



CPGB London seminar series

January 11: Production price in the series on ‘Marx’s theory of value’, using II Rubin as a study guide.

January 18: Marx’s focus on the proletariat as the agent of social change in the series on ‘Marx’s theory of revolution’, using Hal Draper as a study guide.

Seminars are in central London on Sunday at 5pm. Call 0181-459 7146 for details



50p Number 222 Thursday January 8 1998

‘Peace process’
thrown into crisis

The killings in Ireland over the Christmas period threw the establishment into turmoil. But does that mean the whole ‘peace process’ will collapse?

No one should mourn the death of loyalist paramilitary Billy Wright, killed by three Irish National Liberation Army prisoners in Belfast’s Long Kesh prison.

Wright was a leading exponent and practitioner of mass terror, personally responsible for the murder of at least 25 catholics, most of whom had no connection whatsoever with any political organisation, let alone republican fighting groups. His victims included children and a pregnant woman. He was proud to be known as King Rat. Christopher McWilliams, one of the three Inla prisoners charged with Wright’s murder, stated on his appearance in court that the Loyalist Volunteer Force leader had continued to order killings from his prison cell.

But there was a definite logic behind Wright’s thinking, which he spelt out in 1994: “These actions brought home to catholics that the IRA was the source of all violence,” he said. “They knew that if the IRA did something, the catholic community would suffer.” This logic was also recognised by the British state, which has been happy to leave the loyalist terror gangs on a long leash.

The incident was a devastating blow to the British state’s much vaunted “top security”, immediately following the earlier escape of Liam Averell from the same jail. According to Ian Paisley’s Democratic Unionist Party, Inla inmates were in error given the previous day a copy of loyalist prisoners’ schedule of visitors, in addition to a list of their own visitors. This certainly gives the lie to the notion that the action had been carefully planned in advance.

Nevertheless that did not stop *The Times* from going even further: “Many unionists will know only too well that the Inla rarely takes so much as target practice without IRA approval, and will conclude that Wright’s killing was another stage in the republican strategy of destabilising Northern Ireland” (December 29). *The Times* editorial would have us believe that his death, far from resulting from an act spontaneously carried out on the ground, had been sanctioned by Gerry Adams himself.

The entire unionist spectrum was happy to go along with the conspiracy theory, but the LVF used it as ‘justification’ for resuming their murderous random, indiscriminate attacks on catholics, which led to the deaths of two men and the wounding of eight other people. It was entirely coincidental that their first victim, Seamus Dillon, had previously served a life sentence for an IRA killing.

The Times, calling for a new initiative to boost the ‘peace process’, claimed: “The big danger is the perception that the Stormont talks are going nowhere, which plays into the hands of

extremists on both sides.” Ironically that was the line also being pushed by Sinn Fein, which called on the three ‘constitutional’ unionist parties to enter into serious negotiations.

Yet there is no doubt that the IRA is under extreme pressure to strike back at the loyalist murder gangs. Many volunteers must be utterly frustrated by the news that the oppressive forces of the British state are to step up their ‘protection’ of catholics. The IRA prided itself in being able to provide real protection itself. For this reason it is republicans even more than loyalists who must receive British concessions at this time. It is significant that bourgeois commentators are now beginning to raise the possibility of the release of political prisoners under some kind of licence as a way of ensuring that the people who matter are drawn into serious negotiations.

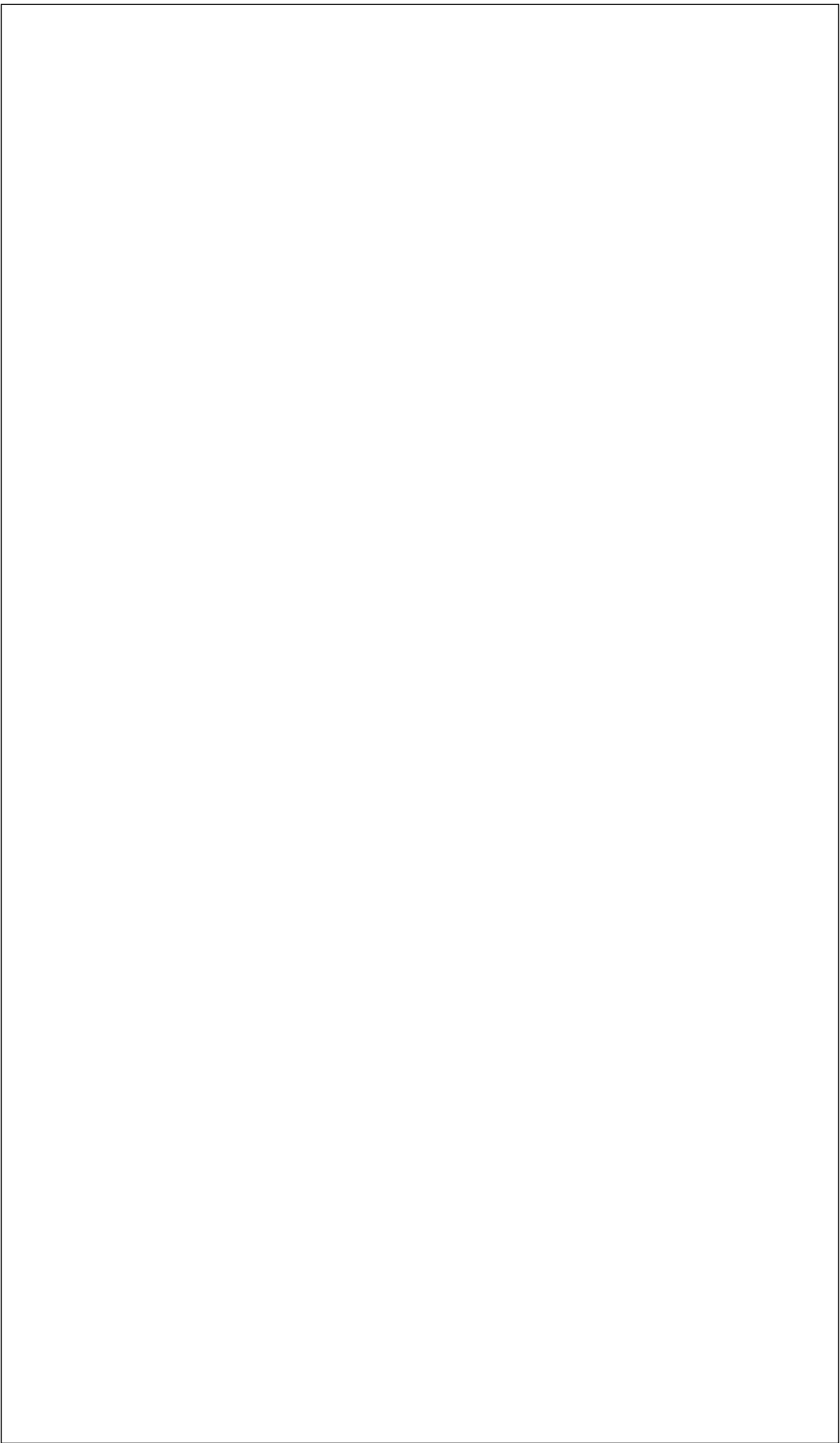
The latest events have also put the two bigger loyalist paramilitary groupings under great pressure. Prisoners belonging to both the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association announced they were “withholding support” from the ‘peace process’, despite the best efforts of Ken Maginnis, the Ulster Unionist Party’s ‘security’ spokesperson. The Progressive Unionist Party, the political wing of the UVF, has decided to stay away from next week’s resumed talks at Stormont. Nevertheless its representatives were due to meet senior Irish government figures this week - a sure sign that the PUP still believes an all-Ireland settlement can be reached under British imperialist hegemony.

In addition rumours have continued to circulate that members of the UDA were involved in the LVF’s second attack on new year’s eve. If that were the case, it would disqualify its partners in the Ulster Democratic Party from the talks. But the UDP did not immediately indicate its withdrawal from Stormont.

Despite the commotion in the loyalist camp, the main players that the British must keep on board are of course Sinn Fein/IRA. No settlement can be reached without the main representatives of republican resistance to British imperialism. The loyalists can cause problems, but they remain in essence supporters of imperialism. The state can always hope to buy them off through a combination of stick and carrot.

That is why talk of the ending of the ‘peace process’ is misplaced. There have been many setbacks and no doubt these will continue. But when both the principal adversaries - the British state and Sinn Fein/IRA - are determined on a settlement from above, only the actions of the masses from below will be able to stop it ●

Jim Blackstock



The late, unlamented Billy Wright - kept on a long leash

Party notes

Perspectives '98

The December aggregate of the Communist Party had just two items on its agenda. First, the final draft of our *Perspectives* document for 1998; and second, and more controversially, a theses on revolutionary openness submitted by the Provisional Central Committee of the Party, which was opposed by an alternative resolution from our Manchester organisation. While the debate around our *Perspectives* proved to be relatively uncontentious, the debate on revolutionary openness overspilled the time available and will continue in the Party, both internally and in the pages of this paper.

Naturally, many of the central themes of *Perspectives '98* continue from the year before. The document starts with a characterisation of the period – one of “ideological and political reaction”. An amendment to the original draft underlined the fragile nature of the ‘triumph’ of the bourgeoisie, however. Given that “the organisations of the working class have not been smashed through terror” and “have, in the main, been defeated ideologically”, we believe that the “period of reaction is therefore of a special type”.

Perspectives '98 then goes on to map out our approach to other organisations on the revolutionary left, the Socialist Labour Party, our campaigning work, rapprochement and our Party press. In terms of our own organisation, the document identifies an important problem that I have written about several times in this column. We have suffered from being “under-organised”.

Our work around the SLP and “the differing conditions facing us in Scotland have clearly exacerbated a tendency to the fraying of the organisation, certain degradation in its levels of discipline and cohesion”. The key to fighting this was identified as the institution of a culture of systematic reports flowing to and from the PCC. This is essential to ensure that the leading committee of our Party is able to exercise coherent and detailed leadership in all spheres of the Party’s work.

For the most part, amendments to the document were details rather than substantive alterations. Two changes are worthwhile singling out, however.

