



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 Hillingdon Hospital dispute.

For more details contact: Brent Socialist Alliance, c/o Galaxy News Box 100,
37 Walm Lane, London NW2 4QU. Tel: 0181-451 0616.

Dockers end fight for jobs

This defeat proves once again that the key to winning workers' struggles is to go beyond trade union forms

The heroic two-year struggle of the 300 sacked Liverpool dockers has ended.

By a four-to-one majority, a mass meeting on January 26 decided to accept pay-offs of up to £28,000 to those dockers formerly employed by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company and its subsidiary, Coastal Container Line. Eighty dockers formerly employed by the Torside company, whose sacking and subsequent picket had sparked the dispute, will get nothing.

The pay-offs will provide no nest eggs. Under social security regulations there will be no entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance until each claimant's savings fall below £8,000. Many dockers will need much of the money to pay off mortgages and other debts run up during the long struggle. The settlement is substantially the same as the offer first rejected by the dockers in December 1996, one which was last thrown out by a 70% majority in a ballot imposed by Transport and General Workers Union general secretary Bill Morris three months ago.

In a statement issued at that time the dockers said: "Should the dockers vote to reject the offer, we fully expect that the tide of solidarity unleashed since the second anniversary of our dispute will rise to a flood, and we will be demanding that the International Transport Federation throw its weight behind the growing international actions." The expected growth in solidarity action did not occur. Although Morris's action in imposing the ballot was condemned in resolutions passed by a number of TGWU regional committees, and many branches of the union submitted motions to the union's general executive commit-

tee calling for positive action to support the dockers, all of these resolutions were bureaucratically ruled out of order by the union's president at the GEC meeting on December 1.

More recently the weekly dockers' mass meetings had heard that promised escalation of international solidarity actions had not been delivered, and that the dispute appeal fund was close to exhaustion. Physical solidarity from other workers within Britain remained at the lamentably low level that it has been from the outset.

The courage, resolve and solidarity of the dockers has been magnificent, and their organisational work has been inspirational. The paramount importance which the dockers placed upon international working class solidarity shows us the future of workers' struggles, in contrast to the narrow, implicitly nationalist sectionalism that dominates much of the workers' movement. However, it has to be recognised that the ending of the dockers' fight represents yet another blow in a long line of defeats for the working class.

As dockers' speakers told last year's second anniversary rally in Liverpool (see *Weekly Worker*, October 2 1997), there is no doubt that it is a defeat that the TGWU leadership, as well as the Blair government, wanted.

The dockers were from the outset already aware of the union bureaucracy's attitude. A statement issued in April 1997 recalled that "between 1989 and 1993 the Liverpool dockers requested on four occasions an official ballot relating to job losses, privatisation and centralisation. These requests were refused by the union for various reasons". Journalist

John Pilger gave elucidation in his *Guardian* article of November 23 1996: "Eric Leatherbarrow (Mersey Docks Communications Manager) wanted me to know that ... the company had no criticisms of the union or its general secretary, Bill Morris ... 'We show the TGWU far more respect than the men', he said".

The TGWU leadership's determination to maintain its presence in the last unionised dock in Britain had led it to adopt the role of industrial policemen. Union bureaucrats even went so far as to threaten the dockers that if they did not comply with management they would be sacked.

Any illusions in New Labour as a party sympathetic to workers' struggles were shattered in the first few months of Blair's government.

There is no doubt that the dockers did reach a better understanding of the nature of the trade union bureaucracy, the Labour Party and the state. In their 'Appeal to the British working class' (*Dockers Charter* No18, September 1997), they called for "a mobilisation against any government which continues these policies" (privatisation, casualisation, anti-trade union laws), and suggested: "Our powerful circles - our trade unions - should be used for our advance to socialism." They were looking for answers through working class political organisation.

Some leaders, like Jimmy Nolan and Mick Cullen, joined the Socialist Labour Party; others called for a new formation. The dockers' defeat proves once again that the key to winning workers' struggles, today more than ever, is to go beyond trade union forms. We need to raise those struggles onto a higher, *political*, plane, to direct them consciously against this reactionary pro-boss government, against the capitalist state itself.

Above all, it shows the urgent need for the building of a Communist Party ●

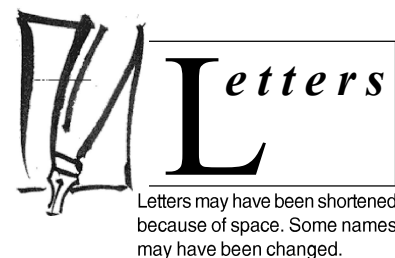
Derek Hunter

The dockers' courage and tenacity was second to none

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

Party notes

The 'P' word

This week's paper features an article commemorating the 150th anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto* (February 1848 - see centre pages). Now and over the next month, every left group worth its salt will be producing articles on the subject. Most of these, however, will be the standard, run-of-the-mill, hack jobs. The majority of the revolutionary left in Britain mouth platitudes about this great work while their day-to-day practice underlines the fact that they have learned little or nothing of the method that informed it.

Without becoming too 'philosophical', the significant silences of some groups on key features of the *Manifesto* are far more instructive than their tired homilies. None more so than the largest organisation on the extra-Labour left, the Socialist Workers Party. Thus, *Socialist Review* (January) devotes seven full pages to proving the contemporary relevance and power of this, "one of the most powerful political pamphlets every written". Dave McNulty - one of the authors - suggests the *Manifesto* was written in response to an identified need of the Communist League: "namely, a small pamphlet giving a short account of the key ideas of the communists". The *Manifesto* has become - they assure us - "one of the most popular pamphlets of all time", "second only to the bible as the highest selling book ever" (my emphasis).

And so it continues. With studious cynicism, these SWP journalists avoid mentioning what the *Manifesto* actually was, managing to steer clear of that dreaded 'P' word: it was a *programme*.

It is now imbedded in SWP culture that having a party programme is a thoroughly bad idea. The last time the organisation debated this question with any degree of seriousness (about the last time it debated anything, in fact) was in the early 1990s. Prominent member Gareth Jenkins - in a contribution taken as an unofficial reply from the leadership to calls from party members for a programme commission - actually went as far as to state that just like the SWP, "the Bolsheviks were light-minded about programmes, but principled in practice" (SWP *Internal Bulletin* No3, November 1991).

An even more telling comment was made by Maureen Watson (subsequently expelled) at the session on 'Centrism and ultra-leftism' at the SWP's annual 'Marxism' school in 1990. She confidently told her audience that "Lenin would be turning in his grave, at the thought of being bound hand and foot by a programme" (cited in *Republican Marxist*, July 1990).

The philistine notion that the mere existence of a party programme somehow trusses the party up and prevents it from being 'principled' in practice is barely worth commenting on. If this were so, one wonders why the most astute, flexible and principled working class politician of the 20th century underlined again and again the "tremendous importance of a programme for the consolidation and consistent activity of a political party" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 4, Moscow 1977, p229).

However, comrade Watson's foolish throwaway remark does reveal a truth about the SWP's attitude to programme. In fact, it was not Lenin and the Bolsheviks who were traumatised by the idea of being "bound hand and foot" by some programmatic document. No, this is a phobia transferred onto them from the leadership of the SWP itself.

Why? Simply because like too many others on the British revolutionary left, the SWP, far from being engaged in a party project, is in the business of building a *centrist* sect. A programme in these circumstances can be not simply a nuisance, but an actual obstacle to the opportunist manoeuvres of the leadership.

For us, "the programme is the foundation for the building of the Communist Party [in that] it firmly links our continuous and all-encompassing agitational work with the ultimate aim of communism; it represents the dialectical unity between revolutionary theory and revolutionary practice. [It] thus establishes the basis for agreed revolutionary action and is the standard, the reference point, around which the voluntary unity of Party members is built and concretised" (J Conrad *Which Road?* p235). As a centrist formation, the SWP must keep itself 'free' to adapt to prevailing moods and prejudices. The last thing the leadership needs is a revolutionary "standard, a reference point", against which today's particular opportunist or sectarian twist can be judged.

As the comrades who went on to form the Revolutionary Democratic Group commented, "the SWP method [is borrowed] from the British ruling class, past masters at deceiving people. The British constitution like the SWP programme is scattered around in a number of documents ... Not surprisingly the average British person ... doesn't really know their constitutional rights" (From *The Marxist programme and the Socialist Workers Party*, undated). And - unsurprisingly - the average SWPer displays equal political confusion; it has no "standard" against which to judge the actions of the all-powerful clique around Tony Cliff and is therefore characterised by profound political passivity.

James Cannon was quite right when he said that "it is not the party that makes the programme: it is the programme that makes the party" (J Cannon *Speeches for socialism* p180). The fight for a reformed Communist Party in this country is centrally a fight to re-equip our class with a revolutionary programme. It is in this spirit that we celebrate 150 years of the *Communist Manifesto*, a brilliant communist programme written by the founders of scientific socialism. The task of communists is to understand the method that produced it and to stand on its shoulders as we struggle for clarity and a revolutionary unity of purpose in today's world.

Mark Fischer
national organiser

No platitude

Comrade Danny Hammill (Letters *Weekly Worker* 223) clearly lives in a very different world from me. For Danny, everyone who takes drugs - legal or illegal - does so in order to "enhance pleasure", and the only blight on the horizon is the nasty puritans who want to impose 'harm reduction' strategies on this aspect of "human liberation".

Sadly, Danny, the reality of my world is one where women are hooked on prescribed tranquillisers to get through the drudgery of their daily lives, where children are "choosing" to inject themselves with heroin and where vicious gangsters are making multi-million pound profit. This is not to mention the fortunes made by drug companies and the tobacco and alcohol industries. For many working class people drug-taking does not make their lives "a hell of a lot easier", as Danny suggests, but does in fact "fuck them up". Of course, there are people who use drugs recreationally and relatively safely, but there are also those who are dependent on drugs. Both groups are entitled to be aware of harm reduction strategies.

Danny seeks to characterise my attitude as one of "dull sobriety". Nothing could be further from the truth. I am in favour of the legalisation of all drugs, but I certainly do not hold with Danny's libertarian and somewhat hedonistic approach to the subject. I recognise there are potential dangers and risks.

