

**weekly  
worker**

**The Weekly Worker  
interviews Ken Coates**  
see back page

50p

Number 223

Thursday January 15 1998

# 'Peace' train back on track

Blair hopes that a  
'council of the isles'  
will secure a new  
imperialist stability

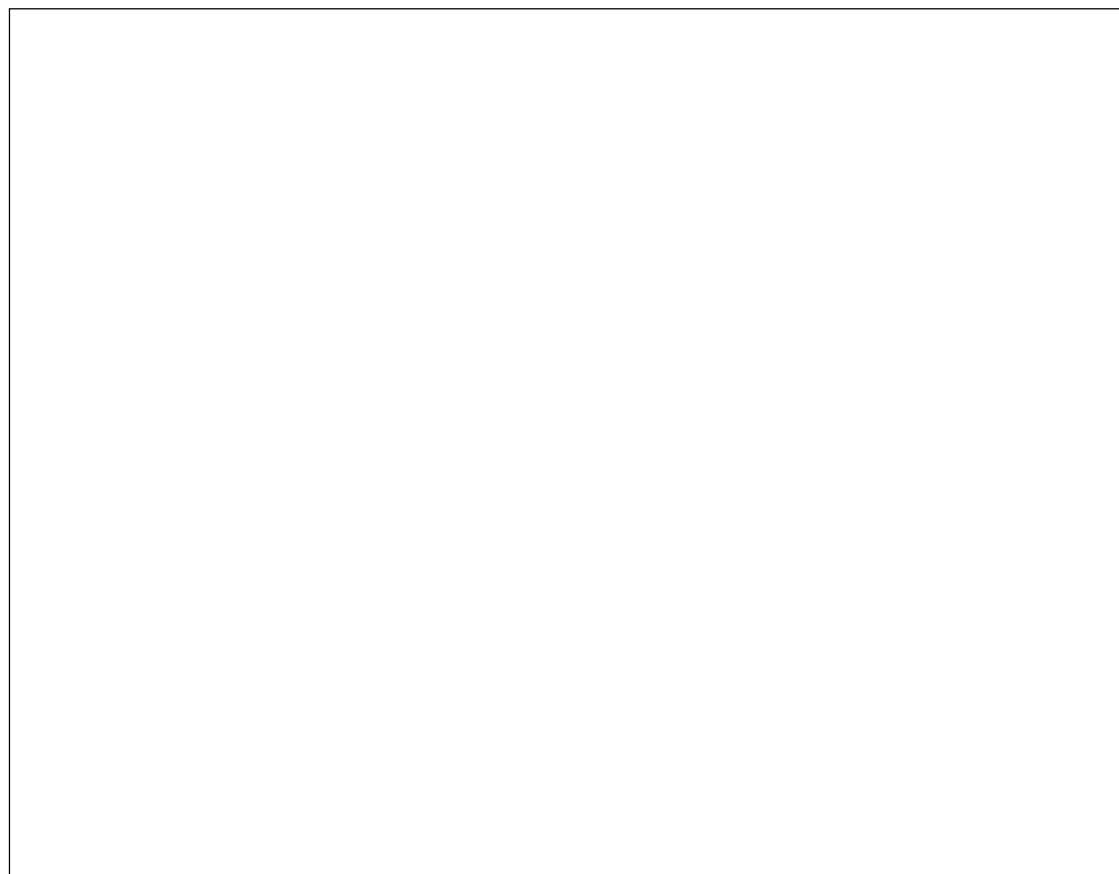
**A** significant step towards the negotiation of a constitutional resettlement in Britain and Ireland was taken earlier this week.

After London and Dublin announced their 'propositions on heads of agreement', the Stormont all-party talks were given a new boost and the main Six Counties parties were united in their expectations of a breakthrough. Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble stood side by side with a beaming John Hume, head of the Social Democratic and Labour Party. Sinn Fein leaders too were looking forward to the start of genuine negotiations.

The British-Irish plan hinges upon the creation of an intergovernmental 'council of the isles', "to include representatives of the British and Irish governments, the Northern Ireland administration and the devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales". The creation of such a body is the brainchild of the Ulster Unionist Party and, as we commented at the end of last year, "Such a scheme would dovetail perfectly with Blair's plans to forge a new consensus under a reformed UK state, while simultaneously reinforcing British imperialist domination over the whole of Ireland" (*Weekly Worker* December 18 1997).

The propositions also allow for a Northern Ireland assembly based on a new version of 'power-sharing'; a north-south 'ministerial council' - the all-Ireland dimension necessary to create the illusion among the nationalist population of a step towards a united Ireland; changes to the Irish constitution, whereby the republic will finally renounce all claims of sovereignty over the Six Counties; and a Bill of Rights, for so long the main campaigning plank of reformists and 'official communists' - a smokescreen to conceal their disdain for the struggle around the central question of self-determination.

The proposals also aim to "establish and consolidate an acceptable peaceful society, dealing with issues



Mitchel McLaughlin and Gerry Adams: an acceptable basis for negotiations

such as prisoners, security in all its aspects, policing and decommissioning of weapons". This clause has been carefully phrased to give the impression that the release of prisoners of war is a top priority, while "decommissioning" languishes at the bottom of the list. This is certainly a far cry from the previous insistence that the IRA must hand over all its weapons before Sinn Fein would be permitted into the talks. Nevertheless, this concession to republicanism pales into insignificance when compared to the overall package - what could be described as "more or less a modernised version of partition", as a leader of the 32-County Sovereignty Committee put it before Christmas.

Just how far removed these proposals are from progress towards the liberation of Ireland can be judged from the reaction in the bourgeois press.

*The Independent's* warm welcome for Blair's "bold stroke" was carried under the headline, "Not just a peace process any more, but a daring vision of new Britain" (editorial, January 13).

Most interesting was the response of *The Daily Telegraph*, whose previous line was to call for the ending of "the long-running farce called the 'peace process'" (January 10). Instead of even contemplating negotiations with the "terrorists", whose challenge to the integrity of the United Kingdom should be crushed by whatever force necessary, the *Telegraph* demanded an agreement with the "constitutional parties".

This wishful thinking suffers from the obvious drawback that it is based on precisely the strategy which has failed so dismally for the best part of 30 years. The more realistic wing of

the British bourgeoisie realised long ago that the IRA could not be defeated militarily, but was nevertheless ready to settle for far less than a sovereign, united Ireland.

However, instead of coming to the conclusion that such an agreement is now in sight, *The Daily Telegraph* has persuaded itself that the government has come to its senses at last. Its correspondent, Tony Harnden, writes: "The plan is based on accommodating the aspirations of Ulster's constitutional parties and an acceptance that the agreement of the IRA cannot be secured" (January 10). He adds: "Mr Blair's plan, as one which copper-fastens the union, cannot be acceptable to the republican movement."

On that basis the editorial in the same edition of the paper gives the scheme its stamp of approval: "The

proposal is one around which sensible unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland could gather. It could, just, turn the terrorist-driven 'peace process' into a democrat-driven peace plan. It could even, unlike Labour's other devolution ideas, actually help the union." *The Daily Telegraph* concludes: "Sinn Fein/IRA ... will surely now consider ending their own ceasefire quickly, and quitting the talks."

Strangely though, there was barely a murmur of protest from Sinn Fein. True, SF spokesperson Mitchel McLaughlin assured the press that his party would not sign up for an "internal agreement". However, SF would put the proposals "to the test" in the Stormont talks. Its clear priority is to lure the UUP into serious negotiations so as to establish itself as the main 'respectable' republican party in place of the SDLP. McLaughlin also stressed the importance of making rapid progress so as to prevent the loyalist death squads from wrecking the 'peace process'.

After Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam's 'audacious gamble' of marching into the Long Kesh prison camp to win over the loyalist paramilitaries, Sinn Fein leaders will now have the opportunity of addressing death squad leaders in the flesh. Mowlam's "inclusive and human" style (*The Independent* January 9) was apparently enough to win over members of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association. As a result their respective political wings, the Progressive Unionist Party and the Ulster Democratic Party, remained in the Stormont talks. After Tuesday's session all the participants agreed to accept the two governments' proposals as a basis for substantive negotiations, due to begin next week.

Only Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party and the smaller UK Unionist Party are still declining to take up their seats. The DUP, still hoping to win a bigger space for itself by crying 'sellout', claimed forlornly that it represented the majority of unionists. Its co-thinkers of *The Daily Telegraph*, while completely misreading SF/IRA's likely reaction to Blair's plan, have assessed the scheme's orientation rather more accurately ●

Jim Blackstock

This line 5mm beyond crop

CL  
TC

This line 5mm beyond crop



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

# Party notes

## Party schools

As outlined in our Perspectives '98 document, we are attempting to institute a far more systematic approach to Party education. In this spirit, we are organising three important schools in the first eight months of this year.

The first, in Scotland over the weekend of February 21-22, examines our approach to the federal republic slogan. The school is divided into four sessions - the national question and the tradition of Leninism; is there a British nation?; Blairism and the 'rebranding' of Britain; and finally, on the federal republic itself.

Clearly, the ruling class does not merely retain the initiative on constitutional reform: it is simply unchallenged by any form of independent working class voice at all. Variants of narrow economism dominate practically all sections of the left in Britain. In practice, this leads to tailing the bourgeoisie in the sphere of 'high' politics. There are a plethora of examples to chose from to illustrate this opportunism in the contemporary literature of the left, but I think Arthur Trusscott, writing in *New Interventions* (winter 1997-8) exemplifies the problem beautifully. He is a model example of what communists have to fight against to win working class hegemony over all the basic democratic questions facing contemporary society.