First, on elections to the Party leadership. A paragraph has been inserted in the section on ‘The Provisional Central Committee and cells’, which reads:

“It is over four years since our last conference and elections to the PCC. It is important we cultivate good practices now despite the fact we are small numerically. Therefore we should conduct elections to the leadership on a regular basis, every two years.”

It was pointed out in the debate around this amendment that it suffered from formalism. After all, the leadership of our organisation is in effect permanently recallable. Any Party aggregate, as well as a percentage of Party cells, have the right to call for fresh elections to the PCC at any time, not simply every two years.

However, as I pointed out in the discussion, the fact that the Party constitution still exists as a series of resolutions passed at different times, by different conferences, aggregates and Party forums is a weakness. It is quite possible for newer members of the Party not to be aware of constitutional conventions. After all, few people

join an organisation because of its constitution. Once members, comrades must have a working knowledge of the statutory norms and procedures of their organisation. Thus, while the aggregate did not explicitly state this, I think it is important that we undertake to produce our working constitutional draft as soon as possible.

The amendment on elections was overwhelmingly passed, with even comrades who criticised its formalism voting in favour. Despite the criticisms that can certainly be made of the passage, I think the spirit that motivated it is a laudable one and helps us develop the collective culture of our group.

On the paper, there were similar criticisms of an amendment put forward by two comrades. This calls on the *Weekly Worker* team to combat a “haphazard approach” to editorial control. Concretely, “all cells and branches need to have much more input into the paper, allowing comrades to work up more feature articles and supplements. Alongside this the editorial board needs to take a more active role in commissioning individuals to write articles in advance and working on them with the author.”

Again, the spirit of the above is worthy, but some comrades were concerned that it has the taste of a formalistic approach to the problem of insufficient input from comrades into our paper. This is essentially a political problem, not a technical one. However, there is no doubt that the commissioning practices of the paper team have been poor for some time. The amendment identified this and offered a solution of sorts and as such was overwhelmingly supported by the aggregate.

The sharp debate on revolutionary openness was unfortunately cut short by time limits, but is agendaed for our first aggregate of the new year. The PCC has produced a series of theses on the question, a response to recent exchanges in the *Weekly Worker*. The feeling of the leadership is that some comrades have a semi-liberal/anarchistic approach to openness, a sentiment that the publication of any criticism can only do us good in the long run. The theses attempt to redress the balance by underlining the fact that openness is a weapon, that it must be employed with care and caution.

Comrades from Manchester have submitted an alternative resolution which gathered considerable – probably majority – support at this initial meeting. While the text of the resolution itself does not differ in substance to parts of the PCC theses, the preamble criticises the leadership document as a “very considerable retreat from the parameters drawn by Lenin ... on the question of freedom to criticise ...” In substance the comrades believe that “the theses are fundamentally flawed and represent not what their title suggests [ie: on revolutionary openness – MF], but quite the opposite. It is important that, in the face of this attack on the principles of revolutionary openness and democratic centralism, the Party reaffirms its commitment to open ideological struggle.”

As well as internal material and discussions, exchanges on this instructive debate will also be featured in the *Weekly Worker* ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Stalinist sewer

I’m amazed that despite the consolidation of one of the most undemocratic and authoritarian regimes ever seen in the labour movement of this county, the *Weekly Worker* is still calling upon socialists to remain in the SLP. This is surely an example of hypocrisy in the extreme. Was it not the *Weekly Worker* who called upon Labour lefts to join the SLP on the basis of the fact that constitutional change in New Labour had rendered socialists in that party powerless? By the same token Scargill’s SLP constitution has rendered the left of his party equally as powerless as their New Labour counterparts – as was so crudely demonstrated by events at the SLP’s 2nd congress. So what’s the difference? Why offer two conflicting pieces of advice for almost identical situations?

My personal view, which has been reinforced by the 2nd congress, is that the SLP has outlived its usefulness. It is no longer a progressive force and will hinder the future regroupment and growth of the socialist movement in this country. Surely the advice you should be offering to the SLP left is to stop wasting their time and energy on a struggle they can never win and turn outwards to the wider movement – including the Labour left, the Socialist Party, the environmental and anti-racist movement and trade unions – and begin the work of constructing a genuine, broad-based, militant, anti-capitalist organisation.

Leaving the SLP and “doing a Driver”, as Dave Craig so eloquently put it, is not the sin you seem to imply. I did not quit the SLP because I was a coward or because I wanted to hide away in sectarian isolation. On the contrary, after leaving the SLP I became involved in the work of the Socialist Democracy Group, who are trying to create a non-sectarian, broad-based socialist movement, which we originally hoped the SLP could have become. In our short existence we have already attracted supporters from the SLP, the Socialist Party and Socialist Outlook and I am very confident about our future prospects.

When struggles against Blair erupt, as they surely must, when allegiances to New Labour come under strain, socialists will not be looking to join an organisation equally as authoritarian and dictatorial as one they have just turned against. They will be looking for a democratic, broad-based organisation with the freedom to openly debate and discuss ideas. The idea that the SLP may still experience further growth and development is therefore a fallacy. Workers and communities in struggle will, I venture to suggest, bypass the SLP as soon as they get a sniff of its festering internal regime. So what’s the point of marking time swimming against the tide in Scargill’s Stalinist sewer? Socialists in the SLP and any other organisation should be working with progressive forces such as the Socialist Democracy Group, to bring about the regroupment and growth of our movement.

Clr Ian Driver
London

Messy analysis

Individuals who have little interest in a given subject should probably avoid voicing any opinion in public. More often than not, instead of some bracing insight, the contribution is reminiscent of the middle class foot-

ball expert on the *Fast show*.

Ted Jaszynski argues (*Letters Weekly Worker* December 4) that it was the New World Order that forced the republicans to the negotiating table: “Perhaps Sinn Fein/Irish Republican Army thought of doing a Cuba or Vietnam before the USSR collapsed as a rival to imperialism.” Yeah, right up to the collapse of the USSR the IRA were convinced that the armed struggle would be on its own sufficient to drive the British into the sea. There would be no face-saving negotiations. Absolutely not. Why, our supporters on the British left would not hear of it. No, nothing short of unconditional surrender will do. And that’s final.

Which is why in 1979 Gerry Adams declared that military victories were not an option for either side and in the early 1980s was the architect of the Armalite and the ballot box strategy. Probably talking bollocks as usual, eh, Ted?

In the interim the war was prosecuted not to drive the British into the sea, but to force meaningful negotiations by making the statelet ‘ungovernable’. To force constitutional change is the objective of the current negotiations. Changes “that may be short of the goals of Sinn Fein, but would be perfectly in keeping with our primary objectives at this time”.

Given the pivotal role played by the good old USSR, as anyone in Ardoyne and the Short Strand will tell you, it is with remarkable insight that the republican movement set in motion the peace process strategy in 1987 (and according to the *Weekly Worker* its own capitulation) in anticipation of the collapse of its ‘anti-imperialist ally’. Mystic Meg must be a Provo?

The entire peace process, like it or not, is a Provo strategy. It was Adams who initiated the contact with Hume, not the other way round. It was the republicans who got the Americans in as a balance against the Brits. It is the republican movement that called the ceasefire in 1994. Major did not even know there was going to be one. He did not know there was not going to be one either. These facts are now widely acknowledged.

But according to Ted it is the British “ruling class that is united in its approach to the Irish question in general and the peace process in particular, while the catholic/nationalist population is divided”. How united is a ruling class when its prime minister is continually misled by his own security services? Was it an oversight that nobody told Major?

If the peace process was sponsored by imperialism, then why did they cause the 1994 ceasefire to collapse? Similarly, on whose evidence is the division amongst nationalists to be based? If they are so divided, why is the resignation of a dozen people from a Sinn Fein branch in County Louth international news? Because the Brits want it to be. This at a time when the loyalists, armed by British intelligence, are shooting lumps out of each other and nobody bats an eyelid.

Far from being united, the British ruling class are still not clear on how to respond. Some clearly want out, but do not want to be seen to have left. Others would like a settlement, but not at any price. While some will pay any price not to have a settlement. So like any strategical withdrawal, it is proving messy and contradictory.

An apt description of the *Weekly Worker* analysis. According to Ted anybody “who confronts the state peacefully or through force of arms have the unconditional backing of communists”. Only when the



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

peaceniks begin to believe that “progress can only be made through negotiations” do they risk the forfeiture of this unprincipled support. Because thinking along those lines causes you “to view potential disrupters as the enemy ... which objectively places you into the imperialist camp”.

Here we get to the crunch. Dissenters can use violence against the peace process as a legitimate right with your blessing. Presumably, the “dissenters” would also have the backing of the *Weekly Worker* if in their war against imperialism they assassinated the people they held responsible for betrayal? Say Adams and McGuinness, Gerry Kelly and so on. According to your analysis the Continuity Army Council would, objectively, be correct. What would your headline be – ‘Gotcha’? Of course not. Such a scenario would appal you.

At the same time, you believe it unethical for the IRA to use or threaten violence to disrupt the CAC strategy. Even if this strategy is diametrically opposed to their own. Even if in pursuit, as you graciously acknowledge, of “their independent aims” the republican movement conclude that the CAC is objectively in the imperialist camp. Accordingly, communists would be equally outraged if the CAC executed traitors or the IRA executed enemy saboteurs. What happened to self-determination? It appears that this objection to the use of violence is a moral rather than practical question, possibly borne out of confusion over which side you should be on.

That said, the *Weekly Worker* clearly needs reminding that it is the British, not republicans, that militarised the situation. And is not the British but republicans that are attempting to demilitarise it.

Your stated preference, along with the most conservative forces on both islands, for the least worst option – a return to the status quo and military and political stalemate – is ironic.

Dire warnings to republicans about the dangers of stumbling inadvertently into the “camp of imperialism” blinds you to the fact that, objectively, it is from there that you are offering them advice.

Joe Reilly
Red Action

Valuable resource

The *Weekly Worker* is easily the best paper on the left today. Where else would we read an in-depth analysis of other left organisations?