I believe in informed choice - that is what harm reduction means; having detailed knowledge about the substance we are taking, knowing the likely effects, what to do if it goes wrong. Sorry if all this sounds boring and didactic to Danny and his friends, who either have all this information or do not feel they need it.

Danny also quotes me out of context. He says: "Get them off drugs and they will become 'good citizens' or, as comrade Ward puts it, "function as part of their communities". I used this as an argument for prescribing heroin, not as a reason for stopping drug taking.

Most of us take drugs, in one form or another. Sometimes for pleasure, sometimes to keep us alive and sometimes because we are feeling self-destructive. I make no apology for being an advocate of harm reduction strategies and fail to see why Danny finds this so repugnant. We must expose the bourgeois prohibitionists for the hypocrites they are and show the reasons why their policies are wrong. But we must not present our attitude to the working class as one of 'take everything and anything. Danny, communist morality is not just a platitude.

Mary Ward
Dundee

Halt on debate

Readers may be curious about the absence of Linda Addison from the polemical stage in the *Weekly Worker*. After all over the past few months and a number of articles and now a letter several side swipes and obscure references to peculiar views attributed to Linda Addison have been penned by Jack Conrad.

Here are few examples. On October 23 comrade Conrad refers to a "very confused comrade Addison". Linda Addison is perhaps also one of those "veering towards sectarianism" in that issue. In a meeting Linda was wrongly attributed with the view that the "working class has been smashed", which reappears attributed to an unnamed minority in the same issue. Conrad continues with a bold and unsubstantiated assertion of "Linda Addison's shameful call for a retreat from political practice and engagement" on December 4. Again Addison "... does not seem to grasp that the boycott campaign was about practical politics. Almost like an anarchist, it was for her a moral posture designed to educate the masses in the 'method' they need". The latest of course is "comrade Addison's mish-mash of ineffectual bile, dour pessimism and puerile inaccuracy

... the comrade arrived at right liquidationism not as a result of theory, but due to a lack of theory" (January 22).

My replies to just some of these misrepresentations were not published because they were characterised as "boring and technical" by the editor. In fact the PCC had taken a decision to pursue internally the arguments I first raised on October 3 in the *Weekly Worker*, since they were not considered immediately relevant or readable by a broader readership. Conrad has in fact quoted in the *Weekly Worker* of November 13 from an internal document which I subsequently wrote.

The problem with Jack Conrad's method of attack in this debate, particularly his last, is that it effectively halts any political debate. If your opponent is replied to simply with a string of accusations on her ability to debate at all, how can the debate be progressed? The debate is written off as irrelevant, as it results from a "lack of theory", is "complete garbage" or "ineffectual bile". It is perhaps a little ironic that my original argument was addressed to the problem of developing all our comrades more fully as self-activating "communist theoreticians".

Linda Addison
London

Misrepresented

I feel my position on the SLP has been misrepresented in Alan McArthur's recent report on the SLP's 2nd congress in *Workers' Liberty* ('SLP severely injured', January 1998). He cites an article of mine as a poor example of the response of some of the left to the farce which the congress undoubtedly was.

Comrade McArthur quotes my remark in the December 18 post-conference edition of the *Weekly Worker*: "If the class was combative, if we were moving forward, the SLP would be swamped by workers who would simply not put up with the bureaucratic shenanigans of the leadership." He then argues: "Even if this were not so very unlikely, to attempt to channel the upsurge in working class activity into a neo-Stalinist sect would be a grave mistake for socialists."

Unfortunately, comrade McArthur failed to quote the very next sentence I wrote: "Alternatively, the SLP would be completely ignored, as workers moved directly towards revolutionary politics" (*Weekly Worker* December 18).

The last thing I was doing was positing the SLP as some necessary step for an emerging class movement to go through. I was hypothetically noting that if the class had been combative *at the time of the SLP's formation*, the SLP would have either been ignored or been a completely different beast from what it is today.

My article was an attempt to stop the SLP left splintering into 57 different directions. It was a polemic against abstract moralism, against wishful thinking, not a prescription for an as yet non-existent militant mass movement. Given an upsurge in working class activity, I will be doing my utmost to channel such a movement into a Communist Party and away from the politics of "neo-Stalinist sects".

However, *in the absence of anything else*, I argued that, despite himself, "Scargill is relatively well positioned" and that the crisis of the SLP "is one of the few bridges which exists between the crisis of Labourism and the struggle for a Communist Party".

What is comrade McArthur's panacea, but a feeble and decidedly abstract call for a "Labour Representation Committee". Our struggle is for a Communist Party, but we are not sectarians. Were such a Labour Representation Committee to become a reality, it would be beholden on revolutionaries to positively engage with such a process. But so far, it remains the idle fancy of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

It is a reflection of the parlous state of

our movement that it only produces shabby outfits like the SLP. However, apart from the Socialist Alliances and our own campaign for communist rapprochement, it is all there is by way of any process for party.

Martin Blum
London

Academic?

Eddie Ford's look at the recent reincarnation of the Revolutionary Communist Party as media stars on the Channel Four series *Against Nature* (*Weekly Worker* January 8) made me wonder what has happened to this organisation. I've been told that the party still exists. Yet the *Against Nature* producer, Martin Durkin, who's not known as an RCP member or supporter, said in the *Guardian* on December 20 1997 that it had been dissolved over a year before. Does he know something we don't?

Whilst *Against Nature* did aim a few nice barbs at the greens, there was nothing in those programmes that could not have been said by an intelligent spokesman for capitalism. To put it another way, the RCP's break into the big time was at the expense of any radical politics. Of course, the greens cannot tolerate any criticism of their holy ideas: hence their annoyance. But merely to pose, as *Against Nature* did, undifferentiated 'progress', without looking at the issue of the control of industrialisation, will not break the ideological stranglehold of greenery.

As for *LM* (née *Living Marxism*), regular readers will have noticed how narrow its focus has become over the last couple of years. Increasingly obsessed with countering moral panics and heaving brickbats at the liberal media, whole hordes of important global events have escaped its eye. Only if events can be wedged into the sphere of the party's current theoretical hobbyhorse, the "culture of low expectations", will they be covered. One gets the impression of a steady disengagement from anything resembling leftwing politics.

A droll lesson, no doubt unintended, was drawn in last November's *LM*. In its libel case against *LM*, over what the journal considered was misleading reportage on the war in former Yugoslavia, ITN charged it with having the "improper motive" of "fuelling its campaign of pro-Serbian propaganda ... thereby hoping to further the cause of revolutionary communism and/or Marxist ideology". This, says *LM*, is a "caricature" of the magazine's politics. I would have thought that being accused of furthering "the cause of revolutionary communism and/or Marxist ideology" was not merely a "caricature" of its politics, but constituted a *prima facie* case of libel.

The essence of the RCP's crisis is that it came to see the disorientation of the labour movement as the demise of the working class as a potentially revolutionary force, the agency of social transformation. The RCP is in danger of going down some very bizarre political thoroughfares. There is the possibility that the combination of its rejection of class politics - in other words, the repudiation of the revolutionary potential of the working class - and its obsession with censorship and the intrusion of the state into people's personal lives could lead to adherents of the group (if not the group itself) veering wildly towards a reactionary libertarian standpoint. Stripped of any class criterion, parts of *LM* are starting to bear an uncomfortable resemblance to rightwing libertarianism, that bolt-hole for the ultimate petty bourgeois hedonist.

Put this way, the question of 'does the party still exist?' seems pretty academic.

Dave Walker
New Interventions

From The Call, paper of the
British Socialist Party,
January 24 1918

BSP raided -
freedom of political
association attacked

The central offices of the BSP in London were raided by police officers from Scotland Yard last Thursday.

Acting under regulation 51 of the Defence of the Realm Act, they took possession of the premises and confiscated copies of a manifesto entitled 'Russia's appeal - will British workers remain silent?', intended for circulation to the delegates of the Labour Party conference at Nottingham this week, together with a message to British workers by comrade Maxim Litvinov, the Russian ambassador to Britain. Several thousand copies of the current issue of *The Call*, which contained the manifesto were also seized, as well as copies of the previous week's issue containing comrade Litvinov's message.

The police had previously visited the premises of the National Labour Press, which printed the manifesto, and threatened to dismantle the machinery unless full information was given as to its printing and delivery.

In the preparation of the manifesto all the requirements of the new regulation 27c of the Defence of the Realm Act had been complied with. Both the manifesto and the reprint of comrade Litvinov's message bore the names and addresses of the authors and printer, and copies were lodged with the Official Press Bureau the requisite 72 hours before the day on which it was intended to circulate them.

The action of the authorities in this matter raises a question of grave concern to the organised working class movement. As an affiliated organisation of the Labour Party, the BSP sought to communicate its views to the other affiliated societies on a matter of urgent importance that was bound to arise at the Labour Party conference. But the government intervenes and, by its arbitrary seizure of the manifestos, prohibits the BSP representatives placing their opinions before their fellow delegates, and prevents the latter from considering them. It means, in effect, that at the gravest moment in the history of the working class movement an organisation is forcibly restrained from communicating its views regarding Labour policy and Labour tactics to other organisations with which it is in political association, because those views do not meet with the approval of the government.

It is not only a further and deadly blow at the free expression of opinion. It is an undisguised attack on the liberty of political association; and it betrays the fear of our ruling class that, inspired by Russia's appeal, the working people of this country will rally, not only to impose Russia's peace terms upon the government, but to sweep away the whole capitalist system, which is responsible for the horrors, miseries and sufferings of the last three years.

The significance of the government's action, both to the Labour Party as a whole, as well as to individual affiliated societies, is easily appreciable, and already resolutions of strong protest have reached us. We hope that similar resolutions will be passed by Labour, socialist and trade union organisations all over the country and sent to the prime minister and home secretary; and we confidently appeal for support from those bodies influencing the Labour Party executive to make determined representations to the government ●

[Editor's note: The offending manifesto, carried in *The Call* of January 17 1918, was published in last week's *Weekly Worker* January 22.]

