

Yes, I am a socialist!

Billy Hutchinson from the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) responds to John McAnulty (WL 22 and 24)

JOHN MCANULTY has been active in the socialist movement for a long time as a supporter of a fascist organisation, the IRA. It does not seem like he has much ground from which to sling mud.

There are all sorts of crazy accusations that I have links with groups like the National Front. I am a socialist; I would never have anything to do with such an organisation.

People like McAnulty can not see how people who describe themselves as British can be a socialist at the same time! They believe that if you are not a Republican, in the Irish sense, then you are not a socialist. That is nonsense.

If this was any other part of Britain I would be working for the British Labour Party as an active member.

I am a socialist from a working class background. The area where I come from used to return Northern Irish Labour Party local government candidates.

The PUP are firmly rooted in working-class areas. We are concerned with socio-economic matters.

We are to the left of the British Labour Party: our constitution is based on the Labour Party's, but it also includes Clause Four. We are for common ownership.

We believe that if we are to move forward in Northern Ireland there has to be a fundamental political shift.

We are a Unionist party. We will attract people from the Unionist community. Our Unionism means that we want to retain the link with the UK.

We believe that Unionism needs redefining. We believe that power should be decentralised — here and in Scotland and Wales. We believe that we are an important part of the Union as anyone in England, Scotland or Wales.

We are trying to attract people who are Unionists but not necessarily Protestant.

Remember that the 26 counties withdrew from the Union. Six wanted to stay.

We need an agreed solution. And that means dialogue.

And that means a solution which allows people in Northern Ireland who feel their Irish identity to feel safe as part of the United Kingdom.

We argue for a Bill of Rights to help. We argue for some cooperation with the South.

If the majority of people decided to go

into a federal Ireland we would have to accept that, as democrats.

We want to redefine Unionism in such a way as to allow class politics to emerge. If the ceasefire holds for a couple of years we would like to see class alliances grow up and nationalists and Unionists vote along class lines. So, at City Hall, we would begin to see community politics being replaced by class politics.

At the moment we are talking to the Workers' Party to see if the beginnings of a left alliance is possible.

David Trimble [new OUP leader] would not have been the PUP's choice. He is on the right and we are on the left. We have in common that we want to retain the link with Britain. But on social issues we are miles apart.

Yet David Trimble has met Pronnais DeRossa — leader of the Left Alliance, which split from the Workers' Party and is now part of the government coalition in Dublin — and he will meet Taoiseach John Bruton. Those moves have been positive.

Victor Serge was a revolutionary, but...

By Cathy Nugent

TONY DALE objects to me calling Victor Serge a centrist (WL23). Tony prefers to see Serge as a "revolutionary who made serious mistakes". What's the difference?

Serge had his heart in the right place. He was implacably opposed to bourgeois and Stalinist rule. In that sense Serge was a revolutionary until the end of his life. But Serge's day-to-day politics, his responses to contemporary events — revolutionary events sometimes, like those in Spain — from 1936 onwards were shaped too much by impressionistic responses and by personal associations. Having his heart in the right place was no help here!

I would neither diminish Serge's achievements as a writer, nor question his fortitude. But where I think we should tell the *complete truth* about Serge, Tony tries to diminish and soften his mistakes. This is sometimes done indirectly, by inference. For instance Tony says Serge and Trotsky had disagreements in which Trotsky was not always 100% right, but does not clearly say where Trotsky was wrong and where Serge was right. That is not how to draw up an honest balance sheet!

Four points.

1. Kronstadt. I agree with a lot of what Serge says about the repression there, particularly his point that more could

have been done to negotiate with the insurgents. I also believe Trotsky was, in terms of the substance of the argument, too defensive. However the context of this debate is very important and Tony ignores this.

