had not devised a means of locking the slides so the few children there were presented with an occasion for sin.

Anyway, the motorcycle cop, now in mufti, arrived with his two children and while the kids sinned together on the unapproved slides, their fathers talked. He'd been a cop for seventeen years . . . life was fashioned around the job, mortgage etc. had misgivings now but what could he do? Our member nodded sympathetically.

In the afterwards, some of us saw him from time to time; he remained a traffic cop until the early Seventies when he was shot dead by an IRA 'freedom fighter' who, presumably, had an aversion to traffic cops.

By then, of course, freedom fighting had created so much inter-community division and bitterness in Northern Ireland that there was no place within working class areas open to consideration of ideas outside the foul patterns of religious and political sectarianism.

RICHARD MONTAGUE

The Socialist Party has branches and groups in various cities and towns. For full details, write to:
52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN

The Socialist Party of Great Britain

The next Executive Committee meeting will be on Saturday 5th June at 2pm at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee at:

The Socialist Party,
52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN
Tel: 020 7622 3811
Email: spgb@worldsocialism.org
Website: www.worldsocialism.org/spgb

Smash Cash

(Article by a then Socialist Party member that was published in 1968 in issue 17 of the sixties counter-culture magazine OZ.)

400BC: Hey all you thirsty people, though you've got no money, come to the water. Buy corn without money and eat. Buy wine without money and milk without price. (Isaiah).

1652: There shall be no buying and selling . . . If any man or family want grain or other provisions, they may go to the storehouse and fetch without money. (Gerrard Winstantley).

1968: The Abolition of Money. The abolition of pay housing, pay media, pay transportation, pay food, pay education, pay clothing, pay medical help and pay toilets. A society which works towards and actively promotes the concept of "full unemployment" . . . (Yippie election leaflet).

Abolition of Money! Down through the ages this wild and visionary slogan has been whispered by a subversive few. Ever since human beings discovered cash, they have hated it and tried to rid themselves of it – whilst their own actions have kept it alive. In this respect, money is like syphilis.

Today the whisper has become a shout – though still the shout of a tiny minority. Tomorrow it will be the roar of the crowd, the major topic of discussion in every pub and coffee house, factory and office.

The abolition of money is an ancient dream, the most radical demand of every social revolution for centuries past. We must not suppose that it is therefore destined to remain a Utopia, that the wheel will simply turn full circle once more. Today there is an entirely new element in the situation: Plenty.

All previous societies have been rationed societies, based on scarcity of food, clothing and shelter. The modern world is also a society of scarcity, but with a difference. Today's shortages are unnecessary; today's scarcity is artificial. More than that: scarcity achieved at the expense of strenuous effort, ingenious organization and the most sophisticated planning.

The world is haunted by a spectre – the spectre of Abundance. Only by planned waste and destruction on a colossal scale can the terrifying threat of Plenty be averted.

Money means rationing. It is only useful when there are shortages to be rationed. No one can buy or sell air: it's free because there is plenty of it around. Food, clothing, shelter and entertainment should be free as air. But the means of rationing scarcity themselves keep the scarcity in existence. The only excuse for money is that there is not enough wealth to go round – but it is the money system which makes sure there cannot be enough to go round. By abolishing money we create the conditions where money is unnecessary.

If we made a list of all those occupations which would be unnecessary in a Moneyless World, jobs people now

have to do which are entirely useless from a human point of view, we might begin as follows: Customs officer, Security guard, Locksmith, Wages clerk, Tax assessor, Advertising man, Stockbroker, Insurance agent, Ticket puncher, Salesman, Accountant, Slot machine emptier, Industrial spy, Bank manager, before we realized the magnitude of what was involved. And these are merely the jobs which are wholly and utterly useless. Nearly all occupations involve something to do with costing or selling. Now we should see that the phrase "Abolition of Money" is just shorthand for immense, sweeping, root and branch changes in society. The abolition of money means the abolition of wages and profits, nations and frontiers, armies and prisons. It means that all work will be entirely voluntary.

Of course, the itemizing of those jobs which are financial does not end the catalogue of waste. Apart from astronomical sums spent on the Space Race, and the well-known scandal of huge arms production, we have to realise that all production is carried on purely for profit. The profit motive often runs completely counter to human need. 'Built-in obsolescence' (planned shoddiness), the restrictive effects of the patents system, the waste of effort through duplication of activities by competing firms or nations – these are just a few of the ways in which profits cause waste.

What this amounts to is that ninety per cent (a conservative estimate) of effort expended by human beings today is entirely pointless, does not the slightest bit of good to anybody. So it is quite ridiculous to talk about "how to make sure people work if they're not paid for it". If less than ten per cent of the population worked, and the other ninety per cent stayed at home watching telly, we'd be no worse off than we are now.

But there would be no need for them to watch telly all the time, because without the profit system work could be made enjoyable. Playing tennis, writing poems or climbing mountains are not essentially any more enjoyable than building houses, growing food or programming computers. The only reason we think of some things as 'leisure' and others as 'work' is because we get used to doing some things because we want to and others because we have to. Prostitutes despise love. We are all prostitutes. In a Moneyless World work would be recreation and art. That work which is unavoidably unhealthy or unpleasant, such as coalmining, would be automated immediately. Needless to say, the only reason these things aren't done by machines at present is because it is considered more important to lower the costs of the employer than to lower the unhappiness of his slaves.

The money system is obsolete and antihuman. So what should we do about it? In years to come, with the increasing education and increasing misery of modern life, together with growing plenty, we can expect the Abolition of Money to be treated more and more as a serious issue, to be inserted into more and more heads. The great mass of individuals will first ridicule, then dare to imagine

(Fantasy is the first act of rebellion – Freud), then overthrow.

In the meantime, as well as propagating the notion of a Moneyless World, those of us who see its necessity have a responsibility to sort our own ideas out, in order that we may present an intelligible and principled case. We must stop thinking of the Moneyless World as an 'ultimate aim' with no effect upon our actions now. We must realise that the Abolition of Money is THE immediate demand. A practical proposition and an urgent necessity – not something to be vaguely 'worked towards'.

Unfortunately those who want the Moneyless World frequently wade in a mire of mystification. Above all it is necessary to understand the workings of this society, capitalist society (Moscow, Washington and Peking are all in the same boat) if we are to know how to destroy it.

For example there is a commonly held view that Automation is going to settle all our worries, that money will expire automatically as part of a "natural process of evolution". This is quite wrong. As pointed out above, this society only automates to increase profits and for no other reason. Employers even take machines out and put workers back in – if they find that labour-power is cheaper. Any gain from automation these days is more than cancelled out by the waste explosion. Do not imagine that the slight increases in living standards of the last twenty years are the beginning of a smooth transition to Abundance. Another huge world slump is approaching.

A different illusion, also popular, is that cash can be abolished by example, by opening giveaway shops or by starting small moneyless communities which are parasitical upon the main body of society. These experiments accomplish little. Those people, for instance, who open stores to give and receive books without payment, face a predictable result: a large stock of lousy books.

These projects stem partly from a belief that we need to prove something. Relax. We don't need to prove anything. The defenders of this insane society, it is they who stand accused, they who have to supply the arguments – arguments for poverty and enslavement in a world of Plethora!

All theoretical constructions which relate to wages, prices, profits and taxes are ghosts from the past, as absurdly outdated as the quibbles about how many angels could dance on the point of a needle. 'Incomes policy' is irrelevant – we want the abolition of incomes. "Fighting crime" is irrelevant – we want the abolition of the law. 'Workers' control' is irrelevant – we want the abolition of 'workers'. 'Black Power' is irrelevant – we want the abolition of power over people. 'The national interest' is irrelevant—we want the abolition of nations.

And let no one raise the banal cry: what are you going to put in their place? As though we would say to a research scientist: "And when you've cured Cancer, what are you going to put in its place?"

Then there is the myth of the small-scale. We cannot go back to being peasants and we should not want to. Keeping several thousand million people alive on this planet necessitates railways, oil wells, steel mills. Only by intricate organization and large-scale productive techniques can we

maintain our Abundance. Do not be afraid of machines. It is not machines which enslave, but Capital, in whose service machines are employed. McLuhan represents the beginning of the New Consciousness of man-made artifacts. Computers are warm and cuddly creatures. We will have a beautiful time with them.

Many of the worst errors which retard the development of the New Consciousness, the Consciousness of Plenty, are to be found in Herbert Lomas' piece on "The Workless Society" in *International Times* 43. This at least has the merit that someone is putting forward a case for the removal of money in specific terms. Unfortunately, they are specific non-starters.

According to Herbert Lomas, a political party is to be formed which will take power and proceed as follows. Useless workers in industry will be gradually be laid off and paid for not working. The process will be extended until money can be abolished. In the meantime, those being paid for doing nothing will do what they like. To begin with many of them might play Bingo; eventually more and more would aim at higher things.

What is wrong with this projection? Many things, but chiefly two. First, it fails to take account of the systematic nature of society. Second, it assumes that present-day society exhibits a harmony of interests.

In the first place, Lomas says: "Why are these people working? They are not working for the sake of production, for the truth is that if they were removed production could be increased beyond measure". He concludes that they are working because of their attitudes, the attitudes of their employers, the attitudes of the rest of society. But the fact of the matter is that these workers are working for the sake of production – not the production of goods but the production of profits. The reason why things are "made with great ingenuity to wear out" is not because of the attitudes of the people involved. The management may think it's criminal but they are paid to optimize profits. If they produced razor blades to last for centuries, the firm would go broke. It is not the attitudes which are crucial, but economic interests. If a teetotaler owns shares in a brewery, it does not make booze less potent.

Which brings us to the second point. Today's world is a jungle of conflicting vested interests. The Abolition of Money will represent the liberation of slaves, yes – but also the dispossession of masters, i.e. the employing class. We cannot view the government as an impartial panel which looks after the best interests of everybody; it is an instrument used by one set of people to oppress another.

On one point Herbert Lomas is correct. The movement for the Abolition of Money must be political, because when we destroy money we destroy the basis of the power of our rulers. They are unlikely to take kindly to this, so we must organize politically to remove them.

For the moment though, what is needed is more discussion and more understanding. We must be confident that the movement will grow. We must think, argue, and think again – but never lose consciousness of the one, simple, astounding fact: Plenty is here. The Moneyless World is not an ultimate millennium. We need it now.

DAVID RAMSAY STEELE, OZ, 1968.

Socialism on one planet

The science fiction writer Ken MacLeod indicated that he had once voted for the Socialist Party. So we asked him why. The two books referred to at the end, in which he brings in the SPGB, are "The Stone Canal" and "The Cassini Division".

I had considered myself a socialist for a dozen years before I understood what socialism was, and why on earth anyone should possibly want it. Oddly enough, that wasn't for lack of opportunity. When I was a student in the early 1970s I took vacation work as a street-sweeper, and used to spend most of my lunchtimes in the reading room of the Greenock public library. My first encounter with Marxist ideas had come via the International Socialists (the SWP's more evolved ancestors) and my head was full of a notion of revolution and socialism that was much more excited about process – workers' councils, workers' control, general strike, insurrection – than product. Nothing quite so thrilling was on offer in that reading room, but *Tribune* and the *Morning Star* and the *Socialist Standard* were. For want of anything else I devoured them all.

When I read the *Socialist Standard*, however, all I could see was that it advocated a parliamentary road to socialism, and addressed itself to "the workers of this country" at that. Parliamentary socialism? You mean, like Labour? Socialism in one country? You mean, like the Communists? Nobody was there to tell me otherwise, and I didn't read enough to learn better. The Declaration of Principles struck me as some quaint, gaslit precursor of *The British Road to Socialism*.

This was a stupid mistake, but hey – I was a left-wing student. What do you expect? As some wag has said: "The experience of every country has shown that the left-wing intelligentsia, solely by its own efforts, can raise itself only to a vanguardist level of consciousness."

