DB119 begins with some thoughts on the coming revolution by Wally Petrovich who starts by combining an attack on capitalism with a criticism of those revolutionaries who regard "any new form of remuneration for labor time contributed to a socially owned industry as a contradiction of Marx's philosophical view of a future society." But aside from this sentence the essay concentrates on the obstacles capitalism and history have put in the way of the efforts of revolutionaries to promote the consciousness of our class as well as the efforts they have made to clarify their views.

ABOUT THE DISCUSSION BULLETIN

The Discussion Bulletin is a bimonthly magazine affiliated with the Industrial Union Caucus in Education (IUCE). It serves as the financially and politically independent forum of a relatively unknown sector of political thought that places the great divide in the "left," not between anarchists and Marxists but between capitalism's statist leftwing of vanguardists and social democrats and the real revolutionaries of our era: the non-market, anti-statist, libertarian socialists. They are organized in small groups of syndicalists, anarcho-communists, libertarian municipalists, world socialists, socialist industrial unionists, council communists, and left communists. The perspective of these groups with their rejection of capitalism's wage, market, and money system as well as capitalist politics and capitalist unionism constitutes the only real alternative to capitalism in both its market and statist phases.

In the DB the often antagonistic groups that make up this sector can debate and discuss the issues that divide them and gain some understanding of their history and future possibilities. Among the latter might be movement toward at least limited co-operation.

The pages of the DB are open to anyone in this political sector, the only limitation being that submissions be typewritten, single-spaced, and copier ready. We do no editing here. As to content, we assume that submissions will be relevant to the purpose of the DB and will avoid personal attacks.

NOTICE

The Discussion Bulletin will cease publication with number 120, the July-August 2003 issue. From now on it will not accept payment for new subscriptions nor renewals. Subs that expire before 120 will be extended free through the concluding issue. For subs that expire after 120, the DB will refund the purchase price if it amounts to $1 or more. The last issue of your subscription is indicated by the number on your address label. New subscriptions for the remaining issues will be sent free.

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The Eclectic Revolutionary ... No Dogmatic Binds That Tie... Human Evolution
Unhindered by The Needs Of The Past ... Building A New Social Dynamic

In our work to promote a democratic replacement for capitalism we need not be philosophical scholars of the works of Karl Marx and Daniel DeLeon. By putting together their essential contributions with our own experiences in the work world, and in the present system of state government, we understand sufficiently more than enough to know that capitalism today ill-serves our everyday living and working interests.

In the course of our efforts to make clear the socialist perspective, we hear and read, or have been personally introduced to self-acknowledged "scholars who have claimed the Industrial Democracy replacement we advocate is not only contrary to Marx's philosophical view of the universe and the destiny of its human content, but in addition, any new form of individual remuneration for labor time contributed to a socially owned industry is a contradiction of the Marx's view of a future society: The conclusion of such argument being that, as socialists, we have no scientific basis upon which to call for capitalism's replacement with a new, democratic form of social, economic and governmental organization.

There is abundant evidence to show, chapter and verse, that Marx was a visionary with a practical, however general, prescription for the workings of an economic democracy, and that he clearly forwarded a system of remuneration in both the "new," immediate socialist society as well what can evolve in a mature socialist society once freed from the old capitalism values.

Unless there are new, revolutionary revelations about the historic and universally demonstrated instinctive needs and wants of people to gather into social communities for protection and mutual well being, we can be confident that our theoretical foundations are fundamentally sound and possible of attainment.

Capitalism is the existing system. While its advocates admit its flaws, they find it acceptable because it has the essential elements which conform to their basic preferences as to how we conduct ourselves in our economic interactions, namely, capital formation, wage labor and commodity production with a view for private profit, and in whatever political governmental structure such elements are best served. Despite the reality that, when performed accordingly, the system produces economic classes which result in severe societal dislocations. The class divisions have resulted in a scant percent minority of the super rich, a middle population of modest material access, and a bottom of the extremely impoverished, the latter two forming the working class, the former being of the capitalist class. Occupation variations and borderline, marginal designations of economic roles played out in each class are open to question, but in the main, the existence of those who live by wage labor standards, and those who own and control dominant capital investment are set apart into specific class categories referred to in economic academia as "capital and labor," or from the working class perspective --the capitalist class and the working class.

We advocate an alternative to capitalism, a new system in which there is not the presence of capital formation, wage labor and commodity production. In the proposed new system we aver there will exist no elements of the commodity production social relationships which have produced the current state of hostile and divisive social, political and economic antagonisms in all societies wherever capital has sought and implemented investment, throughout the world.

Whenever we are confronted by it, one very significant obstacle to hurdle is the subject of Karl Marx. Whenever the question of an alternative to capitalism is posed, the name of Marx is inevitably pressed to the forefront by the most ardent supporters of capitalism. The gist of the Marx's philosophical detractors lies with their proposition that if any aspect of your principles and program have a Marx component, then you must be a "Marxist," which then leads to the content of Marx's metaphysical works concerning a Universal Grand Plan, which is arguably grossly subjective, then, by such a measure, without addressing Marx's practical analyses, the entire principles and program for capitalism's replacement is subjective,
without logic, and falls like a house of cards.

As advocates for a new and fundamentally different system than we now work in, we need not tie ourselves into every nuance and opinion and conjecture offered by those with whom we have an eclectic relationship in which we take the best of what is appropriate for an extension of our principles and program as these apply to our social goals. We need not be Marxists nor DeLeonists in the strict sense of total identification—but we can ascribe to the basic social, economic and governmental propositions which are the hallmark of Marxism and DeLeonism, namely social ownership and democratically operated industries through a new form of an unoppressive industrial government in which production is for social use and not for private profits, i.e., an Industrial or Economic Democracy.

Marx did speculate on the clearly metaphysical questions about the laws of the universe with which his detractors enjoy a modicum of opinionated disagreement. In finding Marx’s metaphysical constructs open to opinionated, highly subjective debate, there are those who then, without substantive evidence, extend the “debate,” however illogical, into the practical, objective relationships of capitalism’s construct where such anti-Marxian explanations of how “capital” is formed, and “who” is responsible for the production of all social values are glibly presented as speculative discourse. However, Marx’s, simple logic in dissecting capitalism’s mechanics, which source our social problems, preclude whatever metaphysical fault finding by his critics, those who do not find capitalism’s wages system and commodity production the causative factors which produce society’s social disorders such as poverty, criminality in all walks of economic life as well as in the dismantling of democracy in our governments.

The most significant problem we encounter when we use Marx’s logic in pointing out capitalism’s social contradictions, is that Marx’s writings have been popularly associated with the history of the erstwhile Soviet experience, as well as with all the many countries whose economic and governmental systems have laid claim to being a “socialist” society. Without holding Marx’s complete analyses of the capitalist system as a criteria for their studies, many comparisons of such societies with the Western and classical concepts of “democracy,” i.e., “Rule by the People,” usually conclude that Marx advocated dictatorship, economic serfdom, and a totalitarian oppression by the state over its working class peoples. Those who have studied in depth Marx’s analyses of how the world turns know how fallacious are such attributions to Marx. The simple benchmarks which Marx pointed out as being a feature of modern capitalism—such as the wages system, commodity production and the existence of a “political state” government, have no place in the new, democratic industrial form of self-government. Such facts are powerful tools we need to employ when confronted with comparisons of Marx with the remaining state capitalism societies which falsely proclaim their identification with Marxist economics and social organization.

Capitalist economists, political scientists and academia, may disagree with the conclusions Marx brings to our thinking table, but unless they resort to intellectual dishonesty, they cannot deny that the essence of Marx’s total works and conclusions are a call for humans to be free of oppressive governments in a society in which material needs and wants are available for every one without restrictions imposed by oppressive economic mechanisms. Marx’s conclusions about the human make-up of the universe, how it operates, and how the laws of its operation will eventually revolutionize it, come down to how we, in the here and now, being intelligent parts of the universe as Marx saw it, can understand the materials needed to make such a revolution a reality.

While Marx, the philosopher, was sketchy in his vision of his proposed society, Marx, the social engineer, was very clear in his analyses of the system of capitalism. His logical exposition of value, price and profit gives us a scientific insight into the system and reveals the bases and sources of material imbalances which result in economic and social classes. Along with significant others, Marx’s works contribute to today’s social/economic/political movements in a practical way which does not depend on
the philosopher's objective world inner dialectic which speculates an "inevitable" revolution from capitalism to a new society free of the oppressive economic rules being practiced today. As Max Eastman put it in his introduction to "Capital," "We do not know what the world is destined to do, but we know what we can do in our own era to try to make it do, and try with good assurance that success is possible. That is all anybody needs to know in order to act, or does indeed ever know when he acts with a hazard sufficient to make his act interesting."

Today's social activists need not be philosophical "Marxists" in order to pursue a new form of social production in an atmosphere of liberty and freedom. Today's socialists generally subscribe to the awareness the establishment of new social forms in whatever periods of time these are implemented can never be mandated or viewed as a permanent solution to mankind's evolutionary processes. The dynamics of social evolution have no limitations. As the philosopher, Marx was content to believe that the working classes "have no ideal to realize; that they have only to set free the elements of the new society." As modern socialists, we do indeed, envision an "ideal" to realize, an ideal whose elements have been developed out of the social contradictions capitalism has foisted upon us.

Unlike Marx, the social engineer who called for workers to organize, Marx, the philosopher, would deem the program of the New Union Party's advocacy of an industrial democracy as "juridical conceptions" which are a mere by-product of economic evolution. However, we in the movement cannot take up such a posture because it is our agitation work and organizational goals which are the human factor which form the "juridical concepts" upon which the "new society" vision is conceived.

Marx, the engineer, laid out the elements of the tools of capitalism which prevent his goal of a society without classes. He also identified some of the tools which could be used to make it happen, namely a working class organization which would use the existing parliamentary processes of government to change the system legally and peacefully.

While Marx, the philosopher, had a problem with the form and content of a new society, and in this respect, his vision was sketchy, Daniel DeLeon, a Marx scholar and socialist activist, had no such problem. DeLeon built upon Marx's social engineering contributions, and extrapolated from anthropologist Henry Morgan's studies of the organization of the NY Iroquois Indian, to conceive of a societal form of government and economics which addressed Marx's revelations of the sources of capitalism's social contradictions, a historic, new concept, which gave form and content to the "juridical conceptions," to which Marx had alluded.

The social dynamic doesn't rest. DeLeon's industrial government concept, together with a community component which melds the workplace with the community... in which the concept of the town hall community meetings in which community, social needs, become an agenda for the industrial workplace councils...which become the agenda for every coordinating council on every plane of industrial organization... democracy in every aspect of our social and work lives.

