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Scargill: 'Keep quiet or get out'

Once again Arthur Scargill lays down the law against democracy in the SLP - this time in his reply to Martin Wicks. The comrade had forwarded him partisan suggestions for extending democracy in the SLP. The document he sent was signed by a number of SLP comrades and published in the *Weekly Worker* (June 12)

Dear Martin Wicks

I acknowledge receipt of your letter dated June 12 1997, asking that a statement signed by a number of Party Branches/CSLPs and individuals from other Branches be circulated to Party Branches.

The document attached to your letter clearly aims at undermining the democratically agreed structure and policies of The Socialist Labour Party, which have been accepted by the membership.

■ Party perspective

1. You suggest there is a need to develop a perspective for mobilising the working class. This is precisely what the Party has and is doing - both in terms of direct action and in its Election Policy at Local and National Level.

■ Privatisation

2. The suggestion that there is a need to build resistance in all privatised public services is an 'insult' to those workers and Party members who have and are doing this on an ongoing basis.

■ Policies

3. You suggest the Party needs to draw on the experience and creativity of wide layers of the working class and that it cannot be "developed from the top down". The policies of The Socialist Labour Party - unlike all other Parties - have in fact been developed from the 'bottom up' and our Policy Statement was written by ordinary members of the Party.

■ Leadership

4. The accusation that the NEC has acted as an authoritative [sic] leadership is untrue.

■ Electoral policy

5. Your statement that there was no discussion regarding Election Policy is untrue. The meetings which led to the establishment of the party and the Inaugural Conference accepted an aim of standing candidates in *all* Constituencies.

■ European Union

6. It is clear that you are obsessed with Britain remaining in the European Union despite the fact that our Party's policy is for a complete withdrawal. Those who take a different view should, in line with the Constitution, accept the Party's policy or join a Pro-European Party.

■ Constitution

7. Your claim that the Party's Constitution has neither been discussed nor voted on is completely untrue. Every single person who has joined the Party has accepted the Constitution. The establishment of Constituency Socialist Labour Partys [sic] (CSLPs) is a central principle of the Party's Rules and Constitution. The original Draft Constitution did not contain a requirement for Constituency Parties, but the preparatory meetings following a full discussion - decided it should form a central plank of a Democratic Constitution.

■ Expulsions

8. Your claim that a number of members have been effectively expelled by the NEC/General Secretary is a lie! No member has been expelled, suspended or disciplined. Two CSLPs have been disbanded for adopting policies contrary to the Constitution of the Party. One, which had since been reconstituted, is not only flourishing but has the largest sales of *Socialist News* of any Branch in Britain.

■ Socialist News

9. The suggestion that the leadership rushed into launching a newspaper without taking advice to prepare for its launch is completely untrue. A working group comprising of journalists - including three who have signed your statement - were involved in the preparatory meetings which discussed design, layout, content, production and distribution. Ninety percent of those involved were non-NEC members. Your claim that it has been decided to centralise production of the paper in Barnsley is a lie.

■ Conclusion

I have no intention of circulating your Statement, and will not be a party to any moves designed to undermine the Constitution, structure and organisation of the Party. I have consistently made clear that this Party will not tolerate 'internecine warfare' or 'factionalism'. We will not certainly countenance a Federal Structure. The success of our Party in attracting members from all the Direct Action groups, other 'Left' Political Parties, disaffected members of 'New Labour' and people who had simply lost faith in Political Parties altogether, is a testament to both our Party and its Constitution.

Yours fraternally

Arthur Scargill

General Secretary, June 13 1997

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Partynotes

Scargill rubs it in ...

Scargill's letter to Martin Wicks (see front page) could hardly be more explicit. As we reported in the June 19 issue of this paper, recent developments in the Socialist Labour Party have marked a "qualitative development" of the witch hunt inside this party. We observed that even campaigning for democracy is now effectively outlawed. The letter draws this out and poses an important challenge to the left.

Comrade Wicks and the 'Swindon group' within the Socialist Labour Party have been at pains to emphasise the 'legitimacy' of their opposition inside the party (see *Weekly Worker* June 12). Comrades suspected of being influenced by the *Weekly Worker* have been excluded from meetings or circulation lists by 'Swindonites' because their fight was apparently 'external' to the SLP. This spurious and deeply opportunist reasoning was used to perpetuate a damaging split on the SLP left, a division that has aided only the witch hunters.

Scargill's brutal reply to these comrades should at a stroke remove this silly divide - he has done all democrats in the SLP a huge favour in that sense. The unelected general secretary underlines - and develops - the message contained in his leaflet to the June 14 meeting of the Campaign for a Democratic in the SLP (see *Weekly Worker* June 19). Apparently it is now not simply illegitimate to campaign in any form for a change to the party's constitution, but the party membership has no right to even challenge policies adopted by the leadership that it disagrees with.

Thus, Scargill contemptuously tells the members that those who "take a different view", on Europe for example, can "accept the party's policy or join a pro-European party". Shut your mouth or bugger off, in other words.

Scargill displays that combination of deceit and overblown bluster common to dictators or would-be dictators everywhere. For example, he rejects as "completely untrue" the self-evidently true assertion from the Swindon comrades that the SLP constitution has never been discussed or voted on. When people join the SLP, Scargill says, they 'accept' the constitution.

Of course, this rejoinder from Scargill does not actually contradict the original observation of the Swindon comrades. Scargill's written statements in the past have been pithy to the point of self-parody and thus contained little room for such absurdities. Frankly, his more recent extended letters and justifications of the witch hunt in his party have been littered with these type of illogicalities and *non sequiturs*, some bordering on the wacky in my opinion.

This is not surprising. The man

clearly is attempting to create a Bonapartist organisation, a tinpot replica of the party regimes of previous 'labour dictators' such as Stalin or Lassalle (see my 'Party notes', *Weekly Worker* February 20). Such a project produces its own rather strange justifications and brings forth its own shabby cadre. It is noteworthy in this respect that Scargill lauds a "reconstituted" branch that is "flourishing" and "has the largest sales of *Socialist News* in Britain".

He is talking about Stockport branch, of course. As readers will know, this is run by the homophobic Stalin-fan weirdos of the *Economic, Philosophic and Science Review*. Terry Burns of Cardiff SLP was treated to an *EPSR* analysis of the defeat of bureaucratic socialism at the June 14 CDSLP meeting (see his open letter, back page). Apparently, the Soviet Union and eastern Europe dissolved because of "too much democracy". No wonder organisations such as this are finding the atmosphere in the SLP so conducive to them - no chance of "too much democracy" there.

In Scargill's world, the small matters of the party constitution and its policies are closed. Those that have joined the party have *by definition* uncritically "accepted" the constitution and all the policies of the party - decided on by a narrow clique - and now do not even have the right to question them. To raise any criticism is to place yourself outside the ranks of the party, to automatically render null and void your SLP membership. Thus he feels justified in peddling the genuine "lie" that "no member has been expelled, suspended or disciplined". Indeed, Scargill states that this profoundly undemocratic constitution has actually been instrumental in "attracting members" from a wide variety of political backgrounds. Whether the man seriously believes this piece of political madness is a secondary point; he is underlining that for him, the restrictive constitution is perhaps the central political question to which everything else must be subordinated. Opposition to it simply cannot be tolerated.

Where does the SLP left go from here? Essentially, it has three options - capitulate, resign or unite to fight back. Through the pages of this paper, we have constantly argued for the opposition to overcome its divisions, many of which have been rooted in ongoing sectarian divisions belonging to the pre-SLP period. A united opposition could have some chance against the Scargill juggernaut: divided, it is defeated already. ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser
fischer134@aol.com

The CPGB's London seminar series

July 6: Leninism and diplomacy in the 'Leninism' series, using Marcel Liebman's *Leninism under Lenin* as a study guide

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Produce evidence

If innocent people are tortured in prison, does it follow that their judgement on release can no longer be trusted?

Peter Manson ('Shades of John Maclean' *Weekly Worker* June 19) answers this question positively. He suggests that the suffering of victims of torture is so dehumanising that their subsequent thinking and behaviour can be dismissed as irrational.

This seems to be the point of Manson's comparison of the recent court appearance on a charge of theft and carrying an offensive weapon of Michael Hickey (one of the Bridgwater Four falsely accused of murder) with John Maclean's criticisms of the newly formed CPGB in the early 1920s.

Manson states that "all the evidence" demonstrates that paranoid delusions caused Maclean's political differences with the leadership of the CPGB. This entails that it is not possible for a victim of torture, such as Maclean, to have retained his sanity. His criticisms of the formation of the CPGB can therefore be dismissed as unreasonable.

Manson's case would be more convincing if he could produce evidence from Maclean's writings that, for example, he had accused a founding member of the CPGB of being a police spy or informer.

The person who makes this kind of life-threatening allegation against a member of a socialist organisation is usually intent on demoralising or destroying the whole group. It is one of the methods Stalinists used to isolate opposition and crush dissent. I continue to wait for scholars to discover evidence (perhaps in an unpublished letter or diary?) that proves Maclean made allegations of this nature.

You do not have to be a Scottish nationalist (nor deny that Maclean suffered a nervous breakdown in prison) to judge whether or not Maclean's criticisms of the CPGB were reasonable. It helps however if, like Maclean's, your dedication to communism includes a commitment to Marxist education and proletarian democracy.

Manson quotes from Maclean's 'Open letter to Lenin' of 1921 as evidence of his irrationality. I would urge every reader of the *Weekly Worker* to get a copy of this document. Robert Pitt reprints it in his pamphlet *John Maclean and the CPGB*. Readers can then judge for themselves whether or not it proves that Maclean was suffering from paranoid delusions.

Maclean wrote the letter at a time when many leading Marxists, including Trotsky, Preobrazhensky and Maclean, were convinced that inter-imperialist rivalry would spark off a second world war between the UK and the USA. Maclean thought that the British government would need a direct or indirect influence over the movement for socialism in Britain. This was necessary to crush any revolutionary tendencies within it and gain working class support for a renewed war effort. Maclean also thought that this influence could only be effectively outwitted by a leadership that was completely Marxist and democratic.