For me, the idea of a classless, moneyless, (etc-less) society was something for the far future, after we'd waded through centuries of workers' states and workers' control. These centuries didn't seem terribly attractive, but they were a sight better than the common ruin of the contending classes, so I reckoned we'd just have to thole it until the automation came on line.

Then, in the 1980s in another library, I came across a little book called *Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, edited by Rubel and Crump. At the time I (like the rest of the pack) was obsessed with 'market' socialism, so I wasn't hoping for much from it. Actually, it was like finding the map. Perhaps it was because I was now a wage-slave myself, and living in a



Rally for world socialism, Trafalgar Square, 1967

council flat, travelling to work on the Underground, working for London Electricity, and shopping at the Co-op – I knew very well that reforms could ameliorate, but not abolish, that condition. For the first time I could imagine it abolished, and what an emancipation that could be. At last I understood what the SPGB was on about. At last I understood what socialism was and why anyone would actually want it on its merits, and soon; instead of as something better than a nuclear war, and eventually.

Here is what I understood that case to be.

From space you can see no borders. We, and previous generations, have built up a productive capacity that is more than sufficient to feed, clothe, shelter, educate and amuse everyone on the planet. The only barrier to its use for that purpose is that it exists as capital. The only basis for its continuing existence as capital is our continuing acceptance of capitalist and state property rights. From below, at the sharp end, in the worker's-eye view, these look as obsolete and obscene as property rights in people. Without those rights, capital would just be machinery, that we all together already operate and improve upon every day, every minute, collectively and globally. The only way in which these rights can be permanently abolished is consciously, politically, collectively and globally, at one fell swoop. Not on the same day all over the world of course, but in the space of a few years, in one historical moment. And why not? Slavery and feudalism were in the end abolished, with a stroke of the pen followed if necessary by a stroke of the sword.

Why should we not think, then, of the abolition of

capitalism? We can't reform it out of existence. Long experience, as well as theory and common sense, tell us this. Neither 'socialist' governments nor 'communist' regimes have ever brought society a day nearer socialism or communism. There are many reasons why not, but the basic reason is simple. Production for exchange can't be gradually reformed into production directly for use. Nor, in a world where almost everything is produced as part of a global division of labour, can it be abolished locally in one community, or one country, or one continent. It's all or nothing.

Closely related to that reason is another. A society of conscious and voluntary co-operation can't be established unconsciously or unwillingly. It can't be imposed from above or from outside or from behind our backs. Many will agree, if pressed, that the world co-operative commonwealth can be thus established eventually, but not now. In the meantime, they want something else: a society called socialism which retains wages, price, and profit but keeps them in the hands of the state and the state, they hope, in the hands of the workers, which all too often means the hands of the workers' party, which all too often means in the hands of the correct leaders of the workers' party. They want that, or they want steps in that direction. The co-operative commonwealth itself is, they insist, for the distant future.

Why not now? We don't need to wait for capitalism to increase productive capacity to the point where the co-operative commonwealth is possible, because it's already done so, and it's already the greatest barrier to the use and expansion of the productive capacity that exists. Why then should we vote for reforming governments to manage it, or 'progressive' regimes to develop it further? Especially when these reforming governments and these 'progressive' regimes waste so

much of production, and so many of us, in war and slump.

We have to make up our minds, once and for all, that we want rid of this system, for good and all. Let those who want to keep it reform it and improve it and expand it. It's their job while it lasts. The job of those who want to end it is to give such people not a vote, not a gun, not a penny, not a person, not an inch, not an ounce of support. No political contender who is not a wage slavery abolitionist, nobody who advocates in word and deed anything less than, and anything other than, the speedy end of this system, and the consequent emancipation of the working class, deserves another minute of our time. To everyone who claims to want such an end eventually, but advocates something other or something less in the meantime, we can say we've lived already a long time in that meantime, and we're still no nearer.

All it would take to do away with this system and establish the world co-operative commonwealth is for most people in the world to agree to do it. It's no news that most people don't. The number who understand and want the commonwealth is tiny. The only revolutionary action worth the name is working to increase that number. Nothing more is needed, and nothing less will do.

So, yes, I've understood it. I've even voted for it, once. And I've put the SPGB, and the co-operative commonwealth, in a couple of books. So why am I not in the Socialist Party? One reason is that I don't entirely understand how non-market socialism could work. And while I agree that the Party's conception of socialism is the same as that of Marx and Engels, I can't really square its conception of how to get there with what seem to me their well-founded views on history and politics. But I wish it well.

KEN MacLEOD

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Long live the (electronic) revolution!

Socialists have always been aware that if we want to influence the ways in which people think and act we must be able to talk to them. Communication is inseparable from politics. For thousands of years this involved oratory and conversational skills. Even into the last decades of the twentieth century, members of the Socialist Party have been expected to try to develop the ability to deliver talks either to groups of fellow workers at indoor meetings and/or in the cities from outdoor platforms. But one of the reasons that we now find it more difficult to attract workers to our indoor meetings is the fact that they consider the idea old-fashioned. And there are so many modern counter-attractions, such as TV.

Admittedly, these were not the only means of communication we had. Printed matter (which had been used for propaganda effectively from the mid seventeenth century) including handbills, advertisements in newspapers and magazines, was most important for putting forward the detailed case for a socialist revolution, once the initial talking was finished. Publishing our own journal and pamphlets was considered essential by the founding members of the Party. It is still very important.

Mass communication

For the great majority of working class people in Britain, access to means of communication remained unchanged until the last decade of the twentieth century. They got their information, carefully edited, from the BBC and, latterly, the commercial broadcasters on radio and television; and they/we read slight variations in the constant support of capitalist values and social structures from daily, evening and Sunday papers.

Telephone communication was just as limited. Even in the late 70s and early 80s the few users of mobile phones needed to carry a heavy suitcase full of electronic equipment in order to communicate with a limited range of similar users, mainly corporate, without dependence upon telephone land lines. Monitoring all or any of these channels of communication was not only straightforward but fairly simple for governments uneasy or suspicious about what their subjects were talking about. The American listening stations in Britain at Goonhilly and Fylingdales were able to intercept and process all the messages both in Britain and on the Continent, to the great advantage of American military and business organisations.

The IT revolution

The switch to digital instead of analogue handling of signals, and the application of computing power to telecommunications constituted a technological revolution. The recording, processing and transmission of information was standardised and universalised, largely owing to the selfless generosity of many enthusiastic experts in the field who took no payment for their inventions. The micro-miniaturisation of circuits and transistors developed at an unprecedented rate, and is still continuing, although not quite so fast. This made not only personal and portable

computers possible and increasingly affordable, but it made mobile telephones as small and light as they are likely to become, if we want to continue to hold them in our hands.

For communication purposes computers have, in the main, linked into existing, landline, telephone services (although radio links are becoming popular). Mobile phones grew out of the popularity of walkie-talkie and citizen's band radio systems. Instead of needing the power of such radio transmitters and receivers, mobile phones were much more modest transceivers, depending upon a forest of aerials deployed across the land and connected to stations which routed and boosted signals to and from them, the whole lot being capable of connecting to the land-line telephone network as well. And this is the way in which mobile phones and computer mail systems are starting to interact.

Although there are many large areas of the world where there are still no mobile phone systems and infrastructures, these are being colonised steadily because such phones obviate the need for much more expensive land-lines in sparsely populated or undeveloped areas. Millions have therefore been sold throughout the world.

There is an essential difference for users between the mobile and the land-line telephone – a call to a mobile phone is a call to an individual person, rather than to a building or an organisation, and this alters the nature of the relationship or the type of message that is being sent. The facility to send brief text messages which wait to be accessed by the recipients has resulted in a snowstorm of texting in which individuals keep in contact at low expense, sometimes every few minutes. For organisational purposes, therefore, they are becoming invaluable. Protest demonstrations have been organised and co-ordinated with their aid, just as any two people are able to locate and find each other. On the other hand, advertisers have not been slow to recognise and employ this opportunity to send messages to hundreds or thousands of individuals.

The internet

In Britain and most other countries, communication by computer has been strongly encouraged by the decision of service providers to charge for messages to anywhere in the world at local call rates. Although email systems will transmit highly complex information such as colour pictures, which take a disproportionate amount of time, the bulk of email traffic is plain text. This is treated as a simple system of numbers (the ASCII code) and is therefore extremely fast and economical. Not only brief conversational messages but also whole books can be transferred from one computer to another. They can then be printed out, if necessary, and as many times as necessary. Moreover, such emails can be despatched to many addresses at once, as we have found and utilised in the World Socialist Movement. In consequence, we can now communicate with our comrades in Australasia or the Americas or Europe or Africa with virtually the same immediacy as we can with other socialists in Britain.

World-wide impact

Quick though socialists and many other organisations were to take advantage of the World Wide Web, industry and commerce were far quicker. Communication inside and between businesses has provided a boost sufficiently great to have helped spur growth and delay another recession. It has also opened up an entirely new field for advertising and the sale of information.

Among the many areas affected in companies' operations, one of the most significant has been the facility to use cheap overseas labour without needing to move the workers. In the Indian subcontinent, for example, an increasing amount of clerical and telephone answering work is being done by English-speaking workers accepting far lower wages than capital needs to pay in the USA or Britain.

Another example of a qualitative difference occurring because of the quantitative difference of speed of communication is that factories in China now produce tailor-made wrought iron (mild steel, these days) gates and fences and garden furniture, based on drawings and dimensions sent by email, and ship them to Britain for a fraction of the price they would cost to make here. Similar endeavours are being made by American firms to use labour in Mexico and South American countries rather than pay the higher domestic rates for the jobs. These and related developments are bringing increasing numbers of workers into a world working class, with English (American) as the lingua franca. This makes it possible for us not only to communicate with each other but to begin to organise together.

Towards democracy

One of the important facts about this burgeoning global electronic traffic is that no governmental or supra-governmental authority can prevent it or even regulate it to any considerable extent (as the struggle to prosecute paedophile rings indicates) without crippling legitimate commerce and information services. And the development of the World Wide Web means that when one electronic pathway is blocked another will be found for a message to get through. Even the eavesdropping efforts by the American government become helpless as the volume of mobile phone texting becomes a torrent of billions. Known organisations and known individuals can always be targeted of course, but the great majority of people's chatter is of no interest to those in power.

There is a great deal to learn in using electronic communication so that it serves the socialist movement's democratic methods and objective. As we have already learnt to our cost, it is easy for people to be abusive, tediously verbose, obscurely illiterate and seriously undemocratic with email. These faults, among others, at present vitiate the potential of the medium. But we are learning and this writer, for one, believes that it is essential that we do; and that we impress this upon all those workers who communicate with us. Oxford University would not have founded a Chair of Electronic Democracy if there were not a strong establishment belief that this is the medium of major communication and decision-making

for the future. For the socialist movement to be left out of it because we are a hundred years old would be to agree to die of old age. As governments faced with falling turnouts at elections by disillusioned voters realise, this offers their greatest hope of renewed political interest and participation.

Such developments would direct the attention of socialists towards the propagation of socialist ideas via the internet, where an increasing proportion of the world's thinking working class is going for its information and discussion.

As the numbers of participants grows greater for a socialist revolutionary change in the world's dominant social system, it will be possible to chart and display its increasing strength. It will be possible to set up a worldwide proliferation of sites and forums in local languages and dialects so that workers will be able to assemble physically, if they consider it safe, in their own geographical areas. Above all, it will be possible to have world-wide discussion of the nature of socialist society; the means of achieving it in different parts of the world; the assistance needed by some areas from others; and the steps needed to establish the new social order in different parts of the world, bearing in mind the legacy left to us by this destructive and increasingly paranoid social order we know as capitalism. Speed the day!

RON COOK

Centenary book

To mark the centenary of both the Socialist Party of Great Britain (June) and the *Socialist Standard* (September) we have brought out a 300-page book, *Socialism or your Money Back*, made up of articles from the *Socialist Standard* from 1904 to this year.

