

'Peace' process settlement near

Despite the bombs Sinn
Fein will be back in the
talks in time to hear the
final proposals

The Northern Ireland 'peace' process hit fresh snags last week. Two bombs shook the Six Counties within hours of confirmation by the British and Irish governments of Sinn Fein's suspension from the all-party talks.

The IRA denied responsibility for both blasts and specifically ruled out the possibility that its volunteers had cooperated in any way with the perpetrators - as had been alleged after previous bombs had been placed by the Continuity Army Council.

Officially SF has been "excluded" permanently from the main negotiations following the allegations by Royal Ulster Constabulary chief constable Ronnie Flanagan that the IRA had been responsible for two recent killings. But Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam made it clear that SF could expect to be back in the talks by March 9 - just as the Ulster Democratic Party has now been readmitted after its own month-long suspension.

Continuing the pretence of defending the "integrity of the talks", which supposedly exclude those groups which do not commit themselves to using "exclusively peaceful" means, Mowlam stated that over the next couple of weeks SF must provide a "convincing demonstration in word and deed that a complete, unqualified and unequivocal IRA ceasefire is being fully and continuously observed". In reality of course, the whole process depends on an agreement to end republican armed resistance being reached between SF/IRA and the British state.

SF leaders appeared to be genuinely furious at their exclusion. But they too went along with the pretence that they are not totally committed to the 'peace' process

through negotiations with Britain. Having fought tooth and nail to prevent his party's exclusion, SF president Gerry Adams now states that his party might not return to the "flawed" talks at all. He spoke of the strong feelings in the nationalist community, but added significantly: "I appeal to everyone to channel their anger and frustration into calm and disciplined protest."

Adams said that it was "disgraceful" that the governments had made their move without waiting for the result of legal proceedings taken in the Irish courts to halt the exclusion. Subsequently the party decided to abandon its legal action. The application to the courts had stated that SF "had not dishonoured" the Mitchell 'principles' of democracy and nonviolence, and had "at all times worked to achieve a lasting peace".

This seemed to be confirmed by the two governments, who, in their joint statement announcing SF's suspension, acknowledged "the very significant and genuine efforts which have been made, and are being made, by Sinn Fein in working for peace".

Nevertheless both governments, as well as SF, must continue to act out their respective parts in order to keep most of the other players on board, so reducing the possibility of the process being wrecked through lack of sufficient consensus. Of major importance in this regard are the unionists.

The Ulster Unionist Party leader, David Trimble, for example, reacted to the second blast in Portadown - part of his own parliamentary constituency - with what amounts to a call for agreement to be reached solely between the unionists and the two governments. "I have no doubt that this

is the work of the IRA," he said of the blast, without the slightest hint of proof. But of course he is playing to his audience. "There can be no question now of [Sinn Fein] returning to the talks," he added rather pathetically.

Trimble's public face is very different from his private one however. Earlier in the week he had held talks with Irish opposition party leaders in the Dail and one of them commented: "The impression we got was that [the unionists] acknowledge Sinn Fein would be back within a couple of weeks."

Adams himself was also in Dublin for talks with Irish prime minister Bertie Ahern. In addition SF continued to press for urgent talks with Tony Blair. These developments serve to confirm that the 'peace' process is very much on track, a sentiment endorsed by former US senator George Mitchell, who is chairing the all-party talks. Although he confessed to being disappointed that business had been held up, he added: "I am convinced that we're going to get past this difficulty."

And with good reason. The charade of hard bargaining with give and take on all sides is soon to be dropped. The two governments are expected to place their draft proposals for a settlement before all the participants by the beginning of April. SF will have to be won to give at least critical acquiescence to a final agreement, which the governments intend to put to a referendum on both sides of the border.

As May 1 is still the projected date for the referenda, and assuming at least three weeks would be needed to prepare for the ballot, that would leave at most one week for the talks participants to discuss, clarify and amend the proposals. A tall order, you might think - particularly as the UUP leaders have not yet been able to bring themselves to exchange words with SF.

However, the talks provide only the public manifestation of what is really happening in the continuous bilateral negotiations involving all the parties. Most important of all, of course, will be an implicit agreement between the UK government and Sinn Fein itself.

Jim Blackstock



Outside No10: Sinn Fein and the British state are the main players

This line 5mm beyond crop

Party notes

The sound of silence

The Communist Party school on the federal republic over the weekend of February 21-22 noted a sad affliction which seems to impede the work of comrade Peter Taaffe, leader of the Socialist Party. We sincerely hope he recovers.

The comrade appears at home speaking about events in almost any part of the world: Pakistan, South Africa, Germany or Sweden - everywhere the comrade is happy to draw parallels, glean lessons, to offer advice and prescriptive analysis. But then we wondered, does comrade Taaffe's world atlas perhaps have a missing page? If not, why does he appear to become so tongue-tied when it comes to events in Scotland? After all, there are some quite interesting developments there, not least in the ranks of the organisation that Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party remains formally united with, Scottish Militant Labour.

For example, our school in Scotland spent some time during its various sessions dissecting a new document by comrade Alan McCombes, the leading SMLer (see 'Party Notes', February 19). Despite its scrappiness, the new position outlined in the paper - *Scottish independence and the struggle for socialism* - is likely to be an influential one. At the least, debate around it will bring into sharp focus some key differences between the approach of Leninists to the national question and that of national socialists like McCombes.

The document as adopted by the national executive of SML (reported in *Scottish Socialist Voice* February 5) is recommended to the forthcoming SML conference to become the policy of the organisation as a whole and then, presuming a smooth ride there, the comrades want to push for it to be accepted by the Scottish Socialist Alliance at its June 20 conference.

