

Blair's rigged referendum and Scotland's right to self-determination

In this pamphlet, Jack Conrad offers a serious critique of the Scottish Socialist Alliance's decision to support the call for a double 'yes' vote in the referendum. He makes it clear why the Alliance's leadership, in the form of Scottish Militant Labour, is unable to take up the challenge to lead the working class away from reformism towards revolutionary politics around the national question in Scotland. With an introduction by Mary Ward. Available from the CPGB for £1.50 inc p&p

Committee for Genuine Self-Determination

To get involved, write to 40 Osborne Street, Glasgow, G1 5QN, or call 0141-552 5872. <http://www.duntone.demon.co.uk/cgsd/>

Fight for genuine self-determination

As the campaign takes off, tensions grow within the Scottish Socialist Alliance

With the approach of Labour's rigged referendum on Scottish devolution, the campaign for an active boycott makes clear that we do not have to accept New Labour's *fait accompli*. The Campaign for Genuine Self-Determination (CGSD) will be launched at a press conference in Glasgow on Monday July 21.

Campaign headquarters are now open at 40 Osborne Street, Glasgow G1. As well as highlighting the campaign's aims and the nature of the sell-out that Labour has on offer, it will host a number of discussions and debates on issues from 'A federal republic or a Scottish workers' republic?' to 'John Maclean - the legacy'.

While Scotland Forward, the establishment campaign for a 'yes, yes' vote, closes down dialogue and discussion on the constitutional question, the Campaign for Genuine Self-Determination will open it up.

Inevitably, this will upset all those who are supporting the government proposals and the Scottish establishment. It has already deeply upset some members of the Scottish Socialist Alliance.

At the SSA National Council meeting on Sunday July 13, members of the leadership moved a motion against CPGB comrades for producing and distributing the first CGSD leaflet.

The contentious leaflet has widely circulated both within and outside the SSA since March. It was distributed during the general election in Dundee and has been the only alternative view on display at Scotland Forward rallies.

Ostensibly the problem was around the sentence: "The Campaign for Genuine Self-Determination was formed by members of the Scottish Socialist Alliance who are committed to fighting for a parliament with real powers."

At last month's national council meeting, Allan Green of the Scottish Socialist Movement complained that, although the leaflet was "technically correct", it was misleading in "giving the impression that the campaign was supported and initiated by the SSA".

Sadly the SSA leaders are now embarrassed by this leaflet, since the majority buckled under the pressure of opportunism to accept Labour's sop and vote 'yes, yes'. When the leaflet was produced there was in fact no SSA position and the CGSD was hoping to influence other SSA members prior to the national conference decision.

Launching another attack on CPGB members and ultimately against democracy within the SSA itself, Allan Green this month said the leaflets had "upset and puzzled" some members of the Labour Party and had been "deliberately used against the Alliance by mischief makers".

I responded by reiterating that there had been no intention to confuse. Indeed the campaign's new leaflet is highly critical of the Alliance's stance on the referendum which we believe to

be a betrayal of the SSA's founding statement to fight for a sovereign Scottish parliament with full powers.

Clearly, if confusion has arisen it is not because the minority of the SSA has stated its view openly but because the majority has not. Instead it has completely submerged itself into Scotland Forward. The SSA has not produced any material to distribute at these meetings and, where members have attended, they have not - with the exception of the CPGB comrades - put over the SSA position on self-determination for Scotland.

Bill Bonner of the Communist Party of Scotland said he "quite frankly found Mary's comments unconvincing". He became very angry that we intended to use the term "rebel members of the Alliance" and suggested that we should not use the SSA's name on any CGSD materials. Others present started to suggest ways that the CGSD leaflet should be written.

Anne Murphy of the CPGB took exception to any suggestion that CPGB members had in any way acted in an underhand or dishonest way. She gave examples of other SSA members. Founding SSA members who are also members of the Communist Party of Scotland campaigned for the Labour Party in the general election against SSA candidates. Whilst arguing vehemently against such actions, CPGB comrades defended their right to campaign for a minority view within the Alliance united front. In fact, no Alliance member had attempted to stop them. Hopefully the Alliance will not become the impotent low level, activist talking shop that the CPS seems to want it to be.

Sean Clerkin, Paisley SSA election candidate, while arguing for the CGSD to change its leaflets, also expressed his dismay at the SSA's inactivity around the referendum. He felt that the SSA's position of supporting a multi-option referendum and a democratic republic should be pushed.

Tommy Sheridan was far more conciliatory on the question of the CGSD leaflet, saying that "of course comrades have the right to say



Genuine democracy must be won by the working class

they are members of the Alliance" and he hoped that future material would be clearer. On the Alliance's own campaign, he felt it was unrealistic to produce materials campaigning for a multi-option referendum in the next few months and the Alliance should work to maximise a double 'yes' vote.

Andrew Lewis of the Scottish Socialist Movement, on the other hand, argued that if members were not fully committed to making the SSA work then they should rethink their position within the SSA. Perhaps it is the role and purpose of the SSA which needs to be more fully discussed. Is it indeed a united front or simply a bureaucratic front under the stranglehold of the majority view?

Rosie Kane, co-chair of the SSA, said that what was really damaging was the SSA's involvement in Scotland Forward. She too felt that comrades of all views should be able to say they are Alliance members without fear of recrimination.

The discussion was heated and some people worked themselves into such a frenzy that

they seemed on the verge of moving bureaucratic restriction on members. Eventually however a two-part resolution was moved:

1. The National Council expresses its disappointment that the CGSD leaflet referred to in the previous minute continued to be distributed by CPGB members.
2. The National Council calls on all affiliates to refrain from using formulations liable to imply that the SSA has positions which it does not have.

Part one of the resolution was passed by seven votes to four with one abstention. The second part was overwhelmingly supported with only one vote against.

I think the debate highlighted the cul de sac the SSA is now in, having supported the call for a double 'yes' vote and entered Scotland Forward. The people who took the SSA into Scotland Forward find the active campaign of the CGSD an embarrassment when compared to their own passivity.

The letter from Scotland Forward's national organiser, Paolo Verstri, to the SSA, welcoming it as part of Scotland Forward, made it quite clear that no one from the SSA would be asked to speak on its platform. Verstri will call the tune and SSA members will be expected to follow.

Some members of the SSA leadership are more concerned with helping their 'friends' in the Labour Party than they are with building a revolutionary alternative to Labourism. The final irony of the day came when the National Council was about to end with still no indication of how they were planning to campaign around the referendum. I had to ask under 'any other business' exactly what was going to happen and Allan Green said he would produce a leaflet on the SSA's position.

It was obvious from the start that 'yes, yes' and Scotland Forward would reduce the SSA to the role of a passive bystander during the referendum campaign and this has proven to be so.

Every day that passes brings with it more indications of the watering down of Labour's proposals.

Political observers such as Ian Bell of *The Scotsman* realise that what is on offer is not only useless - it is insulting: "an amusing parody of local government" (*The Scotsman* July 14). For those who really want to change the constitutional status quo, there are only really two options: "Independence is one of two logical outcomes available if Scots reject the status quo. The other is federalism" (*ibid*). Blair's sop is designed to keep things as they are. It merely creates the illusion of democracy and is certainly not worth fighting for.

In this political context, the Campaign for Genuine Self-Determination can begin to articulate the real aspirations of the mass of people in Scotland. Only in this way can the working class find a voice strong enough to challenge the anti-democrats of Labour, to which the likes of Green and Bonner would have us permanently chained ●

Mary Ward

Partynotes

Party aggregate endorses shift

The CPGB's July aggregate was primarily concerned with two wide-ranging reports on the Party's work - the first around the Socialist Labour Party and the second on Scotland.

The meeting endorsed a shift in the emphasis of our SLP work. This project has undergone a definite change. We fought from the outset for revolutionary politics, then for at least the space to argue for revolutionary politics in this new formation. With the Scargill letter - which effectively bans even *talk* of campaigning against the bureaucratic constitution being imposed from above on the party (see *Weekly Worker* July 3) - the SLP witch hunt has undergone a qualitative development.

Of course, in one sense some of our critics are quite right - we have 'brought all of this on ourselves'. Quite frankly, if battling for democracy and openness in the workers' movement constitutes a provocation to some political forces, an incitement to purge, then so be it. Clearly, many of the immanent tendencies in Scargill's organisation (plus in his own political persona) - its crass bureaucratism, its philistine 'Britishness', its contempt for initiative from below - have been brought out by the intervention of communists. Even this is a service to the movement in its own way. We have nothing to apologise for.

Scargill is re-inventing himself as his opposite. From a great workers' leader, he is refashioning himself as a tinpot despot in an organisation characterised by a cowed membership on one side and on the other by politico-paths like the Stalin Society, people who get j@ è è Ò M - • ð ñ Ì V

®K"á active and aware layers of the class - thin though that layer currently is - has suffered a real degradation. The SLP remains an organisation with a chance; but there is nothing inevitable that says that seismic shifts in the political or industrial activity of the class will automatically detonate an SLP membership explosion. So far, Scargill has only succeeded in creating a small bureaucratic sect, dominated by an autocratic political philistine making up policy on the hoof. In many ways, it already represents an historic opportunity thrown away.

Thus, the SLP left has a real problem. Some elements - for example, the *Marxist Bulletin*/ex-International Bolshevik Tendency - tell us that they plan to go even further underground in response to Scargill's threats to the entire left. This simply underlines the petty sectarian project of this group. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the general interests of the class and its forward movement, everything to do with a subterranean 'ones and twos' recruitment drive by an organisation that has consistently put its own narrow sect interests first. Asked for his best scenario' outcome from the SLP experience, one (mildly drunk) Mber once told us: "Oh, a viable group of about 30, I suppose." The working class holds its breath ...

Whatever the particular projects of the strands of the SLP left (the *MB*/ex-IBT are simply a particularly nasty variant), the ground is coming up to meet them fast, we believe. We underline - we will continue to fight uncompromisingly for democracy in the SLP, to expose any and every manifestation of bureaucratic intrigue, terrorism and diktat. It must be said again however: the space in which we conduct this fight is rapidly contracting. This is a fact that not simply those comrades influenced by the *Weekly Worker* must take note of, but all sections of the SLP left.

