



All London Socialist Alliance

Thursday February 5 - 7.30pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square
WC1 (Holborn - Central Line tube)

All welcome at the launch meeting - 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.

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50p

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New Lurch to nationalism

Scottish Militant Labour takes another step towards separatism

A preliminary proposal to commit the Scottish Socialist Alliance to an "independent socialist Scotland" was placed before the January meeting of the SSA's National Council.

Alan McCombes, SSA campaigns coordinator and leading member of Scottish Militant Labour, presented a discussion paper in which he outlines the need for a political programme directed specifically at the new Scottish parliament. This would supplement the SSA's *Charter for socialist change*. He argues that there should be two components to this:

- a 10-point manifesto that the SSA would fight for a Scottish parliament

to deliver;

- "a clear policy on the national question [in Scotland - NC] expressed in a form which can be easily and immediately understood".

The 10-point programme will be based on key demands that are within the policy areas covered in the limited powers of New Labour's Scottish parliament. These areas would include local government, education, housing, a civil rights bill, etc. The meeting agreed to this in principle, although the content and number of demands will be open to debate by the SSA's membership between now and the next national conference in the summer. Inevitably debate will centre around the content of these

demands. As with all minimum demands, it is vital that socialists and communists put forward and fight for what workers need to live full life under capitalism - whether it is a decent minimum wage; free, good quality education; or the utmost extension of democracy and democratic rights.

The second part of the proposal, for "a clear policy on the national question", is elaborated by comrade McCombes in this way: "I would therefore suggest that a separate but simultaneous debate takes place within the Alliance and its constituent parts around the question of whether or not the Alliance should now explicitly champion the cause of an independent socialist Scotland which would take a lead in the international struggle against global multinational capitalism."

This is indicative of the growing view amongst increasing numbers of SSA members that, now a Scottish parliament with limited powers has been created, the SSA should move to a position of demanding 'socialist' separation from England and Wales - what we have termed 'national socialism'.

The meeting was unanimous in welcoming the opportunity for the membership to fully debate the issue, culminating in a decision at the national conference in the summer. It is important however that all members have an opportunity to consider in an informed way the variety of views that exist within the SSA. It is not enough to argue against caricatures of opinions. There is a real need for all of us to develop our understanding of this question to follow the correct socialist method. The forthcoming CPGB school on the national question, being held in Dundee, will be an important contribution to this process.

Several comrades outlined their attitude to the idea of separation. Mary Ward restated the CPGB's opposition to nationalism and a commitment to a federal republic in order to provide the best conditions for the maximum unity of the working class throughout Britain. Allan Green said that for

travel from Strasbourg to speak.

Other speakers include representatives of the Liverpool dockers and Hillingdon hospital strikers. Some dockers' leaders, totally disillusioned with Labour, have themselves made a call for a new party. The Hillingdon strikers have also seen the impossibility of making any gains under this government. Another speaker, Julia Leonard, Socialist Party councillor, was at the forefront of the setting up of the Hillingdon Socialist Alliance in 1996.

In taking this initiative Brent Socialist Alliance hopes to have the support of all revolutionary organisations and progressives. We need to organise our own working class coalition to Blair's patriotic front. The success of the Scottish Socialist Alliance is an example of how the left can come together. An All-Britain Socialist Alliance movement would be a tremendous step forward in building a working class party capable of taking on this government ●

Anne Murphy
(Brent Socialist Alliance)

Uniting London's left

Blair's latest call for a 'patriotic front' of British interests in Europe is a clear bid to attract renegade pro-Europe Tories on board. It is another example - if one were needed - of exactly where his loyalties lie. He is anxious to unite with the likes of Michael Heseltine and Kenneth Clarke, along with the Liberal Democrats, to cement his own position and further his ambition of making New Labour a permanent government.

But while the most rightwing Labour government in history lines up with dissident Tories, moves are underway to further the unity of working class opposition. The launch meeting of a London Socialist Alliance on Thursday February 5 will bring together a broad spectrum of forces. The Alliance movement throughout England and Wales is beginning to attract interest from those looking for an alternative to Blair's government. Hopefully Ken Coates, the expelled Euro-MEP, will have a message of support ready for the launch. Michael Hindley, another rebel MEP, has told us that he will



SSA members: an "independent socialist Scotland"?

some time now he had favoured an independent Scotland with a federal/confederal relationship with the rest of Britain and Europe.

Comrade McCombes' proposals reflect the current debate on the national question within Scottish Militant Labour, the outcome of which will be decided at its own conference. In the spirit of openness a commitment has been given that a substantial document prepared by McCombes, for SML, will be available to other comrades outside that organisation. Allan Armstrong of Edinburgh SSA and the Republican Worker Tendency suggested that SML's internal discussions should be out in the open too. However, it is unclear whether the debate (rather than merely the fi-

nal outcome) will take this form. It will be interesting to see if it finds its way into the pages of SML's own publication, *Scottish Socialist Voice*, or the Socialist Party's *Socialism Today*. Sadly on past experience this seems unlikely. Once again we urge SML to recognise the importance of conducting such debates in front of the working class.

The National Council also heard a report from Martin Wicks (ex-SLP) on the SLP national congress. Comrade Wicks was in Scotland to talk to SLP members and presumably to persuade them to leave the SLP to join his new grouping, Socialist Perspectives. He indicated his support for alliances throughout Britain ●

Nick Clarke

This line 5mm beyond crop

Party notes

Rapprochement aggregate

On January 31, the Provisional Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Organising Committee of the Revolutionary Democratic Group are organising the first of a series of joint aggregates that we hope will lead to the fusion of the two organisations. This will be a small, but important step forward for the project of communist rapprochement that this paper has explicitly campaigned for over the past four years.

You can't please everyone, it seems. In some sections of the workers' movement, the Communist Party is branded as an organisation of incorrigible splitters, nit-pickers and professional sectarians. Other people will confidently tell you that the CPGB is in fact a mushy, *laissez-faire*-type organisation, a "shifting agglomeration of centrist groupuscules, Stalinist fragments, refugees from Cliffism and various other bits of political flotsam", as our chums in the International Bolshevik Tendency have colourfully described us (1917 No18, undated).

Of course, both these caricatures have in their own way pointed to a certain truth about our organisation. This is why they do their work as caricatures and keep the membership of various rival organisations either chuckling quietly to themselves about us, or – more often – running pell mell in the opposite direction whenever we appear.

It is true that for us unity – in a campaign, a 'united front', an alliance or even a single party – in no way implies a cessation of hostilities between different trends in our movement, a polemical truce. Quite the opposite, in fact. The proximity of different organisations in some form of working unity should be taken as an opportunity to heighten the struggle for truth, to openly clarify differences.

Thus we explicitly reject the approach of our Scottish Socialist Alliance comrades in organisations like Scottish Militant Labour, or the Socialist Party in the rest of Britain. Their '80/20' approach – that is, 'let's talk about the 80% we agree on and ignore the 20% where we differ' – is inimical to Marxism. Our participation in the important electoral and campaigning work of the Alliances in no way implies that we end our fight against the national socialist or reformist illusions of some of our bloc-partners.

On the other hand, our tactic of fighting for communist rapprochement during this period has been parodied by various sects in the style quoted above. We reject the charge that we are programmatic agnostics, that issues of political and theoretical clarity are irrelevant to us. However, we believe that in a party regime motivated by genuine democratic centralism, with the right to form open factions, many of the divisions that today wall working class militants into various hermetically sealed sect-tombs would quickly be revealed as episodic and secondary. Yes, we believe that the unity of all revolutionary partisans of the working class is possible – and desperately necessary – in the here and now.

These are testing times for all trends on the left of the workers' movement. The period in which we operate is producing a certain fluidity and it is certainly pleasing that a number of organisations apart from our own are defending – in principle, at least – the idea of revolutionary unity and openness. However, the dominant theme of the moment remains one of disintegration and fracture, not the coming together of militants. Over the last few years or so, for instance, we have seen a small flurry of journals such as *New Interventions*, *What Next?*, *Historical Materialism* and the imminent *Cutting Edge* sponsored by Red Action activists.

A common theme of these publications – whatever their particular market niche – is the need for "open discussion uninhibited by sectarianism or dogmatism" (*What Next?* No5); "for discussion unfettered by any orthodoxy or 'party line'" (*New Interventions* winter 1997-98); or as *Historical Materialism* puts it, "[we are] not aligned with any particular tendency or party [and thus aim] to ensure that political differences are neither simply repressed nor asserted *a priori* ..." (autumn 1997, No1).

It is hard to quibble with any of this – apart from perhaps the danger of a latent anti-party stance that could flower in the 'interstices' of any of these projects. Yet all are – quite explicitly – products of profound defeat, of the quite ignominious collapse of previous perspectives ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Philosophy

Phil Watson and Kevin Graham raise interesting and intelligent points: the former in defence of George Lukács against the "highly misleading" attack on him by Linda Addison; the latter in defence of Louis Althusser against the "criticism" of John Dart (*Weekly Worker* Letters, January 15). Unfortunately, in correcting what they perceive of as the mistakes of others, both comrades fall into error by widening their defence much too far.

I, in my turn then, must first defend the CPGB 'majority' against the charge of "liquidationism" levelled by comrade Watson, and secondly defend Marx and Engels themselves from the charge of "revisionism" coming from comrade Graham.

Phil Watson seems to believe that comrade Addison's mish-mash of ineffectual bile, dour pessimism and puerile inaccuracy published in the *Weekly Worker* in October last year stems from a sophisticated misreading of Lukács's *History and class consciousness*. I beg to differ. This comrade arrived at right liquidationism not as a result of theory, but due to a lack of theory. Her little lecture on the 'sins' of Lukács is mere ornamentation – or, if you prefer, camouflage.

But what of the "absurd", "unprovable" and "liquidationist" formulation in the 'What we fight for' column which comrade Watson so strongly objects to: namely, "We are materialists: we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round"? Given limitations of space, I am sure the comrade will forgive me for not entering into a discussion concerning the dialectical relationship between matter and consciousness. Needless to say, I do utterly reject his rather flippant charge of liquidationism – which here can only mean liquidating the theory of Marxism. No doubt the comrade wants to appear even-handed and scold both comrade Addison and the CPGB 'majority'.