McCombes' thrust "is to argue that national independence should now be explicitly incorporated into our overall socialist programme ... we should now state clearly that we are in favour of an independent socialist Scotland, as a step towards a wider socialist federation or confederation of European states" (*Scottish independence and the struggle for socialism* p12).

In the *Weekly Worker*, we will build on the work begun at our federal republic school and develop a comprehensive Marxist critique of this disgraceful capitulation to nationalism. McCombes has already anticipated this and tried to dismiss the arguments of the "small, pseudo-internationalist" Communist Party. He attacks arguments in Jack Conrad's *Blair's rigged referendum and Scotland's right to self-determination* (typically, he does not reference these quotes, a dishonest tactic he employs throughout the document).

But we are intrigued - will we be the only serious political force fighting SML's slide towards the abyss? In particular, where is its fraternal organisation in England and Wales, the Socialist Party, headed by Peter Taaffe? Is this comrade - who has proved so sanguine and theoretically inert as his organisation disappears from under him - resigned to the Scottish split? Undoubtedly, if SML is allowed to simply drift away, this will be a potentially fatal blow to the political and organisational integrity of the group as a whole. After Scotland, who will be next?

Of course, Peter Taaffe has become synonymous with what we have called mechanical determinism. Taaffe is only the latest incarnation of this hopeless method, however. This technique, which sees in each and every eventuality a striking confirmation of inevitable progress towards socialism, is intrinsic to the organisation. It is perhaps personified most perfectly not in Taaffe, but by his long-time mentor, the figure of Ted Grant, a man who has left a powerful after-image on the screen of the Socialist Party despite them flicking the switch on him in 1992.

Before he was expelled from the organisation - perhaps the one event in all the many decades of political life that he could not put a positive spin on - Grant became notorious for criminally complacent observations such as this:

"The objective situation is moving in the direction of Marxism and the subjective situation as well ... If the Tories win [the election]

... Marxism will gain. But if Labour wins Marxism will gain even more" (*Militant British perspectives* 1983).

Not surprisingly - despite his caution that "events rarely unfold in ... a linear fashion" - McCombes' document is saturated with the same ponderous non-Marxist logic. We will look in detail at this in forthcoming issues of the *Weekly Worker*. But Taaffe's position is the most untenable. Does he really think that what is happening before his eyes in Scotland is a healthy development? Perhaps the comrade sees the fact that his Scottish organisation is set on a course of UDI as a striking confirmation of what he wrote in January of this year: "1998 promises even more favourable opportunities for the genuine forces of socialism and Marxism in Britain and worldwide" (*The Socialist* January 9). As we commented at the time, this was a statement of "pure faith, not science" (*Weekly Worker* January 15).

In all truth, there seems no way that Taaffe cannot take up the cudgels against this divisive new development. And not before time. Both he and the central SP apparatus have already made important concessions to the growing nationalism in Scotland. Most outrageously, they have justified moves for SML's growing detachment from the national organisation is the most opportunist fashion:

"The decision to go for autonomy in Scotland on financial matters, but also on other organisational issues, arose from the objective situation in Scotland itself. The growth of a distinct national consciousness requires a change in the form of organisation adopted by Militant [Socialist Party] with regard to Scotland. Scotland is not in the position of a separate section of the Committee for a Workers International. The workers of Scotland still confront not a Scottish, but the British state. This requires that the revolutionary organisation in Scotland should be part of an all-British organisation ..." (*Members Bulletin* No16, March 18 1996 - my emphasis).

It is now clear - just as we warned at the time - that these soothing words were meaningless. The national leadership was simply bottling out of a sharp political fight against the poisonous sectionalism infecting its Scottish ranks. Far from 'autonomy' being confined to "organisational issues", this concession reflected a far deeper political malaise, now manifesting itself in moves to essentially position SML as the left wing of the Scottish National Party.

Before last year's general election, Taaffe was reiterating that independence "is not on our programme at this point in time. We stand for the right of self-determination, but we also stand for a socialist federation of Britain ..." (*Links* No9, November 1997-February 1998, p112). Yet this position is now characterised by McCombes and the national executive of SML as "contradictory and confused and would provide the SNP with a stick to beat us" (*Scottish independence and the struggle for socialism* ... p12).

When exactly did the Socialist Party as a whole discuss this line change? Does the leadership in England and Wales agree? Has a meeting of the organisation nationally - let alone internationally - endorsed this fundamental shift? Where has been the debate in the pages of *The Socialist* or *Socialism Today*?

Are we in fact witnessing the nationalist disintegration of the Socialist Party without a peep of protest or hint of a fight from the organisation's leadership?

It can only be a matter of time before the 'Scottish disease' mutates and infects other component parts of the SP. As leading SP comrades themselves warned back in 1996, if similar moves to 'autonomy' in other sections were "accepted and implemented ... it will lead to the dissipation and eventual break-up of what is at the moment a successful democratic centralist organisation" (*Members Bulletin* No16, March 18 1996).

So can we expect a fight? The disease of nationalism in the ranks of the workers' movement must be beaten wherever it raises its head. It is a threat to us all. We trust the leadership of SP will now - at last - take up its responsibilities ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser



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

Ideology and race

Comrade Tom Ball continues to insist on "the implicitly racist nature of advanced capitalism" (Letters, February 19). He fails to come to grips with a key question: why must a state - the purpose of which is to defend the system of exploitation - of necessity employ racism to ensure control?

Comrade Ball's belief in this inevitability leads him to dismiss the officially sponsored bourgeois consensus of anti-racist ideology, in all its obvious manifestations, as "racism more or less disguised". Instead of trying to substantiate this with clear examples of the state's direct encouragement of racism, he can only point to circumstantial evidence.

Citing numerous statistics to prove the well established and uncontested existence of brutal and widespread racism within the police, he asks: "What does all this amount to, if not racism expressed by an integral part of the British state ...?"