Starting from the correct proposition that revolutionaries should support "the fullest democratisation of society", he suggests that this would lead us "not [to] have opposed a 'yes' vote in the devolution referenda". However, as playing with nationalism is a dangerous game, "socialists must emphasise what unites the working class in Britain - the fight for jobs, better wages and conditions, improved education and welfare, etc - and condemn those who seek to divide the working class along national lines".

Thus, Arthur advocates the workers' movement supports anti-democratic sops proposed by the establishment - the insulting concessions of the talking shop Scottish parliament and Welsh Assembly. Having got that uncomfortable issue safely out of the way, we can get on with real working class politics - the fight for better wages, jobs and social services.

Sadly, the narrow approach of comrade Trusscott is typical of the method of the left and stands in stark contrast to the real traditions of our movement. The essence of working class politics is not to concentrate on what simply unites "the working class" alone (and the idea that in and of itself, any particular question automatically unites the class is very foolish - wage claims and the fight for jobs are normally fought sectionally). Proletarian politics consist in making the working class the champion of all democratic demands in society, no matter what class or section is affected.

Our school in Scotland will attempt to provide our comrades with the theoretical equipment to fight this degenerate understanding of 'class politics'.

The second school is in London over the weekend of April 4-5 and is on the USSR.

It is an unfortunate fact that the vast majority of the left have viewed the collapse of the USSR and the bureaucratic socialist regimes of eastern Europe simply as bland confirmations of their own particular theoretical shibboleths, whatever the facts were telling them. We believe that it is perhaps the key theoretical task of Marxists to account for the horror that the first attempt to build a workers' state produced. Almost all theoretical models that have attempted to explain this unique social formation - including our own - have proved to be either one-sided, or simply wrong.

The April school will be a chance for comrades both to discuss work-in-progress on the Soviet question and - crucially - to examine in some detail the method that is informing our research. Again, the school is divided into four openings over the two days. We start with 'historical materialism and the Soviet question'; then an important session on 'the method of *Capital*'. The second day opens with a critique of other theories of bureaucratic socialism and we finish the school with 'towards a general theory of bureaucratic socialism', a discussion using the Marxist method, as applied in the internal discussion material already produced.

This school is one of the more important we have organised for a number of years. Until we have accounted adequately for the phenomenon that was the USSR, the workers' movement is theoretically blind.

Then, in the first week of August, we have Communist University '98, this year in a London venue. As most comrades will know, this consists of an intensive week of debate and argument. As in previous years, we are planning for the involvement of individuals and organisations from outside our ranks, something that always greatly enriches discussion.

The London Book Club - book service of the Communist Party - will be producing a catalogue this week that will contain recommended readings for the first two schools at least and, as soon as the syllabus for this year's CU is finalised, it will be featured in the paper. I warn comrades that places at all three events are limited. If you intend coming, please let Party Centre know as soon as possible. ●

Mark Fischer  
national organiser

## Liberation

I cannot agree with the anti-drugs line implicitly being pushed by comrade Mary Ward in her review of Kevin Williamson's book, *Drugs and the party line* (*Weekly Worker* January 8). The comrade's comments indicate that in her haste to castigate the venal hypocrisy of bourgeois politicians she has thrown the baby out with the bathwater - the baby being, in this case, human liberation.

While I am sure that the book contains all manner of useful information - and that its intentions are subjectively honourable - comrade Ward seems to have imbibed the liberalistic, quasi-puritanical agenda of Williamson. Ironically, this means Mary ends up propping up the very 'party line' that fills her "with a sense of frustration and disgust".

Comrade Ward seems to believe that drug-taking is a problem in and of itself - a 'problem' that needs to be eliminated. Unsurprisingly then, she applauds Williamson's "harm reduction"-centred approach. Adopting this perspective, we should be opposed to the prohibitionist 'war against drugs' on the grounds that it is not an efficient way to *prevent* "substance use". The message seems to be that anybody who takes drugs must automatically be 'fucked up'. Get them off drugs and they will become 'good citizens' again or, as comrade Ward puts it, "function as part of their communities".

The implicit message is that communists support an 'alternative' war against drugs. Legalisation as the continuation of the prohibitionist war against drugs by other means perhaps. The (more stupid) bourgeois want us to 'just say no'. Mary, instead, wants us to say no after a little think.

Thus, comrade Ward writes: "Prohibition, Williamson argues, does not stop substance use; it only criminalises the users." Why on earth do we want to stop "substance use"?

People take drugs because they *like it* - what is so wrong with that? The plain fact of the matter is that for very many people drug-taking makes life a hell of a lot easier. A better way of looking at this question is, possibly, to work out a 'pleasure-enhancing' strategy, not a "harm reduction" one.

However, comrade Ward believes that "there is much more to harm reduction than needle exchanges and methadone programmes" - "harm reduction", thinks comrade Ward, comes as a "package of education, facilities and legalisation". Apparently, the only reason why people take drugs is because of a bleak awareness of "alienation under the death throes of capitalism".

Communists should support legalisation not because of some austere master-plan to reduce "substance use" or increase "harm reduction". If we did, we could end just being a mirror image of bourgeois politicians. We do so in order for "substance use", like every other aspect of social and cultural existence, to become fully socialised and *humanised*. Whether that leads to an increase or decrease in "substance use" is an open-ended question.

It is also illuminating that comrade Ward does not classify alcohol as a drug. Yet it is probably responsible for more damaging, and sometimes anti-social, behaviour than all the other drugs put together. But because of a certain cultural history, it is a drug that is eminently respectable - even worth advertising and praising. Oscar Wilde said that one person's poison is another person's poetry - the same with alcohol. Yet only a "temperance fanatic", to use Marx's words, would want to banish alcohol from human culture and society - though I am aware that Arthur Scargill hankers after such a 'utopia'. We should, fundamentally, treat non-alcoholic drugs in the same way.

I get the impression that comrade Ward believes we are 'products of society' in some crude, mechanical sense - mere copies of the wider bourgeois society. Alienated society "under the death throes of capitalism" equals alienated people, equals substance use. Conversely, I presume, non-alienated socialist society equals happy,

non-alienated people or, at the very least, vastly reduced "substance (ab)use". In reality, of course, people fall into society's interstices: the family, the church, peer pressure, etc - and just as well, otherwise socialism would be a virtual impossibility. Miserable, hopelessly alienated people cannot make and build socialism - whether they have a clear head or not.

The working class must be won to legalisation as part of a project of *universal* human liberation, not out of a commitment to "harm reduction" and dull sobriety.

Danny Hammill  
South London

## Original slogan

May I point out to comrade Frank Vincent (*Letters Weekly Worker* December 18) the slogan, 'Fight for what is needed', was used some time before the Scottish devolution campaign and, far from being meaningless, is as appropriate as ever in light of the attacks on social benefits today.

Apparently, he knows what *his* attitude is to what the *Draft programme* does *not* say, but what is his attitude to what it does say? - ie, does he suggest the various benefits for pensioners, claimants, and payment of the minimum wage to be subjected to the proviso, 'if possible'?

If our comrade seriously believes leaving out 'possible' from the slogan means demanding all the things he describes about colonising planets, etc, all I can say is he has lost his way in thinking about cloud cuckoo land.

Whilst I think the working class has ever been far too modest in their demands during the whole of my lifetime, I am confident they appreciate the original slogan more than our comrade.

Ted Rowlands  
Bishop Auckland

## Lukács

As someone who is only on the outer fringes of the CPGB, I do not necessarily feel very well placed to comment on the interpretation of the Scottish referendum campaign. I do however feel moved to write about the attack made on George Lukács and his *History and class consciousness* in Linda Addison's article, 'Strengthening the theoretical roots of our propaganda' (*Weekly Worker* October 9 1997).

Addison writes: "Given the history of the Second International and the tragic distorted development of the Third International, we should be aware of the shortcomings of deterministic, mechanistic and productivist approaches to political practice. Yet neither should we fall into the crude voluntarism which led Lukács to theorise a view of the party as the 'methodologically indispensable subject-object', replacing the working class as the subject of history, with a man-made *deus ex machina*."

This is all highly misleading, given that the essay Addison is quoting from is actually entitled, 'Reification and the consciousness of the proletariat', where Lukács argues that it is only "when the consciousness of the proletariat is able to point out the road along which the dialectics of history is objectively impelled, *but which it cannot travel unaided*, will the consciousness of the proletariat awaken to a consciousness of the process, and only then will the proletariat become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality" (my emphasis *History and class consciousness* Cambridge USA 1975, p197).

There is no sense in the Lukács of this period, of 'replacing' or mechanically counterposing Party and class, in that he takes their indivisible *unity* as read. I find it *weird* that Addison can come to such conclusions on the basis of reading 'Reification and the consciousness of the proletariat', in that Lukács is concerned in this essay with methodologically unifying and *overcoming* (through conscious practice) the various 'antinomies' of bourgeois thought - subject/object, theory/practice, fact/value, 'ought'/'is', etc, of which Party/class is but another reified example.

Many other criticisms of Addison's article could be advanced, not least her undialectical construction of two dualistic poles around her own measured approach and that of the so-called 'voluntarists' rather than seeing the need to unify the artificial poles of freedom and necessity in a dialectical whole (this is Addison's presumed intention; it is however squandered by her rejection of Lukács).

But to finish I would like to say that Addison's method is possibly not so far from that of the PCC as some might feel. Witness the absurd (and unprovable) assertion in the 'What we fight for' column: "We are materialists: we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round." If social reality is a totality, then it would presumably include conscious practice. So where does that leave the above statement?

Perhaps the seeds of liquidationism are closer to home than the CPGB majority may think.

Phil Watson  
Liverpool

## Althusser

I would like to make a response to John Dart's contribution to the *Weekly Worker* entitled, 'Political inventions' (*Letters*, December 18).

