

mand in the UN Security Council").

It seems that the CPs should be criticised for no longer automatically backing what Moscow does. Nothing here is abstract, or 'idealistic', or contrary to 'the real movement of the class struggle' and the taking of sides with one bloc in 'the major contradiction of our time!' The advancing tanks move, backed by History, and all your programmes and tears will not roll them back one inch!

Finally, what prospects does Grant see in Afghanistan?

"Balancing between the different nationalities of Afghanistan, and leaning on the poor and middle peasants, the Afghan regime, based on Russian bayonets, will undoubtedly be able to crush the rebels and establish a firm proletarian bonapartist state as a Soviet satellite". But things won't be so bad. "Once the counter-revolution has been defeated, most of the Russian troops will be withdrawn... The Bonapartist regime and the Russians will find a way to compromise with the mullahs". Essentially this is the same basic assessment as was made in Workers' Action last January. But the nice 'optimism' is Ted Grant's.

The international contradictions will soften, too. Russia may, in response to the American trade reprisals, back the Baluchis and Pathans in Pakistan and maybe "fulfill the old dream of Tsarist diplomacy, a warm water port". But "Before things go that far, however, it is likely, in the not too distant future, that there will be a compromise between the US and the bureaucracy". This sophorific message will perhaps lull the many readers of Militant who did not have the duty in 1965 and after to read Militant's monthly assurance that compromise was just ahead in Vietnam. It has the effect, however, of minimising the degree of blame the readers of Militant will attach to the bureaucracy for the invasion and the boost it has given to the warmongers.

Setting it straight?

GRANT'S ARTICLE, though it left many things in the air, seemed to come out against the Russian invasion. In fact, it was utterly contradictory. The whole assessment of the 'progressive' side of the effective annexation of Afghanistan implied support for it. The opposition to the invasion was grounded in the need to bow to working class public opinion. Grant declined to take a stand on an independent working class political assessment, and confined himself to describing a process and scoffing at the 'utopians' of the CPGB and Tribune.

Within a short time, some of Grant's pupils inserted the appropriate explicitly Stalinist politics.

One month after Grant's analysis there appeared part 1 of a two-part reply to a letter from 'Roy Bentley', who had 'just read' Ted Grant's article. He wanted to inquire what Grant's line really had been! He offered an interpretation, based on Grant's comment that the call for withdrawal was 'utopian'. "Does that mean that Militant is against the withdrawal of the troops, having quite rightly condemned the invasion"? He "could see" that if the Russian troops were withdrawn, "the Afghan regime of Karmal would soon collapse and there would be an almost inevitable bloodbath and

a return to feudal landowning and backwardness... This would justify support for the troops being there now they have invaded. Is this the position Militant is putting forward?"

"Roy has indeed drawn the right conclusion from Ted's article", began the 'reply'. Thus, ludicrously, Militant began to correct itself.

The reply, by Lynn Walsh, made the following new points.

To call for withdrawal would open up the risk of "Afghanistan's proletarian bonapartist regime" being overthrown (But where was there a regime other than the one installed against the government that they said invited the troops in? This is a bit of camouflage. The Russian troops are the regime). Supporting withdrawal would therefore mean siding with the forces of counter-revolution. (The whole question of any rights for the Afghan people is wiped out by equating the Russians with the left, and by the pretence that the regime has an independent existence).

Militant couldn't support the invasion "because of the reactionary consequences internationally. Once Russian forces had occupied the country, however, it would have been entirely wrong for Marxists to call for the withdrawal of Russian troops". In other words — don't take responsibility, but be glad the bureaucracy is not so fastidious. This attitude of saying 'no' while meaning 'yes' combined the joys of abstention from direct responsibility with those of vicarious *realpolitik*, via hypocrisy. If it is necessary for the troops to stay, on pain of undesirable consequences, then it was right to send them in in the first place. Responsible people should have called for the invasion and should acknowledge now that the initiative of the bureaucracy (even for motives of their own) showed them their error if they didn't. Serious people should — like the SWP-USA — praise the historically progressive role being played by the bureaucracy in Afghanistan.

But Walsh continued: "The Russian intervention in Afghanistan was a progressive move" — Grant is quoted as stating this, though in fact he said it would be progressive if it could be taken in isolation, and that in fact it could not be. "The reactionary international repercussions of invasion completely outweigh any immediate gains in Afghanistan", admitted Walsh; but preventing the downfall of a proletarian bonapartist military regime was 'in itself' another blow to world imperialism. And the invasion "established the development of historically progressive social relations in this small country".

"In Afghanistan, though it has moved to prop up a bonapartist regime that rules through dictatorial methods, the Russian bureaucracy is defending new, fundamentally progressive, social relations". A mass base of support for the regime (that is, for Stalinism) will be created by land reform, planning, etc. "When the proletarian bonapartist regime is consolidated in Afghanistan, which will be within a measurable period, the Russian leadership [sic] will probably withdraw its forces. But", adds Walsh defiantly, "in any case if there were no danger of counter-revolutionary forces threatening the regime and the social changes that have been carried through, we would

then call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops..."!

What exists in Afghanistan is "a grotesque totalitarian caricature of a socialist state", "because of the isolation of the social change in an economically and culturally backward country, and the fact that the bonapartist leadership has inevitably taken Russia's Stalinist regime as its model". (Apart from the fact that it is nonsense now to pretend that the regime has an independent existence, it is not isolated: the character of the regime is determined now not by the conditions in its own society alone, but by the bureaucratic domination of the much more developed Russian society. It is that Russian domination that determined the shape of the regime even in immensely more developed Czechoslovakia).

Walsh insists that Militant "stands for a further supplementary political revolution". But this is an epochal perspective. For Afghanistan it would be after a whole historical period. In Walsh's scheme, the first stage is the growth of support for the regime, under the Russian tanks whose presence Militant supports. And Walsh underlines the point: in Russia and Eastern Europe the bureaucracy has "outlived any progressive role it played in the past through developing the planned economy". (When was it progressive in Czechoslovakia, for example?) But not in Afghanistan. There it has prospects of an organic growth and consolidation of mass support, with the bureaucracy as the natural leading force, despite its methods, for society at that stage — the bearer of a higher civilisation.

Press fantasies?

MILITANT'S THIRD major article on Afghanistan, published in July 1980, brutally ties all this together. Its author was Alan Woods. Like Walsh, Woods is one of those who gathered around the dead stump of the old ISFI (Pablo-Mandel) British group in the early '60s and helped developed the mutant strain that is the present Militant tendency.

Grant established some account of the April 1978 'revolution'; and Walsh (perhaps after an internal dispute, but it scarcely matters) established a (hypocritically dressed-up) pro-invasion line from Grant's unresolved contradictions. Woods emerges as the arrogant champion of the civilising mission of the Army of the Russian bureaucracy, picking up (I should think consciously) the arguments of Fabian imperialism — all the way to the explicit paternalist depiction of the Afghan masses as necessarily the mere objects of someone else's boot and bayonet in history.

Entitled 'Afghanistan: what is really happening?' — the truth behind the press fantasies', Woods' article is a polemic against the press reports of mass resistance to the invaders. That aspect of it is not important. It is, indeed, ridiculous. For his case is that the Western press is grossly unreliable, and making anti-Russian propaganda on Afghanistan — and he establishes it entirely by quotations from the Western press!

The piece is studded by quotations