Coupled with the open debates between CPGB comrades that take place on its pages – a feature which other tendencies’ papers lack – the *Weekly Worker* can proudly present itself as a resource for the whole left.

I hope that the CPGB will continue this commitment to openness for many years to come.

Phil Leeson
Derby

London Book Club

The LBC offers massive discounts. Membership is open to *Weekly Worker* subscribers. Contact 0181-459 7146 for details

Fighting the drugs war

The news over the Christmas period has been dominated by the scandal over Jack Straw and his 17-year old son, William. Two journalists from the traditionally Labour-loyal *The Mirror*, Dawn Alford and Tanith Carey, entrapped the unfortunate William - apparently known as 'Whizz' to his friends - into selling them 1.92 grams of cannabis for the princely sum of £10. It was reported on Christmas Eve that the "son of a cabinet minister" had been arrested for drug possession.

There followed a torrent of hypocrisy and humbug from all quarters. The press had great fun playing 'hunt the parent' - even though, of course, all the papers knew from day one the identity of the cabinet minister involved. The general public were fed with clues each day. Anybody with access to the internet or who could read French had the opportunity to 'finger' Jack Straw long before last Tuesday - mainstream French newspapers available in London had the full story from the start.

This unsavoury cat and mouse game allowed the newspapers, particularly the tabloids, to simultaneously thunder about the "evils of drugs" and the importance of "press freedom". Perfect. Meanwhile the rest of official society is

sucked into a thoroughly reactionary and downright *dishonest* debate about the war against drugs - which we all support, right?

The fact that the alleged drugs deal between William Straw and the *Daily Mirror* journalists took place in a pub has not been commented upon once. Surely this hopeless delinquent is guilty of under-age drinking? But we all know that this is generally regarded as a perfectly acceptable form of law breaking (and *drug* taking for that matter). We all know as well that drug taking - alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, etc - is rife amongst the journalistic community - many of them know about the drugs culture from 'the inside'. Yet they like to pose as moral guardians.

The hypocrisy becomes even more pronounced if you take a look at the new year honours list. On this list you will find a certain *Sir* Elton John, a man not exactly famous for his clean living. Not a word said though.

Jack 'man of steel' Straw made the best out of a bad job. When confronted by *The Mirror* with the incriminating evidence he grassed up his own son. He took young William down the police station, and managed to make political capital out of being the concerned parent (and citizen) who did his duty. The 'war against drugs' continues, no matter what the personal cost.

In reality it is a war waged against the working class. It is overwhelmingly working class kids who end up going before the courts - not middle class ones. The inhabitants of leafy Hampstead Heath puff away with no fear of the police knocking down the door in the middle of the night. Oxford University, for instance, is a well known drugs den - the hard stuff is freely available. Fun- nily enough though, it is not often you read about the drug squad raiding Oxford University and arresting students

Jack Straw's son, William: victim of his father's 'war on drugs'

in the middle of the night (giving them a good kicking in the process).

Nor are Jack Straw's proposed 'parenting classes' intended for the middle classes - let alone himself. This is an authoritarian, nanny-ish measure to be directed against working class parents - single mothers in particular. Anybody forced to attend 'parenting classes' will be further stigmatised and alienated from society.

The state uses anti-drugs laws to intervene in and regulate our lives - to make us into 'productive' citizens (parliament has its bars open 24-hours a day). The licensing laws concerning alcohol were introduced during World War I. The state was concerned that drunkenness amongst the workers in the mu-

nitions factories might have a deleterious effect on the production drive. So they cracked down, making it difficult for workers to drink all night, or get a crafty one in first thing in the morning. A clear head and soberness was necessary for imperialism.

Drug taking goes back to the dawn of humanity. They form an integral part of human culture. Therefore drugs need to be socialised - legalised. In and of itself no drug is anti-social - including 'hard drugs' like crack cocaine or heroin. It is their illegality and the general social-economic - ie, material - conditions and circumstances that breed damaging behaviour, not the actual drug. We need a war against alienation, not drugs ●

Eddie Ford

Around the left Positive direction

As we mentioned in the last issue of *Weekly Worker*, a relatively large number of left journals and documents were circulated at the Socialist Labour Party's 2nd congress last December. Some of the journals had never seen the light of day before. One of them goes by the name of *Workers Action*.

As it patiently explains, "This is the first issue of the journal of the former Workers International League majority. In November the WIL was dissolved after it became clear that political differences threatened the group with paralysis. The differences over the course of approximately a year, and centre on interpretation of the united front and the transitional method, and regroupment orientation ... Since the WIL was increasingly unable to function effectively, it was decided that the best course of action was to form two separate groups, with both retaining their affiliation to the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency. Although it has a different name and format, *Workers Action* is directly descended from the WIL and its paper, *Workers News*, and will fight on the same political line" (December-January 1998).

Regrettably, it is true that *Workers Action* has the "same political line" as that emanating from *Workers News* - ie, congenital and doctrinaire pro-Labourism, with an attendant and sometimes

virulent anti-leftism which reminds one of its Gerry Healy antecedents. At one stage comrade Richard Price writes: "Of course every crank and sectarian headbanger on the left is an anti-Labourite." Not true, comrade ... but it does enable him to equate anti-Labourism with clinical madness. Like those who believed the world was flat or that god created the sun on the fourth day, comrade Price revels in his ignorant 'common sense', because it is what the 'majority' think.

Ludicrously comrade Price mocks the SLP's electoral performance as "derisory", taking particularly delight at its disappointing vote in the Paisley South by-election (153 votes - 0.6%). Would comrade Price be unhappy then if the SLP started to secure tens of thousands of votes in elections?

No, of course not. But comrade Price does not really think any left group should stand against New Labour - fundamentally he believes that bourgeois elections are about choosing the butcher, not fighting for an alternative. The comrade goes on to say: "Worse still, it compounded its sectarianism towards Labour-following workers by instructing SLP members in Scotland not even to talk to the Scottish Socialist Alliance" - an action he describes as "completely crass".

Some of these criticisms from New

WIL are not without foundation - obviously. But what is its solution to the current impasse? Simple, says comrade Price. To *accept* the "fact that broad sections of the working class have retained passive Labourist illusions" and then cut your coat according to your cloth. Therefore, the SLP left "should set itself less ambitious goals for the time being, but sharpen its political weapons. There is no long-term future for an organisation which blurs the distinction between reform and revolution." Is it possible for the left, whether inside or outside the SLP, to be any *less* ambitious than it is now? The comrades in New WIL are surely preaching defeatism and passivity.

In the opinion of *Workers Action*, "A loose networking organisation is no alternative to the SLP ... The most important contribution the SLP left could make now would be *to declare* for a new Marxist organisation" (my emphasis). The SLP left - and the non-SLP left for that matter - can "declare" all it likes, but that will not conjure up a "new Marxist organisation" - apart from just another sect.

Comrade Price ends on a friendly note. If the SLP left "moves in a positive direction it deserves comradely and non-sectarian cooperation from all revolutionary socialists". For comrade Price, a "positive direction" essentially means pro-Labourism and voting for Blair.

For us the key is uniting communists into one democratic-centralist organisation - whether they work in the Labour Party or the SLP is entirely secondary. This "positive direction" points not to another dire sect, but a class party of advanced workers - a re-forged Communist Party ●

Don Preston

action

■ 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.

■ Hillingdon hospital workers fight on

The Hillingdon strikers in west London, deserted by Unison, still need your support. Send donations urgently, payable to Hillingdon Strikers Support Campaign, c/o 27 Townsend Way, Northwood, Middlesex UB8 1JD.

■ Irish political prisoners campaign

For more details contact: Fuascailt, PO Box 3923, London NW5 1RA. Tel: 0181-985 8250 or 0956-919 871.

■ Support the dockers

Donations are urgently needed, to Jimmy Davies, payable to Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards Appeal Fund, Liverpool Dockers Shop Stewards Committee, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS. Tel: 0151-207 3388; Fax: 0151-207 0696.

■ Magnet workers call picket

Wednesday January 21 - 11.00am outside the Radisson Hotel, Portman Square, London (just off Baker Street). On this date the Berisfords company which owns Magnet Kitchens will be holding its shareholders' AGM meeting. Berisfords refuses to accept any sort of negotiated settlement to this long running dispute, relying on intimidation instead. All those wishing to support the 350 sacked Magnet workers should turn up. Please bring your banners and posters. Organised by the Magnet Strike Committee. For more information Fax/Tel: 01325-282389

From The Call, paper of the British Socialist Party, January 3 1918

The peace demonstrations in Petrograd

The great demonstrations in Petrograd on Sunday last afford evidence of the stability of the present Russian government. The course of negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, regarded in Russia as favourable to the conclusion of an early peace, has greatly enhanced the popularity of the Bolsheviks.

A telegram from the Bolshevik Telegraph Agency relates that at Sunday's monster demonstration several hundred thousand workmen, soldiers and sailors took part. The procession began at 10 in the morning, in the environs of Petrograd, and was still passing along the Nevsky Prospect at five in the afternoon. Men from every factory marched in the ranks, headed by the Red Guards. Thousands of red banners and flags were carried in the demonstration, many bearing words to the effect that the only Constituent Assembly that can gain the support of the workers must march side by side with the soviets.

A fact that points well for the internal peace of Russia was the presence of the Ukrainians in the procession, and their unity with the Bolshevik workmen in the demand for action against those who still strive to undermine the revolutionary government ●

1918
.....
Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

Simon Harvey of the SLP Where now for SLP democrats?

With new year festivities over, the reality of political life now returns centre-stage for the left of the Socialist Labour Party. Licking our wounds after the bureaucratically enforced drubbing we received at the December 13-14 congress, most are reassessing their orientation to the SLP.

Despite, or rather because of, the extent of the stitch-up, the political situation in the SLP is marked by a certain fluidity which has been absent for some time. The Fisc-NUM alliance is fragile, not least due to Scargill's sponsorship of Stalin Society member Harpal Brar onto the executive and his victory in abolishing black sections.