DeLeon's "Industrial Union" form of government crystallized Marx's "juridical concepts" into a plan for social production which includes all the prerequisites for addressing the mechanics of capitalism which produce the debilitating social and economic problems for the majority working class. DeLeon conceptualized a social and economic organization which would bring society closer to Marx's conceptions of a world without classes and without government by force, which included the distribution of wealth formula: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his means."

While scholars may argue and debate Marx's philosophical theories of history as well as his analyses of capitalism, those of us who are dedicated to viable social and economic change, work with the knowledge that we live in a class-divided society, that in every epoch each class is defined chiefly, as Bertell Ollman put it: "by its relation to the productive process and has objective interests rooted in that relation. The
capitalists' interests lie in securing their power and expanding profits. Workers, on the other hand, have interests in higher wages, safe working conditions, shorter hours, job security, and - because it is required to realize other interests - a new distribution of power. The class struggle involves everything that these two major classes do to promote their incompatible interests at each other's expense.

Given the present mode of production, and labor's servile role in it, given the undemocratic, dictatorial management of our industrial complex by managers of the dominant capitalist class, and given the construct of our political government in which the shroud of political self interest muffles any real democratic interaction between and among our so-called people's 'representatives,' we understand that all the oppressive features in capitalism are also are mimicked in our governmental institutions. The government organization is a reflex of the economic organization.

In this system, We, the People, are bystanders in the process of the highly-acclaimed, but delusional "self government." But all this can be changed. With an understanding of the historical path which has brought human society to this juncture in our history, and with an understanding of how we can change the social, economic and governmental circumstances which now threaten us, individually and collectively, we would be profoundly remiss were we, in our own time, to fail to do what we can to make happen Marx's "juridical conceptions," embodied in DeLeon's evolving industrial and community forms of a new and better society.

Wally Petrovich

(from p. 2)

The next two items related to the DB118 reprint of excerpts from the Marxist Labour Party in Russia's text "The Marxist Anatomy of October" from the International Communist Current (ICC) journal International Review and of the ICC's response. One is the MLP's answers to political questions posed by the ICC, apparently in further correspondence. Also, Adam Bux fashion comments on the MLP document in connection with the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, arguing that a dictatorship of the proletariat as Marx understood the term never appeared in Russia.

Kephas Mulenga's letter questions the role of trades unions as revolutionary structures, and certainly he is correct in arguing that they are simply organs for marketing labor power. The problem I have is that the term "trades union" implies the existing unions-the AFL-CIO and its equivalents in other countries, not the idea of a combative, militant unionism arising spontaneously from within our class and willing to accomplish the revolution by taking over the means of production and making them social property.

Next Robin Cox speaks to an ongoing discussion within the World Socialist Movement (WSM) which includes the SPGB in Britain and its companion parties elsewhere, including the World Socialist Party in the U.S. It began with the organization of a non-party group called World in Common (WIC) that could include religious people as members - unlike the WSM. The differences between the WIC and the traditional principles of the WSM seem to have broadened, hence this reply to Charmian Skelton's DB118 letter.

For some reason the idea that Daniel De Leon's writings influenced the dissident members of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) who came together in London in 1904 to organize the SPGB enrages some contemporary SPGB members. It's difficult for me to believe that the People, the only English language anti-reformist socialist paper then existing and the source of De Leon's writings, wasn't being read by English opponents of SDF reformism. Certainly there was much in The People of that era to interest the dissidents. In addition during the previous year the SDF dissidents in Scotland had organized a British SLP, and one must assume that at least some of the literature that moved them was circulating in England. Of course the real question is exactly what do Skelton and Richard Lloyd mean by
To the International Communist Current

Comrades!

Though your letter was addressed to the "South Bureau of the MLP", we have brought its contents to our comrades in the organisation who do not live in the south of Russia.

Our collective answer to you is as follows:

1) Do you consider the support of national liberation struggles possible in the 20th century?

We hold that before speaking for or against support of national-liberation struggles in the 20th century, one should gain an understanding of what a national-liberation struggle itself on the whole is. But this in its turn is difficult to do, if a more or less clear definition of 'nation' has not been previously given. Besides, in our opinion, one should clarify, what was Marx's and Engels' attitude towards this question in their time, as well as what was the position of the Bolsheviks-Leninists in this connection - both before and after the October revolution 1917. Finally, one should consider the evolution of views of the Comintern on the given problems...

2) Do you recognise a 'right of nations of self-determination or do you reject such a formula?

The national-liberation movement is an objective thing. Having set a high standard, it indicates that one or another people has embarked on the path of its own capitalist development and that the corresponding ethnic group either is on the threshold of turning into a BOURGEOIS nation, or has already turned into one.

In contrast to what the Bolshevik-Comintern tradition decrees, offering not only to support national-liberation movements as progressive-bourgeois ones, but even orienting to create communist (!) parties in backward countries, parties consisting of the peasantry under the leadership of the national progressive-revolutionary intelligentsia, and to fight for the establishment of Soviet power in the absence or minimum presence of the industrial proletariat there (the notorious theory of "non-capitalist development" or "socialist orientation in developing countries"), the MLP (not to be confused with the MLP(B)!) considers that the support of national-liberation movements creates only an illusion of solving the social problems within national borders. In particular, this illusion finds its expression in the "Marxist-Leninist" slogan: "From national liberation to the social liberation!"

It is only the world social revolution that will be able to solve national problems among others. Participation in any national-liberation movement, i.e. in the fight for the state separation of one more bourgeois nation, is not a special task of Marxists.

At the same time we are not opponents of national-liberation movements. As, for instance, of the political movement coming out in favour of separating Chechnya from Russia, in which some members of the MLP(B) actively participate.

If the majority of the population of a certain nationality and on a determined historical territory has decided to use the "right of nations to self-determination" against "imperialist expansion", we will not come out against such a position, on two conditions:

a) if the territorial separation is able to stop the bloody slaughter with multiple victims amongst the working people of the two sides;

b) if the state independence of a new bourgeois nation leads more quickly to the situation that
inside this nation its own industrial proletariat will emerge and get stronger, which will then launch its class struggle against the local national bourgeoisie, no more being side-tracked by the illusion of any "liberation" except the social one. Before the proletarians of all countries can unite, proletarians in these countries must simply exist!

3) Do you consider all factions of the bourgeoisie equally reactionary in the 20th century - i.e. since the beginning of World War I - and if not - what are your criteria?

Here again it is first necessary to define what should be understood by "reactionary". The word "reactionary" in its primary sense means "counteracting progress" or, more exactly, "counteracting the advancement onward". It is clear, however, that this definition is highly general.

Being Marxists, we can and must speak of that sort of reactionary-ness which prevents the desire to finish with both the bourgeois-capitalistic mode of production and the secondary (private-ownership and exploiter) formation as a whole, which prevents mankind from advancing to the "tertiary formation" - Communism.

At the same time, the classics of Marxism taught us to understand the progressiveness of the bourgeois-capitalistic mode of production with respect to the modes of production preceding it and to the more retarded social-economic structures co-existing with it within the framework of the secondary formation, as well as teaching us to distinguish the progressive stages of development of this mode of production itself. In our opinion, any other approach would be scholastic and dogmatic but not historico-dialectical!

In the 20th century petty-bourgeois and peasant production was giving way to large-scale capitalist production. From the Marxist standpoint, productive forces change the social structure of society in the course of their development. This is objectively progressive.

Hereinafter, in our opinion, with reference to the 20th century, one should speak not of the decay of capitalism as such, but only of the process by which the national-state form of capitalism outlives its necessity, i.e. a definite next-in-turn stage of its development becomes exhausted.

We cannot say that with the beginning of the WWI the capitalism had unambiguously exhausted its progressiveness. In our opinion, this process got under way only from the second half of the 20th century. The clear evidence of this being the present globalisation and economic unification of Europe, for example.

It is in our time that the capitalism has begun to exhaust its progressiveness. The time is coming to sweep it away on the international scale by means of the world social revolution.

4) Do you consider the second World War an imperialist confrontation between two warring poles - the 'democratic' vs. the 'fascist' - fighting for their hegemony or do you consider that the workers should have supported the "democratic" camp against the 'fascist' camp?

From the standpoint of political economy - and that is the main criterion for us - the forces struggling in the W.W.II represented:

a) countries with a capitalist economy of the most developed type (in which monopolies, growing into transnational corporations, are built in the legally controlled mechanism of "free competition" - both on internal, and on international markets); parliamentary bourgeois "democracy" being only an external shell of this phenomenon;

b) more backward countries with national-oriented state-capitalist economy (when the private capitalist monopolies work on the state mobilization plan), the political expression of it being the fascism in its varieties;
c) the even more retarded USSR with the economy representing a united state-capitalistic monopoly in
industry and much of agriculture with the absence of private owners; Stalinism being the political shell
here.

The most advanced countries, having formed a bloc with the most retarded one, were then able to
 crush the national private-ownership-under-the-state capitalisms and to do away with the political regimes
corresponding to them. The Western "democracies" then went on the way of globalisation, while the
USSR, with the temporarily dependent on it Eastern Bloc gradually degraded in the face of this
progressive capitalistic trend and collapsed ...

So we do not consider that "democratic" capitalist bloc with the participation of the USSR was a
"democratic" pole.

In our opinion, your way of presenting the matter is wrong.
Imperialist interests, specific as they were, took place from all three sides.
From the social and political standpoint, fascism was able to mislead under its banners a
considerable part of national detachments of the working class before the W.W.II. For this reason alone,
we consider that the Communist class vanguard of that time had no right to hold an abstentionist position
with regard to the anti-fascist struggle. It had to carry on its own struggle against the fascism.
We would like it very much if in that time the world working class had been really international
and had come out against all the "poles", making the world revolution.
Alas, this did not happen. The European and world proletariat was rendered subordinate to the
imperialist interests of the ruling classes of all the "poles".
We consider that the scornful attitude of European "left-Communist tradition" towards the
anti-fascism of war years that has been basically elaborated after the completion of the W.W.II to be
wrong.

5) What is your attitude towards the ideology of 'anti-fascism' today?
The dialectics of the modern epoch, Comrades, lies in the fact that though in the world new
bourgeois nations continue to appear and develop, and that national-liberation struggles continue,
alongside this the national-state form of capitalism becomes more and more outdated. Even more so the
time of the national state capitalisms has already passed - the highly-developed Western post-industrial
capitalism will nevermore allow their expansion, will not let them develop sufficiently.
Consequently, today fascism as the most consistent political expression of such regimes is, as a whole,
marginal. Therefore the struggle with it in the developed capitalist countries is also marginal from
standpoint of class interests - Marxists cannot give top priority to it here. This is the more so, if behind the
"anti-fascism" a trivial zeal for "civil rights" and bourgeois "liberties" is hidden, which is capable only of
camouflaging capitalist exploitation. The MLP does not participate in the "human rights protection"
movement.