In 1920, the leadership of the British Socialist Party expelled Maclean for refusing to share platforms with the anti-socialist Liberal MP Lieutenant-Colonel Malone. The BSP leadership, including Malone and other establishment figures such as Meynell (a former director of the bourgeois newspaper *The Daily Herald*), went on to form the core of the new CPGB.

In a struggle against the secrecy surrounding the funding of the BSP, Maclean had exposed the potentially undemocratic nature of the new political formation. Moreover his knowledge of Marxist political economy and of students he had taught, such as William Gallagher, led him to characterise the political orientation of the leadership of the new party as being more inclined to anarchism than Marxism.

His most telling criticism of the leadership of the CPGB was that they had an insufficient understanding of the hold that social democratic ideas had on the consciousness of the British proletariat. They were therefore likely to underestimate the strength of the left of the Labour Party in suppressing the revolutionary potential of the movement for socialism.

In the letter, Maclean also complained

that malicious rumours were being spread about the state of his mental health. As Pitt has demonstrated, there was at least one police informer on the central committee of the BSP. It is likely this person was also on the central committee of the new CPGB. Future revolutionary scholars will no doubt discover the identity of this person.

Manson's position is that Maclean's criticisms of the leadership of the CPGB were irrational. This assumes that the CPGB was successful in helping the British proletariat to move closer to realising the possibility of socialist revolution.

The problem with Manson's position is that the party was formed (as was Maclean's own Scottish Workers' Republican Party) in a period of defeat for the working class worldwide.

James Hinton and Richard Hyman have argued that by 1926 the CPGB stood to the right of the Third International. In its pursuit of a mass membership, the CPGB's leaders had sacrificed quality for quantity of cadre. They had been incapable of recognising the power of the reformist institutions of Labourism. Hinton and Hyman could also have added that the CPGB had turned a blind eye to the Independent Labour Party's destruction of Maclean's efforts to establish Marxist Labour Colleges. By 1930, the CPGB had become an isolated sect (see J Hinton, R Hyman *Trade unions and revolution: the industrial politics of the early British Communist Party* London 1975, pp72-74). The Party's deplorable accommodation to Stalinism in subsequent decades is, of course, well documented.

Moreover, Manson's position has implications for the emergence of a revolutionary left today. If it was irrational for Maclean to criticise the ideas of the leadership of the CPGB in 1921, what of those communists and Marxists who criticise the ideas of groups such as the Socialist Labour Party and the Scottish Socialist Alliance today?

Is it irrational to organise legally, semi-legally and illegally separately from and in opposition to the SLP and SSA? Given that a few of these critical communists and Marxists have been imprisoned and suffered torture, perhaps their writings should also be dismissed as the sad products of paranoid minds? Moreover, even if there are mentally unstable individuals on the left receiving psychiatric treatment, does it follow that all their criticisms are invalid? Are they necessarily incapable of constructing a coherent argument?

Paul Smith
Glasgow

Crude attempt

Peter Manson's comments on John Maclean can be criticised in the following terms.

Firstly, Maclean's perspective of the Scottish workers' republic was not related to a nationalist political trajectory. Rather it was connected to his world revolutionary perspective through the break-up of the British empire. The latest Trotskyist Unity Group pamphlet, *John Maclean's principled perspective of world revolution*, goes into this point in detail.

Secondly, the formation of the CPGB was upon the opportunist premises of a tame pro-Moscow stance. Maclean shared Rosa Luxemburg's concern, which she had articulated about the role of German social democracy within the Second International, that domination by a particular national organisation can facilitate opportunism and the undermining of the international struggle for communism. Maclean's 'Open letter' to Lenin makes the case for an open democratic centralist communist international upon an equal political basis. The alternative would be to promote a nationalist ideology based upon the prestige of the October Revolution and the struggle for world revolution.

Thirdly, Maclean's various statements about the CPGB make no reference to Rothstein and Gallacher being state agents, although he certainly castigates them as opportunists. Maclean's specific suspicions of state infiltration relate to Lieutenant-Colonel (sic) Malone, who underwent a miraculous conversion to the cause of the October Revolution despite his vicious support for British imperialism during World War I. Maclean was certainly not exaggerated in his remarks about the CPGB acting as tools



Letters

Note: Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed.

of the Lloyd George government, given their softness towards the Labour Party, which was an accomplice of the main bourgeois parties in their attempts to undermine the class struggles occurring in the 1918-21 period. Maclean, acting with great political integrity, turned down the lucrative offer from the CPGB to become a full-time worker for the Hands Off Russia campaign, on the condition that he 'toned down' his political criticisms of the CPGB.

Fourthly, on the question of the relationship between mental health and politics, Peter implies that mental health problems are identical to political degeneration. This seems to reproduce the dominant bourgeois outlook concerning the 'abnormality' and 'danger' posed by mental illness. Personally, I do not want to speculate about Maclean's mental health. In any event, it is completely irrelevant with regards to the thoughtful process required when studying Maclean's politics between 1918-23. The real subjectivism is displayed by those who object to Maclean's challenge to the ideologically conformist view that the CPGB represented a golden age of Marxism between 1920-24/29/35. This is why the crude attempt to discredit Maclean takes the place of a serious engagement with his ideas.

Phil Sharpe
Trotskyist Unity Group

Fantasy world

The 'Road to nowhere' article (*Weekly Worker* June 19) raises many issues of great significance to the working class. Eddie Ford has highlighted the pathetic post-general election fantasy world of the majority of the left.

The 'crisis of expectations' concocted by the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party and others who gravitate towards New Labour show they do not know the essence of Blairism and his blinkered party - which is nothing but a rightwing organisation only interested in promoting the interests of the capitalist class.

When Blair changed clause four of the Labour constitution he stated quite clearly: "The way forward for New Labour is not the socialism of Marx or the trade unions but a partnership with the British market economy."

Prior to May 1, Blair has also stated that there would be a two-year freeze on public spending and for the workforce not to expect wage rises or the restitution of trade union rights.

The Blair government is nothing more than an extension of class collaboration with finance capitalism, which means further assaults on the working class, the unemployed and those on state benefits.

Karl Marx (see *The civil war in France*) explained quite clearly the nature of bourgeois politics and politicians. What he had to say in 1871 is as relevant to 1997.

Geoff Mansfield
North London

Editorial questions

I am writing to correct my report on the SSA conference (*Weekly Worker* June 19). In my original report I did not say that Ritchie Venton is "perhaps the most sectarian of the SML leaders". This was added by the editorial team.

I have no problem with making sharp criticisms of leading SML members. However, I do object to being ascribed views which I have not put forward. If the editorial team wants to argue its ideas and beliefs let it do so itself, not through the article of a particular individual without their knowledge.

Anne Murphy
Glasgow

Tory minority lines up with Scottish Socialist Alliance

Former Scottish secretary Michael Forsyth puts the fear of god into delegates at the 1996 Tory conference with the flag of a disunited kingdom

Following their annihilation at the polls on May 1 tension within the Tory Party has reached boiling point.

Different factions and interest groups have seized upon the opportunity to apportion blame for their electoral disaster and to settle old scores both political and personal. In the run-up to their one-day conference in Perth this simmering tension exploded into open bloodletting and feuding in a political organisation not known for its open debate and internal democracy.

These events threatened to overshadow William Hague's attendance and speech - his first major set-piece as party leader.

Throughout Britain the Tories have the problem of re-establishing themselves after being rejected as a tired, arrogant, sleaze-ridden government. In Scotland they have the additional, unpopular task of defending the union - the constitutional status quo, which even has a certain degree of unpopularity in their own party.

Their continued denial of the democratic aspirations held by people in Scotland meant they paid the electoral price. Michael Forsyth's 'tartan makeover' had no one fooled - and a 'beefed up' Scottish Grand Committee and the return of the Stone of Scone were just as unconvincing.

The Labour government has the advantage of taking the initiative on these democratic aspirations, albeit in a negative way. It is attempting to divert them into a rigged referendum and a diluted Scottish parliament.

Within the Scottish Tory Party a vocal minority has been publicly flagging up 'radical' solutions to their problems. Individuals such as Edinburgh councillor Brian Meek, Arthur Bell, leader of the Tory Reform Group, and Christine Richard, former Tory leader of Edinburgh council, have been given extensive media coverage, particularly in the Scottish broadsheets such as *The Scotsman* and *The Herald*, detailing their blueprints for a swift return to power and influence for the Tories. Some of the ideas coming for-

ward include support for devolution, greater autonomy for the Scottish organisation and a total reorganisation of the party and its structure, including 'one member, one vote' proposals for internal elections.

The high profile of these 'new thinkers' gave the impression that an historic and epic political battle was going to be fought at the Perth icerink for the body and soul of the Scottish Tory Party. In the end it was the proverbial damp squib - drowning in its own hype. With the partial exception of Christine Richard and one or two co-thinkers, this was a phantom rebellion. Meek and Bell both avoided the conference debates.

The overwhelming majority of speakers dedicated themselves to fight against *any* form of devolution, which they claimed would threaten the political integrity of the United Kingdom. In committing the Tories to leading the 'no, no' campaign in the referendum, Hague declared: "It is not our purpose to thwart the wishes of the people of Scotland. We will advise them against it, but if they want a Scottish parliament they will get one."

Hague, Forsyth and their chums have spent the last 18 years in power doing just that - thwarting the wishes of the people of Scotland.

Following the defeat of her isolated call for devolution, Christine Richard claimed that the motion passed did allow for individuals to continue campaigning for devolution and that she was fully justified in her support for Scotland Forward.

Although partially upstaged by Michael Forsyth's temporary return from political retirement for the conference, Hague managed at least to share the headlines. However, whether his call for unity and the setting up of a commission on party reorganisation will lead to electoral recovery is very debatable in the short term. Perhaps as important is whether they will stem the flow of business support away from his party to Labour. This is unlikely in the immediate future.

Despite the opposition being ineffectual by its absence from the conference,

the 'unity' on show had an air of superficiality. For example, on Scottish Television's *Conference Report*, ex-MP Allan Stewart directly challenged the UK-integrity line: "It is time to think the unthinkable if devolution comes - post-devolution independence could be the best option for Scotland and the best for Scottish Conservatives."