Yet, rather than taking advantage of this fluidity, the SLP left is in danger of disintegrating. The spontaneous unity of the democratic forces forced on us at congress looks unlikely to be sustained. Nevertheless we must fight to maintain it. The alternative is the sectarian wilderness.

The coming together of the Democratic Platform, the *Marxist Bulletin*, the Campaign for a Democratic SLP and the SLP Republicans was a victory for SLP democracy. Unity of such forces around a common platform for democracy is a necessity. Ironically, it is Scargill who has the ability to keep these forces together. Outside the SLP, unless there is regroupment in the Socialist Alliances project, we will see the break-up of this fragile unity.

Petty sectarianism and egoism are raising their heads. Rather than attempting to cement and build on the unity of democrats reached in the 'statement of 57 congress delegates and observers', many comrades have wheeled out their own barrows and seem intent on pushing them right out of the SLP.

For many, leaving the SLP may seem a reasonable perspective. All things considered, the SLP can no longer be transformed into a vibrant, democratic vehicle for working class advance. But this is not to say it is completely dead as a project in itself. The SLP remains the only all-Britain party project with any social weight outside the Labour Party. There are hardly any green pastures of working class realignment at the present time. As distasteful as it may be, there ain't much else except the SLP. It is this political reality on which we must base our decisions, not some imagined perfect road to socialism.

Despite the monstrous internal regime, the SLP can still grow. Though unattractive to the Labour left at present, the SLP still has Arthur Scargill. In the minds of millions of workers, Scargill is not the anti-democratic creature the left of the SLP know him to be, but a militant fighter for the workers, who stood up to Thatcher right down to the wire. It is ludicrous to suggest, as some comrades on the left do, that workers do not join bureaucratic organisations. The reality of the workers' movement, not least that of the 20th century, stands in complete contradiction to such an idle wish - one which amounts to nothing more than moralistic self-projection.

Those of us who want to build a democratic, militant, class struggle

party of socialism cannot treat organisational affiliation on a personal whim. You cannot build a coherent, authoritative and trusted revolutionary leadership around people who flip-flop between groups, treating organisations as this year's latest finery. This is not the morality of serious working class politicians. The current behaviour of the 'Strasbourg Two' is exemplary by comparison, in that it stands in stark contrast to the morality of many on or around the SLP left.

The Socialist Democracy Group is a good example of an organisation with no grasp of working class morality. It is composed of a bunch of 'I Ran Aways'. The group was formed by people who simply walked out of the Socialist Party, despite having ample opportunity to put forward and argue their positions on the national committee, at conference and in the SP's internal bulletin. Phil Hearse previously left Socialist Outlook to join the SP (then Militant Labour). Next he abandoned the SP in favour of the of the SDG. Now he is about to leave the organisation he has just set up to live in another country. Nowhere did these individuals stay and fight, whether in the Socialist Party, the SLP or Socialist Outlook.

In contrast, MEPs Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr are not meekly relinquishing their Labour Party membership. They are trying to win as many of their comrades to their position. In this way, they take the high moral ground. They shift the debate onto the morality of the Labour Party leadership - not just in terms of party democracy, but also its viciously anti-working class programme. At the same time, they are not remaining idle in terms of preparing a political sea for themselves after the inevitable occurs.

It seems likely that these comrades will become involved in the Socialist Alliances, in Scotland almost certainly, and perhaps in England and Wales as well. Such an initiative could provide the spark to create a truly all-Britain Socialist Alliance.

Pro-party revolutionaries, the sterile and dogmatic process of Trotskyite regroupment notwithstanding, have three strings to their bow: the SLP, the Socialist Alliances and the ongoing process of revolutionary rapprochement initiated by the CPGB. Obviously, these processes are not mutually exclusive.

The meeting of SLP democrats this Saturday provides an opportunity to discuss these issues. Naturally, the main debate will be over whether to stay in the SLP or not. Those wanting to leave are either irredeemably sectarian or full of moralistic self-importance. Some comrades are seriously proposing to leave the SLP to join groups which favour exclusive orientation to the Labour Party! Some are trying to create new organisations out of thin air - and not around programme or perspective, but themselves as political egos. Others want to constitute themselves as the left wing of non-existent social democratic formations where the right wing will let them be. Still others seem to be slipping into the swamp

of localism. It is all pie in the sky, comrades.

Unity is what we need - not unprincipled unity and not unity around pipe dreams. The fight for democracy in the SLP is the only basis on which we can unite at present. We can have no illusions about achieving this. Nothing short of a political revolution in the SLP can turn it into a positive process for working class self-liberation. And for this to happen, society will have changed to such an extent that militant workers will most likely have grabbed hold of and forged some other weapon to achieve their victory.

Yet socialists must have an orientation to the mass as understood in a political way. 'Mass' in this context does not mean millions of atomised workers, but those workers beginning to constitute themselves as a class for themselves. The SLP, as putrid as it may seem to our delicate r-r-revolutionary sensibilities, is one of the few arenas which have brought such a mass together, and, not unimportantly, brought together revolutionaries from across a wide spectrum of the left. We still have Arthur Scargill to thank for that. Such an opportunity is too precious and rare to just abandon.

■ Block vote phantom

I have been doing some investigation into the mysterious North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners' Association. Though I am yet to pin it down, it seems that this is not a trade union after all, but a retired miners' association. It was mentioned as a positive thing that the NUM is one of the few unions which allows sacked or retired members to retain union membership. I agree. However, the SLP affiliate which delivered Scargill his 75% majority on anything he wanted is not of the NUM.

Clause II, section (3) of the SLP constitution states:

"Affiliated membership shall consist of:

- (a) trade unions recognised by the party's executive committee as bona fide trade unions;
- (b) Constituency Socialist Labour Parties."

So it seems that for its own purposes, the NEC has ludicrously declared the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners' Association to be a "bona fide trade union". The amendments to the constitution which were recommended by the Campaign for a Democratic Socialist Labour Party to allow for the affiliation of "working class, socialist or progressive organisations" at the discretion of congress would have allowed for the miners' association to affiliate quite nicely without Arthur having to flout his own constitution.

I would welcome working class organisations affiliating to a federal party. But they must be real, based on an active membership democratically mandating their delegates. Otherwise, as Scargill demonstrated with the NWCCMA, they become the tool of bureaucratic labour dictators ●

Facing up to realities

Extracts from a discussion paper circulating within Lewisham and Greenwich Socialist Labour Party

Following the dramatic events of the party congress our branch needs to thoroughly assess the nature and future direction of our party and our work as communists, socialists and radicals. Failure to do this could result in a number of active members being lost to the party.

The call to establish the SLP was a correct one. In less than two years it has established itself as a small but significant break with New Labour and the Labour Party. Militant trade union leaders, union activists, and socialists from a wide range of backgrounds have been drawn to its ranks.

Despite our small size, our influence within the labour movement is important, which is in direct inversion to the much larger Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party. Tensions and splits within these organisations are developing as a direct result of our presence.

The party stood 63 candidates in the general election, two of those in Lewisham. Over six million people saw our election broadcast, four million election addresses were delivered, hundreds of thousands were able to read about our policies on Ceefax, thousands of homes were canvassed and we gained over 52,000 votes, the highest socialist vote to the left of the LP since the CPGB in 1966. Our candidates gained almost two percent on average.

Locally we have built from the ground up one of one of the largest and most active branches in the party. We gained one of the highest votes for the party in standing John [Mulrenan] in Deptford. We delivered thousands of leaflets and participated in numerous meetings arguing for socialist politics.

We have fought two council by-elections and gained over five percent of the vote in July for Terry Dunn. Comrade Tony Link, a ward councillor for Hither Green, has joined us, forming a partnership on the council with councillor Ian Page from the SP in working to defend jobs and services.

We have established a Save Lewisham Housing Campaign and have made links with tenant activists and local trade unionists fighting off proposals to privatise over 7,000 tenants' homes.

All this hard work, experience and activity must not be thrown away. Those socialists disappointed at the outcome of the party conference and planning to walk away from the party should be persuaded to remain. Notwithstanding the events at our congress, it is possible that a further layer of trade union activists and general LP members will break as the LP turns ever more rightwing. At present there is no alternative but to continue the work to win the party to a more democratic path. However, we should be alive to the developments outside the party and the possible formation of new political forces.

Yet as socialists we need to be sober about what we have achieved but also about what we are as a national party and in what direction the party is now likely to travel following our party conference. If we are unable to alter its course and direction over the

next two years, we will need to ask and answer the question if as a branch we are content to remain a part of it.

Comrade Arthur Scargill is both our greatest asset and biggest liability. Membership of our party remains small at probably less than 3,000 with all too few active members, and not surprisingly over the last six months we have lost members. Authoritarian party regimes gradually depoliticise and demotivate members.

Our party could have already grown into a substantial organisation and formed the basis of a party of recomposition of the British left on a similar level to those in Italy, Spain and Germany. It still has the potential to do so. To perform such a task it will have to be open, pluralistic and democratic. The leadership of our party could have been based on the best of talents from the breadth of our party rather than the 'approved' and hand-picked. The decision of the party to abolish black sections further reduces the possibility of the party attracting additional layers of support, especially in London.

We should continue to ignore the sectarian attitude of the party leadership. The politics adopted at our conference makes our job harder, but we should continue our work in building a socialist party from the bottom up. We need to present a pluralistic and non-sectarian face locally. Working to build trade union solidarity work, supporting local workers in struggle and defending jobs and services.

The immediate direction of the SLP is now clear. The SLP is in danger of becoming a large sect, with strong hangovers from the worst of the 'old' LP. A far cry from the sort of new socialist party many of us wanted to see. The party is likely to be increasingly dominated by Arthur Scargill and his entourage in the short term. It was inevitable that our party would have the birth marks of its founder, but those counterbalancing his Stalinist tendencies now have a much weaker position on the NEC.

The election of the leader and founder of the Stalin Society onto the NEC could even draw into the party's orbit members of the Stalinist New Communist Party and Indian Workers Association. The dream of the *Weekly Worker* for a reformed CP could be coming true! The rest of Europe is seeing the demise of Stalinist parties. In Britain we are perhaps seeing a rebirth!