Our formulation corresponds to and is adapted directly from Marx's celebrated 1859 preface to his *Contribution to the critique of political economy*. Hopefully a few selected quotes will suffice: "In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness ... a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out."

This brings me to comrade Graham. He more or less equates 'classic' Marxism with arid economic determinism. However, as can be seen from the passage just cited above, Marx (and Engels) rejected the absurd and ignorant notion that economics was the sole determinate – rather than the determined determinate of the last analysis. Yet comrade Graham foolishly says that it was they who therefore set the "revisionism" of Althusser "in motion".

My prime objection to Althusser is not that he brought into Marxism a stress on the role of ideology – it was there in rich abundance already. But that he re-invented an entirely spurious old, 'scientific' and young, 'idealistic' Marx. Of course, there was a young and old Marx. Marx was not born a Marxist. But when did he become a Marxist? Althusser places Marx's 'epistemological break' not, as I would, in 1844 with the *Paris manuscripts*. Rather it was with *Capital* or even his *Marginal notes on Wagner* – Marx's only fully Marxist work, according to the French academic. This revisionism originates not in the Collège de France, as comrade Graham imagines, but the Soviet Union. The Stalinists could not but find embarrassing stirring calls for negating alienation and universal human liberation. They tried to explain away the *Paris manuscripts* and the *German ideology* by dismissing them as the product of a 'non-scientific' young Marx.

In my opinion there is an uninterrupted method and aim that joins the Marx of 1844 to the Marx of *Capital*. The method is scientific; the aim is freedom. Between the two

works and the two points in time there was no qualitative break but, not least as shown by *Grundrisse*, consistent, logical and painstaking development. Althusser did not try to "strengthen Marxism", but revisionism. Thankfully in the end he failed.

Jack Conrad
London

Pie in the sky

Although Jim Blackstock's article 'Winnie fills SACP vacuum' (*Weekly Worker* December 4 1997) can be said to be 'better' than most being bandied around in the media, it contains hints and misinformation that I feel should not pass.

I presume it is felt by many that the 37 ANC members (including the president, Thabo Mbeki), having been amnestied by the Truth and Reconciliation Committee without having to state their crimes, are to be excused. After all, as Jim Blackstock says, they were fighting the struggle and I agree one cannot equate revolutionary violence with reactionary violence. But were they really?

In the 1970 and 80s, great respect was paid in Britain and in Europe generally to the chief representative of the ANC in London, Solly Smith (Samuel Khunene) and his sidekick, Dr Francis Meli. In 1990 Smith confessed – and implicated Meli – to having been spies for the South African apartheid regime. After his confession, Smith was made head of the ANC in the Orange Free State and a few months later both were found dead in hotel rooms in different towns.

In the 1980s the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group was being trashed by the ANC and AAM, as was David Kitson and myself. The membership of the London ANC was peculiarly obedient to these spies.

The British media also fulsomely followed the dictates of the spies. But there were many others: the British Anti-Apartheid Movement went to great lengths to assist the Boer agents. Ken Gill, leader of the union Tass, joined avidly in trying to rubbish the Kitsons and stopped David's funding at Ruskin College, having previously promised him a 'job for life' after his 20 years in jail as a member of the high command of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Nothing further has been published about the spies, although PAC member Patricia de Lille tried to make some facts known in parliament recently. Her allegations have not, of course, been answered.

But back to Winnie Madikizela Mandela: It has not been found in any court, nor at the TRC, that Winnie killed, beat or caused the killing or beating of anyone. She asked for an open hearing to clear her name.

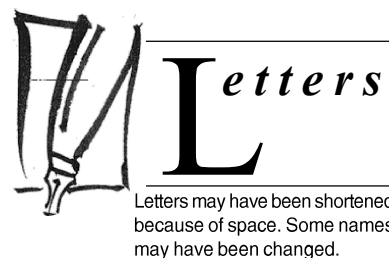
Jim Blackstock says "numerous witnesses have implicated" her in the murder of Stompie and Dr Asvat. These witnesses were all self-confessed liars: even the 'unassailable' Albertina Sisulu, when called upon to confirm her act of signing a medical card – evidence which she had given previously a number of times – denied having done it. One 'witness' admitted being a police spy. One, Falati, gave as her reason for lying that it was 'traditional', and so on. Posing Cebekulu, Richardson, Falati and people like them – self-confessed criminals and liars – as witnesses to Winnie MM's 'crimes' is misleading your readership.

There have been campaigns against Winnie MM for many years, all of which have proved in and out of the courts to have been baseless. One after another, cases have been set up against her and then disproved. The one area where she was found guilty was in kidnapping.

In the UK and Europe there have been many cases where children have been removed from the care of child abusers. Only in South Africa, in the case of Winnie MM, has this been termed 'kidnapping'. Falati reported to her that these children were being abused and *she* removed them from Verryn's care, and she admitted that.

Judge Stegman found that when Stompie was murdered, Winnie MM was proved to be in Brandfort. This was corroborated by Mrs Sisulu at the TRC hearing when she denied signing the medical card with its altered date so crudely offered as evidence of Winnie MM's presence in Johannesburg on that day.

Did you know it was said at the time of his death that Dr Asvat was in a position to con-



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

firm that Stompie had been raped? That was the reason given then why he was murdered. Winnie MM could not have done that (or arranged it) because it would have been contrary to her interests. Through all the years Winnie MM has run crèches, provided venues and food for children. Her writings of the children of Soweto are profoundly loving. Also, Dr Asvat was a great friend of hers.

Jim Blackstock says Winnie MM's "revolutionism has drifted in the direction of reactionary populism" because she is alleged to have said she is in favour of restoration of the death penalty. Winnie denies she ever said that. Winnie MM has a huge constituency among the South African people. Dire moves were made to prevent her being elected deputy president of the ANC; but, despite all the media hype and hatred, she achieved 15th position out of 150 candidates in the voting stakes at the ANC conference in Mafikeng.

JB's final paragraph is actually laughable. Here we have a revolutionary leader, proved and tested in the struggle, *leading from the front*, and he is asking the "masses" to jack her and "unite their forces in order to reforge the SACP around an independent working class programme". Talk about pie in the sky! What SACP is he referring to? The Yusuf Dadoo one, who spent his time drinking himself under the table and whose followers (or leaders) were hand in hand with the confessed spies? Or the one led by Moses Mabidha who was not allowed to make decisions unless passed by Brian Bunting? The Slovo-led one which negotiated away the revolution? The one led by Jeremy Cronin that believes you can talk yourself into socialism and, hidden under the cloak of the ANC, is leading its capitalist policies? Or is something new suddenly going to jump out of the woodwork?

The umbrella of the ANC covers many good comrades. Let us hope they emerge, as Winnie has done, unsullied by the spies, the opportunists and the renegades.

Norma Kitson
Zimbabwe

Use and abuse

After reading comrade Danny Hammill's letter concerning drugs (*Weekly Worker* January 15) and re-reading comrade Mary Ward's book review on the same subject (January 8), I feel Mary's position needs defending.

I believe Danny is confusing drug use with drug abuse. Mary talks about drug abuse and the "harm reduction" from it in the context of the Widnes experiment: If the product of the legalisation of drug use removes death from heroin abuse, this is good; if it prevents "children as young as 10 injecting heroin in Glasgow's streets" this is good; and if it makes addicts "stabilise their lives and function as part of their communities", this again is no bad thing.

Although only a small proportion of drug users are actually or will become drug abusers, Danny tends to be a little blasé to this aspect of the question. Whilst I agree that socialists and revolutionaries "should support legalisation ... in order for substance use ... to be fully socialised and humanised", the potential physiological and psychological dependence of some drugs, notably the opioids – eg, heroin (morphine) – will always remain. It is therefore in this context that I believe the education, facilities and legislation that Mary writes about should not be overlooked as an important feature when dealing with drug usage.

The fight for the right to use drugs will be but one of many as we take up the issue of democracy and openness alongside the fight for socialism, communism and human liberation. Only then will "harm reduction" be fully achieved and workers be given the opportunity to establish whether or not a drug "pleasure-enhancing" strategy for society is an appropriate one to adopt.

Bob Paul
East London

This line 5mm beyond crop

From The Call, paper of the British Socialist Party,
January 17 1918

Russia's appeal - will British workers remain silent?

Manifesto of the British Socialist Party to the national Labour Party conference at Nottingham

Comrades

The revolutionary Russian workmen and peasants have addressed an urgent and imperative appeal to the British working class movement.

In face of unrelenting opposition from the ruling classes of the Entente countries, in spite of abuse, calumny and misrepresentation, the Russian people's government has opened the way for an immediate general peace on the basis of no annexations, no indemnities and the rights of all peoples to self-determination.

The invitation to take part in peace negotiations on this basis, issued by Russia to all the belligerents, has been contemptuously ignored by the Entente governments. M Pichon, the French foreign minister, openly derides the Russian proposal and demands the forcible acquisition of Alsace-Lorraine without regard to the wishes of its inhabitants. Mr Lloyd George threatens that Russia will be abandoned and her frontier provinces left to the tender mercies of the kaiser's government. President Wilson, whilst rendering lip service to the Russian Revolution, turns a deaf ear to the proposal to put the Russian formula into practical effect.

All the Entente statesmen denounce the crafty German imperialists who, whilst professing to accept the right of self-determination for the peoples of Poland, Courland and Lithuania, seek to shelter their annexationist designs behind the spurious councils of German barons and landowners, established since the military occupation. All demand that the German armies shall evacuate these territories and the peoples left free to decide their own destinies free from the menace of an alien military force. But no Entente statesman has expressed the willingness to apply the same principle to the peoples of the territories occupied by the Entente since the beginning of the war.