Many have made clear that all they are

concerned with is getting the referendum over with so they can devote themselves to getting some seats in the new parliament. In a fashion similar to the Scottish Militant Labour leadership within the Scottish Socialist Alliance, many Tories may be quite happy to let 'the only show in town' - Scotland Forward - get on with it ●

Nick Clarke

Fighting fund

With just one week to go to the end of the CPGB's 14th Summer Offensive we are some way off our ambitious but much needed target of £25,000.

This is not unusual. We have had a much improved response this year from readers of the *Weekly Worker* to our financial call. However, the bulk of the fundraising is still carried out by the most active supporters of the CPGB, organised in branches and committees of the organisation.

Therefore a dash to the finish is an ongoing feature of the offensive as supporters rush to achieve their individual pledges and usually to raise them to meet the collective target.

To date we have just over £16,000 pledged and £10,000 actually received. The money pledged will be coming in from around the country in the next week before the celebration meal on July 12. But there is still a shortfall. We need an extra effort from *Weekly Worker* readers to ensure that we reach the target and can continue to develop and spread the influence of the paper and the struggle for open discussion and Partyism within the workers' movement.

Congratulations to those who have made a donation or already fulfilled their pledge. But we will need an extra effort from these comrades too to raise over and above the amounts already pledged. This will be essential, not only to ensure we reach the minimum target of £25,000 in the next week, but hopefully to smash through it.

Dig deep and fight hard to win finance from others for the Party project in the next week. Send cheques to the CPGB. Tickets for the celebration meal on Saturday July 12 in central London are available now at £20 or £50 solidarity price. The meal is followed on Sunday by a meeting to mark the end of the Offensive at 5pm, also in central London. We hope to see comrades who have taken part or will take part in this year's fundraising drive.

Linda Addison

Around the left

Dismissing the national question

For a useful lesson in how not to tackle the national question in Scotland, read the latest issue of *International Worker*, paper of the Socialist Equality Party.

In a report - which for the most part appears to be factually accurate, at least - on the second annual conference of the Scottish Socialist Alliance held two weeks ago, comrade Tony Hyland denounces "the political bankruptcy of Scottish Militant Labour" (June 28).

The comrade bases his accusation on the grounds that SML "pioneered the formation of this unprincipled alliance with various Stalinists, middle class radicals, Greens, Scottish nationalists and ex-Labourites" (June 28) - in other words, just about everyone is marked with the sign of Cain, as far as the SEP is concerned.

Which is not to say that comrade Hyland does not make many correct criticisms of the SSA and its policies, even if he is being a bit inaccurate - or even economical with the truth, perhaps - when he claims that the "SSA's stated aim is Scottish separatism". However, the comrade is not far off the mark when he

comments: "Only a year after the SML founded the SSA on the pretext of providing a socialist alternative for the working class, their nationalist perspective has led them back into the arms of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. They would serve as the loyal opposition with any future bureaucracy."

Quite correctly as well, after discussing SML's horse-trading over the minimum wage, comrade Hyland observes: "On every question the SML tailors its demands to what is acceptable to the Labour and trade union bureaucracy." This is something we have pointed out ourselves on numerous occasions.

So what is the SEP's answer to the Scottish question then? Simple - *it has not got one*. Or, to be more accurate, in a typical leftist fashion it denies that there is one. How very convenient for the SEP, if not the Scottish masses.

Apparently, "the call for self-determination in Scotland was always a complete distortion by the Stalinists and radicals of the support of the right to self-determination as it was histori-

cally understood by the Marxist movement". Where have we all gone wrong? Comrade Hyland then delivers his supposed trump card: "Scotland is not an oppressed nation but part of an oppressor nation."

In just one facile sentence, comrade Hyland airily dismisses the democratic aspiration of the masses. The fight to remedy the democratic deficit is brushed under the carpet and the SEP end up doing an SWP - ie, lecturing Scottish workers on how they are exactly the same as English and Welsh workers.

Excuse me if I am underwhelmed by the sheer power of the SEP's analysis. Yes, comrade Hyland, we agree that Scotland is not a nation - but that is not *the* issue. Is it?

In a shameless piece of economism, comrade Hyland is reduced to quoting an article written by someone called Howard Fielding who is described as a student of Scottish history at the University of Dundee. In the opinion of this article, "despite a certain amount of depreciation in people's perceptions, the Scottish economy is in a state of upturn beyond a lot of the rest of the UK".

'Stop all your silliness about self-determination,' says the SEP. 'You're better off than the rest of us!' Lenin described this approach as 'imperialist economism' - ie, abstractly and impatiently waving aside the national question in the belief that it is historically redundant and that all that matters is the fight for 'socialism'.

Comrade Hyland's espousal of 'im-

perialist economism" leads him to the most absurd and *deeply reactionary* conclusions.

As part of his report on the SSA conference, comrade Hyland points out: "The only opposition to the support for Labour's referendum and entering Scotland Forward within the SSA came from the ex-Stalinists of the Communist Party of Great Britain/*Weekly Worker* group, who called it a betrayal of the struggle for self-determination."

The alternative put forward by the CPGB was to achieve this through the independent mobilisation of the working class - to develop the movement of the working class along national lines. Such talk of 'working class nationalism' does not belong to the lexicon of Karl Marx, but of Benito Mussolini. It would only hasten the development of a fascistic movement in Scotland".

Welcome to the crazy world of the SEP - and also to the philistine mire that passes for its 'theory'. Our fight to gain hegemony over the mass movement developing in Scotland, and to *divert it* away from the fatal attraction of nationalism/separatism, is described as hastening the "development of a fascistic movement".

In reality of course, it is the SEP which is abandoning the Scottish workers. Like the ruling class, it tells them that they are part of the 'union' like everybody else and to knuckle down. With friends like these, who needs enemies? ●

Don Preston

action

■ Diarmuid O'Neill

Benefit social for the family at the Grosvenor rooms, 92 Walm Lane, London, NW2. Music by Brendan's Barn, Friday July 18, 9pm-2am. Tickets: £5 on the door, £2 in advances

■ Committee for Genuine Self-Determination

To get involved, write to PO Box 6773, Dundee DD1 1YL, or call 01382 203805
<http://www.duntone.demon.co.uk/cgsd/>

■ Scottish Socialist Alliance

To get involved, contact PO Box 980, Glasgow G14 9QQ or ring 0141-552 6773

■ CPGB Scotland

For details of CPGB activity in Scotland, contact PO Box 6773, Dundee DD1 1YL, or call 01382 203805

■ Party wills

The CPGB now has forms available for you to include the Party and the struggle for communism in your will. Write for details.

The report of the CPGB-organised discussion around the idea of a ‘crisis of expectations’ (see ‘Road to nowhere’ *Weekly Worker* June 19) has provoked two responses

A single step forward

Bob Pitt, writing below, is on the editorial board of the journal *What next?*

The *Weekly Worker*’s recent meeting on the Labour government and the ‘crisis of expectations’ resulted in a wide-ranging discussion that lasted about three and a half hours. So it is not surprising that your report in the issue of June 19 could not cover everything that was said. All the same, you rather distort the arguments I put forward at the meeting.

I do not hold the opinion, which you attribute to me, that there will be no crisis of expectations under a Labour government. What I reject is the view that the euphoria which followed the Tories’ defeat on May 1 generated expectations among Labour-voting workers that there will be radical changes under Labour, with the result that there will be a crisis when these expectations remain unfulfilled. The fact that there has been so little opposition to the Blair government’s essentially rightwing course, and that most Labour supporters are satisfied with the very minor reforms that have been implemented, demonstrates the falsity of this over-optimistic version of the ‘crisis of expectations’ argument.

But this does not mean that Labour supporters have *no* expectations of improvement under a Labour government. They hope and believe that they will be spared the attacks on their living conditions and basic rights that they suffered during 18 years of Tory rule. It is *this* expectation which will almost certainly be dashed.

If the Labour leadership sticks to its intentions to keep public spending within the limits set by the outgoing Tory administration, the national health service will quickly be driven into a major financial crisis. Over the next three years, either the NHS will suffer the biggest cuts in its history, or the principle of free healthcare will be severely undermined (hence Frank Dobson’s refusal to

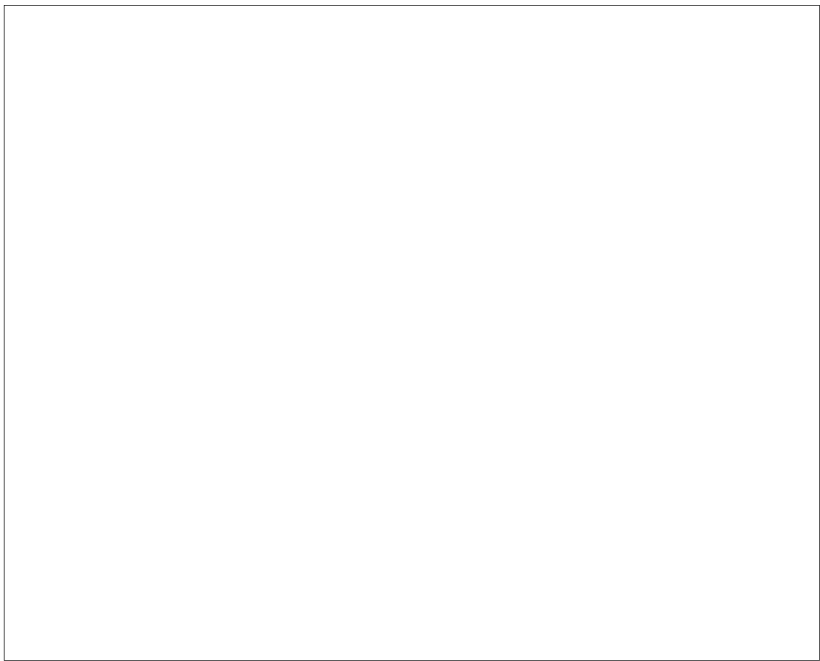
rule out charging people to see their GP). Public sector pay is another explosive issue, as we can expect to see the government imposing pay ‘restraint’ on a scale unrivalled by the Tories themselves. An eventual confrontation between the Blair administration and sections of the working class who voted it into office therefore seems inevitable.