1918

Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

Family feud of Turkish ruling bloc
**Islamist Welfare
Party banned**

The Constitutional Court of Turkey has decreed that the Welfare Party, which seeks to establish a regime based on Islamic *sharia* lines, has contravened clauses in the country's constitution prohibiting political parties based on religion.

The party offices have been closed. Six of its leaders have been expelled from parliament and banned from switching to another political party. They include the chairman of the party, who until very recently was deputy prime minister in the coalition government. Party funds and property were confiscated and the substantial annual subsidy due to be paid to the party in proportion to its representation in parliament was frozen.

However, the islamists had already taken precautions against this long-expected development. They, like the left, are familiar with the whimsical nature of the Turkish constitutional legal system.

This is the 23rd party closed down by the Constitutional Court since 1963, but only the second Islamist party. The rest of them, as the reader might guess, were various left organisations. Two Islamist parties were also closed down by the martial law authorities.

Welfare Party leaders are now ready to form a new, 'spare wheel' organisation. They had the option of doing so in advance, but preferred to await the conditions attached to the court judgement.

Otherwise they were ready. All the party's property and funds were 'privatised' - placed at the disposal of a few trusted members. The state was only able to confiscate two broken down minibuses and a few sticks of furniture at party headquarters. In an added twist of irony, the state became liable for all party debts. Now each and every honest citizen who can prove they lent money or rendered any service to the party may claim it from the state.

Apart from the six banned leaders, the ex-Welfare MPs have been allowed to remain as independents. They constitute almost a third of the

parliament - still the largest group with 147 members out of a total of 550. However, they will no longer be represented in the commissions and committees of the parliament until they become members of the new party.

Many municipal administrations, including two major cities, are run by ex-Welfare Party, now independent, islamists. The religious foundations and their offsprings, the Islamist companies and corporations, continue to generate political funds in and out of Turkey. The 'illegal' sects identified with this party are still in operation.

The islamists have displayed a confident and defiant, but guarded mood in response to the judgement. They did not panic. They did not rush into hasty actions. Their organisational structure remains intact. One of their options is to force an early election through mass resignation of their MPs, once the new party becomes operational.

The ban has created new international media interest in Turkey's affairs. We must however be cautious in our evaluation. First of all, let us remind ourselves that the Islamist threat to a secular democratic bourgeois regime in Turkey has not been confined to the Welfare Party.

The Islamist forces were aided and abetted by the finance capitalists of Turkey and their state during the late 70s in their attempts to counter the working class and petty bourgeois revolutionary movement. The last remnants of the secularist ideals of early bourgeois Turkey were blown away by the winds of revolutionary crisis and military counterrevolution. The military regime of the 80s went so far in this direction that even their successors of the 90s are now criticising them.

The islamists were still considered a very important ally by Turkish finance capitalists in their colonial war in Kurdistan. The sudden changes in the Central Asian and Caucasus regions after the collapse of Soviet Union gave them a new importance in aiding the Turkish state in their

desire to expand into these regions.

However, the islamists were themselves on the offensive against the secular regime, encouraged by the international advance of fundamentalist reaction. This offensive reached beyond the limits of what secular, western-oriented finance capital and the influential petty bourgeoisie were prepared to accept.

The tangible concessions gained by the islamists during the coalition government also alienated another major section of society. The Alevis, oppressed for centuries by the Sunni state Islam, began to show their discontent. The legal and tacit concessions that the other bourgeois political parties were forced to give the islamists in order to cling onto power, even in the form of a coalition government with the Welfare Party, together with the islamists' success in the local elections, were the straw that broke the camel's back: A secular backlash became inevitable.

Threatening direct intervention, a military-led bourgeois secular alliance forced the collapse of the coalition government. Since then the Constitutional Court decision to ban Welfare has been on the agenda as a direct result of this backlash.

However, by these actions the state cannot hope to suppress an organised and vocal opposition representing a substantial portion of the population. The finance capitalists want to control it to their benefit, but the beast is not easy to tame. The illusions the islamist have fed to the dissatisfied masses of the city slums and the disintegrating rural communities is very important if those forces are to be kept in check.

Here lies the tragedy of the Turkish left and communists. A very large part of their natural constituency remains under Islamist influence, while the bourgeois regime has the greatest of difficulty in ruling in the old way. Yet the Turkish left is in deep ideological crisis and faces organisational disintegration. Far from seizing upon the opportunities the situation presents, it stands aside from these developments in utter aloofness. This only adds to its confusion and disintegration.

The legal, reformist left evaluates this judgement as an onslaught against democracy. The ex-Maoist left, draped in the colours of the early bourgeois revolution, defends the action of army and state as a bulwark against Islamist reaction. The so-called revolutionary left claims that this judgement is nothing but an attempt to distort and divert the political agenda. Some in the same tradition even see the islamists movement as an anti-imperialist ally. The Kurdish nationalist movement is flirting with its own Islamist in trying to establish a more powerful coalition against the enemy. The split trade union movement supports this judgement on the one hand and asks for a 'better' bourgeois democracy on the other.

Meanwhile the family feud in crisis-ridden Turkey between the secular, finance capitalist-led sections of the bourgeoisie and its Islamist reactionary wing is continuing, but without any effective participation of the working class movement ●

Osman Aziz

action

■ **CPGB schools**

Dundee: The national question and the federal republic, February 21-22

London: The USSR: what was it?

April 4-5

Communist University: A week of stimulating study and debate in August. Contact Party centre for details.

■ **CPGB Scotland**

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

■ **Scottish Socialist Alliance**

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

■ **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 Magnet workers**

To support the 350 sacked Magnet contact the Strike Committee. For more information on 01325-282389.

■ **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.

Fighting fund

.....
Clinton's wad

Despite enjoying the backing of super-rich patrons, as all US presidents must, Bill Clinton's position looks decidedly rocky. Those seeking his downfall also have millions of dollars at their disposal.

One thing is certain: Whatever the outcome, in the US as in Britain those who hold the reins of power will remain at the service of capital, with virtually unlimited funds behind them.

We on the other hand cannot rely on millionaire backers. The well-being of our paper depends entirely on our supporters.

Comrades and supporters do-

nated a total of £450 in January - very good. But not good enough: We narrowly missed our new monthly target of £500. Help us hit the target next month!

Thanks this week to RW (Carlisle), who sent us £25 and II from Southampton, who donated £20.

Thanks also to all the hardworking comrades, who raised money on street sales: RT from Manchester raised more than £50, MY and NE (Dundee) sent us £40 and TW and PM in London collected £34.

Keep it coming, comrades! ●

Katrina Haynes

Programme of liberation

Lenin made a very profound observation when, in a scribbled note to Karl Radek, he drew attention to the fact that the *Communist Manifesto* was both the product of a "small group of revolutionaries" and "ferment among masses" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 36, Moscow 1977, p335). The first edition appeared just prior to the outbreak of the revolutions which swept Europe in that wonderful year 1848. Bound in a dark green jacket, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* - to give the full title - had 24 pages and was written in eloquent, cultured German. However the *Manifesto* was published not in Berlin, Frankfurt or Cologne - censorship prevented it - but London.

The printer, a political exile named JE Burghard, was a member of the Communist League - which in the main consisted of German-speaking artisans and workers. Few people at the time would have heard of this semi-secret society (naturally that did not apply to the Prussian police or its agents). Even among the most advanced continental revolutionaries ie, those in Paris - the group would have been obscure. Faced as we are in 1998 with the task of *rebuilding* the Communist Party on solid political foundations, that point is, to say the least, germane. Revolutionary organisations in the Britain of today ought to be judged not according to vainglorious boasts about influence or size, but first and foremost by programme (something shunned by our Socialist Workers Party almost as a matter of principle).

Germany in the early 1840s was a European backwater. Divided between autocratic empires, numerous petty kingdoms and city states, it languished in economic, political and spiritual stagnation. Germany was the Yugoslavia of the day. For many 'sober minded' intellectuals Germany represented a hopeless case. Its people were naturally conservative. The very air they breathed made them servile. There was as a consequence no chance whatsoever of this dead country following the splendid example of France and carrying out its '1789'. Better resign oneself then to the impossibility of revolution or radical reform than suffer 'adventurist' delusions, exertions and dangers. "Despair takes more courage than hope", claimed Arnold Ruge, the journalist and young Hegelian. Nevertheless, despite the fact that nothing existed in Germany equivalent to the Jacobins, it appeared to the most perceptive minds that revolution gestated in the womb of society - even though no one believed in it.

Still in their mid-20s, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were already committed political activists, scholars of the highest calibre and hence revolutionary optimists. Replying to the dire pessimism of Ruge and his ilk, Marx suggestively wrote in March 1843 that Germany was becoming *ashamed* of its backwardness - that is "already a revolution". Germany would in due course meet its fate. "That fate is the impending revolution", he predicted with an almost uncanny foresight (K Marx *MECW* Vol 3, London 1975, pp133-4). In 1848 Germany exploded. Resignation breeds self-defeating and self-fulfilling inaction. That is why Marx insisted, in contrast to Ruge's cynicism and dust-dry book learning, on *real* "participation in politics". "We do not say to the world: cease your struggles; they are foolish." Instead Marx promised the "true slogan of struggle" (*ibid* p144).

In the early 1840s intellectually, and practically, in no small part due to the

The *Communist Manifesto* is no historical footnote, writes Jack Conrad. In its essentials it remains a brilliant analysis of the necessary conditions for and means of making social revolution

pull of the masses, Marx and Engels found themselves compelled, first independently and then in partnership, with one great leap rapidly following another, to move beyond the realms of revolutionary democratic extremism to full blown revolutionary democratic communism. Unlike their contemporaries, however, the new-found communism of Marx and Engels eschewed the visionary blueprints of previous thinkers - down to fanciful notions of how coming generations must behave and even dress. Marx and Engels refused to instruct the future. Utopian communism was a savage and often brilliant indictment of existing conditions. Fourier and Saint-Simon deserve the utmost admiration. But, not least when their ideas took the organisational form of doctrinaire sects, they could not provide a realistic strategy.