All the Entente statesmen profess to strive for the liberty of the people of Alsace-Lorraine and the unfree peoples of Austria. But none has declared willingness to give equal liberties to the subject nationalities of India, Egypt, Ireland or the other territories forcibly acquired in the past by the Entente powers.

By the publication of the secret treaties, made behind the backs of their peoples, the Russian democracy has torn off the mask that hid the imperialist designs of the Entente governments. Their insistence upon full publication in all their dealing with the German diplomatists has forced the German imperialists to reveal their annexationist plans. Their enunciation of the democratic principles, on which alone a durable peace can be based, has confounded the aggressionists of both groups of belligerents. The ruling classes see in the triumph of these principles a menace to their own class domination; they fear the new era of social, political and economic emancipation of the working class.

But Russia's appeal is made over the heads of the ruling classes. It is directed to the common people of all countries, who have nothing to gain from the imperialist aims and territorial lusts of their ruling cliques.

Already the courageous stand of the Russian people has created the powerful peace movement amongst the workers of Germany and Austria. If the workers of Britain, the most powerful of all the Allies, made it clear to the German workmen as the Russian workers have done that every belligerent nation must apply the doctrine of no annexations and the principle of self-determination to their own possessions and empires, it would be impossible for the German Junkers to keep the German workmen any longer in the war.

The workers of all the warring countries can satisfy each other that they accord to all an equal right to existence and development. That is the Russian workers' message. They have found there is no strength or virtue for the common people in national aggrandisement or imperial might. They have done more to harass and weaken the German autocracy than all the battles, with their millions of dead, than all the speeches of imperialist statesmen.

Let British Labour join them in that task. Let the forthcoming Labour Party conference at Nottingham give the answer to Russia's urgent and imperative appeal. Say to the government: 'Labour will not allow you to betray Russia because you hate and fear the Revolution.'

Say to the government: 'If you will not comply with Russia's request for an immediate armistice and negotiations for a general peace, Labour will thrust you aside and take up itself the task of restoring peace to a sorrow-stricken world.'

Comrades, let British Labour grasp the hands of the Russian workmen and peasants. Together they can convince the German workmen that they suffer no danger from the common people of any land, that all alike are victims of capitalist imperialism.

Let Labour rely upon itself. Speak clearly and unmistakably. Act swiftly.

On British Labour rests the hope of peace now and its presence in the days to come.

On behalf of the Executive Committee
of the British Socialist Party
Albert Inkpin
secretary

[Editor's note: Unsold issues of *The Call* containing this appeal, along with leaflets carrying the same message intended for distribution at the Labour Party conference, were seized by Scotland Yard shortly after publication.]

1918

Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

France

Unemployed fight back



Demonstrators battle with police after last week's Paris demonstration

Last weekend's Paris demonstration showed that the mass movement in France for unemployed workers' rights has not been suppressed despite the violent break-up of employment centre occupations by state forces.

Although there were only around 10,000 demonstrators, this continued the trend of relatively few workers participating directly in militant action, but those actions having nevertheless the support of millions.

The present campaign began at the beginning of December with the first occupations by supporters of unemployed action groups. They quickly spread to take in more than 30 *assédics* - employment centres - within days. A welcome feature was the close cooperation of the three main organisations - previously renowned for going their own way. One of these groups is the Comité de Chômeurs (Committee of Unemployed Workers), sponsored by the large communist-led Confédération Générale du Travail trade union centre. Despite the continuing social-democratisation of the Parti Communiste Français (Communist Party of France) and its participation in the right-wing Socialist Party government, PCF militants are still capable of leading such militant direct actions.

The two other organisations are the Action Chomage (whose initials sound out *assez*, the French for 'enough') and the APES. Both contain members of left and revolutionary groups.

Several thousand workers played some direct part in the sit-ins, which enjoyed the support of the majority of the population - opinion polls showed 60-70% sympathising with their actions. This support was given concrete form in the shape of solidarity visits and donations of food, blankets and cash. There were hundreds of meetings, marches and demonstrations, as well as symbolic occupations of Socialist Party offices, town halls and plush restaurants, all over the country. The *assedic* occupations continued for five weeks until the CRS riot police broke them up earlier this month.

There are approximately seven million unemployed in France - although, thanks to government massaging of the figures similar to the British practice, official statistics show around half that total. The real figure includes millions of *sans droits*, who receive no benefits at all. A senior government official was recently fired for admitting the true extent of French unemployment.

Although benefits for the short-term unemployed are relatively high compared to those in Britain, long-term benefits drop to sub-poverty level. The occupiers were demanding an immediate increase of 1,500 francs (£150) a month on the minimum long-term rate and the reinstatement of

the 3,000-franc Christmas 'bonus' withdrawn by the previous administration of Alain Juppé. The call is for the right to work or decent benefits.

Although the Jospin government used the heavy hand of the CRS to end the occupations, it felt obliged to make concessions too. It announced a package worth around one billion francs (£100 million) for the long-term unemployed and offered to negotiate with representatives of the main unemployed organisations. Previously Lionel Jospin had ruled out any such increased spending as jeopardising French participation in the European single currency. Nevertheless the package represents a pittance compared to the real needs of the unemployed - and to the 560 billion francs paid out in company takeovers in 1997, or the 150 billion rescue of the Crédit Lyonnais bank.

While the campaign of the unemployed continues, there are signs of other workers moving into action. Miners are resisting plans for pit closures and teachers have just launched a series of one-day strikes and demonstrations. Calls have been made for the coordination of all these struggles.

There are deep divisions and growing tensions within the Parti Communiste Français and the CGT. On the one side of the class divide, PCF leaders are loyal members of a government which is continuing the ruling class offensive against welfare spending. On the other, PCF members are amongst the leaders of the militant fightback.

PCF leaders say that the Socialist Party-led government now needs a "fresh start" after a "positive" beginning. In contrast René Barthes, a leading supporter of Co-ordination Communiste, a left opposition group within the PCF, told me: "For the first time we have communists in a right-wing, Blair-type government. They are following the *Plan Juppé* aimed at meeting the Maastricht criteria. The policy of privatisation and the anti immigrant Pasqua-Debré laws remain in place. But the Jospin government is really being challenged after only seven months in office."

A feature of the *assedic* occupations was the tremendous comradely and optimistic atmosphere. The militants adapted old calls to arms from the Resistance in their songs of solidarity. This time however the enemy is not German imperialism, but French capital and their 'own' government.

The movement in France to win real advance for the unemployed provides a stark contrast to the present inaction of British workers, where new assaults by the Blair government have not yet provoked action capable of successfully defending even the gains of the past ●

Peter Manson

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.

■ 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 hold out

To support the 350 sacked Magnet contact the Strike Committee. Fax/Tel: 01325-282389 for more information

■ Bloody Sunday march

Assemble at 12noon, Saturday January 24, Highbury Fields, London (Highbury and Islington tube). March to rally in Caxton House, 129 St Johns Way (Archway tube). An apology is not enough. The truth must be told. Peace through British withdrawal.

■ Irish political prisoners campaign

London benefit, including live music and food. Saturday February 7, 8.30pm, £3. Downing Street picket - first Sunday of every month, 12 noon to 1.30pm. Release the prisoners! For more details contact: Fuascailt, PO Box 3923, London NW5 1RA. Tel: 0181-985 8250 or 0956-919 871.

This book comes covered in accolades and superlatives. *The Spectator* praises its "unobtrusive informality", *The Times* believes it to be the "best account" yet written about Albert Einstein. The author himself observes: "Although in recent years some 400 books about Einstein and his work have appeared, they tell only part of the truth ... My aim is to balance the equation by retrieving as much of the missing half as I can, to reveal some of the long-guarded secrets. My intent is not to diminish, but to enlarge the man" (p xi).

In the last analysis, though, this fails to live up to the mega-hype. I confess that I find it hard to believe that this is the "best" book available on the subject. However, if this boast is correct, then this only proves that there is a large gap in the market, which needs to be filled urgently.

One of the flaws of this book is its almost obsessive chattiness. Denis Brian's idea is to give us a feel for the 'real' Einstein or, as the press release puts it, to treat us "to a deeper and more complex vision of this remarkable man". To this extent, it succeeds partially. But there is a price to pay for adopting this approach. The wider picture gets eclipsed - ie, you end up not being able to see the wood for the trees. You get bogged down in biographical trivia and tittle-tattle. Einstein's intellectual 'centre' fades from view at many points.

Einstein: a life is riddled with conversations, giving the feel of a novel on occasion. It is impossible not to wonder about the veracity of some of the supposed remarks, especially those that he was said to have made in his youth - perhaps everyone who encountered Einstein was so overawed that every word he uttered was seared into their memory cells forever. Then again, perhaps not.

Given this novelistic approach, it is not surprising that Brian lingers in some detail on Einstein's admittedly florid relationships with women. I have no quasi-puritanical objections to such revelations. Human beings are complex. If they help to throw light on Einstein's intellectual/scientific genius, then let us hear all about them. But at times it leads to an over-speculative style of writing. Thus, chapter two is entitled 'First romance', referring to Marie Winteler: "If she and Albert spent less time bird-watching than in watching each other, it was because these field trips were their few chances to be almost alone together. In Italy he had been infatuated by a flock of young women who found him charming, but had kept his distance and his head. Now, at 16, he believed he was really in love" (p10). This is just one typical example.