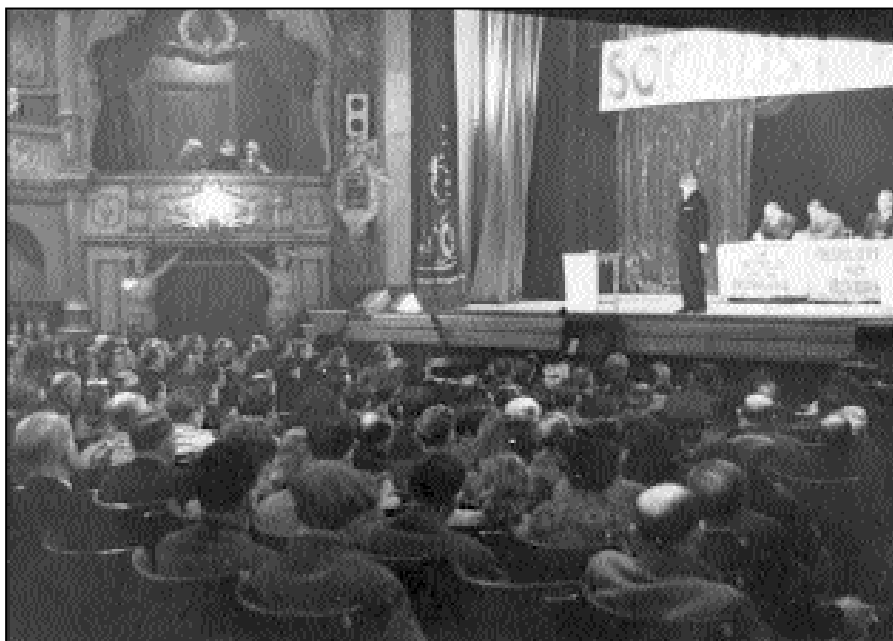
The seventy articles provide a running commentary from a socialist perspective on the key events of the last hundred years as they happened. The two world wars, the Russian Revolution, the General Strike and the rise of Hitler are covered, as well as the civil war in Spain, Hiroshima, the politics of pop, democracy and the silicon chip, and much else.

The book will not just be of interest to socialists but also to those wanting to study the political, economic and social history of the twentieth century.

The price is £9.50. Copies can be ordered (add £1.50 for postage and packing) from:
52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN (cheques payable to "The Socialist Party of Great Britain").

As others have seen us

"The Socialist Party of Great Britain, a young organisation and an offshoot from the Social Democratic Party, is spreading about London and challenging the older organisations in such districts as Battersea and Tottenham. The members are Marxians and revolutionaries, preaching the Class War. The catechumens of the party are put through a rigid course of training in the principles of their creed, which they must be prepared to defend at the risk of their liberty. What is most remarkable and disquieting about this dangerous organisation is the fact that the members are unquestionably higher-grade working-men of great intelligence, respectability, and energy. They are, as a whole, the best-informed Socialists in the country, and would make incomparable soldiers, or desperate barricadists. As revolutionaries they deserve no mercy: as men they command respect."
W. Lawler Wilson, *The Menace of Socialism*, 1909, p. 316.



"The split in the SDF was followed, two years later, by another. In 1905, a section of the members, chiefly in London, broke away under the leadership of Fitzgerald, and formed the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Equally with the SLP, this body denounced the compromising tactics of the SDF; but it drew a rather different moral. In its eyes, political action as practised by the other Socialist bodies was mere reformism, but it was also of the opinion that Trade Union action was doomed to futility as long as the capitalist system remained in being. Strictly revolutionary political action alone would help the workers and the only activity that was justifiable under existing conditions was the persistent education of the working class for its revolutionary task. As there were no candidates worth voting for, the slogan of the SPGB was 'Don't Vote!'"
GDH Cole, *Working Class Politics, 1832-1914*, 1941, p. 177.

"It is difficult to integrate the Socialist Party of Great Britain into any account of wider working-class politics because its policy of hostility to all other political groups, and rejection as an organisation of participation in any partial economic or social struggles, effectively excluded it from association with other tendencies. But no account would be complete without some reference to them.

Before the War, they were a substantial presence in the area. Their Tottenham Branch had over 100 members, and there were also effective branches in Islington and Hackney. The SPGB also had a very high proportion of the ablest open-air speakers, notably Alex Anderson of Tottenham, who by common consent was the best socialist orator of his day. The SPGB's principled Marxism had perhaps a wider influence than it would like to admit".

Ken Weller, *Don't be a Soldier! The Radical Anti-War Movement in North London 1914-1918*, 1985.

"The Russian debacle is rather appalling but quite explicable. Lenin and Trotsky appear to me to be of the SPGB type or the wilder types of the SDP."
Clement Attlee in a letter to his brother Tom, 20 March 1918 (quoted in *Clem Attlee. A Biography* by Francis Beckett, 2001).

"The Socialist Party of Great Britain . . . denounced the Russian Revolution as state-capitalist within hours of hearing of it".
David Widgery, *The Left in Britain 1956-1968*, 1976.

"Another pre-1914 organisation with influence on Socialist thought in Battersea, particularly in the building trade unions, was the Socialist Party of Great Britain. It was the Battersea branch of the SDF which had become the springboard for the attack on the Hyndman leadership that resulted in the SPGB being formed. From 1904-05 Sydney Hall in York Road became the centre of their activity and propaganda. It was from amongst the bricklayers that several powerful and erudite speakers and debaters came to the fore. The Irish bricklayer, Jack Fitzgerald, was one outstanding example, fearless in debate, he was so confident in his own party case that he would take on anyone, be they small fry or big cheese. His style as a debater was to treat his opponent, from whatever party – Tory, Liberal, Labour, ILP or Communist – as the exponent of the policy of their party. He invariably knew more about the programme and published material of his opponents' party than did his actual adversary. To get to grips, not with a brilliant speech but with the written word, was his method, the apt quotation to clinch an argument. If challenged, he would dive into his trunk of books to produce the evidence. His audience loved it. Undoubtedly 'Fitz' was the

star, but there were others too, bricklayers and impressive SPGBers (Sloan, Cadman, Foan and others). I believe each of them, in their day, taught their craft at the Ferndale School of Building, then sited in Brixton. Here, they pioneered or upheld extremely high standards of craftsmanship. Direct labour, too, was seen as upholding standards”.

Harry Wicks, *Keeping My Head: Memoirs of a British Bolshevik*, 1992.

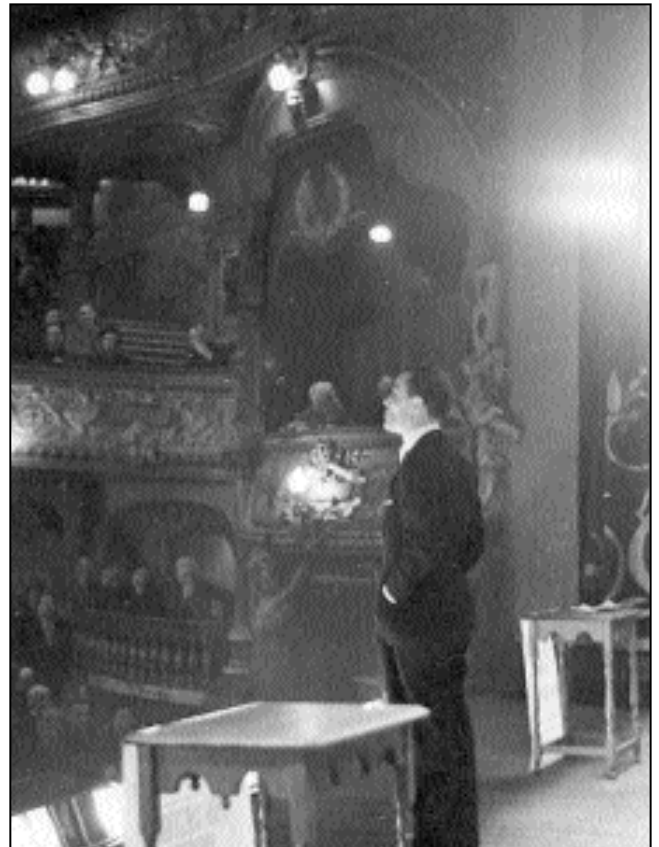
“The course of the SPGB is more interesting, for it maintained a more or less constant membership of two or three hundred throughout the inter-war years, the same number as belonged before the First World War. Like the SLP, the SPGB had split from the SDF at the turn of the century over the parent body’s reformism. Its membership was concentrated in London with a handful of branches in Manchester, Glasgow and a few other large conurbations. In both theory and practice the SPGB was an extreme manifestation of the pre-1917 Marxist tradition. Its function was to educate the workers in the intractability of capitalism and the hopelessness of all trade union action or reform: its medium was the street-corner pitch where speakers would harangue passers-by and sell the *Socialist Standard*. Since prospective members were examined for their knowledge of Marxism and ability to speak in public, and since they prided themselves on their ‘scientific socialism’, propagandists of the SPGB enjoyed a reputation as formidable Marxist purists.”

Stuart Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science, Marxism in Britain 1917-1933*, 1980.

“The 1922 general election saw a fierce political contest in North Battersea, where Saklatvala, the Indian Communist, was chosen, with national Labour Party approval, to be the Labour candidate . . . This brought my first election experience. Delivering leaflets, one day on the Burns estate, I chanced upon a friendly SPGBer I had met previously at the Marx class. He was short, somewhat bow-legged, always wore a bowler hat and sold the *Socialist Standard*. Maybe I was over-excited by the election, because in a kindly manner he set about deflating my high hopes. ‘You are wasting your time and energy young man,’ he said, ‘Socialism, not reforms, is what is necessary.’ To complete the shock, he told me that he intended to write across his ballot paper in the election one word: ‘Socialism’”.

Harry Wicks, *Keeping My Head: Memoirs of a British Bolshevik*, 1992.

“When I first began to question the CP line I still sold the *Daily Worker*, but at Marble Arch I came into contact with the Socialist Party of Great Britain, and a guy who was then the Secretary of the SPGB called [K]ohn. He gave me a terrible hammering one night on my ‘Leninism’, and I spent the whole night reading, and when I went back the following night he gave me a bigger hammering. For some months after that I used to attend SPGB meetings, and learned a great deal from the SPGB over the course of the next eight or nine months. But then I came across Trotsky’s pamphlet *What Next for Germany?* . . . ”



Jock Haston, future leader of the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party, talking about 1934 in *Against the Stream: A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain 1924-38* by Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, 1986.

“But it should be noted that Marx and Engels and Lenin did use the words Socialism and Communism interchangeably, at other times making a distinction between Communism as the highest stage of Socialism. For an able study on the use of the words at different times by Marx, Engels and Lenin see *The Socialist Standard*, August, 1936”.

CLR James, *World Revolution 1917-1936*, chapter 5, footnote 4, 1937.

“Of all the sights and sounds which attracted me on my first arrival to live in London in the mid-thirties, one combined operation left a lingering, individual spell. I naturally went to Hyde Park to hear the orators, the best of the many free entertainments on offer in the capital. I heard the purest milk of the world flowing, then as now, from the platform of the Socialist Party of Great Britain.” Michael Foot, *Debts of Honour*, 1980.

“Why Socialism? As Pandit Jauraharlal Nehru sees it. Hindustan Publishing Co., Ltd, Rajahmundry (Andhra), S. India. This pamphlet was evidently issued under the influence of the small body of Socialist sympathizers within the Indian Nationalist movement. We are by no means convinced that its contents give expression to the views of the Indian Nationalists, for the pamphlet consists of six articles reproduced from working class periodicals, four of which originally appeared in the *Western Socialist*. The two others

were taken from the *Socialist Call* (Chicago) and the *Socialist Standard* (London) ”.

Western Socialist, journal of the Socialist Party of Canada, March 1939.