By 1844 the two had come together - Marx and Engels were to be firm friends and lifelong collaborators. With remarkable quickness they laid the theoretical base, or starting point, for what has become known as scientific communism or scientific socialism: ie, the materialist and dialectical understanding of social development. The productive forces and the clash of class against class under the conditions of *advanced capitalism* create the necessary *material* conditions for social revolution and universal human liberation. The critical *subjective* agent of change was not in the view of Marx and Engels an enlightened revolutionary elite or minority, as imagined by Auguste Blanqui and other great revolutionaries in France. It was the political struggle of a conscious modern working class: the "proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class" they were famously to declare (K Marx and F Engels *MECW* Vol 6, New York 1975, p494).

Germany possessed merely the faintest beginnings of such a class. Engels had though fortuitously moved to Manchester. Here he "forsook" the middle classes and their "port wine and champagne" and devoted his leisure hours to the company of the working class (F Engels *The condition of the working class in England* London 1972, p323). He became convinced that this sprawling city with its giant factories and huge concentrations of workers held up a mirror for the whole world.

Because of political repression and economic distress German artisans migrated westward in large numbers, not least to France and Britain. Germans were in that way being proletarianised and attracted to advanced ideas. Communism was already "itself a power" (K Marx and F Engels *MECW* Vol 6, New York 1976, p477). In Paris and London Marx and Engels made contact and then threw in their lot with those who fought under the banner of the Communist League. At one of its delegate meetings - I believe in Soho - during the summer of 1847 Engels managed to get himself instructed to draw up a programmatic document.

After producing a couple of drafts he handed the whole business over to Marx. Engels initially put down his thoughts in the manner of a communist catechism or confession of faith. Among communist groups this ques-

tion and answer form was standard. Engels soon recognised its limitations. Something more was needed; a manifesto, he suggested to Marx. Work began in November 1847, but was incomplete by the next delegate meeting of the League - again in London. Despite that the two persuaded their comrades to accept the fundamental principles and perspectives they had recently developed. Marx was thereafter given a free hand and the *Communist Manifesto* duly came out in February 1848.

The document's biggest propaganda impact would have been on the circles of communists which organised underground in Germany as well as abroad in Switzerland, France, Belgium and Britain. Around this German 'core' a number of 'peripheral' translations immediately followed - Swedish, Polish and Danish (those into French, Italian and Spanish remained unpublished). The Chartist journal, the *Red Republican*, carried the first English translation - by Helen Macfarlane - a little while later in 1850. Its editor, George Julian Harney, named Marx and Engels as the co-authors for the first time in his introduction. All previous editions had been anonymous.

In the long period of reaction following the defeat of the revolutionary wave of 1848 the *Communist Manifesto* had no mass impact or circulation; in the words of Engels "it seemed thenceforth to be doomed to oblivion" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 26, London 1990, p515). When the proletarian movement revived in the 1860s with the International Workingmen's Association there had to be a broad programme acceptable to British trade unionists, Proudhonists and Lassalleans. The open communism of the *Manifesto* would have been inappropriate and counterproductive. Only in 1872 was the *Manifesto* reprinted; and, as Marx and Engels noted in their preface, the thing had become somewhat "antiquated" in terms of details (K Marx and F Engels *MECW* Vol 23, London 1988, p175).

Nevertheless today, according to the *Guinness book of records*, the *Communist Manifesto* is the second most widely circulated publication of all time. One hundred and fifty years after first coming off the press only the bible of the Christian religion surpasses it - and this cult claims something like a 2,000-year, uninterrupted history. More to the point, where the bible was employed by classes, schisms and states to shape Western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries - with the coming of the 'Dutch' printing press and vernacular editions - those acting in the name of the *Manifesto* shaped the whole planet in the 20th century.

The mass parties of the Second International - founded in 1889 - formally accepted the politics of the *Communist Manifesto* as the general basis of their programmes (the Labour Party was a rare exception). These parties provided the core material for the Third International set up in 1919 under the dual impact of the horrors of World War I and the triumph of the Russian Revolution. The parties that originated with the Third International in turn went on to seize or preside over state power not only in the Soviet

Union but China, Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba and Eastern Europe. Capitalists were everywhere expropriated and the economy in these countries run on the basis of state ownership and direction. Khrushchev declared in October 1961 that the socialism "predicted as inevitable" by Marx and Engels "has been transformed into reality" and that the Soviet Union would assuredly build the material and technical foundations of communism by 1980 (Documents of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU *The road to communism* Moscow 1961, p169).

What of the remaining parties of the Second International? Having sided with their own ruling classes in World War I, they gave ideological gloss and popular underpinning for the social democratic settlement following World War II. Industries were nationalised on a wide scale; housing, health and education provision became a universal right; unemployment was reduced to minimal proportions. No longer was ownership of capital concentrated in the hands of an oligarchy. Capital became progressively social and faceless. As a result during the 1960s it was fashionable to talk of the 'convergence' of capitalism and socialism and a new post-capitalist industrial state. John Kenneth Galbraith argued that "decisive power in modern industrial society is exercised not by capital, but organisation; not by the capitalist, but the industrial bureaucrat. This is true in the western industrial system. It is true also of the socialist societies For organisation - bureaucracy - is inescapable in advanced industrial technology" (JK Galbraith *The new industrial state* New York 1971, pxxvii).

From our present vantage point claims of a post-capitalist capitalism now appear like babbling nonsense. In contrast 'official communism' stands revealed as one of the biggest lies in history. What existed in the Soviet Union from the first five-year plan onwards had nothing to do with the self-liberation of the working class: ie, genuine socialism. Workers lost all democratic rights under Stalin and suffered ruthless exploitation. Real living standards and conditions plummeted between 1929 and 1934. Millions were butchered or suffered premature death. Planning existed on paper, but it was chaos in reality. The Soviet Union was neither capitalist nor socialist.

Socialism was negatively realised as bureaucratic domination and the systematic elimination of any hint of dissent or independent thought. Stalin's system marked the victory of terrorism, not democracy. His attempt to build socialism in one country took him step by improvised step to the very opposite outcome of his original intentions. None of the other examples of 'living socialism' began with proletarian revolution. Their model was Stalin's USSR. With this in their heads there was no chance of the 'official communists' in China, Vietnam, Czechoslovakia, or anywhere else, realising anything other than a travesty of socialism.

The barbarity of bureaucratic socialism, the absolute denial of democracy, the economic backwardness and autarchy, the privileged and hypocriti-

cal life of the elite served the ideologues of capitalism admirably. Each and every opportunity was used to hammer home the lie that this dystopian system was somehow the direct and unavoidable result of the theories of Marx and Engels. Here the interests of 'official communism' and official capitalism dovetailed. No wonder wage slaves in the west considered themselves lucky. Compared with what the masses had to contend with under 'living socialism' they enjoyed far more rights and far better lives. Capitalism thereby strengthened itself considerably against those below: on the one side through anti-communism and on the other the social democratic state. It is no accident that with the 1989-91 collapse of bureaucratic socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe the representatives and personifications of capital have sought to reverse the post-World War II social democratic settlement and pare away the welfare state.

The world seems to have returned to its point of departure. Yet, where the 20th century was born with high hopes and the sure expectation of progress, it is ending with a widespread feeling of despair and failure. Reaction rules. Marxism has been thoroughly discredited by 'Marxists'. Capitalism appears unassailable... and yet objectively the need for communism has never been greater. To show why this alternative to the rule capital retains all its relevance and validity, we are well advised to go back and examine the basic theoretical propositions of the *Communist Manifesto*.

The *Manifesto* begins with what could easily be mistaken as a paean of praise for the bourgeois mode of production. Marx and Engels state that the bourgeoisie, has historically "played the most revolutionary part" (K Marx and F Engels *MECW* Vol 6, New York 1976, p486). The wonders of the bourgeoisie far surpass the "Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts and Gothic cathedrals". With the development of modern industry and commerce all the old exclusivity and parochiality was torn away. The world market destroys or pushes into the background what has been handed down from the Middle Ages. Everything - religion, sentimentalism, chivalry - is subordinated to cash payment and "direct, brutal exploitation" (*ibid* p487). The bourgeoisie can never rest. Production must constantly expand. Conditions and the techniques of production endlessly revolutionised. The bourgeoisie thereby "creates a world after its own image" (*ibid* p488). Hence we have nowadays not only a world market but a world economy. Capital has been accumulated on a scale hardly imaginable in the 19th century - where there were millionaires now there are billionaires. And today's technology makes that of even 20 years ago look positively stone age - one person using a modern computer does the work of a thousand pen-pushing desk clerks.

Needless to say, what is now called capitalism is riven with endemic contradictions of its own making. Overproduction is inevitable and brings forth periodic, general crises. Even though peoples needs go unsatisfied, there is too much civilisation, too much wealth, too much industry for the "narrow" conditions of bourgeois society, where production takes place for the sake of production. In our century economic crisis has been combined with world war, annihilation of whole cities and countries, and the slaughter of millions in automated death camps.

The bourgeoisie is increasingly unfit to govern. Capital must be overthrown by proletarian revolution in the interests of society and the immense majority. To the extent that capital develops, so does its "gravediggers". At the time of the *Manifesto* there would have been no more than a couple of million proletarians across the whole of the planet - South Korea alone has that and many more today. The workers spontaneously form themselves into trade unions in defence of wages and conditions. But every real class struggle is a political struggle. With the help of communists the workers can and must be organised into a conscious class, and "consequently into a political party" (*ibid* p493).

The workers first clash with the bourgeoisie on the national terrain. The content of their struggle is, however, inescapably global, because capital as a metabolism is global. Victory will be secured only over the bourgeoisie order as a whole. The notion of socialism or even successful *communist* revolution in one country was specifically rejected by Engels in his second draft of October 1847. Our revolution will have to take place "simultaneously in all civilised countries". It is a "worldwide revolution and will therefore be worldwide in scope" (*ibid* p352). National communism or socialism leads not to liberation, but a "freak" society. That surely describes the Soviet Union under Stalin and his successors.

The role of communists is to bring to the fore the "common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality" (*ibid* p497). They do not establish "a separate party opposed to other working class parties" - that is parties committed to the "conquest of political power by the proletariat". By this formulation Marx and Engels meant, of course, organisations such as the Chartists, not today's Labour Party, which lauds and props up the capitalist system.