The events of our congress have demonstrated that three men were planning to cast 3,000 secret votes from a retired miners' welfare society, swamping the hard won 1,000 members from the 114 CSLPs and single trade union branch represented. The result was that the leadership gained re-election on block and won all the votes by a landslide margin, apart from the black sections vote.

Unless the direction of the party is changed, sadly we cannot expect our party to become the sole basis of a new socialist party in Britain. Our task must be to ensure that the SLP goes on to play an active role in the likely emergence of new forces of the left ●

Lewisham SLP
Socialist Democracy Group

Hitting the big time

The left in this country has long been crippled by an almost complete lack of imagination and political verve. Instead of a healthy thirst for the big time, it normally prefers pedestrian routinism - whether organisational or theoretical/ideological. A placid calm - or inertia - reigns throughout the left press, disturbed only occasionally by bad-tempered 'polemics' against those who dare to attempt to break free from the conformist straitjacket.

One organisation that has never been afraid to make a big splash in the tiny left pond has been the Revolutionary Communist Party - or perhaps I should say the Organisation Formerly Known As the RCP (OFKARCP).

Thanks partly to the efforts of the Independent Television News, with some help from that scandal-sheet know as *The Observer*, its monthly journal *LM* - still referred to by those lagging behind events as '*Living Marxism*' - has become relatively well known. In fact, its masthead proudly proclaims each month, 'The mag ITN wants to gag'.

We have long commented on the RCP's flair for self-publicity and its dynamism, especially when contrasted to the clapped-out and indolent leadership of many other left organisations. Its former weekly publication, *The Next Step*, was by the very low standards of the British left a lively, iconoclastic and entertaining read - a refreshing change again. The actual paper itself was well produced, with an arresting lay out and design (itself something of a rarity on the revolutionary left).

Unfortunately, this dynamism was accompanied by an unbearable arrogance, stupendous sectarianism and an irritating sixth form-type precociousness - qualities that *LM* shares in abundance and has developed to near perfection. So much so indeed, that *LM* often appears to live in its own tiny self-made world, hermetically sealed off from real political events and movements. The 1997 general election, for instance, seems to have passed it by almost completely, and the Socialist Labour

Party does not even register on the *LM* Richter scale.

But, having said that, the RCP appears to have pulled off a major publicity coup - one in the real world for sure, and one of enviable proportions. The 'RCP' has managed to expropriate - or hijack - three hours of prime-time television, in the form of a programme called *Against nature*. It can only give us all hope.

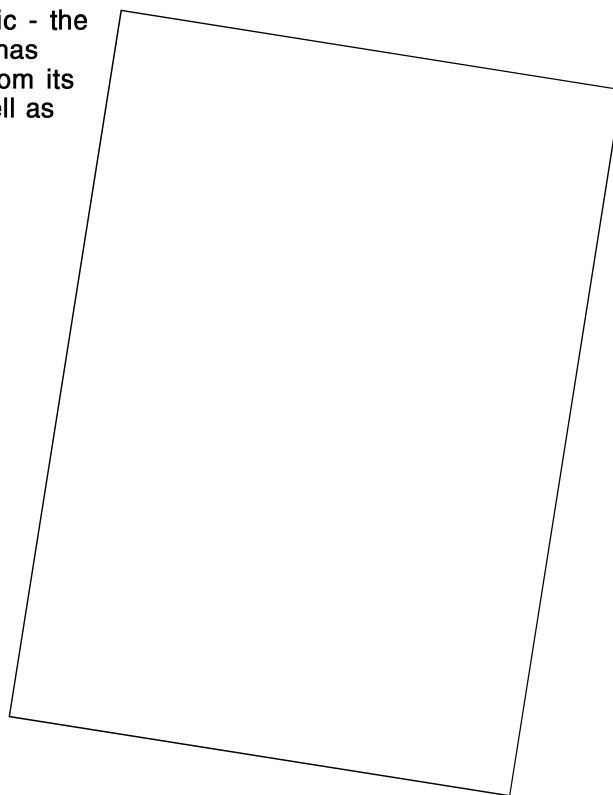
This Channel Four programme delivered a much needed broadside against environmentalism - mainstream and fringe - and 'Greenism' in general, attacking the neo-Malthusianism, not to say misanthropy, that lies at the heart of much environmentalism. Given the fact that some of the basic tenets of 'Greenism' have become almost universal 'common sense' - particularly its reactionary anti-science prejudices - it is only to be welcome that its ideological hegemony is being challenged (not that we necessarily agree with the critiques put forward by *Against nature*, some of which seemed merely petulant). Our slogan must be 'Red not green'.

The key interviewee and protagonist on the programme was Dr Frank Füredi of Darwin College at Kent University, a distinguished academic and specialist in development studies. Füredi is *LM*'s chief theoretician, a role he seems to have taken over from 'Frank Richards' of the RCP, his alter-ego. The other main contributors were John Gillot, *LM*'s science correspondent, and Robert Plomin, who recently had a very sympathetic interview in *LM*. The director of the programme, Martin Dunkin, interestingly describes himself as a Marxist.

A number of years ago the RCP decided to abandon outmoded and dogmatic concepts like political intervention and political practice. The clarion call was 'Go to the suburbs' - a jokey euphemism for embracing a narrow intellectualist project with distinctly 'post-modernist' undertones. This project involved complete immersion in the petty bourgeois student/academic milieu.

Against nature is clear evidence that they have been successfully burrowing away in polite circles: attend-

Still iconoclastic - the the 'Marxism' has disappeared from its contents as well as its cover



ing the right dinner parties, going to the right conferences, regular contact with bourgeois journalists, etc. Frank Füredi's partner, Ann Bradley, has also become a minor media personality, primarily thanks to her position as chair of the National Child Birth Trust. Yet her achievements are small fry compared to Frank's *Against nature* exposure.

Not surprisingly, *Against nature* ruffled a lot of 'green' feathers and sparked off an anti-communist witch hunt - albeit of a very liberal, 'civilised' and low-level sort. The attack was led by the environmentalist George Monbiot writing in *The Guardian*, under the banner, 'Marxists found alive in C4' (December 18). He complained bitterly about the "shrill ideology" which drove *Against nature*, a condition which is completely absent of course from all the other programmes that appear on television.

Now the witch hunt - why was such 'politically incorrect' material allowed

on the TV at all? As Monbiot puts it, "Where might it have come from? At first we thought the far right might have been involved. But, over the past three weeks, another picture has begun to form. *Against nature* is the product of an extreme political ideology, but it comes from a different quarter: an obscure and cranky sect called the Revolutionary Communist Party."

In other words, we are not meant to take seriously any viewpoints associated with the words 'revolutionary' or 'communist' - by definition any such views can only be "obscure" or "cranky", and therefore ruled out of order. But Monbiot's complaints do not stop there: "The only brand of Marxism which follows the line the series takes is the RCP's ... Line by line, point by point, *Against Nature* follows the agenda laid down by the RCP." How dreadful. Naturally, if *Against nature* had followed "line by line" the agenda of Population Concern, Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth, that would be an entirely mat-

ter altogether.

For the Monbiots, the stranglehold of green ideology is taken to be near sacrosanct - all counter-opinions must be labelled with a health warning in order not to confuse the poor old general public. Monbiot explains: "There was no presenter; instead we were instructed, in true documentary style, by an authoritarian voice-over. The RCP/*Living Marxism* interviewees were not captioned as such, but presented as independent experts." Presumably, Monbiot would have liked it if every RCP/*LM* member/interviewee had had the caption, 'communist nutter' prominently displayed. All in the interests of balance and honesty, you see.

But it transpires that the good burghers - or policemen - of Media-land are getting all hot and bothered about nothing. In a letter to *The Guardian* defending himself from Monbiot's quasi-McCarthyism, Frank Füredi revealed: "My interest in party politics of any sort during the past seven years has been nil. Anyone who has read my last four books would find them difficult to situate within the Marxist tradition or, for that matter, any political tradition. I prefer to describe myself as a libertarian humanist, whose main concern is with the general Culture of Fear that prevails in society" (December 19).

This may come as news to many readers of *Living Marxism/LM*. There has not been a single article openly explaining when this decision to dump Marxism and embrace "libertarian humanism" took place, or explaining the reasoning behind this 180° shift in orientation. Nor have the voices of those who must have opposed this move by the Füredi-ites appeared in *LM*. Perhaps Dr Frank is more of a Tony Cliff than he would like to think - though he most definitely will never make the grade as a labour dictator.

We would all love to know what actually happened inside the RCP of old, and what is going on at the moment in the OFKARCP. But we will probably have to wait forever for an official explanation in the now 'non-political' *LM* ●

Eddie Ford

Rapprochement, refoundation and a new tendency

As revolutionary democratic communists, we aim for world communism by means of the revolutionary struggle for democracy. In this struggle we want to replace parliamentary democracy with workers' democracy (soviets or workers' councils), the most advanced form of democracy ever achieved in the world. In the struggle for workers' democracy, we seek to advance bourgeois democracy and democratic rights in a revolutionary way. We must unite as a single tendency.

Over the past years two important questions debated on the left have been refoundation and rapprochement. Developing a correct view of

these issues is a major weapon in the battle against the sectarianism that has dominated the British left. The SLP has been a small step on the road of refoundation. Equally, as we know, the SLP is on the brink of going pair-shaped. That is something that revolutionary democratic communists must fight to prevent.

Discussions about rapprochement have involved the Communist Party of Great Britain, Revolutionary Democratic Group, Open Polemic, International Socialist Group and the Republican Worker Tendency. The high point was probably when Open Polemic took up representative entry into the CPGB and the low point was

when that was suspended. Marxists have never lacked the will to succeed and so it is encouraging to note that after all the advances and setbacks the process of rapprochement is still edging forward.

A small step was taken at the beginning of 1998 to set up a revolutionary democratic communist tendency. An Organising Committee will shortly be holding its first meeting with representatives of the CPGB Provisional Central Committee, RDG and Open Polemic. The RWT has also been invited. Discussions have already been taking place with them. We are optimistic that they will formally join the Organising Committee for the joint aggregates we are planning to hold.