Yes, comrade, but is it deliberately encouraged or even officially directed? If comrade Ball could provide us with examples of overt racist procedures relating to police recruitment, training or official practice, then he would have a case. Are police officers *instructed* to abuse Asians and beat up blacks because they are Asian or black?

As he well knows, official anti-racism is present in every aspect of police procedures just as much as it is a feature of all state-run institutions. State representatives routinely condemn police racism and claim to be taking rigorous steps to combat it.

It is true that senior police officers and home office ministers may frequently attempt to disguise the extent of racism within the police, and may even conspire to cover up the worst incidents, but this is not primarily because they may themselves be racist or because they are pursuing some covert racist policy. The state tries to promote an image of its police as almost entirely honest and trustworthy, and is always reluctant to admit to evidence to the contrary. In this way, it may also attempt to conceal other categories of 'misdemeanour', but I do not think even comrade Ball would suggest that this proves that the state condones police bribe-taking or drug-running. By and large police racism exists as a *bastard* form of state ideology.

Comrade Ball's second example of state 'racism' is bizarre in the extreme. Citing the abolition (in the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act) of the obligation on local authorities to provide caravan sites for gypsies, along with the ending of government funding for that purpose, he states: "The removal of this obligation is a racist act directed against Roma." So how would he describe the previous legislation (in 1968 and 1980), which introduced the provision?

To describe state policy directed against this heterogeneous community of British, Irish and continental Romanies, along with an assortment of outcasts and hippies, as "racist" makes the term itself meaningless.

Comrade Ball is prepared to admit that "Tony Blair and his government may be formally anti-racist". But, he continues, "They are in office, not power. Power rests with the state and capitalism proper." There are two possible interpretations of this remark. The first one is that, while government personnel themselves may be anti-racist, civil servants, state bureaucrats and capitalists are not. They are in effect perpetuating racism in opposition to Blair and co.

However, I believe that comrade Ball is proposing a different explanation: he seems to hold that ideologies can exist in a vacuum, independent of human consciousness. Although politicians, council officers, public sector bureaucrats, company directors, bankers, academics and broadcasters may, in their overwhelming majority, all accept the current anti-racist consensus, nevertheless they are powerless in the face of an inanimate, but all-pervading ideology. According to Tom, the state cannot afford to drop racism "even if it could" (original emphasis).

It is this belief in the ability of ideology to exist detached from human thought itself that leads comrade Ball astray. But in order to grip the population a ruling class ideology must be promoted. Furthermore it must be accepted as 'the truth' by most of the ruling class itself.

When the inferiority of blacks or the superiority of the English was promoted to justify slavery and colonialism, these myths were widely believed. Yet in Britain today any hint of racial ideology is liable to cause outrage amongst large sections of the bourgeoisie.

Comrade Joe Reilly made some interesting and useful points (Letters, February 5). He explained how state anti-racism can be just as divisive in its present use as racism was (and could be again). He was absolutely correct to say that "the project is conceived and implemented from the top down. As such, it is entirely divorced from any concept of social justice." Whenever we leave the implementation of a positive idea in the hands of the bourgeoisie, we can be sure that it will be turned against us sooner or later.

However, comrade Reilly is wide of the mark when he says: "Multi-culturalism is promoted and endorsed by the ruling elite precisely for this reason" [to provoke "horizontal resentment and violence"]. Such schismatic splits may result, but the policy was not adopted with that in mind. I have argued that the bourgeoisie's main concern is to ensure continued relative social stability. The establishment needs to maintain a passive division amongst workers - to guard against the possibility that we might unite against it. At the same time through national chauvinism it promotes a more active 'unity' of all sections in its own interests behind the state.

In addition comrade Reilly is very wrong to think that "race has displaced class as the primary dynamic within society". This is contradicted by the implication of his own assertion that race-based divisions are used by the ruling class against the workers.

Alan Fox
London

Steven Kitson

Thank you for your condolences on the death of our son Steven, who died of cancer at the age of 40.

When he was nine years old and Verwoed was assassinated, he was beaten up by boys in his school, because 'his father was a communist'. My family was continually harassed by the security police while I was in jail and in 1968 came to England, where he grew up.

He started coming to visit me in jail in South Africa when he was 13. He visited me every year until he was 25, when he was arrested and detained by the security police, who accused him of being an ANC courier. Such was the outcry in Britain that they had to release him after six days and he was deported, being prohibited from visiting me again. While he was flying back to Britain his aunt, Joan Weinberg, was murdered in an act of spite. Then he became very active politically indeed.

Last week I visited Johannesburg. I took the opportunity to visit the national offices of the South African Communist Party and renewed my party card. It is a lousy party, but it is the only one we've got. In particular it is compromised by participating in a government which represents the interests of the bourgeoisie. In fact the GNU exercises the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie rather than the interests of the working class.

However, I joined in 1940 and feel a gap if I am not paid up. Furthermore there is an inner-party struggle going on between the old and the new, so I have a feeling of hope.

David Kitson
Zimbabwe

Political prisoner

I'm writing from Bayrampasa prison in Istanbul. I'm a political prisoner and I have been in prison for four years. I'm following the debates and news on the socialist and working class movement throughout the world.

I want to read the *Weekly Worker* and other CPGB material. I request you to send issues continuously.

Erol Kaplan
Turkey

Send messages of solidarity to Erol at: Bayrampasa Cezaevi, C-12, Istanbul, Turkey

This line 5mm beyond crop

From The Call, paper of the
British Socialist Party,
February 21 1918

The last war

The popular cry at the moment is 'The working class must take control.' But how?

The present parliament has sat longer than any parliament since the time of Charles II. It began by shortening its own life to five years and is now in its eighth session. Its executive committee, the war council, was put in power by Lord Northcliffe and a particular section of the high finance interests. How, under such circumstances, are the working class to 'take control'?