“The Communist Party has NO dealings with murderers, liars, renegades, or assassins. The SPGB, which associates itself with followers of Trotsky, the friend of Hess, has always followed a policy which would mean disaster for the British working class. They have consistently poured vile slanders on Joseph Stalin and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, told filthy lies about the Red Army, the Soviet people and its leaders, gloated over the assassination of Kirov and other Soviet leaders, applauded the wrecking activities of Trotskyist saboteurs in the Soviet Union. They have worked to split the British working class, and are in short agents of Fascism in Great Britain. The CPGB refuses with disgust to deal with such renegades. We treat them as vipers, to be destroyed”.

(Letter from Secretary of the West Ham branch of the Communist Party, 23 February 1943, reproduced in *Socialist Standard*, May 1943).

“In 1905 another split took place in the SDF, when part of the membership this time mainly centred in London formed the Socialist Party of Great Britain, a body so sectarian that it adjoined both politics and trade union action, believing that socialism would come when everyone was converted. Fifty years later it was still a tiny sect, mainly concerned with echoing propaganda hostile to the Soviet Union”.

AL Morton and G Tate, *The British Labour Movement, 1770-1920*, 1956, p. 218).

“. . . those honest and genuine revolutionaries, the Socialist League and the Socialist Party of Great Britain, which broke away from the left of the Social Democratic Federation . . . ”

Herbert Morrison, Lord President of the Council and later Home Secretary in the post-war Labour government, in *Forward from Victory! Labour's Plan*, 1946.

“In the forties and fifties, Turner was the star turn of a cuddly little organisation grandly named the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Its approach was Marxist, but it believed there could be no real change until enough people had seen the light. It was Tony's job to show them the light, and he blinded them daily with the brilliance of his wit. His technique, though simple, demanded an IQ of near-genius level. He would serve up 15 or 20 minutes of glorious knock-about humour, in which hecklers were crucial. Once he had drawn a large enough crowd from neighbouring meetings, he would sock the socialism to his admiring audience for five minutes or so. But he rarely went on much longer. Soon he would return to the fun, alternating laughter and sermons for up to 90 minutes or more. I don't know how many converts he made—my guess is quite a lot. But he provided better entertainment than most professional comics.”

Ian Aitken, *Guardian*, 26 February 1992.

“The Brussels International Conference (25-26 May

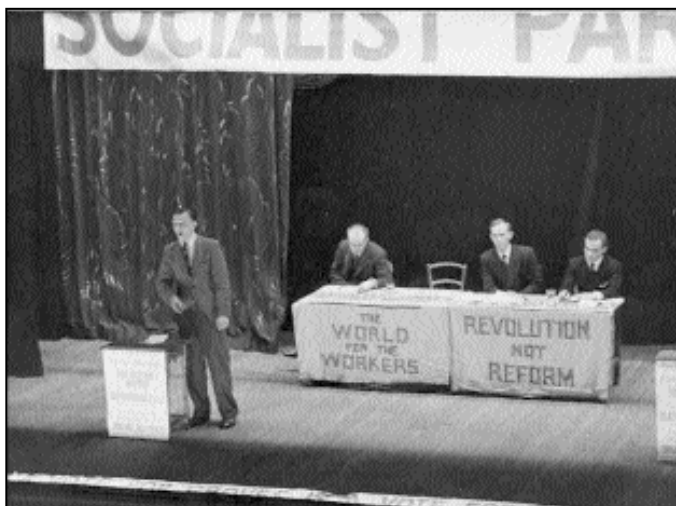
1947): The Communistbond Spartacus excluded the bordigist Partito Comunista Internazionale of Italy, which took part in elections . . . It invited, nevertheless, also the SPGB, as ‘witnesses’, one week before the conference, with a view to the formation of an International Contact Bureau, even though this last participated in the British elections of 1945, perhaps because it rejected the October revolution as ‘non-proletarian’. The Executive Committee of the SPGB did not send delegates, but only a statement. The SPGB mentioned the invitation to the Conference during meetings of its Executive Committee. Some members wished to send representatives to Brussels.”

Philippe Bourrinet, *The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900-1968)*, p. 400 and p. 403 (on line at: .

“In the English-speaking world – since Mattick's *Living Marxism* ceased – there is no other organ that in criticising all the Labor and socialist ‘reformers’ (really defenders of capitalism) at the same time could show the positive aims of pure class fight. For in England the most radical socialism is the S.P.G.B., that believes in ‘pure’ parliamentarism, and Left, that thinks a United Socialist Europe should be the slogan.”

Anton Pannekoek (Letter to J. A. Dawson, 12 October 1947)

“Less sullied even than the ILP by the contamination of practical politics was the ‘SPGB’ – the Socialist Party of Great Britain. This was a group of non-violent Marxists, who preached an undiluted gospel of class struggle and poured an equal contempt on every other party, including Labour and the Communists. They put up two candidates, one in North Paddington (where they had previously fought in 1945 and at a 1947 by-election) and the other in East Ham South. Their propaganda had the austere purity of perfectionism, offering, as they truly said, no vote-catching promises. Their candidates had the self-effacing devotion of members of a monastic order. ‘One thing we must warn you about’, they told their followers, ‘Do not trust in leaders, trust in yourselves alone. Unless you understand the cause and the solution of your miserable condition no leader can help you, no matter how honest and sincere he may be; if you do understand,



then you do not require leaders; you will know what you want and how to instruct your delegates to get you what you want'. Their 1950 intervention can hardly have accelerated the revolution of their dreams. In East Ham South they won 256 votes. In North Paddington the 1945 figure of 472 was more than halved, and reduced to a mere 192".

H. G. Nicholas, *The British General Election of 1950*, 1951, pp. 253-4.

"It was in the 1960s, and a by-election was being fought in Glasgow Woodside constituency. In those days, parties too poor to afford posters still used the city's traditional political medium: chalk on the pavement: One day, walking up Lynedoch Street, I found beneath my feet the following slogan, written in large, precise white capital letters:

'IF YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND AND WANT SOCIALISM, DO NOT VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATE OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN.'

For sheer integrity, that slogan cannot be beaten. Its authors, the SPGB, were and still are an austere Marxist sect founded well before the Russian Revolution".

Neal Ascherson, *Independent on Sunday*, 22 September 1996.

"Some claim that the tiny Socialist Party of Great Britain is anarchist in inspiration".

(*Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* by Peter Marshall, 1992, p.495).



"In this country, the ultra-orthodox Marxists, the Socialist Party of Great Britain advocate the abolition of the wages system, free access to the means of production, the abolition of the state as anarchists do. But and an important but, they want to abolish the state by capturing the state through putting an X on a ballot paper. So it would seem they are anarchists in bad health".

Robert Lynn, *Vote: What for?*, 1991.

"Robert Lynn revelled in the forums, which he called the University of Life. They certainly had their moments. I remember one exemplary SPGB graduate speaking mounting the platform, drawing a ten-shilling note from his pocket and holding it dangling from his thumb and forefinger for a quarter of an hour or so while delivering a devastatingly witty attack on money. The audience of thirty or so were spellbound. There was not a single heckler, until he set fire to it".

Stuart Christie, *My Granny Made Me An Anarchist: 1946-1964*, 2003, p. 157.

"The Labour Party, Trades Council and the STUC . . . were largely responsible for securing the biggest postwar

demonstration in Glasgow till then, at the start of the 1960s. Incidentally, that was the demonstration that produced the sectarian slogan to end all sectarian slogans. Just as we were turning round the corner of Sauchiehall Street two grim stalwarts of the Socialist Party of Great Britain were standing heralding the march with a huge banner and slogan which read: 'This demonstration is useless – You must first destroy capitalism.'"

Janet and Norman Buchan, "The Campaign in Scotland", in *The CND Story*, edited by Hohn Minnion and Philip Bolsover, 1983, p. 53.

"Actually," Bird says, "I was a member of something called the Socialist Party of Great Britain at school for a while. You had to pass an exam, you know. You could not just join".

John Bird interviewed in *Evening Standard*, 3 December 1997.

"Those who taunt the so-called 'abstentionists' with SPGBism . . ."

Contribution to internal debate on the Common Market within IS, forerunner of the SWP, *IS Bulletin*, July 1971, p. 60.

"In the coming revolutionary confrontations between the working class and the bourgeoisie the role of the SPGB will be indistinguishable from that of any of the other bourgeois parties".

(*World Revolution*, organ of the International Communist Current, July 1976).

"The SPGB has survived since 1904 as a proletarian organisation. While its rigid sectarianism from the beginning tended to inhibit any real contribution to the clarification of the tasks of the working class, it nonetheless stood against both world wars, attacking them as capitalist wars in which the working class had no interest, denouncing anti-fascism for the anti-working class movement it was. The SPGB also recognises Russia and China as state capitalist, and sees parties of the left and extreme left as parties of state capitalism."

(*World Revolution*, April 1977)

"The fact of the matter is that the credit for this particular form of state capitalism should go back to the Socialist Party of Great Britain who taught Jock Haston his Marxism in the first place and had promulgated the theory as far back as 1918. For it was Haston who first raised the question of state capitalism within the Revolutionary Communist Party, not only as a purely Russian phenomenon but in global terms, both in the

group's internal bulletin (*War and the International*, pp. 182-5) and in a series of articles in *Socialist Appeal* (mid-August to mid-September 1947). In fact Cliff's remit from Mandel when he first came to Britain was specifically to argue against these incipient 'state capitalist' heresies, and what happened was that in the course of the dispute the contestants changed sides. Anyone who wishes to make a serious investigation of the whole topic should consult the above sources, as well as the SPGB's position, which was reissued as a pamphlet in the same year as Cliff first published his own, though we have to admit that Cliff's logic is inferior to theirs, since they dated Russia's capitalist revolution back to 1917."

Revolutionary History, Autumn 1991, reviewing of SWP member Alex Callinicos's book *Trotskyism*.

"Students at the London School of Economics last night voted strongly to apologize to Professor H. J. Eysenck for the incident on Tuesday during which he was punched and kicked as he started to address the school's Social Science Society. But although voting was about five to one at a mass meeting attended by about 600 of the school's students, a later motion attacked Professor Eysenck's views on race, heredity and intelligence and said that those responsible for the attack should be actively defended against any disciplinary action . . . Moving the successful motion to apologize to Professor Eysenck, Mr D. Zucconi, who said he was a member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain and the World Socialist Society, said: 'An issue like this in general cuts across political differences. The events on Tuesday were a disgrace and discredit to socialism and a blow for fascism'. Responsibility for the attack on Professor Eysenck has been attributed to the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist).'" *Times*, 11 and 17 May 1973.

"Sir Keith Joseph, the Conservative Party's policy overlord, used a debate in Streatham, London, yesterday on 'The Case for Capitalism' to attack Mr Wedgewood Benn's plans to channel pension and insurance funds to government-approved investment projects.

In the lunchtime debate in the crowded hall of the Philippa Fawcett teacher training college, Sir Keith said there were broadly three main ways of organizing society: by mutual agreement, a family type of agreement suitable for a large kibbutz; by a market system, with supply and demand regulated by profit and loss under the pressure of competition framed within humane social laws; and by the command system adopted by all centralised societies and dictatorships, in which prices were laid down by a bureaucracy.

Sir Keith was challenged by an idealistic member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, Mr Edgar Hardy, aged 75. Mr Hardy believes that Marx got his economics right and that Maynard Keynes diverted attention with his 'disastrously mistaken theories'". *Times*, 25 April 1975.

"At the Barras market in Glasgow about 25 years ago open-air political meetings were not uncommon, and the best were conducted by a fiery band of working-class revolutionaries

called the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Founded about a hundred years ago (and still going, I'm glad to say) and proudly hostile to all other allegedly socialist or communist political parties, they had several fine speakers and in those less apathetic days could always raise a fair crowd of the starvelings whom they hoped to rouse from their slumber.