A tendency is not a party. It is a pre-party or sub-party formation. It may be unified or fragmented. It is not a faction of another organisation. It is part of the wider communist movement. In the post-war period there have been three main tendencies in the communist movement - Stalinist, Trotskyist and state capitalist. The old CPGB, Militant Tendency and the IS/SWP were the main representatives of these tendencies.

Today the Stalinist tendency has

been reduced to a declining existence on the fringes. It includes the New Communist Party, the Stalin Society, the Association of Communist Workers, Partisan and the International Leninist Workers Party, etc. The Trotskyist tendency includes the Socialist Party, Workers Power, Socialist Outlook, the Spartacists and the International Bolshevik Tendency, etc. The state capitalist tendency is the least fragmented. We have the SWP, RDG, International Socialist Group, and the RWT. In this case the vast majority of 'state caps' in the UK are in the SWP, which therefore almost coincides with the state cap tendency.

The revolutionary democratic communist tendency is the first new tendency to emerge within the communist movement after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ending of the USSR. It will begin life as a multi-faction tendency. It is likely to contain elements of 'the old order' of Stalinism, Trotskyism and state capitalism within it. It will reflect a certain rapprochement between the least sectarian elements from the old tendencies. The old debates, which will no doubt continue, will not be the *raison d'être* for the new tendency. It will be our commitment to revolutionary and democratic

forms of communism that will fuse eventually into a coherent alternative to the old tendencies which still dominate our movement.

The new tendency begins with independent organisations gathering under one roof. These may in the process of development become factions of the tendency. In the process of development the original differences may disappear and new ones arise. The freedom for factions to express their views will be one aspect of the new tendency. It is one reason why the words 'democratic communist' appear in the title. The ideas of democracy and openness cannot be found in the main tendencies or even in the fragmented groups which make them up.

With a new year and the emergence of a long awaited and desperately needed new tendency, we should be cautiously optimistic. We are set to advance. No doubt there will be new setbacks and new problems that we have not yet imagined or confronted. But with patience and determination we will rally the best working class militants and communists to our banner ●

Dave Craig
(RDG, faction of the SWP)

By the standards of western Europe the United States is a highly religious society. According to a US national election study of 1992, more than half those questioned stated that god played an “extremely important part” in their lives. More than 25% of adults attended church at least once a week and only one third said they would ever consider voting for an atheist.

Against this background Clyde Wilcox provides a useful assessment of the present strength and influence of the religious right in American politics. He outlines how bourgeois commentators have alternated between grossly overestimating and totally writing off this political movement over the past couple of decades. However, Wilcox estimates that during this time its support has remained constant at around 10 to 15%.

Nevertheless it remains a highly important pressure group, particularly its most influential component, the Christian Coalition. This organisation’s weight within the Republican Party is so pronounced that all six 1996 Republican presidential hopefuls addressed its conference the previous year.

The Christian right movement has a social agenda of the most reactionary kind. It calls for religion to be placed at the centre of public life, particularly in state schools. It wants to end sex education and calls instead for children to be taught the biblical ‘theory’ of creation. It believes a woman’s place is in the home looking after her children, and of course it is virulently anti-abortion and anti-gay.

The Christian Coalition’s founder, Pat Robertson, himself a Republican presidential candidate in 1988, has been prone to extreme, not to say unhinged, statements. Wilcox quotes a 1995 fundraising letter sent out to activists under Robertson’s name: “The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a

Smug complacency

Clyde Wilcox *Onward Christian soldiers?* Westview Press 1996, pp180

socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practise witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians” (p9).

The author gives many other examples of statements and actions by those who might be termed ‘loony righties’: such as the attempt to have *The wizard of Oz* banned from schools because one of its characters is a ‘good witch’; or the picket of a seaside bakery which sold “anatomically correct cookies” deemed to be pornographic. More seriously some Christian groupings have been linked to violent attacks on medical workers providing abortions.

Yet he shows that such actions do not enjoy the support of most activists, let alone broad sections of the public as a whole. Robertson’s extremism is more than balanced within the Coalition by the pragmatism of co-leader Ralph Reed, who projects his organisation as a “Christian chamber of commerce” or a “Christian AFL-CIO”. Whereas Robertson appears to want to impose his own version of ‘Christian family life’ on an unwilling US society, Reed portrays the movement as a defensive struggle and uses the language of victimisation. According to Wilcox, Christian right leaders “frequently lace their speeches with quotations from Martin Luther King Jr, and often compare their movement with the civil rights movement of the 1960s” (p53).

They are able to get away with this by portraying themselves as op-

pressed by the secular US state. The first amendment of the constitution is democratically light years ahead of Britain: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” - a sentiment which communists heartily endorse. Prayers and bible readings are prohibited in US state schools - unlike in the UK, where they are a legal requirement.

Leaders like Reed play down the Christian right’s desire for “the establishment of religion”, claiming instead that the school ban is an infringement of the clause “prohibiting the free exercise thereof”. Here their support is firmer, as fewer than half of American adults support the supreme court ruling that precludes classroom prayer.

Although support for the Christian Coalition comes overwhelmingly from “white evangelical Christians”, who according to Wilcox make up approximately 25% of the US population, it is making strenuous efforts to embrace the mainstream churches and black evangelicals. It also seeks support for its policies from religious Jews.

However, it is handicapped in its attempts to win over blacks by its ultra-right socio-economic policies. The “economic individualism that comes from the Calvinist heritage” (p126) leads it to call for a sub-minimum wage and the ending of all welfare. Nevertheless the backing of the organised Christian right has, from the point of view of US capital, been most

welcome for the implementation of welfare cuts.

But Wilcox demonstrates that on social issues it has made no real progress, being unable to claw back the inroads of the women’s movement or ostracise homosexuals. Bourgeois society continues to promote its own version of female equality (for middle class careerists), and gays are more accepted in all spheres of official US society. Evolution and sex education continue to be taught in most state schools.

Only over its vicious anti-women campaign against abortion has it forced some reactionary change in a few states, causing some women to cross state lines when obstacles have been erected. While these outrageous attacks should not be underestimated, even in this sphere the Christian right is very far from its goal of banning abortion under all circumstances. Only a small minority of US Christians, including catholics, support that.

Where rightwing Christians have managed to win control of school boards (sometimes using ‘stealth’ tactics - ie, concealing their views), they have usually been voted out after trying to implement their policies. Only within the Republican Party have activists succeeded in gaining a foothold, winning control of some states’ nomination processes.

Wilcox’s own position is one of a mainstream bourgeois liberal, asking, “Is the movement good or bad for America?” (p149). He believes it to

be positive in that it has managed to draw a section of society previously contemptuous of the bourgeois political process towards participation (presumably just like millions of other alienated citizens). But this will only be consolidated if the pragmatic wing of the movement succeeds in exercising a moderating influence over its fundamentalist colleagues. In the meantime, “the tone of political discourse would be improved if both sides [Christian extremists and their radical opponents] would calm down a bit” (p151).

Thus Wilcox comes to the contradictory conclusion that it is possible for the Christian right to become fully accepted in the American mainstream - but only if it ceases *to be* the Christian right. As only a small minority of citizens accept their programme, organisations such as the Christian Coalition could never hope to force through their reactionary extremism, he says. Just as those other extremists - communists who call for workers to take control over their own lives - can never gain a mass following of course.

Wilcox’s static thinking leaves him blind to both possibilities. Politics is viewed as a process decided by passive voters with virtually unchanging opinions. The possibility that millions can be drawn into mass *action* - reactionary or revolutionary - totally escapes him.

We communists do not share his smug complacency. When societies are thrown into crisis the ‘extreme’ can suddenly appear to the masses as the only sensible option. All sections are drawn to the poles of revolution or fascistic counterrevolution. In the USA, where religion holds such sway, fascism could well take on the appearance of the defence of Christian family values, necessitating the bloody suppression of all those deemed to threaten them ●

Alan Fox

Frustration and disgust

Kevin Williamson *Drugs and the party line* Rebel Inc 1997, pp141, £5.99

For me this book sums up everything I knew to be the case about the phoney and hypocritical “drugs war”, but I never had the facts to back up. Now, thanks to this unemotive book which oozes with truth and clarity, the facts are there for all who want and are prepared to see them.

The 36-year old ‘war against drugs’ costs world governments at least £69 billion per year. It funds anti-drugs agencies who are fighting a battle that was lost before it began. This book starts by looking at the first attempts at alcohol and tobacco prohibition. It concentrates on the lessons that should have been learnt from the Great Prohibition in America in the 1920s. “Virtually overnight the Land of the Free became a land of smugglers, gangsters, pirates, moonshine liquor, police and judicial corruption, and political chicanery, with the whole sorry mess dancing to the tune of speakeasy madness and machine guns on the streets” (p13).

Prohibition, Williamson argues, does not stop substance use; it only criminalises the users. He shows that attacks on recreational substances have gone hand in hand with attacks on the culture they are part of. Cannabis was banned as the result of vested economic interests reacting against a

‘threatening’ youth culture which they seemed unable to control. This often had racist undertones. Not only were there hysterical attacks on the tablet Ecstasy, but also the 1997 Criminal Justice Act banned illegal gatherings which played “loud repetitive beats”. Ecstasy, techno and dance culture were demonised in one fell swoop.

Prohibition and abstentionist messages are the ones the bourgeois reactionaries - Labour and Tory - feel most comfortable pedalling. It suits their pseudo-morality and ‘Christian values’. It gets them elected through playing on irrational fears and makes them appear strong law and order types. Yet in reality they are hypocrites who willingly suppress the facts while young people, particularly working class youth on the council estates, are criminalised as a direct result of their ‘drugs war’.

Williamson provides the reader with facts and statistics which cannot rationally be argued against. Despite the expenditure of billions, illegal drug-taking is inexorably on the increase. The people who benefit from prohibition are the anti-drugs agencies set up to ‘tackle the problem’ and the gangsters whose trade in illegal drugs is worth £400 billion per annum.

Decriminalisation along Dutch lines would be a positive step (from the point of view of users), but still leaves control in the hands of gangsters.