Those are some such as c-de Siroin, whom you, obviously, met in Moscow and who recently
'glided over' to the MLP(B), who consider the "anti-fascist activity" to be main activity today. It is no
mere chance that earlier he had been a member of editorial staff of an anti-fascist newspaper
"Chelovechnost" ("Humanity"), which can be fully referred to as the left wing of bourgeois human rights
activists.

At the same time, we consider that today, too, fascism with its attempts to influence upon the
proletarian ambience, especially upon working class youth, must get an adequate rebuff on the part of
Marxists in the developed capitalist countries.

In developing countries, however, the situation can be different. The political pressure and all-out
financial control on the part of the globalising transnational capitalism is capable of bringing about the political fascisation of national-liberation struggles - in conditions, when the economic stage of local state capitalism has not yet been reached by the given young bourgeois nation and will hardly be reached.

And, as the events of the latest history show, a religion, for instance Islam, can become an ideological cover for such fascisation. Marxists are obliged to take these new phenomena into account in their activity in such countries. The anti-fascism is not only actual there, but in propaganda it must be also closely linked not only with anti-nationalism and anti-chauvinism, but with atheism.

6) Attitude towards trade unions?

We do not actively participate in the trade-union movement. For we understand that it is impossible for the proletariat to obtain social, and not merely political changes, i.e. radical, properly revolutionary changes, with the trade-union activity only. At the same time, as Marx and Engels repeatedly emphasized, trade unions can be a step to an all-class self-organisation of the proletariat. So we are ready to support and do support individual lines of activity of those trade unions (for instance, of the trade union "Zashita" in Russia), which are created by left organisations and have set not only economic tasks, but also political ones which exceed the limits of capitalism. For all this we, of course, do not tie ourselves by any obligations toward their electoral organs.

Those are members of the MLP(B) who actively work in trade unions and hold posts in them.

This was probably the main practical activity of our former comrades in our organisation when it was still united. Unfortunately, at the same time they found little time for the development the MLP.

7) Participation in parliament?

As a whole, our attitude towards the parliamentarianism is negative. The South Bureau of the MLP, the Ural Bureau of the MLP and a number of other comrades who stand by the initial positions of the MLP have never put forward their own candidacies at elections, nor have we supported candidacies of any politicians, i.e. we haven't carried on agitation timed to parliamentary elections. Parliaments are an old pernicious illusion. Unfortunately, our former comrades from now the MLP(B) had and have a different opinion.

Thus only several years ago c-des Kuznetsov and Baiiborodova, backed by other like-minded persons in the MLP, went to the city of Astrakhan to help the well-known leader of the trade union "Zashita" c-de O. Shein be elected to the Russian parliament.

In response to this after O. Shein's election to the Duma they became his assistants having privileges.

At the same time the "neo-Bolshevik" faction participated - without preliminary permission - in the initial stage of the creation of the labourist "Russian party of Labour" (RPL) under the virtual leadership of the same Shein, thus having the secret accompanying aim of liquidating the MLP as a result.

Again we sharply came out against it. But all the time our opponents profited from the fact that they had superiority of 1 vote in the Council of the MLP.

Even ordinary members from the "neo-Bolshevik" faction have begun to gradually realize the fatality of such "activity".

Today the same leading persons are attempting to tack between their MLP(B)ism, on the one hand, and the "entryism from the left" in the RPL, on the other hand, now making advances to O. Shein, now coming down on him with demagogic critiques depending on the conjunctures of the political moment.

We consider that it was not worth participating in the "Movement for the Labour party" at all. It was necessary to endeavour to strengthen the MLP itself and to spread propaganda.
However, one should bear in mind that with our negative attitude towards the parliamentarianism we have no anarchist prejudices in this plan. If a situation appears when a deputy is elected to the organ of power directly from workers and if he is really checked by the class organizations of proletarians we shall be able to support such a candidate.

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As you could notice, the split with us in our ranks has been ripening for long and could not occur in one day.

For example, one of the other issues, on which insurmountable discords appeared among us, was the insistent desire of the "neo-Bolsheviks" to become paid party workers. Moreover, what is the most important, paid not from the party dues, coming from the worker-proletarian mass - there is no such mass behind the MLP for the time being - but from finance coming from other sources, which in some way or other are connected, of course, with capitalist business. These are exactly such aspirations that we considered and do consider to be parasitic.

Did the dictatorship of the proletariat ever exist in Russia? Some comments on the pamphlet "The Marxist Anatomy of October and the Present-Day" published by the South Russia Bureau of the Marxist Labor Party of Russia

The SPGB would agree in general with the basic thrust of your pamphlet, namely, that what you call "October" (but what should more properly be called November, the fact that Russia had still been using the old Julian calendar abandoned by the West nearly two centuries previously being a measure of the catching-up Russia needed to do) was a moment in the decades-long historical development in Russia of capitalism, eventually in its classic form with a capitalist class enjoying individual, legal private property rights in the means of production.

In this sense the Russian revolution that began with the overthrow of the Tsar in March 1917, and including the seizure of power by the Bolshevik Party and the transfer of land ownership from the nobility to the peasantry, can be seen, as the pamphlet says, as an essentially "bourgeois revolution". The fact that this revolution was carried out without and even against the bourgeoisie of the time does not detract from the fact that its task was still that of a bourgeois revolution: to clear away feudalism, to distribute land to the peasantry, to spread wage-labour as the predominant form of labour, to allow the development of a capitalist class living off surplus value that would eventually legalise its position.

The pamphlet digs up some interesting facts to show that the pre-1917 Lenin realised that the tasks of the coming anti-Tsarism revolution in Russia could only be those of a bourgeois revolution and that he felt that the Social Democratic party should seek to initiate such a revolution and even participate in the post-revolution government, on the grounds that, precisely, the Russian bourgeoisie was too weak and too dependent on Tsarism to carry through its own revolution. Arguably, this is what happened—a bourgeois revolution carried out by (a section of) the Social Democratic movement—even though by this time Lenin's language had changed and he had begun to speak, mistakenly, of it as a "proletarian" or even a "socialist" revolution.

There is, however, say 5 percent of the pamphlet that the SPGB would have to take issue with. The SPGB would disagree with the pamphlet's claim that "the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia did exist" (page 1) even if only for a "few months" (page 4). We would also disagree with the pamphlet's suggestion that the Bolshevik Party at one point represented the working class (as on page...
The claim that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" existed in Russia after November 1917 even for a few months can be challenged both on theoretical and on factual grounds.

**Theoretical refutation**

Marx only used the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" on a limited number of occasions but did not mean anything different by it than the term of "conquest of political power by the working class" that he used more frequently to convey the same idea.

It ought not to be necessary to explain that Marx was not using the word "dictatorship" here in its 20th century sense of an undemocratic regime but in its classical Roman sense, revived by the French bourgeois revolutionaries of the 1790s, of a government mandated by the people with full powers to carry out a precise task in an emergency situation. The fact that Marx added "of the proletariat" should be sufficient to distinguish Marx's position from that of others such as Blanqui who proposed a simple dictatorship of self-appointed revolutionary leaders acting in the name of the people or of the proletariat. For Marx, not only was the "dictatorship of the proletariat" compatible with democratic forms but he envisaged that it had to take a democratic form both in the sense of enjoying majority working-class support and in the sense of respecting democratic principles. How else could the "dictatorship" be exercised by the "proletariat" itself (rather than by some minority of leaders)? Unfortunately, it is necessary to make this point since not only opponents but also some claiming to be Marxists (in particular Lenin and Trotsky at the time of the Russian revolution and immediately after) have interpreted Marx as standing for dictatorship in the 20th century sense. I think we are both agreed that they are profoundly mistaken.

I would add that the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" is not one that the SPGB normally uses (we only do so in discussions such as this one). This is not just because it has never formed part of the everyday language of working class militancy in Britain, nor because it is liable to be misunderstood, but mainly because we think that the period Marx used this term to refer to (the period of the revolutionary transformation of society from capitalism to socialism) can now be gone through in a few years at most, not the generation of 30 or so years he expected it to have to take in the third quarter of the 19th century.

Unlike some other, rival theories of how to get rid of capitalism and so bring about the emancipation of the working class from wage slavery and exploitation for surplus value, Marx always adhered to the view that the first step towards getting rid of capitalist exploitation had to be the capture of political power by a class-conscious working class.

At the time of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 Marx believed that this would only be possible in the course of a working class insurrection. Later, during his period of activity within the First International (1865-1872), he declared that, under the political conditions that existed at the time in some countries, it might also be possible for the working class to win control of political power more or less peacefully (1872 speech at the Hague). Since the countries he mentioned were the USA, Britain and the Netherlands, it is clear that the alternative to insurrection that he had in mind was via elections in countries where there was an elected parliament which controlled the government (whether a republic or a constitutional monarchy) and where the majority of electors were members of the working class. This involved what he later called converting universal suffrage from the means of trickery it had been till then into an agent of emancipation (1880 preamble to the programme of the French Workers Party).

Actually, strictly speaking, Marx meant more by "dictatorship of the proletariat" than just the "conquest of political power by the working class". He also meant the exercise of political power by
the working class with a view to the revolutionary transformation of society from capitalism to communism (or socialism, the same thing) (1875 Critique of the Gotha Programme). The assumption, therefore, is that the working class that is exercising this political power is doing so with the conscious aim of abolishing capitalism and establishing socialism. In other words, that a majority of the working class have become socialist-minded. This was to be the case whatever the means by which it acquired political power (insurrection or ballot box).

This is why Lenin's concept of "the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat", i.e. of the proletariat capturing political power with a view to introducing political democracy rather than socialism, is dubious. Since Marx regarded the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as being the period during which the working class uses its control of political power to transform society from capitalism to socialism, to apply the same term to a period when political power would be being used to introduce political democracy rather than socialism is a misuse of the term.

What Lenin had in mind was the Social Democratic movement itself seizing power in the course of an anti-feudal, bourgeois revolution and introducing (bourgeois) political democracy itself (because the bourgeoisie was either too weak or too cowardly or too dependent on a regime like Tsarism to be able to do this itself). Marx would not necessarily have disagreed with this tactic; in fact he would probably have supported it, but it is doubtful that he would have used the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" in connection with it. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" is simply a shorter way of saying "the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat". The concept of a non-socialist dictatorship of the proletariat, such as one to merely establish political democracy, is a contradiction in terms.