Scorn for their hearers' meek acceptance of poverty and satire upon the quality of goods and services supplied to the workers were prominent in their arguments, as when the speaker would draw our attention to an evil-looking greasy-spoon caff and recite parts of the horrible menu, concluding with *Stomach pump free of charge*. Once, when challenged by a wee bauchle with scarce a backside to his trousers on the grounds that 'under socialism we widnae be individuals', the agitator on the soapbox paused from his remarks on the rival attraction of 'Jehovah's Jazzband' (a Salvation Army ensemble) just down the street, fixed him with a baleful eye, and loosed a withering tirade about how the questioner was obviously a proud specimen of individuality, with your individual Giro and your individual manky shirt and your individual football scarf and your individual council flat and your individual Scotch pie for your individual dinner . . .

It went on for ages, a tour de force of flying".

Kenneth Wright, *Herald* (Glasgow), 13 February 2001.

"The Socialist Party has reiterated its ban on people with religious beliefs; it says they cannot share the materialist philosophy of true socialists. The latest edition of the party's journal, *The Socialist Standard*, concludes a two-page debate on the ban by saying that not even Jesus could have joined. 'We can't think of a single thing [Christianity's] mythological founder is supposed to have taught and done that would qualify him as a socialist.' Labour supporters are also refused." *Church Times*, 12 April 1996.

"The SPGB has neither a leader nor a hierarchy of committees, and it repudiates the principle of leadership. Organised as local branches, the members of each electing their own officers independently of Head Office (which serves as hardly more than a clearing-house) and sending delegates to the annual Conference, it works throughout on one person one vote and simple majorities. Subject to a minimum of procedural rules any branch can bring any issue before Conference and Conference decisions bind the Executive Committee (which, like the Party Officers, is elected annually by vote of the whole Party). Any six branches can call a Party poll, and any member expelled can appeal to the annual Conference. All meetings of the Executive Committee and the branches, Delegate Meetings and Conference, are open to all members (and in fact to the public). These are not just aspirations or entries in the Rule Book; unlike other parties the SPGB really does function in this way. A majority of the members controls the organisation and its officers." George Walford, *Angles on Anarchism*, 1991, p. 53.

Photos in this section from SPGB rally, Metropolitan Theatre, Paddington 1946

Movement or Monument?

In 1975 Robert Barltrop wrote a book about the Socialist Party called *The Monument*. It was a highly entertaining read but heavily anecdotal (sometimes rather dubiously so). While it was primarily a positive account, the sneer that the Party is "a monument" is one that has often been repeated by our political opponents before and since. It fails to take into account the distinctive contributions the Socialist Party has made to revolutionary theory and practice since our foundation. For the record, we list some of the most significant here:

- ◆ That the socialist revolution has to be majoritarian and must involve removing the capitalist class's stranglehold on the machinery of government, thus denying them control over the state's coercive apparatus and removing their claims to democratic legitimacy.

- ◆ That the socialist revolution (and subsequent operation of socialist society) requires the conscious political understanding and democratic action of the majority of the working class rather than organisation by a political leadership with a set of passive followers.

- ◆ That the socialist movement itself must be fully democratic, with all members having equal opportunity to participate in the Party's affairs; by the same token, political secrecy is unnecessary and potentially dangerous – instead, all Party meetings should be open to members of the public.

- o That the advocacy of reforms to gain support (reformism) is a pointless and potentially dangerous approach as reforms cannot succeed in making capitalism run in the interest of the working class and will only attract people to the socialist movement who are primarily interested in reforms rather than socialism.

- o That the socialist political party must be fiercely independent from – and hostile to – all the parties of capitalism, with socialists refusing to take the platform of opposing parties except to state their case in opposition.

- o That the socialist revolution can only be international, creating a world-wide society where production is carried

out solely to meet the needs and desires of its inhabitants.

- ◆ That there can be nothing progressive about wars in the modern world; socialists oppose all wars as their ultimate cause is the competitive struggle between sections of the owning class over resources, trade routes, markets and the strategic positions necessary to protect them.

- ◆ That nationalisation of the economy (even under so-called workers' control, as was claimed in Soviet Russia) is state-run capitalism, leaving intact capital accumulation from the surplus value extracted from the workers, class division, production for markets, etc.



Islington election meeting 1987

- ◆ That taxation is ultimately a burden on the owning class rather than the working class and that therefore political disputes about taxation are a matter of interest for the capitalist class and their political representatives but

are an unnecessary diversion for the class of wage and salary earners.

- ◆ That economic crises and slumps are inevitable under capitalism but that no crisis can of itself be fatal for the system without the conscious political action of the working class.

- ◆ That the attempt through Keynesian economic theories to prevent economic crises by, among other strategies, a relaxed monetary policy led to a persistent (and ongoing) inflation of the currency across much of the world; this being caused by an excess issue of inconvertible paper currency far in excess of that required by the levels of production and trade in the economy.

- ◆ That the creation of the so-called 'welfare state' would not solve the problems of the working class but was the product of a series of measures designed to stave off discontent by removing some of the worst excesses of capitalism while, at the same time, creating a more efficient and productive workforce.

- ◆ That socialism can be an ecologically sustainable society that is decentralised and responsive to people's needs and desires, in distinction to visions of the new system of society being organised on the basis of a vast and inflexible 'central plan' of production.

Getting Splinters

Since our foundation in 1904, membership of the Socialist Party of Great Britain has been conditional on acceptance of the Party's Object and Declaration of Principles. All applicants for membership are required to undertake a short written or verbal 'test' designed to enable them to demonstrate an understanding of – and agreement with – this Object and Principles and also of the Party's basic political positions not otherwise directly covered in the Declaration. There has been a sound reason for this as all members, once admitted, have full democratic rights and stand in basic equality to one another. This kind of political democracy can only work on the basis of agreement around fundamental principles and there would be no point in a socialist organisation giving full democratic rights to those who, in any significant way, disagreed with the socialist case. The outcome of that would be entirely predictable.

Naturally, in an organisation of critical thinkers that has endured for a century, the existence of *some* disagreement is inevitable. Indeed, it would be true to say that a fair number of internal debates and disagreements have arisen in the Socialist Party concerning issues not covered by the Declaration of Principles and not addressed in the initial membership test – in other words, issues which are somewhat peripheral or incidental rather than core and fundamental. These issues have included the Party's exact attitude to trade unionism, its view of capitalist economic crises, and – in more recent years – whether something akin to law will exist in socialist society. There have been some event-specific debates too – such as over the Party's precise attitude to the Spanish Civil War in 1936, to the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 and then to the movements for political democracy in the Soviet-bloc states in the 1980s.

On other, far fewer, occasions, small groups of Party members, sometimes concerned by the Party's pace of growth (or lack of growth in some periods) have developed ideas which have challenged the Party's basic, core positions more clearly. Having initially agreed with the Party's principles and analysis they developed a political critique which challenged these positions at a more fundamental level. But even in these instances, only a handful of disputes have been so serious that they have led to organisational breakaways, and for a political body that has seen thousands of members join over a century of activity, this is remarkable. While sometimes damaging to the Party, these have always involved very small numbers of dissidents who have either left the organisation voluntarily or who have been expelled by a Party Poll. In each case they have

been more an instance of splintering than splitting.

For the historical record, six splinters of the various kinds discussed above can be readily identified. They are detailed below in chronological order.

The Socialist Propaganda League

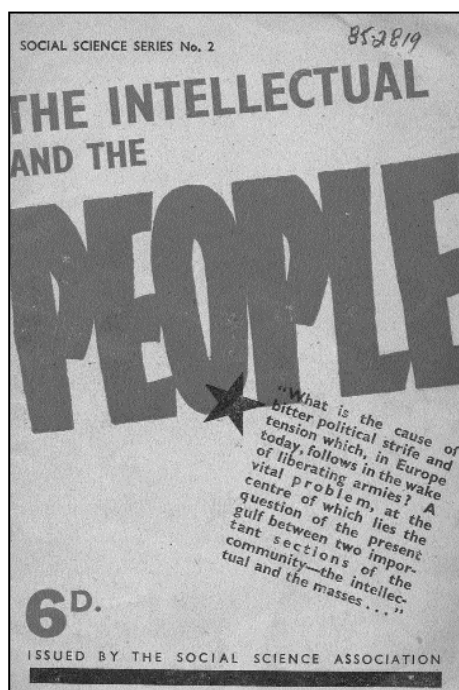
The early dispute in the Socialist Party which led to the formation of the tiny Socialist Propaganda League was the product of the optimistic belief of the Party's founder members that the socialist revolution was near. A group of members around Harry Martin and Augustus Snellgrove wanted the Party to take a definitive stand on the attitude socialist delegates elected to parliament or local councils would take towards reform measures proposed by one or more of the capitalist parties.

In February 1910 a letter from "W.B. (Upton Park)" was sent to the *Socialist Standard* asking "What would be the attitude of a member of the SPGB if elected to Parliament, and how would he maintain the principle of 'No Compromise'?" The perspective of this small group of members was that no reform of capitalism could ever be supported by the party claiming to represent working class interests as it was not the job of socialists to take part in the running of capitalism. Any attempt to do so would run counter to the famous 'hostility clause' of the Declaration of Principles.

The *Standard's* reply on the matter, backed by the Party's Executive Committee, stated that each issue would have to be looked at on its merits and the course to be pursued decided democratically. This did not satisfy the members who had raised the question,

who formed a 'Provisional Committee' aimed at overturning the position espoused in the *Standard's* reply and who set their case out in an 'Open Letter' to Party members, arguing that socialists were required to oppose measures introduced by capitalist parties on each and every occasion. This was again rebutted firmly by the EC who contended that it would be ridiculous for socialists, by way of example, to oppose a measure designed to stop a war in which the working class was being butchered.

Believing this approach to be a violation of the principle of 'no compromise' several members resigned over this issue during 1911, a small number going on to found the Socialist Propaganda League. The SPL's principal speaker and writer was Harry Martin, Snellgrove having been one of those from the Provisional Committee later to rejoin. Though Martin was sympathetic to the Party in all other respects, he continued to denounce the SPGB's willingness to engage in 'political trading' in pamphlets and on the



A pamphlet from the 'Social Science Association'

outdoor platform until his death in 1951. One of the SPL's pamphlets, *From Slavery To Freedom*, was critically reviewed in the *Socialist Standard* in November 1932.

Harold Walsby and 'Systematic Ideology'

The group that formed around Harold Walsby and his ideas probably represents the most unusual breakaway from the Socialist Party in its entire history. During the Second World War this group developed a fascination with perceived impediments to mass socialist consciousness among the working class. The theory they developed was expressed by Walsby himself in his 1947 book *The Domain of Ideologies* and those involved in the group set up an organisation to propagate their views called the Social Science Association, which existed from 1944 until 1956, attracting a number of new recruits during the 'Turner controversy' (see below). It was later succeeded by the Walsby Society and the journal which emerged from it called *Ideological Commentary*. This survived until the death of its editor (and the former secretary of the SSA), George Walford, in 1994. Today, barely a handful of its exponents still survive.

The theory of the group developed over time and was re-christened 'systematic ideology' by Walford in 1976. Its basic premise was that people's assumptions and identifications (the factors making up their 'ideology') are not explicable in terms of material conditions in general and their relationship to the means of production in particular – and are never likely to be. Instead, there are persistent and distinct ideological groups in society, cutting across social classes and forming a series, with the largest groups being most typically guided in their thoughts and actions by a preference for family, authority, familiarity and tradition. Politically, these preferences find predominant expression in the ideas of the large number of so-called 'non-politicals' in society, and in Conservatism and then Liberalism (the strength of these preferences gradually weakening through the series).