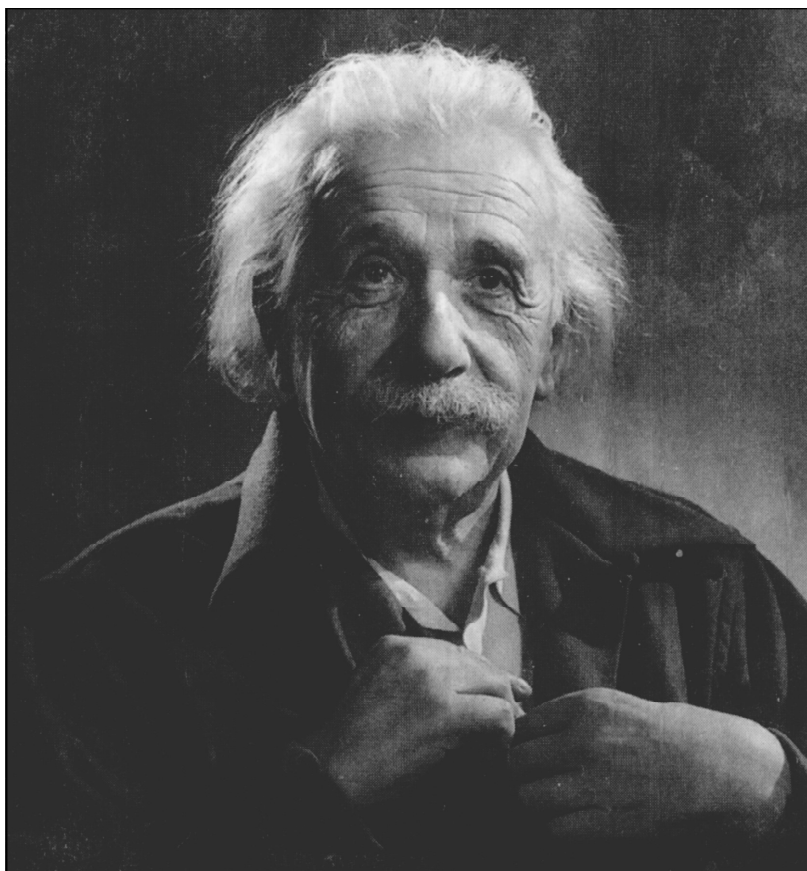
Sometimes, Brian's novelistic imagery borders on the comical - quite unintentionally, I suspect. Chapter three begins like this: "Because of Einstein's arresting looks and personality, his college friends were puzzled when he gravitated to Mileva Maric, a somewhat shapeless woman of awkward gait caused by a congenital dislocation of the hip. She was the only female in his class, four years his senior, and showed little sense of humour, while even the tamest joke set off his explosive laughter" (p15).

The main criticism of this book, undoubtedly, resides in the attempt by the author to puff up and exaggerate Einstein's political acumen. Brian clearly thinks Einstein was some sort of political visionary, if not a semi-guru. This is a mistake - and utterly unnecessary. The genius of Einstein is located in his scientific breakthroughs and discoveries - which revolutionised the way humanity looks at the natural/physical world.

Of course, Einstein's world view is extremely interesting - especially as his politics could be defined as progressive. He was a passionate supporter of the World Federalist Movement, convinced as he was that

The universe demystified

Denis Brian, *Einstein: a life*, John Wiley 1996, pp509, £11.99



Albert Einstein - a lasting contribution to human culture

the solution to the world's problems could only be found on a supranational basis. He also took a dim view of the capitalist education system, which he believed led to "the crippling of individuals ... An exaggerated competitive attitude is inculcated into the student, who is trained to worship acquisitive success as a preparation for his future career" (p378).

But there were certain limitations to his progressive and internationalistic outlook. For instance, he was a committed Zionist, on the grounds that it "gives Jews a common interest. This nationalism is no threat to other people. Zion is too small to develop imperialistic designs" (p185). Brian comments that he regarded "the birth of Israel as one of the few political acts in his lifetime which had an essentially moral quality and wanted to alert the world to the threat to its existence" (p425).

He also had a life-long suspicion of

"the communists". This came out strongly in 1953, during the infamous trial of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg for treason - ie, passing on nuclear secrets to the Soviets. In a letter dated September 12 1953 he wrote: "Unhappily, the Rosenberg case was used as an instrument by communists, which circumstances had a very unfortunate influence on the course of events" (p410). His views on Leon Trotsky and the Russian Revolution are also revealing. Though, for example, in 1929 he strongly urged the German finance minister, Rudolf Hilferding, to grant political asylum to Trotsky, he nevertheless thought that "from my point of view both Stalin and Trotsky are political gangsters" (p300).

I do not say any of this to detract from Einstein's brilliance. But the fact that Brian makes so much of Einstein's political/philosophical world view forces one to add a corrective. It is also irksome that Brian is in an indecent hurry to disassociate Einstein's

leftish views from communist ones. The author makes clear that he is angered by the fact this "dedicated democrat was constantly accused of being a communist or communist dupe" (p xi).

The book really comes alive when we come to the sections on actual science. Chapter 11, 'The special theory of relativity', is fascinating. It details Einstein's ground-breaking work in 1905, which saw him mailing four papers to the prominent scientific journal, *Annalen der Physik*. In these papers he developed his theory of relativity - thus turning the cosmos upside down and inside out.

The third paper, *On the motion - required by molecular kinetic theory of heat - of small particles suspended in a stationary liquid*, represented a brilliant innovation inspired by the Scottish botanist, Robert Brown. The latter, staring through a microscope one day, saw pollen dust executing haphazard, zigzag movements in water, as if alive. Even when he substituted organic and inorganic substances, he noted the same phenomenon. Was this perpetual motion?

Einstein concluded that these 'Brownian movements' were in fact actual collisions between invisible molecules of the water itself and the visible particles. He produced a formula stating that the average displacement of the visible particles in any direction increased as the square root of time. By using this formula he estimated that a gram of hydrogen consists of 303,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 molecules (303 sextillion - US system; 303 thousand trillion - UK system).

What was the importance of this? As Brian explains, "Not only had Einstein found evidence that atoms of a definite size really exist; he also had created a statistical method to chart their behaviour. Experiments by French physicist Jean Perrin verified Einstein's work, confirming the perfect accuracy of his equations and demonstrating the physical reality of atoms" (my emphasis, p64). This laid the foundation for a truly materialist view of the universe - just as Darwin had done before him in the realm of biological/evolutionary theory. Scientific atheism had arrived big time - or rather the foundations for it had been irreversibly proved. The fact that neither Darwin nor Einstein ever described themselves as atheists only helped to add weight to the emerging world view.

The fourth paper, *On the electrodynamics of moving bodies*, was even more revolutionary. It challenged the previously hegemonic Newtonian view of the universe - one which saw space as a fixed, ether-pervaded, physical reality, through which stars and planets move and against which their movements should be measured. Naturally, time itself under this view was regarded as an unvarying absolute, flowing from an infinite past to an infinite future.

Einstein demolished Newton's Earth-centric, human-centric cosmology with one blow. Einstein's universe was one in which the stars,

planets, galaxies, etc move in relation to each other and not to an exclusive, god-appointed space - ie, one's relative position in the universe determines one's viewpoint. The same went for time - there is no more such a thing as absolute time as there is absolute space. Einstein wrote: "We have to take into account that all our judgments in which time plays a part are always judgments of simultaneous events" (original emphasis, p65).

From all this Einstein deduced that light always travels at 186,000 miles per second, that it is completely unaffected by the motion of its source or of its observers. This clashed violently with the Newtonian 'common sense' then prevalent - surely light reaches an observer more rapidly if the actual observer is moving towards rather than away from the light (ie, photons)?

Eventually, using the equations of the Dutch physicist, HA Lorentz - which stated that a flying charged particle foreshortened in its direction of travel would increase in mass - Einstein was able to show that objects moving at great speeds and over vast distances decreased in size and increased in mass. Further, at these speeds time slows down.

It was not long before Einstein went a step further. Later in the same year he leaped to the 'heretical' deduction that all energy has a mass. By 1907 he pushed the boundaries of science back even more - proposing that matter and energy are different aspects of the same thing - matter approaching the speed of light becomes energy, and energy slowed becomes matter.

This idea eventually germinated into his general theory of relativity, which he described as the "happiest thought of my life". He was now attempting to extend special relativity, which applied only to a hypothetical universe where objects moved with constant velocity in gravity-free space. He grappled with the 'real' universe, where objects are subjected to gravity and acceleration. This led him to reject Newton again, who saw gravity as a force attracting objects to one another. Instead, argued Einstein, we should see gravitation as an effect of the distortion of space by matter. In other words, space is curved or warped by the presence of matter, and objects move through space along the shortest path following the contours of space - 'Space tells matter how to move and matter tells space how to curve'.

In 1916 he expanded - and simplified - his theory of gravitation, or general relativity, in his book, *On the special and the general relativity theory: a popular exposition*, using only elementary mathematics. This book sent Einstein - and his disciples - on the quest for the elusive 'unified field theory' (or 'superstring theory'). Like nearly all truly great paradigm-shifts, for years it was either ignored or treated with derision. Some devout sceptics questioned Einstein's sanity. One particularly venomous critic - the engineer, George Francis Gillette - declared that the theory of relativity was the "moronic brainchild of mental colic" and mere "voodoo nonsense", comparing Einstein to "the Mad Hatter" (p103). Other critics were equally harsh.

Thanks to the brilliance of Einstein it became possible to scientifically and accurately measure - hence understand - the entire universe. It was now demystified - but still awesome. Even more so, as god receded for good. Humanity, the product of a cosmic accident, stands alone in the universe - with no need for a divine masterplan or 'Purpose'.

This is the lasting contribution of Einstein to human culture. The man who said "imagination encircles the world" (p185) had unleashed the collective imagination of humanity and allowed it to encircle the entire universe ●

Danny Hammill

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New tendency's first meeting

The first meeting of the revolutionary democratic communist tendency (Organising Committee) was held on January 9. It was accepted that agreed minutes and/or reports of these meetings could be published in the *Weekly Worker* and *Open Polemic*.

The meeting agreed that there would be three 'gateways' into the tendency's aggregates. These would be critical support for three draft documents - rapprochement, factions and revolutionary democratic communism. The last of these would be discussed at the next meeting. The first aggregate would be held on January 31 and discuss the 'gateways' and the related question of openness. Amendments to these documents must be submitted to the Organising Committee by January 24.

It was reported that the Republican Worker Tendency was prepared to attend the aggregates. However, there were some outstanding matters arising from a letter of complaint from the RWT. It was agreed to try to sort this out through mediation and to invite other organisations.

Provisional dates for the second and third aggregates are March 21 and May 30.

