

LETTERS

Marxism and Alliances

WE'VE ALL got used to Martin Sullivan trying to find a "Marxist" cover for his left (in fact, these days, not even very left) reformist politics. But his article 'How Should We Fight Blairism?' (*What Next?* No.25) can't be allowed to go unanswered.

Sullivan presents Marx's bloc with petty bourgeois democrats during the German revolution of 1848-9 as a model for the opportunist alliances he proposes in the labour movement of the early 21st century. According to Sullivan, the lesson to be drawn from those events is that the left should not advance its own independent class programme but instead tail "progressive" democratic forces.

Even leaving aside the questionable parallel between the tactics appropriate a bourgeois revolution and those Sullivan seeks to apply today in a rightward-moving, disintegrating, no-longer-even-reformist Labour Party, the fact is that he misrepresents the lessons of 1848-9.

Has Sullivan not read Marx and Engels' 'Report of the Central Committee to the Communist League' of March 1850? In it the authors repudiate the tactics which they had adopted in the German revolution and which Sullivan now uncritically endorses. They argue that it was a mistake to allow the dissolution of the Communist League, because as a result of this "the workers' party lost its only firm foothold ... and in the general movement thus came completely under the domination and leadership of the petty bourgeois democrats". The authors state emphatically: "An end must be put to this state of affairs, the independence of the workers must be restored."

Marx and Engels also reject the electoral tactics they had employed in 1848-9, arguing that the workers must stand their own independent candidates against the petty bourgeois democrats: "In this connection they must not allow themselves to be seduced by such arguments of the democrats as, for example, that by so doing they are splitting the democratic party and making it possible for the reactionaries to win. The ultimate intention of all such phrases is to dupe the proletariat."

If we are indeed to draw any lessons for today from Marx and Engels' considered assessment of 1848-9, it is that the left should organise itself separately, on its own programme, not abandon independent politics in favour of unprincipled alliances with forces from the political "centre" of the labour movement.

Bill Evans

Chen Duxiu Website

GREETINGS! We are a group of friends who are interested in the study of Chen Duxiu. We are glad to tell you that a website particularly for the study of Chen Duxiu has been set up. "Chen Duxiu and the Chinese Revolution Web" (www.chenstudy.com) is online now! (Email: chenstudy@yahoo.com)

In the '90s, the transformation of the Soviet Union and the changes in China brought about by its opening up to the outside world have spurred many people to re-explore the history of both the Chinese and overseas communist movements and the way forward for human society. In recent years, both Chinese and overseas scholars have been actively studying Chen Duxiu and the dissidents of the Chinese communist movement, i.e. the Chinese Trotskyist groups. The aim in setting up this website is to sort out the historical documents, research and information about Chen Duxiu, the Chinese Trotskyist movement and the Chinese revolution.

The new website insists on academic independence and open-mindedness and will not bend to a particular party. We cordially invite everyone to contribute relevant historical materials to the website. You are also welcome to provide us valuable advice regarding the content. Thank you.

Lam Chi Leung

Walter Kendall

I WRITE to you on behalf of Walter Kendall, professional historian, past chairman of the Society for the Study of Labour History, former Senior Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford, and former student and tutor at Ruskin College, Oxford. Also author of *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921* and *Labour Movement in Europe*, both recognised as seminal authorities in their respective fields.

He would very much like to publicise the fact that his 250,000 word text 'The Russian Revolution and the Communist International 1898-1935' is now available for consultation in the manuscript department of the British Library. I wonder if you could help in "spreading the word"!

Gaby Ochsenbein

Editorial Note: Since receiving this letter, we have heard the sad news of Walter Kendall's death, and extend our condolences to his friends and family.