As the series progresses further, the next, progressively smaller, ideological groups seek to repress these identifications and preferences in favour of dynamism, social change, logical thought and the pursuit of theory as a guide to decision-making, these being expressed politically in Labourism, more overtly still in Communism and then, in an ultimate and extreme form, in Anarchism (or 'Anarcho-socialism', the purist variety of it allegedly expounded by the SPGB). The more an ideology represses the preferences for family, tradition, etc in favour of social change, dynamism and the pursuit of theory as a guide to action, the fewer in number its adherents are likely to be, with anarchists (or 'anarcho-socialists') being the smallest of all. Those seeking radical social change, so the theory contends, will always be hampered and restrained by the enduring preferences of the largest ideological groups.

Systematic ideology itself was rather hampered by the fact that even if the ideological series it posits is a historically accurate one (which is highly contentious in itself), it has always been unable to adequately explain why this should be so. More precisely, what it is that influences some people and not others to gravitate through the series

towards an ideology such as that supposedly represented by the Socialist Party? If some can do it but not others, systematic ideology has yet to coherently articulate why.

Walsby's early version of the theory was clearly hierarchical (with those understanding the theory being the smallest group of all, metaphorically positioned at the apex of a pyramid, just above the Socialist Party) and it lent itself to criticism on the grounds that it was merely a particularly convoluted type of 'human nature' argument. This was essentially the response outlined in the *Socialist Standard's* April 1949 review of Walsby's book, called 'The Domain of Sterilities'. From the 1980s onwards, George Walford, an inveterate attendee at Socialist Party meetings and a logic-chopper extraordinaire, watered down some of the theory's more obviously elitist elements and even left the SPGB money at the time of his death. He did this on the grounds that although in his view the Party would never help achieve socialism it did perform a valuable function by demonstrating through its application of critical analysis, logical thought and theory the limitations of other political groups that valued these less highly (a perspective which had informed Harold Walsby's decision in 1950 to surreptitiously rejoin the Party through its postal branch and write articles for the *Standard* under the pseudonym H.W.S.Bee).

Walsby, Walford and their group produced a large number of leaflets, pamphlets and other literature over time, a fair chunk of it dealing with the SPGB, even if a lot of it was highly abstract and sometimes downright silly. The most readable expressions of systematic ideology are probably Walford's book *Beyond Politics*, published in 1990, and the pamphlet *Socialist Understanding*, published ten years earlier.

The 'Turner Controversy'

Throughout its history, the Socialist Party has been known for the high calibre of its outdoor speakers and public debaters and Tony Turner was one of the Party's most effective – indeed, many who heard him (both inside and outside the Party) claimed he was the finest outdoor orator of the twentieth century. When membership and activity was at a peak in the period after the Second World War, Turner began giving lectures for the Party on what socialism would be like. The content of these lectures led him to develop a position that caused enormous controversy in the Party by the early-to-mid 1950s and which was elaborated by Turner and his supporters in articles in the Party's internal discussion journal of the time, *Forum*.

Three interlocking propositions underpinned the 'Turnerite' viewpoint:

- (i) that the society of mass consumerism and automated labour which capitalism had become had to be swept away in its entirety if alienation was to be abolished and a truly human community created. This meant a return to pre-industrial methods of production, on lines inspired by Tolstoy and William Morris's *News From Nowhere*.
- (ii) that the creation of the new socialist society was

not simply in the interests of the working class but was in the interests of the whole of humanity, irrespective of class, a proposition they thought it essential for the Party to recognise in its everyday propaganda, and (iii) the means of creating the new peaceful and co-operative society had to be entirely peaceful, indeed pacifist (and in the view of some, possibly even gradual).

This view was in direct contradiction to the Declaration of Principles, which identifies socialism as being the product of the class struggle and which states that the socialist movement will organise for the capture of political power, including power over the state's coercive machinery, should it need to be used against a recalcitrant anti-socialist minority.

A series of acrimonious disputes between the 'Turnerites' and the majority of the Party culminated in a Party Poll decision and then a resolution being carried at the 1955 Party Conference to the effect that all members not in agreement with the Declaration of Principles be asked to resign. Turner, having survived a previous attempt to expel him, promptly did so, along with a number of other members including Joan Lester (later to become a Labour minister) and the psychologist John Rowan. Some of these ex-members formed a short-lived Movement for Social Integration, though, ironically enough, the impact the dispute had on the Party as a whole was almost entirely disruptive and negative. Indeed, it didn't recover its vitality for some years, until the wave of radicalisation that grew up in the 1960s.

'Libertarian Communism'

During the 1960s the Party was enthused by a healthy influx of new recruits initially politicised by the CND marches, Vietnam and the May Events of 1968 and who sought to make a more genuinely revolutionary stand than those of their generation who joined the so-called 'new left'. The boost to Party membership and activity at this time was considerable.

Influenced by the prevailing political climate, some members who joined in this period wanted to change the emphasis of the Party's propaganda efforts towards taking a more positive attitude to industrial struggles, claimants unions and tenants associations but also to women's liberation and squatting, arguing that the Party had developed a somewhat idealist conception of how socialist consciousness arises, being divorced from the day-to-day struggles of workers. To this effect 15 activists from the 'sixties generation' signed a mini-manifesto in 1973 entitled "Where We Stand" which was circulated inside the Party. Although these 'rebels' in the Party were never a homogenous group, many more long-standing and traditional Party members felt uncomfortable with their line of argument.

One particular group of these activists published an internal discussion bulletin, which, in 1974, converted itself into an externally-oriented journal called *Libertarian Communism*. This was produced with the aid of non-members and supported the idea of workers' councils. It openly attacked as 'Kautskyite' the Party's traditional

conception of the socialist revolution being facilitated through 'bourgeois' democracy and parliament. At the same time another group of younger members, based mainly in Aberdeen and Edinburgh, was keen that the Party express support for such things as higher student grants (on the grounds that the Socialist Party was always prepared to support demands for higher wages) but the arguments of this group found no more favour with the majority in the Party than those put by the group around *Libertarian Communism*. Indeed, both of these groups were to be charged and then expelled for issuing literature that contradicted official Party policy.

Some – though certainly not all – of the members who came into dispute with the Party during this period appeared to be genuinely swept along with the activism and student radicalism of the time and developed some reformist viewpoints which were unlikely to be palatable to the membership of a genuinely revolutionary organisation. Members whose disagreements with the Party were less serious and fundamental stayed in, working for the creation of what they hoped would be a more tolerant, and in their view, less 'sectarian' organisation.

The prominent activists of the time who were either expelled or left of their own volition typically became involved in single-issue campaigns or the radical feminist movement. However, one network of former members – those based around *Libertarian Communism*, who were critical of the Party's revolutionary strategy and attracted by 'council communist' ideas – created an organisation called Social Revolution and others became involved in the Solidarity group. Some years later a number of these activists were also involved in the foundation of the Wildcat council communist group and one of its successors, Subversion.

The Guildford 'Road To Socialism'

In October 1987 the Party's Guildford Branch circulated a discussion document around the Party which was to create controversy. It arose from discussions within the Party as to how socialist society could be organised to most effectively solve the problems left by capitalism. The document, entitled "The Road To Socialism", questioned at a fundamental level the Socialist Party's established view of how socialism is likely to come about, labelling it the "Big Bang" theory of revolution. It argued that the Party needed to develop "a more sophisticated multi-dimensional model of socialist transformation which nevertheless incorporates the more useful insights of the old theory", but it was precisely what was meant by "multi-dimensional" that was to cause difficulties.

What Guildford had in mind was that the growing socialist movement would have a profound economic impact on the operation of capitalism before the overthrow of the capitalist class and the formal establishment of socialism. They claimed that socialists would use their influence politically (through parliament and local councils) to adjust patterns of state income and expenditure in 'socialistic' directions, including the provision of free services. Drawing inspiration from writers like Andre Gorz, they also claimed that socialists would be

encouraging the growth of the non-monetary, voluntary sector of the economy and should be instrumental in developing support networks for co-operatives and LETS schemes.

In short, Guildford's vision was a gradualist one in which the materialist conception of history as applied to the coming of socialism was turned on its head: the economic structure of society would be essentially transformed *before* the socialist capture of political power, rather than afterwards. In the Guildford scenario, the capturing of political power would merely be a mopping-up exercise, designed to dispense with the remaining capitalist areas of the economy.

This critique of the Party's revolutionary strategy was vigorously rebutted in other circulars from branches and members and at Party conference, the Guildford perspective only receiving limited support from outside the branch itself. While most members readily acknowledged that the growth of the socialist movement would have profound and perhaps unpredictable impacts, and while it was the already established Party position that socialists would be organised on the economic front as well as the political front to ensure the smooth changeover of production and distribution from capitalism to socialism, this did not equate with seeking to mould capitalism into socialism from within, in a gradual way. As the Party had long attacked co-operatives and the idea that the state could increasingly give away services for 'free', the Guildford perspective made little headway and its critique was largely dismissed as a caricature of the Party's conception of socialist revolution.

Nobody was expelled over the matter, though a small number of members resigned. They published a journal called *Spanner* for a time, so-called because it aimed to 'span' opinion across the non-market socialist sector of political thought, and in recent years some have been instrumental in founding the small World In Common group.

The Socialist Studies Group

The most recent splinter from the SPGB occurred in 1991 when, following requests from six branches and after two polls of the entire membership, two dozen members from the Party's Camden and North West London branches were expelled for persistently undemocratic behaviour.

The expulsions occurred because the branches repeatedly refused to abide by Conference resolutions stipulating that in most instances the Party should refer to itself as "The Socialist Party" for publicity purposes. Being more traditionally-minded than most, this group claimed that to discourage use of the Party's full name for publicity purposes was to effectively take the Socialist Party of Great Britain out of the field of political action altogether. Underlying this particular issue, however, were others. The majority of members of the two branches had long been inclined to claim that the Party's principles were being diluted and that social democratic and reformist elements had taken over the Party.

The group levied a long list of charges at the Party and the majority of its membership. The *Socialist Standard's*

qualified expression of support for the democratic organisation of trade unionists and workers in Polish Solidarity in 1981 was deemed evidence of reformism by the group and to this end they also opposed a motion at the 1990 Conference on the fall of the Russian empire which had repeated a Party declaration from the Second World War supporting the independent efforts of workers everywhere struggling against dictatorship.

Over time, the group veered towards a fundamentalist position whereby the Party's historic distinction between opposing all reformism (the political advocacy of reform measures designed to win support), rather than all proposed individual reforms per se, became completely blurred. Indeed, echoing the 1910-11 controversy, the group was later to explicitly state that socialist MPs in parliament should even vote against reform measures that are in the interests of the working class (*Socialist Studies*, 43).

In addition to their claims about 'reformism', the group argued that the Party no longer sufficiently emphasised the parliamentary aspect of the socialist revolution. It accused the Party of falling into the hands of anarchists, contending that it was not the established Party position that the state would be abolished immediately upon the overthrow of class society, but that the state would "gradually wither away" instead.

Many Party members had mixed feelings about these controversies, though a common reaction was that the expelled group had seemed to replace political analysis with knee-jerk sectarianism, possibly the product of a mindset that can sometimes come with lifelong membership of a fringe political movement. What made the disagreements with this group – and their subsequent expulsion – particularly difficult was that in Hardy, Harry Young, Cyril May and other members it contained some of the Party's staunchest and most able writers, speakers and activists from earlier periods, in some cases as early as the inter-war years. The Party made an important judgment, however, that no member or group of members could consider themselves above Party democracy: for if that was allowed to happen, the SPGB would no longer be a democratic organisation and would cease to be socialist on its own terms. If some of the other disagreements being aired were possibly containable, deliberate and persistent flouting of the Party's democratic decisions was most certainly not.