In this context, we encourage the SLP left and those comrades we influence to work more closely with the various Socialist Alliances where they exist and possibly to initiate them where they do not. This does not represent a fundamental shift in the work of our organisation. We have already recognised the importance of the SAs as a forum for the fight for working class unity, particularly in Scotland. Now we shall fight for the (ongoing) higher experience of the SLP - both positive and negative - to be taken into the SA movement.

A comprehensive report from Scotland was given to the meeting and substantially endorsed. The only note of controversy was around a small dispute between a leading comrade in Scotland and the *Weekly Worker* editorial team which rumbles on (see *Weekly Worker* July 3 and July 10). In my opinion, now that most of the issues around this particular incident have been clarified and the principles involved mostly agreed upon, the argument is revealed as little more than a storm in a teacup and should be left where it is. Practice will reveal the extent of any remaining differences.

The meeting also received a brief report on the Summer Offensive. While characterising this year's as a success with near £20,000 raised, the proposal to extend the campaign until the end of July was accepted by comrades. Readers and supporters will see more material on this very soon ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser
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Self-liberation

Allan Armstrong (*Weekly Worker* June 27) argues that the Campaign for Genuine Self-Determination should be a genuine united front where platforms and tactics can be fully discussed. Quite right. The campaign aims to be just that. We plan to provide a forum of discussion and debate around the national question with a conference in August and a series of public meetings over the summer.

However, I do not agree that our emphasis on self-determination is wrong. Allan is for a separate Scottish workers' republic. I, as a member of the CPGB, am for a federal republic which is fought for by workers throughout Britain and does not mean the separation of the Scottish, English and Welsh. However, neither of these views should form the basis of the boycott campaign.

The aim of the campaign is to articulate as militantly as possible the aspirations of the masses to have genuine self-determination. We as revolutionaries aim to fight for that in such a way as to put the working class at the forefront of the fight for democracy. The national question in Scotland is an issue that goes to the heart of the British state and should be taken up by the masses.

I agree that the question of a republic is central to the campaign. It is implied within the concept of a parliament with full powers. It cannot be a sovereign parliament if it is still subject to the monarchy. We are arguing for people to take things into their own hands - clearly not as subjects of Queen Elizabeth.

To put republic before self-determination gets us nowhere. Many in Scotland Forward are for a republic. But they will support Blair in making cosmetic changes that mean nothing. They want to reform their way to a republic. Most if not all members of Scottish Militant Labour would say they are for a republic. But by supporting the 'yes, yes' campaign they are also trying to reform their way to it. Again this takes working class self-emancipation not one step forward.

We are fighting for a republic in a revolutionary manner. That cannot be achieved by deciding in advance that a separate republic or a federal republic are the only options. It must be up to the mass of the people to decide. By us deciding in advance we are foisting our own schemes on to the working class. Certainly we will be aiming to win our ideas, but this is not done through imposing them. That is not what self-liberation is about.

The Committee for Genuine Self-Determination aims to unite all those who refuse to be bought off. But we also want to involve others in the debate, especially those who have not yet made up their minds. It will include those who do not see themselves as revolutionaries, but as nationalists. In the context of aspirations among the masses for real change we fight for independent working class politics. That is the principle.

Anne Murphy
Scotland

SLP and democracy

The Campaign for a Democratic Socialist Labour Party is much needed, as the NEC has increasingly shown itself rather more interested in the most outrageously anti-democratic and bureaucratic behaviour whereby individual party members and whole constituency branches have been voided and witch hunted for that most heinous of crimes within the labour movement - that of seeking to discuss political issues on a socialist basis.

Following the general election, Arthur Scargill and the rest of the NEC are re-embarbarking on the sort of paranoid, desperate tactics that one big bureaucrat would have been proud of.

Clearly, Scargill and his bureaucratic accomplices now regard arguing for democracy within the SLP, discussing revolutionary socialist ideas (the SLP actually stands for the abolition of capitalism) and favouring an appeals commission against expulsions as being "in violation of the party's constitution"!

Unfortunately, the NEC's 'Message to members' leaflet put the wind up some party

activists who, rather than face down the organisational methods of Stalinism, were covered. Individuals who did this, including independently-minded leftists and supporters of the so-called SLP *Marxist Bulletin* (who themselves handed out their own politically compromised leaflet and then dutifully returned to the nearby McDonald's), do not appear to have learned the lessons of the past.

When the Labour Party was witch hunting active socialists from its ranks in the 1980s, those grouped around the old Militant Tendency and Socialist Organiser continually appeased the Kinnockite witch hunters - and were booted out of the Labour Party just the same.

Clearly, whilst suicidal and adventurist tactics are to be avoided, there comes a time when those claiming to be fighting for genuine socialist politics - inside a party that openly proclaims the need to abolish this pernicious system of capitalism - have to stand up and fight. And when Scargill and company demonstrate an increasing contempt for the best traditions of the labour movement - ie, democratic debate and constructive socialist argument - the time for keeping one's head down (if there ever was one) is well and truly over. The NEC does not own some leasehold over the struggle for socialist ideas.

Consequently, all talk of "violating the party constitution" must be rejected (not least as the SLP constitution has been crudely imposed from above), because the real "violation" is the NEC's steadfast opposition to the struggle for, and dissemination of, socialist ideas within a supposedly socialist party.

At the June 14 meeting itself, the CDSLPL limited itself to a general organisational fight for a democratic constitution for the SLP after full and frank discussion around a general series of proposals.

It proved necessary to pass a resolution which highlighted the need to avoid mentioning the past political affiliations and leftwing political sympathies individual SLP members may have, at a time when the magnitude of bureaucratic intolerance at NEC level has reached epidemic proportions. This would not have been necessary had supporters of the *Socialist Labour Action* bulletin not chosen to include in their leaflet references to one comrade's supposed political affiliations.

Sadly, despite formally standing against the witch hunt, the SLA supporters effectively played into the hands of the NEC via this idiotic and deeply sectarian behaviour and also, to a lesser extent, by virtue of the fact that they abstained on practically all the united front proposals for joint work against the witch hunt. Typically, when the proposal was moved from the floor reminding comrades of the need to avoid mentioning the names of individual comrades and their respective revolutionary sympathies in publications, the worthies of the SLA duly voted against. Presumably, this flows from the SLA's insistence on "refusing to hide their politics" (sic). Interestingly, despite all their bluster and bravado, the SLA supporters have not "refused to hide their politics" until fairly recently. It is only recently that one SLA supporter in London has declared how she "solidarises with Workers Power". This is because SLA supporters have never really been serious about a principled struggle for revolutionary politics inside the SLP. Now they are simply preparing the ground for their own expulsion, where they will no doubt attempt to proclaim themselves as principled martyrs to the cause. They are in fact no such thing. However, such is the disgraceful nature of an essentially rightwing sectarian approach to politics. Scargill and his motley crew (from NEC clones through to avowed Stalinists around *Lalkar* and the openly homophobic *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*) are actually aided by the foolish and unserious antics of the SLA supporters.

The SLP was set up as a leftwing split from the increasingly rightwing and openly anti-working class Labour Party. The coming months will see many trade union conferences where activists can take arguments and proposals for struggles against the treacherous Labour government. The trade union tops must recognise that organised rank and file workers will not continue to allow their bedrock organisations to be emasculated by the pro-capitalist Blairites.



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

That is why it is correct to attempt to win the new SLP to the politics of revolutionary socialism (ie, the only politics that can really finish off capitalism for good) and avoid the politically crippling prospect of a Labour Party mark II. That is why it is also correct to fight Scargill's appalling witch hunt in order to facilitate the chance of building a real revolutionary working class socialist party, as opposed to the politically brain-dead Stalinist/reformist rump which the SLP will inevitably become if the Scargillites get their way.

G Usher
Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International

Pragmatic line

On reading a contribution like the letter from Danny Hammill ('IWCA patronises' *Weekly Worker* June 12), I am always torn in deciding whether the author is deliberately misrepresenting the issues or is simply politically half-witted.

Beginning with the first assumption, we see Hammill attack the Independent Working Class Association for barring the Revolutionary Communist Group from offering their paper for sale on an IWCA leafletting on the Isle of Dogs. To back his stance he invents an entire theory which he then attributes to the IWCA. Suffice to say, you won't find more red herrings on any dock.

From the start, the IWCA's stated reason for being was the failure of the left and the methods of the left, both inside and outside the Labour Party. Considering paper selling a priority is a symptom of that failure. It simply doesn't work. It was assumed the RCG understood this. Secondly, if the RCG or indeed the *Weekly Worker* believe that the working class on the Isle of Dogs are bereft at being denied examples of their rapier-like analysis, they have every opportunity to flog their wares on any other of the 364 days a year. If anyone genuinely believes that in an area where the BNP got in the region of 8,000 votes in May the best way of reaching the working class is to get them to subscribe to the *Weekly Worker*, or invite them to benefits for Cuba, one can only assume that there is a deep religious element in such a conviction. Certainly there is no practical basis to support such a strategy, which is why the IWCA favours a more pragmatic line.

Having finished a lengthy diatribe against an adversary fashioned largely by himself, the cynic departs to be replaced by the imbecile. Hammill begins: "I must hasten to add that there is nothing unprincipled about setting up advice centres, advice surgeries, etc - far from it, and it would be deeply silly to suggest it was." Well, yes - particularly when he was the one who introduced the idea. Nowhere else is the concept of dealing with "housing benefits" or "revolutionaries" becoming "glorified Citizens Advice Bureau workers" ever suggested by anyone associated with the IWCA - until Hammill himself came up with the idea. Not that he is cut out for that type of work - too low brow: being required to deal with "localist politicians" and the like. No, his aim is to become a "tribune of the oppressed". A title befitting a 'proper' communist. Danny wants to start at the top.

The only problem between him and his goal, as he candidly admits, is that "we have never been so weak and isolated". And the way forward? "Selling leftist newspapers at every opportunity ... always quite enjoyed it myself ... What is so wrong with that?" Clearly the reality of increasing isolation and what he identifies as the "overriding priority" are not in his mind in any way connected. Yet it is simple cause and effect: the bigger the emphasis on promoting the party, the deeper the subsequent isolation. Somehow I suspect for the likes of Hammill this is a reality to which he is largely indifferent.

Having considered the matter, and while not an expert, you should, I think, either get professional help - or a proper hobby.