In fact, when you cut through the verbiage about ‘huge expectations’ and an ‘enormous yearning for change’ in Peter Taaffe’s article in the June issue of *Socialism Today*, he is not really arguing anything very much different from what I am. But he obviously feels the need to deck out his argument with a bit of ‘onward and upward’ rhetoric.

Presumably this is intended to raise the spirits of his members, the more realistic of whom must be feeling a bit demoralised after the generally abysmal showing of their candidates in the general election and the wreckage of their leadership’s predictions that the ‘Blairisation’ of the Labour Party had opened up favourable conditions for building a new socialist party with significant working class support.

Your report was also mistaken in claiming that I said it was “incorrect to fight for the complete scrapping of all the Tories’ anti-union laws”. What I in fact argued was that it is tactically mistaken to *agitate* now for the complete abolition of the anti-union laws. There is surely a difference.

For example, as communists, supporters of the *Weekly Worker* are presumably committed to fighting for the smashing of the bourgeois state apparatus and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But I hardly imagine that they turn up at their trade union meetings and *agitate* for an immediate armed insurrection. (Mind you, on second thoughts, I would not put it past some



Will Brown’s budget see workers assert their own control?

of them!)

During the election campaign Tony Blair observed with apparent approval that Britain has the harshest anti-union laws in the western world, and his government evidently intends to keep it that way. Indeed, if they are faced with a clash with the public sector unions over pay, it seems more than possible that they will bring in additional laws of their own, perhaps restricting strikes in essential services.

Support for this position with the labour movement is virtually non-existent outside the top circles of the Labour Party. Most people, even rightwing trade union bureaucrats, believe that there should be changes in the existing legislation, which makes the most basic industrial action extremely difficult within the law and repeatedly threatens the unions with the loss of their funds. It is therefore possible to construct a majority bloc within the movement against the

Labour leadership around the question of reforming the anti-union laws. (The relevant slogan, I think, is for ‘the restoration of trade union rights’ or some similar formulation.)

The demand for the complete abolition of the anti-union laws is, by contrast, a minority view within the labour movement. To agitate against Blair’s anti-union policy around this demand is therefore tactically inept, as it automatically hands him a majority in the movement when he rejects it.

The same reasoning applies in the case of the minimum wage. When the government eventually comes up with a figure next year it will probably be around £3.50 an hour. The vast majority of trade unionists support the demand for a minimum wage of half median male earnings - which works out at £4.22 or thereabouts.

Here is the basis for waging an effective struggle, with the backing of the

mass of the movement. If you start agitating for £7 an hour, as the *Weekly Worker* does, you immediately reduce yourself to an ineffective minority which can have no impact on the real struggle that is coming up over the minimum wage.

Militant Labour (aka the Socialist Party) puts forward the demand for £6 an hour, no doubt in order to impress potential recruits with the organisation’s radicalism. But when Roger Bannister of ML stood for the position of Unison general secretary he campaigned on the half-median-male-earnings figure. When he was asked why, he replied that this was the figure around which you could maximise support!

I think he was right. But the obvious question is - what point is there to ML agitating for a demand in their newspaper, if they are forced to abandon it when they actually intervene in the labour movement?

The proposal to build broad alliances around basic demands, which you find so hopelessly minimalist and pessimistic, is in fact the only way to take the class forward in the present circumstances. And a single step forward for the class is, after all, worth a thousand programmes. Sectarian groups like the CPGB/*Weekly Worker* who reject this approach find themselves paralysed and reduced to sterile propaganda.

Helplessly declaring that nothing much can be done in the real world (where, in Jack Conrad’s words, the working class can be dismissed as existing only “in a limbo state as passive atomised voting fodder for the bourgeoisie”), the comrades around the *Weekly Worker* seem to believe that we should devote ourselves primarily to the task of keeping alive, in the minds of a very narrowly-defined vanguard, the *idea* of a Communist Party - a Party which will be built some time in the indefinite future, by forces that do not yet exist. It is the outlook of a quietist millenarian sect, and I cannot think of anything much more pessimistic than that! ●

Socialist Labour’s Blairites

John Stone of the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International and former member of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International condemns the sectarian methods of SLA

The recent conference of the Campaign for a Democratic SLP overwhelmingly voted in favour of censuring comrades in the SLP who produce the journal *Socialist Labour Action* for fingering comrades on the SLP left. The journal put in jeopardy the future of some comrades inside the SLP.

The only people who voted against the resolution were the few SLA comrades attending. It is time for the SLA to rethink their position.

- It is the second time that a left SLP meeting has censured the SLA for this pro-witch hunt attitude.

- The Vauxhall branch adopted a resolution criticising its secretary for publicly supporting a group which campaigned against the branch’s candidate in the general election. Nobody supported her.

- The SLA has not recruited one single person to its faction. No SLP member wants to support a faction that openly identifies with a group which campaigned for a bourgeois old Conservative Blairite against Scargill and

against nearly all SLP candidates.

- The SLA refuses to open up its faction to SLP members who are not pro-Workers Power. Even some ex-WP members are not allowed to join the SLA. If you want to be in that faction you have to be an open supporter of a group which advocates the destruction of the SLP and is against voting for it.

- The only SLP candidate which the SLA unconditionally supported (Terry Burns) was in favour of the SLP official manifesto, is against a democratic-centralist party and against the right of WP to be inside the SLP; he is against voting Labour and in favour of voting for the SLP and Socialist Party; he shares most of the SP’s positions. His ‘revolutionary programme’ does not mention the dictatorship of the proletariat or a workers’ international, but has two pages of Scargill quotations. Burns openly attacked WP and voted to censure SLA at the CDSLP conference.

- The SLA is trying to build a faction which openly rejects the bureaucratic

SLP statutes and leadership. However, members of the group in the past completely supported the bureaucratic way in which the left opposition was purged from the League for a Revolutionary Communist International.

The SLA is not only alienating rank and file SLP members, but also all the opposition democrats inside the SLP. They are acting as provocateurs and informers.

If the SLA want to work inside a party, they should be consistent and leave the SLP and join Labour, which they supported electorally. If they want to carry out work inside the SLP they should adopt a less sectarian attitude.

With these attitudes the pro-LRCI people are discrediting themselves inside and outside the SLP.

The SLA must change its positions. It should stop helping the witch hunters and fingering dissidents. It should not help the leadership to expel the left. It should attempt to create united fronts with the left ●

Class knuckle-duster

Dave Osler of the Socialist Labour Party

Your account of my remarks at a recent CPGB seminar are factually inaccurate on two points. Please allow me to set the record straight.

I did not argue that a security guard on £3.50 an hour would see a £3.50 minimum wage as a reform. What I did say was that a security guard on £2.40 an hour - along with one million or so other workers on similarly low pay in Britain today - would see £3.50 as a reform. That is surely beyond dispute.

Nor did I argue that a crisis of expectations would be “potentially a weapon for the organised left”. I did say that a legal right to trade union recognition was potentially a weapon for the organised left. This is, you will concede, entirely a different matter.

If the union bureaucracy provides proper resources - if only out of self-interest - and activists have the force of law behind them, the far left can significantly extend its industrial base during the lifetime of the Blair administration by leading a drive to restore union representation. That is a realisable concrete political perspective.

Lastly, is a call for a British party of recomposition really “unintentionally courting a Chile scenario”? Absolutely not. I have elsewhere (specifically in an

extended article on the Socialist Labour Party in *What next?* earlier this year) explicitly discounted the idea that the SLP will eventually replace Labour as a mass membership party capable of winning a parliamentary majority in bourgeois elections.

I argued instead that “within two or three years, the SLP is likely to find itself a party of perhaps 5,000-10,000 individual members and a wide ranging periphery at least as large again, grouping together the most advanced workers as the knuckle-duster of the class” (see *What next?*).

Industrial organisation is the key to the future of the SLP. This will be measured through the strike ballot box, not the general election ballot box.

The only real rider I would add five months on is the fear that the internal situation in the party will deteriorate to the point where the whole project goes belly up.

This is not to discount electoral activity. A socialist slate - hopefully led by the SLP - is capable of winning the same level of five to ten percent support enjoyed by similar parties of recomposition on mainland Europe or the red-green convergence groupings in Scandinavia. But that is not a Chile scenario either ●

Imperialist hypocrisy

To the strains of ‘Land of hope and glory’, Hong Kong was handed over on Monday to the Chinese government. Chris Patten - the 28th and last imperial governor of the colony - bid farewell to the bright lights with a tear in his eye.

He was not the only one reduced to tears. The grotesque and faintly surreal ‘last night of the proms’ coverage has generated an orgy of imperialist nostalgia and regret from all quarters of bourgeois society.

The Hong Kong hand-over - or ‘the return’, as the Chinese media more accurately describe it - has been an exercise in monstrous hypocrisy, and an instructive lesson in the art of disseminating the neo-imperialist message. Nobody could miss the drip-drip intimation behind all the reports: the contrast between British civilisation and Asiatic/Chinese barbarism and backwardness.

If all your information was derived from the bourgeois media, you could be forgiven for thinking that British imperialism’s ‘acquisition’ of Hong Kong was an inspired act of altruism. The noble gentlemen of the British Empire were concerned solely with delivering enlightenment, civilisation and - here’s a good one - democracy to the Chinese masses. Except for a few undeniable ‘bad eggs’ and the occasional regrettable ‘mistake’, the cadres of the empire were a fundamentally decent lot. In the weasel words of *The Guardian* editorial, “It is absurd for Chinese commentators to label the entire 156 years since then with the guilt of British imperialism” (June 30).

The intention, whether unconscious or semi-conscious, of the media offensive on reality and the truth is to rehabilitate British imperialism - or, at the very least, to prettify its history. ‘Let’s give imperialism a face lift,’ says the ruling class. Prince Charles’ and Chris Patten’s farewell speeches were brave attempts at historical revisionism, for all of the latter’s feigned regret at the manner in which Britain came to possess Hong Kong.

The real story could not contrast more with the media’s airbrushed versions. When the union flag came down - and Hong Kong became a special administrative region inside China - we were in fact waving farewell to the “butcher’s apron”, not to decades of civilising influence.

