

by Gary Genosko

red LONDON

A TOUR OF WHAT'S LEFT OF THE LEFT IN THE U.K. ... A MAGAZINE AND MARX'S GRAVE

Lenin drove a 1921 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost. Among Lenin's precious things, it is less well known than his brain. Floating in formaldehyde, the latter has been poked, stained and sliced at the Moscow Brain Institute since his death in 1924. According to the pseudo-science promoted by German neurologist Oskar Vogt, brain morphology was said to reveal something of cognitive ability. But there was, in the end, nothing extraordinary about Lenin's brain. Soviet doctors would have learned just as much about Lenin's intelligence by examining his car.

Lenin's body will soon, by all accounts, leave its glass sarcophagus in Red Square and enter the soil of St. Petersburg. If Lenin is buried, then one of the best advertisements for the science of pickling bodies will be lost. It is rumoured that the Scientific Research Institute in Moscow will offer the service for a mere quarter of a million US dollars. Happy customers abound: Ho Chi Minh, Georgi Dimitrov (Bulgarian Communist Party), Augustinho Neto (Angolan CP). Of course, Mao was embalmed and is still on display. The Chinese, like the Russians, guard their secret recipes. While the sale of Mao memorabilia abounds in his hometown of Shaoshan in Hunan Province, his eternal bath has not been offered to mere peasants.

The celebrated muralist Diego Rivera was thrown out of the Mexican CP in 1939 and began, if we are to believe recent revelations about his life, as well as that of his colleague and friend Leon Trotsky, to pass information

about Communist activities and Soviet involvement in Mexico to the FBI. He may also have been involved in the first failed attempt to assassinate Trotsky.

London is a gold mine of socialist ephemera. Mining of all sorts is, however, in decline in the U.K. Still, the dailies dally over the museum pieces of international leftism and report the latest scandals with glee. What were Lenin's last words? "Good dog." What is the name of the Ossetian nationalist head of the Committee for Stalin's Body who has recently demanded its return to its "native" soil in the Caucasus Mountains? Avram Dzhotseiev. The left would be wise to invest in a special post-Marxist edition of Trivial Pursuit. Instead, with the demise of print projects such as *Marxism Today*, we have attempts such as *Red Pepper* to "spice up the left". The deadline for making a pledge was December 10, 1993, and the first issue of the magazine is now on the stands (May 1994). Many investors in this project of the Socialist Movement came from the legal community and could claim up to a 45% tax rebate. Whatever happened to the tax-happy principles of the *Manifesto*? Is leftist culture now only a tax-avoidance scheme? In the tragicomic alphabetic guide, "A-Z of the Left," in *New Statesman and Society* (25 March, 1994), it is reported that Hilary Wainwright has raised almost \$300,000 for *Red Pepper*. *Red Pepper* is "not to be confused with *Socialist* [the] fortnightly newspaper launched by the Socialist Movement in 1991. Closed after 14 issues, having lost

\$125,000, most of which had been raised by Hilary Wainwright." It was only four years ago that *New Statesman and Society* lost the libel suit launched against it by John Major and Downing Street cook, Clare Latimer. Since that time it has staggered forward, and again finds itself in a crisis brought about by infighting among the editor, Steve Platt; chairman of the board, Duncan Campbell; and the investor, Philip Jeffrey, who saved the magazine. On another magazine front and in the name of the *New Internationalist*, Lenin announces that "With the NI we have the best Read Army in the world." The no-risk trial subscription "Plus World Map" has moved *Red Pepper* into the domain of Book-of-the-Month Club offers in the battle for hearts and minds.

As it happens, *Red Pepper* is really a call for Green Socialism. Still inspired by such goals as that of a "classless society"—but so is John Major!—and "sustainable development"—a buzzword adopted by the most conservative international organizations to mean the continued exploitation of Third World resources under new contractual arrangements (sometimes called "free trade") and new informational regimes (genetic engineering and patent laws)—*Red Pepper* spices up the left with poorly digested borrowings from ecology. Its motif, the pepper, inspires recipes in the "Pepper Pot" (this month, *Red Pepper* and Lentil Soup) and "Pepper Pals" or personal ads (red hot, I suppose, if zoophilia is on the sexual agenda: "Choosy Pedigree Chum. My type seeks Lassie as very best PAL to share kennel"). Tony Benn makes yet another self-promotional

appearance, and Stuart Hall is reduced to compiling a single-page bulletin board of events and labour disputes (ironically called "Praxis"). The glossy centrepiece of the magazine is a remarkable parody of business culture and Torydom called "Prospectus For The Sale Of An Offshore Island, U.K. plc." Drafted by Kate Thompson, Tariq Ali and Christopher Hird, the Prospectus lays bare the cynicism of Tory politics as a corporate entity hell bent on deregulation—in the workplace, in planning, in financial services, etc. As brilliant as it is sad, the Prospectus is disturbing because it captures the everyday political and legal life of the U.K. Red peppers can bring tears to your eyes.

Everyone knows that London is rich in historic Marxiana. Marx's chair in the reading room at the British Library, and his grave in Highgate Cemetery—not to mention his flat on Dean Street just off Oxford Street (1951-1956)—attract numerous visitors. Gone, however, are the tour buses delivering party members from the Eastern bloc to Highgate for a glimpse of the massive bust of Marx that sits atop the impressive resting place shared by *Der Mohr*, "the Moor" his wife, their grandson, and daughter Eleanor. The sheer size of the bust makes Marx's moustache appear tusk-like. Few miss the irony that Herbert Spencer is buried close to Marx, reminding one of another famous British couple, Marks and Spencer. The English National Heritage Blue Plaques identify Marx's Dean Street flat (a site marked by the fluttering Italian flags of the restaurant downstairs) and Lenin's flat in Percy Circus, although he also stayed at 21 Tavistock Place in 1908 while he wrote *Materialism and Empiro-Criticism*. No Blue Plaque could possibly communicate Marx's or Lenin's experience of the arcades (Burlington or the Royal Opera) and the urge they must have felt to hum a tune or make merry—both of which were prohibited—while window shopping. One person's trivia is another's dissertation. Classics in the socialist-ephemera business include L. Muravyova's and Sivolap-Kaftanova's *Lenin in London* (1983), a record of all of Lenin's haunts, addresses, activities and attitudes towards London. More recent scholarly research includes Bob Henderson's detailed investigation (in *Solanus* 4 [1990]) into the books consulted and donated by Lenin during his visits to the British Museum Library between 1902 and 1911.

Stalin's local pub in Ewen Street, Whitechapel, The Queen's Head, is still a rough place. Another Ewen Street haunt of Russian revolutionaries in London, The Crown and Woolpack Pub (unfortunately lost to fire) at the corner of St. John Street, was the site of Bolshevik congresses in 1905 and 1907. The Red Lion in Soho on Great Windmill Street was the site of the Second Congress of the Communist League from which the *Manifesto* emerged in 1848. Lenin may be in ruins, as the Krovers say, and London Walks may no longer offer socialist-inspired outings in these post-Marxist days, but red London continues to struggle against the forces which reduce history to a series of saleable ephemera. Even in these difficult times the flowers on Marx's grave are usually fresh.

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