So we're not talking about a situation where the working class mandates representatives to exercise political power for any purpose, but where a socialist-minded working class sends its delegates to exercise political power with the conscious aim of establishing socialism. A reformist-minded working class has on many occasions elected representatives to try to reform capitalism in its interests (Labour, Social-Democratic and other leftwing governments in various parts of the world). But this does not represent either the capture or the exercise of political power by the working class. It is not the "dictatorship of the proletariat" in Marx's sense, i.e. the "socialist dictatorship of the proletariat".

This is obvious for Labour or Social-Democratic governments that come to power through elections. But it applies equally to working class representatives that might come to power under other circumstances but without being socialist. When a capitalist state has collapsed, or when a capitalist or pre-capitalist state has not provided for elective institutions or not for the working class to participate in electing them, then inevitably the opinion and will of the working class will express itself through other means than elections.

Generally, the alternative has been what have been called "workers councils". These appeared in Russia in 1905 and again in 1917, then in Germany and other places in 1918 and 1919 and on other occasions later (for example Hungary in 1956). But there is nothing in the workers council form itself that automatically makes workers councils expressions of socialist consciousness. Just like elections, they will express the opinion and will of the workers who compose, elect and support them whatever those opinions might be. If the workers are not socialist-minded then neither will the workers councils be (the same goes for factory committees insofar as these might be different from territorially-based workers councils). In fact, the majority of workers councils that were formed in Germany in 1918 and 1919 were expressions of support for the overtly reformist SPD.

This applies even if the workers councils capture political power and install a Workers Council government. Unless the majority of workers behind the councils are socialist-minded then their assumption of political power will not represent the capture of political power by the working class.
(any more than the election of a Labour or Social-Democratic government would or does); nor will the exercise of political power by such a government represent "the dictatorship of the proletariat".

In other words, the capture and exercise of political power by a national federation of workers councils cannot be regarded in itself as the "dictatorship of the proletariat". That will depend on whether or not the workers behind the workers councils and the Workers Council government are socialist-minded. Which is a question of fact.

Factual refutation

Thus the factual questions to be resolved in relation to the change of government in Russia on 7 November 1917 are:

1. Was the change of government an assumption of power by the Russian workers councils "Soviets")?

2. Were the majority of workers who sent delegates to the Russian workers councils socialist-minded, i.e. did they want to establish a society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production with production solely for use and not sale on a market and the consequent disappearance of commodity-production, money, wage-labour, etc?

The SPGB would argue that the facts show that the answers to both questions has to be "no", for the reasons to be set out below. However, even if the answer to the first question was "yes" (and there was no particular reason why in Russia in 1917 it might not have been), the negative answer to the second would have ruled out calling the 7 November 1917 a socialist or working class revolution and the government that came to power as a result of it a "dictatorship of the proletariat".

In appearance it was the workers councils, or rather soldiers, peasants and workers councils ("soviets"), that seized political power in Petrograd on 7 November and this was how things were presented by the new government to give itself legitimacy. However, Trotsky clearly set out the real position in his History of the Russian Revolution: the seizure of power was planned and executed under the strict control of the Bolshevik Party. It was the Bolshevik Party that seized power in November 1917 using the soviets as a front. It was not the soviets as such that seized power.

Trotsky recounts how Lenin had originally envisaged an open seizure of power by the Bolshevik Party itself as the self-proclaimed vanguard of the working class and how he had been persuaded that it would be better to seize power in the name of the soviets. The Bolsheviks therefore set out to win the support of a majority of delegates to the congress of soviets and to its executive organs. Trotsky (who enjoyed great prestige for having been the president of the soviets in St Petersburg in 1905) had himself appointed to the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviets. It was this committee that planned and organised the details of the actual seizure of power on the night of 7 November but, Trotsky recounts, it took its orders directly from the leaders of the Bolshevik Party whose central committee fixed the precise date for the overthrow of the Provisional Government in the name of the Congress of Soviets.

The idea that the soviets should assume power and that the government should be responsible to them was a popular one amongst the workers of Petrograd, Moscow and other large cities and industrial regions. However, most envisaged such a government as being composed of all the anti-Tsarist revolutionary forces that claimed to be socialist (not the same as actually being socialist in the proper sense, of course) and pro-working class, the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries as well as the Bolsheviks. In other words, they envisaged a sort of Labour or Social-Democratic government that would be a broad coalition of professedly pro-working class parties.

This was not to be as Lenin and (most of) the other leaders of the Bolshevik Party were
resolutely opposed to this. They wanted an exclusively Bolshevik government on the grounds that the Bolshevik Party was the vanguard of the working class and the only true representative of working-class interests, though they did admit as a concession certain Left Socialist Revolutionaries to the new government for a few months.

So, factually, it was the Bolshevik Party that seized power in November 1917 not the soviets as such. The only way to see the November change of government in Russia as a working-class revolution would be to accept the Bolsheviks' claim that they really were the vanguard of the working class and to see the Bolshevik Party as an instrument used by the workers' soviets in particular to seize power rather than the other way round (i.e. the soviets as an instrument used by the Bolshevik Party to seize power).

This was how the Bolsheviks themselves presented things, in most cases probably sincerely enough (that's not the question), and it was a version of the facts accepted by many (but not all, not by the SPGB for instance) revolutionary socialists in the West, including such people of the calibre of Rosa Luxemburg, Otto Rühle, Herman Gorter and Anton Pannekoek, who defended not just the "Workers Government" under the Bolsheviks in Russia but the idea of a workers council revolution leading to a Workers Council government as the way forward for workers in the West too.

Within a few years, when they saw state capitalism being developed in Russia, they revised their position. Most still saw the events of November 1917 as having been a genuine workers council revolution but now as one that had later come to be hi-jacked, betrayed or suppressed by the Bolsheviks. This tradition still continues and is defended to this day by many anarchists and Left Communists. A minority, though this came later, came to deny that November 1917 was even a workers council revolution, seeing it essentially as a coup d'Etat by the Bolshevik Party. Although not in the tradition of either anarchism or leftwing communism, this is the position the SPGB adopted right from the start. This position does not deny that there was widespread working-class discontent in Russia in 1917 nor that the workers councils and factory committees were genuine expressions of working class opinion, but it does deny that there was ever a working class revolution, in the sense of the capture of power by a socialist-minded working class, in Russia in 1917.

As mentioned above, it is conceivable that there could have been a genuine seizure of power by the soviets in Russia in 1917. However, given the low level of development of socialist understanding to be found amongst a majority of workers in Russia in 1917, this would not have amounted to a workers revolution in the sense of the capture of political power by a socialist-minded working class with a view to transforming society from capitalism to socialism. At most it would have represented the coming to power, by means of a popular uprising rather than elections, of a government of the Labour/Social Democratic type.

No less than the Bolsheviks, such a genuine "soviet" government, had it emerged (but it didn't), would have had no alternative but to continue the development of capitalism in Russia. This would inevitably have brought it into conflict with the working class and have led it to suppress strikes, factory committees and other forms of working class resistance to capitalist exploitation, even though it could be surmised that it might not have been so ruthless and brutal as the Bolsheviks were in this respect. But this is speculation and political fiction since such a soviet government never did come to power.

The second question—whether a majority of workers who supported the soviets really wanted to see established a society based on common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and the consequent end of commodity-production, money, wage-labour, etc—has virtually been answered already. Even though a small minority will have done, the vast majority did not. They were discontented, severely discontented but discontented with the effects of capitalism is not the same
thing as a positive desire to establish socialism (properly understood, as above) in its place.

The evidence suggests that what most workers and peasants (including those in soldier's uniform) wanted was summed up in the slogan the Bolsheviks used to win mass support, inside and outside the soviets, "Land, Peace and Bread". The Bolsheviks did deliver Land to the peasants (as in a classic bourgeois revolution, as the pamphlet points out) and they did sincerely try to bring Peace by taking Russia out of the war (it wasn't their fault they didn't succeed). "Bread" was more difficult but by 1921 they had realised that, in the circumstances in which they found themselves, the only way to get production going and rising again was to allow capitalism to develop and indeed to actively develop it themselves in the form of a state capitalism.

Thus socialism was out of the question in Russia in 1917 for two main reasons—the productive forces weren't sufficiently developed and there wasn't a majority in favour of it anyway. But even if there had have been a socialist majority in Russia in 1917 (which there wasn't) socialism could still not have been developed in Russia on its own. This was not just because of Russia's relative economic backwardness but because the developed productive forces that make a socialist society a material possibility only exist on a worldscale. Socialism has to be a world system. It cannot be established in just one country, not even a developed one let alone a backward one like Russia.

The productive forces, on a world scale, were sufficiently developed for socialism by 1917 so, if the workers of the rest of the world had been socialist-minded, socialism could have been established in Russia in 1917 as part of world socialism along with the rest of the world. However, although the "objective" conditions for (world) socialism existed in 1917, the "subjective" condition—a socialist-minded working class, organised politically and economically for socialism—was far from existing. The workers of Europe, North America, Australia, Japan and South Africa, to name the parts of the world where industrial capitalism existed to a greater or lesser extent, were as little socialist-minded as those in Russia. Certainly, they too were discontented—wars tend to radicalise working-class opinion—but only a small minority of them saw socialism, properly understood, as the way out. Indeed, elections in North America, Britain and France did not even give a majority to parties which used the word "socialist".

This undermines another of Lenin's justifications for the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in November 1917: that it was the first step in an imminent world socialist revolution. No such revolution was imminent and it was an illusion to imagine that it was, an illusion that Lenin no doubt held in all sincerity. But the absence of such an imminent world socialist revolution means that the Bolsheviks' seizure of power has to be explained in other terms than the first step in this. It has to be explained essentially in a Russian context of, as the pamphlet has done, a stage in the development of capitalism in a country which was a late-comer to capitalist development.

Adam Buick
May 2002
Dear DB

This is another belated contribution to the ongoing debate on trade unions (DB 116).

Trade Unions can claim to be the only legitimate institutions that are helping the working classes to intensify its class struggle within the limiting political and social freedoms of capitalist society.

My contention is that trade unions are not revolutionary in the sense that Trade Unions are not engaged in intensifying the class struggle between labour and capital.

Trade Unions are social institutions seeking to help the workers to bargain for higher wages and improved conditions of service.

The principle of Trade Unionism is arbitration rather than revolution. Every class conscious person may easily point out that Trade Unionism is arbitration rather than revolution. Every class conscious person may easily point out that Trade Unionism is a decadent specimen of working class class consciousness.