The immediate task of communists concerns securing state power for the working class: ie, the minimum part of the programme. Marx and Engels, as I have indicated, were by no means indifferent to the political conditions under which the working class organises against capital. On the contrary they stressed the necessity of fighting to "win the battle of democracy" (*ibid* p504). Hence their analysis of the various socialisms which then existed - reactionary, bourgeois, petty bourgeois and critical-utopian. Communists, declared the *Manifesto*, "fight for the immediate aims" in the interests of the future of the movement. They therefore proposed temporary alliances with, or support for, the likes of the radicals in Switzerland, the bourgeoisie in Germany, and the social democrats in France. Communists are for the "union and agreement of the democratic forces of all countries". In short the communists "support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things" (*ibid* p519).

The maximum programme ie, after the working class has been constituted as the state - consists of returning the alienated wealth of society - capital - back to society. Capital is a "social power" and needs to be converted into "social property" (*ibid* p499). Obviously nationalisation by the capitalist or bureaucratic state would at best be a partial or negative attempt to overcome the contradictions of capitalism. What the communists desire and consider vital is the positive, that is the democratic supersession of capital, through overcoming the subordination of the workers to the products of their collective labour. In other words a free association of free producers.

If the workers are to win the world we must relearn and reapply these programmatic lessons. Let us reforge communism as a power ●

Building the fourth tendency

One banner, many flags

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group (faction of the SWP) calls for communist rapprochement

In March 1921 the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) split and fought to the death over the ice at Kronstadt. The programme of the minority was for rebuilding workers' democracy, elections to soviets, free speech, etc. The majority backed the Bolshevik government and its policy of war communism, which now came to mean war between communists. A majority of Kronstadt communists supported the uprising and many Red Army units either refused to fight or were reluctant to do so.

With these tragic events, the Russian revolution imploded. As a temporary measure, factions were banned inside the party. This became permanent. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union began the long process of degeneration and decline, which came to an end in 1991, when the USSR was abolished. Over these 70 years, the communist movement has been deeply divided.

During and after 1921 Lenin became seriously ill and later died. Not before he had become very worried by the growth of bureaucratic state power and the danger posed by Stalin. Following the death of Lenin, Stalin ousted Zinoviev, Trotsky and eventually Bukharin. The split between Stalin and Trotsky led eventually to the foundation of the Fourth International and Trotsky's murder. In the 1940s the Trotskyist movement split. Armed with the theories of Raya Dunayevskaya and Tony Cliff, a new tendency arose based on the view that the USSR was state capitalist.

What kind of workers' state was the USSR? The Trotskyists swore blind it was a bureaucratic and degenerate one. The state capitalists, on the other hand, claimed that without proletarian democracy, it was not a workers state at all, despite nationalisation of the means of production. One of the central issues was the question of revolutionary workers' democracy. Without revolutionary democracy, within the soviets and in the communist parties, it was impossible for the working class to win the world revolution. History has proven that communism without revolutionary democracy is like a car without an engine. It just does not go anywhere. It is a lesson that all communists need to learn and apply.

After 1945, the cold war kept the communist movement divided. In the UK three main tendencies dominated the movement. The Stalinists were organised in the CPGB. The Trotskyists were organised into the Socialist Labour League (SLL) - later to become the WRP - and also in the rival Militant Tendency. The International Socialists, since renamed the Socialist Workers Party, became the focal point for the "state capitalists".

From the mid-1970s, the struggle between these three tendencies for the right to challenge capitalism was confronted by a new set of circumstances. World capitalism moved into crisis and mass unemployment returned to the industrial centres. The world crisis soon impacted on the USSR. Threatened by huge foreign debts and an unproductive and uncompetitive economy, the ruling class in the USSR took the path of market reforms.

During the 1980s the CPGB and the WRP broke up. The Militant Tendency enjoyed a relatively success-

ful period when the Labour Party moved left. Later it split between Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe. The old Militant Tendency became first Militant Labour and then divided between England (Socialist Party) and Scotland (Scottish Militant Labour). The state capitalist tendency has remained relatively intact and focused on the SWP. But it has produced a host of tiny groups of dissidents including Workers Power, Revolutionary Communist Party, who left the tendency, and the RDG and International Socialist Group who remained as state caps.

Between the tragic events of Kronstadt and the end of the USSR (1991) the communist movement has been steadily breaking up and fragmenting. It would be surprising if the shock waves from those 70 years did not continue to reverberate for many years to come. Revolutionary democratic communism has been a tendency waiting to be reborn. It has been struggling for life within the wreckage of the Stalinist, Trotskyist and state capitalist tendencies.

The ending of the USSR in 1991 is in many ways a watershed for the communist movement. In the past, rapprochement between the three main tendencies was objectively impossible. Every occasion that the Soviet Union intervened abroad, in for example Hungary, Czechoslova-

kia or Afghanistan, these divisions widened and splits were inevitable.

Since 1991 the objective circumstances are ripe for rebuilding communist unity and rapprochement. The communist movement can be turned in the opposite direction. We can see examples of elements from the old tendencies beginning a dialogue. Debating and drawing lessons from the Soviet experience remains the major source of communist theory. At heart are the central theoretical questions of what constitutes capitalism, socialism and communism. But this debate will not be shattered by an invasion of soviet tanks or the stepping up of the nuclear arms race between the USSR and the USA.

Today the process of fragmentation continues. New fragments are appearing all the time. For example, we have seen the Socialist Democracy Group and, within the last few weeks, Socialist Perspectives emerge. At the same time we can see movement in the opposite direction, towards unity. We have seen the SLP and the Socialist Alliances bring comrades together. But these moves to unity are not based on revolutionary democratic communist politics. They are not primarily about communist unity. They are about left unity against Labour.

The time is now ripe for a new rapprochement tendency. The basis

for this is not "Stalinism" or "Trotskyism" or "Marxism-Leninism" but revolutionary democratic communism. However, without the conscious action, intervention and support of communists, it will not happen. Spontaneity will not create a new tendency. Revolutionary democratic communists, in whichever tendency they currently reside, must work for this new unity. We must win the argument with other comrades that in the new post-USSR epoch all communists have a duty and responsibility to work for communist unity. This must be a central strategic task. We must work to gather all revolutionary democratic communists under one banner. But we must make it clear that each constituent group can carry its own flag.

It is in this context that the organising committee of the revolutionary democratic communist tendency has invited the CPGB, RDG, Open Polemic, Republican Worker Tendency, *Marxist Bulletin*, Socialist Democracy Group, and Socialist Perspectives to the first of three meetings. At these meetings we intend to discuss the ongoing process of forming a new tendency.

The emergence of a new tendency, alongside the three old tendencies, may prove to be the most significant development in the communist movement since 1991. Cynics may wonder whether we really need a fourth tendency. Aren't three enough? The answer is that we need a fourth tendency because the other three are failing. We need a fourth tendency to provide an alternative way forward to that offered by the SWP, Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Britain. We need a fourth tendency to work for communist rapprochement.

The fourth tendency may be the smallest, but it will survive if, and only if, it meets the needs of our movement at the present time. We have to show that rapprochement can work. To begin with, we will draw together comrades and groups that have come from all three of the old tendencies. Certainly there will be state capitalists from an IS/SWP background and comrades whose background was in the Stalinist and Euro-Stalinist CPGB. There is every possibility that some revolutionary democratic Trotskyists will participate.

Of course this new initiative may fail. There have been plenty of past failures. There are many reasons why it could go pear-shaped. There are sectarian groups which refuse or fail to work seriously for unity. There is a history of sectarian rivalries that have poisoned relationships within our movement. We have the egos of all the various leaders. We have the machinations of spies and agents within our movement who are paid to ferment divisions and splits. Even if we can overcome this, we may still fail. But even a failed attempt is well worth the effort. For like every struggle, there is much to learn in the process and much to gain.

Let us raise the banner of revolutionary democratic communism.

- For revolutionary democracy
- For workers' power
- For international socialism
- For world communism

We will soon begin to see who rallies to our side ●

Thesis on factions

Agreed by the CPGB (PCC) and RDG (OC)

1. A revolutionary democratic communist party is united around its programme. But, because it is part of the class and not an ideological sect, it can contain within itself many different views on many different questions. What matters is correct revolutionary practice. That can only be ensured if there is unity in action and the right and duty to criticise and self-criticise. Differences should be expressed openly - in print and at party meetings. They must be allowed to take organisational form, including the form of factions.
2. Factions are organisations within the party not united by geography, nationality, sex or any other objective criteria, but a common political position. This can be confined to one particular question or it can involve a whole range of issues and principles.
3. Factions are permissible in any revolutionary democratic communist party. If factions are subject to a permanent ban they will reappear as illegal factions within a bureaucratic centralist regime. Without the right to form factions there can be no genuine democracy in the party.
4. The right to form factions provides the best conditions for overcoming factionalism and the replacement of factional centres with the difference of shade. Party work and frank exchange of views is what brings about the unity of communists both in terms of theory and practice.
5. Members of factions have the same rights and responsibilities as all other members of the party. Members of the party work under its collective discipline, pay required dues and abide by majority decisions when it comes to the actions of the party. Members have the right to elect and be elected. Members have the right and duty to express their views as long as they do not disrupt the actions of the party or jeopardise its security.
6. Factions should be granted proportional representation on the leading committee and the editorial boards of party publications. Minority positions should also be proportionally represented in the election of congress and conference delegates, etc.
7. Factions have the right to organise their own national and regional meetings. Details of cell membership and business are matters for the cells and higher party committees alone. But factions have the right to submit theses, platforms and resolutions to party cell meetings, aggregates, conferences and congresses. Factions have the right to organise fringe meetings at party schools and must be given provisions to present their views in plenary sessions.
8. Factions have the right to raise their own finances by levying dues or inviting donations. Factions have the right to submit articles, resolutions, etc to party publications. They also have the right to produce their own publications and have them printed at cost price by the party printshop ●

Failure of the left

Workers Power quits SLP

Supporters of Socialist Labour Action have left the SLP to re-join Workers Power.