The capitalist war, starting with a violent outbreak of the narrowest nationalism, is to end with the ruin of the very thing which was the chief support among the people. As we view with satisfaction the ruin of working class chauvinism, we must find means of carrying on the last war, in which the alignment is no longer national boundaries, but between the working class and the capitalist class of all countries.

The struggle we are entering is easily the most stupendous fact in history. It supervenes upon the great world struggle of imperialism and reduces it to minor importance. Shall we be less bold in our thinking and planning than are the capitalist class? Consider and admire the courage of their thinking. It is that which enables them, a small section of the community, to turn the national life to their own benefit, regardless of the welfare of nine-tenths of the population.

The British imperialists, true to their 'faithful allies', who have their own demands to be satisfied, will carry on, without taking into account the sufferings of the soldiers and the starvation of the people. Says the London correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* with reference to the Versailles conference: "The most serious and informed comment in the business that I have heard is that the Allies cannot agree on anything short of their several maximum demands." The imperialists of the 'enemy countries' are not less thorough in their cynical thinking and planning.

All the bold thinking of the capitalist class is backed by the action of the working class. The capitalist class alone can only think; the working class can think *and act* - therein it alone has the capacity for true courage.

We must comprehend the whole field and action must be swift. The authority of the working class must dictate an immediate international conference. Its aim will be the closing down of the capitalist war with a view to the conquest of our own countries by the working class of Europe ●

JF Hodgson

1918

Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

The 'war against drugs'

Don't fear the reefer

As we have seen time and time again, in the 'war against drugs' the first casualty is truth. In this total war, anything goes - including at times even the vaguest semblance of rationality. Nothing is too silly. Science can go to hell, moral panic is the order of the day. Just lie, lie and lie and hope that the media and 'public opinion' swing behind you. If not, there is always the law and the power of the state to save the day for western civilisation and moral decency.

Naturally, if things get really tough and the chips are down, there is always good old-fashioned censorship. For an excellent example of this anti-democratic and authoritarian approach to the 'drugs problem', just take a look at the United Nations and its World Health Organisation. In December the WHO published a report on cannabis, its first on the subject in 15 years. Rather uncontroversially you would have thought, it said that cannabis is less dangerous than either alcohol or tobacco, and concluded - gosh, what a revelation - that even if cannabis were consumed on the same scale as cigarettes and whiskey, it would probably still be less dangerous than either.

The report continued: "In developed societies cannabis appears to play little role in injuries caused by violence, as does alcohol." It also pointed out that there is "good evidence" that alcohol can harm foetal development, while the evidence that cannabis can have similar detrimental effects is "far from conclusive". The reason for making the comparisons between cannabis and alcohol was "not to promote one drug over another but rather to minimise the double standards that have operated in appraising the health effects of cannabis".

All hell broke loose - and the truth was quarantined. Heavies from the US National Institute on Drug Abuse and the UN International Drug Control Programme rushed in to 'pressurise' the authors of the report. One member of the panel which drafted the report said: "In the eyes of some, any such comparison is tantamount to an argument for marijuana legalisation." Billy Martin of the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, said the drugs bureaucrats "went nuts" when they saw the report (quoted in *New Scientist* January 21). The relevant - ie, unwelcome - passages were scrapped.

Unfortunately for the drugs censors, the deletions were leaked to the *New Scientist*. This respected scientific journal was appalled by the bureaucratic, and anti-scientific, actions of the above organisations - and also by the rank cowardice of the WHO, which was "wrong to bow to political pressure and expunge from a recent report an informative, if controversial, comparison of the harms caused by different drugs including alcohol". Even more outspokenly, the *New Scientist* editorial damned the "anti-dope propaganda that circulates in the US" and called the New Labour government "fools" to ignore the growing tide in favour of decriminalisation or legalisation of cannabis - "Only the politicians still seem irrationally terrified by the idea of any relaxation in the law" (*ibid*).

Apart from its obvious leisure use, marijuana appears to provide medicinal benefits: it has been recommended to relieve the pain of glaucoma, multiple sclerosis and Aids sufferers and as a palliative for those undergoing cancer chemotherapy. It was used in childbirth during the 19th century.

No wonder support for legal reform is gaining ground from all quarters. Despite that the anti-drugs war continues. Why? Not because the state is determined to protect its citizens or subjects from harm. No, the anti-drugs war is a form of social control. The state knows

that the law is universally flouted by those under the age of 50. That means the law can be used to punish targeted individuals and groups and greatly strengthen the powers of the state. Some drug-takers are knighted or invited to No10 while others are demonised and imprisoned. There is a price to pay. A rich criminal sub-class above and thousands of extra prisoners below.

The rational case for marijuana is hardly a new one. The Indian Hemp Drugs Commission politely pointed out in 1894 that the evils of marijuana had been exaggerated. A House of Lords science and technology select committee inquiry on cannabis opens next month, much to the extreme disapproval of Jack Straw. Last year a BMA committee began considering a case for cannabis on prescription for certain illnesses. Even senior police officers have called for decriminalisation. Earlier this month Ross Rebagliati, the errant Canadian snowboarder who tested positive for cannabis at the Winter Olympics in Japan, was given his gold medal back. The idea that cannabis could be a performance-enhancing drug was just surreal.

The continued criminalisation of drugs, especially cannabis, is taking on the proportions of the US Prohibition. Some 40,000 people were either cautioned or prosecuted for drug offences in 1995 and this figure keeps going up. The long-time campaigner for cannabis decriminalisation Paul Flynn, Labour MP for Newport, correctly commented: "There is a vast army of individuals with a vested interest in keeping the present prohibitionist policies. They include the criminal fraternity and those who make their living from the prosecution of otherwise lawful citizens. I hope this report means governments are going to stop the fibbing at last."

