

● Dave Richards and Nigel Stanley cut in on 'Crossed Lines', the debate about the future of Britain's Communist Party.

● Tess Woodcraft gives some new insights on 'How the Other Half Lives' and . . .

● Adam Sharples rescues some babies from the bathwater of the Left's strategy for creating jobs.

DAVE RICHARDS

Communists in search of an identity

Jon Bloomfield's article represents an important analysis of both current political trends, and the Labour Party and the labour movement. Importantly, it also takes the divisions in the Communist Party out of their ghetto and firmly places them in the context of the movement as a whole.

His characterisation of the divisions in the Communist Party is accurate, and will be recognised as such by those who are faced day-to-day by the factions which undermine the creative implementation of the Communist Party's policies and which, by their sectarianism, drive away many who should join the Communist Party.

However, I do think that in his analysis there is a weakness of emphasis on the question of the development of independent public work by the Communist Party, including, importantly, our electoral work. My experience in the recent Cynon Valley by-election campaign for a Communist candidate with distinctive Communist policies has underlined for me that it is essential that we take our policies and membership out into the communities where the Left so rarely treads.

Presenting Communist policies in their own right does nothing to undermine the potential for developing the very broadest campaigning alliances — in fact, the very opposite is true. The miners' strike is an outstanding example of how the Communist Party can be heavily involved in *all* aspects of picketing, practical solidarity etc, and at the same time can organise Communist public meetings and mass leaf-letting, putting forward the Communist case for coal, for democracy and for Britain's future, all activities which are essential.

Jon Bloomfield highlights the important areas for our present and future development, and they deserve to be not only debated but effectively put into practice. However, much of our valuable time and resources are being used instead to fight off a concerted sectarian attack on our programme, the *British Road to Socialism*.

The dangers of the slide towards sectarianism which the Communist Party executive committee warned of in its last statement on the *Morning Star* is daily becoming clearer, and while there are some who will still claim that there is no shift in policies in the paper, there are others who give the game away with their praise for the 'much improved Star', for its uncritical attitude to the socialist countries, and for the 'paper which is going to save the party from reformism'. Ron Bellamy's attack on Jon Bloomfield's article is a good example of the conservative dimension of this attack on the *British Road to Socialism*.

Ron Bellamy uses distortion and slurs in an attempt to boost his case that Bloomfield had forsaken the leading role of the working class. What we must recognise is that it is precisely those who share his viewpoint that are the ones to deny the working class the opportunity of exercising its leading role, by closing their eyes to what is new and to the opportunities which face the working class.

The long years of experience which have led to the development of the *British Road to Socialism*, the recognition of the need for the working class to *win* the leading role in society, the development of an alliance of all democratic forces with the working class movement the 'fulcrum' of such an alliance, will only be possible to the extent that it takes up all the broad democratic issues — women's liberation, national aspirations, anti-racism, a thousand and one democratic issues which affect people's lives — thereby winning the hearts and minds of the overwhelming majority of the people for revolutionary change. Finding the way to do this is the challenge for us now — a return to the old slogans can only impede this progress.

NIGEL STANLEY

Communist Party — where next?

For those in the Labour Party who have recently emerged from a long tunnel of sectarian infighting, there is a temptation to sit back and enjoy the current divisions within the Communist Party, basking in

our new found spirit of unity. But this would be to miss the point. For, slowly and surely, a fundamental realignment is taking place on the British Left. Its birth pangs have already convulsed the Labour Party. Now, as Jon Bloomfield (*Marxism Today* April 1984) makes clear, it is the turn of the Communist Party. And, whilst the Labour Party has put behind it the extreme divisions and tensions that convulsed it after the 1979 election defeat, to this observer at least, a real question mark hangs over whether the Communist Party can emerge from its current crisis in anything like the same shape it entered it.

For at the heart of this realignment lie challenges and new ideas that cut across many of the old alliances and common assumptions of interest that have made up the Left in Britain. And this cleavage seems to run right through the Communist Party.

Jon Bloomfield's description of the new hard Left, or as he more accurately described it, fundamentalist Left rings very true. The support given by *Tribune* editorials to the *Morning Star*, taken together with Tony Benn's explicit condemnation of *Marxism Today*, indicates that the elements identified by Bloomfield are fully aware of this process. Ron Bellamy's claim (MT May 84) that opposition within the Communist Party has grown from 15% to 40% confirms this trend too. If supporters of this current triumph within the Communist Party and the PPPS, it will be a boost to the fundamentalists inside the Labour Party.

This would be bad news for those left forces that came together to give Neil Kinnock his famous victory in the electoral college held last October. Groups like the Labour Co-ordinating Committee did not back Kinnock merely because he demonstrated a (now realised) potential to project the party beyond its own ranks after a period of myopic introspection, nor because we agreed with every stance he had taken throughout his political career.

We backed him for two simple reasons. Firstly, like the LCC's broadsheet 'After the Landslide' and Eric Hobsbawm's later 'Labour's Lost Millions' Neil Kinnock fully appreciated the enormity of defeat.

His campaign was not tinged with a 'what we needed was a real socialist manifesto' leftism, neither did it make the mistake of thinking that appealing in a Wilsonian way to a mythical centre ground could rebuild Labour.