In 1937/38 "Kronstadt" had been raised slanderously against Trotsky as part of an attack "from the left" aimed at undermining Trotsky's efforts to build support for himself and the others accused in the Moscow trials. "Trotsky is as bad as Stalin" was the message. Trotsky, who freely accepted political responsibility for the repression, was falsely accused of playing a leading personal role in it. Serge's contribution to the debate gives more space to criticising than to defending the Bolsheviks at Kronstadt. His defence when it comes is

"The overall affect of Serge's later writings on Kronstadt, in the context of the smear campaign, is to bolster up unreasonable doubt about the record of the Bolsheviks."

tacked on at the end. This is the most critical piece he had ever written on the subject: he wrote nothing like this at the time of the events. Yet Serge too, as a functionary for the Communist International, bore at least *some* political and moral responsibility for "Kronstadt". The overall affect of Serge's later writings on this subject, in the context of the smear campaign, is to bolster up *unreasonable* doubt about the record of the Bolsheviks. Either Serge was being naive about the effect of his words or he deliberately wanted to present a mealy-mouthed defence of the Bolsheviks. I never said Serge was wrong about Kronstadt. I would say his contribution was unhelpful, subjective, and his intentions were possibly not honourable.

2. The Fourth International. Tony says Serge's objections to its foundation were not so unreasonable although they were misguided. The weakness of the movement after the Second World War did reflect an *a priori* weakness. But Serge was opposed to the founding of the Fourth International for entirely different reasons.

Foremost in Serge's mind, shaping his objections, were political differences with the Trotskyists. Serge denounced and deeply resented what he saw as the "sectarianism" of the Trotskyists when they criticised the Popular Front errors of

the POUM.

Serge wanted an international that would be a "loose" association that would include organisations such as the POUM and the POUM's sister parties like the ILP and German Socialist Workers Party. The parties of such a loose association would, of course, cover for and not polemicise against each other. And "foreigners" would not be free to criticise the work of other sections. Serge shows what he thinks on that score when he ridiculously repeats some of POUM leader Nin's prejudices against "foreign" Oppositionists coming over to Spain to assist and guide the Spanish Opposition!

Serge's position, although confused and vague, was not internationalist. At one point he says Trotsky should never have "interfered" in the work of the "tiny" national groups but stuck to his "intellectual work". Every revolutionary group no matter how tiny has to start somewhere. Every national grouping of the Opposition was important. Every national group can learn from the experiences and the mistakes of others. Trotsky was right to "interfere", to try to educate and organise all these "tiny" groups of people opposed to Stalinism, however weak their base among the working class, however imperfect their resolve.

It boils down to this: Serge did not want to build a revolutionary party where sharp, "polemical", rational debate was central. He was rejecting Lenin's model of such a party.

3. Tony says the differences between Serge and Trotsky were deliberately exacerbated by the GPU and by the antics of some factionalists. This point is continually made in the *Serge-Trotsky Papers* and is typical of the book. What the authors say can never be taken at face value yet Tony seems to have done precisely this.

For the most part, the differences between Trotsky and Serge arose from *written* debate and well-established facts, not rumour. They were about substantive

political points. "Whispering campaigns" can not have been decisive here. And Tony, I think you have to assume that Trotsky knew about the antics of the GPU, and made allowances!

In his letters to Serge, Trotsky displays nothing but "broad-mindedness" about "factionalism" in the international opposition. He tells Serge to acquaint himself with the facts, to make up his own mind about political differences. He displays great patience and judiciousness in these matters — a point not brought out in *The Papers*.

Serge played the factional game too! Serge chose to associate himself with some of the people who instigated the — largely apolitical — factional battles of the early years of the international Left Opposition. Whether he did it because of an "I'll work with anyone" attitude or for some other reason, we cannot know because he never explains why he associated with the people he did. And that, empty of political accounting as it is, is the worst kind of factionalism.

4. Spain. Despite Serge's solidarity with the POUM, no doubt he had his own differences with its leaders. Tony cites Serge's criticisms of POUM sectarianism towards the anarchists. But the fact is that Serge does not re-examine his adherence to the POUM. The defeat of the POUM was in no small part brought about by its own weaknesses: illusions in the Popular Front government, membership of the Popular Front government in Catalonia and Valencia and — as Trotsky who knew about such things insists — by an abject, criminal, failure of revolutionary will. One of the worst examples of such abdication was when the POUM leaders deliberately disarmed POUM workers in May 1937 after the barricades went up in Barcelona, leaving them vulnerable to murder and repression at the hands of the Stalinists.

It is true, as Tony says, that Serge admits to being wrong about the Popular Front. Not in Spain, but in France! And not at the time when *mattered!* Furthermore Serge says this in passing, in a single sentence, in a chapter in the *Memoirs* which contains no other self-reflection. That one sentence *condemns* Serge! It is not worth much, because a serious Marxist would find more than a single sentence to write about the world of lessons that are there, written in blood, in the experience of the Spanish revolution and the Popular Front in Europe.