The tobacco firms are certainly preparing for the future. This week *The Observer* revealed that the British American Tobacco company experimented with a high-nicotine crop, specifically cross-bred to produce twice as much nicotine as normal. It also contemplated putting small traces of marijuana in cigarettes. The newspaper quotes from an internal BAT document, which states: "In the illicit use of marijuana, relatively large doses of the active personal are involved. If the use of such drugs was legalised, one avenue for exploitation would be the augmentation of cigarettes with near subliminal levels of drugs."

Unsurprisingly, cigarette firms have already registered brand names with links to marijuana. In 1993 Philip Morris filed a trade mark application in France for 'Marley' - no guesses as to whom it refers. Other drug-related names registered by tobacco companies include Acapulco Gold and Red Leb (short for Red Lebanese).

The puritanical, 'anti-drugs' bodies were horrified. Paul Betts, director of Action for Drugs Awareness, thundered: "Marijuana is a drug, not a safe option" (February 22), and we were treated to a sanctimonious editorial from *The Observer*: "Here is something to ponder for those clamouring to legalise cannabis. Who would run that industry? Almost certainly the same people who have been cynically exploiting smokers for all these years" (February 22).

Drugs form a component part of human social existence and culture. Our fight to legalise drugs is not motivated by a desire to make companies like BAT even richer - though of course that is a very likely spin-off from such an eventuality. It is driven by a desire to liberate society from irrational prejudices and state terror ●

Danny Hammill

action

■ CPGB school

London: The USSR: what was it? April 4-5
Communist University: A week of stimulating study and discussion 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.

■ 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.

■ Scottish Socialist Alliance

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

■ 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

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.

■ Diarmuid O'Neill

The Justice For Diarmuid O'Neill Campaign is demanding a public enquiry into his murder by state forces.
Contact BCM Box D O'Neill, London WCIN 3XX.

■ For a workers' budget

Lobby of parliament, Tuesday March 17, 1.15pm. Chuck out the cuts! Organised by the Welfare State Network.

■ Network of Socialist Alliances

The National Liaison Group of Socialist Alliances has decided to call an additional national network meeting to build on the momentum achieved before, during and since the meeting in Walsall last November.

Saturday March 21 - 10.00am-4.00pm at the Koco Buildings, Spon End, Coventry.

The liaison group meets again on March 5 to finalise the agenda. Please contact us before then with ideas or proposals for the national meeting.

Pete McLaren, 32 The Green, Long Lawford, Rugby CV23 9BL. Tel: 01788-569766. Fax: 01922-644 705. E-mail: john@soc-alliances.demon.co.uk.

■ Debate

Wednesday March 4 - 8.00pm at the Princess Louise pub, 208 High Holborn
'Republicans and the national question' - a debate between the SLP Republicans and supporters of the *Marxist Bulletin*. All welcome.

■ Anti-fascist demo

Last November the National Front marched in Dover to demand the removal of gypsy asylum-seekers who had recently come to the town from eastern Europe. The NF were forced to abandon their march when confronted by opponents who had gathered from all over the country.

Kent anti-fascists have reliable information that the NF and their supporters will try to march in Dover again on Saturday February 28. Let us make sure we force them of the streets again.

For more details contact Eric Segal. Call: 01303-279019 (home); 01303-221993 (work) or 0336-700463 (pager).

■ Rapprochement

Revolutionary democratic communist tendency

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

These basic ideas of the tendency are supported by the CPGB and the RDG. The organising committee has written to Open Polemic, the RWT, the Socialist Democracy Group and Socialist Perspectives to find out their views on these points.

New threat to liberty

The state took the first step along the road of forcing 'non-approved' organisations to disclose the names of all their members last week with the announcement of plans for a compulsory register of freemasons.

Home secretary Jack Straw called on the United Grand Lodge - the masons' national executive - to voluntarily publish a list of all its members, and threatened legislation if cooperation was not forthcoming. He also intends to oblige new recruits to the police, the magistracy and the prison and prosecution services to declare whether they are masons.

This followed an investigation into

secret societies carried out by the parliamentary home affairs select committee under the chairmanship of Labour's Chris Mullin, renowned for his dogged campaigning for victims of state frame-ups such as the Birmingham Six. During his work on their behalf Mullin discovered that several officers of the West Midlands serious crime squad - those most directly involved in persecuting the Six - were masons.

The freemasons are indeed a secret society, whose members vow to erect a "column of mutual defence" in front of a fellow member, committing themselves to "succour his weakness and relieve his necessities". They are said

to be able to identify one another through use of a secret handshake, which commander Michael Higham, the lodge's grand secretary, declined to demonstrate to the right honourable members, when summoned before the select committee.

In fact the 'brotherhood' originated not as an exclusive club for select members of the establishment, but as a craft guild in the middle ages. It was only in the early 18th century that it started to become transformed into a society for 'top people'. According to the United Grand Lodge, today there are around 350,000 members attached to just under 8,000 lodges. Renowned for its bizarre rituals, the organisation prohibits discussion of politics and religion during its meetings, although all members are required to believe in a 'supreme being'.

The masons' pledge to protect each other does indeed lead to their mutual advancement and the covering up of corrupt practices. But if Mullin thinks that outing freemasons will put an end to corruption and prevent new frame-ups, his energies are misdirected. Capitalist society, based on the achievement of gain at the expense of competitors, is congenitally corrupt - a feature which is inevitably reflected in its state. The masons form but one small strand in the whole corrupt web.

Many Labour politicians fell over themselves to back Straw's move, which was also supported by Alan Beith, the Liberal Democrats' home affairs spokesperson. Lord Irvine, the lord chancellor, appeared to stand alone amongst members of the government in condemning it. He said it was "an infringement of privacy and individual rights".