Although interesting and supportive of the CPGB, he opines that the theoretical advances made by Althusser are to be viewed as "scholastic idiocy" and amount to little more than academic prostitution whose prime concern was to conceal the crimes of conservatism and bureaucracy in the former Soviet Union.

Not claiming to be an expert on Althusser, I would like to advance the position that Althusser's project was in fact to strengthen up a structuralist cast of thought in order to fill what had been a glaring gap in previous Marxist theories of ideology and, in contrast to John Dart's proposition, I would argue that Althusser achieves this by remaining broadly within the Marxist problematic.

I do not want to rehearse the basic tenets of structuralism, except to state that it proposed that meaning is generated through difference. For Althusser this emphasis on difference and its mirror opposite, unity, then gives us the notion of articulation, and it is this notion of articulation which is central to this reply.

The classical formulation of base/superstructure which dominated previous Marxist theories of ideology are all based on the idea of a necessary correspondence between one level of social formation and another. Althusser, however, proposes that there is no necessary correspondence, which means that there is no law which will guarantee that the ideology of a group will correspond to the position which that group holds in relation to the capitalist mode of production.

I think that it is also worth noting here that it was Marx and Engels who set this work of revisionism in motion, as can be seen from the documentation in Althusser's *For Marx*. Engels says: "It would be absurd to claim that a social totality is dependent solely upon an economic determinism, and to do so would be to ridicule the whole works of Marx and myself."

I think that Althusser's work clearly shows the importance of contemporary theory related to present-day practice, and shows Althusser strengthening a Marxist-Leninist position and not a Stalinist one.

To address the final criticism made by comrade Dart concerning the early and mature Marx, it derives from comments made by Althusser in 1965, when he separates the early ideological and decidedly Feuerbachian Marx from the mature and scientific Marx - that is, the Marx who discovered the science of history, or historical materialism.

Kevin Graham  
South Cheshire

CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX ● Tel: 0181-459 7146 ● Fax: 0181-830 1639 ● CPGB1@aol.com ● http://www.duntone.demon.co.uk/CPGB/

From The Call, paper of the British Socialist Party, January 10 1918

## Chicherin and the Petrovs released - and deported

As we predicted last week, no longer able to temporise with Trotsky's imperative demand for the release of our comrades Chicherin and the Petrovs, our contemptible dictators gave way with the worst possible grace, and deported them with as much secrecy as could be observed and no little personal indignity.

Our comrades (in the care of the Criminal Investigation Department!) left London last Thursday evening but, notwithstanding the secrecy, a number of friends assembled at the station to greet them and wish them godspeed. In the case of comrade Petrov a concession was made in that the secretary of the BSP was allowed to visit him on the afternoon of his departure, but no similar relaxation appears to have been made to Mrs Petrov or comrade Chicherin.

Such a childish exhibition of ill temper cannot fail to bring universal discredit on its perpetrators, and it is not inconceivable that the hurried departure from Petrograd of the British ambassador, Sir George Buchanan, on grounds of "ill health", is comrade Trotsky's prompt tit for tat. But the government was forced to climb down, because Trotsky would brook no further evasions. Will the British labour movement appreciate the moral of this lesson, and learn that it is deeds, not words, that count?

By the return of comrades Chicherin and the Petrovs to Russia the BSP loses three distinguished members; but our loss is Russia's gain. We shall shortly be able to welcome back another good colleague in the person of comrade Holtzman, the first diplomatic envoy of the Bolshevik government, who, prior to his return to Russia last summer, was for several years an active member of Central Hackney BSP. Our comrade Maxim Litvinov too, who has been nominated as Russian ambassador to Britain, ... has worked closely in contact with us. It is reported that the British government will 'recognise' him.

It will have no freedom to do otherwise if the organised workers demonstrate what they really think and feel ●

# 1918

Russian Revolution  
this week 80 years ago

## Around the left

# Cross your fingers

In the latest issue of *The Socialist* we get to see the Socialist Party's clunky determinism yet again. In a double-page spread, SP's general secretary, Peter Taaffe, "looks at the prospects for the working class and socialists, in Britain and worldwide, in 1998" (January 9).

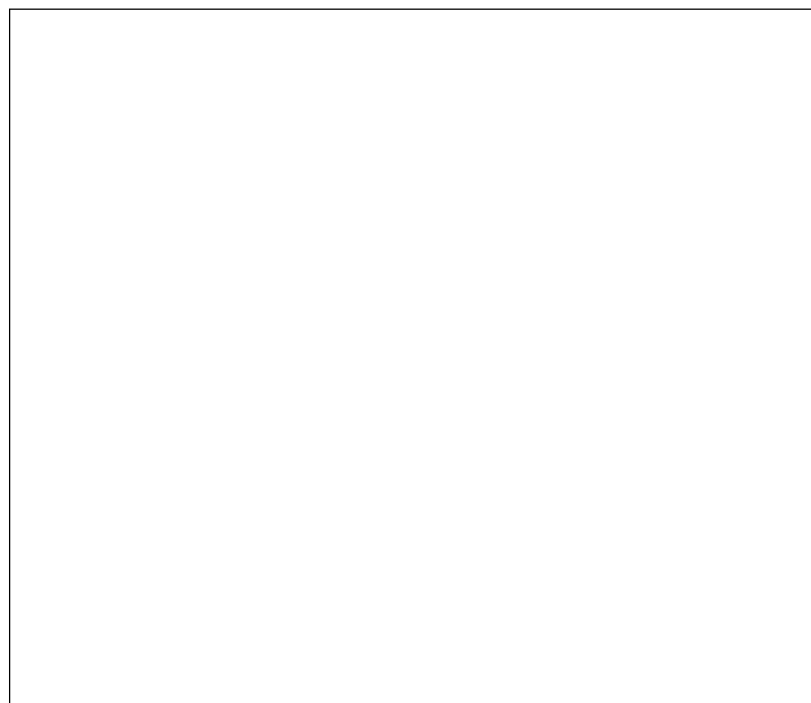
In essence, we see the 'cry wolf' syndrome from comrade Taaffe, as he majestically surveys the current state of world capitalism. Predict catastrophe, meltdowns, crashes, etc often enough and you are bound to be right eventually. As Leon Trotsky famously remarked about such an approach, the broken clock is always right twice a day.

With disturbing relish, comrade Taaffe prophesies the "looming world economic catastrophe" - something the comrade has been looking forward to all his political life. The recent - and continuing - financial/economic turmoil in Asia only adds considerable grist to comrade Taaffe's catastrophist mill. Like a fatalistic ancient astronomer observing Halley's Comet, the comrade discusses how Japan will withdraw its investments from United States government bonds: "This alone could trigger a major US financial crisis, with the collapse of the dollar. This is apart from the underlying instability in the US - share prices will inevitably collapse as a certain stage. This will, in turn, bring the present US expansion juddering to a halt. Nor can Europe take up the 'slack', which the US can no longer provide, of Asia's exports. European capitalism will be burnt by the meltdown in Asia", and so on grimly - yet cheerfully.

Mocking the "capitalist economists" who thought that capitalism was in a "perfect state of equilibrium", comrade Taaffe makes a bold claim for the SP's exclusive brilliance: "Almost alone, *The Socialist* and our theoretical journal, *Socialism Today*, refuted these arguments and showed that we were on the eve of a new world financial and economic crash." All I can say to that is that the comrade should really make an effort to read more.

1997 was another glorious year of course. Puffing up the events of last year, perhaps in order to salvage his "red 1990s" schema, comrade Taaffe points to the "magnificent French truck drivers' movement", which did not suffer "an outright defeat"; the Liverpool dockers' struggle, "another tremendous example of working class solidarity nationally and internationally"; and the "magnificent" UPS workers' strike in the USA, even if the Teamsters leadership did "quite unnecessarily" make concessions to the bosses.

The harsh reality is that these disputes were in the main examples of *defensive* strikes - in some ending up as a war of attrition. Without a political programme such struggles are prone to isolation and



Nostradamus: Taaffe predicts great thing ahead

leave the employers only marginally affected.

Comrade Taaffe also talks up the student protests in Germany. Apparently, "some lectures are crammed to bursting point, similar to the conditions in French universities before the 1968 general strike". The comrade is stretching his 'optimism' to its furthest point. The student radicals in the 1960s were inspired by political *ideas*, had a vision of their society of the future - no matter how utopian or idealistic it might have been. That does not appear to be the case at the moment.

"The students are always the 'light cavalry' in any mass movement," comments comrade Taaffe. Perhaps. But, comrade, there is no "mass movement" for the students to connect to, or take inspiration from. The working class has had its historic vision removed. The 1990s are not revolutionary, but a period of reaction of a special type.

As always, the SP relies on spontaneity and single-issue politics, particularly the fight against lone parents' benefit cuts, the clampdown on disability payments, etc. In this context, comrade Taaffe takes heart from the rebellion of 47 Labour MPs: "We argued that this anti-Thatcherite mood would sooner or later clash with the Blair government's avowed rightwing pro-capitalist policies. It has come sooner rather than later."

To give further comfort, comrade Taaffe states: "In all countries, a new capitalist recession will severely dent the capital-

ists' huge ideological offensive against socialism." Not necessarily. Without a workers' movement, armed with Marxist theory, such a recession could just as easily give a boost to that "ideological offensive", and lead to the further erosion on the working class as any sort of conscious alternative to capital.

The comrade is therefore right to worry about layers of the working class, especially the youth, "who could turn away from 'politics' in disgust". However, "where a real socialist alternative is posed, these very same workers can be mobilised into action and won to the ideas of socialism" - ie, the SP's Joe Higgins in Dublin West in the 1997 Irish general election. Unfortunately Taaffe has no strategic perspective of how to forge and unite a revolutionary workers' party. Saying it won't make it happen - that is one prediction that can safely be made.