A Shaw
North London

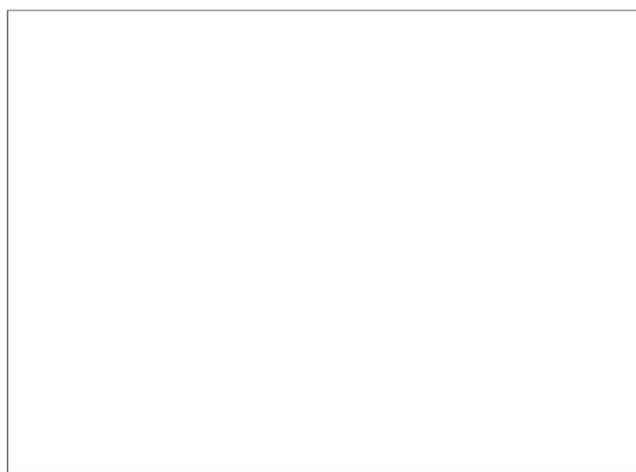
Simon Harvey

Blow against sectarianism

I am pleased to see that Lewisham SLP in south-east London is building on its successes in the general election and is contesting the Churchdown ward by-election. The party's candidate for the July 24 vote is NEC member Terry Dunn. Our party received 1,400 votes in Lewisham on May 1.

Already SLP comrades are wearing down their shoe leather distributing our party's election address. Other London SLP support is most welcome.

What is most interesting about the election address concerns its reference to Lewisham Socialist Party councillor Ian Page alongside councillor Tony Link of the SLP. You will remember that from the very beginning of the SLP's existence, the Socialist Party (then Militant Labour) has been seeking, as a minimum, electoral alliances with the SLP. Many SLP activists continue to support forming such alliances and the



Terry Dunn: SLP candidate in Lewisham

Weekly Worker has also campaigned for electoral cooperation amongst socialist forces.

Considering there are such differences on electoral strategy inside the SLP, Terry Dunn's election address seems to me to be a clear sign that he and

his branch support open cooperation with the Socialist Party.

Terry Dunn's address begins with the following: "Lewisham Council has 67 councillors, with only two socialist councillors." It adds that by "voting for Terry Dunn you will be

electing another councillor to join up with councillors Tony Link and Ian Page". Such statements are reinforced with a quote from comrade Dunn himself: "If elected, I will be working with other socialists." The leaflet claims that "socialist councillors are the only ones who can challenge New Labour in the council."

This stands in stark contrast to the action of Arthur Scargill, who autocratically demanded the liquidation of the Lewisham Council 'Socialist Group' formed earlier this year between Tony Link and Ian Page. In a letter to Tony Link dated February 11 1997 (see *Weekly Worker* March 20), Scargill instructed comrade Link that he was to "make clear to councillor Ian Page that . . . you will not be part of any pact or agreement, and certainly not be part of any 'Socialist Group' on Lewisham council with members of another political party".

Terry Dunn's election statement faces up to the political reality that the working class needs a united socialist alternative to the Labour Party. The sectarianism of Scargill towards other socialist forces will not be stomached by those fed up with Blair's Labour Party.

It is clear that Terry Dunn shares such concerns and is committing himself to working openly with the Socialist Party in Lewisham council. As I reported previously (*Weekly Worker* February 20), Terry Dunn was in support of the formation of the Lewisham Council Socialist Group and attended the meeting where the decision to form the group was taken.

The Socialist Party itself is not contesting the by-election and is supporting the SLP.

SLP congress

Rumours are beginning to spread around the SLP of yet another 'unconstitutional' postponement of our party congress. Supposedly 'iron guaranteed' for every May, readers will recall that this year's congress had already been moved from May to October 25-26. The reason given was the general election.

I have heard that the congress is now being moved to December. The reason? No one could find an appropriate venue to book in either October or November. Well, we could all understand the move from May due to the election, and I for one would have accepted it, were it not for the fact that Scargill's bureaucratic 'constitution' was being applied selectively when it suits the leadership. But this move yet again underlies the arbitrariness with which the leadership treats the membership.

Just whose party is it? ●

CPGB E-mail

Please note the CPGB E-mail address has been changed to CPGB1@aol.com

Dockers benefit social

International cabaret organised by the London Support Group for the Liverpool dockers. Saturday July 19, 8pm, Bread and Roses, 68 Clapham Manor Street, London SW4. For more information call 0181-806 0249

Justice for Diarmuid O'Neill

Campaign meeting on Wednesday July 23 at 7.30pm, House of Commons.

Nearly a year after police shot and killed Diarmuid O'Neill his family and friends are no closer to knowing the truth behind the police actions and the barrage of lies produced by the media. The inquiry into the police action and the inquest has been suspended. The campaign is calling for an independent public inquiry into Diarmuid's killing. For further information contact BM Box D O'Neill, London WC1N 3XX

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.

fighting fund

As mentioned in this week's 'Party notes', the organisation's aggregate has decided to extend this year's Summer Offensive fundraising drive to the end of July.

Though just over £20,000 is already secured, comrades are determined to push past the £25,000 target, given the political tasks that face us in the coming year.

As readers will also see in this issue, the Campaign for Genuine Self-Determination in Scotland is launched this coming Monday. Comrades in Scotland face a daunting task to raise the necessity of actively fighting for genuine self-determination rather than passively accepting New Labour's sop - almost without exception the left has deserted the field of class combativity to say 'yes, yes' in Labour's rigged referendum.

We need more finances immediately for this campaign, as well as people. Call 0141-552 5872 if you can help out with the campaign between now and the referendum in September.

'Party notes' also mentions the developing atmosphere in the Socialist Labour Party. As opportunities for democratic discussion are further severed, this paper will become increasingly important for all in the movement to argue their views and to raise the banner of Partyism.

Launching themselves into the extra two weeks of fundraising, comrades from Manchester raised over £450 this week.

We will again be appealing to readers to dig that bit deeper, given that many branches and Party committees are now heavily involved in preparation for Communist University '96 as well as the campaign in Scotland. It has been the extra support of readers this year that has ensured that this Offensive has been such a success. Party supporters, as well as being busy in many areas of Party work, have been unusually plagued by illness and personal tragedy during the two months of fundraising.

With an extra push we can achieve the whole £25,000 needed as a firm financial basis for the many political tasks we face. Rush cheques before the end of July to the CPGB address ●

Linda Addison

The CPGB's London seminar series

July 20: Sylvia Pankhurst and the revolutionary struggle for the women's vote in the series on Revolutionary profiles

August 3: Leninism and the international in the 'Leninism' series, using Marcel Liebman's *Leninism under Lenin* as a study guide

August 10: Abstract labour in the series on 'Marx's theory of value', using Il Rubin as a study guide

Please note there will be no seminar on Sunday July 27

All seminars are in central London on Sunday at 5pm. Call for details



Communist University 97

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Programme includes:

■ Robin Blackburn discusses his recently published book *The Making of New World Slavery - from the baroque to the modern 1492 - 1800* ■ Hillel Ticktin (editor of *Critique*) *The USSR: In transition from what to what?* ■ Ian Driver (SLP councillor) *SLP and the witch hunt: which way forward for the left?* ■ The Socialist Party debates with Anne Murphy of the CPGB *Blair's party: Is it still a bourgeois workers' party?* ■ Mary Ward of the CPGB and Scottish Militant Labour debate *Scotland's referendum: yes, yes ... or boycott?* ■ Bob Pitt (author of 'John Maclean and the CPGB') and Phil Sharpe (Trotskyist Unity Group) *Scottish workers' republic and John Maclean* ■ Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran *The situation in Iran and the tasks of communists* ■ Alliance for Workers Liberty and the CPGB debate *Do we need a new Labour Representation Committee or a reformed Communist Party?* ■ Revolutionary Democratic Group *When does a workers' state stop being a workers' state?* ■ Mark Fischer of the CPGB *Communist rapprochement: the next stage* ■ Tina Becker *The PDS in Germany and the tasks of communists*

Humanising our environment

Do communists support a ban on fox-hunting or do we defend the 'democratic rights' of fox-hunters? Is a campaign to ban fox-hunting a 'diversion' from serious politics? **Danny Hammill** gives his view on some of these issues, debated at a recent CPG London seminar

Mass demonstrations are not a thing of the past after all. Over 100,000 people took part in a march and rally at Hyde Park last Thursday, and the mood was undeniably militant. One of the demonstrators interviewed on television threatened insurrection if their demands were not met and even drew comparisons with the IRA - 'Nothing compared to us'. Perhaps the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party were right all along and the crisis of expectations amongst the masses has reached fever pitch - already.

But even the most optimistic member of the SWP or SP would have been a bit disturbed by the slogans printed on the placards of the marchers - 'Killing Foxes is cool by me', 'Country sport means country business', 'This is real life - not the Archers' and so on. Even more alarming for our SWP or SP comrade would have been the social composition of the demonstration, composed as it was of the most reactionary and backward elements of society. Aristocrats to actors, landed gentry to rural workers were all united in opposition to Tony Blair and his "urban values". All 'respecters of the countryside'. All demanding that their "minority rights" be upheld. As Melanie Phillips, self-appointed expert on morality for *The Observer*, put it: "The ban is thus an act of intolerance against a minority group" (July 14).

Yes, the fox-hunting rabble had come to town.

The scenes at Hyde Park reminded me of a counterrevolutionary rally from the 1920s and 1930s, even if they did take on the appearance of a polite protest by decent, law-abiding folk. This impression is certainly reinforced by the knowledge that most of them are armed to the teeth - even if they, thankfully, had left their weapons at home on this occasion. In a sense, you could argue that this is what a *real* far right, counterrevolutionary movement would look like - and not a BNP type in sight either. As for the speeches by the likes of David Bellamy, Jeremy Irons, Willie Carson or William Hague, one cannot but help recall Leon Trotsky's classical definition of fascism as the "enraged" petty bourgeoisie, "driven mad by despair".

In fact, the central core of the demonstration consisted of the middle class, or what could be termed the Range Rover-driving countryside class. Pathetically, this militant defence of their right to kill foxes and wear silly jackets is in reality more of a defence of their right to ape the aristocracy. Pent up class frustration was on display at Hyde Park, not concern for the countryside or a plea for so-called countryside values facing extinction from 'de-natured' townies. Michael Heseltine, almost with tears in his eyes, said: "The bill would destroy communities, damage fragile environments and destroy jobs." I wonder what the miners would think of Heseltine's new found sensitivity.