Reacting to the government's likely first move to set up a voluntary register of criminal justice workers who are masons, *The Independent* commented impassively: "Anyone who refuses to disclose whether they are a member or not is likely to be considered a freemason" (February 18). The very stuff of witch hunts.

Communists are not unduly con-



Just a few of Britain's 350,000 freemasons at a meeting in London

cerned about the rights of judges, magistrates and the police. But a measure originally directed at one particular section can soon be extended to other organisations - especially those of the working class. If tomorrow our political parties, trade unions and strike committees were considered equally as undesirable and exclusivist, the state would not hesitate to use the precedent it first employed against freemasons in a more threatening direction.

Working class organisations - which potentially or in actuality stand in opposition to the state - need to

protect their members and supporters. A requirement to disclose names and other details would not merely infringe our rights, but inhibit our ability to strike at our class enemy.

In a workers' democracy the corruption of exclusive self-seeking groups would soon be exposed by the practice of openness and accountability - ensured by the ability of our class to recall and immediately replace all elected representatives. We need to fight for such advanced democratic practices in the here and now ●

Peter Manson

Fighting fund

Tarnished image

It's an expensive business, dreaming up new policies. Lord Irvine, the cabinet's law officer, has just announced that he is to spend £2.5 million creating a think tank "to help reinforce his role on the cusp of government".

£2.5 million which will not be spent on single mothers, disabled people or the unemployed, but on some overpaid spin doctors. Even the royal family is thinking of recruiting one - at a salary of about £150,000.

The desperate search for a better image reflects the ruling class's fear of losing control. But it's money well spent, if it ensures the oppressed do not fight back and instead accept their position.

The *Weekly Worker* exposes the reality behind the image. It is not however a passive commentator on events. As the collective organiser

of the Communist Party of Great Britain, it reports on the fight to reforge the Party as the mass, revolutionary democratic formation our class so desperately needs.

Support the *Weekly Worker* financially. We don't have millions of pounds in the bank to spread our fight for communism. We are dependent on you. Many thanks this week to CL (London) for £10, MN from Manchester for £100, IW (Lancaster) for £80, KC from Glasgow for £15 and special thanks to EM (Bristol) who filled in a standing order form - a welcome commitment of £8 per month. That means that we raised £443 this month - very good indeed, but not good enough: we are £57 short of our monthly target. Help us reach the full £500 in March. Write to Party centre for standing order forms now ●

Around the left *Sectarian isolation*

The existence of the Socialist Labour Party, despite itself, continues to exert a positive influence on the left. Traditionally, most left papers have been characterised by a near morbid introspection and a fear of the great unknown. Thankfully, the SLP's formation has opened up - to some degree or another - these closed groups. Their papers and journals certainly make for more interesting reading these days.

A good example is the Fourth Internationalist *Socialist Outlook*, which is initiating a discussion on the SLP. As it says, "We will carry more material from different points of view on the evolution of the SLP and the broader question of how the left can organise against Blair's project" (February). To this end, the above issue publishes the agreed statement of the 'SLP 57' left and democratic oppositionists; a statement from the

Socialist Perspectives grouping; and an article by comrade Pete Bloomer, the previous chair of Birmingham SLP and now a supporter of Workers Action, a recent pro-Labour split from the pro-Labour Workers International League. This spirit of openness and debate from *Socialist Outlook* is only to be welcomed, though it should not be forgotten that it belongs to the school of left thought - the majority one - which believes that the 'time is not right' for the launch of a serious left alternative to New Labour. We should wait and ... wait and wait - then see ... perhaps.

Comrade Bloom of WA is certainly less fatalistic than some sections of the left. He correctly states that "the SLP at its inception had the potential to become a force on the left". Discussing the December 13-14 SLP congress, the comrade points out that "without the block vote, one of the

left candidates would have been elected". Comrade Bloom also observes that at the congress, Scargill "cemented an alliance with the Indian Workers Association" (more precisely it was with Harpal Brar as an individual) and "by closing the black section he was attacking" the Fiscites around the Sikorskis and Brian Heron.

For all these insights and observations however, comrade Bloom brings a certain spirit of dogmatism and 'political correctness' to his analysis. For instance, the SLP's infamous 'residency laws' are described as "excluding people in a totally racist way" (though such a stipulation discriminates against, for example, white New Zealanders). This anti-racist paranoia leads the comrade to comment, "Scargill may protest that the reason for the rule is not racist - but he has yet to come up with any other rationale". The less sinister explanation - of sheer legalistic, bureaucratic idiocy by those elements who formed the SLP, plus a commitment to national socialism - does not seem to occur to comrade Bloom.

The SLP congress also appears to have been non-politically correct on other issues. Sounding slightly shocked, comrade Bloom writes: "The possibility of organising within the North of Ireland was also not ruled out, with the resolutions on this ques-

tion voted down or remitted. It is inconsistent for those who oppose the partition of Ireland to support the continued organisation of British trade unions and workers' parties in Ireland. We must stand for an independent, all-Ireland, basis of organisation." This seems to be a classic example of what Lenin called "straight-line thinking". The state we live under is known as the 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland'. We cannot hope to smash the state if we refuse to organise unitedly in all areas under its control as a matter of principle. This does not contradict our commitment to Irish self-determination and a united Ireland - or for that matter Scottish and Welsh self-determination. (Talking of political correctness, it is interesting to note that in the *Socialist Outlook's* 'where we stand' column, we are told that "socialism must be ... feminist ecologist".)

Comrade Bloom's narrow thinking also comes across in his comments on the 'black section scandal'. Referring to Harpal Brar, the comrade says: "In an animated speech he argued against the self-organisation of black people, decrying it as tokenism". One suspects that if had been Arthur Scargill leading the anti-black section charge, the accusation of "racism" would almost inevitably have

cropped up.