The comrade's analysis, such as it is, is totally SP-centric. All we are told is that the launch of the SP last February "helped lay the framework for developing a powerful socialist movement in the future"; and "1998 promises even more favourable opportunities for the genuine forces of socialism and Marxism in Britain and worldwide" - a statement of pure faith, not science.

Comrade Taaffe's article graphically highlights the fact that SP has no real project for political intervention, no real strategic orientation. Just carry on as before, cross your fingers and hope things turn out OK.

Like Trotsky's stopped clock, not very helpful or inspiring ●

Don Preston

## London Book Club

The official book club of the CPGB offers discounts up to 20% on almost any book.

Special offer: order more than 10 copies of a book and you get one copy for free.

Just name the author, title and publisher. For details and orders write to: London Book Club, Box 35, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS.

## 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 fight on

Wednesday January 21 - 11.00am outside the Radisson Hotel, Portman Square, London (just off Baker Street) On this date the Berisfords company who owns Magnet Kitchens will be holding their 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

## Fighting Fund

December tends to be a slow month politically. Four whole weeks are usually taken up with preparations for Christmas and the new year. Despite that it is usually very easy to raise money - the Christmas spirit and all that. But this December saw the SLP's 2nd Congress and important developments on the left, which culminated in the Reading split this month. As a result not enough fundraising has been done. Our £400 target was £36 short. Good, but not good enough.

Fortunately, comrades in Dundee did their best to fill the December breach. They raised well over £100 last month. Last week alone - braving the weather and post-Christmas apathy - they raised £27 through street work and collections.

Thanks also to MT from Peterborough, who gave £20, TM from Wales who sent in £15 and comrades on the south coast who donated £40. Let's pick up the tempo in January, comrades! ●

Katrina Haynes

Democratic Platform conference

# SLP left splits - again

**T**he left of the Socialist Labour Party has split. The January 10 meeting of the Democratic Platform, held of all places in sleepy Reading, cleaved more or less down the middle, one half wanting to continue the struggle in the SLP, the other half opting for resignation and the creation of what looks set to dwindle into an exclusivist but essentially right-wing project.

Obviously the split in the Democratic Platform is in reaction to the SLP's 2nd Congress of December 13-14 1997. Given the bureaucratic gerrymandering, the ruling out of order of countless resolutions and constitutional amendments, the three puppets with 3,000 votes, etc, the congress was indeed a "shambolic farce". The terse protest statement, issued by 57 delegates and observers during the congress itself, damned the "complete travesty of democracy" witnessed at congress and ridiculed the authoritarian "actions and methods" of the Scargillite leadership (*Weekly Worker* December 18 1997). Yet in spite of all that was thrown against the left it is no exaggeration to say that it "performed creditably".

The left is now able to operate semi-legally. Unlike May 4 1996 there was no Carolyn Sikorski barring unwanted delegates at the congress door. The left's leaflets, publications and slates circulated freely. Fringe meetings were not banned or subject to organised disruption. Both the Campaign for a Democratic SLP and the Democratic Platform sponsored well attended events. When it came to National Executive Committee elections the left scored well with something like 30% of the membership vote (leaving aside the mammoth block vote wielded by 'Lancashire NUM' - that is, the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners' Association). In other words the left has *de facto* established its right to exist, agitate and be counted - albeit at considerable cost in terms of voidings, closed branches, etc.

Perhaps of equal importance to the standing of the left was the fact that there was a messy and very public schism between Scargill and the Fourth International Supporters Caucus of Brian Heron, Carolyn Sikorski, Patrick Sikorski, etc. The myth of a monolithic leadership around Scargill has been shattered and the left's room for manoeuvre has thereby greatly increased.

Because Scargill rules the SLP as a labour dictator, such a falling out was inevitable. Courtiers, no matter how they fawn and flatter, have a definite sell-by date. True, the schism was papered over at the last moment in melodramatic fashion when Brian Heron tearfully announced Fisc's capitulation. However, divisions over the black section - and the implicit threat to the women's section - remain. Whatever the congenital cynicism of the Fiscites, they were genuinely hurt, angered and disorientated by the use of the decisive 'Lancs NUM' block vote to close *their* black section. Crucially Scargill no longer trusts them. Though they retain a presence on the NEC, the star of Fisc has considerably waned. Scargill's recent bizarre pronouncements in praise of JV Stalin indicate that it is Harpal Brar, editor of *Lalkar*, who now has the ear of the ideologi-

## Anti-communism is anti-communism, no matter who imposes it

cally uncouth and shallow SLP general secretary.

Under these circumstances the left should be cautiously optimistic. Scargill is strong bureaucratically but weak politically. Resort to a highly dubious 3,000 block vote was a desperate measure by a desperate man. Evidently without it he was not sure of the congress outcome. With 3,000 votes in his back pocket Scargill could organisationally overwhelm the left and get his way on every single issue. But in terms of political legitimacy there was an enormous price to pay. Many of Scargill's closest NUMist allies knew nothing of this so-called "bona fide trade union" affiliation and visibly suffered moral

.....  
"Martin Wicks, the effective leader of Socialist Perspectives, seems to fear communists almost with the same intensity as Scargill. That is why he imposed a witch hunt and is cultivating his own policeman"  
.....

meltdown when it was suddenly pulled out of the hat. Terry Dunn and Davy Proctor wore ashen expressions throughout the second day. In other words there is the potential for rapid shifts and radical realignments within the SLP.

But it is precisely the conditions which have created this potential that have driven the soft left in the SLP to walk out before decisive battle has been joined. Hard won gains are being thrown away.

Those elements who came into the SLP in the naive belief that at last they had a broad and democratic working class party have been bitterly disappointed by Scargill's outrageous shenanigans. Those who blamed the anti-communist witch hunt on the victims have seen its methods crystallise into a bureaucratic system. Those who are theoretically weak - the anti-Leninists, the pro-Labourites - were always prone to petty bourgeois moralism ... and that, sad to say, is all that was on display from the soft left at the Reading meeting of the Democratic Platform.

Half the meeting was pig-headedly determined to desert the SLP and thus split the SLP left no matter what. Why? Because of Scargill's "Stalinist" dictatorship and the "exodus of membership" (Martin Wicks - ex Fisc).

Because the SLP "practises a form of 'English socialism'" and "makes no attempt to organise internationally" (Pete Bloomer - Workers Action supporter). Because they have had enough of "groveling" (Geoff Barr - ex-WRP). Because people will not be "attracted" to the SLP in the future (Berkshire area SLP).

Here we have political squeamishness combined with clairvoyancy. There can be no denying the distasteful nature of the Scargill regime, the clumsy, top-down decision-making, the ability of Scargill to demoralise and repel as well as attract and galvanise. But that has been true since day one of the SLP. Certainly the witch hunt effectively commenced in December 1995 when Scargill issued and then enforced Bonapartist imposition of his 'draft' constitution (it contained anti-communist clauses plagiarised from the Labour Party).

The real question is whether or not the SLP is finished. As a vehicle that can facilitate the self-liberation of the working class the SLP was a non-starter. The 1st Congress established the SLP as a unique right-centrist political formation - semi-Labourite, semi-syndicalist, semi-'official communist' under the personal domination of one man. Therefore not Labourite, not Stalinite, not NUMist ... but Scargillite. The key task of revolutionaries and communists consequently became the fight to establish the democratic right to openly organise and freely propagate their views. As suggested above, there have been certain advances here.

We have been told by the soft left that workers do not join bureaucratic parties. Transparently untrue. The Labour Party has a mass membership of workers ... and not only through trade union affiliations. In western Europe - France, Italy, Spain, Germany - 'official communist' parties embraced hundreds of thousands in spite of blatantly undemocratic theory and practice. So in terms of both past and present the notion of workers shunning bureaucratic parties has nothing to do with an objective statement of fact. It is rather a subjective wish, and a refusal to face up to the hard tasks and struggles that lie ahead if we are ever to overcome the domination of bourgeois ideas - which permeate all strata of society.

What of the SLP? Frankly it is too early to write it off. Much will depend on what happens with the Labour Party. Tony Blair has effectively de-Labourised Labour. Under his premiership British politics are being realigned around neo-liberalism and a remodelled UK constitution. His is undoubtedly the most rightwing Labour government ever and with the attack on single parents the honeymoon period is surely over. Thus far the trade union bureaucracy has proved utterly supine. The Labour left is a miserable shell of its former self and is without social roots. As a subject - ie, maker - of history, the working class has for the moment been defeated by the forces of triumphant capital because of the failure of social democracy and 'official communism'. And yet the market system is

far from healthy. As shown by South Korea, Indonesia and Singapore, it faces the looming prospect of a new general crisis, not another 1950s-60s golden age. Capitalism can survive only at the expense of living labour. The welfare state is Blair's first target. Our wages, democratic rights and organisations will be next. Under such circumstances it is foolish in the extreme to dismiss the SLP as a possible conduit of discontent.

Arthur Scargill might have discredited himself in the eyes of the soft left. But for millions he is a potent symbol of militancy, of intransigence, of socialistic principle. Today that exercises little or no gravitational pull. But tomorrow may well be different.

Pity the class that needs such a hero. A working class that turns to Scargill is a class only in itself. But a mass turn to Scargill cannot be ruled out. That is why it is wrong, irresponsible and premature to desert the positions the left has gained for itself in the SLP.

Communists and other comrades must rebuild the Democratic Platform so as to extend our salient within the SLP. While it has the potential to attract those who enter the field of class struggle, the SLP remains a site for communist intervention. Combative workers are our natural constituency and would quickly and easily be bro-

.....  
"A mass turn to Scargill cannot be ruled out. That is why it is wrong, irresponsible and premature to desert the positions the left has gained for itself in the SLP"  
.....

ken from the national socialist spell of Scargillism.