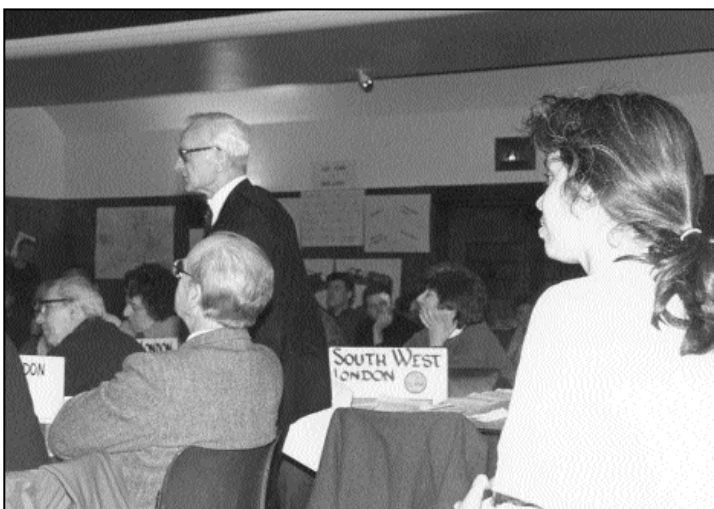
In June 1991, 16 members of the expelled group – rather bizarrely it may be thought – 'reconstituted' the SPGB on their exclusion from the Party. Their remaining members, along with a handful of sympathisers, still publish their journal *Socialist Studies* and occasional pamphlets. These publications today give the unmistakable impression of a small group of rather disgruntled ex-members choosing to cast themselves in the mould of latter-day Fitzgeralds and Andersons making a principled break with an organisation beyond political redemption, when the true comparison is more akin to the aforementioned "W.B of Upton Park" and the Socialist Propaganda League.

DAP

Some internal debates

The Socialist Party has always had a lively internal intellectual life, though 'internal' is not quite the right word since, although the debates have been confined to Party members, they have taken place in public. All our meetings, including even those of our executive committee are open to the public; so that anybody is entitled to listen in to these debates and to have access to the written record of them.

We reproduce here three debates as recorded in the reports of the proceedings of annual conference: one from 1946 on the transition period; one from 1969 on the nature of the Russian ruling class; and one from 1990 on socialists and political democracy. We could have chosen other interesting debates – on trade unions, on violence, on reforms – but the three we have chosen will have to suffice to illustrate democracy in action within the Socialist Party.



Socialist Party in debate, conference 1994

The Party's attitude to the transition period (1946)

A **Manchester delegate** said that the views expressed by party members on this matter ought to be conditional, and that it was wrong to hold hard and fast views. Some thought that capitalism would go on under normal conditions with an ever-increasing number of workers supporting socialism and then taking over. It was quite possible that when the workers did take over things would not be easy and comfortable. No definite answer could be given to those who wanted to know precisely what was going to take place, because the conditions that would exist at the time could not be known now.

A **member of the Editorial Committee** said that there could be no useful discussion unless the delegates took account of the position the Party has always taken, what Manchester disagreed with in this, and what suggestions they could make. An article in the January *Socialist Standard* on the subject had not put the view that there would be an abrupt transition without giving an explanation. The change would be abrupt in the sense that one day the workers would be without control of the machinery of government for socialism and the next day with it. The general view outside the party was that the transition period was something prior to the establishment of socialism. This was the Labour Party attitude, and they held that the transition period was actually taking place now. It was difficult to satisfy outside workers on the question of what would be done after the capture of governmental power, but party speakers did not usually have any difficulty over the subject. As a number of members were probably not familiar with past party discussion and statements in the *Socialist Standard* on the subject, it might be as well for Manchester branch to discuss the *Socialist Standard* article referred to and circulate a memorandum to branches if they disagreed with it.

A **SW London delegate** said that there would be no transitional period, but economic changes resulting

from the emancipation of the working class.

A **non-delegate** said that the phrase 'transitional period' should not be used, the period would be one of reconstruction on a socialist basis.

Leeds delegate raised the question of the possibility of workers in one country gaining power with workers in other countries lagging behind.

A **West Ham delegate** said that socialists elected in a majority to Parliament could not continue the wages system. When there was a majority of socialists in one country there would be large minorities in the others.

Glasgow claimed that development all over the world was more or less similar and example in one country would act as a spur abroad.

An **Ealing delegate** stated that it was now necessary to conceive of socialism taking place at a time of world depression and shortage, and that it was no longer possible to tell enquirers that there was always plenty and that there was no need for anyone to go without what they needed.

A **Glasgow delegate** said that even if socialism was established immediately after a war, the agricultural resources would be largely untapped and production and distribution would be the least of our troubles.

A **non-delegate from Manchester** thought that the party attitude on the question was not clearly stated. The January *Socialist Standard* said that we agreed with Marx and Engels on the subject. If so we must also agree with the transitional period described in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*. There could be no basis for the claim that there would be no dictatorship of the proletariat. The problems of the workers were not the same all over the world. There was an unequal economic development and the next economic crisis would leave one set of workers less well off than the others. The political level of the American working class was lower than that of the British. Our propagandists were not

dealing adequately with the question on the platform.

A **Bloomsbury delegate** claimed that after the capture of power there would be a number of problems to solve. There might be a period of greed and it might be necessary for the State to issue orders for a time.

SW London delegate said that the word 'transition' had been confused with 'transformation'. The State would not exist to coerce. Exploitation was common to every capitalist country and in the course of time this would produce a similar reaction.

A **non-delegate** said that the whole question was not one of party policy as had been urged, although it was a matter of interesting speculation and discussion. Party policy was aimed at capturing the machinery of government for socialism, and once this had taken place the task of the Socialist Party was finished. The job of reconstructing society on its new basis would then devolve on the workers. The discussion on the uneven development of capitalism failed to take into account the international character of the socialist movement. We already had the beginnings of this and in the future the working class would act internationally although restricted by capitalist national barriers. The varying levels of understanding of the workers of different countries was considerably exaggerated.

A **Marylebone delegate** asked for more debates of this kind. These problems were not as easy as they seemed. Our object was as much economic as political. We did not exist just for the purpose of capturing political power, but we were a political party because class struggles were political. It had been said that no principle was involved, but party speakers were saying that there would be no transitional period and claiming it to be the party position.

A **member of the Editorial Committee** said that while Manchester had emphasised that the transition period was after the workers had taken power, other contributors had dwelt largely on the difficulties of getting political power. It was obvious that the statements made in the *Socialist Standard* over a number of years were not known to all contributors. Our view was that it was a waste of time to worry about what was going to happen after power had been obtained. When dealing with the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" as put forward by Marx we referred to Engels' preface to *The Civil War in France*.

A **West Ham delegate** pointed out that the capitalist class was becoming more and more international in character.

A **non-delegate** suggested that the unequal rate of national capitalist development was offset by the equal rate at which socialist ideas gained acceptance. When other parties referred to 'transition' they meant merely a change in capitalism itself and not the change from capitalism to socialism.

A **Camberwell delegate** said that if there was a depression when socialism was established there would have to be readjustments to deal with it.

A **second member of the Editorial Committee** said that it had never been suggested that the change

from capitalism to socialism would be a smooth one, but that intelligent workers would know how to deal with the problems of distribution, etc. Even to-day the working class did all the necessary work of society.

A **Manchester delegate** in winding-up said that it appeared that the party position was that there was no 'transition period'. Some members took an oversimplified view of every problem and this made our propaganda seem unconvincing. He could not agree that there would be a change over-night in society. The development of capitalism would lead to greater crises.

The nature of the Russian ruling class (1969)

Resolution: "This Conference recognises that the ruling class in state capitalist Russia stands in the same relationship to the means of production as does the ruling class in any other capitalist country (viz. it has a monopoly of those means of production and extracts surplus value from the working class) and is therefore a capitalist class."

Comrade Crump (Manchester) said the issue here was not whether or not Russia was state capitalist – all members agreed on that – but is the ruling class in Russia a capitalist class. His Branch felt that the way the Party tended to speak about the Russian ruling class reflected a weakness in our theory of 'state capitalism' and 'social class': it seemed that we were not prepared to face up to calling the ruling class in Russia capitalist. Those who were against this had argued that 'capitalist' has come to have a more or less definite meaning in socialist discussion over the years – those who were direct employers or investors in shares or government bonds. But this was not necessarily so. The capitalist class were those who monopolised the means of production and accumulated capital. It was irrelevant that the Russian rulers may have led Spartan lives. They were a capitalist class, even though they were not direct employers, because they monopolised the means of production and accumulated capital.

Comrade Hardy urged the Conference to go slow on the Manchester resolution that seemed to say that in Russia the top political and managerial people were the capitalist class because they were the rulers. Marx held that a capitalist was a person who owned enough money and commodities to have a business employing hired labour. There were various types of capitalist – the small working capitalist, the larger one carrying out purely capitalist functions, shareholders in joint stock companies, state bondholders, directors. All these made up the capitalist class. Manchester's view was at variance with that put forward by Engels in *Socialism Utopian and Scientific* on the evolution of state capitalism. Engels held that when the state took over industry the capitalists would be forced out of control in favour of salaried employees. He took this to be the end of capitalism, but he was wrong on this.

Private enterprise and investment in Russia were not unimportant and Russian factory managers were

themselves involved in it. Millar estimated in 1963 that about a quarter of all industrial (i. e., non-agricultural) investment in Russia went through private or non-official channels. Manchester Branch had suggested that bondholding in Russia was disappearing. It was true that the old forced loans had gone but they had been replaced by savings bonds. The Russian government had been very successful in building up private savings in this way and paid 3 per cent tax free.

Engels had argued that the capitalist class being thrown out of both joint stock companies and state enterprises in favour of salaried employees meant the capitalists never were entirely replaced and have come back in increasing numbers. One reason for this has been the effect of inflation of workers' incomes. In order to combat this they have enrolled some as directors for the big salaries, pension funds, golden handshakes etc, and other perks. It was not true that in Britain the typical director was a salaried employee: he was a wealthy capitalist. What was the ambition of salaried people in Britain and Russia? To become wealthy capitalists in their own right. They had not only the ambition but also the opportunities. This applied to politicians and even trade union leaders as well. It is certain that in Russia, in addition to the one quarter of private capitalism, managers and Party officials were using the set-up to make money on the side. Russia was going through great changes. The question was in what direction? He would suggest tentatively towards the mixed state/private set-up – as in Britain.

Comrade Zucconi said that, as Djilas had pointed out in his *The New Class*, the Russian ruling class had a different background to that in America or Britain. In 1917 most of the capitalists left Russia so that the Bolsheviks had to develop state capitalism, raising some of the capital through state bonds. It was not correct to say that only those who owned industry or employed labour were capitalists. The bureaucrats in Russia were privileged in that they could use their control of capital to channel surplus value in their own interests. In this there was no difference between them and Paul Getty. In Russia there was a class enjoying the fruits of the labour of the Russian workers. A capitalist was a capitalist whether he got his surplus value from direct ownership or political control.

Comrade Knight said the top managerial strata were a significant part of the capitalist class in Russia. They had a vested interest in exploiting the workers and accumulating capital, not for themselves but also for the state.

Comrade D'Arcy said the resolution was premature. The Party had always avoided saying there was a capitalist class in Russia. We asked not who got the surplus value but where did it come from. It was confusing to say that the bureaucracy were the ruling class because of their nepotism and money-making sidelines. They may be becoming capitalists, but it was wrong to speak as if this had already happened. In Russia the monopoly of the social capital was exercised not by private individuals but by the state. Private enterprise

was still illegal in Russia and so could not be carried on properly. The capitalist class had not yet emerged. All we could speak of was an embryonic capitalist class which at some later stage would plunder the state industries. Bureaucracy would break down into private wealthy individuals.

Comrade Baldwin: Engels had pointed out in his *Origin of the Family* that the state was not only an instrument of class oppression but also that with the development of industry it tended to become the ideal personification of the capitalist class. In Russia in the absence of private capitalists the state had taken over their function. This was why we spoke of state capitalism there.

Comrade Buick said there were private capitalists in Russia but were they the ruling class? They were not and we might need a new name to describe those who exploited the workers through political control. The Party had already accepted that a class could own collectively and a chapter in our pamphlet *Russia 1917-1967* explains how this was so in Russia. In Russia the individuals who made up this class got an income not as direct employers or as bondholders but from the bloated salaries, perks, bonuses, etc that went with their jobs.