Their rupture happened unnoticed by the rest of the membership. During the December congress of the Socialist Labour Party they did not organise any fringe meetings, while WP itself had no paper-sellers, let alone a stall. SLA did however produce the largest bulletin of all the oppositionist groups for the congress. Yet, in around 30 pages the comrades put forward not a single new suggestion - just a collection of old reprints. WP and their supporters in the SLP had nothing to propose.

During the congress there was a meeting of around 70 people attended by all the opposition groups. SLA only intervened in order to put forward one idea: that everybody should immediately leave the party. Nobody took them seriously.

The January issue of *Workers Power* advises the left that "the time has come for a sharp reassessment of what they have achieved". We could make the same point to WP. Its intervention in the SLP was for it a major entryist adventure. Yet it resulted in fiasco. Those who joined Socialist Labour are leaving it without winning a single recruit to WP. These comrades have wasted at least a year and a good deal of energy for just about nothing. Even worse, half of the WP entryists have now decided to leave WP too. The organisation stands discredited amongst the SLP left.

In December 1995 WP argued that "thousands of trade unionists ... need a strong, well organised socialist voice and an organisation to organise and lead their resistance. That is why WP welcome Arthur Scargill's call for discussions on the left to consider the establishment of an SLP." WP committed itself to the building of a "revolutionary SLP". It would have been consistent with that position to advocate an offensive tactic, pushing for an active intervention in the process of the new party's creation.

When the SLP was launched some left organisations (like Fisc, the CPGB, RDG, IBT, ILWP, etc) decided to make just such an intervention. However, WP was larger than any of them. In addition it had a much stronger national structure. During the 1980s it was the most theoretically productive and programmatically consistent left group. A decisive intervention in the SLP from its inception could have made WP the dominant left force in the organisation - one capable of leading the opposition, which counted around one third of the party's membership.

For the hundreds of activists who had joined the SLP to build a combative alternative to Labour, WP could have become a pole of attraction - a defiant force against the leadership's bureaucratic passivity. It could have provided the leadership for SLP actions and been at the forefront of many branches. It could have created a bloc of candidates around its own programmatic ideas.

WP should have developed a similar line to the one formulated by Trotsky towards the ILP in the 1930s: intervening in the SLP to pose a revolutionary transitional programme in opposition to Scargill's little-England reformist nationalism, while demanding that the SLP adopt a united front policy towards Labour.

Actively intervening inside the SLP does not mean dissolving your own organisation or ceasing publication

John Stone of the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International looks back at the activities of a group of SLP entryists

of your own papers and journals. A group of comrades could have remained officially outside the SLP in charge of all the external tasks, while a disciplined contingent carried out internal entryist work. The CPGB, a group smaller than WP, participated in the SLP, but continued producing its weekly paper.

WP did not follow that course. A few weeks after its commitment to help build a "revolutionary SLP" it made its first U-turn. In the March 1996 edition of its paper it characterised the SLP as "Britain's newest reformist sect" and ruled out any intervention in it.

However, after the SLP's 1st Congress (May 1996), WP was most impressed and decided to make a second U-turn. Its June paper declared that the SLP was not completely a reformist party, that it was in the process of definition and that revolutionaries could win that battle: "The founding conference indicated that the SLP is a party that remains in the process of formation with a small but significant minority clearly seeking revolutionary policies and answers. One thing is certain: the struggle for the political soul of the SLP has only just begun."

The logical conclusion should have been to make a very serious and active intervention. Some weeks later WP's youth organisation, Revolution, applied to join the SLP. During mid-1996 many long-standing WP cadres suddenly turned up in SLP branches claiming to have left their previous organisation. They promised to be the best *activists* in building the party. The quantity and quality of WP's SLP entryists was not insignificant.

Now that WP has called home all their members, there is no longer any reason why we should continue trying to protect these comrades against the witch hunters. By mid-1996 at least a dozen cadres with several years experience in WP were inside the SLP. They retained their WP membership, including in positions of leadership in some cases. Some of them had differences with the WP leadership, but most of them were loyal to it. One of these new SLPers was a founder WP member and another three were or are members of the LRCI's national or international executive committees.

If these experienced comrades had worked together consistently, they could have built a bigger bloc nationwide than any other current with the potential of attracting SLP members. A tendency based around concrete issues could also have promoted a broader pro-democracy coalition. Yet WP adopted a very sectarian and confused position. It instructed its supporters inside the SLP not to associate with any other comrade - not even former WP members - who were not under the guidance of its central committee.

WP created a very exclusionist faction: Socialist Labour Action. It was open only to comrades who were politically loyal to WP's leadership. It was closed to the rank and file SLP membership and even to other SLPers who were former WP members.

SLA was so sectarian that it even

refused to take any responsibility in building a broader opposition. Inside the SLP there existed at various times four oppositionist broad fronts: the Revolutionary Platform, the Left Network, the Campaign for a Democratic SLP and the Democratic Platform. WP instructed its supporters to boycott some of their initiatives and to refuse to take on any leadership commitments in these fronts.

In mid-1996 the Revolutionary Platform had its first conference with around 25 to 30 delegates. At that meeting comrades who had split from WP because of political differences managed to influence the RP's programme and to replace the aim of a federal republic by the strategy for a socialist workers' republic. Nevertheless, WP instructed their supporters not to attend that meeting, not even to put forward their own positions.

WP's supporters attended the meetings of the Left Network and the CDSLP, but they would not take up any leadership responsibility. In the LN one of WP's supporters was commissioned to produce a united front bulletin, but he showed up at the next meeting with a bulletin produced by WP sympathisers around WP policies. That was how *Socialist Labour Action* was launched.

The last joint national aggregate of the LN and the CDSLP almost unanimously condemned the SLA for publishing leaflets in which they fingered SLP oppositionists as members of other organisations. According to Scargill's constitution any person labelled a supporter of another group could automatically be expelled from the party.

SLA did not participate in the Democratic Platform. They did not even come to the meeting of the entire SLP opposition on January 10.

WP's sectarian approach is very much linked to its own confusion and lack of self-confidence. WP had no constant, consistent and clear position on the SLP. It shifted radically from one line to another. At one point the group was selling a monthly paper (*Workers Power*) which characterised the SLP as an immutable counterrevolutionary Stalinist sect, while its theoretical journal (*Trotskyist International*) was simultaneously writing that the SLP was a progressive phenomenon and that revolutionaries should try to influence.

The confusion grew even more when WP supporters inside and outside the SLP had entirely contradictory lines. Outside Socialist Labour WP was calling for a vote for the Blairites against SLP candidates, while inside the party WP supporters were backing SLP candidates against New Labour.

WP could have had a point with the argument that as long as Labour is the mass party of the working class (albeit with an imperialist programme) it might be possible to push it into power in order to expose its nature and intervene within it. However, they did not seem able to see that New Labour's extreme right turn had the potential to drive thousands of activists outside that party and in opposition to it. It could be important to relate to the militants who are trying to create

a class alternative against Blair's neo-conservatism. WP could do that through intervening in the SLP (and also in the SP and the SWP).

For that reason, as well as calling for a Labour vote, a revolutionary organisation ought to have advocated a critical vote for representative socialist candidates and for socialist electoral alliances. This does not mean a propaganda bloc, but a left united front around specific demands - against cuts and privatisations and for the defence of the proletariat's living conditions and historical gains. However, WP's tactic towards the SLP was not at all related to working class interests, but to satisfying the appetite of its small-sect mentality. Richard Brenner, a WP leader, wrote in the *Weekly Worker*: "A revolutionary party would therefore call for a vote for Labour in all constituencies where it is unable to stand." (May 16 1996). WP could vote for the SLP only "if we find it possible to join [the SLP] as a revolutionary organisation with full rights".

That meant that WP, which never stood a single candidate in more than two decades of its own existence, would always vote Labour, even if a significant left force emerged. Voting for the SLP did not depend on its ideas, its weight in the class or among working class activists. WP's tactic towards the SLP was summarised in the following ultimatum: 'As long as you don't allow us to join you as an independent party, we will support the Blairites against you and we will sabotage your organisation.'

WP's contradictions are devastating. On the one hand it advocates a vote only for Labour, while in its 'Where we stand' column it carries the message that "we are for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party". Nevertheless, WP does no work at all inside it. On the other hand it sent more than 10% of its cadres into a party to which it refused to give any kind of electoral support.

In the three places where SLA had a some influence (Leicester, Cardiff and Vauxhall) WP's policies destroyed all the work that their SLA supporters had been doing. In Leicester SLA was firmly opposed to making any electoral arrangement with Militant Labour for a council by-election in late 1996. Revolutionaries inside the SLP should have argued that the best way for the SLP to stand candidates was in coalition with the rest of the left and the combative trade unionists.

It was the SLP's right wing which opposed any bloc with ML and the left, because it did not want to appear too 'radical' in the eyes of the union bureaucrats it was trying to recruit. In the Leicester election the SLP achieved 8% while ML obtained 12%. The two forces combined could have gained more than 20% and could have pushed New Labour into a close finish.

Such a result would have been very positive for the left inside the SLP, helping to move the party towards a greater openness as a broader party of the left. In its sectarianism against ML SLA campaigned for a 'pure' So-

cialist Labour ticket with a member of the Stalinist and homophobic *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* as its candidate.

In the May general election the SLP nominated the same *EPSR* candidate for a Leicester constituency. This time the SLA editor decided to make a U-turn, breaking any sense of party discipline in calling for a vote for New Labour against his local SLP candidate.

In Vauxhall despite being voided the branch courageously threw its own resources into the general election campaign behind the SLP candidate. In no other constituency did WP have so many activists. However, WP decided to campaign for a Blairite against that rebel branch. Nobody backed the branch secretary - an SLA supporter - when she was censored by the branch for openly supporting an organisation (WP) which called for the defeat of its candidate. She became very isolated in her branch and the party.

In Cardiff WP "wholeheartedly" supported the SLP candidate Terry Burns during the general election, while in the rest of the country they voted for Labour. It was the first time in the 22 years of its existence that WP advocated a non-critical vote.

There were also other twists in WP's policies. Traditionally WP had called for a critical vote for Labour non-bourgeois candidates, but also for left candidates (like Sheridan or Nellist) who have some social basis.