The facts point to the logic of the legalisation of all drugs, thus reducing drastically drug-related deaths, wiping out the black market and cutting property crime (a heroin addict on the Castlemilk estate in Glasgow needs £300 a week to feed their habit - crime becomes inevitable).

Williamson shows clearly that prohibition/abstentionism does not work, but believes that there is much more to harm reduction than needle exchanges and methadone programmes. One of his most convincing arguments is when he details the Widnes experiment, where Dr John Marks provided pharmaceutical heroin to registered addicts. The results were phenomenal and have subsequently been suppressed by government agencies:

- 96% reduction in acquisition crime;
- no locally acquired HIV infections from drug use;
- the black market had no longer a role in providing for the punters; therefore the gangsters moved to more fruitful areas;
- 96% reduction in new addicts;
- heroin deaths were zero.

The addicts were able to stabilise their lives and function as part of their communities. Real harm reduction was taking place. All of this has been reversed since the experiment was closed down, allegedly through lack of money. Drug tsars are apparently more *Sun* and *Mirror*-friendly than a ‘free drugs to junkies’ policy.

As you read the book, you cannot but help be filled with a sense of frustration and disgust. Disgust that the ‘debate’ goes on without working class people being given the facts or a voice. Instead, salacious and sensational media stories are where work-

The state criminalises the leisure activity of thousands in striving to control every aspect of our lives

ing class people are expected to get their ‘facts’ about drugs. Frustration, because if the real facts were made clear and prejudice and moral panic were taken out of the debate, the ‘great British public’ would be demanding the legalisation of drugs.

While the politicians lie, it is our young people who are criminalised - not Sir Elton John and Bill Clinton. When children as young as 10 are injecting heroin in Glasgow’s estates, then clearly current laws protect no one. Williamson shows harm reduction as a package of education, facilities and legalisation, but sets the problem clearly in the context of alienation under the death throes of capitalism.

Williamson’s work does a service to us all and should be compulsory reading for all those who simplistically think the message should be ‘just say no’ to drugs ●

Mary Ward

This line 5mm beyond crop

C.T.

This line 5mm beyond crop

Prejudice or racism

In trying to make a strong case for the CPGB's position against immigration controls and responding to my incorrect positions, as he fondly imagines them, Alan Fox ('Fight oppression not prejudice' *Weekly Worker* November 20 1997) makes several minor and major mistakes.

By concentrating on the superficial, official policies of the state, in its national and local manifestations, we are able only to obtain a partial reality. A number of deeply serious questions are raised that need extensive research and discussion to plumb. For example, can racism be distilled down to a stinking essence that concentrates only on skin colour? A very doubtful proposition. After all, Germany's Nazis applied a test of 'racial' taint to those of Romani ancestry whereby anyone was eligible for the camps if merely one of their great-grandparents was a Rom, twice as exacting a test as that applied to Jews. Hostile perceptions of difference, where overlapping manifestations of chauvinism, xenophobia and racism are concerned, is anyway fraught with difficulties in the way of scientific, communist assessment. But without doubt there is an element of racism in the way in which many migrants are treated on arrival at Britain's ports of entry; and racist oppression is a fact of life in today's Britain.

Roma whose ancestors came to Britain centuries ago are still facing racism today. Recently in parliament, on Monday November 24, politicians were complaining about problems caused by *indigenous* Roma, that is, British 'gypsies', in their constituencies. Roma coming to Britain from the Czech Republic (many of whom, incidentally, migrated recently from Slovakia) or from Slovakia face racism - not because "most ... are dark skinned ..." but because they are Roma. Comparison of skin tones is invidious, in fact, since this is only one of the possible bases of racism, a world view preoccupied with race, itself a slippery, highly political categorisation system with a variety of different definitions serving different political purposes. It is beyond our powers as communists to pin down racism to the simple, not to say simplistic, formula that racism is only concerned with skin coloration. Outside of Africa, which has a richly diverse human genetic pool according to recent research, there is in fact very little genetic diversity from one end of the planet to another. So, of course, the idea of a genetic template for perceived racial difference falls down and we are forced to try to understand this irrationality, vomited up most particularly under capitalism, using tools which tackle its non-scientific and totally subjective character, made even more difficult since each variant of racism develops its own internal logic.

Xenophobia, or fear and hatred toward outsiders is, of course, but the precursor of the later term, 'racism'. Before the 1950s the term 'racism' was almost unknown anyway, at least in Britain - the expression 'racialism' being virtually used synonymously. Cloaked in various forms, such as the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland, the 'superior' English 'race' (for which read 'imperialism') conquered 'inferior' peoples; for the last 150 years or so the English/Scots/Welsh amalgam has within bourgeois ideology carried the same idea of racial superiority for its 'racialists' and racists, whether or not leading lights in the British imperialist state. This state has not changed its spots, nor will it ever do so. But it will often hide its light under a bushel, versatile enough under con-

ditions of relative social peace to be able to avoid the brickbats of liberal chatterers and anti-racists and happy to encourage itself to be portrayed, superficially and wrongly, as 'anti-racist'. In like manner has the state become 'pro-feminist', allegedly in favour of women's rights and sympathetic to the needs of the female majority?

Communists' tasks include that of destroying illusions about the nature of the state. Our job is not helped by pretending that the capitalist state is somehow now positively anti-racist, since this is only surface and intended to obscure its real face. Otherwise, we are no better than the liberals, social democrats, and opportunists of the old CPGB who kidded themselves at some time or other that the state could be, if it was not already, a means to achieving 'progressive' ends in society. Marx examined this question in his earliest writings and clambered through his own misapprehension about what the bourgeois state could do, concluding it was anathema to the development of humanity and had to be overthrown.

As Jack Conrad's *Draft programme* for the CPGB says, "The capitalist state in Britain has an official ideology of anti-racism. That in no way contradicts the national chauvinist consensus which champions British imperialism's interests against foreign rivals and sets worker against worker." And in no way does this thin veneer of the "official ideology of anti-racism" conceal the underlying reality of the British state's racist essence. National chauvinism meshes with xenophobia and racism in a multitude of ways in neo-colonialist, imperialist Britain.

It is precisely because the bourgeoisie at this time wants social peace and stability that it puts on the coat of 'anti-racism'. But let us not be fooled by appearances. While expressions of hostility to those of African-Caribbean and South Asian origin living in Britain are officially frowned on under the state's policy of 'anti-racism', this is not the case as regards the Roma, whether or not individual Rom live in the country or not. Similarly, there has been no difficulty for

so-called 'patrials' (ie, with a 'racially' acceptable grandparent born in Britain) from beyond the EU migrating to Britain, whether or not they are workers, while petty bourgeois as well as working class South Asians wait months and years to join their spouses under the racist immigration rules. There is no getting away from the fact that racism is part and parcel of the British state's being, infecting all parts of society. Pointing to black presenters on children's television programmes is almost too fatuous for words: it betrays complete ignorance of the racism pervading media organisations as it pervades all of revolting capitalism.

It is amazing of comrade Fox to argue that were the state to require disharmony (which state does not want harmony and stability, anyway?) it would either "encourage black immigration - or conversely repatriation" (original emphasis). Neither black or any other kind of immigration creates racial strife in and of itself: this is one of the oldest myths perpetuated by reactionary liberal 'anti-racism'. Giving credence to this liberal lie goes directly against the *Draft programme*, which states: "Immigration is a progressive phenomenon which breaks down national differences and prejudices. It unites British workers with the world working class." Racism is created, developed, and nurtured by the bourgeoisie as one means to divide worker from worker and secure its hegemony; clearly the use of racism is a dangerous tactic for the capitalist class, but limiting it by means of 'anti-racist' legislation maintains a degree of control over it, given that prosecutions may or may not go forward, depending on government policy at any particular time. There are even suggestions that some 'anti-racist' initiatives and groups are connected with MI5 in order that the state may keep tabs on racist groups and organisations and ensure they do not get beyond the state's control. Clearly, nice judgements by the British bourgeois state are involved as to what degree racism shall be allowed to prevail and to be tolerated by it, depending on relative social peace and the need to divide the

working class at any particular time.

The fact that comrade Fox was stung to respond to my original letter (*Weekly Worker* November 13 1997) suggests that he imagines the argument for workers to be allowed free travel without border controls is somehow weakened by ignoring the strong racist element present in the way many migrant workers are dealt with at port of entry and inside Britain by the state. Unfortunately, if the whole truth seems messy this is no reason to ignore parts of it. The case of the Czech and Slovak Roma shows exactly how the British state's figleaf of 'anti-racism' falls off, exposing how the Roma's special status at this time as pariahs in British society allows racism, even in a restricted form, to continue to exist at the level of bourgeois respectability (ie, with at least the complicity of the state).

British state 'anti-racism' can be switched on or off as desired: a fact implied by comrade Fox when he describes how the state may, in a revolutionary situation, seek "to undermine working class unity and foment division". But the state cannot turn on what is not there to be turned on: that is, not the mere presence amongst the population of different ethnic and religious minorities, but their ongoing scapegoating, anathematising, and racist oppression. At the moment, the Roma fulfil this ongoing purpose for the bourgeoisie: a vehicle for the engenderment and maintenance of a reservoir of racism, to be topped up as and when necessary, consequent on the depth of crisis and proximity to a revolutionary situation.

In contradiction to what comrade Fox declares, castigating "the left's insistence on seeing racism in the motives of the ruling class" for being "not only foolish, but downright dangerous", if communists refuse to see racism when it is always there in the state's calculations as a ready weapon in case of difficulty, then we shall not be ready for revolution. Window dressing is merely that: a display intended to entice us into the bourgeoisie's ideological store, whose goods stink of reaction ●

Tom Ball

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.

I want to be a **Communist Party Supporter**. Send me details. ☐

I wish to subscribe to the **Weekly Worker**. ☐

ww subscription £ _____

Donation £ _____

Cheques and postal orders should be in sterling.

