

Small is lonely

Dreadful Deidre

The Guardian (1959-2003); Feb 11, 1987;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer

pg. 10

The tabloid press is having a wonderful time working itself up into an ecstasy of righteous loathing over Labour's candidate in the Greenwich byelection — Dreadful Deidre, the hard face of London's Labour left. Think what fun they could be having with the Revolutionary Communist Party's candidate, **Kate Marshall**. Richard Gott, however, lent her a sympathetic ear.

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THEORISTS of the breakdown of civilisations always record the flourishing, in the collapsing years, of utopian or millenarian movements which flit across the stage bearing banners inscribed with impossibilist slogans. Usually, those possessed of the message are women and men of the utmost normality, people with whom one can enjoy a drink, a joke, or long conversations over good food and wine. Their company is excellent, their analysis often impeccable. Only when the solutions are presented do one's eyes begin to cloud with mists of scepticism, and one's ears to stop with doubt.

Such a person is **Kate Marshall**, general secretary of the Revolutionary Communist Party, apparently the first-ever woman leader of a revolutionary party, and the RCP's candidate in the Greenwich byelection. If charisma, charm, vivacity and wit were sufficient motivators she would by now have us all lined up at the barricades, ready for the final assault on the last bastions of capitalism. As it is, she is still a voice crying, largely unheard even in the wilderness. This, of course, she vehemently denies. "We're not into being isolated," she says firmly, with just a trace of a Rochdale accent.

Nevertheless, at a time when unity of the left, in and around the Labour Party, is all the rage, the Revolutionary Communist Party is spectacular in its uncompro-

mising stand. The chutzpah of its programme takes your breath away: support for the IRA, the Malvinas for Argentina, and an end to immigration controls — and that's just for starters.

Apart from a generalised opposition to imperialism "from Grenada to Chile," there has been specific support for such Third World figures as General Galtieri and Idi Amin in their attacks against Britain. She explains, in the context of the IRA, that "We don't have complete political support for them, but at least they're fighting Britain, they're trying to weaken our state."

Yet surely the time might come when the external enemy, so admirably helping to weaken the capitalist state, might begin to harm the people — or the working class? What would have happened if Hitler had invaded Britain? "Well," she says firmly, "we couldn't have allied ourselves with Churchill. We'd have to have had our own independent resistance movement — as they did, in fact, have in some countries of Europe during the war."

Kate Marshall began her political life in the women's movement. "It affected a lot of young women in higher education at the time. If you were at all radical, the obvious thing to be was a feminist." She still looks back on that period with affection. "We did a few things that were really good. We even got nursery facilities at college."

But she soon became irritated by the lack of politics. "One day, involved in an anti-stripper campaign, I found myself linking arms with Catholics who, only the day before, I'd opposed on abortion. I began to wonder whether all women's problems were really the same." She thinks that these thoughts are occurring to a lot of people now. "There's a lot of disillusion and retreat in the women's movement." It's not difficult to see why. "It was once possible to get a little money for feminist projects, but not now." And of course "the economic situation of women is much worse than it was."

She's still enormously supportive of women. "I think they're better at politics, indeed better at everything, they make the best revolutionaries because they have a broader view of life at home and at work." But she believes that "The strategy must be against capitalism rather than men." For femi-

nists to campaign against pornography, for example, is a superficial issue, not a real one. "The problem of violence in society is not reducible to snuff movies and video nasties. In places like Eastern Europe, where pornography is banned, women are just as badly off."

She also has controversial thoughts about the Greenham Women. "Their creative tactics," she once wrote, "would have been far better employed fighting against the wars that are going on today in Ireland, the Middle East and Central America." If you want peace, she argues, you must fight against wars. "It's relatively easy for British people to be against American imperialism, not so easy for them to be against British imperialism." She thinks anyway that a war between the United States and some European country is more likely than a war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Internationalism, she believes, is something best

practised at home — hence the RCP's advocacy of the right of foreign women to have abortions in Britain, and its opposition to import controls. "This is better than having links with insignificant groups abroad you don't really agree with."

By the time she was 19, **Kate Marshall** had ceased putting all her eggs in the feminist basket and had joined the Revolutionary Communist Group, itself an intellectual offshoot of the International Socialists (later the Socialist Workers' Party). She was working at the time on a thesis about Tribune and the Labour Left in post-war Britain, and (apart from Ireland) there is no subject on which she is more outspoken than reformism. "A revolution cannot be made through the Labour Party. They accept capitalist arithmetic, and law and order. However radical the manifesto, it can never be implemented."

At the beginning of the

1980s many people who used to argue like this, and had been in left wing sects, began to move back into the Labour Party. **Kate Marshall** disapproves. "I see people rejoining the Labour Party as a kind of retreat." Her particular group had itself split, and she found herself in the Revolutionary Communist Party — a party which put up four candidates at the election in 1983. "It's a good way to get ideas across." In Ashton-under-Lyne they got 407 votes.

Isn't it rather disheartening to be so small? Even in the list of Trotskyist organisations, the RCP is not in the same numerical league as Militant or the SWP. As behoves a revolutionary, **Kate Marshall** is suitably optimistic. "People are fairly aware that there is going to be a war. Their living standards are going down. And they also know that the power of the state is so enormous that they are nothing beside it."

So there's plenty of reason.

to suppose that people are bubbling underneath. "And when things change, they change very rapidly. I think a collapse will happen. World events will shake things up. The question of who will lead the world — the United States, Germany or Japan — will be decided."

Apocalypse now? Well, not just yet. Labour's once respectable but now vulnerable majority in Greenwich is unlikely to be further undermined by the RCP. Its candidate could even serve the purpose of emphasising just how much territory there is to the left of Deidre Wood, the tabloids' "hard face of London's Labour left." Then, for **Kate Marshall**, who is involved in politics "most of the time," it will be back to her world of marches, pickets, selling newspapers on windy street corners and demonstrations — "and of going to other people's meetings and disagreeing with them." Tiresome and, perhaps, necessary.



Kate Marshall: a voice crying in the wilderness. Picture by Martin Argles