Trade Unions collaborate and interact with mainstream political parties whose political and economic reforms they actively support. Thus a strike organised by a Trade Union cannot or does not signify a class conflict because the objectives which the incidence of a strike is meant to achieve is not political, but monetary.

We may want to know to what extent Trade Unionism may come to claim working class political consciousness even in conditions where class struggles are not politicised as such.

Adam Buick was exaggerating when he said that Trade Unions are not expected to be revolutionary (DB116) unless he must be taken to imply that working class class struggles must never be revolutionary. The SPGB does not collaborate nor interact with Trade Unions though the SPGB may express sympathy and moral encouragement to the principle of working class organised industrial militancy.

But even this support and encouragement remains purely verbal—it is a mere gesture of political propaganda.

If comrade Adam Buick meant to defend the principle of Trade Unionism on empirical grounds, then he can only do so at the cost of his revolutionary principles.

Trade unionism cannot help to intensify working class struggles partly because Trade Unions do not consider themselves as political pressure groups.

In circumstances where old methods of intensifying and consolidating class pressures have proved ineffective, the class conscious workers must find the initiative to experiment with revolutionary structures that may come to vindicate its political consciousness.

The opportunities still exist.

Kephas Mulenga, Box 280 168 Chimwemwe, Kitwe, Zambia

(from p. 6)

"influenced"? There is no question that the early SPGB wasn't influenced to organize "socialist" unions like the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance or pour their energies into the IWW as the SLP did. On the other hand, they could have been influenced by De Leon's principled opposition to reforms and his belief in the importance of political action.

Among plans for DB120 is a selection of anti-war in Iraq leaflets by groups in our political sector. I'm content in this issue to reprint only one, mainly because it is well-written and obviously emanates from a revolutionary group. It is ideal for publication in the DB because our readership consists of anti-capitalist revolutionaries, and the leaflet seems to be directed toward just such a rather narrow audience: those who share the writer's primary concerns like globalization and capitalism in general. The real difficulty I have with the leaflet is that it seems to be taking the reader into its confidence on a sort of plan for bending the minds of demonstrators who have never before been exposed to these ideas. Now this may play well on Slingshot's home turf in California, but not in Grand Rapids where the greater part of the demonstrators are not part of the "radical community" by any stretch of the imagination. Many are
Hi all

Charmian Skelton of the Ashbourne Court Group makes a number of points in DB 118 in response to my earlier contribution, some of which merit a reply.

1. Revolutionary gradualism

Skelton asks whether I suppose the capitalist would just stand by as more passive onlookers while their class interests and power were gradually eroded - in effect, by the growth of a non-capitalist or "gift economy" sector in response to the growth of the socialist movement itself. Well, I'd say it this way - if she thinks that they are going to intervene to stop this then why does she not also think they will intervene to stop the growth of the socialist movement itself? Logically, if perhaps inadvertently, she has committed herself to the naive leftist view that in response to the threat of a socialist revolution, the capitalist state will become more authoritarian, more barbaric, more fascist. Presumably next she will be urging us to take up an armed struggle against this state which, after all by her reckoning, is unlikely to just stand by and allow the growth of the socialist movement threaten the very future capitalist rule but will take steps to close down any prospect of democratic change. In other words, make it impossible to capture the state democratically.

As a historical materialist I see quite the opposite happening. The stronger the socialist movement becomes the greater and more profound will its impact upon the social climate become. Capitalist rule operates on the basis of popular acquiescence or support. Take away that support and regimes crumble. Look what happened in Eastern Europe. In other words, the particular form of the state - liberal, social-democratic or fascist - tells us a lot about the kind of society over which it presides.

What kind of state would preside over a still-capitalist society significantly permeated and transformed by socialist consciousness? At the very least, I would say a rather weak, socially tolerant and ultra-liberal one. Certainly not one likely to crush the socialist opposition or its concomitant economic forms of organisation within the economy sector. Even if it wanted to, it could not do anything about them. For example, the present crisis of the Argentinian economy has facilitated a huge growth of LETS schemes within the country - this even in the absence of a strong socialist movement. Why hasn't the state done something about this?

The truth of the matter is that Skelton's perspective lacks any kind of historical imagination. Its simplistic naivete stems from a dogmatic and uncritical approach to theory - rather like a religious neophyte.

Next, Skelton asks, if Cox rejected the Big Bang theory of "sudden" revolution over ten years ago and favoured instead gradualism as the most practical alternative, "how can he now have the brass neck to claim that his gradualistic view is simply a supplement to the sudden view". This illustrates precisely her inattentiveness to detail. If she ever bothered to read the Road to Socialism circular (1987) which I co-authored with other members of the old Guildford Branch of the SPGB, she would have come across the following statement:

"Undoubtedly Parliament will play a role in the achievement of socialism, something which we shall later consider. But the traditional Party emphasis on the use of Parliament alone (as above) is unsatisfactory. There are a number of reasons why the traditional "big bang" theory of socialist revolution must be regarded as inadequate and why we need therefore to construct a more sophisticated multi-dimensional model of socialist transformation which nevertheless incorporates the more useful insights of the old theory."

One has to wonder who exactly has the brass neck in this case? Me or Skelton for suggesting I had
changed my mind?

Finally, she asks: how can I square my gradualistic view of revolution with my claim to be a socialist. Well, firstly, while I do include a gradualistic component in my perspective of revolution, I also include a "sudden" component, as the above makes clear. These two components are not incompatible; what has to be recognised is that the latter applies to the residual capitalist economy and not the capitalist economy as it exists today. In other words, it is based on the recognition that the extent and scope of capitalism is bound to contract under the influence of the growing socialist movement, facilitating the growth of a non-capitalist sector (the gradualistic component) but still leaving the "commanding heights of industry" so to speak in capitalist hands and requiring a political revolution (the sudden component).

Secondly, unlike Ms Skelton evidently, I take a structuralist Marxist view of revolution as denoting a fundamental change in the economic basis of society. Whether this change takes place gradually or suddenly or both (my view) is a secondary issue; what matters is WHAT this change has achieved and I frankly resent the insinuation that having a somewhat different view of how the change might come about makes one any the less a socialist.

2. Religion

Skelton refers to my "crazy campaign to persuade the various WSM parties to put out a welcome mat for religious believers". For a start I am no longer a member of the WSM so the question of trying to persuade it to change its policy on religion is rather redundant. It's a pity my comrades in the WSM should persist with this ill-conceived policy but really there's nothing more I can do about it. The ball is entirely in their court now.

Far from being crazy to rid the organisation of this policy, the opposite is the case. Skelton opines that "in the modern world as never before religion is not a private matter nor is it politically neutral". This is a complete red herring. All ideas have some kind a societal trace or origin. But so what? The question is what is the effect of such ideas. Are they, for example, a hindrance to socialism (and if so how big a hindrance?)

The fact of the matter is that it is completely possible for one to hold religious views and be a revolutionary socialist. Many of the early communists were religious in outlook - look at the Diggers and the Levellers. There are many socialists today - in the WSM's sense of the term - who have religious convictions but that does not in any way prevent them from wanting or understanding socialism. Some are ironically ardent sympathisers of the WSM.

Skelton's mistake is to generalise about religious belief and this is wholly in accord with her simplistic view of the world. Religion is no more necessarily antithetical to socialism than atheism necessarily favours it. The vast majority of atheists - like the vast majority of religious folk - are not socialists. But what the WSM does and what the Asbourne Courtesans do, is to actually restrict their membership potential to a tiny and relatively stable fraction of the population - about 5% in the UK - who can be classified as hardcore atheists. This is truly crazy!! It condemns them to perpetually political irrelevance - unfortunately.

Some religious beliefs like fundamentalist Islam or Christianity are admittedly very difficult to square with socialism, but people from these faiths are unlikely to be drawn to socialism anyway. More and more people are turning away from formal religions to informal religious convictions, and it is with the latter that likelihood of socialist sympathisers will I suspect significantly increase. Indeed some people I have spoken to see their religious beliefs as justifying their socialist convictions.

At the end of the day, if religious beliefs were in any way to interfere with the integrity of one's socialist convictions, this would soon enough come out in the wash and show itself in one form or another - e.g. beliefs in authoritarian leadership. If that were the case, this could then be dealt with on these terms.
The policy of refusing membership of a socialist organisation to individuals with religious beliefs is for this reason, totally superfluous or redundant. It achieves nothing except to restrict our growth to a tiny segment of the population that shows no sign of growing despite our increasingly secular society. It is a ludicrous and irrational policy and, regrettably, smacks more of a religious sect than a serious political movement committed to changing society.

For revolutionary socialism

Robin Cox, World in Common Group <www.worldincommon.org>
(from p. 17)

students at religious colleges or church people or politically liberal types who seem to feel that openly socialist literature and signs will alienate onlookers. I can’t believe that “Stop the Everyday War” will be well received; I even get a few dark looks while distributing the New Unionist and SLP and SPGB leaflets.

Troazar was the last volume in B. Traven’s six-volume Jungle Series about the lives of indigenous peasants and peons in Chiapas, Mexico to be translated from the German and published in English. With its vivid descriptions of the hell of the mahogany lumber camps it lays the groundwork for the last two volumes in which the sweet dream of any revolutionist comes to life and the oppressed win — at least temporarily.

As usual we end with some notes, announcements, and short reviews.

Finances

As might be expected during the DB’s wind-down period, the financial picture seems to be bleak. Actually it could have been much worse except that an occasional reader ordered a complete set of back issues and a couple of loyal subscribers made contributions. I am now convinced that I will have to send to the Cayman Islands and dip into the DB’s undeclared profits in order to publish 120 and pay off its subscription debts.

Contributions: Jerry Kaplan $8.05; Arminius $10. Total $18.05. Thank you, comrades.

BALANCE February 26, 2003 $68.80

RECEIPTS

Contributions $18.05
Sales 138.00
Total $156.05

DISBURSEMENTS

Postage $163.05
Bank Charges 8.00
Printing 36.29
Postage Due 6.10
Total $213.44

BALANCE April 23, 2003 $11.41

Fraternally submitted
Frank Girard
Adam Buick insists that De Leon influenced the founder-members of the Socialist Party of Great Britain:

The SPGB has never accepted so-called 'socialist industrial unionism' ... and was never influenced by De Leon's mistaken ideas on this and could not have been anyway since when the SPGB was in the process of being founded in 1903 and 1904, De Leon himself didn't hold this view anyway (DB117).

Buick's argument is based on the assumption that De Leon did his famous U-turn after the SPGB was founded (June 1904). It fails because De Leon had already turned to industrial unionism before this.