That is not to say we should put all our energies and hopes into the SLP - far from it. The SLP left must actively promote and support the formation of an all-Britain Socialist Alliance as well as other such united front bodies and campaigns. It should also identify and closely align itself with the CPGB. The fact that the CPGB has engaged with the SLP but at the same time maintained itself as a revolutionary pole of attraction shows that it is quite feasible to pursue a twin-track strategy.

Communists in the SLP should certainly join the CPGB. Dual membership is against the Scargill constitution, but that is no barrier for genuine revolutionaries. It could not be more clear: to have liquidated the CPGB, as demanded by Scargill and urged by some elements of the SLP left, would have been criminal. The bold and honest criticism of Scargill in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*

has been invaluable in defending, articulating and advancing the SLP left. More to the point, the paper has educated a whole layer of working class partisans about the living reality of Scargillism and the terminal crisis of old Labourism.

What of the ex-SLP soft left? Having walked away from the fight, they have constituted themselves under the rubric, Socialist Perspectives. This is a very heterogeneous grouping. In truth it is united not so much by what it stands for, rather by what it stands against - that is, Scargill on the one hand and unfortunately the CPGB on the other. It has no special sect theory, apart from a sectarian hostility *to* theory. Despite that within its ranks there can be counted members of the various competing factions of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, along with Leninist-Trotskyite supporters of Workers Action, state capitalist ex-SWPer and anti-Leninist localists. Formally this strange amalgam has two defining and very worthy aims. They want a mass workers' party and so they say that party must be democratic and pluralistic. It was more than ironic therefore that the first vote taken by this new grouping was to impose a Scargill-style exclusion.

Scargill has ensured that a swathe of comrades have involuntarily been placed outside the ranks of the SLP. If Socialist Perspectives was established simply in opposition to Scargill as a personality cult then it would be a complete irrelevance. Communists would have little or no interest in a purely negative project. But if, as they insist, Socialist Perspectives has an orientation towards a mass democratic workers' party, then those who have borne the brunt of Scargill's witch hunt and who support that positive goal should be welcomed with open arms, not subjected to another anti-communist voiding.

Martin Wicks, the effective leader of Socialist Perspectives, seems to fear communists almost with the same intensity as Scargill. That is why he imposed a witch hunt and is cultivating his own policeman. Carolyn Sikorski can serve as Scargill's Yagoda because of her knowledge and intimate contacts with the revolutionary left. In Socialist Perspectives that unenviable role is performed by Lee Rock - a man who previously defended communists with a degree of revolutionary honour. Sad to say, he ensured that any communist who attempted to discuss the formation of a new grouping at the Reading meeting was fingered and duly excluded (after the SLP left split there were two concurrent meetings in the same building).

Hopefully there will be a sharp struggle in Socialist Perspectives against anti-communism. Unless that is successful, the group will go from bad to worse. After all things develop from their origins and then move according to their own logic. The origins of Socialist Perspectives are anti-communist. As Scargill has conclusively proved, a mass democratic party of the working class can never be built on the logic of excluding communists. Bans and prescriptions can only but lead to anti-working class results, no matter who imposes them ●

John Bridge  
SLP membership no1,203 - voided

This line 5mm beyond crop

CL  
TD

This line 5mm beyond crop



# A republican party of the working class

The struggle to forge the SLP into the republican party of the working class has just taken two very tentative steps forward and one step back. The first step was taken when the National Executive Committee published the report of its republican constitution committee. The implication of this report is that the SLP now supports a republican constitution for the UK. It is worth remembering that the leadership of the SLP have managed to avoid any serious discussion on this matter through two party congresses and two referendums in Scotland and Wales.

At the founding congress, there was a report from the republican constitution working group. The SLP bureaucracy failed to circulate this report to the branches. It was put as the last item on the congress agenda and not discussed. So when the Scottish and Welsh referendums were held, the SLP had no real policy. A further attempt to get this issue before the delegates at the 1997 congress failed. An amendment from Liverpool, calling for a federal republic, was ruled out of order without any valid reason. John Hendy QC, who gave the report of the congress arrangements committee, could not explain it.

The SLP Republicans, dissatisfied with the situation, had been organising and lobbying for change. A republican candidate received 216 votes as part of the Democratic Platform. The argument was put that we need a working class republican party, which is democratic and contains within its ranks both communists and those from a socialist or left Labour tradition. Support for a federal republic was not drawn up on normal left-right lines. It gained a sympathetic hearing from all sections of the SLP. Some on the left were against it and some for it. The same was true of the SLP right and centre.

In a rather perverse way the second step forward was in the struggle for democracy in the SLP itself. The SLP left had united on the issue of democratic rights for rank and file members. They did unexpectedly well at the congress, despite the 3,000 block vote that appeared like a rabbit out of a hat. Only naive people thought the democratic arguments would win, and were therefore disappointed. A more sober estimate of the situation suggests that the democratic left did better than expected. They gained up to a third of the votes at SLP congress. But for the block votes they might even have secured a seat on the NEC.

One of the central demands of the Democratic Platform was the right to publish platforms, slates and bulletins. The *Marxist Bulletin*, the Republicans and the Democratic Platform took up this right in practice. Scargill and the leadership acknowledged from the platform that different points of view existed in the party. They recognised the existence of different slates. They decided not to take action against those who committed this 'crime', but to publish their own slate. We await to see whether the SLP leadership will now clamp down. In the present state of the SLP it is probably one of the most stupid things they could do. But don't hold your breath.

## Jan Berryman analyses developments in the SLP from a republican-communist angle

The congress also exposed a split between the right and the right-centre (Fisc). These allies fell out in full view of the membership. As a result, the expected victory for comrade Scargill came at the expense of the public exposure of his 3,000 block votes. This has been very damaging for him. But it will open up the democratic debate to a wider layer of the membership.

Prior to congress the main issue affecting some members was their right to be in the SLP. Some were voided. Some were banned from holding meetings. Some who were late paying their subs were disqualified from membership.

If these methods continue we are likely to see the final implosion of the SLP. The morale of the troops on the ground wouldn't stand for more of the same. The SLP project can only be saved if the leadership continues the move signalled at congress to a more open and tolerant regime.

After all, what has Arthur got to fear? He controls the National Executive and with his block votes he controls the congress too. Is he really that frightened of criticism by rank and file members? Surely not.

Whilst the SLP, despite itself, may have taken two steps forward at congress, we have now taken one step back. A section of the SLP left has now decided to leave the party. On January 10 1998 they formed a new group - Socialist Perspectives. This is the first group born out of the SLP. An historic moment? Perhaps. Certainly the SLP was born out of a number of groupings and individuals coming together. Now after two years, we see the first signs of movement in the opposite direction.

It was a step backwards. For some it proves the failure of the SLP project itself. In other ways it is a product of the failure of the SLP left. Those who speak for this group tell us it is too early to say what this new group stands for. They are in the process of working these matters out. That in itself indicates the premature nature of this new birth.

The SLP left has comprised many individuals with a range of backgrounds and views. Over two years they have made various attempts to organise themselves into a coherent position. The Revolutionary Platform, the Left Network, Socialist Labour Action and the Campaign for a Democratic SLP have all appeared, only to disappear almost as quickly. Prior to the 1998 congress this process began to sort out and clarify different perspectives.

As a rough approximation the left were divided three ways. First were the ultra-lefts - essentially Trotskyists who joined with the aim of winning the SLP to become a revolutionary Marxist party (or communist party). They are seeking to persuade the SLP to adopt Trotsky's *Transitional programme*. Some of these comrades formed Socialist Labour Action and others set up *Marxist Bulletin*. The latter have now become the main voice of Trotsky-

ism in the SLP. The second grouping were independent or non-aligned lefts. These are not really a group: more a collection of individuals. They do not have any common programmatic positions. Some are more sympathetic to Trotskyism and others to republicanism. The third grouping are the SLP Republicans. Some commentators, such as Dave Craig, describe these comrades as not being on the left, but rather in the centre between left and right. Others consider them to be a left group who reject the ultra-left politics of Trotskyism.

The SLP Democratic Platform was a united front between the independents and the republicans. The *Marx-*

.....

**'Whether the SLP can make the transition to a party of republican refoundation remains to be seen'**

.....

*ist Bulletin* were also involved. In the end they refused to join the Democratic Platform in order to uphold their ideological purity. The rest of the left considered the *Marxist Bulletin's* approach to unity as a typical example of left sectarianism.

The new Socialist Perspectives group is in essence the majority of the independent left forming themselves into something more than a campaign for democracy. With their exit there are now only two remaining perspectives - a republican perspective and a Trotskyist one.

The SLP left has failed at least in part because it has been dominated by ultra-leftism. This has been shown in terms of the Trotskyist programme and in adventurist stunts and sectarian tactics. When the SLP was formed and communists joined, they brought the virus of leftism with them. Lenin was very clear that ultra-leftism is a symptom of immaturity. Communists cannot become a real political force in the SLP, in the trade unions or in society if they suffer from the infantile disorder of leftism. Socialist Perspectives is a continuation of the same. It is yet another adventurist turn, which has no basis in reality. They will soon be forced to decide on what type of party and what kind of republicanism they are in favour of.

Ian Driver (Letters *Weekly Worker* January 8) was amazed that despite the lack of democracy in the SLP we should call on socialists to remain as active members. He suggests that the SLP left are powerless because of Scargill's constitution. This is surely constitutional fetishism. The left are powerless because they have not

developed a programme which fits today's situation. Such a programme would be powerful because it could unite our meagre forces, and draw ever wider support from the working class. With mass support it could roll over the British constitution, never mind Arthur's constitutional tablets of stone.