The leaders of the POUM, Nin, Maurin et al, were centrists — their courage cannot change the reality of that. Serge's "solidarity" nearly amounted to *uncritical loyalty* and that too was the act of a centrist. He did not associate with the POUM in order to influence it as the Trotskyists tried to do, (even after they were expelled!). He was in it because he thought it was influential (or perhaps the word "big" might be more appropriate). Like a shopper, like a consumer, he

thought it was the best thing on offer! But the POUM was not good enough to lead the Spanish workers. The Trotskyists, as small as they were, attempted to build a movement that *would be* good enough. They were builders and rebuilders not passive, fatalistic consumers.

Serge is rather like — it would be unfair to say exactly like — some of the "intellectuals" or "personalities" who have mixed it with the SWP or the Militant because they can't stand to be in the political wilderness and would sacrifice all or some of their critical faculties in order to save themselves that fate. It is a sad reflection on a man of Serge's calibre and sadder still that all we can say about *why* Serge went this way after 1936 is what the Americans sometimes say: "shit happens".

What's the difference between a centrist and a revolutionary who made a lot of mistakes? What Trotsky wrote about Sneevliet, a former Dutch Oppositionist, much admired once by Trotsky as a great militant, then during the Spanish Revolution an associate of the POUM leaders, could equally have been written about Serge. Sneevliet too was subjectively a revolutionary. He stayed at his post in Nazi-occupied Holland and died before a firing squad in 1942.

"Contrary to its own intentions the POUM proved to be, in the final analysis, the chief obstacle on the road to a revolutionary party. The platonic or diplomatic partisans of the Fourth International like Sneevliet, the leader of the Dutch Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party, who demonstratively supported the POUM in its halfway measures, its indecisiveness and evasiveness, in short, in its centrism, took upon themselves the greatest responsibility. Revolution abhors centrism. Revolution exposes and annihilates centrism. In passing, the revolution discredits the friends and attorneys of centrism. That is one of the most important lessons of the Spanish revolution."

Jail food is poison!

By Laurens Otter

IF SPECULATING that prison food is drugged (Bob Pitt: "The real John Maclean") is evidence of insanity then the majority of people in prison, (at least the majority who were there when NVDA took me there 9 times in the late '50s and early '60s) screws (prison officers) as well as cons (inmates) are insane.

It may well be that the food, (particularly the porridge and the cocoa) is of such poor quality — the sacks for the porridge, in Stafford, in the summer of '60, were labelled "Third

New Interventions A Journal of Socialist Opinion and discussion The latest issue contains

- The significance of 1945
- The rise of social-patriotism in the Communist Party of Great Britain
- Perspectives for Labour after Clause Four
- The crisis of socialist theory

Single copy: £2.50; four issues: £9.50; eight issues: £18; overseas: £12.65 for four issues.

Students and unwaged, half price.
Cheques in pounds sterling payable to Markon Press, PO Box 707, Worthing, West Sussex BN11 5ZP

Grade pig meal — Not for human consumption” — that it just tastes funny, but nearly all cons I met believed it was drugged, and the screws openly joked about it.

Indeed two prison doctors have told me that it's not unknown; the second, the doctor at Oxford, in the winter of 1961/2, talked about the matter quite seriously. There had just been an official (government-minister) denial and I mentioned a prison doctor had told me that it was done occasionally. He replied (obviously I don't remember the exact words, but these are not far out:)

“Of course, the nature of prison is that prisoners lead an unhealthy and unnatural life. It would be grossly irresponsible if prison doctors never took measures to counter to this. We are not allowed to admit it, and I try to keep it to an absolute minimum, but — off the record — I have, on occasions, prescribed drugs all round.”

PS, When you are forcibly fed, they first hold your nose, so you have to open your mouth a little to breathe. Then they insert something looking like a large pair of scissors, but flattened the other way, with which they lever your teeth apart. It locks into place so you can't shut your mouth. They then push a pipe down your throat, with a funnel attached, into which they pour liquid feed.

They are more likely than not to cut your mouth/gums in the process of opening the mouth, and so the feed is mixed with the taste of one's own blood.