The following statement drafted at the end of 1997 was issued by the tendency:

"We believe the time is now right to take the next steps in the rapprochement process on the basis of the agreed documents on factions and rapprochement. We identify the following stages in the process: preliminary stage; transitional stage; fusion conference.

1. Preliminary stage

a) Exploratory talks take place.
b) The CPGB (PCC) and the RDG (OC) publish a call for the formation of a revolutionary democratic communist tendency and invite others to join us.
c) The tendency will come into existence at the beginning of 1998 and be open to all who accept, though not necessarily agree with, the joint documents.
d) Representatives of participating organisations will act as the organising committee for the tendency with powers of cooption and the

right to publish joint statements under the name of the tendency.

2. Transitional stage

The tendency will call a series of joint aggregates starting in January 1998. The number of these aggregates (provisionally three) will be flexible, depending on what progress the participants feel has been made. These aggregates will work on joint perspectives and other matters which require clarification. A provisional agenda might include: rapprochement; organisation of the new tendency - theory and practice; SLP work; Scotland and SSA work; building the tendency; general perspectives. At the end of the transitional stage, organisations and individuals will have the opportunity either to withdraw or to take the next step.

Entry and withdrawal from these aggregates is voluntary and this step should be taken without resort to polemics.

3. The fusion conference

At the end of the transitional period, a conference will be convened by the tendency to create a new fused organisation. Decisions at the conference will be taken by majority voting. The conference will decide:

a) name of the tendency;
b) organ for the tendency and its name;
c) new 'Where we stand';
d) programmatic basis;
e) organisational principles, rules, subs, etc;
f) perspectives.

■ Breakdown or failure

In going through this process it is always possible that there will be a breakdown or failure. We consider that the way we handle this is just as much a testament of communist politics as anything else. In the event of a failed unity, we should seek to establish the facts, in the first instance, concerning the breakdown by means of an agreed statement between all participating organisations. Further polemics must be handled with the greatest calm, precision and the interests of both communist rapprochement and the wider movement ●

Fighting fund Campaign to double circulation in 1998

There are a million and one criticisms to be made of our paper - communists must be their own most exacting critics. Yet the key weakness that the Party as a whole has identified is the question of circulation.

Put simply, we have barely begun to scratch the surface of the potential audience for our paper. Communist Party *Perspectives* - agreed unanimously by the December Party aggregate - set the target of doubling *Weekly Worker* circulation during 1998.

The *Weekly Worker* is the main weapon of our Party. It is an irreplaceable vehicle for the development of communist theory and information for the working class. Just take the example of the SLP. What other paper has chronicled in such detail the fight for workers' democracy inside Scargill's party? Our 12-page SLP special was almost immediately snapped up in bookshops nationally, and practically every other paper on the revolutionary left have cribbed their reports of the conference from ours (the more honourable of them at least having the integrity to credit the *Weekly Worker*).

This ambitious target means that we must make 'soft' occasional readers into 'hard' regular subscribers. It means we have to get

our paper into the hands of people who have never seen it before - but need to read it on a regular basis. We have a potential audience of tens of thousands, comrades.

To reach them, we need imaginative advertising campaigns in left journals, we must produce attractive mass publicity and drive forward a concerted campaign by branches and cells to spread the paper's influence.

All of this is going to take money - plenty of it. The Party has ambitious plans for the *Weekly Worker* in 1998. We know our readership is going to support building the circulation of the best paper on the British left.

Thanks this week to Phil from Derby. He resubscribed to the paper. And then - bless him - donated £30 on top. Not only is he keeping circulation steady through subscribing as an individual: his donation is helping to build it. Thanks also to Colin (Glasgow) who sent us a cheque for £25; and to that 'hero of socialist labour', comrade Peter from London, who as a stalwart of Party streetwork - despite miserable weather - raised more than £50.

Keep it coming, comrades ●

Katrina Haynes

Thesis on communist rapprochement

1. The aim of communist rapprochement is to unite the communists into a revolutionary democratic communist party, which contains within its ranks the advanced part of the working class.
2. Such a party must be organised around a revolutionary programme, on the basis of democratic centralism, including full faction rights for minority views.
3. Marx and Engels laid the ideological foundations for revolutionary working class politics, combining the ideas of revolutionary democracy with the aim of communism, and placing these ideas on a scientific basis.
4. The early CPGB was founded in 1920 through a process of communist rapprochement, including the British Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party. This process, inspired by the Russian Revolution, was the first party of this type within the working class of Britain. With the rise of Stalinism, the party came under the hegemony of opportunist politics veering between ultra-leftism and centrism.
5. The *British road to socialism* confirmed the CPGB as a party of radical reformism, committed to a parliamentary road to socialism (later to evolve into Eurocommunism). The epicentre of this programmatic degeneration - which affected every part of the world communist movement - was the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was destroyed by the Stalinist bureaucracy.
6. Today the communist movement is fragmented into many different organisations, including the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Alliance for Workers Liberty, the Communist Party of Britain, Workers Power, Communist Party of Great Britain, the Workers Revolutionary Party, the Revolutionary Democratic Group, Red Action and others. There is no revolutionary democratic communist party.
7. The communist movement is dominated by the SWP and Socialist Party. Both these tendencies are economistic and veer towards syndicalism and Labourism. Neither of these organisations has the correct ideological or programmatic foundations for building a new communist party. A revolutionary democratic communist party cannot be built out of the growth in the membership of these tendencies.
8. The formation of the Socialist Labour Party has created new opportunities for communists to work together. The SLP is not a communist party. Its policies are mainly influenced by left Labour socialism. But communist ideas also have an impact.
9. The SLP has attracted to its ranks a small but significant number of communists, including ex-members of the Militant, CPB, CPGB, SWP, Fourth International Supporters (Fisc) Socialist Outlook, RDG, International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) and Workers Power. The SLP presents new opportunities for communist rapprochement.
10. In Scotland the main focus for communist rapprochement has been the formation of the Scottish Socialist Alliance. The SSA was formed at the initiative of the Scottish Militant Labour and includes the CPGB, Republican Worker Tendency and the Edinburgh Republicans.
11. Without significant change in the political situation, there is no immediate prospect of launching a communist party in the UK. However, the process of communist rapprochement, which played such an important role in the foundations of the CPGB, is part of the process which can move us in that direction.
12. The process of communist rapprochement is as yet only in its earliest stage. Our task is to define each stage correctly in order to act effectively.
13. The initial stages of communist rapprochement is the establishment of comradely relations between communist organisations. This may lead to joint work and cooperation, to building a united front for communist unity and even the fusion of organisations.
14. A higher stage of communist rapprochement is the struggle to create a revolutionary democratic communist tendency.
15. A revolutionary democratic communist tendency will be organised around a draft programme on the basis of democratic centralism with the full freedom for factions to express their views internally and publicly.
16. One tendency, uniting as many factions as necessary, will define itself in terms of the theory and practice of revolutionary working class democracy and communism. It will not define itself in terms of adherence to any particular historic leader (eg, Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin). Individual members or factions will be free to define themselves in whatever way they want.
17. This tendency would seek to actively engage with larger forces on the revolutionary left, as well as the class itself, where possible. Such a tendency would not be a communist party, whatever name it adopted. It would be or have the potential to become the main alternative to the other main tendencies within the communist movement.
18. The highest stage of communist rapprochement is the negotiation, preparation for, and the founding of a revolutionary democratic communist party, which unifies the main tendencies and the majority of communists into a single party.
19. The founding conference should debate and agree a programme, from various drafts, which will serve as the basis for the party.
20. The new party seeks to become a mass party by linking its programme to the struggles of the advanced section of the working class. The party will seek to become a genuine political leadership of the advanced workers. The party seeks to fuse, to merge its conscious organisation with a real movement of the class.
21. The revolutionary democratic communist tendency will make the struggle for communist unity, for the unification of tendencies, into a single party a central part of its activity.
22. However, the fight for a united communist party should not be considered as some diplomatic truce with Labourite, syndicalist, centrist and ultra-left politics. On the contrary there can be no united communist party without a hard fight against all forms of bureaucratic and anarchistic ideology. Defeating these ideas will be an important element in creating a strong united communist party ●

Revolutionary democratic communism

1. For revolutionary democracy

We hold a revolutionary democratic attitude to all questions of bourgeois democracy (eg, civil liberties, women's rights, national question, racism, constitutional change, etc). We utilise bourgeois democracy, defend it against all anti-democratic forces, including the capitalists and the fascists. We seek to extend all democratic rights by mass struggle and revolutionary action. We consider the working class is the only genuinely democratic class under capitalism. We consider that the working class can become the leading force in society by championing the struggle for democracy.

2. For workers' power

We support the democratic self-organisation of the working class in trade unions, workplaces and communities. We are in favour of workers'

control of all industries and services. We are in favour of replacing parliamentary democracy with a more advanced form of democracy, based on workplace councils electing delegates to a workers' parliament. This must be defended by an armed working class organised as the state (ie, the dictatorship of the proletariat).

3. For international socialism

Socialism must be developed by the international organisation of the working class. Socialism is the transitional period between world capitalism and communism.

4. For world communism

Our aim is to abolish the world market system of capitalism and replace it by world communism. Communist society is a classless worldwide community based on global planning, cooperation and mutual solidarity between the people of the world ●

Around the left

Harpal Brar plants flag

Members of the Socialist Labour Party will find the latest issue of *Lalkar*, the bi-monthly journal of the Indian Workers Association (Great Britain), of particular interest. The editor and main contributor of this august publication is of course the newly elected member of the SLP's national executive, Harpal Brar.

His election at the congress means that for the first time a member of the NEC is openly producing their own factional journal. The other trends and individuals represented on the party's highest committee must bargain for space in *Socialist News*, the SLP's official 'monthly', which is inevitably dominated by Bonapartist general secretary Arthur Scargill.

The January/February edition of *Lalkar* contains a lengthy report on the SLP's 2nd Congress held in December 1997, written in comrade Brar's inimitable style. As can be seen from its contents, he has constituted himself an ultra-loyal Scargillite, while attempting to occupy a clearly defined position in opposition to the most politically articulate of the other tendencies on the NEC, the Fourth International Supporters Caucus of Patrick Sikorski, Brian Heron and Carolyn Sikorski.