Arthur's constitution may be a nuisance, but it is not all-powerful and it certainly will not stop a movement of the working class. The reason that most of the left are in the SLP is nothing to do with whether the Labour Party or the SLP has the most democratic constitution. The SLP was not set up on a democratic basis. It was not democratic when Ian Driver joined or when he left. The reason why some of the left remain in the SLP is not because of democracy or the lack of it but because of the current situation and the objective tasks that socialists must carry out.

During the last 10 years the socialist and communist movement in the UK has experienced many setbacks. The trade union movement has been weakened by mass unemployment and an employers' offensive. We have seen the rise of New Labour alongside the defeat and marginalisation of the Labour left. The Communist Party was fragmented and liquidated and neither the Socialist Party nor the SWP have been capable of filling the vacuum. If Blair was facing a mass revolutionary communist party, then working class militants would face a direct choice. But at present there is no such party, nor any immediate prospect of creating one.

In the present situation, we must work for the unity of the left and the unity of revolutionary communists. We need rapprochement between revolutionary communists and the refoundation of a party of the left. We need a party of the left that can mount a challenge to Labour. In theory such a party could contain the Labour lefts, Socialist Party, SWP, SLP and other Marxists. At present many are ruled out not just by Arthur's constitution, but by their determination to back Labour in elections, especially the Labour lefts and the SWP.

This type of party has been called "a party of recomposition", a "communist-Labour party", "a party of refoundation" and "a party of the broad left". In Italy (RC), Spain (United Left) and in Germany (PDS) such parties have emerged out of the crisis of Stalinism and a vacuum on the left. Yet in many ways these are all misnomers.

The SLP was formed under the Tory government. It was an anti-Blair party at a time when Blair's popularity was rising. It was a party of decomposition. Arthur Scargill's history enabled him to be a magnet for all the fragmented and decomposing elements of the left. He has drawn together a rag, tag and bobtail army. Here we find the decomposing elements from Labourism and the NUM, as well as from Stalinism, Trotskyism and the SWP, etc all thrown together.

To call the SLP a party of decomposition should not be seen as an insult. It is merely the reality that we have to deal with. We are wading up to our necks in the mud and slime of the British working class movement. It has made many people feel very sick. Ian Driver has gone off to vomit in one corner and Socialist Perspective are searching for a different corner to be sick in. What they will soon discover is that there are no safe havens and nowhere to avoid the shit and puke. We just have to fight our way through it until we come out the other side.

A 'party' of decomposition can take many forms. In Scotland the Scottish Socialist Alliance has played that role. In England and Wales the Socialist Alliances are much less significant. They are in competition with the SLP. The failure of the SLP to take on board first Militant Labour, then comrades Coates and Kerr (MEPs) and now the exit of Socialist Perspectives all indicate that the SLP is failing in its duties. Had the SLP developed along the right lines, all these decomposing elements would now be on board. The Socialist Alliances and the Socialist Party would be dead in the water. As it is the Socialist Alliances are now a lifeboat for everybody.

A party of decomposition is inevitably a mess. But it is also the reality that we have to deal with. It is a party with a limited life span. It must transform itself into a party of renewal and refoundation or it will steadily degenerate. From decomposition to refoundation means turning the negative into the positive. It has to become a republican party of the working class.

This is the positive alternative to Blair's agenda, not simply a negative and defensive reaction to it. The Chartist party in the 1840s was the first republican party of the working class (strictly speaking semi-republican). Now that we face the constitutional agenda of New Labour, there has never been a better time to recreate a party that puts the constitutional interests of the working class to the fore.

Whether the SLP can make the transition to a party of republican refoundation remains to be seen. The Chartist party was a rebel party, a party of popular democratic revolution. It was a party which organised the mass mobilisation of the working class on the streets. This is the kind of party that the left needs today. We need a republican party of the working class, which can attract both Labourites and communists and which can develop the democratic and socialist alternative to New Labour.

The collapse of the SLP into a Stalinist rump will not benefit the left. It will not benefit Ian Driver or Socialist Perspectives. It will not benefit the working class. It will benefit the Blair government. At a stroke it will remove the only possible electoral danger from the left. The fate of Scargill and his party will be a warning to any rebels in the Labour Party. In the current circumstances resigning from the SLP without a serious debate and consideration of the options plays into the hands of Labour and therefore constitutes yet another ultra-left move ●

# Abolish the block vote

We publish below a discussion document emanating from Lewisham and Greenwich SLP, written in response to a previous paper, 'Facing up to realities' (see *Weekly Worker* January 8). The author, Richard Tisdell, made it clear that its contents were intended for internal use only. However, having been sent a copy, the *Weekly Worker* felt it should be made public. Comrade Tisdell is very close to the Fourth International Supporters Caucus, an organisation thrown into crisis by Arthur Scargill's use of the block vote to abolish the black section at December's congress. This is clearly reflected in comrade Tisdell's discussion document. Should SLP members continue to "uphold" the constitution and abide by the "authority of the NEC" - while refusing to "provide candidates and fund elections"? That the comrade believes he and Fisc can do both has an air of unreality about it. But the very fact that previously ultra-loyal supporters of the witch hunt are contemplating rebellion shows how fluid the SLP has become in the aftermath of its 2nd Congress

I was shocked and dismayed by the decision of the leadership to deploy a 3,000 block vote representing a retired miners' welfare group, a decision which effectively disenfranchised the entire membership of the SLP.

This action not only demonstrated a contempt for the rank and file membership but was also unnecessary and out of proportion. What was achieved by this inept and clumsy manoeuvre was the abolition of the black section and modification of the membership of the National Executive Committee by at most two members.

The result has been that the party has become the object of ridicule, isolating itself from potential recruits. Arthur Scargill has lost a lot of the considerable respect he formerly enjoyed, that respect being his most effective tool in holding the party together.

I joined the SLP because I believed it had the potential to unite socialists from different backgrounds and fill the political vacuum arising from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ever rightward drift of the Labour Party. Such a party, armed with distinct and coherent policies, acting in a united and disciplined fashion, would be able to intervene in struggles, influence significant sections of British society, and eventually form a socialist government.

I did not join the SLP to form a mark II Labour Party, Mark II Communist Party, realignment of the ultra-left or, worse still, participate in an unprincipled hotchpotch of diverse grouplets and individuals posing as a Socialist Alliance. I am opposed to any proposal that we in Lewisham and Greenwich enter into agreements with the Socialist Alliance. The SLP project aims to build a mass party, whereas the SA is a Trojan horse for ultra-left realignment. The two projects are totally incompatible and dual membership is a violation of the constitution we have all undertaken to uphold.

We should also resist the temptation to become localist, declaring UDI and disregarding the authority of the NEC. There is every reason to expect that attempts to behave in the way that Southwark [Vauxhall - ed], Cardiff, and others have in the past will be met with decisive action now that the new disciplinary procedures are in place. Such action also seeks to evade rather than confront the difficulties we are now facing.

Clearly it is totally unacceptable that the democratic rights of party members are flouted as they were at congress, and that black party members have been singled out for derecognition of their section.

It is important that rank and file party members strive for the maximum possible unity in the struggle for internal democracy. I believe that this will be achieved by concentrating our campaign on the issues of opposition to the block vote and supporting reinstatement of the black section.

I therefore propose the following:

- We continue with our local activities as before.
- We continue with our local, London and national internal activities as before.
- We campaign with SLP branches and members elsewhere for the abolition of the block vote.
- We campaign for PR in local, national and Euro elections *and* within the SLP.
- We demand the reinstatement of the black section as this is clearly the wish of the majority of *real* party members.
- We make clear to NEC members that we are not prepared to provide candidates and fund elections if we continue to be denied effective democratic representation at party congress. We should review our plans for the May elections with this in mind ●

## Simon Harvey of the SLP Democratic Platform builds new unity

The Democratic Platform of the Socialist Labour Party met last Saturday to discuss the way forward for the left of the SLP. The meeting provided an opportunity for the democratic forces inside the SLP to build on the unity reached at congress last December. Unfortunately the opposite occurred. The Democratic Platform split down the middle, with half of those at the Reading meeting walking out of the SLP.

For some time now, it has been clear that Martin Wicks, the main coordinator of the Democratic Platform, has been angling for this bloc to decamp from the SLP and form yet another leftwing groupuscule with himself as leader. The fact that Democratic Platform meetings were held in Reading, his 'power base', indicated that he was more interested in this than in fashioning an effective weapon against the witch hunts and fighting for genuine democracy in the SLP. Although he has achieved his pathetic aim, he has fortunately been unsuccessful in liquidating the Democratic Platform. Comrades representing all pro-democracy tendencies remaining in the SLP are now united under its banner. While not as strong as we were at congress, the Democratic Platform is in a good position to consolidate and augment its forces.

It is worthwhile noting that Martin Wicks and his south-west England followers initially organised around a document centred on the SLP's general election strategy. These comrades called for a minimum number of SLP candidates and a vote for Blair's Labour Party in all other constituencies. Although they objected to the witch hunt, their prime concern was to ensure that their Labourite election strategy was discussed in the party.

Such an approach is not surprising. Martin Wicks was intimately involved in the one and only formal meeting convened by the Fourth International Supporters Caucus. Whether he fell out with Brian Heron and Pat Sikorski, or whether he just could not stomach the blatant hypocrisy needed to carry out the Fisc agenda, I do not know. But around issues such as Europe and the general election, comrade Wicks decided to go it alone. He split from Fisc and published *Socialist Perspectives*, which circulated within his own restricted coterie. Supposedly against the witch hunt, he has now formed an organisation whose first political act was to bar communists.