In April 1904, De Leon's talk, The Burning Question of Trade Unionism, showed a significant switch in his thinking, as Coleman noted:

This marks a fundamental break with the social-democratic-theory of socialist transformation, which places the political party, bidding to win control of the state, as the principal vehicle for changing society. To achieve this 'general lock-out of the Capitalist Class', as De Leon was later to call it, required a revolutionary industrial wing to the revolutionary political party. This amounted to far more than a shift in literary rhetoric: it was a new theory of revolution.

(S. Coleman, Daniel De Leon; 1990, pp.80-81.)

Compare the arguments of the SPGB in the first issue of the Socialist Standard:

"The Socialist... has to show the workers that while their organisation in trades will prove an invaluable aid in the transformation of society by facilitating industrial reorganisation, yet at present they can best help to emancipate themselves from the thraldom of wage-slavery by recognising that in their class struggle with their exploiters they can be most certain of success in the political sphere of action...

The first duty of the Socialist Party is the teaching of its principles and the organisation of a political party on a Socialist basis. The party becoming strong will capture parliamentary and other governmental powers. When these powers - legislative, administrative, and judicial, are wrested from their present class holders, the way is clear for the building up of the industries of the country upon the principle of collective production and collective distribution, and for the establishment of the Socialist Republic (Sept. 1904).

Other issues where the SPGB differed from De Leon included his tolerance of reformism and compliance with the reformist 2nd International, his belief that Europe was still feudal and that Socialism could only be started in the USA - Socialism in one country! - and his concept of vouchers and incomes in Socialism.

On another level, Buick's argument fails for lack of evidence: while the early SPGB published pamphlets by Kautsky and Morris, they published none by De Leon. In fact, actual evidence of De Leon's supposed influence on the early SPGB is about as strong as reliable evidence of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

For Buick it seems that, since in our pamphlet Socialist Policies and Principles - Setting the Record Straight, we wrote, "as people trying to make a contemporary political point" (true), this means we were "not writing as historians aware of or interested in the facts" - an oblique way of suggesting that we were cherry-picking, twisting the facts to score points, at best ignorant, at worst mendacious. Our pamphlet was an attempt to show how very misleading and inaccurate Perrin's book was. That book was clearly written with a political axe to grind, and unfortunately Perrin is not good on facts.

Indeed, while Perrin confidently asserts that "The views of the Impossibilist American SLP undoubtedly had an influence on both the SPGB and the British SLP, he seems to think De Leon never held any theory of revolution other than that of industrial unionism, e.g.;
Emanating from the American SLP under Daniel De Leon, socialist industrial unionism was based on the idea that socialist economic organisations were needed alongside a revolutionary party to rival the existing trade unions...

...the SPGB’s disagreements with the followers of Daniel De Leon were not so much about the necessity for an economic organisation along side the revolutionary socialist party - they were more about matters of tactics.


Again, we ask, where’s the evidence? Perrin offers only a footnote reference to Coleman’s book. As for Coleman, the only evidence he offers is that Jackson, in his old age, put something in his memoirs about the sort of pamphlets and political literature he was encouraged to read as a young man in the SPGB. No doubt he was also urged to study the writings of Marx and Engels, but on this Coleman and Perrin were silent, likewise Buick.

Our pamphlet dealt with several important issues where Perrin’s book gave a slanted and misleading account of what he claims to be SPGB theories and policies, such as his own theory - if you can call it that - of the , possibly imminent, collapse of capitalism. It is odd that Buick chose to dig into the dim and distant past rather than answer our charge that Perrin’s book systematically misrepresents what the SPGB’s position has been and is, on a number of theoretical and political issues.

I am sure Discussion Bulletin’s readers can draw their own conclusions. To those of you who have actually forked out L13.95 for Perrin’s book, I urge you - in your own interests - to get hold of our pamphlet (L1.00). After all, which do you prefer - fact or fiction?

Charmian Skelton
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(from p. 32)

issue is a one-page article, “Human Nature - No Barrier to Socialism” by Stan Parker. He attacks the “human naturists” views of our shortcomings item by item: aggressive, competitive, selfish, etc. It too is an excellent article and I would suggest that readers interested in copying the articles for those who need enlightenment obtain the April number for L1 from 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN, UK. E-mail spgb@worldsocialism.org

Red Lion Press is the publishing arm of the mutualist brand of anarchism. But its titles reflect a wider range of interests than those of the parent ideology. Among these are:
Toward Post-Modern Anarchism: Modernity and Post Modernity and how this affects anarchism... 11 pages, $1.50;
Cosmic Dialectics - Joseph Dietzgen’s unique anti-sectarian and libertarian thought. Its impact on the labor movement and its importance today (1996) 20 pages $2.50;
Sane Anarchy - Critique of New Left influences on anarchism How to build a movement and more. (1995) 17 pages $2.00.
Reaffirming Reich by John Griffen An examination of Wilhelm Reich’s experiments in weather control and a discussion of Reich and UFOs... 22 pages $3.00.

(to p. 25)
Did De Leon Influence the Socialist Party of Great Britain?

The group who currently control the Clapham based Socialist party claim that Daniel De Leon "influenced" the early members of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. By implication, the Socialist party of Great Britain's Object and Declaration of Principles and Party policy owe a debt to De Leon. This is wholly specious nonsense.

If we look at Stephen Coleman's book "Daniel De Leon" (1990) it does not actually argue that the S.P.G.B. was influenced by De Leon, apart from citing remarks made towards the end of his life by T. A. Jackson in his political memoirs, "Solo Trumpet" (1953).

On the contrary, Coleman supplies plenty of evidence against such a thesis. First, De Leon was and remained influenced by Bellamy's utopia, Looking Backward and the S.P.G.B. has always rejected utopianism. Second, De Leon held to the Erfurt Programme line that religion is a private matter while the S.P.G.B took the line that religion is a public, political issue, and published a pamphlet defending this view. Third, De Leon had already abandoned his "political" line before the S.P.G.B. was established. Fourth, De Leon was clearly more tolerant of reformism than the early S.P.G.B. in his relationship with the Second International which the Party opposed.

This is not the case with another Clapham member, David Perrin in his more recent book "The Socialists Party of Great Britain" (2000). He states "the views of the impossibilist American SLP undoubtedly had an influence on both the S.P.G.B. and the SLP" and he cites as a reference Coleman's book (p.156), but gives no quotations or other references to support this assertion.

So while Coleman is clear that the early De Leon differed largely from the post 1904 De Leon, Perrin does not even hint at this. For him the "undoubted" influence of De Leon relates to industrial unionism, not to the 1898 "What means this strike?" pamphlet which Perrin seems to be ignorant of. Perrin makes no mention of De Leon's dealings with the reformist SPA, his support at Congresses of the second international for resolutions calling for merger and unity.

We also need to place T. A. Jackson in some context for his remarks appear to be pivotal in this revisionist history. Jackson had been a founder member of the S.P.G.B. but he had left the Party, first to join the L.L.P and then to go on to establish the Communist Party of Great Britain.

In his book Jackson refers to the S.P.G.B as "the impossibilists" (p. 65). No where does he mention the Socialist Party of Great Britain by name. All we have as evidence is his assertion that one of the reasons why the Party split from the Social Democratic Federation was that "we, youngssters, were much under the influence of the weekly People, and Daniel DeLeons's brand of dogmatique Marxism" (P. 66).

Jackson goes on to relate how he attended the economic classes of Jack Fitzgerald, another founder member of the S.P.G.B. Fitzgerald drew the class's attention to Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, then available from New York in De Leon's translation (p.61).

Jackson then states that Fitzgerald also suggested the economic class should read, the Weekly People, the official organ of the American S.L.P, edited by De Leon. According to Jackson, Fitzgerald claimed that this was: "the best Socialist journal published in English" (p.61).

No concrete evidence is given. Merely hearsay. A recollection made some fifty years after the event.

In the 1950's as an ardent Stalinist, it suited Jackson's politics to associate the S.P.G.B with De Leon. The line taken at the time by the Communist Party was that anyone associated with De Leon was suspect, dogmatic and politically naïve. However, he does not tell us who "we youngssters" referred to. No names are given.

And this is the book on which Coleman and others at Clapham base their evidence that the
early Socialist Party of Great Britain was influenced by De Leon. No historian of any note would use Jackson’s memoirs without qualification and conclude that the Party was influenced by De Leon. A secondary source book based upon prejudiced memory is highly suspect, especially where other, primary, source material exists and all the more so, since the primary source material counters this argument.

We would also point out that Jack Fitzgerald was not the Socialist Party of Great Britain. He was just one person out of the 142 founding members. Just because Fitzgerald might or might not have been influenced by De Leon when he was in the Social Democratic Federation does not mean that the S.P.G.B. was influenced by De Leon’s writings.

The S.P.G.B was always quite clear in its official publications where the Party stood in relation to De Leon. One of hostility. In the 1932 “The Socialist Party of Great Britain and Questions of the Day”, the Party made the point that the Scottish Socialist Labour Party was “crippled at birth” (p.9) and “it soon became apparent that the members of this party had really only changed their idols; Hyndman, Quelch and company were deposed, and De Leon and Connolly took their places” (p.9).

The small inconsequential faction within the S.P.G.B who were attracted to Industrial Unionism either left or were expelled. In fact, in 1909, Fitzgerald debated against the one-time Party member, E. J. B. Allen who had resigned from the Party to join the Industrial League.

Bourgeois historians have an obsession with individuals. For Socialists what counts is the conscious and political development of the working class to the point where it forms a Socialist majority. All play a part in a Socialist organisation; those who speak and write, those who sell the literature and those who just argue the Socialist case with friends, family and whoever else will listen to them.

The Party has always rejected leadership, no matter how well meaning. Political theory and policy have always been determined by the Party as a whole. What counts in the Party are not idiosyncratic ideas and beliefs of individual members but the fact that the membership subscribe to the Object and Declaration of Principles; that the Party controls the journal and the pamphlets which set out the Socialist case against capitalism and that Party decisions are democratically arrived at and acted upon.

There is no evidence that the Party’s Object and Declaration of Principals was influenced by De Leon. There is no evidence that the Party’s 1905 Manifesto, was influenced by De Leon. And, from the early editions of the Socialist Standard, not a whisper of his name. This is especially significant since, in the early days, the Socialist Standard carried a number of articles, reprints, etc by European Socialists. Moreover, De Leon was an active writer and translator. If the early S.P.G.B members were actually influenced by De Leon as claimed, you would expect them to have indicated this –perhaps by occasionally quoting him, at least.