Comrade Bloom comes to the following rather prissy and sterile conclusion: "Rather than conduct a prolonged dogfight with Scargill and the Stalinists it is time to lead a split from it and from its sectarian isolation. Socialist Perspectives [which excludes CPGBers but includes *Workers Action* supporters - DP] is contacting SLP members to urge them to leave and participate in the debate on the politics and perspectives of forming a new organisation outside the SLP - with the question of regroupment and joint activity of the left high on the agenda.

"Having played a small role within the SLP, *Workers Action* has been invited to participate in the debate on the politics of the new grouping together with other forces. *Workers Action* is arguing for a labour movement orientation and for revolutionary socialist politics and principles to be adopted" (my emphasis).

In other words, give up the fight and let "Scargill and the Stalinists" have it all their own way. Abandon the genuine democrats - and the struggle for democracy - inside the SLP. In the name of overcoming "sectarian isolation", comrade Bloom of Workers Action advocates ... yet more sectarian isolation ●

Don Preston

Socialist Perspectives

Clique politics

welcome the opportunity to reply to Lee Rock's letter to the *Weekly Worker* ('Unjustified attack', February 12). Comrade Rock raises a number of points which I dispute and others which require clarification. But first, let me make it clear the comrade's contribution is taken in a fraternal spirit, as this reply is intended to be.

Comrade Rock notes that the meeting called by SLP Democratic Platform in Reading on January 10 divided into two after a debate on whether democrats and revolutionaries should continue SLP membership. Those deciding to remain in the SLP continue as the Democratic Platform, while those who left the party formed a new organisation, Socialist Perspectives.

Before the split occurred there was an *indicative* vote in which a narrow majority favoured working outside the SLP. It is worth mentioning that a motion which I passed to the chair, Martin Wicks, was not read out to the meeting and so not voted on. It read: "This meeting of SLP democrats affirms its commitment to struggle for democracy in the SLP as well as pursuing other avenues for building a working class alternative to New Labour." But no matter.

I do not accept comrade Rock's assertion that it was agreed "the meeting would split into two on the basis of the vote". My understanding of the reason to hold two meetings was the division between those working inside the SLP and those party comrades who were pursuing the building of a mass-based, democratic party outside the SLP. I do not doubt that comrade Rock believes that the basis of the division was as he said, but the truth is this notion was in his head before the meeting began, not agreed by the participants.

The two CPGB comrades who asked to attend the meeting of those who were quitting the SLP had been kicked out of Scargill's party and are in favour of building a mass-based, democratic working class party outside the SLP - the publicly declared basis of the meeting that comrade Rock attended. These comrades are prevented from working in the SLP *because they are communists*. They were excluded from the Socialist Perspectives meeting on the same basis. The *private* manoeuvrings leading up to the Reading meeting support this conclusion.

It is instructive to note that Martin Wicks unilaterally called the meeting in Reading, despite the previous decision of the Democratic Platform to hold it in London. The original agenda distributed by comrade Wicks (which was not sent to all those attending the previous Democratic Platform meeting) indicated that proceedings should from the beginning take the form of two separate meetings - those wanting to leave the SLP and those wanting to stay in. As this, again, was against the decision of the previous Democratic Platform meeting, comrade Wicks was forced to change the agenda and start with a joint meeting.

As a result of the manoeuvrings before January 10, decisions and perspectives were not fully aired on the day. So comrade Rock is actually projecting previous, *private* discussions onto a public forum. He indicates this by stating: "I was fully aware that those leaving the SLP were adamant that they did not want the meeting to include CPGBers on this occasion." Well, comrade, I was not aware of this, and no one brought this up at the joint meeting at which CPGBers were



Carolyn Sikorski: Scargill's doorkeeper

present. Comrade Rock knew beforehand that, no matter how CPGBers voted, we were not welcome and acted accordingly.

And he has the cheek to write: "I was not excluding them from the meeting"! Frankly this reminds me of Carolyn Sikorski - Scargill's mealy-mouthed doorkeeper who barred SLP members from the 1st congress in May 1996.

In his letter, comrade Rock also states: "By not being present at the discussions of Socialist Perspectives/Democratic Platform over the last 12 months it might well be the case [CPGBers] did not correctly assess the view of the people they were hoping to influence". But why had we not attended those meetings? It was certainly not because we did not want to. We were consciously excluded from them. I was personally told by comrade Wicks that I was not welcome. On what basis? I supported the 'Swindon' statement on democracy, I was a member of the SLP - what other criteria for attendance was there?

I was forced to lie - as I had to lie to Scargill and Carolyn Sikorski - about my political affiliation in order to attend two Democratic Platform meetings. Comrade Rock is well aware of this. He is also well aware that I made a commitment not to publish the proceedings of those meetings in the *Weekly Worker* without the consent of the Democratic Platform. A commitment I upheld.

Finally, comrade Rock claims that there is a stark distinction between the reconstituted SLP Democratic Platform and Socialist Perspectives in their attitudes towards joint work. He correctly reports that "only after a

heated exchange was it agreed to approach Socialist Perspectives for joint work". He then says that his meeting "agreed, without dissension, to continue working with those comrades working in the SLP".

That may be the case, but what was your practice? When the two separate meetings came together at the end of the afternoon, it is interesting to note that only three Socialist Perspectives members participated, while virtually all the Democratic Platform members attended. And Socialist Perspective's commitment to joint work? We proposed two concrete activities, both of which were rejected by Socialist Perspectives. They were: a joint attendance at the Scottish Socialist Alliance national council meeting which was held the following week and collaboration in the writing and producing of *Socialist Perspectives*.