The tone of comrade Brar's report is set in the opening section, dealing with the remarks of SLP president Frank Cave:

"He emphasised that we were proposing an alternative to capitalism - ie, socialism - and to that end had to defend our party and constitution against all those who wanted to destroy us ...

"... the NEC had unanimously agreed to circulate a recommended list of NEC candidates that proposed a fair balance.

"It rapidly became obvious that there were those who would have preferred a much less fair distribution of NEC seats. They wanted the NEC to reflect the aspirations of a Trotskyite minority to hijack [sic] the party, or failing that to emasculate the NEC by denying it any authority or decision-making power."

The main 'evidence' that comrade Brar produces for this is the proposal from Wythenshawe and Sale East Constituency SLP for the establishment of a control commission to be "charged with the work of safeguarding all aspects of party democracy and discipline".

He comments: "This theme, however, was present in many of the motions and amendments submitted to congress. In summary they either wanted the constitution changed to allow organised factions, or, on the belt and braces principle, wanted to remove authority from the NEC so that those who contravened the constitution and organised Trotskyite factions in the party would not be subject to party discipline, but would be protected by some committee or other 'elected from the floor' for the purpose."

Several such proposals were ruled out of order - and a good thing too, according to the comrade: "In the usual Trotskyite fashion there was much moaning about how undemocratic, bureaucratic and dictatorial a strong constitution was (ie, it would not easily allow them to impose the undemocratic control of a minority clique)."

As an unreconstructed Third Period Stalinite and member of the Associa-

tion of Communist Workers, comrade Brar is certainly in favour of "a strong constitution" - that is, one where "Trotskyite" factions are banned, but loyal members like himself, as long as they remain uncritical of the Great Leader, can organise and publish in whatever way they please. And of course all those who dare to raise democratic criticisms must by definition be "Trotskyites".

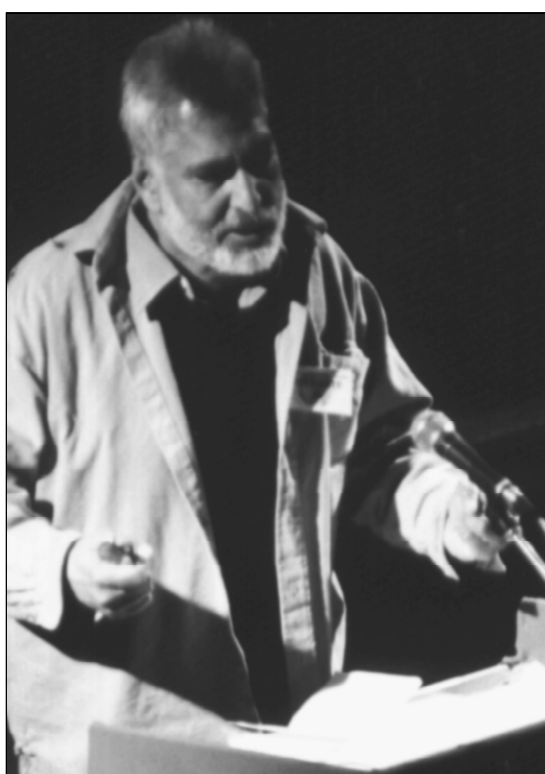
Like JV Stalin comrade Brar has mastered the art of 'Newspeak'. He explains that he and labour dictators like Scargill are the true democrats, the true revolutionaries. Those who have a genuine understanding of the need for workers' self-liberation - including through the direct control of our own organisations - because they oppose the stunting of such self-activity are dubbed "anti-communist".

"... in the language of the anti-communist sects which plague the working class movement," writes comrade Brar, "congenitally counterrevolutionary elements are portrayed as 'revolutionary', 'democratic' and 'left', whereas serious-minded revolutionaries are ridiculed as being 'right', 'undemocratic' and 'bureaucratic'."

The most interesting part of the *Lalkar* report is the long section covering the constitutional amendment to abolish the black section moved by Harpal Brar himself. This succeeded only because comrade Scargill had secured himself a guarantee against defeat from any quarter in the shape of a 3,000 block vote wielded by the mysterious North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners' Association. The three NWCCMA delegates cast their vote - on Scargill's behest - in favour of abolition. This ensured victory for the mover by 3,297 votes to 506.

Comrade Brar reports his own speech in glowing terms: "Harpal Brar received the enthusiastic support of the majority of delegates," he writes, despite the obvious fact that, if the block votes of the NWCCMA and the black section itself (75 votes) are excluded, there was a clear majority against. He puts this down to the fact that the NEC - in outvoting Scargill, who wanted to support the amendment - recommended rejection: "The fact of the matter is that, had the NEC not opposed motion number 8, there would have been no more than approximately 120 votes against it - including the 75 block votes that the previous constitution allotted to the black section."

Comrade Brar is seriously suggesting that the delegates genuinely in favour of the black section carried fewer than 50 votes - ie, perhaps a dozen people in the hall. Apart from the sheer absurdity of this statement, he is also implying that, far from being clear-minded, not to say revolutionary, independent fighters - as the rest of the report would have you believe - the great majority of delegates were mere voting fodder for the leadership. In fact our own estimation was



Lalkar editor at SLP congress

that, excluding the block votes, this 'loyalist' section carried just under 400 out of the approximately 900 votes available (see *Weekly Worker* December 18).

The movers of the amendment to abolish the black section won through the sheer power of their logic (a single speech by the author himself), the comrade asserts: "They were successful in it, not because the NWCCMA delegation voted for them in response to the dictate from 'king Arthur', as the scurrilous *Weekly Worker* insinuates, but because the NWCCMA delegates were persuaded by the force of the arguments put forward in support of the amendment ...

"The NWCCMA delegates are honourable and solid working class comrades; unlike our flabby and unstable petty bourgeois gentry, they have a serious attitude to questions of working class politics and organisation. The Ealing Southall delegation was proud to have had the support of such fine comrades as those who represented the NWCCMA. If they were people to be cowed down, they would not have voted against the NEC recommendation, as they actually did."

The *Lalkar* article takes the *Weekly Worker* to task for its comments over comrade Brar's remarks in his congress speech, "Don't insult me by voting for me because I am black." We had pointed out that "comrade Brar was elected to the NEC ... precisely because he is a leader of the Indian Workers Association with some influence in the black community. He was on the NEC's 'recommended' list for that reason" (December 18).

Brar is outraged by this "despicable, not to say racist, comment": "... had the NEC as much as hinted that Harpal Brar was on the recommended list precisely because he belonged to the Indian Workers Association 'with some influence in the black community', he would have doubtless declined the nomination."

Pull the other one, comrade. We have no doubt that Harpal Brar is sincere in wanting to unite black and white in a single revolutionary party, where each member is viewed as "a communist who incidentally happens to be black [or white]". But his views are

not shared by the national executive. True, Scargill and one or two others might on occasion pay lip service to the idea of revolution. Most of the others are trade union militants with a vague image of the SLP as a more leftwing Labour Party, while Fiscite Brian Heron at congress in a remark aimed at comrade Brar. "If comrades want to build a Bolshevik Party they should go and join one of the sects."

Because Fiscite does not want to build a party based on voluntary unity through revolutionary discipline (that would mean a 'white' party because of the majority of its membership), it sees the idea of an autonomous black section as a means of attracting black workers. Scargill does not agree - perhaps because he fears that he would not be able to exert complete control over such an autonomous component. But that does not mean he is not keen himself to recruit black members. On the contrary, he too needs to establish that 'his' party has leading members from all sections of the working class - including on its highest committees - as long as they can be relied upon to faithfully back up his every move. The fact that comrade Brar is an IWA leader "with some influence in the black community" was an advantage. The fact he is a sycophant was a positive recommendation.

It is true that Harpal Brar appears to be replacing Fiscite as comrade Scargill's political mentor. Nevertheless it must be gratifying for Scargill to have whole sections of his speeches reproduced uncritically in the pages of *Lalkar*, and reports of his faultless leadership skills under headings such as 'Scargill defends the honour of the party'.

But what does comrade Brar think of the use of the block vote in a working class political party? The answer to this lies in his cryptic comment, "There is no abstract truth: that truth is always concrete."

He writes: "*Whatever our own views about the block vote*, it remains a fact that when some of us joined the SLP, we joined fully aware of this provision in the constitution ..." (our emphasis).

"Even more bizarrely," continues comrade Brar, "the very people who complained most about the block vote are the ones who have spent a lifetime infiltrating the Labour Party, where they have argued against the reduction of the union block vote at the Labour Party conference. And this, notwithstanding the fact that year after year, decade after decade, the majority of unions affiliated to the Labour Party have cast their votes on the side of reaction and in support of the interests of British imperialism. At the SLP congress however, the NWCCMA comrades were casting their vote in the furtherance of the revolutionary cause ...

"If [the left] were so opposed in principle of course to the block vote, they ought to have proposed a simply worded, one-line amendment to the effect that 'this congress does away with the block vote'. That would have been an honest, straightforward, serious and businesslike approach to the question."

I wonder which way the NWCCMA delegation would have voted if such a hypothetical amendment had been moved - assuming of course it had not

previously been ruled out of order. Still, truth is always concrete: that is, if the block vote goes in your favour, it is good; if not, it is bad.

The fact of the matter is that its use is inherently reactionary, whether in the Labour Party or the SLP. Trade unions, usually the most conservative of organisations, can almost always be relied upon to support the status quo, to back up the leadership in preventing democratic change.

Comrade Brar is keen to paint not only the revolutionary left, but also the democratic centre who were also highly disturbed by comrade Scargill's NWCCMA 'insurance policy', as "professional squabblers". He writes: "The history of the working class movement in all countries furnishes ample proof that those guilty of opportunism in the matter of organisation invariably hide behind fraudulent and deceptive phrases about democracy and the false slogans about the struggle against bureaucracy - all in an effort to undermine the authority of the party and its central institutions."