The fact that Hong Kong became ‘British’ at all was the result of the most monstrous plunder. The imperialist adventurers/bandits who seized the New Territories hinterland were driven by the rapacious *realpolitik* of imperialist ambition and inter-imperialist rivalries. They shot, bombed and murdered their way to a position of mastery over the Chinese masses, regarded as an entirely inferior race who were to be treated *at best* as wayward children. Signs saying, ‘No Chinese or dogs’ littered the imperialist-dominated zones of China - some of which remained right up until the Chinese Revolution of 1949. For all the crap that has been spoken over recent weeks, this mind-set of imperial, racialistic contempt for the Chinese has been alive and well amongst sections of the ‘ex-pat’ community in Hong Kong. The pious praise



British traders fed opium addiction throughout Chinese society

now being heaped on the Hong Kong Chinese - for their “talent”, “brilliance”, “inventiveness”, etc - is a quite new-found discovery.

Even though their modern descendants love to preach against the ‘evils’ of narcotics - conducting a ‘war against drugs’ even - the imperialist invaders of China had no such moral compunctions. Disturbed by the growing trade imbalance with India, they thought it would be an excellent idea to export opium to China. To this end, they consciously set out to create the highest number of opium addicts possible. This policy was accompanied, of course, by general brutality - such as burning down the Forbidden Palace. In this way whole tracts of China were divided into imperial spheres of influence, with the Chinese masses humiliated and made strangers in their own land.

Chris Patten’s predecessors went in to rob and loot China, Like India before it. For the glorious British empire, China was a potential source of cheap labour; an enormous zone of super-exploitation. Nothing else came into the equation - unless you count personal self-enrichment. Patten’s claim that British colonialism in Hong Kong provided “the scaffolding ... the rule of law, clean government, the values of a free society” are laughable - and contemptible.

This is the *real* legacy of imperialism. Its baleful shadow still lingers over British society. The upholders of the British empire received a classical education at institutions like Eton and Harrow. This education was not motivated by any great aesthetic appreciation of Homer’s epic poetry, or the verse of Ovid. The sons and daughters of the British empire - mainly sons, of course - wanted to learn the lessons of the ‘divide and rule’ tactics of the Roman empire, and hence *replicate* the success of the Roman conquests and hopefully avoid its eventual fate. As part and parcel

of this training the young students imbibed the notion that they were innately superior to the masses and were born to rule. This elitist, class-divided education system - perfected at this time of imperial plunder - continues today.

What really grates are the lectures on the virtues of democracy being served up by the bourgeoisie and its media. Conjuring up its most pompous imperial voice, *The Observer* informs us: “The people of Hong Kong are being transferred from a model democracy to a model dictatorship ... Britain’s responsibilities to Hong Kong do not end tomorrow. We have a special obligation to keep the freedom of its people in the international eye. If disaster strikes, our moral duty to arrange refuge - and if necessary to offer it ourselves - is unambiguous” (June 29).

What offensive hypocrisy. Hong Kong, until very recently, was run as a colonial dictatorship - no elections, or any expression of democratic sentiment, were allowed. When the original Joint Declaration was signed in 1984 between Deng and Margaret Thatcher, the dread ‘d’-word was not mentioned. The Hong Kong masses were to be handed over to China and that was that.

Patten himself gave the game away in a recent interview with *The Guardian*, when he let slip that all the previous governors treated pro-democracy activists “as though they were Trots, enemies of the state”. In the same interview, Patten also boasted: “In five years, we haven’t had a single large strike. No riots, no big student demos, no punch-ups in parliament” (June 30).

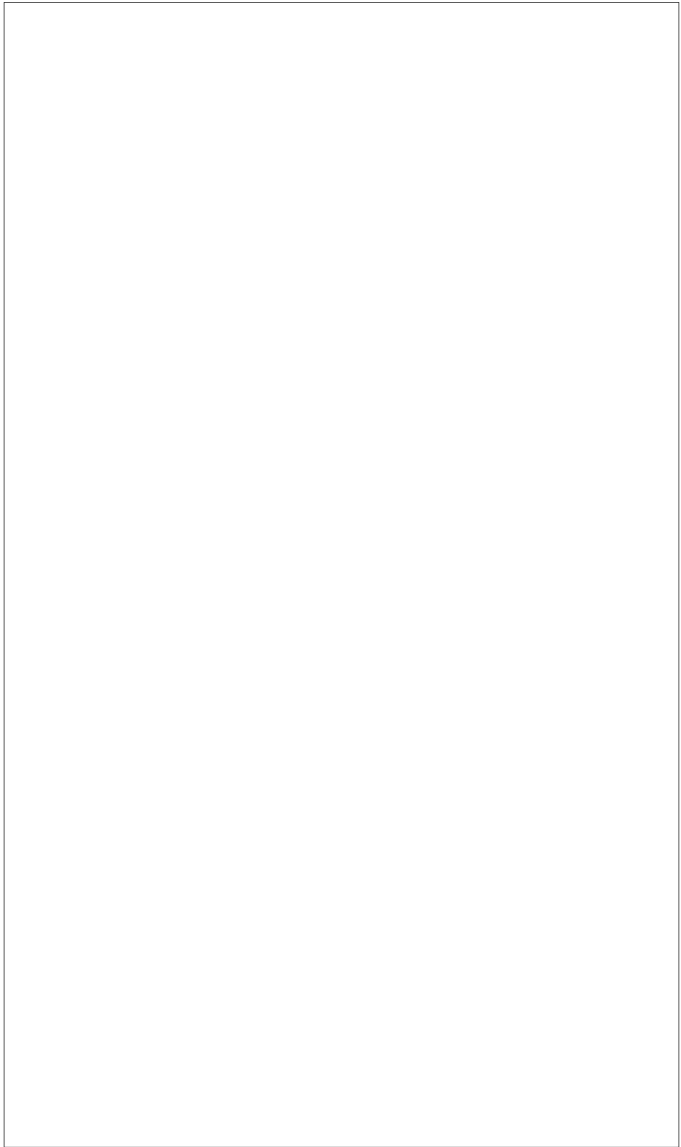
Clearly, Chris Patten’s sudden conversion to the marvels of elected assemblies and legislatures was a blatant attempt to destabilise mainland China, to implant the Trojan Horse of ‘democracy’ and appear to be more virtuous than the Chinese bureaucrats. It was a cynical exercise, as was the farcical boycott of the of-

ficial Chinese ceremonies held on Tuesday.

The US administration and the British government are so offended by the non-democratic nature of the new hand-picked legislative assembly, the Legislative Council, they cannot bring themselves to attend. Funnily enough, their conscience never stirred from its sleep during the last 150 years of British rule over Hong Kong - nor does it prevent them from

quite cheerfully rubbing shoulders with Saudi Arabian dictators. US imperialism was delighted to do deals, to name just one example, with general Augusto Pinochet of Chile in 1973 - who came to power by massacring the elected government of Salvador Allende. However, the Legislative Council is beyond the pale.

The Communist Party of China has promised to preserve Hong Kong capitalism with its



Shedding a tear for the hayday of British imperialism

‘one country, two systems’ formula. There is no reason not to believe them. In China itself, the Party/state bureaucracy is introducing capitalism *from above*. It should be mentioned in passing that this is not an uncommon phenomenon: in many parts of the world, capitalism was imposed by the state apparatus - it did not emerge spontaneously from below, as some modern-day myth makers would suggest.

The capitalistic ‘reforms’ we witness in contemporary China bear no relation to the NEP of Lenin’s Russia - a temporary concession to the peasantry, dictated by the catastrophic exigencies of war communism. Top layers of the Party/state bureaucracy are *merging* with the top layers of the new, emerging capitalist class. A good example of the new breed of “red capitalists” - as they are increasingly referred to in China - is Tung Chee-hwa, the new chief executive who takes over from Patten. He is a Liverpool-educated shipping tycoon who is the darling of the CPC. There are plenty of others just like him.

The sons and daughters of Party bureaucrats are steadily enriching themselves and use their personal/filial ties to promote this process, and the sons and daughters of top business figures are joining the CPC. The Communist Party of China has become the vehicle for the introduction of capitalistic social relations - a capitalism that is far beyond what existed previous to the revolution. Pre-1949, a formal or primitive capitalism operated only in small, isolated pockets of China.

Hong Kong’s re-absorption into the ‘motherland’ significantly boosts this capitalistic momentum. This city-state has massive concentrations of capital, and China overnight added somewhere in the region of 20% to its GDP. By a splendid paradox, the removal of imperialist control over Hong Kong and its re-unification with ‘socialist’ China has objectively aided the expansion of world capital.

The Hong Kong hand-over points to the wider tragedy of the Chinese Revolution. Its proletarian head cut off in 1927, Mao and his followers pursued a non-proletarian ‘socialism’ - developing a fundamentally utopian ideology which followed the contours of Stalin’s anti-socialist socialism, but located it within a rural framework. As is evidenced by the disasters of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the Communist Party of China came to embody a *completely different idea* of socialism to Karl Marx and VI Lenin - a hopelessly petty-bourgeois schema which was doomed to such brutal failure.

When we look at the bright capitalist lights of Hong Kong - with its capitalist exploitation, corruption, prostitution, etc - and Guangdong Province in Southern China, which has become one massive sweatshop for its tens of millions of inhabitants, we see the *consequences* of Mao’s failure.

The Chinese Revolution aimed to build ‘socialism’ within its national boundaries. Now it hopes to compete as an ‘equal’ with world imperialism ●

Eddie Ford

Labour day in Detroit

Socialist Labour Party ‘voided’ member and Unison activist **Barry Biddulph** reports on workers struggle against the odds in the USA

On Saturday June 21 5,000 workers marched through Detroit in solidarity with workers from six unions, sacked in a union busting operation by the main Detroit newspaper owners. This was ‘Action Motown’ (Detroit is the car manufacturing centre of America). Militants had originally planned for ‘Shutdown Motown’. This sounded too controversial for the trade union bureaucrats. The march was only sanctioned nearly two years after the start of the strike and four months after national union leaders had effectively sold it out.

The strike began in July 1995 when newspaper workers refused to accept provocative cuts in jobs and conditions. The bosses sacked the unionised workers and brought in 1,200 scabs to break the unions and smash the strike. Workers fought back on the picket line in face to face battles with local cops.