Comrade Cook: This was the old argument of where you draw the line between ownership and control. The bureaucrats were using their control to become owners. When control was legalised it then became ownership. The question was would what was now illegal in Russia become legalised so that the bureaucrats turned their control into ownership. The situation was fluid.

Comrade Young quoted Tony Cliff about Trotsky's mistake in equating state ownership with socialism which prevented him realising the state capitalist nature of Russia. The 'official persons' in Russia were a capitalist class eating up surplus value.

Comrade Lawrence said it was not a question of the size of a person's income or of whether capital was in private or state form. We should look at the historical background of the capitalist class in Russia. Clearly those who monopolised the means of production and accumulated capital were the Russian capitalist class. It had been argued that development in Russia would make capitalism there more like that in Britain. But there was no reason why it should. Capitalism in Russia had a different historical background. The state had always dominated and control had always been centralised there. Whereas in Britain the rising bourgeoisie had broken the power of the autocratic state. This had never happened in Russia. Thus we would expect the state to play a dominant role in the development of capitalism there.

The resolution was carried 30-3, with 10 abstentions.

Political democracy (1990)

Resolution: "This Conference re-affirms the stand taken in the September [actually October] 1939 *Socialist*

Standard and repeated in the September 1989 *Socialist Standard* that the Socialist Party of Great Britain wholeheartedly supports the efforts of workers everywhere to secure democratic rights against the powers of suppression. Whilst we avoid any association with parties or political groups seeking to administer capitalism we emphasise that freedom of movement and expression, the freedom to organise in trade unions, to organise politically and to participate in elections, are of great importance to all workers and are vital to the success of the socialist movement."

P. Lawrence (SW London), opening, said that democracy does affect us both as workers and as socialists. The existence of political democracy was important because (i) it allowed workers to pursue their material interests within capitalism, as through trade unions; (ii) with the absence of political tyranny people were free from arbitrary arrest; and (iii) it was absolutely crucial for the establishment of socialism. Our attitude towards actions to establish democracy was the same as our attitude towards trade union action: support when it was on sound lines, i. e. not involving nationalism, racism or support for other political parties. This had always been the Party position and should now be formalised.

J. Krause (Camden): his branch wholeheartedly opposed the resolution. The 1939 Manifesto which was referred to was not about workers securing democratic rights but about the futility of war as a way of defending them. The resolution gave the impression that we had a two-stage theory: that workers in countries without democracy should struggle first for democracy and then for socialism, instead of struggling directly for socialism. The *Socialist Standard* talked of workers winning a victory on the streets of Rumania, but democracy there was vital to the success of capitalism not socialism. Though some form of democratic action was needed to get socialism, the existence of political democracy was not: workers had organised to establish trade unions without democracy first existing, so they could do the same for socialism.

T. D'Arcy (NW London): his branch was also opposed. SW London had distorted the October (not September) 1939 *Socialist Standard*. Our position was that we opposed all other parties, not just that we should "avoid any association" with them as the resolution put it. What was happening in East Europe was detrimental to the interests of the workers as it was leading to the consolidation of capitalism. We were in favour of democracy but only as a way to socialism, not for its own sake.

C. Slapper (Islington): the position taken by the NW London delegate was disgraceful and unbelievable: was he saying that what existed in East Europe was better than what now exists there? We wanted democracy because we wanted workers to enjoy its benefits and we were in favour of pluralism, i. e. competing political ideas and parties. It was sad and pitiful to see that some members were not inspired by the events of the last few months. Dictatorships had

fallen, the Berlin Wall had come down, political prisoners had been released, and workers were rightly celebrating this.

C. Pinel (Manchester): we were here discussing freely at our Conference because workers in Britain had democratic rights. We needed these to propagate socialist ideas, and so should support the struggle of workers who didn't have them to get them.

J. D'Arcy (Camden): The resolution made us have two policies, one for workers in Britain, who we told to struggle for socialism, and one for workers abroad, to whom we said "go and get democracy". As a change in a country's constitution democracy was a reform and socialists should not get involved in reform struggles even if other workers did. It wasn't true that you couldn't carry out socialist propaganda unless certain formal democratic rights existed. Nothing had happened in East Europe. We had always told workers not to confront the forces of the state on the streets and didn't support struggles for constitutional reform.

J. Bradley (Enfield and Haringey): even if individuals could carry out isolated acts of socialist propaganda in a dictatorship, a socialist party could not exist in such conditions as a socialist party could only function as an open democratic organisation. In so far as a socialist party was a necessary instrument for establishing socialism, so too was the existence of democracy.

V. Vanni (Glasgow): this debate had confirmed that some members actually believed that "anything that happens that isn't socialism wasn't worth happening". The idea that you could carry on socialist propaganda in an authoritarian dictatorship just as easily as you could in a political democracy was absurd. Comrade D'Arcy had said that the workers in East Europe were stupid to have gone out onto the streets but this was ridiculous since, if you hadn't got democracy, what else could you do to get it?

D. Gluck (non-delegate): he had recently asked for help from comrades to go from Hamburg where he lived to Leipzig in East Germany to carry out some socialist propaganda, but this wouldn't have been possible before, so obviously the coming of democracy to East Europe was an advantage. OK, it wasn't socialism but it wasn't really realistic to say you could go straight from dictatorship to socialism; you had to have democracy first.

F. Simpkins (SW London), winding up, said it was inconceivable that socialists should not make a value-judgement about democracy. Democracy was better than dictatorship. We couldn't be indifferent to this issue just as we couldn't be indifferent to the release of political prisoners when dictatorships were overthrown. It was ridiculous to suggest that democracy was something that came automatically under capitalism without any struggle. The establishment of democracy involved workers struggling and we should welcome such measures brought about by workers' struggles.

The **resolution** was carried **102-35**.

As soon as this pub closes...

Amusing and not wholly inaccurate entry on the SPGB from this booklet by Chus Aguirre & Mo Klonsky (pseudonym of John Sullivan) in 1988, subtitled "The British Left Explained".

The oldest socialist party, the SPGB, was founded in 1904, when the left wing of the *Social Democratic Federation* (SDF) rejected the opportunist politics of Hyndman, Marx's *bête noire*, the leader of their parent group, which culminated in congratulating King Edward on his accession to the throne. The original Left faction was a confused amalgam which included some people in London and a number of Scots comrades influenced by the American Marxist/Syndicalist Daniel De Leon. Unfortunately De Leon's ideas came to them through the agency of the Edinburgh adventurer James Connolly who ended his career as an Irish nationalist and Catholic martyr. Instead of fighting to win the SDF to a Marxist policy the Scots broke away in 1903 to form the *Socialist Labour Party* (SLP), leaving the London SDF members compromised and isolated. The following year they themselves split from the SDF and formed the SPGB.

The double dealing of the faction which formed the SLP made the SPGB an angry and suspicious group from the beginning. That was demonstrated by the *Declaration of Principles (D of P)*, carried in the first issue of its journal, the *Socialist Standard*. The key part of the document is Clause 7, the famous 'hostility clause' which states: "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, the party which seeks working class emancipation, must be hostile to every other party".

The 'hostility clause' was a stroke of genius which expresses the essence of the SPGB and achieved a simple formula for achieving isolation and non co-operation which the party's rivals try to obtain through confused and inconsistent dialectical contortions. Religious sects achieve the same effect by shaving their heads or wearing distinctive clothes. The hostility to other groups was reciprocated from the beginning as the SPGB's insistence on writing in plain English caused great offence: most Left groups consider that a church must have its own language and liturgy, and have laboriously constructed a jargon comprehensible only to the initiated. The SPGB's insistence on using the vernacular has provoked much the same response as that of the Papacy towards those who translated the Bible into the common tongue. The D of P has never been seriously challenged and the party has never

looked back. It has been fortunate in finding a biographer in Robert Barltrop, whose book *The Monument* is a truthful and warmly affectionate account of a group whose aggression and cantankerousness have placed a strain on the tolerance of most people who encounter them. People have the impression that a group bound to a doctrine first enunciated in 1904 must be composed of dogmatic robots. Nothing could be further from the truth! The SPGB was, until recently, full of the most delightful and varied eccentrics one could hope to meet. The reason for this is that although the D of P is sacrosanct it covers *only* the question of how the socialist society will be brought about. The party, in contrast to many other sects, does not try to regulate its members domestic lives, eating habits, or personal relationships.

The party's formula for achieving socialism is beautifully simple: the workers are to become individually convinced of the socialist case and when that has been done they will vote in a government which will decree socialism at a stroke. No attention is given to the boring questions of tactics or strategy. The SPGB, thus, achieves the unique distinction of being both constitutional and revolutionary. Through this formula the SPGB avoids the strains which drive other socialists to drink or revisionism. The very simplicity of the formula might seem to rule out the possibility of discussion. However, the D of P, inflexible as it is in the area which it covers, does not specify what the society of the future will be like. Consequently, SPGB meetings, whatever the ostensible topic, quickly tend to gravitate towards discussion on precisely this theme. Under socialism will we be vegetarian? Monogamous or not? Will we still live in cities? Will we use more or less water, and will goods still be mass produced? Visitors to SPGB meetings, expecting to hear solemn Marxists discussing how to overthrow the bourgeoisie, are usually surprised and charmed. No speculation is forbidden by the D of P, so imaginations can soar, unfettered by the tedious discussions on tactics and strategy which form the content of most socialist theory. Even the least imaginative of the speculations are more appealing than descriptions of the Christians' dreary, male chauvinist, heaven.

It is accepted sociological wisdom that any organisation which has existed for three generations should have achieved a measure of family continuity, and so be relieved of the constant necessity to win converts from the outside world. As the SPGB is the only political sect which has been around long enough to test the theory on it has attracted more attention from sociologists

than students of politics. In fact, the SPGB's achievement there has, not yet, equalled that of any established religious sect. What does happen, according to Barltrop, is that new members join because of social relationships rather than formal propaganda, which serves as a diversion for the members rather than as a source of recruitment. The party is, apart from the *Discussion Groups*, the only socialist organisation which is at all difficult to join. Members have to satisfy a committee that they understand the SPGB's case: in contrast, the vanguard groups will accept anyone who does as she is told.

In the 1950s the SPGB seemed like a survivor of the Edwardian era, rather like the Secular Society with whose cultural milieu it overlaps. However, just as that scene was rejuvenated by a revival of interest in the Universities so, to a lesser extent, was the SPGB. This has changed the internal atmosphere, in ways which are sometimes worrying. Discipline, once draconian, has become very lax: some of the younger members interpretation of the 'hostility clause' is frankly alarming. They argue that while the D of P enjoins hostility to rival *organisations*, this need not be extended to the *members* of such organisations. On a strictly legalistic reading of the D of P this is perhaps allowable, but it would severely weaken the social effect of the hostility clause. It would never have been accepted by the stalwarts who built the party, and goes against its whole tradition. . .

As we reach the fag end of the 20th century, thoughts inevitably turn towards the centenary celebrations in 2004. Conway Hall has been looking a bit dowdy in recent years, but it is a central spot with many associations for socialists, so it might well be the site for the festivities. A committee will be set up to determine the precise form which these will take, as the party does not believe in arbitrary decisions by authoritarian leaders. It can look forward with quiet confidence. Membership has grown from a mere 100 founders to nearly 700. In contrast, most of its early rivals have passed into history, and later competitors are in disarray. The *Communist Party* is splintered and in apparently terminal decline, while the *Labour Party* has abandoned whatever socialist rhetoric it once employed to deceive the masses. The *Socialist Workers Party* no longer attracts intelligent young people as it did in the early 1970s, so the SPGB can look forward to having the field to itself. The apolitical sociologists asking boring questions about the party's social composition are a nuisance, but the D of P has nothing to say about them.