It is interesting to note that this rally was vigorously promoted, and supported, by wide sections of society. The reactionary BBC radio programme, *The Archers*, acted as a *de facto* mobiliser for the demo - and certainly became its focus, with members of *The Archers* cast appearing at the demon-

stration. The *Farming Today* programme also did its bit for the cause.

Backing for the fox-hunters' crusade came from some unexpected quarters. Hugo Young of *The Guardian* - a newspaper which must be the *bête noire* of any respectable fox-hunter - waxed movingly about the plight of "rural outsiders" and how Thursday's rally was a massive cry against the "hideous plight of centralised uniformity". A ban on fox-hunting, Young argued, "destroys the freedom of a minority to do what it has done for centuries ... Does the centre have no duty of respect for the jobs, the economies, the pleasures and the preferences of the periphery?" (July 10). Similar sentiments have appeared from commentators such as Polly Toynbee of *The Independent* - people who we normally associated with urbanite, liberal values. But these commentators have been seduced by rustic romance and are all eager to defend a rural idyll of their own imagination, somewhere untouched by the hideous onward march of the "homogenising juggernaut" (Hugo Young), a misty, mysterious world of hay wains and thatched cottages. Alienated liberals like Young and Toynbee want to keep the city out of the country, a bolthole to retreat to when class inequality and poverty in the cities reaches such a level that it offends their liberal sensibilities and the aristocrats' paternal embrace becomes more inviting.

We can see then that Thursday's rally was an attempt - to one extent or another, and with some degree of success - to forge a cross-class alliance in defence of fox-hunting and "country values". That is, to keep the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate. As the Duke of Roxburghe explained, about fox-hunting: "It's a good way of linking social classes"; and his wife, Duchess Virginia, added: "But this is also about what goes with the hunt. In a big way we're bringing the countryside together with lots of related social activities - cricket, tennis, and things for the children like pony clubs" (quoted in *The Guardian* July 11). Henry Porter of *The Guardian* was also keen to stress that "farmers, plumbers, dairymen, builders, land agents, journalists and lawyers" also take part in the hunt (July 10).

This points us to the central significance of the fox-hunters' demo - the *constitutional* question. The 'tally-ho' brigade were mounting a defence of the House of Lords and everything it stands for - 'Damn these elected city blighters in London'. Lord Cranbourn, the Tory chief whip in the House of Lords, did the rounds on the media, gleefully reasserting the power of the lords and the peers. In fact, he made clear that the House of Lords should have *more* powers, not less. Even with the 'meagre' powers at their disposal at the moment, Lord Cranbourn and his aristocratic allies will easily sabotage the Wild Mam-



Forces of reaction mobilised

mals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill, which is being introduced as a private member's bill by Mike Foster, Labour MP for Worcester. The bill is likely to pass its second reading in the House of Commons on November 28 but after that it is curtains for Foster's Bill as it passes into the tender hands of Lord Cranbourn's fox-hunting chums.

Miserably, Tony Blair is backing down already. Thursday's rally put the fear of god into the government and for all its dishonest protestations about how there is "no change in its position", it has indicated its willingness to pull the plug on the bill. Blair will not force a vote on the Wild Mammals Bill through parliament and will let the aristocrats and lords have their own way. If only the workers' movement had such power and influence.

We must also treat as contemptible the claims of the countryside lobby that they are eco-warriors in disguise and that their undying love for animals exceeds that of the Animal Liberation Front. The fox-hunters and their sycophants are most definitely not friends of man's best friend. Every year, for instance, sees a beagle holocaust, with the in-touch-with-nature houndmaster putting a bullet through the head of any unfortunate dog which is unable to keep up with the chase.

The fox-hunters' beloved 'natural' countryside is a total fraud - indeed, it is totally people-made. Historically, the countryside was created by forcefully driving the rural workers off the land and enslaving them in the newly-forming factories and cities. Denuded of people, the landowners and aristocrats, in effect, turned the countryside into their own plaything. What is more, the land-owning gentry were ferocious when it came to defending their acquisition - even if it means pointing a shotgun at any impudent person who 'trespasses' on their land. The real joke is that the 'conservationist' farmers and landowners have been the biggest *despoilers* of the

land, pouring chemicals into the land in a quest for greater and greater profits. For them to lecture 'townies' on the virtues of ecology and 'harmony with nature' is surely beyond a joke - more like depraved hypocrisy.

This hypocrisy and cant is not restricted, of course, to the fox-hunting lobby. The annual grouse-shooting massacre in Scotland is also a monstrous example of obscene aristocratic privilege. The Scottish highlands have been cleared of people, and zealously parcelled up into separate reservations, precisely in order that these idle parasites can enjoy their leisure pursuits and pretend they are on safari. You can guarantee that if some parliamentary bill was introduced which threatened their historic 'right' to kill defenceless birds, then they would be clogging up Hyde Park or Edinburgh high street in protest - and, if they were really lucky, Jeremy Irons would speak at their rally as well.

It should be clear to communists and progressives that the fox-hunting lobby, and the social classes and relations which lie behind them, represent a major enemy of the workers' movement and a serious obstacle to the building of socialism, and therefore we cannot afford to treat this question lightly - unless we concur with *The Independent* when it calls them a "relatively harmless minority group" (editorial, July 11).

No doubt some on the revolutionary left will dismiss the fox-hunting controversy as a 'secondary issue', if not dismiss it entirely. Or they might argue that we should concentrate our revolutionary attentions on 'real issues'. Some might even agree with Melanie Phillips that calling for a ban is an example of "metropolitan political correctness". That would be foolish, philistine and unLeninist. We need to have answers for *all* the questions facing society, not brush aside the 'inconvenient' ones and thus hand them over on a plate to reactionary sections of bourgeois society - who can use the issues involved to gain some degree of ideological hegemony over the working class.

Therefore, we need to take a stand on fox-hunting. This means we must avoid at all costs adopting, albeit unconsciously, a Revolutionary Communist Party/*Living Marxism*-type mentality - best summed up by their best-selling T-shirt which says, "Ban nothing". This is nonsense, and certainly has nothing in common with serious communist politics - it is more akin to apolitical left communism, which believes that all that matters is the struggle for 'revolution' and 'socialism' - ie, everything you care to think of becomes automatically a 'secondary issue'.

Communists do not object to state bans as a point of principle, even under the current society we live under. It is not inherently unprincipled for communists to call upon the (bourgeois) state to outlaw things. Do we not agree that it was a progressive measure - a sign of *our* strength - when the British parliament in the last century banned child labour, or when it outlawed slavery? Do we not call upon the bourgeois state *now* to introduce a minimum wage and introduce greater health and safety regulations at work? Of course we do.

If we cast our eye around the world, the reactionary implications of a 'no state bans'-line becomes clear. The Egyptian government - under reactionary pressure - has just unbanned female circumcision - ie, barbaric bodily mutilation. Communists are obliged to be in the vanguard of those calling for female circumcision to be re-banned, and for that ban to remain in

place forever.

This is not to sow illusions in the bourgeois state or any such leftist nonsense. We do not believe that the Blair government - even if it did get Foster's Bill through parliament - is going to expropriate the aristocracy and the landed gentry, and give the land back to the masses. More to the point though, any reforms introduced under capitalism can only ever be partial, inconsistent and subject to reversal. We fight for socialism precisely in order for these reforms to become *permanent* and ingrained in our socialist culture - the only basis on which we can construct our communist civilisation.

Given that it is a live issue and a bill is actually going before parliament - it is not something we have actively campaigned for and agitated around - there is no reason why communists should not support the ban on fox-hunting.

It is not primarily the animals' suffering that concerns us, though that is not totally irrelevant of course. It is the dehumanising effect that the infliction of suffering has on their tormentors. All the rituals and ceremonies which attend fox-hunting - such as 'bleeding' - represent a living *negation* of the communist culture we want to see. Such events dehumanise and pervert the humanity of all those involved in them, and only perpetuate oppressive social relations. The same could be said for bull-fighting in Spain, another barbaric ritual. Communists and revolutionaries in that country should also take a stand, not shrug off bull-fighting as a relatively 'harmless' cultural hangover.

Some comrades, possibly, might object to a ban on the grounds that it will throw some of those involved in the fox-hunting industry onto the dole. Perhaps it will. But it is not the role of communists to concoct an alternative economic strategy for capitalism. No doubt the abolition of slavery was 'bad' for the economy and added some more to the ranks of the unemployed - do we then decry the abolition of slavery? We also call for 'not a single penny, not a single person' for so-called defence spending. If Blair woke up tomorrow and implemented such a programme, it would lead to *massive* job losses - do we therefore abandon our slogan?

Naturally, everything has to be decided in the concrete. We do not support the Dunblane/Snowdrop campaign to ban guns. To back such a reactionary campaign, as the Socialist Party has done, is to sow social pacifism and hence illusions in the bourgeois state. Such bans are a symbol of *our* weakness, not our strength. Unless the workers are armed we are unable to carry out our programme, making revolution an impossibility. Hence socialism becomes impossible. Paradoxically, we need arms to realise our humanity.

As part of our communist vision, we aim to *humanise* our environment - whether that be the urban jungles of New York or Calcutta, the Scottish Highlands, Antarctica or, for that matter, the planet Mars (ie, by employing 'terraforming' technology). Only the most misanthropic 'eco-warrior' could object to such a goal. Nobody can seriously argue that this noble - and necessary - aim was the objective of those demonstrating in Hyde Park on Thursday. Quite the opposite..

'Bring the countryside into the cities and the cities into the countryside' - that should be our war cry. To fail to realise this is to abandon the struggle for communism, and to fight over disembodied abstractions instead ●

Kirstie Paton's DNA

According to Kirstie Paton (*Workers Power* July/August), the rapprochement call initiated by this organisation amounts to little more than an attempt at "constructing a loose socialist grouping". As the Socialist Labour Party's Simon Harvey commented in last week's paper, this is "either deliberate dishonesty ... or rank stupidity" (*Weekly Worker* July 10), but I think neither option really explains it.

Kirstie's inability to understand the notion of rapprochement around the project for a party of the working class is actually an involuntary reflex. It is lodged in her political DNA structure as the supporter of a tendency in the Socialist Labour Party "in political sympathy" with the Workers Power sect (*ibid*). As evidence that this myopia is a problem generalised throughout the sectarian left, I cite the similar charges against rapprochement made by the sub-Spartacist group, the International Bolshevik Tendency.