In May 1997 WP rejected its previous position of voting for any socially-rooted left candidates. It even campaigned for a bourgeois ex-Tory minister who was running on a Blairite ticket against Scargill. They claimed that Burns stood on their programme. However, Burns said that his party and his programme was the Scargill one and he openly advocated an entirely opposite line to that of WP: voting 'yes' in the Welsh referendum, but advocating no vote for Labour.

Later in the year Burns stood for the same Cardiff branch in a council election. This time, inexplicably, WP called for a vote for Labour against Burns.

These disastrous zigzags discredited SLA. It was unable to influence anybody. Its demoralised supporters became reluctant to attend meetings of the SLP opposition movements. Desperately WP instructed them to provoke their expulsion. SLA comrades called on SLP members to campaign for the expulsion of their 'Stalinist counterrevolutionary leadership' and publicly attacked Scargill. Despite all its bureaucratism, the SLP leadership took no disciplinary action against SLA.

Today, former SLA supporters say that they are returning to a democratic revolutionary group. However, WP is no longer a healthy organisation. The incredible zigzags that we saw over the SLP also characterise its lines on Scotland and Wales, on the former Yugoslavia, on the state question, on the character of the period, on Eastern Europe, and on every important question.

Its internal regime is no better than Scargill's. When a left opposition inside the group tried to build a faction, its organisers were suspended and later expelled without being given the opportunity to defend themselves or the right of appeal. *Workers Power* is becoming an intolerant sect, whose members are required to unquestioningly follow their leadership's U-turns.

Simon Harvey of the SLP Scargill 'loyalist' resigns from NEC

In a move which is bound to further lower morale in the SLP, Terry Dunn has resigned from the party's national executive committee. This latest development in the SLP's crisis at the top creates more opportunities for those below. Up until now, comrade Dunn has been part of the inner circle of Scargill loyalists. Discussion of comrade Dunn's resignation - and Arthur Scargill's response - dominated the agenda at last week-end's NEC meeting, the first held since congress.

The ham-fisted utilisation of the previously unknown 3,000 block vote at congress has caused outrage and shock among almost all sections of the party. Comrade Dunn's resignation, handed in just days after congress, was a protest at the way the block vote was used.

Fallout from the December congress continues. While sections of the SLP left cravenly slinked out, 'morally' outraged at the internal regime, the real shock waves are resounding at the very heart of Scargill's creation. The desperate rescue of Scargill's shaky alliance with the Fourth International Supporter's Caucus produced the first casualties at congress itself when Roshan Dadoo and Imran Khan refused to accept their positions on the NEC. Now a comrade from a solid NUMist background has fallen by the way-side, openly expressing his division with the founder-leader. And, judging from the report I received of the NEC meeting, comrade Dunn may not be the last.

This resignation means that nine NEC members have left their posts since the party was founded. On average, that is one resignation every two months - a damning indictment on the internal regime.

Yet, to judge from the latest official statements emanating from the party, everything is fine and dandy. Both in the current issue of *Socialist News* and in Scargill's latest missive to the membership, the SLP is going from strength to strength.

In a letter to all members dated January 12 1998, our general secretary concludes thus: "Finally, you will be pleased to know that not only is membership of the party already ahead of the projections made at the time of its launch in May 1996, but has increased substantially since the 1997 congress in December." Such bravado in the face of the continuing blows to the SLP's remaining prestige requires breathtaking arrogance and not a little stupidity.

The claim of growth in membership is based on 'official' reality. An article in the current *Socialist News* (February/March 1998) by Robert Morris concerns the affiliation of his Ucat branch to Socialist Labour in January 1998. However, reports I am receiving from across Britain point to a tendency towards the *real* as opposed to fictitious or paper membership haemorrhaging. In the north west, Wales and the south west, whole branches have folded since congress. I have had reports of CSLPs in London losing half their membership. Where people have stayed on, party life barely has a pulse.

No doubt this is uneven. However, that there is a crisis is irrefutable. Comrade Dunn's resignation is the tip of the iceberg. Yet, what is Scargill's reaction? Adopting the attitude he struck up in the weeks before the end of the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85, he pretends he sees the opposite. In the closing moments of the strike, Scargill was claiming the stockpiles of coal were all but gone. After the miners were defeated and forced back to work, Arthur claimed victory - a claim he maintains to this day.

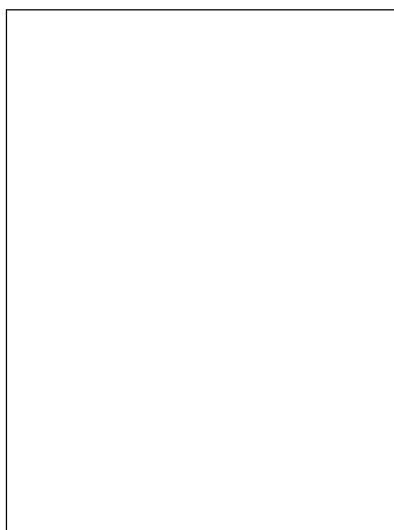
With Scargill's record of refusing to acknowledge a setback even when it stares him in the face, the SLP is in real danger of becoming a sectarian rump of sycophants and court jesters.

Scargill displays this sectarianism in *Socialist News* when he "looks forward to the local elections on May 1 [sic]". Despite being a week early, his assertion that "Socialist Labour offers the only alternative" flies in the face of reality. Established Socialist Party councillors will be recontesting their seats and on top of this, Socialist Alliances look set to contest local elections up and down the country. Reports suggest that candidates from rebel SLP branches will cooperate with other forces to present a united socialist platform to the electorate.

In his article comrade Scargill says: "The capitalist state knows (I sometimes think better than we do ourselves) that the working class united can never be defeated." Yet by refusing to stand in elections with other, already existing socialist forces in the wider movement, the SLP looks set to add to our division by pig-headedly claiming to be the "only alternative".

The awkward task of reporting on the party's 2nd congress is left to SLP president Frank Cave. The article takes up less than half a page. Even so, comrade Cave's report at least shows that there was division, and he rightly points out that this political schism took the form of wrangles around the constitution.

He writes: "Our 'unitary' constitution was reaffirmed [sic] at our December congress in an atmosphere I would describe as fairly lively. That's no complaint." That the comrade himself puts quote marks around 'unitary' serves to emphasise the flimsy



Dunn turns his back on Arthur

basis of the claim. Despite his contention that "lively debate" is welcome around the constitution, comrade Cave contradictorily states that the current minority should leave the party. He argues: "What was made clear at our congress was that people who believe in what's called 'federalism' and think the SLP should be an umbrella for other political groups cannot - in fairness - be members of the party."

The point is that the SLP is already an "umbrella" for the Fourth International Supporters Caucus, the Stalin Society, the Indian Workers Association, *the Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association and a handful of other union organisations.

Comrade Cave puts a brave face on the abolition of the black section at congress. Hiding behind the colour of the skin of the amendment's mover, he reports: "Comrades from the black community argued that the existence of black sections is incompatible with the SLP's constitution ... in that their existence effectively perpetuates discrimination." The party's president then notes that "following a heated debate, the congress accepted" the motion to abolish black sections.

Nowhere does the report mention the controversy over the block vote. Nowhere does it mention that a substantial majority of delegates from CSLPs voted against the abolition of black sections. Nowhere does comrade Cave's report note that it was effectively three men with 3,000 votes who decided all.

The latest round of bureaucratic intrigue complete with resignations and rebellions by former Scargill loyalists all point to an organisation in deep trouble. In order to understand the character of the organisation, we must go deeper than transferring old categories onto this new phenomenon. Clearly, what we have is - unique - a Scargillite party.

■ Lassalle

In order to understand the nature of this new creature, it is useful to look back at past attempts of Scargill-type

figures to mould working class organisations in their own image. One such figure was Ferdinand Lassalle, who founded the General German Workers Association in 1863. The GGWA was a forerunner of the Social Democratic Party. Lassalle was at the receiving end of polemic from Marx, due both to his contempt for democracy and his 'state' socialism - shades of Scargill's own politics.

In the fourth volume of his interesting series, *Karl Marx's theory of revolution*, Hal Draper makes some general observations about Lassalle. Draper says he "was a very easy man to dislike as well as to adulate. He tended to polarise people who knew him: in this, his flamboyant and strident personality was both a strength and a weakness" (p242). He goes on to note that to his Berlin followers at the time "he was the enlightened Bonaparte; the very constitution of the GGWA made it a personal dictatorship" (p261).

The new movement in Germany at the time, coming out of the period of reaction following the defeat of the European revolutions of 1848, looked to Lassalle as leader. This testified to the workers' lack of class conscious self-confidence. Lassalle's ability "to put his imprint on the new movement meant that it was cradled in the swaddling clothes of a bureaucratic dictatorship, nurtured on state-cultist politics, and educated in the spirit of the cult of the individual leader ... The Lassallean pre-emption of the burgeoning movement did not mean the gift of independent organisation from a shining knight but rather the injection of a toxin." (p263).

Many on the left are dismissing the SLP out of hand. Comrades may well be right. The SLP could be finished, dead in the water. However, winning the mass of our class from Labourite politics remains the major strategic task for revolutionaries in Britain. While the SLP may turn out to be just another sorry example of what 'history' (or rather our class) leaves behind, its significance as the first split from Labour for decades, with a prominent workers' leader at the helm, ought not to be overlooked.

Although I am not trying to make direct parallels, the observations about Lassalle have an eerie ring of familiarity. At present, Scargill does not find himself in front of a burgeoning mass movement. But it is a sobering thought that throughout our class's history, would-be, as well as successful, labour-dictators have managed to lead us into disaster. Trying to understand the reality, instead of wishfully claiming workers do not join bureaucratic organisations, is the real service the left can salvage from the SLP experience.

Even if Scargill's current project has flopped - and that is not yet a certainty by any means - our history shows that similar, and more dangerous, autocrats will try to emerge to (mis)lead our movement. For that reason alone, it is worthwhile learning the lessons now ●

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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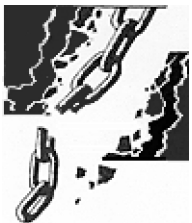
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UDP 'suspended' from Ireland talks

Loyalist killings fail to derail 'peace' process

Beneath the wave of killings and seemingly unending series of crises besetting the Six Counties settlement negotiations, the 'peace' process continues to exert its centripetal force.