Their aim was to prevent distribution of the newspapers produced by scabs. They had some success. Particularly at the distribution centre of Sterling Heights.

When the Detroit Newspaper Agency resorted to legal injunctions to prevent mass picketing, the union bureaucrats rushed to comply with court orders and call off mass pickets. Even before the bosses had turned to the courts the local trade union misleaders were nervous about clashes with the police. The official leaders acted to disperse the pickets over a large area.

By the spring of 1996 a fully fledged respectable strategy of relying on publicity and the good will of management was firmly in place. Instead of flying pickets, the unions were issuing their caricature of the mainstream bourgeois papers produced by the scabs. Moral appeals were made to consumers to buy the union newspaper and not the paper put out by the scabs. In addition appeals were made to public opinion about the unfair labour practices of the newspaper barons. This was as ineffective as similar union publicity campaigns in Britain.

Another disincentive to militant action was the reliance on the supposed friends of labour - the Democrats. No demonstration could be called until Clinton was safe again in office. If waiting for Blair has brought disappointment in Britain, reliance on Clinton was a false hope manufactured by union bureaucrats.

In February 1997 the official leaders surrendered unconditionally. They ordered the strikers back to work without consulting them. The workers were expected to return to work on any terms the newspaper owners were prepared to accept. Only a few strikers were allowed back. It was a serious defeat for the trade union movement.

Typically the leaders still talked of moral victory. This victory was expected to come from the courts. Even if the courts were to rule in favour of the sacked workers they would not obtain their jobs back. So far the courts have not compelled or shown any signs of compelling the bosses to act fairly to the strikers. Looking to the capitalist courts was a strategy for defeat.

Many workers protested at the union instruction to return to work. But the problem throughout the strike was the lack of a clear rank and file movement independent of the local and national leadership. Those Marxists arguing for rank and file elected committees on a

class struggle programme to take the strike forward (eg, *Workers Voice* - a small Trotskyist group) were not numerically strong enough to have a decisive influence. Those on the left who did have some influence were unwilling or incapable of acting independently of the local officials.

Rank and file organisation in the unions appears to be far weaker than in Britain (if that is possible), with the trade union bureaucracy in a far more dominant position. The employers and the local city authorities were confident the official union leaders would prevent any angry outbursts or disorder from the demonstrators. A very small contingent of police kept in the background with none of the usual harassment of marches we experience in Britain.

The anger of the crowd was restricted to smashing up newspaper vending machines along the route of the march. When the police arrested some of the culprits the crowd chanted for their release, and the police let them go. But the police could afford to be generous. The authorities were well aware the demonstration was more of a funeral march organised by the trade union bureaucracy to formally bury the strike while claiming a moral victory.

The powerful influence of nationalism in the USA could also be seen. Many of the hard hat (blue collar) workers’ contingents carried the stars and stripes rather than traditional union banners. The rally was opened by the singing of the national anthem.

The defeat in Detroit follows a number of other defeats for newspaper workers in America. Indeed, workers in general have suffered serious defeats since the 1980s. The trade union struggle is at a historic low in the USA. Union organisation is down to nine percent of the workforce. Certainly in Detroit the economy and the strength of the workers’ movement has declined drastically since the 1950s and 1960s. Most black workers appear to be living in Great Depression-like conditions. The general standard of living in Detroit is well below London or South East England.

An indication of the weakness of the left and trade unions is the strength of neo-liberalism. Public services are non-existent or minimal. In the 1950s when Detroit was a workers’ stronghold there were extensive public services. Now if you do not have a car you cannot go anywhere in Detroit. Many workers are trapped in their neighbourhood.

The Marxist left also seems more isolated than in Britain. A meeting of various groups after the rally had a very incestuous feel about it.

The comrades from *Workers Voice* were the only tendency present to have a healthy approach to rank and file work in the unions. The League for a Revolutionary Party (which split originally from the International Socialist/Socialist Workers Party tradition) dismissed rank and fileism altogether. They have a sectarian approach of counterposing the revolutionary party to the rank and file in the unions.

The courage and determination of the Detroit newspaper strikers and the Marxist left who attempted to intervene in the dispute to offer alternative leadership demonstrates that workers in America are still prepared to fight. Communist organisation, though presently marginalised, is prepared to go beyond trade unionism and capitalism ●

Still making excuses

Bob Smith of Open Polemic never was one for mincing his words. So when he launched another verbal onslaught on the CPGB in last week’s *Weekly Worker* (June 26 1997), it would hardly have surprised our readers.

In his article, ‘Bucket loads of hypocrisy’ (reprinted from *Open Polemic Update* No9, May 1997), comrade Smith lists no fewer than seven examples of what he calls CPGB “hypocrisy”. The first case in point was perhaps the most telling - not in exposing the CPGB, but in revealing Open Polemic’s own dishonesty:

“*Hypocrisy 1*. Claim you are reforging a multanimous CPGB and when you ensnare an honest (some may say gullible) participant then you hit them for six with your own faction’s rules, while claiming to be acting on behalf of the Party (sic) majority. When the honest/gullible participant complains, you then accuse them of reneging on democratic centralism.”

Who can Bob be referring to? And exactly what form did this outrageous behaviour take? Three members of Open Polemic, including of course comrade Smith himself, took up ‘representational membership’ of the CPGB in April 1995, only to slink away a year later. But it was not the imposition of some previously concealed “rules” that caused their departure.

In fact OP frequently complained that our organisation had too few clearly defined rules. They left because they could not accept that a democratic decision taken by a Party aggregate (in which they participated) should apply to them - namely, that all members should be set a minimum fundraising target for our Summer Offensive.

In other words OP could not accept the operation of democratic centralism within our organisation. Feigning innocence, the comrades would now have us believe that they had no idea that we took decisions on that basis - we “hit them for six” with democratic centralism.

But, we must ask, how is it that such self-proclaimed theorists of communist practice were so blissfully unaware of the CPGB’s organisational methods when they applied to join? After all, to quote Bob Smith’s own words from his regular weekly column in our paper, “the fact remains that the CPGB along with the Open Polemic faction represents surely the highest point of Marxist-Leninist unity in Britain today” (*Weekly Worker* November 30 1995).

What, Marxist-Leninist unity without democratic centralism? In the same article comrade Smith outlines the reasons for OP’s entry: “In short, our brief was to uphold and develop democratic centralism within the future Marxist-Leninist party.” It is true that neither OP nor the CPGB as a whole claimed that such a Party was already in existence, but how can you “uphold and develop” something without practising it in the present?

As Jack Conrad pointed out, “Unless democratic centralism, no matter how rudimentary or preparatory its forms, is applied in the present, in the here and now, nothing worthwhile will result in the future. No matter how few, no matter how inexperienced, communists must organise at the highest level. That is why the principle of democratic centralism can never be premature” (*Weekly Worker* February 20 1997).

To cover their retreat from the practice of democratic centralism OP has attempted, in addition to hurling accusations of hypocrisy at the CPGB, to theorise it out of existence when it comes to the concrete conditions of Britain in 1997. In a statement replying to comrade Conrad’s article it claims: “The fact is that the principles of democratic centralism, the leading role of the Party and proletarian internationalism are, *firstly*, dependent on communists being united within a single Communist Party. These principles are certainly not in the here and now in terms of *united practice*” (*Open Polemic Update* No8, April 1997).

The statement adds: “OP in fact considers that conditions in the communist movement today make consensus democracy justifiable although, with the existing rampant sectarianism, even that form of communist political organisation may also be premature.” The comrades cannot be accused of being over-ambitious.

Just what is it in the present concrete conditions that makes the practice of democratic centralism (and perhaps even of consensus democracy) “premature”? For comrades who claim to hold such store by the principle of historical and dialectical materialism, they are sadly lacking in its application.

All they can point to is the lack of subjective will on the part of the revolutionary left. What else is preventing the rapprochement of existing organisations? No one is doing it, so it cannot be done.

Why must effective communist organisation await the official declaration of the Communist Party’s reforging at

groups which stopped short of what is necessary: “Instead of proposing such halfway house solutions, revolutionaries should be devoting all their energy to seeking unity through rapprochement to build the Communist Party - the only form of organisation that can liberate our class.

“That task is for today, not some indeterminate time in the future.”

Comrade Smith’s other claims are equally mind boggling. How about this? - “*Hypocrisy 3*. Enter the SLP under false pretences and false identities ...” Which “false pretences” would they be, comrade? Unlike some other groups we have made no secret of our organisation’s participation. We have not tried to conceal our reasons for this orientation, nor the thinking behind our strategy.

And “false identities”? This is certainly amusing when we remember that it is a certain ‘Bob Smith’ who is criticising us for hypocrisy. He has every right to use whatever name he likes of course, but he really must try to avoid confusing the principle of political openness with the need to maintain security.

Comrade ‘Smith’ reluctantly concedes that it might be a relevant tactic for communists to “interact with left reformist organisations” - but only when we have put our own house in order. However, as even consensus democracy might be “premature” in his view, we could clearly be in for a long wait before we are able to do anything of any use in the cause of the working class. Meanwhile opportunity after opportunity goes begging.

Of course our interventions would be

.....

‘We should recognise the positive step that the Open Polemic comrades took when they decided to enter the CPGB. But two years on they should stop to re-examine their project. In order to excuse their retreat - not only from any kind of intervention in the class struggle, but also from the practice of democratic centralism - they seek to blame it all on the CPGB’

.....

some future congress? And how could its refoundation ever be achieved without such organisation?

But instead of fighting with us for that common goal and the attempt to make the *Weekly Worker* “the finest communist paper this country has ever seen” (Bob Smith *Weekly Worker* January 4 1996), OP preferred to beat a retreat.

It is in this light that comrade Smith’s next example of CPGB “hypocrisy” should be viewed. Far from acknowledging that retreat, he claims that the CPGB has decided to “dump communist rapprochement in favour of a quick manoeuvre for position with the [Socialist Labour Party]” (*Weekly Worker* June 26 1997).

Rapprochement and our orientation towards the SLP are not mutually exclusive, comrade Smith. Perhaps he has not read Eddie Ford’s report of the debate organised by the CPGB last month (*Weekly Worker* June 19 1997). Although Open Polemic stayed away, representatives from no fewer than seven left groups turned up to debate ‘Where now for the left?’