Throughout his piece, comrade Brar names but one of these "Trotskyite disrupters" - Cardiff Central general election candidate Terry Burns. Brar repeatedly asserts that comrade Burns is "a prominent member of Workers Power", who "led his Cardiff delegation in a walkout to the jeering of the majority of delegates". In fact comrade Burns, who received the second highest number of votes of all the SLP general election candidates, has no connection whatsoever with the Workers Power group. Despite the taunting of the vociferous minority - in particular the homophobic supporters of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* - comrade Burns refused to abandon the party and remained in the congress. Unlike genuine supporters of Workers Power, grouped around the journal *Socialist Labour Action* who have now given up on the SLP, he has signified his intention to continue the fight for a mass democratic workers' party inside Socialist Labour.

"That the incurable sects of anti-communists from Workers Power, the 'Marxist Bulletin' and the so-called CPGB should have behaved the way they did at the congress is quite understandable," writes comrade Brar.

However, he also has harsh words for his comrades on the new NEC - those other 'despicable counterrevolutionary Trotskyites', the Fiscites - for declining at first to take up their seats on the national executive after the result of the black section vote was made known. He adds patronisingly: "That serious comrades such as Brian Heron, Pat and Carolyn Sikorski, Imran Khan, etc should display, albeit temporarily, a disdain and disregard for the decisions of the congress is lamentable indeed."

Despite this comrade Brar concludes: "The 2nd Congress will go down in the history of the SLP as the congress at which the party principle prevailed over personal considerations, at which opportunism in matters of organisation suffered a crushing defeat, at which anarchist phrase-mongering and demagogic intellectualist verbosity were shown the door."

The coming year should certainly prove to be an interesting one for members of the national executive committee ●

Alan Fox

Simon Harvey of the SLP

Fisc in a twist

Well, Fisc have got themselves into something of a bind, haven't they? As the Sikorskis, Pat and Carolyn, and Brian Heron sit down at this month's national executive meeting, I wonder what must be going through their minds as new NEC member (and Stalin Society aficionado) Harpal Brar waxes lyrical on the need to drive Trotskyites from the ranks of the SLP.

Trapped by the circumstances of history - or rather, trapped by their semi-Nietzschean concept of history - they will no doubt bide their time and bite their lip, their position on the NEC greatly weakened after the December congress.

They will of course be minus their 'more principled' comrades, Roshan Dadoo and Imran Khan. Both refused to take their positions on the NEC in protest at the abolition of the black section - a constitutional amendment sponsored by comrade Brar.

Richard Tisdell, whose views appear to be very close to those of Fisc, has put in writing some of the contradictions and frustrations they must be experiencing. The *Weekly Worker* (January 15) published his contribution to a discussion going on in Lewisham and Greenwich SLP. Comrade Tisdell makes it clear that he was "shocked and dismayed" at the utilisation of the 3,000 block vote which "demonstrated a contempt for the rank and file" and resulted in the abolition of the black sections. The comrade notes that the "party has become the object of ridicule".

His solution? Comrade Tisdell writes: "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 black vote and supporting reinstatement of the black section." Now, here is the rub.

Comrade Tisdell wants to change the constitution of the SLP. This is a path fraught with danger. Anyone who has followed the development of the SLP knows that, in what is a classic Catch 22 situation, it is against the constitution to campaign to change the constitution.

No doubt he wants to do so 'cleverly' and certainly as a partisan of the SLP. Well, comrade, no matter what you think of those in the party who have been campaigning against the witch hunt and for a change in the original, imposed, constitution, they too, like myself, did so genuinely, with

the interests of the SLP as a whole in mind.

Richard says: "We should resist the temptation to disregard 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." But then in his concrete proposals, the comrade suggests: "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."

What is this other than ignoring the authority of the NEC? And it should be pointed out that Vauxhall CSLP, despite being suspended and its entire membership being threatened with expulsion, continued as a matter of principle to stand, fund and campaign for a parliamentary candidate.

Those who fought the witch hunt from day one, including its first victims, were always at pains to point out that it really had nothing to do with the CPGB *per se*. It was about the type of party we were building. In a classic repetition of history, albeit on a diminutive scale, we have a farcical replay of the parable of Pastor Niemöller: "First they came for the communists, but I was not a communist..." Starting with a witch hunt against the communists, we quickly saw the net widen. It has now extended to the very edges of Fisc's political spectrum. Roland Wood and Dave Osler, partisans of the United Secretariat, have been 'cashiered' out of the party - kicked out for supposedly falling behind with their dues.

Just who will be next? The future of the witch hunt hangs in the balance. Will Scargill back off, secure in the knowledge of 3,000 votes in his back pocket? Will his hand be stayed by more independent minded NEC members such as Joe Marino, or will he "finish the Trots off", urged on by



Brian Heron of Fisc

Harpal Brar and the ravings of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*?

So whatever happens, comrade Richard Tisdell, and no doubt his Fiscite co-thinkers are in a bind. For my money, they are more than welcome to work with the Democratic Platform in achieving our joint aims, spelt out by comrade Tisdell, as "striv[ing] for the maximum possible unity in the struggle for internal democracy". The door is open, Brian, Carolyn, Pat and co.

Block votes and a federal party

In the light of ongoing division at the top of the party as to the use of the block vote, it is worthwhile looking at the NEC's report to congress. A subsection of this report is titled 'Building on our aims and constitution', which largely seems to be a thinly veiled response to the coverage of the SLP within the pages of the *Weekly Worker*.

The view that the SLP has a potential to win mass support, it says, "prevails even among critics on the left and those critics include, sadly, some comrades who despite actually joining the SLP have maintained a constant sniping at Socialist Labour's constitution and leadership".

The NEC report states: "The only other challenge to our party's constitution is an attempt - yet again - to change Socialist Labour into a federally structured organisation, something the SLP has made clear it will not become - because that is a sure recipe for disaster."

The report continues in a similar vein: "The decision to build a unitary - not a federal - party is one of Socialist Labour's founding principles. It is a cornerstone. People who believe in federalism, and believe that Socialist Labour should be based on a federal structure, cannot in honesty be members of this Party."

Only the terminally stupid or the wilfully dishonest can deny that a party which comprises affiliates exercising block votes is a federally structured organisation. This threat of expulsion for merely wanting constitutional change makes clear one message to the members - 'This is not your party'. Whose "decision" was it to build a "unitary" party? Certainly not the membership's.

Harpal Brar is clearly one individual who does want a unitary party. At least the comrade is consistent. He was vilified by Brian Heron at congress for trying to turn Socialist La-

bour into a Bolshevik-type party. If only this was so. Comrade Heron is clearly in favour of a bureaucratic federal party, complete with the anti-communist clauses of the Labour Party introduced by Ramsay MacDonald.

Writing in *Lalkar*, the paper of the Indian Worker's Association (GB), comrade Brar correctly points out Fisc's hypocrisy regarding the use of the block vote to abolish the black section. No one seemed to cry foul over the use of Fisc's 'own' block vote - that of the black section itself. Comrade Brar's desire for a unitary party led him to oppose the black section. It will no doubt lead him to oppose the women's section next.

My position is for one of consistency. A workers' party ultimately needs democratic centralism in order to achieve unity and take power. But if this stage of the rearticulation of a workers' party is based on affiliation, then it should be open to all working class, socialist and progressive organisations, subject to congress approval, who will *accept* the policies and constitution of the party. This would permit the affiliation of all anti-capitalist forces and allow the SLP to become the "party of all left-thinking people", as comrade Frank Cave put it during congress.

There is clearly no way such a reform in the SLP's constitution is going to come about without some 'road to Damascus' conversion by its founder-leader. The SLP's chances of becoming the progressive force its foundation promised are now very slim indeed. The battle over the SLP constitution has shifted. It is now the bureaucratic unitarists, such as Brar and other Stalinites, versus the Trotskyite bureaucratic federalists of Fisc. While Fisc played anti-communist doorkeeper, they had the ear of Scargill. Who plays Cerebus now?

Union affiliate

I have been making further enquiries about the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners' Association. I previously stated: "It seems this is not a trade union after all, but a retired miners' association" (*Weekly Worker* January 8). This perhaps gives the wrong impression. In fact, the NWCCMA is, it seems, the living shadow of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (the forerunner to the National Union of Mineworkers). The NUM was previously a loose federation of various miners' associations and it would appear that when the structure, and name, of the union changed, the former miners' associations were not wound up, but utilised as bodies of retired miners. They still carry out some of the service function, such as representation regarding pension payouts. In that sense, these miners' associations shadow trade unions. The amalgam of the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria is connected with the long and slow decline of the British coal industry. The great miners' leader of the 20s, A J Cook, wrote of the dwindling number of mines when he moved to south Wales almost 100 years ago.

Today the Lancashire NUM no longer operates as a separate region of the union. It was incorporated into the national structure and now runs a local office of the national union.

My thanks to a Yorkshire NUM activist for the clarification ●

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Statement by supporters of the Democratic Platform

Agreed at a meeting held on Saturday January 10 1998

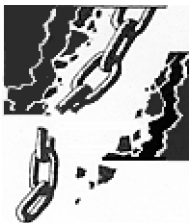
The 16 supporters of the Democratic Platform present at this meeting remain committed to fighting for democracy in the SLP, and the creation of a mass, independent workers' party. We recognise we made some advances at the last SLP congress and seek to take that further in breaking the working class from Labourism.

CPGB London seminar series

January 25: 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.

February 1: Production price in the series on 'Marx's theory of value', using II Rubin as a study guide.

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



**On the weekend of January 10-11,
a deep and festering division
surfaced in the new executive
committee of the Communist Party
of Britain**

Fragile unity under threat

Against stiff opposition, by 17 votes to 13, Robert Griffiths replaced sitting general secretary Mike Hicks, a change recommended by the retiring political committee. The recommendation was moved by *Morning Star* editor John Haylett, a stand which may well cost him his editorship, at the hands of the Hicks-Rosser clique which controls the *Morning Star*.