Earlier this week the Ulster Democratic Party, political mouthpiece for the Ulster Defence Association, walked out of the Lancaster House all-party talks, pre-empting its imminent expulsion. This followed the admission by the UDA, acting under its Ulster Freedom Fighters *nom de guerre*, that its terror gangs were responsible for the deaths of three Catholics, whose killings had previously been claimed either by the Loyalist Volunteer Force or by no group at all.

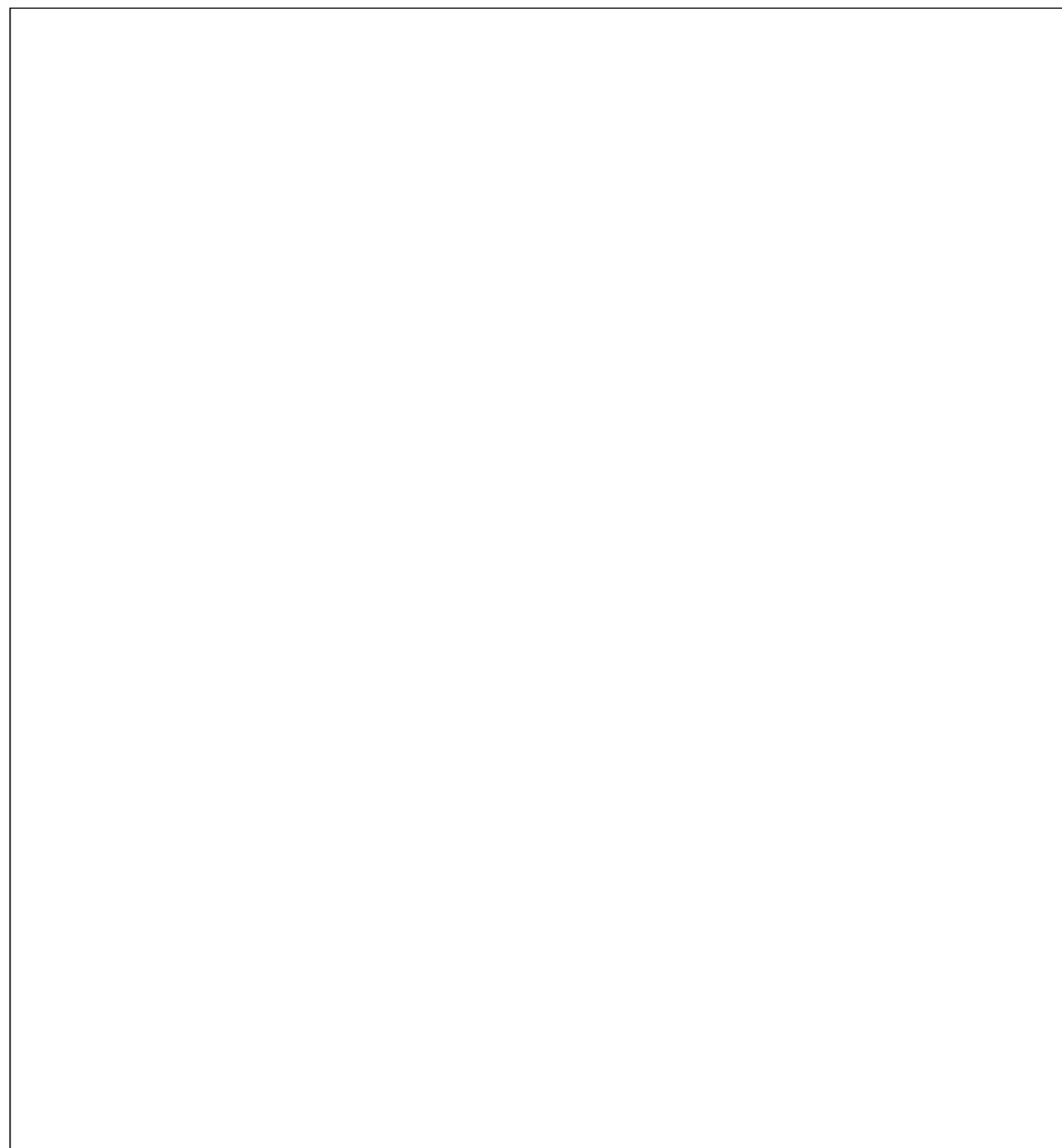
This disclosure had been an open secret, for it was well known that Eddie Treanor, shot dead on New Year's Eve, had died at the hands of gunmen operating from a UDA stronghold. The killers had provided an LVF code word, but this cover was finally blown last week. Royal Ulster Constabulary chief constable Ronnie Flanagan was paraded before the press to confirm that the RUC believed that the three Catholics, including Treanor, had been shot by the UDA/UFF murder squads.

Until then they had claimed to be abiding by their ceasefire, thus allowing the UDP to continue its pretence of fulfilling the Mitchell 'principles', whereby only parties committed to "exclusively peaceful" means can participate in negotiations. On the other hand the LVF - despite all the obvious signs to the contrary - insisted that the 'peace' process will inevitably end in a united Ireland, refused to back the talks and continued its indiscriminate attacks on Catholics. Obviously the group was enraged by the audacious killing of its founder-leader, Billy Wright, by three Irish National Liberation Army volunteers inside the state's 'top security' Long Kesh prison camp.

Wright's death led to an immediate launch of the present LVF campaign, aided and abetted by the much bigger UDA. Eight Catholics have been killed and others injured in their attacks. But INLA struck again, shooting dead prominent UDA activist Jim Guiney, while the Continuity Army Council planted a 'protest' bomb in Enniskillen.

The bourgeois media have unanimously labelled these actions "tit for tat violence". They equate random killings carried out by loyalist paramilitaries with INLA's targeted assassination of Wright and Guiney, or the attacks on loyalist or state property, preceded by telephoned warnings, by the CAC.

No matter how they are described, these comparatively small-scale incidents do not threaten the 'peace' process itself. As we have repeatedly pointed out, despite the ability of both the loyalist paramilitaries and the



Mo Mowlam: marked reluctance to follow Mitchell 'principles'

Northern Ireland constitutional parties to exert pressure and hinder the path to a settlement, the main players are the British state and those who have led the resistance to its occupation of the Six Counties - Sinn Féin and the IRA. The 'peace' process is about a negotiated end to armed or violent resistance, and the SF leadership has not been distracted from this goal by the loyalist murder squads. Gerry Adams has so far been able to contain opposition to this strategy from within his own ranks.

Undoubtedly the 'propositions on heads of agreement' put forward by London and Dublin have a distinctly pro-unionist orientation. After initial prevarication SF declared that the proposals could not be considered a basis for serious negotiations. Nevertheless the organisation stated its intention of remaining in the talks and has since begun to negotiate. The

IRA issued a statement condemning the British-Irish proposals for having once again "succumbed to the Orange card" and encouraging "continuing assassinations by loyalist death squads". According to *The Independent*, the statement "exudes an unmistakable air of menace" (January 22).

Yet there is a degree of convergence between the two main players on the main features of a new constitutional arrangement, and it is likely that the British state's next major shift will be in a decidedly 'pro-republican' direction. Unless this occurs, SF/IRA will not be able to portray any settlement as a step on the road to a united Ireland. It will not be able to claim that the struggles and sacrifices of the past three decades have been worthwhile. The IRA's "air of menace" is for the benefit of any wavering supporters just as much as it is

designed to keep up the pressure on Blair.

None of this means that SF/IRA is on the verge of a victory over imperialism, as some on the left maintain. Far from it - Northern Ireland will remain under the imperialist domination of Blair's redefined UK state. The IRA, although undefeated, has been forced to concede that it cannot hope to drive out the British and is now prepared to settle for something less ambitious.

However, if the two main players are to come to an agreement, most of the other actors must also be pulled towards it, or at least neutralised. That is why secretary of state for Northern Ireland Mo Mowlam showed a marked reluctance to follow the logic of the Mitchell principles and expel the UDP from the all-party talks. For several weeks the government turned a blind eye to the UDA/UFF involvement, hoping that the killings would be called

off. Even after it was established as a fact and could no longer be ignored, Downing Street ludicrously claimed that it was up to the talks participants themselves to decide which of their number remained qualified to be present, while the Ulster Unionist Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party and Sinn Féin all passed the buck back to the government and declined to express an opinion on the matter.

Mowlam expressed her dilemma in this way: "It's competing moralities. We have the competing morality of the integrity of the talks, the three murders and the Mitchell principles on non-violence on one side, versus trying to hold the talks together and making sure more lives are not lost."

The Guardian was even more blunt: "It is an ugly truth, but the whole point of this peace process is not to achieve an agreement among moderate democrats on both sides - but among the men of violence who have made Northern Ireland a war zone. If one side is absent, the negotiators can agree what they like: their accords won't stick" (January 27).

UUP leader David Trimble did a lot more than mouth the usual platitudes, condemning the loyalist killings. He was clearly enraged by what he views as an attempt by ultra-loyalists to sabotage a settlement acceptable to unionists. He denounced the UDA/UFF as "criminal gangs" who "are doing the work of republicans". From completely different starting points, SF and the UUP are being pulled towards an accommodation.

In the event the UDP effectively agreed to be suspended from the talks. The UDA/UFF reinstated its ceasefire, declaring obscenely that it had completed its "measured military response" (the indiscriminate murder of Catholics) to the death of Billy Wright. The loyalists have now to prove "by word and deed" that they are once again committed to "exclusively peaceful means" before readmittance after a few weeks.

The Mitchell principles have certainly been devalued over these past months. Originally they were intended to cover the state's retreat from its previous refusal to openly treat with Sinn Féin as long as the IRA retained the means to strike at the state. Now they are being interpreted as merely providing for the temporary exclusion from the main negotiations of any party associated with current violence. Even that does not preclude face-to-face bilateral talks with the suspended party.

The whole 'peace' process remains fraught with uncertainty. It is continuing to cause new tensions across the board in the Six Counties - tensions that could be replicated within the British state itself. As a settlement nears, the possibility of increased violence becomes ever more likely. ●

Jim Blackstock