Writing in its obscure 1917 journal it colourfully describes the Communist Party as a "shifting agglomeration of centrist groupuscules, Stalinist fragments, refugees from Cliffism and various other bits of political flotsam" (1917 No18 undated, p31). The skeletal frame for this odd composite creature - our IBT comrades tell us - is the opportunist formula of 'freedom of discussion, unity of action', a slogan "lifted from the early years of the Bolsheviks, when they were in a common party with the Mensheviks. In practice it means that every disparate fragment can say whatever it wants, whenever it wants" (*ibid*).

Of course, both these groups are fully aware of the levels of discipline and activity that are taken as Party norms in our organisation. I venture to suggest they compare favourably - at least - with what passes for 'Bolshevism' in either of these two groups or any other on the revolutionary left. It has been made explicit time and time again that the call for rapprochement does not imply any "watering down of our Leninist politics or principles" (Jack Conrad, 'Party, non-ideology and faction' *Weekly Worker* December 15 1994).

What we have called for is unity on the basis of *Partyism*, a situation which would imply that "as long as factions are loyal to the Party and the Party principle, as long as all members of the Party, irrespective of faction, diligently and fully carry out agreed assignments and fulfil all their financial ob-

ligations", their different viewpoints could actually grow together. Such a Party regime would facilitate "the merger, the fusion of factions and the conversion of factional centres into centres that are only those of shade or trend" (*Ibid*).

This process would not be one of the obscuring of differences, but rather the *heightening* of the struggle between different political tendencies. The practical experience of the Open Polemic group, which joined our ranks as a faction, should really underline the fact that there is

nothing "loose" in our approach to communist unity. We wrote that OP's subsequent desertion of the Party was "precipitated by the disciplined communist practice of our organisation, set at a pace by the Party majority that OPers - used to the rather more dozy tempo of 'official communism' - found too painful" (*Weekly Worker* November 28 1996).

Clearly, the 'looseness' that Kirstie Paton or the IBT sectarians believe they can see in our practice relates not to our levels of work or Party discipline. No, these comrades believe our *political openness* to be indicative of indiscipline.

Kirsty illustrates this in her *Workers Power* piece when she rubbishes the decision of



Workers Power's particular brand of 'Leninist' discipline leads it into the arms of Tony Blair - without a single voice of opposition

the June conference of the Campaign for a Democratic Socialist Labour Party to launch an open publication to debate issues of the broader workers' movement, as well as the campaign against bureaucratic abuses in the SLP. This apparently is a waste of time, as the "supporters [of the CDSL] come from many political traditions and none. They have little agreement on the issues facing the 'broader workers' movement'.

"There are any number of publications inside and outside of the SLP which will publish their views. Why start another one?" (WP July/August).

In other words, Kirstie continues to advocate the exclusive, narrow sectarianism that is a hallmark of the organisation she is in political sympathy with and which she presumably equates with 'Leninist discipline'. Perhaps it may be a little churlish to point this out, comrade Paton, but your other CDSLers are ostensibly *members of the same party as you*. Why on earth should it be counterproductive to fight to overcome what you perceive as these comrades' wrong ideas in a common open publication? One of the strengths of the SLP was that it started to overcome the isolation of working class cadre from each other - it anticipated a genuine party project, in other words.

The idea that Paton's sterile narrowness has anything to do with the practice of Lenin and the Bolsheviks - at any stage of their political development - is impossible to defend. Interestingly, neither the IBT nor the Workers Power group have ever seriously tried to do so. The logic of such an attempt would lead the likes of comrade Paton to describe Lenin's party as a "loose socialist grouping" of course.

And that, presumably, would be a little embarrassing ●

Mark Fischer

Around the left

Confusion reigns

We can see major developments inside the Socialist Party. Clearly, centrifugal forces could threaten to tear apart the organisation. If the SP was to entirely fragment, which is a distinct possibility, that would represent a significant step backwards for the workers' movement.

'Do your own thing' seems to be the new motto of the SP. Not unlike the SLP, the SP has abandoned any idea of Partyism. Instead, bureaucratic anarchy rules. With regards to the national question, the organisations in Scotland, Wales and England seems to be going their separate ways - ie, the Welsh concern themselves with Wales, the Scottish with Scotland and the English with England. The poison of separatism has set in - and its looks like it might kill off the patient.

Of course, the same old left reformism is ever present in all the competing SP groups. Indeed, left reformism seems to be one of the few things that holds the organisation together. Comrade Alec Thraves, secretary of the Socialist Party, Wales, writes: "**Whilst critical of the lack of powers for the proposed assembly, it will nevertheless be a step forward and can be used as a limited vehicle to advance socialist ideas in Wales.**" Sound familiar? If so, it means you have read comrade Alan McCombes in *Scottish Socialist Voice*: "**At the very least, an elected parliament brings the Scottish Office under some measure of democratic control**" (July 4).

Wales or Scotland - the same opportunist logic. We also see the Socialist Party/Scottish Militant Labour's 'method' of politics by opinion poll. That is, tail ending the masses - 'Tell 'em what they want to hear', and perhaps they will flock to your ranks. One day.

Thus as the desire amongst the masses in Scotland for self-determination gathers pace, the SML comrades take on a more nationalistic stance, start speaking the language of left nationalism. Conversely, as nationalist sentiment is not so intense in Wales - at the moment - the language of workers' unity and anti-nationalism flows easier. Unfortunately, it has nothing to do with Marxism.

Thus, comrade Alec Thraves quotes various statistics to justify SP Wales' opposition to any form of separatism: "**There is not at this stage a large number supporting independence in Wales. A recent opinion poll put it as low as eight percent**" (July 4). What if there was "**a large number**" supporting Welsh independence, comrade Thraves? Would SP Wales 'do an SML' and decide to become left nationalist?

McCombes loves to quote statistics as well - albeit in the other direction: "**It is significant that among SNP voters 94% intend to vote for devolution. For this layer, Labour's proposals are seen as a starting point rather than an end in themselves. Among Labour supporters, 79% say they will vote 'yes' to devolution. Yet only 26% of Tory voters favour any change.**" The comrade's unseemly desire to be 'with the masses' - a perfectly correct and laudable aim, of course - means he abandons a principled programmatic perspective and bows to spontaneity.

He makes the opportunist logic even clearer: "**A 'yes' vote is strongest among the working class ... Socialists have to stand on the side of the working class against big business.**" While this sounds superficially reasonable, it in effect means that the comrade is not prepared to fight for what is necessary - merely what is expedient at the time. What if comrade McCombes' beloved opinion polls showed something different? Presumably, he would tear up all of SML's 'programme' and start all over again from scratch. Hardly a scientific approach to working class politics.

Inevitably, the messages coming out of Scotland and Wales differ. Comrade Thraves favoured formulation is: "**Our message to the Welsh working class will be clear: we stand unashamedly for a socialist Britain with autonomy for Wales - a parliament with real powers - within a socialist federation of Europe.**" This does not sound the same as the viewpoint expressed by comrade McCombes: "**We will continue to fight for a fully self-governing socialist Scotland, which will retain strong links with the other nations of the isles of Britain and Ireland.**"

In other words, confusion reigns supreme in SP, SP Wales and SML.

However, what is clear is that the SML comrades seem to positively relish the prospect of the break-up of Britain. After discussing recent events in Canada, Belgium and Spain, comrade McCombes writes: "**The referendum in Scotland is likely to usher in a new period of political turmoil and upheaval.**" But, comrade McCombes, judging by the separatist/nationalist tide which threatens to engulf these countries, that is not necessarily a good thing. Is it?

SML needs to reject national socialism, otherwise it will lead the Scottish working class to disaster ●

Don Preston

From *The Call*, paper of the British Socialist Party, July 12 1917

A new party?

The Leeds Convention was an expression of the ever growing movement for a general peace.

Because socialism was and remains the motive power in that movement, there arose the eager desire to respond to the internationalist appeal of our Russian comrades. Desirable as it is that soldiers' pensions should be augmented and allowances to soldiers' dependants be increased, the palliation of war was not the aim of that memorable gathering. Neither did it stand for amendments of political democracy, too often advanced to avoid attack upon the fundamental evils of society. The Convention was an organ of working class internationalism ...

We are not of those who consider the Labour Party the final word in political organisation. As in the more orthodox parties, greater wealth has weight in the Labour Party. Neither do we view the craft trade unions as perfect instruments against capitalism in its recent developments.

1917

80 years since the Russian Revolution

The Labour Party must change. Probably it will be completely transformed before long. But while it changes, the socialist organisations must be in the Labour Party, fighting to ensure that its reconstruction is on lines which they alone can indicate.

There is no sure foundation for a workers' party but the organisation of the working class. Only a political party with that basis can respond to the requirements of independent organisation. For us there can be no participation in forming a body designed to find place and profit for politicians, for whom existing parties provide no avenues for advancement or notoriety.

The Workers' and Soldiers' Council, and the coming district conferences, should co-ordinate existing local bodies ... From the first the representatives of the British Socialist Party on the Workers' and Soldiers' Council have been insistent in their demand that its object and basis should be as indicated above ●

Capitulating to the witch hunt

In last week's *Weekly Worker* (July 10) comrade Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group (faction of the Socialist Workers Party) wrote an article in which he describes the ex-RDG comrades, not as a part of the SLP left, but of its centre, along with members of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus. He also failed to explain why his fellow-thinkers did not participate in the Campaign for a Democratic Socialist Labour Party. In this article we will examine how this "centre" is failing in the struggle against the witch hunts and is moving in the direction of leading Fiscites Brian Heron and Patrick Sikorski.

For comrade Craig, "The banning of the June 12 rank and file democracy conference is a significant event in the short life of the SLP." This "has obvious parallels with a coup d'état". For him, "Scargill's coup is a move against the party and its constitution." Internal democracy "has been replaced by a dictatorship of the NEC".

Craig asserts that the public organisation of this event was completely justified. Nevertheless, despite all of these conclusions, he fails to explain why he did not take action consistent with them and stand against the attacks. When there is a coup, the revolutionary method of defence is to mobilise and unite all the opposition against it.