The meeting which led to this split was initially conducted in a very comradely and open fashion. Despite the positive mood of the left in the face of the leadership split at congress, the meeting discussed only one issue - whether to stay in the SLP or leave.

Those in favour of leaving were reduced to one argument: that it was impossible to remain in such a dreadful organisation. The most extreme example of this came from Geoff Barr, who said: "We cannot move forward chained to Scargill." He declared that he was not "doing any more fawning and grovelling".

Other comrades argued that it is

against working class morality to just walk out of a workers' organisation. They criticised this method, suggesting that those who had previously "fawned and grovelled" before Scargill need not have done so then, and need not do so now. Some of these comrades went into the SLP with the idea that it was 'Arthur's party' and are leaving it for the same reason. It is merely their illusions in Arthur Scargill which have changed. Martin Wicks provided the most valiant attempt to politicise this petty-bourgeois moralism. He said that there were no further political gains to be made inside the SLP. This is based on his assessment that no new forces will join.

On two grounds, comrade Wicks's argument is false. First is his claim that militant workers do not join bureaucratic organisations; second is his belief in greener pastures outside the SLP.

The entire history of the 20th century shows that militant workers do join bureaucratic organisations. Trade unions to begin with. On top of this militants have at times flooded the ranks of social democratic organisations and the 'official communist' parties.

In the minds of many workers, Scargill is not some bureaucratic demagogue, but the militant miners' leader who stood up to Thatcher. For want of another alternative, radicalised workers could yet turn to the SLP.

What of the argument that greener pastures lie outside Socialist Labour? Comrades remaining inside pointed out that, apart from the SLP, there was no real party process to the left of the Labour Party. The Socialist Alliances, while a positive development, largely remain as just a good idea outside Scotland.

It was pointed out that SLP membership need not preclude activity in the Socialist Alliances. In fact, part of the tasks of comrades in the SLP should be to involve their local party organisations in the Alliances, no matter what edicts Scargill may proclaim. The fact that Hugh Kerr and Ken Coates seem intent on involving themselves in the SAs but not the SLP is a sure sign of Scargill's sectarian weakness on this issue.

After an indicative vote - a small majority favoured leaving the SLP - the two camps had separate meetings. The first real controversy arose when two voided members - both communists - were barred from the Wicks meeting. The only reason given was their assumed membership of the CPGB. A member of Worker's Action and a member of the Socialist Democracy Group were in attendance at this meeting. Neither voted for the two communists to remain, raising a cloud over the purported democratic credentials of the SDG as well. Those leaving decided to form a new group - Socialist Perspectives. So now we have yet another left group to add to an already crowded field.

The continuing meeting of the SLP Democratic Platform was constructive and comradely. It was decided to prepare a bulletin for SLP members and a statement was agreed. After some

heated debate the Democratic Platform agreed to propose joint work with Socialist Perspectives, which would not preclude a joint publication. The Democratic Platform also proposed a joint approach to the Socialist Alliances. Both these offers were rejected.

On a positive note, what remains of the SLP left seems to have finally united around a principled bloc for democracy. In addition, it has no illusions in its assessment of prospects for the SLP and will be pursuing all avenues toward building a working class alternative to New Labour.

### ■ Individualism or collectivism?

It is worthwhile responding to comrade Ian Driver's letter in last week's *Weekly Worker* (January 8). Like those who have formed Socialist Perspectives, his motivations, though well intended, have all the hallmarks of an individual moralist who has had his unrealistic illusions in the SLP shattered.

Comrade Driver claims it was the *Weekly Worker* "who called upon Labour lefts to join the SLP on the basis of the fact that constitutional change in New Labour rendered socialists in that party powerless". This is not true. My understanding of the position of the CPGB contradicts this on two grounds. Firstly, socialists have never had any real power in the Labour Party. Secondly, the CPGB, while calling on Labour lefts to join the SLP, did not call on them to leave New Labour. It is the principled position of the CPGB, one which I share, that socialists have a responsibility towards the comrades they organise with. It is the act of an individual to up and leave. The principled collectivist fights for their perspectives within the organisation and tries to win over their comrades. If they are expelled in the process, so be it.

Scargill should not have torn up his Labour Party card: he should have formed the SLP as a Labour Party member. Let the bastards throw you out, and organise with those still on the inside. Party cards should not be treated as souvenirs of revolutionary tourism.

Comrade Driver imagines that organising for militant democracy in the SLP somehow precludes you from turning towards the wider movement. This is simply not the case. As he well knows, supporters of this paper in the SLP have always called for SLP democrats to turn to "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".

So what does he propose SLP democrats actually do? Join the Socialist Democracy Group, naturally. Does that include me, Ian? And does he call on all CPGB supporters, the *Marxist Bulletin*, SLP Republicans and the Democratic Platform to join his group?

Comrade Driver is speaking as an isolated - and confused - individual activist, not as someone proposing a serious alternative for the class ●

Racism or national chauvinism?

Tilting at windmills

Tom Ball's article, 'Prejudice or racism', was very instructive as an example of much of the left's blind but false insistence on the existence of 'institutionalised racism' at the heart of the British state (Weekly Worker January 8).

It was aptly titled, for you could not wish to for a better expression of prejudice. It reminded me of the method of turn-of-the-century social researchers, who, guided by the 'certainty' of the 'inferiority' of blacks, set out to explain away facts that demonstrated the contrary. These were portrayed as 'exceptions' which proved the rule.

And so it is with comrade Ball, who is just as convinced of the 'fact' of British state racism. Confident that all sensible leftists share his prejudice, he does not think it necessary to offer even a shred of evidence to back up the assumption upon which his argument is based. His only attempt at 'proof' is the assertion that the British state often behaves unpleasantly to outsiders, such as the Czech and Slovak Romany asylum-seekers.

Comrade Ball correctly states that British imperialism adopted an ideology of racism to justify its colonialist expansion: "The 'superior' English 'race' ... conquered 'inferior' peoples." But then he makes his first logical leap: "This state has not changed its spots, nor will it ever do so." Why on earth not, comrade?

At the end of the 20th century does imperialism still rely primarily on armed occupation to enforce its exploitation of the whole planet? On the contrary, with only a few exceptions its past conquests have been decolonised. So why should imperialism perpetuate the myth of racial superiority when the occasion for its use has long since disappeared? Not that comrade Ball is claiming that today's imagined official racism assumes superior and inferior races. It apparently attempts to provoke racial divisions amongst the working class upon some other, undefined, basis.

In my previous article ('Fight oppression not prejudice' Weekly Worker November 20 1997) I tried to show that the modern state's main task in times of relative class peace is to ensure social stability. Thus in Britain it actively promotes multi-racial harmony through a whole range of measures. It encourages the notion that ethnic diversity ought to be the norm of a civilised society: indeed it is positively desirable. That is why anti-racism is taught in schools, why local councils and most big companies prominently display their anti-racist policies and credentials, why television in particular - the most popular and powerful of all the mass media - constantly and consistently pushes the same theme.

Comrade Ball has taken note of my arguments. Yes, he too has observed all this. Instead of simply ignoring these obvious manifestations of the 'racist' state's official anti-racism, as most on the left prefer to do, he attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable. Rather than seriously re-examine the false basis of his prejudice, he develops an elaborate, not to say fantastic, conspiracy theory.

You see, the state is "happy to encourage itself to be portrayed, superficially and wrongly, as 'anti-racist' ... Let us not be fooled by appearances." Comrade Ball assures us that racism continues to be secretly "nurtured" by the state (strange there are so few manifestations of this). Cleverly however, the bourgeoisie realises that its

use could be "a dangerous tactic", but "limiting it by means of 'anti-racist' legislation maintains a degree of control over it". This requires "nice judgements" of course. Still, if they get it right, "British state 'anti-racism' can be switched on or off as desired".

Believe it or not, those cunning bourgeois have even worked out that they need to "maintain a reservoir of racism, to be topped up as and when necessary, consequent on the depth of crisis and proximity to a revolutionary situation". Presumably, since there have been no examples whatsoever of state-inspired racist propaganda for a generation or more, the reservoir has been at a sufficiently high level for the past couple of decades or so.

In Tom's fantasy-world bourgeois strategists are certainly much more farsighted than any on planet Earth. Comrade Ball is convinced that the ruling class is carefully preparing for counterrevolution. But today, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 'death of communism', which establishment politician, which apologist commentator, has an inkling that capital will ever again be threatened by the organised working class - let alone considers it necessary to make active counterrevolutionary preparations? They are characterised by an arrogant and unmovable belief in the permanence of their system.

Searching for authoritative confirmation of his prejudice, Tom turns hopefully to Jack Conrad's *Draft programme* for the CPGB. He quotes the following extract: "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." But then comrade Ball threads in his own interpretation: "And," he adds seamlessly, "in no way does this thin veneer ... conceal the underlying reality of the British state's racist essence."

Comrade Conrad can speak for himself of course. But it is a fact that his *Draft programme* was based on conclusions reached after lengthy discussions within the Party. In fact the majority did not share Tom's view. National chauvinism was not viewed as a corollary of racism, but was actually seen as something quantitatively different. The quotation actually means what it says: the state's ideology is not racist; it is national chauvinist.

Racism, as described by many on the left, is viewed as a device for pro-

voking internal divisions. But comrade Conrad's phrase that national chauvinism "sets worker against worker" should be understood in the context of "foreign rivals". National chauvinism provokes external, international divisions amongst our class.

Comrade Ball has overlooked a key word. The bourgeoisie strives to cohere the entire population around its "national chauvinist consensus". It aims to win ideological hegemony over every section of society - every class, every ethnic group. It eschews racism not because it believes in polite and agreeable behaviour, but because a divided population would be antithetical to its present aims of consolidating national unity directed against outsiders.

