

Reply to an anti-Trotskyist rant over SEP candidate's appearance in Scotland

9 December 2008

The following letter has been sent to the Strathclyde Telegraph, the student newspaper of Strathclyde University in Glasgow, Scotland.

Martin Cairns,
Editor,
Strathclyde Telegraph

Dear Mr. Cairns,

I have only recently been made aware of the contents of the November edition of your publication.

Its readers were presented with two sharply contrasting reports of the meeting organised by the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) at the University of Glasgow. The event was part of a national tour by the Socialist Equality Party's presidential candidate in the United States, Jerry White.

Your report by Hayley Taylor, "US Presidential candidate visits Glasgow," was a model of objective reporting. She noted many of the main points of White's contribution on the financial crisis, the recent Wall Street bailout and the political issues facing the working class, writing for example, "In his presentation, White elaborated a Marxist analysis of the current international economic and political developments, citing the greatest threat stemming from the current financial crisis as an outbreak of war."

"Quite clearly, White stated that the very idea behind a bailout plan is undemocratic and only stands to benefit the very people who caused the financial ruin in the first place," she went on.

The accompanying opinion piece by news editor Ralph Kirkwood, however, is quite another matter. His sketch, "Will the real Jerry White please stand up," is little more than a hostile rant, the tone of which is epitomised by the following quote:

"If you don't know the subtleties of left wing politics then some basic information about this particular

group—they love ice picks. Seriously, the next Trot you meet just tell them how the ice pick is the best thing since sliced bread and they will just love you."

This statement may have been confusing to some of your readers. But Kirkwood refers here to the assassination of Leon Trotsky by the Stalinist agent, Ramon Mercader, who killed Trotsky with an ice pick as he sat at his desk on August 20, 1940 in his home in Mexico.

The assassination of Trotsky was the most infamous political killing of the 20th century.

It was the culmination of the campaign by Joseph Stalin and his henchmen to eliminate the greatest revolutionary of the 20th century. The incessant political activity of the co-leader of the Russian revolution, the founder of the Red Army and most consistent and determined defender of the international traditions of Bolshevism, posed a permanent threat to Stalin's bureaucratic apparatus. Trotsky's murder was preceded by a campaign of political terror—most notoriously the Moscow Trials between 1936 and 1938—during which Stalin imprisoned and executed tens of thousands of his political opponents, targeting in particular Trotsky's co-thinkers in the Left Opposition.

The Socialist Equality Party is unaware of Mr. Kirkwood's own politics. But such banal and offensive references to ice picks have long been a hallmark of both Stalinist groupings and the right wing of the Labour Party. For decades, the Stalinist Communist parties advocated and perpetrated violent attacks on the Trotskyist movement, up to and including political assassinations.

Today, what remains of the once substantial Stalinist milieu in Britain is no longer in a position to politically challenge the Trotskyist movement, let alone resort to the violent practices of the past. Decades of betrayals have done their work, reducing the Communist Party of

Britain and the Communist Party of Scotland to tiny and politically moribund rumps. Nevertheless, Kirkwood's undisguised animus towards Trotskyism clearly makes him nostalgic for the past—and not only when it comes to his juvenile references to Trotsky's murder. Like a drunken boor, he concludes his column, "so you do not have nightmares about potential revolutionaries coming to get you, do not worry, I've seen what you are offering and, to be honest, I could take Mr. White and his colleague by myself."

Mr. Kirkwood is, of course, entitled to his opinion of the politics of the Socialist Equality Party. But he should not be allowed to abuse a position of trust within the editorial staff of a student publication to hurl abusive epithets and make statements intimating that physical violence is a suitable response for those who disagree with the SEP.

We therefore insist that the *Strathclyde Telegraph* publishes this response, and makes clear its opposition to Kirkwood's inflammatory statements directed towards the SEP, which have associated your publication with one of the great political crimes of the 20th century.

Yours sincerely,

Steven Johnstone for the ISSE, Glasgow



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