However, Craig's method is to *adapt* and *conciliate* to it and to *hide*. His fellow-thinkers turned away in fear from the CDSLPL conference and headed for the safety of a burger restaurant. More than 30 SLP members decided to challenge Scargill's anti-constitutional banning. SLP parliamentary election candidates, including Terry Burns (who obtained more votes than Scargill) and Ian Driver (who, despite the expulsion of the local branch, obtained twice the votes of Sikorski), attended the meeting. Despite his bravado, Scargill was afraid.

Before expelling SLP candidates and the SLP's only London's councillor, Scargill must be concerned how this action could damage his image and the entire SLP project.

Supporters of the *Marxist Bulletin* adopted a more consistent opportunist attitude than Craig. They denounced the meeting as an anti-SLP lash-up. They hoped to show the SLP witch hunters that they are not as bad as the rest and offered their services to the bureaucracy by denouncing the majority of the opposition as anti-party. Sooner or later, Scargill will pay them back with a kick up the backside.

All the 'moderate' oppositionists who either denounced the CDSLPL as "anti-party" or simply decided to boycott the meeting out of extreme caution (or pure and simple cowardice) helped the bureaucracy in its attempts to frighten and divide the left. Craig's faint-heartedness is nothing new.

When Barry Biddulph was voided, Vauxhall was advised to accept it in order not to provoke the leadership. When the Vauxhall SLP branch was voided, it was advised to sacrifice one or two radicals and rejoin the party according to the bureaucracy's rules. When Tony Goss assaulted the CPGB's national organiser, the attacked and the injured were placed in the same camp by some 'oppositionists' who called for no severe sanctions against him. Today Craig recognises that everything about the CDSLPL was correct, but he thinks the faint-hearts were right not to risk their skin. How on earth can SLP democrats coordinate their actions if some of them will be intimidated every time and end up sabotaging meetings because of it?

The witch hunters not only want to split the dissidents, but also to press some of them to become more moderate and adapted to the bureaucracy. Craig's co-thinkers are among those who are moving to the right. Of course, our friend Craig is not like the supporters of the *Economic and*

John Stone of the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International replies to Dave Craig's assessment of the balance of forces in the Socialist Labour Party

Philosophic Science Review, who, after helping to found the Revolutionary Platform, sold their souls and became active witch hunters. He is continuing to defend internal democracy, but he is trying to be part of the moderate centre led by the SLP former general secretary.

Moving to the right, Craig said that the SLP has three wings: the right wing, including Scargill and everybody who wants a left Labour party; the left - "those who want the SLP to become a new communist party"; and the centre, which is based on ex-SWPs (like the ex-RDG) and Fisc, who "are those who see the future of the SLP as a communist-Labour party or, using the Italian analogy, a Rifundazione Comunista (RC) or a Marxist-Labour party".

Craig openly confessed that he is against a communist party in any sense. What he wants is a halfway house. He wants a left reformist party (like the Italian RC). The RC is a *bourgeois workers' party*. Its programme is in favour of the preservation of Italian capitalism, the army, police, big business and multinationals. It wants a more protectionist capitalist state with less attacks on the welfare state. It supports the ruling bourgeois coalition.

The Italian RC, the French CP and the Spanish United Left have nothing to do with Marxism or communism. Revolutionaries should intervene in such parties on condition that they do not hide or renounce their politics, and openly counterpose a transitional anti-capitalist programme to the bourgeois reformist programmes that lead such working class-based parties.

The comrades from the SLP left, especially the ones that read the *Weekly Worker*, should not have any illusions in the RDG. The RDG is *not* in favour of fighting for a communist party, inside or outside the SLP. They are in favour of building a British version of a bourgeois workers' RC. Craig is quite happy to say that his centre grouping "rejects the idea of a Trotskyist programme". In fact, this label has always been used by all reformists to discredit any Marxist or Leninist platform. He does not describe himself as Leninist.

Further, he is proposing a kind of party (left reformist), a kind of revolution (bourgeois republican) and a kind of programme (social democratic programme for a national state capitalism) which is antagonistic to Leninism. Craig's "centre grouping" proposes better words "like 'democratic programme', a 'new *British road to socialism*', 'minimum programme' or 'republican programme'".

The 'British road to socialism' is a classical national-reformist way to fight against socialism. Even using the label "old" or "new" (like Blair's New Labour) this strategy rejects international socialist revolution and proposes a national way to transform the imperialist United Kingdom into a

democratic capitalist republic with a more substantial welfare state. The RDG's 'minimum' or 'republican' programme was always a programme of reforming British capitalism. In previous articles we showed how the RDG rejects socialist revolution in any place of the world (even in the super-advanced USA).

For the RDG the only revolution which is valid is a bourgeois democratic one. At the beginning of this century the Mensheviks advocated a bourgeois revolution as the first stage against backward tsardom while in western Europe they advocated a socialist revolution. Craig is more rightwing than the Mensheviks because he argues that even in the most imperialist countries (after more than 80 years of tremendous industrialisation and technological development) there are no conditions for an anti-capitalist revolution.

Stalin was for 'socialism in one country' while the RDG is against building socialism in any country and for a national state capitalism in a new British republic. The RDG strategy is

He is advising the left to liquidate itself and to dissolve itself inside the Heron-Sikorski "centre" camp. For Craig the left was defeated only because Scargill banned the CDSLPL meeting. However, no new sanctions have been imposed on any comrade that participated in that conference. Even in the case where the NEC had expelled all of them, that in itself would not be the same as a defeat. Expelled members could have some impact on the party through open publications and actions.

Craig presents a very fatalistic and self-defeated image of the SLP left which is based on complete misrepresentations. For Craig the SLP "left or communist wing comprised of assorted Stalinists, Trotskyists and state capitalists (ie, ex-SWPs). The Stalinists were represented by the *EPSR*, ex-members of the Communist Party of Britain, ex-CPGB and later the Indian Workers Association. The Trotskyists were represented by those such as Fisc, those later associating themselves with the *Marxist Bulletin*, *Socialist Labour Action* and

they. Fisc was never part of the left. They imposed the official line and many expulsions. In his analysis of the SLP Trotskyists, Craig ignores very significant oppositionist comrades who are Trotskyists and come from other traditions. In his distorted way of presenting reality, Craig said that today the left in the SLP is reduced to the "Trotskyists gathered around the *Marxist Bulletin* and *Socialist Labour Action*."

Very important left currents, from the Revolutionary Platform to *Socialist Perspectives*, and in oppositionist branches from Cardiff to Brent East and Vauxhall, are excluded from his list. He gives great importance to the *Marxist Bulletin* and SLA. In previous articles we have shown how SLA committed hara kiri, that they are not interested in being inside the party any more and that they have no significant influence amongst the left. After not recruiting a single soul in the SLP, they are openly advocating a rupture and their re-integration into a group which describes the SLP as a "counterrevolutionary sect on the fringes of the workers' movement".

The *Marxist Bulletin* is much more influential. However, they refuse to be part of the left. They boycotted all attempts for a left opposition (Revolutionary Platform, Left Network and the CDSLPL). Even more, they denounced the most advanced SLP internal united front for democracy as an anti-party conspiracy. Their policies are a mixture of sectarianism and opportunism. On Ireland they are to the right of the SLP programme because they oppose Irish unification. They don't think that the SLP is a left reformist party because for them it is a sort of anti-capitalist vehicle. They don't think that Scargill and the NEC are on the right because they believe that they are much better than revolutionaries who advocated a critical vote for Labour.

The *Marxist Bulletin* is against any united front of the left or the democrats against the witch hunters. They are prepared to *adapt* to it, to accept voiding instructions and even to attack democratic gatherings as anti-party plots. Craig said that the left was divided not by programme but around the 'internal' or 'external' question. As genuine revolutionary Trotskyists argued, inside the SLP this is a false debate.

The voided comrades have no other way of fighting than by using public, extra-official channels. The left in the party are those who, despite all their differences, are against witch hunts and reformism. They need to create a serious pole of attraction. The CDSLPL must broaden itself and try to make a united front with other groupings in Manchester, Coventry, Reading, Swindon and other areas.

For Craig all the ex-SWPs are part of the moderate centre. This is another distortion. Many SWPs who were purged from the SWP openly rejects Craig's "post-Menshevik" ideas and are for a united left opposition to the right and the "centre". The *Marxist Bulletin* and people like Craig want to become moderate and inoffensive creatures so they could survive in the middle of an increasingly bureaucratized and rightward moving party. In summary, Craig is trying to demoralise the left. He says, 'You are defeated' and that the only way forward is to form a bloc with a section of the

.....
 'Craig is consistent: he does not need a communist party but a left-reformist party, in which communists have to dissolve and be part of the moderate centre'

for a left republican government: ie, a popular front government (like in Spain 1936-39) which is based on an alliance between the workers' organisations and the republican bosses - who never open the way for democracy but help reaction demobilise and disarm the proletariat.

Preparing a bloc with Heron and Sikorski, Craig wrote: "Whilst logically the ex-Fiscites and the ex-SWPs are in the centre, they entered the SLP stage from opposite ends, the former involving themselves in the witch hunt and the latter opposing it. As yet there is no centre bloc."

However, Craig is suggesting the constitution of such a bloc. That would mean that Fisc should become less intolerant to the opposition, while Craig's "ex-SWPs" should drop all links with the voided comrades and adapt more to the witch hunts. Craig, in fact, is trying to do as much as he can to be a person who is not involved in the witch hunts but who is willing to conciliate with it. For Craig the SLP left is already defeated and "it is possible that the struggle will now take on more the character of a struggle between the centre and the right".

ex-members of the Workers Revolutionary Party."

This is completely wrong. He is putting into the left camp people who are more rightwing and keener witch hunters than Scargill. The *EPSR* initially was around the Revolutionary Platform, but its homophobia, its support of Stalinist massacres like Tiananmen Square and its aim of building a Stalinist party put it into the extreme witch hunt camp. The members of the Stalin Society, ex-CPB and the IWA never opposed the witch hunts and in fact supported them. They never criticised the bourgeois reformist content of Scargill's programme. On the contrary, they wanted a less radical party and to transform the SLP into a highly bureaucratic and rightwing machine capable of filling the old CP space.

It is an insult to the comrades influenced by the CPGB to be put in the same category as the "Stalinists" with the *EPSR* and the open supporters of Stalin or Brezhnev. They, despite all the critiques that we can make of their "minimum programme", were always one of the pillars of the left and the pro-democracy opposition. No other current was more witch-hunted than

Going out with a bang

NEC that voided tens of SLPers and two branches, and voted for the banning of the CDSLPC conference.