Comrade Ford ended his article by criticising proposals from the other

more effective the deeper and broader our unity, but we must make the best use of whatever resources we have. And comrade Smith’s notion that we must meekly ask Scargill’s permission to intervene in ‘his’ party is bizarre, to say the least.

We should recognise the positive step that the Open Polemic comrades took when they decided to enter the CPGB. But two years on they should stop to re-examine their project. In order to excuse their retreat - not only from any kind of intervention in the class struggle, but also from the practice of democratic centralism - they seek to blame it all on the CPGB.

When OP ran away from its obligations by deserting a living, concrete rapprochement process, the CPGB invited its representatives, if they felt no longer able to remain Party members, to take up ‘representational supporter’ status. That would involve the right of OP to a weekly column in the *Weekly Worker* and the right to attend Party aggregates with speaking rights. OP did not even bother to reply.

What was that about dumping communist rapprochement, Bob? ●

Peter Manson

Rapprochement: where now?

Has the process ground to a halt? **Dave Craig** of the Revolutionary Democratic Group (faction of the SWP) gives his views

Rapprochement between the CPGB and the RDG has been subject to a certain amount of speculation in the *Weekly Worker*. It has been suggested that it is all over, and that the CPGB is only interested in big fish like the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party.

All this is the speculation of individuals and not the collective decisions of definite groups. Obviously if the CPGB want to pull out that is their decision. But the RDG comrades remain committed to the process. We joined the process in 1996. We are not pulling out. We will only leave this process when or if we come to a political dead end. If this happens we will make a collective statement on the reasons for our decision.

Neither is there any crisis in our relations with the CPGB as far as the RDG is concerned. Certainly there have been disagreements over the tactics to be deployed in Scotland and in the SLP, some of which have been debated openly in the *Weekly Worker*. This does not constitute a crisis: rather a testing out of the differences that a fused organisation would have had to cope with.

Rapprochement is a process, not an event. The RDG and CPGB agreed what should constitute the substance of this process. It meant representatives of both groups meeting to produce some joint statements. These could then be put before the full membership for discussion. As well as positions already agreed, we were producing a joint statement on rapprochement, as well as clarification of our differences on the national question and permanent revolution. In addition to this we were looking at programmatic differences and at the question of the rules. Work began on this and came to a halt in January 1997. Nothing further was done until May.

In this sense the agreed process came to a halt rather than a dead end. Whether this can be explained by lack of political will or pressure of other activities is open to question. Personally, I put it down to pressure of work. However, work has begun again and on the plus side there is now a draft agreed between representatives on the issue of rapprochement itself. If that is ratified then we can move on. We are certainly not trying to delay anything.

If there is a crisis of rapprochement it is not down to the alleged sectarian approach of the RDG. The failure of negotiations to continue has mixed with different conceptions of what we are doing and why. This has caused a minority(?) to become frustrated. This was reflected in the letter by Martin Blum (*Weekly Worker* May 22).

Mark Fischer stated that there was a political difference between us over the question of rapprochement. This is why it is quite right for the RDG to seek agreement on this before proceeding further. Some CPGB comrades, as evidenced by Martin Blum's letter, see things in very simple terms. Will you join the CPGB - yes or no? We want you to join now and we are getting fed up with your delay. Documents, agreements and debates are all a waste of time. Just take out a membership card.

Unfortunately this is the same kind of approach practised by the SWP. Will you join the SWP - yes or no? They used to be quite patient with doubters. Then you would be written off as worthless. However the SWP did not disguise this with highfalutin titles like rapprochement. Build the party, join the SWP. We saw this non-programmatic method to recruitment as opportunistic and therefore sectarian

Of course this is not to deny the differences between CPGB and SWP when it comes to approaching new recruits. If we join, we will be allowed to say critical things in the *Weekly Worker*, but not in *Socialist Worker*. This aside, some com-

rades in the CPGB are not a million miles away from the recruitment methods of the SWP.

Organisational rapprochement (or 'join immediately') has been tried and failed. It has been tried with Communist Action Group, Open Polemic, the Republican Worker Tendency, International Socialist Group and - last but by no means least - the Bullites. The ideas of the Bullites, who we are now told are mad and homophobic, were no problem when it came to joining. I was certainly told that Roy Bull either had joined or was about to. Organisational rapprochement is nothing more than the raider mentality. We fuse so that each is better able to raid the membership of the other. Later we part company with much bitterness and hypocrisy all round. This does not create factions loyal to a common project, but rather the worst kind of competitive factionalism.

The RDG has a different conception. We do not see this process in terms of trying to recruit people to our group or network. None of our comrades have either openly or secretly tried to recruit members or supporters of the CPGB. We have certainly entered debates with the aim of influencing your political ideas. This is not because we cannot find the membership forms. It flows from our conception of genuine rapprochement.

The process of rapprochement is far more important than grubbing around for an extra member or two. However, we now seem to get regular appeals to join you with the 'threat' of being slagged off if we do not. I am not yet convinced that your 'join now' policy is any more successful in producing recruits than ours. So far the score is nil-nil. The frustration shown by Martin Blum comes from his 'join now' politics. So severe has this become, that he is now trying to terrorize us into joining. If you don't join soon there will be an almighty big bang.

Building a communist party is absolutely an ideological and organisational question. Since we see rapprochement as part of the process of building towards such a party, it would be strange indeed if we defined this in purely organisational terms.

If you see the process in purely organisational terms, then you end up with loads of groups and grouplets in one organisation - '27 wild cats in a bag', as someone recently called it. To put it another way, we will not win the boat race simply by having 15 people in a boat, if they are all rowing in different directions. We are not getting into any boats which we think are going in fundamentally the wrong direction over the nearest waterfall. Even if we are given the freedom to shout out, 'This boat is about to crash and we'll all be killed'. Of course we don't think that is true of the CPGB. Otherwise we would have bailed out by now.

Those who think in purely organisational terms set up a straw person. They claim that we demand that everybody agrees with the theory of state capitalism before we can fuse. This is nonsense. We have to work out in practice what needs to be agreed.

Strictly speaking, real rapprochement must be programmatic rather than theoretical. The argument for programmatic rapprochement is clear. Those who get in the boat will have an agreed map of where they are going. The map may contain some mistakes that will have to be altered on the way. Some may try to steer more left and others more to the right. Perhaps there will be some zig-zagging. But it will be zig-zagging in the right direction.

We have some experience to draw on. Look at the success you have achieved with organisational rapprochement in terms of the Bullites and Open Polemic. Open Polemic made no programmatic rapprochement, which they considered a

barrier. In this sense Open Polemic was the polar opposite to the RDG approach.

The failure of organisational rapprochement does not prove our approach successful, but it certainly points out what has failed. We seem to be told this failure is down to the fact that these people are not up to standard, or are a bunch of misfits and malcontents. Non-ideological rapprochement provides us with a non-ideological explanation.

One last point. It now seems to be coming fashionable to conclude that the RDG does not exist and therefore is not worth bothering with. The RDG does not claim to be anything other than what it is, and the politics it represents. We are more or less the same group or network

that we were when we first began this process. I do not think we have changed. We remain as unimportant and non-existent as ever. If the Provisional Central Committee were thinking of pulling out, and there is no concrete evidence that they are, this would reflect a change of policy in the PCC, not some diminution in the size or importance of the RDG.

In conclusion, we remain committed to the rapprochement process. We continue to have infinite patience with you. We hope you will continue to reciprocate. The next step is to publish the joint thesis on rapprochement. We will be discussing this and coming up with some concrete proposals to take the process further forward ●

From **The Call**, paper of the British Socialist Party, June 28 1917

On to victory

A statement is now being issued to all working class organisations in the country by the Provisional Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council giving particulars regarding the formation of local committees.

It states that "they should be so constituted that they cover the whole of the local labour, socialist, cooperative and democratic organisations. The trades council, where sympathetic, should take the initiative in the formation of such councils. Delegates from all working class organisations should attend their meetings. It is suggested that factories, workshops and committees of shop stewards should send representatives."

It further states that "there must be no desire on the part of local councils to encroach upon or to supersede organisations already established. All friction must be avoided, a broad spirit of toleration encouraged and overlapping eliminated as far as possible."

If in such circumstances the local councils are called into being then a decided step will have been taken on the road to victory. With all the workers gathered under the banner of the local committees there is no limit to their potentialities if with clear purpose and courageous leading they deliberately aim at the rule of the proletariat.

The *real power* rests with the workers. They are the only necessary members of the community. Upon their shoulders rests the whole fabric of society. Without them wheels would not turn, cloth would not be woven, houses would not be built, food would not be produced, marketed and distributed - no vital service would be performed. And, realising that, the organised workers in the towns and districts are in such numbers that they could easily dominate all the public bodies - political, economic and social - in their respective localities.

If the local workers' and soldiers' committees achieve complete local solidarity then the next parliamentary election should witness the return to the House of Commons of an overwhelming majority of direct representatives of the working class. A working class power would thus express itself politically, so also would it express itself industrially. No industrial struggle would take place without the conscious support of

the whole of the workers, and the growing movement towards the control of industry would receive tremendous impetus.

Nor is that all. The cooperative movement, by the active participation of cooperative guilds in the work of the councils, can be induced to play its part in the struggle of the workers for emancipation. The Belgian workers before the war set an example to the workers of all countries by their effective coordination of the three great branches of the movement - the trade unions, political organisations and the cooperative societies. It required the Dublin dispute, when the ships owned by the cooperative societies took cooperative supplies to the striking transport workers, to make the workers of this country even faintly realise how powerful could be the support of the cooperative movement in industrial struggles. Since that historic struggle there has been an ever growing desire for a closer working between the cooperative and industrial organisations.

Inspired with revolutionary social democracy, the workers' and soldiers' councils, by locally coordinating the three branches of the movement, by rallying all the workers and implanting in their minds the sense of power and the will to conquer, will pave the way to victory. After 30 years of persistent socialist propaganda in this country we believe there is sufficient socialist consciousness amongst the workers to accomplish the revolution if means can be found to give it complete and definite expression.