Generally speaking people who are being forcibly fed are solitarily confined so that the only time in the 24 hour day that you see anyone at all is when the screw comes over to take you over to be fed. When this was happening to us, (in Norwich, spring 1959) Phil Cooke commented: “You get to the point when you look forward to them coming to torture you with the feed.”

Prison life is degrading, pointless

Revolutionary History Trotskyism and Left Communism in Italy in the 1930s and 1940s

256 pages, £4.75 (UK),
£5.50 elsewhere, including
P&P.

Cheques in pounds sterling,
payable to “Socialist
Platform Ltd”, BCM 7646,
London WC1N 3XX

and incredibly boring; anyone, who experiences it, is going to have trouble when they come out reconciling themselves to the fact that they have allowed people to do things to them (make them do things themselves) that demeaned them. It would be more abnormal not to be put under mental strain by this, than to show signs of strain.

But what is to be done about Bosnia?

By Amanda Sebestyen

I MET *Workers' Liberty* outside the meeting of the grotesque ‘Committee for Peace in the Balkans’. I find your article on the left and Bosnia mostly excellent, but I must put you right on a point of misinformation.

The young men who shouted when a message from Serbian opposition groups was read at the Bosnia Solidarity Campaign Rally were not Bosniacs. They were Albanians from Kosova/Kosovor possibly the most oppressed nation in the Balkans — and they were protesting for the not irrelevant reason that the statement was signed not just by “left wing groups in Serbia” and anti war organisations, but also the nationalist opposition such as Vuc Draskovic's Serb Renewal Party.

The ‘double eagle’ Albanian flag was quite visible in the hands of these angry young refugees from Kosova. They were asked to be quiet by Iza Zymkese of the Kosova Information Centre, who was then invited to speak to the meeting. (The meeting broke up before his turn came).

It would be an excellent thing if *Workers' Liberty* were to interview Isaf Besisha and other intellectuals from Kosova in exile here.

Overall, I have one query on *Workers' Liberty*'s attitude to the Bosnian question. Are you overwhelmingly concerned to be right — or do you want to do something?

Engels' “reflective materialism”

By Carl Rennert

AGAINST criticisms of Engels's “reflective materialism, according to which knowledge is simply a reflection of matter in motion”, Tom Willis (*Workers' Liberty*

23) quoted Engels's comment on “philosophical crotchets” about the difficulties of “reflection of reality” being refuted by “practice, namely experiment and industry”.

According to Willis, this shows that Engels (and Marx too) “had no problem fusing the two aspects”, of reflection and of reality being shaped by human activity.

Yet Georg Lukacs showed that Engels's “deepest misunderstanding” here “consists in his belief that the behaviour of industry and scientific experiment constitute praxis in the dialectical, philosophical sense. In fact, scientific experiment is contemplation at its purest... And... inasmuch as industry sets itself ‘objectives’ — it is in the decisive, i.e. historical, dialectical meaning of the word, only the object, not the subject of the natural laws governing society” (*History and Class-Consciousness*, p.132-3).

George Lichtheim made a similar point. “For the early Marx — and in a measure for the mature Marx too — nature and man are complex realities whose interaction is studied in society. This is precisely the reverse of Engels's habit of deducing historical ‘laws’ from the operation of a nature conceived of as an independent reality external to man” (*Marxism*, p.251).

*“The ‘reflection’
concept has nothing
to do with
materialism, but is a
mystical realism, such
as propagated by
writers right back to
the medieval Church.”*

I do not endorse Lukacs's Stalinism, any more than I endorse Lichtheim's social-democratic politics, by drawing attention to these apt formulations of these authors.

The “reflection” concept has nothing to do with materialism, but is a mystical realism, such as propagated by many writers right back to the medieval Church. For instance, Carlus Bovillus (1470-1553): “Man is the centre of the hierarchical universe, as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm”.

And GW Leibnitz (1646-1716): “A perpetual living mirror of the whole universe”; “every monad is a mirror of the universe in its own way”; “the soul, that mirror of an indestructible universe”; “souls in general are living mirrors or images of the universe of created beings” (*Monadology*, section 56, 63, 77, 83).

“Materialism and Empirio-Criticism”, in which Lenin gave his authority to the “reflection” concept, is his worst book — much praised by Stalin and by scholastics like Gerry Healy.