	6 m	1 yr	Institutions
Britain & Ireland	£15	£30	£55
Europe	£20	£40	£70
Rest of World	£28	£55	£80

Special offer to new subscribers: 3 months for £5.00

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TEL _____

Return to: CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX.
Tel: 0181-459 7146 Fax: 0181-830 1639.
CPGB1@aol.com

Printed by and published by: November Publications Ltd (0181-459 7146). Registered as a newspaper by Royal Mail. ISSN 1351-0150. © January 1998

This line 5mm beyond crop

C.T.

This line 5mm beyond crop

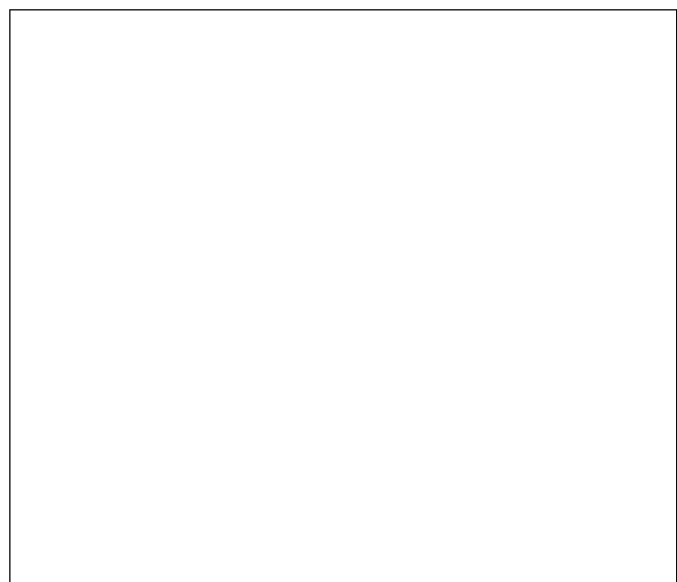
Another small left split from New Labour now appears inevitable, giving the revolutionary left a new opportunity

Seize the moment

Clearly we live in a period of reaction. But it is a period of reaction of a *special type* - ie, one that contains within it positive potentialities, possibly even the seeds of its own negation.

The birth and formation of the Socialist Labour Party was one such indicator. Another sign can be found in the European parliament. There has been rumbling discontent from Labour MEPs over the rightist drift by Tony Blair, taking particular objection to the proposal for a 'closed list' system - a device which enables the leadership to rid itself of 'undisciplined' and 'troublesome' (ie, left) MEPs. This band of MEP malcontents have been labelled the 'Strasbourg Six', and there has been recurrent speculation that they would split from the 62-strong Labour group in order to stand as independent Labour candidates.

At long last, two of the 'six' have gone public and announced their intentions - and have been duly expelled from the Labour and Socialist groups in the European parliament. The two are familiar suspects - Ken Coates, MEP for North Nottingham and Chesterfield, and



Ken Coates: rebel with a cause?

Hugh Kerr, MEP for West Essex and East Herts. As *The Observer* put it, "Both have along history as leftwing rebels ... They claim they could tap into the well of political discontent that is spreading beyond the traditional left to include the supporters of full benefits for single mothers and the disabled" (December 28).

Both Coates and Kerr have

announced their intention to stand against Labour. Writing in the same paper, they declared: "We have decided to consult our party co-workers and supporters to see if we can lay the basis for contesting the next European parliament election in June 1999 in opposition to, and with an alternative to, the Blair government's social policies."

Coates also told the 4,000 party members in his Euro-constituency that he would be ashamed to stand for the "authoritarian and intolerant" New Labour, describing the Blairite platform as "indistinguishable from Old Tories"; while Kerr told his members: "The decision to abolish free education and introduce tuition fees and abolish grants in higher education has breached the whole of Labour philosophy." According to Kerr and Coates six other MEP colleagues are privately considering similar action - if Blair continues his rightward stampede.

The introduction of proportional representation for the 1999 European elections provides an opportunity for left candidates like the Strasbourg Two - as they have pointed out. With as little as nine percent of the vote in the London region it will be possible for the left to win a Euro-seat - and it is also quite possible that New Labour will lose up to half its seats. Another bonus is that as sitting MEPs they will attract EU funding of £25,000 each towards general election expenses.

In all likelihood, of course,

they will be expelled from the Labour Party itself by the NEC when it meets on January 28.

This ought to be viewed as a positive development, which needs active *encouragement*. No doubt some leftists will dismiss the Kerr/Coates initiative out of hand, on the grounds that it does not provide the "revolutionary programme" necessary for the class. Of course that is true, just as it is also true that the two have been motivated at least in part by careerist considerations. Nevertheless we must use every opportunity that presents itself in the interests of independent working class organisation.

Kerr and Coates have spoken of the need to form a Socialist Alliance. For the left here is an opportunity to overcome its inveterate sectarianism and make a mass impact - surely a step in the direction of a united *class* party. The Kerr/Coates grouping in Strasbourg at the very least could become a popular focus for resistance - and create more space for the articulation of left views.

There are positive signs. Hugh Kerr shared a platform with Tommy Sheridan at a press conference in Glasgow under

the Scottish Socialist Alliance banner on December 30 and is likely to stand in the coming elections to the Scottish parliament as an SSA candidate. Allan Green, national secretary of the SSA, said: "We envisage Hugh Kerr being part of the full Alliance slate for the Scottish parliamentary and European elections in 1999."

Kerr said he was "interested in talking to the Scottish Socialist Alliance because they have managed to unite the left outside the Labour Party in Scotland and it may be the kind of body we can work with in Scotland if we develop an alternative slate of Labour members".

Ken Coates sent a message of support to the meeting of the Socialist Alliances Network in November, while another dissident MEP, Michael Hindley, addressed the conference in person.

Communists welcome the Kerr/Coates split. It provides us with an opening through which we will argue and fight for the type of organisation the working class really needs if it is to liberate itself - a single, reformed Communist Party ●

Danny Hammill

English Socialist Alliance?

There was controversy at the December meeting of the steering committee of Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance when the delegate from the Campaign for a Democratic Socialist Labour Party, John Pearson, proposed that the Steering Committee recommend the following resolution to the next full meeting of the GMSA:

"The Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance is concerned at the early direction of development of socialist alliance structures with separate English, Scottish and Welsh organisations. This is not only detrimental to working class unity, but is also a major concession to nationalism. Nationalism is antithetical to socialism and it should be vigorously combated by all socialist alliances.

"GMSA resolves to fight for an all-Britain Socialist Alliance federation. As a step in this direction it will propose that the Socialist Alliances Network Liaison Group be reconstituted with all-Britain representation.

"GMSA supports the democratic demand of the right of self-determination of the Scottish, Welsh and Irish people. However, in the cause of working class unity, it commits itself to campaign for self-determination to be exercised in favour of a

federal republic of England, Wales and Scotland, and for a united Ireland."

Reiterating the concern that he had expressed at the November Socialist Alliances Network meeting in Walsall, comrade Pearson protested that the national forum of Socialist Alliances, held in Coventry on June 7 1997, had never decided to restrict its work to building an *English* federation of Socialist Alliances. That Coventry meeting had agreed *inter alia*:

"To set up a liaison group (Pete Maclaren, Coventry and Warwickshire; John Nicholson, Greater Manchester; Dave Nellist, Socialist Party; and Dave Church, Walsall Democratic Labour Party; and link with Allan Green, Scottish Socialist Alliance). This would seek to raise the national profile of the Socialist Alliance Network and initiate efforts to establish Alliances in areas where these do not already exist.

"That the Liaison Group would gradually strengthen links with all known socialist groups and parties, nationally and locally, green/environmental activists and parties, trade union broad lefts, direct action groups, and all other progressive forces on the left; including individuals not in any organisation.

"That the Socialist Alliance Network should devise ... a common programme - an absolute minimum basis for left unity supported as widely as possible - on which to campaign commonly across all Socialist Alliances.

"That the Socialist Alliance Network should work to seek agreement with every possible socialist organisation, left-green organisation, etc, to establish socialist unity to fight either by-elections or local government elections, probably from 1999 onwards."

But, by the time of the subsequent Walsall meeting, the SA Network Liaison Group had decided that comrades from Socialist Alliances in Scotland and Wales were to be introduced as "international guests", and that the statement to be recommended for adoption by the meeting should contain the following:

"The Network recognises that SAs exist in some areas but not in all. To assist campaigning throughout England, the Network supports the development of local groups and offers speakers to help initiate in areas without them ...

"The Network recognises the importance of regional issues - in light of devolution possibilities in Scotland and Wales and in light of propor-

tional representation for Euro elections - and encourages meetings of all socialists within regions of England to discuss regionally based campaigns, defence and development of regional public services, consideration of 'regions' as defined, and electoral unity for socialists on a regional basis - in addition to national links ...

"The Network is composed of SAs which are rightly internationalist in outlook. The Network resolves to encourage this and to continue to make practical links with socialists and socialist organisations in Scotland and Wales, Ireland, and throughout Europe, and to enlist the assistance of European elected representatives to develop this ..."

Comrade Pearson sought to persuade the steering committee of the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance that a serious error was being made in creating an 'English Socialist Alliance'. He urged that GMSA should champion the building of an all-Britain Socialist Alliance federation. CPGB delegate Steve Riley seconded the motion, stressing the paramount need for working class unity in confronting the British capitalist state.

A forthright response to the motion came from GMSA conveyor John Nicholson, one of the SA Network

Liaison Group members, who had chaired the Walsall meeting. He suggested that the motion was "out of order and irrelevant as Scottish and Welsh comrades have self-determined their own form of organisation and Alliances have recognised this". The steering committee chair, Socialist Party member Noel Pine, whilst not upholding the "out of order" plea, argued that the motion contradicted the *Charter for Socialist Change* adopted by GMSA at its inaugural conference.

The scene was set for an interesting debate, which comrade Pine proposed should take place at the next meeting of the steering committee, until the GMSA treasurer, political independent Declan O'Neill, pointed out that the structure adopted at GMSA's 1997 conference stipulated that policy decisions could only be made at the organisation's annual conference. The steering committee majority duly invited comrade Pearson to re-submit the motion to the annual conference, which will be in July 1998.

I would urge comrades active in other Socialist Alliances to press for this crucial question - socialism or nationalism - to be discussed ●

John Pearson