The *Weekly Worker* is becoming one of the most important forums for SLP oppositionists. Yet Craig ended his article with the following: "The *Weekly Worker* will now have to decide who to support. It seems it will back any external faction that emerges from the defeated Trotskyist left. Will it back the remnants of Trotskyism, such as the internal left, or switch its support to the centre, or oppose the SLP project all together? These are the decisions that the *Weekly Worker* needs to consider."

Craig is calling for the second alternative. He is asking the *Weekly Worker* to renounce its aim of fighting inside and outside the SLP to reforge a communist party and for adopting the strategy of building a new left reformist and programmatically bourgeois British Rifundazione. He is also asking the *Weekly Worker* to forget all its campaigns against Fisc, to try to adapt to it and to build a moderate centre around its *de facto* leadership.

In summary, he is asking the *Weekly Worker* to become a sort of *Socialist News* of the former general secretary's supposed faction. Many good voided comrades, who were being accused of being friends of the CPGB, should forget all their misfortunes and capitulate to the leaders who expelled them. Their struggle and sacrifice was a mistake.

It is very doubtful that the CPGB would operate such a U-turn. It would entirely destroy its own project and it would discredit all its strategy for communist regroupment. Many comrades inside the *Weekly Worker* have complained very much about the RDG. Some articles have criticised the fact that the RDG is an organisation of one man which does not produce its own publication, that it is over-represented in the *Weekly Worker*, or that a group which calls itself a public "faction of the SWP" does not intervene in 'Marxism' or in SWP internal life.

However, these are not very crucial criticisms. Despite its almost non-existence, the RDG has a strong ideological influence inside the CPGB. With the aim of trying to recruit Craig for the CPGB, the group has made many concessions to him. The *Weekly Worker* never finds room for most of the articles that we send, while Craig's articles are constantly filling the paper. The CPGB has adapted to the RDG minimum programme for a federal republic. It is one thing to support democratic and anti-monarchist demands and another to advocate the replacement of the United Kingdom by a capitalist federal republic like the one in Germany or the USA.

Craig is consistent: he does not need a communist party but a left-reformist party, in which communists have to dissolve and be part of the moderate centre. Despite all its concessions, Craig will never join the CPGB. On the contrary, he is pressing the CPGB to commit political suicide and dissolve itself in to a bloc with and behind the former SLP general secretary.

There is no defeated left inside the SLP. The *Weekly Worker* must continue fighting against the right and the centre of the SLP and for a united left opposition. In fact, if the *Weekly Worker* needs to make a shift, it is towards genuine Leninism.

The backward evolution of Craig and his adaptation to the witch hunters show the extreme limitations of any minimum programme and "communist-Labour party" projects. The SLP left needs an anti-capitalist programme and to build a solid and combative campaign for internal democracy ●

Somewhat unusually, the latest issue of *Class War* makes for interesting reading. This seems to be due to the fact that this is the very last issue or, as the front page headline proclaims, 'Class War is dead ... long live the class war!'

The paper is definitely going out with a bang and not a whimper. This makes a dramatic contrast to some existing left publications, which either mysteriously disappear overnight without a word of explanation or whine away in a corner for months before dying of natural causes.

As previously reported in the *Weekly Worker*, all manner of trouble has been brewing in the Class War Federation - the publishers of *Class War* - for some time. The temperature has finally reached boiling point and the organisation has fragmented. According to the *Class War* editorial, "The majority of London Class War has decided to part company with the rest of us and have gone their own way. We wish them luck." Slightly curiously, the editorial claims: "We [presumably the London minority - EF] are aware of no fundamental political differences between ourselves and the comrades who have left" (all quotes in bold from Summer 1997 issue).

The differences, however, appear quite glaring to us. In the words of comrade Dave Douglass, a supporter of the majority, the London minority represents a "petty bourgeois current which does not like the working class" - this minority hankers for a "more intellectual milieu" and treats with contempt the "old-style image" of *Class War* - ie, 'hospitalised coppers' and so on.

Dave and the majority do not think it is "necessary to analyse and re-analyse" the class struggle. The task of revolutionaries is to "empower the existing struggles". The majority - or the 'provisionals' as they have already been dubbed - will have a new publication out soon.

Whatever the exact lines of dispute are, *Class War's* self-criticism is admirably frank and honest. It is certainly hard to imagine monolithic publications like *Socialist Worker* or *The Socialist* ever admitting openly that they are wrong about anything, let alone going in for the lengthy soul-searching which is the defining feature of the last issue of *Class War*. Thus, in its own words, "The Federation remains a tiny group with a big image which has outlived its usefulness. The truth is that we will never grow any bigger in our present form. The appeal of our paper has become too narrow and limited - we have only sold between four and five thousand papers each issue for the last few years." *Class War* concludes: "We have gone as far as we can: the time has come to try something new."

Class War is not an insignificant organisation. It enjoys a relatively high public profile, as the media loves to evoke *Class War's* name whenever discussing 'extremist' groups or doing a shock-horror exposé on how outside 'infiltrators' are stirring up trouble on demonstrations and marches. *Class War* is also often held up as the ultimate in mindless agitation and general mayhem.

A cursory examination of this issue of *Class War*, however, does not reveal dumb anarchism. It is in fact an

'Open letter to the revolutionary movement', quite a novelty for the *Class War* Federation. Previously the CWF had only displayed unremitting hostility to the revolutionary left, invariably described as "middle class wankers" or words to that effect (not that the social/class composition of the CAF could exactly be described as exactly 100% proletarian either). The open letter presents an extremely articulate and well-argued case - shame it did not do this every issue, you could say - and might well come as a shock to some of its hard-core readers.

The comrades write: "This paper marks a departure in style and content: every past issue has been written to be read by, for want of better words, ordinary working class people ... This final issue of *Class War* is different. It is written for all those who already consider themselves 'political', whether they regard themselves as anarchists, communists, socialists or whatever. This Open Letter is directed at everybody who is genuine in their desire to bring an end to this class-divided capitalist society that we live in, and who is open, honest and flexible in their attempts to achieve it."

These are sentiments that we can certainly empathise with.

It has to be said that its critique of the revolutionary left hits the mark in many places, even if the anarchist comrades have picked up the curious idea that it "sometimes seemed that the entire left press has existed for no other reason than to slag off *Class War*".

It attacks the "siege mentality" of most of the revolutionary left (Gerry Healey's Workers Revolutionary Party somehow springs to mind), which means that "members are more likely to do what they are told and accept an absence of debate and democracy". Tragically, this is the history of Trotskyism, and the revolutionary left in general - who have replicated, albeit on a smaller scale and without the mass murder and terror, the worst sins of 'official communism'.

Class War's critique of the various revolutionary left groups can be sharp at times. Discussing the Socialist Party/Militant, it points out: "Over the years tactics and theory got very well confused and the majority of Militant supporters saw nationalisation under workers' control [or even without it - EF] as a thing in itself and thought those who argued for real revolution were fools."

The Socialist Workers Party also gets dissected. It is "renowned for two things. Firstly, calling for strikes, whatever the situation ... Secondly, opportunism. Essentially this means they chop and change policies from week to week on a vampire-like basis. Whatever brings in new blood is good." More crucially, the SWP has "created an organisation with little internal debate or democracy, and worse, lacking any culture of critical debate. For a group that pays lip service to the idea of revolution it is ironic that they are totally lacking in imagination, freedom of expression and open discussion." I defy anybody to disagree with this pithy summation.

As for the Revolutionary Communist Party, who cannot warm to *Class War's* opinion on "the most ambitious and arrogant group in the 1980s"?

The RCP became "increasingly obsessed with developing their theory over political practice", "shut down their newspaper [*The Next Step* - EF]" and "as any fool knows, if you lose the relationship between theory and practice you soon end up with your head up your arse."

But *Class War's* solution to this malaise is hopeless - ie, to look to a loose, decentralised party. In the lofty opinion of *Class War*, "It is more likely that a highly centralised state will be defeated not by a pale imitation of itself but by a decentralised, diverse and multi-headed opposition." Comrades, this is pure utopianism.

Also, the comrades' instinctive suspicion of "lefty theory" - the great bugbear for most anarchists - is a permanent Achilles' heel. It also has to be said that there is a small element of holier-than-thou hypocrisy to *Class War's* attacks on the RCP for losing "the relationship between theory and practice". The plain fact of the matter is that the CAF has never attempted to develop theory, to turn its members into *thinkers* - it never had anything to unite its 'practice' (turning up drunk to demos for instance) with. Instead, for the most part the CAF has been far more interested in cultivating its image of being a collection of "angry young white blokes" rather than seriously building a revolutionary organisation. This was also another bone of contention. The "petty bourgeois" intellectuals of the minority said that this macho image was "unattractive to women and black people". It certainly did not help.

Having said that, communists are well aware that some young people are attracted to anarchism (in all its 57 varieties) because they are serious about revolution, not because they see it merely as an organic development of their alternative lifestyle, which they must attach themselves to if they want to remain cool and hip in front of their peers. To these comrades we appeal - be part of a centralised, disciplined party where, yes, "open discussion and freedom of expression" is an organic part of Party culture. This is the only real way to overthrow capitalism and maintain the "relationship between theory and practice", as the *Class War* open letter quite correctly mentioned.

This is not a devious Leninist ploy to lull anarchists into a false sense of security and then massacre them in their beds - though paranoid conspiracy theories are a hallmark of the anarchist milieu. Lenin and the Bolsheviks, during the Revolution and the Civil War, endeavoured to win over the anarchists to their side - and many did defect to the Bolsheviks. Contrary to much anarchist mythology, the anarchist forces during the Civil War hardly behaved like angels. Forces loyal to Nestor Makhno, the legendary anarchist hero, *banned all political parties* in the areas under their control - hardly an inspiring example of 'libertarian communism', particularly in the context of a brutal civil war being waged by White counter-revolutionary armies.

Without a strong dose of political imagination and initiative, the danger is that disaffected members of *Class War* could end up like an anarchist version of the RCP. Now there is something to think about ●

Eddie Ford

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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Debating the legacy of John Maclean

On the sidelines

In my article, 'Shades of John Maclean' (*Weekly Worker* June 19), I tried to show how incarceration in the state's prisons can have a destabilising effect which may subsequently lead to mental health problems. That was the point of describing the ordeal of Michael Hickey, one of the Bridgewater Four falsely accused of murder.