When the initial Executive Committee met on 18 June 1904, the EC declared the following publications suitable for sale by members: “Socialism and the Worker by Sorge; Wage Labour and Capital by Marx; Socialism and Radicalism by Aveling; Liebknecht’s No Compromise and The Socialist Revolution by Kautsky (The Monument, B. Baltrop p.42). Nothing whatsoever by De Leon. And no recommendation was made by the EC, which included Fitzgerald, for members to take out a subscription to the Weekly People.

The academic parlour game of tracing the “influence” of someone’s ideas on somebody else’s work is largely sterile. Politics cannot be reduced to stylistic dilettantism. Even if Fitzgerald did advocate the reading of the Weekly People when he was running economic classes in the SDF this does not mean that the early Party was influenced by De Leon. The foremost theoretical influences on the founders of the Party were the materialist conception of history, the labour theory of value and the
political concept of the class struggle.

Academics and would-be academics have a problem with the S.P.G.B. It was not established by intellectuals, lawyers, professors of ideas, doctors of philosophy or second class minds from Oxford. The Party was founded by ordinary working class men and women who thought for themselves in line with their own class interests.

In fact the split in the SDF was largely the dictatorial and undemocratic actions of the SDF leadership and its social reform programme. But even this is to understare the real influence. What really influenced the thinking of the early members of the Party was the class struggle, what Marx referred to as "the motor force of history".

At the meeting in 1904 to formally constitute the Socialist Party of Great Britain, the centrality of the class struggle rather than the influence of individuals was underscored.

This was again stated in the Manifesto of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, published in 1905: "Realising that the economic forces working through the development of capitalist society demanded the formation of a revolutionary Socialist party, believing that the emancipation of the working-class can be accomplished only by the members of that class consciously organised in a Socialist party, and recognising that the class-struggle can alone be the basis of such a party..." (p.11).

So why should the Clapham Socialist Party want to place De Leon as an important influence on the Party? Why do they want to refer to the SLP as "our cousins"? The reason is political. They want to share the same political platform with De Leonists in the US. They believe, to use the phrase of one of their former members, that they all belong to the same "non-market anti-statist" club. Utopian anarchism and opportunism by another name.

- Richard Lloyd

(from p. 22)

Anarchist Economics - two selections from Benjamin Tucker on mutualism and corporations (1998) 10 pages $1.50.

For a complete catalog or to order write to L. Gambone, Box 174, Succ. D, Montreal QC, H3K 3B9 Canada. (Do not mention Red Lion Press when addressing mail.)

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Stop the Everyday War

PB Floyd

As horrifying as the prospect of the United States launching a pre-emptive strike war against Iraq is to millions of people, one has to wonder if we’re not all falling into precisely the trap that Bush and Company are laying for us.

This war is being conjured up out of thin air, timed during a major economic downturn, with “debate” and Congressional approval of the war conveniently scheduled a month before mid-term elections. People are hurting financially all over the country. Under these circumstances, Bush’s war talk appears to be a cynical attempt to divert attention from domestic problems, in hopes of gaining a short-term political advantage. The chance to diminish the United Nations, flex unilateral US military dominance, and increase world oil supplies is gravy. The pretext of making the world “safe” from Iraq is at best laughable.

If the only ripple effect of Bush’s war strategy was securing Republican control of the Congress, perhaps it wouldn’t be so bad. Whether Congress is controlled by Republicans or Democrats is essentially irrelevant since both stand for the same earth destroying, worker exploiting, world dominating policies.

But the ripples haven’t been limited to the mainstream political reality. In the US and around the world, people involved in popular movements that had been starting to challenge the economic assumptions of the ruling order—generally known as the anti-globalization movement—have shifted their time and energy to opposing the approaching war. Time that could have been used for positive action has been consumed on reaction—playing defense, not offense.

If those in power are able to divert activism that would have been directed against their economic domination into defensive single-issue activism narrowly focused against war, the war will pay much greater dividends than mere control over vast oil resources.

For our part, it’s crucial that we don’t lose sight of the real war while we’re opposing Bush’s manufactured war against Iraq.

The real war is waged every day, receives little media coverage, and isn’t the subject of countless marches and rallies by well-meaning liberals: it’s the war of the powerful against the weak, the north against the south, industrialism against the earth, cold economic rationalism against life and freedom.

This daily war systematically causes far more destruction, human misery, death and environmental destruction than Bush’s contemplated war against Iraq will. Bush’s war may kill a million Iraqis, a terrible, unacceptable, horrendous cost.

But how many people are dying day in and day out because of this capitalist/industrial system? How many are living lives as walking dead, their spirits crushed, serving a machine? How many live without food, clean water, a dry place to sleep, any hope or future? Between 1 and 2 billion people worldwide live below the subsistence threshold. Even in Western industrialized countries, millions live hopeless, powerless lives.

As terrible as war against Iraq would be, and as vigorously as we must oppose, disrupt, and if possible prevent the Iraq war, the everyday war must not be permitted to continue. If the war on Iraq can be prevented, it won’t be time to sit back in satisfaction and declare that everything is now “A-okay.” The day before a war on Iraq begins, and the day after it ends, the daily war will continue.

The daily war concentrates the power and weapons of mass destruction in the hands of the United States that makes a war on Iraq possible. Only when the daily war is ended once and for all will the need to oppose this and that military adventure off into the future finally cease.

Fortunately, opposing the war against Iraq and opposing the daily war against the earth and its people are not totally incompatible. While it’s certainly possible to oppose the war against Iraq in such a
narrow way that the everyday war is not simultaneously opposed, there are numerous opportunities to use the struggle against the Iraq war to promote understanding of the struggle against the everyday war.

The horror, the waste and the brutality of war can focus attention on the gap between the rhetoric of our rulers, and the reality of this system. People who believe in the system—who believe that the US is a kind nation which promotes democracy and peace—are ripe to be radicalized when they see how the system operates in practice. In September and October, polls showed a majority of citizens opposed a preemptive attack against Iraq in the face of international opposition. Folks wrote thousands of letters, lobbied their representatives, and got nothing. Now they sit, opposing the US regime, feeling increasingly alienated from the system.

Our opposition to the Iraq war can promote greater awareness of the everyday war by emphasizing the failure of liberal methods and assumptions. The approval of congressional resolutions in favor of the war shows that the system doesn’t care what citizens think. The whole affair demonstrates that the United States government relies, not on the promotion of democracy and peace, but on naked military superiority in international relations.

People who turned out by the thousands to anti-war demonstrations have been confronted with the reality of the corporate media—these demonstrations were largely ignored.

From the liberal perspective, war against Iraq seems an aberration—a violation of the liberal conception of the United States’ role in the world. This is an opportunity to point out that the war isn’t an aberration—it’s an honest expression of a society that promotes power, violence and domination over self-determination, cooperation and human life. In short, the war unmasksthe death culture that is the capitalist / industrial system.

Each speech given by Bush demonstrated the gap between rhetoric and reality: Bush and the US government are guilty of most of the “evils” that Bush charged against Iraq:

* The US attacks and threatens to attack its neighbors without provocation.
* The US is the world’s leader in weapons of mass destruction.
* Bush emphasizes the danger of Iraq acquiring nuclear weapons, when the US already has thousands of them. The US is the only nation to ever use nuclear weapons in war, and its war plans contemplate their use again, including preemptively.

If these actions are evil for Iraq, how are they good for the United States? Nothing distinguishes the US’s military domination of the world scene from Iraq’s much weaker attempted military domination of their local scene.

The task of the radical community goes far beyond working to publicly oppose the war against Iraq. It’s crucial to prevent Bush & Co. from using the war to distract the world from a critique of economic domination. Moreover, it’s up to us to use our struggle to oppose the war in a positive way—to build a movement against the everyday economic war all around us.

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What revolutions are made of—a review of B. Traven’s TROZAS

by Mike Ballard

B. Traven puts a lot of Spanish and Indian words in his novels. He always translates these words right after using them and that is certainly a pleasant thing about reading his work. However, he doesn’t explain what this book title means until page 183:

“A troza, what’s that? You must tell me that, if I’ve got to look for one.”

“It’s the trunk of a felled caoba, a ton of mahogany. Cut into the right lengths, stripped of bark, and hewn square, so that the trunk has a diameter of about a foot.” Andres, tells his twelve year old boy helper, Vincente.

Another, perhaps the most pleasant and refreshing thing about reading B. Traven’s novels is encountering his class conscious sense of humour. Mocking the bosses can be fun and in TROZAS much amusement is had at the bosses’ expense. Overseeing wage-slaves in the mahogany forests of Mexico, “Don Remigio had asked each one of the line of monteria workers, mostly Indians, with a few mestizos, what their names were, compared them with the names on the lists the agents had sent him, and then begun to divide the young men into the working groups in which they would be most useful for his contract, according to their bodily strength and fitness or their experience in particular kinds of work.

“When he got to the end of that uncommonly heavy and responsible task, he had a good time complaining about his fate and bemoaning his miserable existence. Since no one else in the world ever felt sorry for him, there was no other way to arouse pity in the circumstances than to pity himself.”

The monteria (mahogany camps) are where the workers, who the doleful Don Remigio is inspecting, will be force-marched. They are indentured servants being herded into the hellish wage-slavery of the timber industry in early 20th Century Mexico. After all, someone must harvest the caoba (the mahogany). “The people in New York and London want mahogany furniture for the dining tables” and it may as well be these men and boys who do that work. It is their own sin that their older, sicker fathers had too many debts or had died in their forties on the fincas, (the plantations) the great farming tracts of the landlord class. Yes, it’s the sons’ fault that these men whose fathers art now in heaven, had to be buried at an expense exceeding the meager savings their mothers had been left with. They are held responsible for accumulated debts of their parents. Oh yes, to be sure, there are others being marched to the monteria, mostly those who have stupidly accumulated a fine or two because a piece of governmental paper had not been stamped correctly or they had gotten into a fight with a muchacho in the cantina. What are the good people to do? They must recover the money owed to them and officials must enforce the laws of the State. So, they sell the muchachos (the men/boys) by contract to the recruiters of the monterias. Why? Well of course, so they might work off those debts and fines. Their debt/work contracts are then sold to the owners of a fine enterprise like The Caoba Exploitation Company. Here’s how Traven has one of the bosses who transports workers to the monteria rationalizing the situation:

The Indian workers, “are not used to anything else anyway and do nothing but fool around. If they
TROZAS is the fourth in Traven’s series of six novels examining the circumstances which gave birth to the Mexican Revolution of Zapata’s and Villa’s time. I reckon the novel is set around the year 1909. That was the last year before the uprising against the old dictator of Mexico, Porfirio Diaz. By then, Zapata himself had developed his strong sense of political consciousness by feeding a voracious appetite for stories about older members of his family and their campaigns against the Reactionaries and the Imperialists. As it happened, Zapata was also a man of integrity, as Celso and Andres are in TROZAS. Knowing that Emiliano would never sell them out, the people of his home town of Aneucuico elected Zapata president of a council to defend their interests in that fate filled year of 1909. The next year Zapata would enthusiastically join what Traven titled his fifth novel, “the rebellion of the hanged”. Although, one cannot say that Zapata could be called “the general from the jungle”(the final book in the series), the enthusiastic reception to Traven’s jungle novels amongst Mexican readers suggests that he was adept at depicting the root causes of their political revolution. I daresay, B. Traven’ jungle novels have also managed to plant many seeds in the international imagination along history’s way. I remember seeing the film “Viva Zapata” as a young lad--how impressed I was with Steinbeck’s screenplay and Kazan’s apt direction. To think that they had not read and been influenced by Traven, would be like presuming John Huston hadn’t read Traven’s “Treasure of the Sierra Madre” before conceiving the layout of his film by the same name. Would that the jungle novels could be taken up in an honest, non-Hollywoodized way by a decent director with an adequate budget today. Ah, but I digress into proletarian pipe-dreaming here.