The palace coup in the leadership of the so-called Communist Party of Britain - which rivals the CPGB Provisional Central Committee's claim to represent the communist tradition in this country - puts a question mark over the future of both the 'party' and the daily paper it supports, the *Morning Star*. The ousting of the conservative and lethargic incumbent general secretary, print union bureaucrat Mike Hicks, by the younger and more dynamic South Wales lecturer in labour studies, Robert Griffiths, ostensibly as the candidate best able to unify the organisation, paradoxically threatens to disturb its fragile opportunist unity.

In the first place, removing Hicks as general secretary means challenging the control of the Hicks-Rosser clique over the *Morning Star*. This also raises the question of the subordination of the 'party' to the paper. Yet the CPB owes its very existence to the *Star*, support for which was the reason for the CPB's birth. Without CPB support, the *Morning Star* would be seriously weakened. Without the *Morning Star*, the CPB would have no reason to exist. CPB members would do well to reconsider the wisdom of placing their faith in a 'party' which is led by a paper.

The *Daily Worker*, from its first issue on January 1 1930, was the political voice of the CPGB, notwithstanding the change, after World War II, from nominal individual ownership by a series of trusted comrades - taking their turn as fall guys in the event of legal actions against the paper - to cooperative ownership by the Peoples Press Printing Society. Although legal control of the *Daily Worker*, and, after the 1967 name change, the *Morning Star*, rested with the PPPS, nevertheless editorial policy remained with the Communist Party. The paper's editors, from Bill Rust in 1930 through George Matthews to Tony Chater in the early 1980s, were members of the Party's political committee, and took instructions from it - until editor Tony Chater unilaterally declared independence. He described the CPGB as an "outside body" which he would no longer follow.

The roles of the CPB and *Star*, however, are reversed. The CPB was formed as an organisation of *Morning Star* supporters, rallying in defence of the paper's declaration of independence from the Communist Party in the mid-1980s. Although this rebellion was against a rightward moving Eurocommunist CPGB leadership which eventually liquidated the Party, the removal of the paper from Party control was itself a major step in the process of liquidation. Having successfully freed itself from more than 50 years of political control by the official CPGB, the *Morning Star* will now find it much easier to maintain the paper's independence from the CPB, a 'party' which is its own creation. It would indeed be a miracle if any kind of party control were re-established over the *Morning Star*.

The survival of the CPB on any other basis than support for the *Morning Star*, however, is as likely as Tony Blair voting communist.

In the second place, any dynamism on the part of the new general secretary, Robert Griffiths, satisfying though this might be for the more energetic cadres of the organisation, itself threatens the sleepy unity of the conservative and inactive CPB membership. Those who doze peacefully together in blissful ignorance of each other's politics may suffer a rude awakening if stirred into activity or thought, and may find it impossible to stomach each other in the cold light of day. The absurd postage stamp debates on the letters page of the *Morning Star* about whether or not Stalin's purges took place testify to the depth of unreality characteristic of *Star* readers and CPB members.

Surprisingly however, the CPB has recently experienced a modest growth in membership - up from below 1,000 to approximately 1,200. Precisely because of its lack of political initiative or activity under Hicks, combined with its programmatic loyalty to New Labour, no matter how Blairite, the CPB's various industrial advisory committees - the only parts of the organisation which half-function - have been able to provide a career network for the lower echelons of the trade union bureaucracy. This is the field in which the organisation has been able to recruit. Ironically, it is among this layer of trade union activists with at least some life in them, incubated precisely under the safe cover of Hicks' conservatism, that frustration with the CPB's stagnation is greatest. Stirring the comatose body of 'official communism' into action would inevitably reveal the divergent strands of opportunist decay to each other, threatening an end to their fragile unity.

As *Weekly Worker* readers will be aware, the disciplined unity in action of CPGB members and supporters is won through the open clash of ideas in this paper, striving to make known and understood all trends in the organisation and the differing positions of leading comrades. Such revolutionary unity is strong because it is based on openness of ideas. The CPB and the *Morning Star*, on the other hand, churn out official pap until real differences burst forth unexpectedly. No sign of the anti-Hicks struggle could be detected in the *Morning Star* reports of the CPB's November 1997 congress. And it is not only the rank and file who are caught unawares and unprepared.

Talking to various CPB executive members over the last few days, I could find nothing but complacency. None accepted that political differences underlie the division between Hicks and Griffiths. As with the SWP after the collapse of the USSR, 'nothing has happened'. There had been "personality clashes" with Hicks, who, it was argued by his opponents at the executive committee meeting, had been "paranoid about the influence of outside organisations" on the 'party', and this had been "divisive". The replacement of Hicks was "a great opportunity to stop the stagnation" in the CPB, whose "policies and ideas are excellent, but their implementation has been held back by stagnation and personality clashes". "Both sides support the alternative economic strategy and the *British Road to Socialism*, although there may be differences in interpretation." The change in personnel represents "absolutely no change" in the policies and direction of the CPB. So I was told.

Obviously, none of this can explain the tenacious resistance to removal offered by Hicks over a period of more than two years. It was not the *newly elected* political committee which recommended Hicks' removal, but the *retiring* one. Furthermore, when, after the previous congress in the autumn of 1996, Hicks survived by a single vote a challenge from chairman Richard Maybin, this challenge was also recommended by the retiring political committee. For the past two years, Hicks' position as general secretary has been maintained by a tiny majority on the 30-strong executive, against the wishes of eight out of ten members of the political committee.

It would be naive to believe that Hicks will meekly accept his downgrading with comradely humility. Perhaps he and his partner, PPPS chief executive Mary Rosser, will retaliate from their entrenched position of strength by removing John Haylett as editor. Rumour has it that the 100-strong Socialist Action group, which has long since been sucking up to Hicks and Rosser, will attempt to get an in on the *Star* at the forthcoming PPPS annual general meeting. This, of course, would be difficult without the connivance of those who hold the levers of power in the PPPS, which is well protected by so-called "checks and balances", as one comrade put it, against takeover by a sudden mobilisation of shareholders from any organised group.

In truth the differences now re-

flected in the opposing camps on the CPB executive go back beyond the birth of the CPB through the Communist Campaign Group in the 1980s.

On the one hand, *Morning Star* editor Tony Chater's UDI from Party control represented a bureaucratic split in the rightward moving 'official' CPGB. Chater's section of the Party machine rebelled against the Eurocommunist threat to *his* control over *his* paper.

On the other hand, the bulk of the more militant Party cadres, unhappy with the Party's 'revolutionary' reformist *BRS* programme, instead of joining the open, principled struggle launched by *The Leninist* in November 1981 to reforge the CPGB on revolutionary lines, fell in behind Chater's section of the opportunist Party bureaucracy. This effectively sealed their fate as prisoners of opportunism, stunting the development of their revolutionary leanings by outlawing open debate as divisive. The CCG, which organised comrades, expelled or otherwise, behind Chater and the *Morning Star*, imposed a conservative, legalistic regime of loyalty. The Party was to be re-established on the basis of its existing *BRS* programme and the AES, neither of which could be challenged or even examined until after re-establishment. Thus, the very reformism which was the root cause of the Party's decline and liquidation was reinstated as the basis of the CPB, setting in motion a repeat performance, only in miniature: a rightward moving leadership followed, reluctantly, by a rightward moving opposition.

In this short sketch of the CPB's evolution, the roles of Mike Hicks and Robert Griffiths contrast somewhat. Hicks, as a member of the CPGB's national executive, and a leading figure on the London District Committee, was a *British Roader* through and through, and had played his full part in the bureaucratic persecution of leftwingers. Nevertheless, he boasts a proud record of industrial militancy, leading printworkers out of their Fleet Street workplaces within an hour of the jailing of the Pentonville Five dockers in 1972, and playing a key role as chief steward in the 1986 Wapping dispute against Rupert Murdoch. When tried and jailed for his Wapping activities, however, his reformism poisoned his militancy. Instead of defiance in the face of anti-working class laws, he proclaimed not only his innocence, but also his respect for the legislation. While this failed to keep him out of the bosses'

jail, it destroyed his cover as a 'revolutionary'.

His general secretaryship of the CPB has been characterised by lack of initiative and complete incapacity for original thought, sticking mindlessly to what he already knows. When the USSR collapsed, he famously announced in a TV interview that this was irrelevant to the CPB, as "we have our own programme for socialism in Britain". Under his unimaginative leadership, the recruitment of MSF leader Ken Gill to the CPB was given contemptuous quarter-inch treatment in the *Morning Star*, before disappearing from view. Likewise the surrender of comrades Andrew Murray, Nick Wright and Susan Michie of the Communist Liaison Group, who were permitted to join the organisation with more scorn than welcome.

Robert Griffiths comes from a Welsh nationalist background, and was a critic of *BRS* reformism. Once a Plaid Cymru research officer, he published, with Gareth Miles, *Sosialaeth i'r Cymry* (*Socialism for the Welsh People*) in July 1979, and the following January founded the Welsh Socialist Republican Movement. In May 1982, the WSRM was active in support of Bobby Sands and the other Irish political prisoners on hunger strike when Robert Griffiths was among those arrested and tried on bomb-related charges. Griffiths served time on remand but, unlike some others, was found not guilty.

During the *Morning Star* rebellion in the CPGB, Griffiths joined the CCG, and became known to readers of *The Leninist* when we reproduced the *South Wales discussion papers* which Griffiths had published. This was a collection of writings by a number of comrades highly critical of the *BRS* from the left. Under the healthy conditions of open debate practised by *The Leninist* and its offspring, the *Weekly Worker*, these views critical of the utopian, gradualist, parliamentary road to socialism could have been fully expressed, rounded out and developed into a coherent revolutionary approach. Instead, the South Wales discussions were choked at birth by loyalty to an opportunist bureaucracy.

Robert Griffiths and those who followed him into the CPB quickly became loyal to the *BRS* and have subsequently moved steadily to the right. Only by breaking from the liquidationist logic of the *BRS* can CPB comrades prevent themselves being wasted as communists ●

Ian Farrell