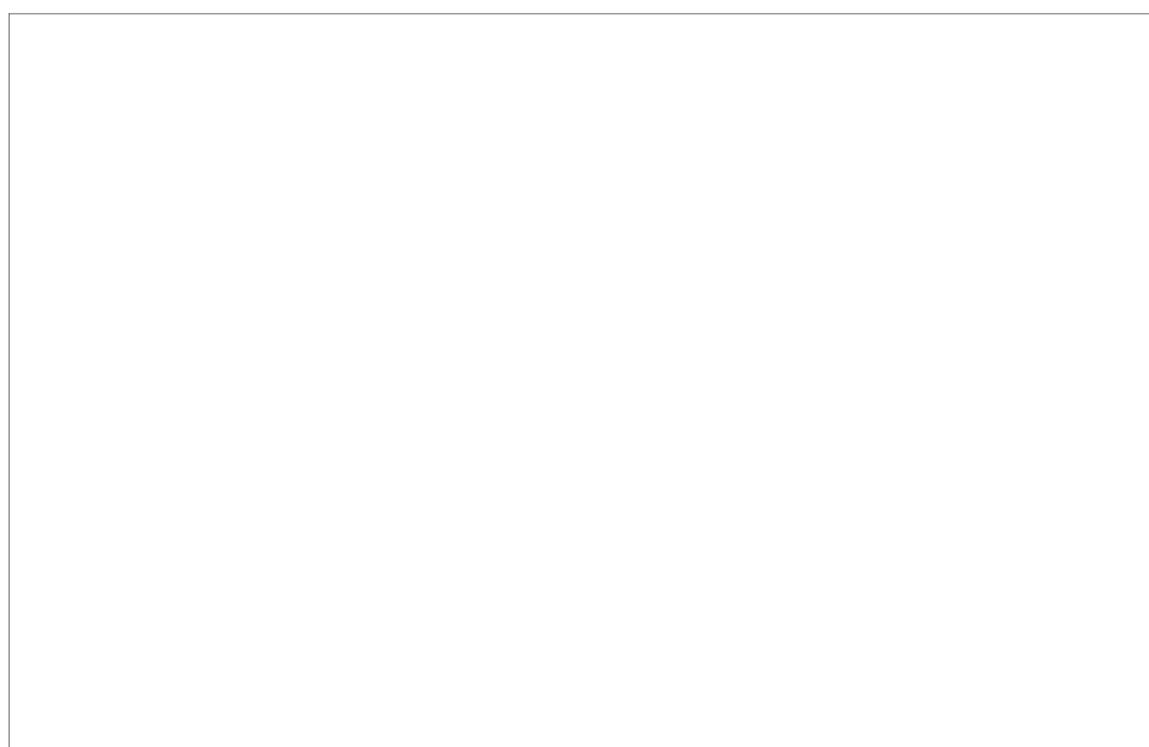
I did not imply, as Paul Smith states, that in every case the suffering of the state's victims "is so dehumanising that their subsequent thinking and behaviour can be dismissed as irrational" (Letters, July 3). Phil Sharpe's statement in the same edition of the *Weekly Worker* that "Peter implies that mental health problems are identical to political degeneration" is equally off the mark.

It is self-evident that in *some* cases a ill-treatment in prison can result in mental breakdown (Maclean himself believed that the British state had a deliberate policy of attempting - in some cases successfully - to destroy political prisoners both physically and mentally). It is also clear that *some* mental problems can impair political judgement - what is the point of denying that?

I am not interested in making a "crude attempt to discredit" anyone, as comrade Sharpe alleges. I do not start from an assumption that Maclean was mentally disturbed and then casually go on to dismiss all his political ideas. I start from his refusal to play any part in the most significant event of British working class history - the founding of the Communist Party of Great Britain - and try to explain how it was possible that such a heroic and dedicated socialist revolutionary could end up actually condemning the whole project.

Comrade Smith justifies Maclean's position by pointing to the actual and potential defects of the Party and its leaders: its "potentially undemocratic nature"; "more inclined to anarchism than to Marxism"; the "insufficient understanding of the hold that social democratic ideas had on the consciousness of the British proletariat". He goes on to inform us that "the CPGB stood to the right of the Third International" and that its leaders "had sacrificed quality for quantity of cadre"; he also reminds us of "the Party's deplorable accommodation to Stalinism in subsequent decades" - presumably Maclean's political acumen was so astute that he was able to predict the CPGB's degeneration even before it was formed.

Comrade Smith could also have mentioned the economism, propagandism, reformism and chauvinistic prejudices that were present to varying degrees amongst the founder members. What else would you expect when such a heterogeneous collection of organisations and individuals are propelled towards unity through



The first Central Committee of the CPGB - without John Maclean

the sheer impact of the Russian Revolution?

There is a difference, Paul, between criticising "the ideas of the leadership of the CPGB" and refusing to take part in such a stupendous event. It is not only legitimate, but essential to constantly expose such faults and shortcomings. But what of Maclean's slanderous accusations that the founding comrades were "conscious and unconscious tools of Lloyd George and the propertied class of Britain" ('Open letter to Lenin', reprinted in R Pitt *John Maclean and the CPGB* London 1995)?

Was it correct to stand back from the CPGB project and even attempt to set up a rival organisation? Comrade Smith does not openly say so, although the implication is clear.

Phil Sharpe has no such reticence however. For him, "The formation of the CPGB was upon the opportunist premises of a tame, pro-Moscow stance." The Third International, he says, promoted "a nationalist ideology based upon the prestige of the October Revolution".

What idealistic nonsense. Without the Russian Revolution there would have been no International, no revolutionary upsurge, no CPGB. Organisations do not spring up, lily-white and pure, out of a vacuum. Comrade Sharpe seems to think that defending the gains of the international proletariat in the shape of soviet power in Russia can be counterposed to extending the world revolution - as if the one does not in fact complement the other.

It is one thing to make such absurd

claims. But it is quite another to project them onto John Maclean. Comrade Sharpe states: "Maclean's 'Open letter' to Lenin makes the case for an open democratic centralist communist international upon an equal political basis."

That is completely untrue. Even a cursory glance reveals that the whole purpose of the letter was to prove that British communist leaders such as Willie Gallacher were unworthy of Lenin's support. Instead, the open letter argues, the Russian leader should give his blessing to Maclean's own comrades: "It was my fidelity to you and the cause of revolution that got me the five years' sentence in 1918," he wrote. On the other hand, "The man in Britain [Gallacher] who is against Marxism is against Bolshevism in Russia too."

When it comes to Maclean's claims that specific communist leaders - in particular Gallacher, Theodore Rothstein and L Malone - were agents of the British state, comrade Smith simply denies that any such allegations were made, despite all the evidence assembled by Bob Pitt in *John Maclean and the CPGB*. Pitt quotes various secret British state documents, including several extracts from the *Report on revolutionary organisations in the United Kingdom* for 1920.

In January it was reported to the Cabinet that Maclean's relations with others in the working class movement were under serious strain because of "his constant reference to 'spies' being present at public and private meetings". In March, the *Report* alleged,

"Maclean announced on a public platform that all the leading communists in the country, mentioning them by name and including that of Theodore Rothstein, were police spies."

By April the state agents had concluded: "The communists have been slow to realise, what was patent to everyone else, that John Maclean is the victim of the monomania of the hidden hand", and they are now reaping a harvest of suspicion from their loyalty to him." The report continues with smug satisfaction: "Maclean's obsession is quite likely to break up the communist movement, for he has a large following in Glasgow and in season and out of season he gives vent to these denunciations" (*Report on revolutionary organisations in the United Kingdom* April 8 1920, CAB24/103/CP1039).

When Maclean accused Willie Gallacher at a Glasgow public meeting of being "no better than a government agent" (*Daily Record* December 27 1920, quoted by Pitt), Gallacher responded furiously: "We can't have a man going round trading on his past and accusing everyone who disagrees with him of being a government agent" (*The Worker* January 8 1921, quoted by Pitt).

But Maclean simply repeated his charge: "I have insisted in public that you never hit the governing class but they hit you back in reply. Gallacher obviously was their instrument this time" (*The Socialist* January 13 1921, quoted by Pitt).

Despite comrade Pitt's careful research, Smith and Sharpe continue to claim no knowledge of any such ac-

cusations against Gallacher and Rothstein. However, both combine their profession of ignorance with statements which imply that Maclean's allegations against Malone were true. Smith refers to Lieutenant-Colonel Malone as an "anti-socialist Liberal MP", even though he subsequently joined the British Socialist Party and was one of the founders of the CPGB.

Malone's conversion to communism was certainly remarkable and clearly superficially based, for he soon left the CPGB and drifted out of politics, but his role in mobilising support for the young Russian republic should not be underestimated. There was never the slightest proof that he was a secret agent of the state during his short period as a communist. Nor did Maclean offer any.

Maclean's Open letter to Lenin' makes clear allegations against the newly formed CPGB as a whole. He writes that the posing of Labour leaders such as MacDonald and Snowden as friends of Russia would not deceive Lenin. Lloyd George "must therefore make way for a Communist Party whose 'leaders' are controlled by him". And of course Maclean ends with the "conscious and unconscious tools" smear.

Comrade Sharpe would have us believe that Maclean was merely criticising the CPGB leaders' opportunism - and then goes on to repeat the smear himself: "Maclean was certainly not exaggerated in his remarks about the CPGB acting as tools of the Lloyd George government, given their softness towards the Labour Party ..."

So let us sum up the objections of comrades Smith and Sharpe. They appear to be saying that John Maclean's treatment at the hands of the state left him with no lasting mental problems; but even if he *was* mentally disturbed that did not affect his political judgement. They say that Maclean never accused the CPGB leadership of being, collectively or individually, agents of the British state; but if he *had* made them the allegations were probably true.

Our differences with the comrades are not primarily about John Maclean and the founding of the CPGB. Our main differences concern the need for a Communist Party *today*. Is it correct to stand and watch from the sidelines while others attempt to build what is necessary? Is it enough to point out their shortcomings, or should those who claim to know better attempt to shape a real movement themselves? Should disagreement over tactics and strategy keep us apart, or should communists agree to organise as a unity and test them out in practice?

And should professed revolutionaries hurl false accusations in an attempt to cover up their own refusal to join such a project? ●

Peter Manson