The workers' and soldiers' councils will provide the means: it remains for the branches of the BSP and the socialists everywhere to provide the necessary revolutionary enthusiasm, leading and enlightenment ●

Tom Quelch

John Maclean

The All Russia Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates in Petrograd last week enthusiastically adopted a resolution of fraternal greetings to comrade John Maclean, "now sitting in jail for preaching internationalism".

This resolution of the Russian workers and soldiers should stir our comrades here to still greater efforts to secure Maclean's speedy and unconditional release ●



What we fight for

● Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.

● The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers' movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.

● Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.

● We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.

● The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single Party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.

● Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs: ie, communism.

● We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.

● Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.

● War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world's problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

We urge all who accept these principles to join us. A Communist Party Supporter reads and fights to build the circulation of the Party's publications; contributes regularly to the Party's funds and encourages others to do the same; where possible, builds and participates in the work of a Communist Party Supporters Group.

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Democracy and the Socialist Labour Party

The right to assemble: the 'yellow sheet'

I was at the meeting of the Campaign for a Democratic SLP (CDSLP) held in London on June 14. I went with the intention of meeting others who want to change the constitution of the SLP - party members who want to create a democratic SLP. I will not attempt to deceive anybody about my attendance. I was there. I participated in the discussions.

The necessity of getting involved in such a struggle as the CDSLP was made abundantly clear when members who wanted to attend the meeting were met by an NEC member handing out a 'yellow' sheet of paper. The 'yellow' sheet threatened all SLP members entering the meeting with disciplinary action. It now seems even the right of assembly is to be denied to SLP members (I assume the sheet was legitimate, as there was no NEC meeting date on the sheet, nor was any NEC minute quoted).

I became a member of the SLP with the expectation that I had joined a democratic party where socialists engage in discussion and debate. I sought a campaigning socialist party with a healthy internal life. I anticipated a deluge of comrades joining the party, cascading in from all the various socialist and campaigning organisations. I anticipated they would bring all their different traditions and methods of work.

After 30 years in the stifling Labour Party, particularly the Kinnock years, I was looking forward to the political climate I expected in the SLP. I thought it would be open and pluralistic. I certainly expected a party, with comrade Scargill in the leadership, to be committed to fighting witch hunts, bans and proscriptions. I expected comrade Scargill and the NEC members to be the most ardent defenders of dissenting members.

Unfortunately this has proved to be a false hope. The result - I have continued my quest for a democratic party, and set off for the CDSLP meeting on June 14. As I started to go into Conway Hall I was asked by an NEC member if I was an SLP member. My name was taken and I was handed a copy of the 'yellow' sheet. Then I was harangued by another SLP member who pro-

ceeded to denounce democracy, explaining that "too much democracy caused the USSR to collapse". I'm afraid the level of debate convinced me. In I went.

■ The CDSLP meeting

The meeting centred on three issues:

1. the general lack of democracy in the SLP: for example, the programme of voiding members and branches;
2. the need for a journal that addressed socialist and democratic ideas and aimed at the class;
3. affiliation of other parties to the SLP - the central issue for the meeting.

The meeting agreed that affiliation was the priority issue and to be the sole subject for resolutions to the SLP conference from CDSLP-supporting branches.

This proved problematic for me, given the fact that since the day I joined the SLP I have made it clear that I do not support the concept of the SLP being a federal body. I belong to no other party - only the SLP - and I do not regard affiliation as a democratic issue.

The party can be completely democratic with or without affiliations. I believe affiliation of other parties, and trade unions for that matter, to be a diversion from the main task of building a democratic, mass-based SLP.

Affiliations would create a battleground, as each little 'party' within the main 'party' seeks to build its own party, as they all posture as *The Party* - Bolshevik of course. *No matter how it's posed, it's a party too many for me.*

■ Fusion and alliance

The task we need to address is that of building a socialist party that is able to reintroduce socialism into the everyday vocabulary and political agenda of working people.

A concept of socialism free of the tainted totalitarian states of the east and free of the betrayals of Labourism. In the process of building such a force, I have no problem with a party that has internal factions supporting a variety of ideas. They can even challenge the party leaders for the leadership itself.

I have no problem seeking pacts and alliances, or working with other groups to build campaigns or united fronts. In many cases I see this as essential. I would welcome discussion with

the CP (*Morning Star*), the CP (*Weekly Worker*), the Socialist Party, Labour lefts, even the SWP. The idea of contesting general elections, with proportional representation, fielding a team such as Corbyn, Nellist, Scargill, Sheridan, Foot (Paul), would be very interesting.

The SLP should pursue the idea of a united left, combining with other parties, based on fusions where possible, and alliances where fusion is not a viable option.

■ Democratic rights in the SLP

Having rejected the main plank of the CDSLP - that of affiliation - I cannot in all honesty see why I should continue my involvement. There appear to be two other campaigns on 'democracy', which have broader aims. These aims include: *rights of members facing disciplinary charges*, the right of free speech and association within the party, including *rights for minorities, tendencies and platforms*, plus, unfortunately, the affiliation issues.

Democracy in the party must centre on the right to influence and change the leadership. There is a clear need to fight for the right to speak and organise within the party. If we are to understand the tasks that face the party, we need the ideas that independent journals, newspapers, bulletins can provide. Ideas, not constitutions, change people.

More discussion and debate, not less, will develop, enliven, stimulate and animate the party. Democracy will help build the SLP.

■ Root and branch

The constitution, where it relates to organisation, disables activity and disempowers members - it impedes the party in its work. To list chapter and verse of the changes needed would require a lengthy report. A simpler task is to scrap the organisational sections of the constitution and replace them. Therefore we need to:

1. Cancel all disciplinary action taken under the existing constitution, restore membership to all 'voided' and expelled branches and individuals.
2. Establish a committee to hear disciplinary cases, drawn from the NEC and equal representation from the regions.
3. Establish a rank and file appeals committee elected at con-

gress from members who are not national officers or NEC members.

4. Establish a constitutional commission to write a constitution that empowers the rank and file of the SLP and assists it in developing and building the party. The commission should be NEC members, rank and file members, party sections - women, youth, etc. It should take evidence, contributions and suggestions from any party member, branch or section, write a draft, circulate the membership for consideration and amendments and bring it to a recall conference within six

months.

5. Maintain the political statement in Clause 4, as our affirmation that the party is anti-capitalist and committed to revolutionary socialism.

■ A campaigning, socialist SLP, based in the masses

Are you fed up with all this internal wrangling? Me too. I have to get involved in this debate: I must defend the right to organise and attend meetings. But I prefer campaigning against the bosses or the giant multinationals who are involved in the 'rape

of the world's' environment and resources.

The election gave us a great opportunity for taking the SLP out into the world. Given all the circumstances, we did well. The number of votes was important, but not vital. The essential element was doing something as a party - propaganda and agitational work in the name of socialism.

It really is a pity we have to spend time on issues like the constitution. To most of us constitutions are of secondary importance to policy, programme and campaigning ●

June 1997

Revolutionaries or social workers?

Twenty-eight delegates from 23 Constituency Socialist Labour Parties in London met at the Conway Hall on Sunday June 29. They were joined by a dozen observers. The SLP now has 455 members in London.

The meeting was called to discuss SLP work in the capital and to elect a London regional committee. What it got was a bastard replica of the NEC and Fisc's big idea on the way forward for the SLP.

Comrades from the voided Vauxhall CSLP in south London attempted to gain access to the meeting but were blocked by doorkeeper Carolyn Sikorski. Comrades Marcus Larsen and Kirstie Paton were advised that they were not members although neither had been notified of this. Comrade Sikorski summoned the help of leading fellow Fiscites Brian Heron and Pat Sikorski to reinforce the message: democracy was not on the agenda.

Having dealt with this little matter, the comrades opened the meeting.

Debate centred around the nature of the SLP, the forthcoming local elections and the Socialist Party.

Comrade Stuart Goodman of Finchley and Golders Green CSLP called for electoral agreements with communists and socialists to avoid splitting the left vote. Clashing at the ballot box reinforced the idea of the left as

weak, divided against itself and irrelevant.

He argued that for the SLP to become mass required it to open itself up to members of the Socialist Party. (If the comrade is sincere and he is serious about the SLP he must join with those forces fighting for this. I do not recall seeing his face at the recent conference of the Campaign for a Democratic SLP).

On the Socialist Party, Comrade Heron pooh-poohed any suggestion of electoral agreements. The SLP and the SP were fundamentally different. The SP wanted to build "a revolutionary Marxist current in the working class." How preposterous! The meeting was told that the SLP has a far bigger base than the SP will ever have. Slipping into United Secretariat-speak, an excited comrade Heron explained that the SLP had within its ranks "class struggle leaders". The SP's Tommy Sheridan and Dave Nellist will no doubt be devastated to learn that they do not meet Fisc's criteria for "class struggle leaders".

It was left to NEC hard man Tony Goss and his partner Ann to signal the existence of Fisc's big idea: advice surgeries!

It would appear - at least to comrades Goss, Heron, *et al* - that tens of thousands would rally to our banner if we championed their right to clean streets, sorted out that little misunderstanding

with the landlord or won the installation of dog toilets in the local park.

The elections for the London regional committee saw a more or less straight fight between democrats and bureaucrats, left and right. Six leftwingers faced a twenty-strong right bloc. Only for elections to the positions of trade union organiser, London agent and *Socialist News* organiser did this bloc lose its unity.

Nominations for trade union organiser saw John Mulrenan seconded by Tony Goss. Harpal Brar of the Indian Workers Association nominated Steve Cowan of Ealing Southall for the position of publicity officer. This split the right vote 15:6. Fiscite Polly Radcliffe was elected. The other successful candidates were Brian Heron (president), Roshan Dadoo (secretary), Imran Khan (vice president), Lila Patel of the Stalin Society (fundraiser), John Mulrenan (trade union organiser), Brian McEwan (*Socialist News* organiser) and Tony Goss (London agent). A solid right bloc.

Three comrades from the *Marxist Bulletin* stood as a platform. Although comrade Heron winced every time they made reference to *MB*, the comrades were not challenged. Clearly the witch hunt for Heron and Sikorski is a covert action hidden as much as possible from the 'ordinary member' ●

Frank Lore