Traven begins TROZAS by introducing his main protagonists: Nature, the workers and their exploiters. Nature is a giant of a character. She is all pervasive. You feel her colossal presence in the jungles of Chiapas as she both smothers and engenders life under the skirt of her thick jungle canopy. Her ever present atmosphere is hot, heavy, oppressively damp, seeping through every pore, nook and cranny of the monteria. The animals, the insects, the mould, the rot, are everywhere in the novel and most especially where the workers and the bosses swelter--the cutting fields of the mahogany jungle.

The bosses are drawn as the putty things they are by comparison. To be sure, they have a constancy about them, but it is a constancy located in tragi-comic authoritarian character structure. Traven satirically pries them apart, meticulously exposing the petty, corrupt, selfish, usually mean spirited beings that they have become, ensconcing them in their hierarchical nook and animating the cheapness of their petty lives.

A prime example is the depiction of a chief administrator of the monteria. He is shown to be a man whose fondest wish is to have his office building painted. He daydreams about it all the time, always balkling at the price. Yes, this is the mental map of ‘the hollow men, the stuffed men’ of the nowadays mythically proportioned free market. The chief administrator is a man obsessed with triviality and sussing out ways to squeeze ever more pennies from his personal fiefdom. Corruption points in this direction and he follows in his capacity as appointed governmental representative, turning a blind eye to the enforcement of bar licensing laws. As Traven wryly comments, “Often the reasons for his tolerance were to be found less in his generosity than in the fact that the bars either paid him a toleration tax or that the bills which he made out for himself in the bar were never submitted for
The last of Traven’s three subjects are the workers, who, as mentioned above, are sold into debt-slavery to The Caoba Exploitation Company. “Without men they can’t get anything going on the monteria. They need men just as much as they need caoba. Without caoba no profit, without men no caoba.” For their work, the men are paid wages. To be sure, that’s bad enough, but it gets worse. The wages the workers are paid do not cover the costs of living within the abnormal conditions of the monteria, even when they go without clothes and work naked harvesting the caoba for The Company’s owners to sell. With his best black humour, Traven calculates thickness and length of the fetishized chains this particular kind of wage-slavery for his readers. It will take most of the men 10,000 years to pay off their debts.

However, this arrangement is all perfectly legal in the eyes of the State for, “a cash advance had been paid to every man recruited by the agents, the better to tempt the men to confirm their contracts before the municipal president and thus, in the eyes of the civilized world, give the impression that it was a simple labour contract such as can be concluded anywhere on earth. The old cacique (most probably Porfirio Diaz, the dictator of Mexico) knew far better than the newly fledged dictators how to conceal the true conditions in his country from the suspicions of the other nations, helped by a gagged and self-corrupting press that grovelled before him. What the workers themselves said or spread abroad was nothing but lies and slander. Truth was only what was written in the labour contracts, acknowledged by the workers, and stamped by an official authority. That the Indian workers could neither read nor write the dictator did not regard as his fault. Why didn’t they learn to read and write? They were too stupid for it and just didn’t want to learn.”

Among the workers, there is one who can read. Andres is already known to those readers who have pored over Traven’s CARRETA, second of the Jungle Novel series. He and Celso, a Chamula Indian worker who has had previous work experience in the mahogany camps and who is a proven fighter, are acknowledged by their fellow debt ridden wage-slaves as leaders in the day to day struggle for survival and against the bosses of The Company. When they first meet, Celso asks Andres if he will teach him to read. Andres agrees and Celso gives him the sage advice of the experienced monteria wage-slave in return, “Never get out in front! Make that one of your most important rules here. No one should ever push to the front anywhere in life. Only when it is a matter of your own pot. You don’t get anything out of it. Only twice the work and a kick up the arse when it’s over.”

Some may be taken aback by Traven’s depiction of racism toward the Chinese in TROZAS. The Chinese, who appear in this novel, are on contract as camp cooks. They are freer than the Indian proles though. They are in the jungle of their own volition and not being forced to work off debts. Traven paints the two of them with a brush similar to the one he uses to portray the owners of the monteria. But unlike the owners of The Company, these Chinese represent want-to-bes. To use an old Wobbly term, they are cockroach capitalists. They are, by force of circumstance, even more concerned with cutting corners with cheapness than the big bosses, otherwise they will not survive as small businessmen-businessmen who cook for a living. Of course, their cost cutting proclivities result in their serving chintzy food thus providing a near constant bone of contention between themselves and their voraciously hungry customers. Partly because of this and because they maintain a life, a set of customs and culture separate from the Indian workers and their whiter bosses, the non-assimilating Chinese are subject to constant racist comment. While they do manage to maintain some dignity by controlling what wealth they produce for their labour, Traven does not play the politically correct game
of excising epithets or for that matter sexist comments toward the women who have attached themselves to the mahogany camps. This is the kind of speech which would have been made by real people at that time. To be sure, a close reading of TROZAS and other Traven novels will show that the author is quite sensitive to the corrosive realities of the oppressed/oppressor dynamic both within the working class and without it. It’s all part of the old game of divide and rule through a verbal abuse which leads towards psychological demoralization.

Being divided from heaven and thus power, most people in Traven’s novels become acculturated to living life patiently, resigned to waiting for their pie in the sky. As such, God concepts get no quarter from the revolutionary writer. In this passage from TROZAS, Traven demonstrates a sympathy for working oxen while showing, with biting humour, the capricious cruelty of the controlling power, if indeed, such a being really exists outside the human mind.

“How easily could a sympathetic and loving God have lessened, even eliminated, the agonies of the innocent, hard-working beasts if it had pleased him to create no biting flies, no mosquitoes, no worms that bored into every hurt place on a living animal and bred there, to create no morasses too deep to be of use to any creature and simply acting as breeding places for all sorts of parasitic insects. “Swarms of tiny flies crawled into the ears and eyes of the animals and of the people working with them. Ticks waited in the leaves of the bushes. dropped onto the animals and the men as soon as the bush was touched, and ate into the skin, digging in their heads and clinging so firmly that it was painful to pull them off, and the skin became inflamed, even more painful if the head broke off and stuck in the flesh when they were pulled off.”

Of course, the attitude of the controlling power’s representative on Earth is not spared either. Vincente, the twelve year old who asked Andres what trozas were, had a father once. But his father had been kicked by a “refractory mule and died” while working on his employer’s finca. Vincente’s mother, not wanting her husband interred like a dog, asks the priest for help with her burial duties. But as Traven writes, even though the Father knows that the woman has little or no money, “The priest could not do that for nothing, for since God had presumably endowed him with intelligence but also with a healthy stomach which had to be filled every day so as not to let the intelligence get rusty, and a body that must be clothed in order not to cause offense, there was nothing left for the cura but to let himself be paid for God’s blessing in the coin of the realm when he administered it. That is not a sin in itself, and it is just as respectable a business as cutting shafts for wagons or forging horseshoes. The sin in this holy career appears only in that the curas persuade people that bodies must unconditionally be laid in the earth in the Christian manner; and the Christian manner of course means with the help of a cura, with the tolling of bells and the sprinkling of water, and if bodies are buried without that special blessing, which only an anointed cura can give, then it all goes wrong with the poor souls, for they are burnt and can know only weeping and gnashing of teeth instead of the singing of holy songs and the playing of harps. Thus the people whether poor or rich, are convinced that God’s blessing is essential and that they must take the trouble to acquire, or, to put it plainly, to buy that blessing for themselves or for the souls of their departed.”

And thus, is young Vincente sold to into his 10,000 years of purgatorial style wage-slavery in order to pay off the debt of having his father properly enshrined.

TROZAS. B. Traven Published by Ivan R. Dee, pb, $14.98. Can be purchased from AK Press, <http://www.akpress.org>
NOTES, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND SHORT REVIEWS

The People as Enemy: The Leaders' Hidden Agenda in World War II is the title of a book by John Spritzler soon to be released by the Canadian publishing company Black Rose Books. In a recent letter, the author says, "I wrote a book re-examining World War Two that will be available this May at Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk, and local bookstores in the U.S. and Great Britain. The book re-examines why Axis and Allied leaders started the war and what their goals were. It challenges the "good war" mythology of that war and shows that Allied and Axis leaders used the war primarily to control their own populations at a time when they feared domestic revolutions, and that in the actual conduct of the war, the allies' first priority was preventing working class movements from taking power in Europe and Asia, not defeating the fascists or liberating people from them. I wrote the book because George Bush often calls upon the mythology of WWII to cast his "War against Terrorism" as being the modern day version of the war against fascism. He uses the unchallenged "goodness" of WWII as an argument for the justness of his war, for example invoking the "lesson of Munich" to justify pre-emptive war."

The DB expects to have a review in the next issue.

The book's url at Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk are below in that order:
http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/search-handle-form/026-0261703-7202055

"Human Nature and Human Behavior" is the title of a review of by Adam Buick of Stephen Pinker's latest book, The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature. Pinker, an MIT professor of evolutionary psychology has produced a book that gives scientific aid and comfort to the age-old Christian view that humankind are naturally evil as a result of Adam's having eaten the apple. The book has has had a real impact on the intellectual classes here. It has been reviewed in many prestigious scientific journals as well as such popular publications as the New York Review of Books. In fact reading it convinced a leftist friend that socialism was a hopeless aspiration because deeply embedded in our minds are the anti-social urges and impulses that make a new society impossible. Published in the April 2003 issue of the Socialist Standard, Buick's three-page review effectively refutes the arguments of those who deny the possibility of a socialist reconstruction of society on the grounds that human nature makes it impossible. Also in this
(to p. 22)