There are numerous examples of this. A recent one concerns the BBC football commentator, John Motson, who naively confessed to finding it difficult on occasions to quickly identify black players. This caused an outrage and the hapless Motson was completely taken aback by the vehemence of those rushing to condemn him. Whatever you think of his comments, the reaction to them gives the lie to the myth of widespread and officially sanctioned racism.

While the slightest hint of discriminatory language or action based on race or ethnicity is officially frowned upon and usually forcefully condemned, when it comes to expressions of patriotism, of discrimination in favour of Britain and against outsiders, that is considered to be not only desirable, but completely natural. White workers are never encouraged to think of themselves as having separate and distinct interests as opposed to black workers. Yet standing up for Britain, for 'our' interests, is the officially promoted orthodoxy.

A Romany child lying among his family's belongings. The state's exclusion of gypsies was anti-worker, not racist

This ideology does not usually portray the British as being superior to other nations. That is unnecessary. It insists only that 'we' have a common interest, directed of course against all other countries. Just as employers continually strive to instil in their employees the notion that workers, managers, directors and shareholders all ought to collaborate for the good of the company and their mutual benefit, so British capital seeks to forge a similar 'unity' in the interests of the 'nation'.

This ideology is so powerful and all-pervading that it even affects the thinking of the left. No self-respecting leftist would want to be viewed in any other way than as a committed anti-racist who believes in the equality and solidarity of all. Yet the left and self-proclaimed revolutionary organisations embrace such ideas as import and immigration controls, the hope of making social advances in 'our' own country without reference to elsewhere: in short national socialism.

That is why attacks on the 'racist' state are misdirected. The bourgeoisie is only too happy to condemn and attempt to prevent manifestations of racist discrimination within its shores. But there is no common ground whatsoever over genuine internationalism. For the ruling class Britain's 'national interests' must always come first.

It is true that racism still exists at every level of society. But to admit that does not imply that it is officially sponsored. Not only is the left's obsession with tilting at racist windmills misconceived.

It also dovetails - conveniently for the bourgeoisie - with the state's genuinely vicious and oppressive chauvinism ●

Alan Fox

CPGB London seminar series

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.

January 25: Production price in the series on 'Marx's theory of value', using Il Rubin as a study guide.

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

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	1yr	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

CL  
TD

This line 5mm beyond crop

Ken Coates talks to the Weekly Worker about the need to build a fightback

*Blair puts the boot in*

Last Thursday, Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr were informed by Tom Sawyer, the Labour Party's general secretary, that they "had made themselves ineligible to be party members" and were therefore no longer entitled to hold office or act as representatives.

The shabby and sordid nature of the expulsion was typical of New Labour. Both Coates and Kerr attended a meeting of the European Socialist Group in Brussels, only to find their names already removed from the attendance register and from their normal seats - 'non-persons' indeed. Neither was allowed to speak, so therefore left within a few minutes of arriving at the meeting.

Afterwards, a Labour Party spokesperson said: "We asked them to do the honourable thing and resign. They clearly have no intention of doing so. We have therefore acted promptly in line with the party rules. It was inevitable that their behaviour would lead to this".

There were attempts to link the names of Coates and Kerr to the Green Party. At one point, the mainstream press confidently informed us that the two had defected. This was so much Labour Party black propaganda. Even though this assertion was pure invention, an LP fax sent to Ken Coates said punishment - ie, expulsion - was necessary because of his "application to join the Green Party group" - Hugh Kerr also never had any intention of joining the Green Party group. Perhaps this Goebbels-like fax to Coates is an example of New Labour doing the "honourable thing".

In fact, Ken Coates has now applied to join the European United Left Group, which is composed of individuals from groups like Communist Refoundation of Italy and the Communist Party of France. He will be sitting as an Independent Labour MEP, as will Hugh Kerr.

In a joint statement, Coates and Kerr stated: "We are appalled at the method of expulsion. We have been denied the right to speak, but they cannot stop us speaking to the millions of Labour voters who are distressed and angry at the Tory policies being pursued by the Blair government."

Significantly, Ken Coates has ruled out joining the Socialist Labour Party because of its national socialist 'let's pull out' position on the European Union. Unlike the leadership of the SLP, Coates wants to unite workers across national frontiers.

With the Blairites determined to push Labour even further to the right, now talking of "affluence testing" - ie, means testing - *all* state benefits, we should not be surprised to see more defections from the Labour Party, whether they be based in Brussels/Strasbourg or London ●

Paul Greenaway

## All London Socialist Alliance

Thursday - 7.30pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square WC1 (Holborn - Central Line tube). All welcome - plenty of time for discussion and questions. Speakers include: Michael Hindley (MEP for Lancashire South), Julia Leonard (SP Hillingdon councillor), and strikers from the Liverpool docks and Hillingdon Hospital disputes. Ken Coates MEP and Hugh Herr MEP have also been invited. For more details contact: Brent Socialist Alliance, c/o Galaxy News Box 100, 37 Walm Lane, London NW2 4QU. 0181-451 0616.

# Euro rebel defies Blair

**What are your thoughts on your expulsion from the Labour Party?**

It was all a case of parliamentary spin-doctoring and deliberate confusion-mongering. I have had no interview, never mind a trial. It is extraordinary that the European Socialist Group jumped at the word of the British Labour Party. I didn't want to leave the socialist group and I get on well with its leader, but she felt she had no option but to go along with the wishes of the Labour group.

It is not true to say we joined the parliamentary greens. I never considered joining them. All that happened was they offered to provide a letterbox and act as honest broker in our dispute with the Labour leadership. You have to apply to join a European parliamentary group. That requires at least two interviews, including with the group as a whole. None of that happened.

The Labour leadership could have found out the true situation, but the truth is they didn't want to know. So that is the end of a lovely relationship.

You may be interested to know that I have now applied to join the Gauche Unifié Européenne, the group that contains the French Communist Party and the Italian Communist Refoundation.

**How long have you been dissatisfied with the Labour Party?**

Ever since Tony Blair was elected it has been brewing up. He made it plain from the beginning he wanted to reform the welfare state. Now we see the cuts, the war on lone parents, the attacks on invalidity benefit.

I am not just talking about cuts in the next parliamentary offensive, but cuts that are going ahead right now. My post is already full of people having their benefits cut off. Most of these people voted Labour, but this is something different, something they did not vote for.

**When did the crisis come to a head?**

When they instructed us not to speak out in public about changes in the election process for candidates to the European parliament. We refused to be gagged. These are reforms of a most undemocratic kind and a huge regulation of the system. For example, my own constituency covers three million people from Northampton to Sheffield. Yet people would not

be voting for individuals, but for party lists picked by the leaders. Never mind 'one person, one vote': this is 'one leader, one vote'.

**What is the main task we face now?**

How to develop a network of people uniting the various struggles. We have put up a flag and people are already writing to us. We need to attract welfare campaign groups and those representing the disabled.

**How do you view the development of a network of Socialist Alliances?**

The Socialist Alliances provide one area of work, but they are only a small part of the constituency being hammered by New Labour.

**Have you considered joining the Socialist Labour Party?**

No, I have not considered the SLP. They have a firm position on Europe which I am strongly against. I am for the unity of the European working class.

**There is a sizeable SLP minority who would agree with you.**

I am very keen to talk to them all. We need an open dialogue. I am in favour of a pluralistic movement containing different tendencies such as those they organised in the French Socialist Party. At present all the different groups are in powerful disagreement and we are not able to unite our efforts.

**Are you in favour of a new working class party?**

The idea to unite might come about, but until then it is too early to talk about a new party. The situation in the old party was that only 47 rebelled in the recent vote. That was a great victory, yet still a defeat from the point of view of the lone parents. We have to bridge that gap by creating a sense that we're all moving in the same direction of opposition. Everybody thinks they're isolated, yet many people are thinking those thoughts.

So we must get the movement first. You can't blueprint it. We must unite people to have a go and, if enough do, you can have a movement. Then you can really have out all the arguments.

**What is your view of the Labour Party historically?**

I was 40 years in the Labour Party, but it has been a battle all the time. Recently I was happiest when John Smith was leader. He was an old-fashioned moderate, committed to full employment. He wanted to introduce Keynesian methods

Ken Coates: 'Develop a network to unite the struggles'

on a European level in order to create jobs. That was the most hopeful time in recent years.

Undoubtedly over half a century the position has improved under Labour governments. Not as much as some of us would have liked, but working people have been defended nevertheless.

There were three strands to the Labour Party over this period. Firstly what you might call the ideal position of democratic socialism, summed up perhaps by clause four. The second function was to organise an elected presence, both locally and nationally, and the third was to protect people who belonged to our natural constituency. For example, measures were introduced to help the trade unions to improve wages and conditions, ensure safety at work, etc, and legislate accordingly; also to help the poor through the welfare state, the health service and state education.

These three functions were still being discharged under John Smith, but now that distinctive doctrine has gone, to be replaced by neo-liberalism. You could say

that the elected presence has not gone, but the social composition of the parliamentary Labour Party has changed rather adversely. There has been a triple roll-back. **How would you describe yourself politically?**

Broadly as a libertarian socialist. I am not for centralisation or a directed economy. As a lifelong advocate of workers' control, I am not in favour of capitalism. Most of the labour movement are for taming it, but abolishing it is a tall order. It is a matter of how people organise themselves. You can have workers' control under capitalism. Workers themselves can decide how to organise their labour. You can't have self-management - no: but you can have workers' control.

Yes, there would still be a profit motive, but you can have a collective where the workforce is sovereign and elects the directorate. If capital is needed, it could be borrowed from a bank or state funds and the increments would belong to the workers. Today workers have no say over the disposition of their labour - they are wage slaves ●