

# THE LEFT DRIFTS RIGHT

From time to time, 'Class Struggle' carries articles criticising the policies and practices of other organisations on the left. Usually these criticisms are related to their stand towards current events and trends in the world. Such articles have usually been popular with readers. Although they often have to go into complicated issues, they help clarify what is right and wrong on the left, and give a clearer idea of what needs to be done. Such polemics are an essential part of building a revolutionary organisation: they serve to educate those who study them on how to tell real from false Marxism and how to decide on the most suitable course forward for the struggles in which they are involved.

We print below an article which we hope will contribute to this kind of debate. While agreeing with many of the arguments in the article, we do not agree with parts. We welcome replies, comments etc. from our readers.

## THE STATE OF THE LEFT

Contributed.

### Consolidation of the Rightist Trend

In an article carried in 'Class Struggle' at the end of last year (1985- Crisis on the Left, 'Class Struggle' Vol.9, Nos 11-12), the impact of the increasing crisis of British imperialism upon the left here was examined. The article showed how, at a time when the importance and the possibilities of revolutionary work were increasing, the bulk of the left was distancing itself further from such work. This was especially true of the Labour left as a whole, but also of some outside it.

In the months since that article was written, that rightward trend has further consolidated itself.

'New Socialist', which began as a Labour Party magazine of Bennite inclinations, three years ago, has turned its back on "hard Left" (!) politics under the editorship of Stuart Weir, and now simply reflects the preoccupations and obsessions of its middle class, tired ex-student readership.

Pages and pages of this glossy magazine are filled with life-style politics that are totally irrelevant to the bulk of working class people for whom the increasingly difficult struggle to get by is more urgent. It has little to say about solidarity with liberation struggles, except for that in South Africa/Azania - an easy one to support.

In May of this year, associate editors Michele Barrett and Rosalind Coward wrote of how 'New Socialist' had "shown a willingness to move away from the traditional concerns of the white, male, middle-aged left". But all it seems to have done is to address itself more successfully to white, middle-aged people in general, of vaguely left of centre politics.

It has supposedly been heavily influenced by feminist perspectives but these can, without abusing that much misused term, be fairly called bourgeois feminist perspectives. Time and time again, issues such as incest, child murder, motherhood and sexuality, which have been raised by a wider women's movement, have been treated in a way divorced from class, as though, for example, the experience of motherhood which working class and middle class women have, is not radically different.

This "broadening" of the magazine's coverage, its "openness", concern with 'style', etc. so beloved of an assortment of ex-

student hand-wringers in safe middle class jobs (not to mention its ugly new design, which resembles closely that of the pretentious magazine, 'The Face'), has not done it much good: 'New Socialist's' circulation has halved in the past year.

Also suffering under the impact of such soft left politics is 'New Statesman' magazine, now down to a quarter of its peak 1960's sales. The appointment of Kinnoek supporter John Lloyd as editor should ensure that it says even less to upset the Labour leadership than in the past. 'Tribune', once the main voice of the Labour left, is also firmly hitched to the Kinnoek bandwagon. It seems fitting. In the past, when people like Wilson and Foot were on the left of the Labour Party, they worked with 'Tribune', and then parted company with it as they moved to the right and to the top. 'Tribune' has moved after Kinnoek, saving them from parting.

This clutch of right-moving Kinnoek supporters is completed by the Communist Party's domin-

and Politics', edited by Chris Wrigley, he paraphrases part of a resolution adopted at the Fourth World Congress of the Communist International in 1922, saying that it called for the establishment of "broad" governments in the capitalist countries, when it actually said: "In certain circumstances, Communists must declare themselves ready to form a workers' government with non-Communist workers' parties and workers' organisations".

The kind of government Hobsbawm and his wing of the CPGB want is opposed by most of the Labour left, who believe that Labour's coalition partners would cooperate to stifle any pro-working class initiatives backed by the Labour Party. We, who have less faith in Labour's virtues, can see that a coalition would provide an easy way

Now Eric Hobsbawm, leading CPGB theoretician, has re-written the history of the communist movement to add weight to his backing for a coalition government composed of Labour,

while the other group, around the journal 'International', has taken a more critical stance towards Labour's leadership, and has also made a greater commitment to solidarity with Third World liberation movements than the Ross faction.

Since the split in the Workers' Revolutionary Party, last October, the expelled Healey faction have kept all the trappings of a religious cult, idolising their leader, seeing great conspiracies on all sides against their party and keeping the membership at arms length from other political tendencies, in a world of its own. (Funnily enough, there is much in their antics which various Trotskyist groups have claimed is typical of "Stalinist" parties!) The WRP majority, has gone into a serious re-evaluation of its past since Healey's expulsion, with the consequence that the letters page of its weekly 'Workers Press' is now one of the liveliest and most thought-provoking on the left. One immediate result of the rejection of a great deal of the WRP's past under Healey, was the establishment of a commitment to serious work in solidarity with Ireland, which can only be welcomed in a left which generally has a bad record on this struggle so close to home. The WRP majority has also recently begun to challenge the Healey position towards women's movements worldwide, which branded them all, irrespective of their class composition and the content of their demands, as "bourgeois feminist".

In contrast to these positive developments, 'Socialist Organiser' has assumed the role of apologist for Zionism and Loyalism. The turn to a Militant-type "unite the workers - nationalism is divisive" line took place first in relation to Ireland. But in the past year, it was also extended to Palestine. Now 'Socialist Organiser' puts Zionism and Palestinian nationalism on a par, when the first is necessarily an oppressive ideology (in that the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine meant the dispossession of the Palestinians and Palestinian nationalism is the nationalism of an oppressed people who want only their own national freedom, not the oppression of anyone else). This means that 'Socialist Organiser' opposes the PLO and opposes the call for a democratic, secular state of Palestine. Labour Party students who support the Palestinians found at the last NUS conference that their pro-Palestinian work came in for more obstruction from 'Socialist Organiser' than the pro-Israel Union of Jewish Students.

out both for Kinnoek and his friends, and for those on the Labour left who have not wanted an expansion of anti-government struggle which they cannot control. Both can claim that it is the coalition partners who are blocking the march forward of working people under Labour leadership, and the Labour left can oppose Kinnoek in parliament, knowing that their votes will not bring down the government, but will keep them looking like a credible left alternative.

### THE "FAR LEFT"

Among those who are commonly seen as "far left", the current trends are confused, as is to be expected at a time of crisis. The former International Marxist Group, which liquidated itself into a Labour Party caucus around the paper, 'Socialist Action', split last year over issues which are only now becoming clearer. The faction around John Ross, which still runs 'Socialist Action', has been drawn deeper into mainstream Labour Party politics,

the move rightwards, away from campaigning in the working class, and away from any consistent internationalist position, which much of the left has made, is opening up the political space for communist politics to have a greater influence. The League has to work out how to take up this challenge and make the most of the new possibilities that exist. Hopefully, productive dialogue can be established with those on the left who reject the rightward shift of the majority, who see through Labourism to a large extent, and who believe in the necessity of a socialist revolution in Britain in alliance with the liberation movements of Ireland and the Third World. Fundamental differences must not be glossed over, but a dialogue through which all learn from each other's strengths will be of service to the working people who liberation is the desired goal of all.

Liberalism and SOP. In an essay in a collection in honour of A.J.P. Taylor ('Warfare, Diplomacy