Secondly he represented a fresh start. Although clearly from the traditional Left within the party, he had been a relative bystander in the inner party civil war that followed the 1979 defeat. We had not gone along with every stance he had taken then, but were quick to realise that this was an advantage. His candidature could look forward and not be based in a justification of positions struck in the trench warfare that the party needed to put behind. As such his leadership could result in an opening out of debate and the development of new strategies capable of facing up to Labour's decline.¹

Not all Labour Party feminists share Ann Pettifor's (MT May 84) seeming hostility to the new leadership by any means. For example Anne Phillips in the March/May *Chartist*² argues that feminists must note the overlap with today's 'revisionism' and goes on to cite Kinnock's recent contribution to *Poverty* as encouraging.

The hard Left has had a different attitude to Kinnock's leadership. They have waited for opportunities to cry sell out. *Tribune*, for example, led one week on 'Will Kinnock send back Cruise?' above an article hinting that this was not to be. The very next Sunday Neil Kinnock told Weekend World viewers that he would. People from his office were justifiably aggrieved that no check was made before *Tribune* ran the story.

This approach, if taken up by the whole Left, would inevitably drive the leadership to the right. Hostility does not win friends and influence people. In particular the Trotskyist groups that make up a numerically small but rather influential section of the hard Left, especially within London, need conditions of polarisation in order to justify their entrism.

But within the Labour Party it is much easier to cope with these disagreements within the Left, however fundamental, because they take place within a mass party. There is a large shared agenda of purpose for everyone in the party, even if this too frequently fails to be anything other than electoral. This cannot be said of the Communist Party at present. Ron Bellamy and Jon Bloomfield are poles apart. There is little agreement between the factions as to what it is there for. It is therefore difficult to see everyone wanting

to stay in it once one side or another decisively wins. The Soviet Communist Party's sponsoring of splinter parties in Spain and the Netherlands does not augur well for party unity either.

And that is why in the end I find myself in two minds about the Communist Party's future. On the one hand, as I argued, a victory for the hard Left would set back the kind of changes I want to see in the Labour Party. On the other hand as I have always believed that if you are going to be in a gradualist party you might as well be in a big one I don't really see a long term role for a small Eurocommunist party either.

TESS WOODCRAFT

How the other half lives

Like Bea Campbell in the 'Labour in Crisis' debate, I am an optimist. Like her, I am a feminist trade unionist, part of one of the 'strongholds of democratic socialism, whose imperative is to invent effective socialist renewal in the face of the exhausted examples of Labourism'.

But, certainly in the white collar sector in which I work, Bea hasn't got it quite right when she says that our agenda is the redistribution of resources between class and between workers, low paid and well paid, men and women. Would that it were! We are still working towards that. Still grappling with the implications of setting ourselves the task of changing a male-dominated institution from the inside. We've joined the unions, we pay our subs, we want them to represent us — but we haven't yet found the way to compel them to do so.

How we should do that is the subject of considerable debate and discussion among women in the unions (and it's partly because of the energy and commitment that I've seen in these debates that I'm an optimist). We are establishing structures — formal and informal — in which women who do not necessarily think of themselves as feminists, white feminist trade unionists and black women trade unionists can exchange views and experiences. Out of this dialogue, a women's trade union agenda is emerging, and it spans organisations as well as issues.

On organisation, the agenda centres on the barriers to women's involvement in unions (and takes in the sort of issues Jean Gardiner has looked at in these pages) — we're all agreed that not enough women are active in trade unions, and it is empha-

tically not because they are not joiners; they are, after all, the backbone of parent/teacher organisations, churches and tenants' associations. It is, rather, that they cannot identify in any immediate way with trade unions, and often feel powerless and cynical about the possibilities of change.

It is perhaps because of this that the emphasis in much of the debate among women has centred on very specifically 'women's issues'. In doing so, women have fundamentally challenged what a trade union issue is. The women's agenda that is emerging insists that all sorts of things that have hitherto been seen as 'personal' have huge implications for women's working lives and must, therefore, be viewed as public (ie, trade union) issues. Sexual harassment, pre-menstrual tension, menopause, domestic responsibilities all come into this category. Not for nothing have we seen a rash of publications emanating from union women's committees entitled 'Sexual Harassment — a trade union issue' or 'Women's Health — an issue for trade unionists'. They are a constant preoccupation for most women in one way or another, and a backdrop to women's participation in the labour force.

The emergence of this women's agenda, however, has not as yet enabled us to find a way of reworking the traditional trade union agenda. So although our issues now adorn trade union policy statements, the thinking behind them only rarely informs those policy statements.

We've added a few items to the 'traditional' agenda, and moved some items higher up the priorities (the women's TUC's success in recent years exemplifies this) but it is my contention that we have not yet found a way to challenge some of the unspoken male assumptions that lie at the heart of British trade unionism. Afraid of being accused of being 'divisive' or of 'rocking the boat' (accusations to which we are, not surprisingly, sensitive — after all, we're committed trade unionists, well aware that this government wants to cripple trade unions) — we have rarely faced battles head on. Instead, our approach has tended to be tangential. Take the question of pay. Our conference motions are framed in the language of low pay and equal pay — the stuff of which piety is made — rather than the erosion of differentials and flat rate rises, wherein lies conflict (but also progress?).

¹ See *Reconstruction* £1 from LCC, 9 Poland St. London W1.

² 60p from 170 Wandsworth Rd London SW8.