For me, the main lessons of this altercation is that much of the left in Britain is yet to break from clique politics. It is yet to grasp political openness. Instead, it relies on private manoeuvrings, Machiavellian doorkeeping and the withholding of information for sectional gain.

I respect comrade Rock. I believe him to be a revolutionary. We have invited Socialist Perspectives to become involved in the process of communist rapprochement - an invitation not made lightly. Yet I also want to move the comrade - along with most other fragments of the revolutionary left - away from a political method based on intrigue and clique building. I look forward to further clarification, but - more to the point - joint work and communist unity ●

Terry Watts

Simon Harvey of the SLP

Scare stories

As the SLP's star wanes, the Socialist Alliances are developing new life. Having faded to almost nothing over the last two years in England and Wales, the Alliances are developing potential as a fruitful arena for building a political challenge and alternative to Blair. All this threatens Scargill's sectarian and exclusive project. Scargill has refused all electoral co-operation with others on the left, including the Scottish Socialist Alliance. And as last November's Paisley by-election shows, the SLP can be the loser. The SLP gained just half the number of votes achieved by the SSA.

Those familiar with Scargill's method know that he does not react to such developments in an honest or rational way. Self-belief becomes self-delusion.

At the last meeting of the SLP's national executive committee, Scargill reported on developments relating to the European parliament elections to be held in 1999. Scargill claims to have obtained a leaked home office report whose recommendations would effectively ban electoral alliances. Political parties would have to register to stand in elections, he claimed.

Of course, there is the possibility that this is true and that there is a conspiracy of silence amongst bourgeois journalists against reporting this home office document, which would signify a substantial shift in British electoral law. Or perhaps it has only been leaked to the SLP.

I could be wrong, but I suspect that our comrade leader is indulging in scaremongering. Morale in the SLP is low. The SLP in Scotland is considering liquidating into the Scottish Socialist Alliance. Branch activity is feeble, and just about everyone thinks that the second congress of the party was an anti-democratic farce.

With MEPs Hugh Kerr and Ken Coates kicked out of New Labour, and then pointedly deciding *not* to join the SLP, demoralised members are noting the rekindled interest in the Alliances and looking hopefully towards them. Scargill pathetically and self-defeatingly wants to stem the tide by spreading disinformation to the membership with the intention of preventing SLP work in the Socialist Alliances amongst the rank and file. Scargill seems prepared to resort to all manner of tactics to ensure the party does not stray from impotent sectarianism.

■ Marxist Bulletin

Desperate times, desperate measures. With the SLP project looking decidedly uncertain, the *Marxist Bulletin* - one time arch-'loyalists' on the party's left - seems to have been sent into a spin. Whereas the Fourth International Supporters Caucus has no pretence of revolutionary politics, the *Marxist Bulletin* comrades attempted to portray themselves as the SLP's very own revolutionary tendency. No longer. In the last issue of the *Marxist Bulletin*, they criticised the CPGB for not knowing when to

"break from a corrupt political framework" with the decided implication that they do. Well, no half measures here.

The *Marxist Bulletin* comrades holding positions in at least one CSLP have resigned, not from the SLP - yet - but from branch executive positions. They have also withdrawn from the SLP's Democratic Platform. As well as being a rather confused reaction - not all of their editorial board appear to have resigned from CSLP executive positions - it is also silly. If they are preparing to leave the SLP - perhaps they have now concluded it is a "corrupt political framework" - then it seems rather puerile to abandon positions on party branches. What better position to argue your corner than on the leadership? Although I understand that the *Marxist Bulletin* is not officially synonymous with the International Bolshevik Tendency, the group to which most *MB* supporters once belonged, the fact that the IBT in the US has recently suffered a major split must have sown not a little disorientation and demoralisation among these comrades.

■ Dunn and the block vote

Former NEC member Terry Dunn continues his campaign around the 'unconstitutionality' of the block vote of the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association. Last week I noted that the exercise of the NWCCMA block vote breached the statutes of the SLP. I have no doubt this is true and thank comrade Dunn for bringing this to my attention.

But, what to do? The practice of our general secretary is to ride roughshod over even his own constitution, if it suits him. Comrade Dunn is not the first person to point out such anomalies. However, unless comrade Dunn is prepared and able to mount a party-wide campaign against the leadership, his cause is lost. Failing that, the only realistic possibility would be a legal challenge and its inevitable consequence - the defeat of the party leadership by a bewigged member of the ruling class. Perhaps these facts are dawning upon Dunn? I have heard that he is thinking of leaving altogether. I hope not. All I can say to the comrade is that you might still find allies in places where you have not yet dared to tread.

■ SLP Scotland

The SLP in Scotland met in aggregate last Saturday. Under 20 comrades attended. I have not had a full report from this meeting, but understand that all comrades feel that the party's 2nd Congress was a travesty of democracy. However, some seem to think this is acceptable - all political organisations have their flaws, but at least we've got Arthur - or at least so the thinking goes. Another understandable criticism is that the party's NEC still has no Scottish representation. No wonder even the most loyal of Scargillites have an eye on developments in the Scottish Socialist Alliance ●

In the sectarian swamp

The latest issue of *Workers Power* (February) carries a full-page polemic against the *Weekly Worker* by Richard Brenner in which the LCMRCI is also attacked.

Workers Power argues that the SLP, all its dissidents and the rest of the left are useless sects isolated from the masses. It rejects any regroupment process and claims that it alone has a revolutionary Marxist programme. In this reply we will examine how, behind all its arrogant self-proclamation, lies an insecure group in the process of leaving behind the healthy tradition inherited from Dave Hughes and increasingly becoming an erratic and intolerant sect.

In relation to the SLP Brenner writes: "If it were a mass organisation, revolutionaries might be obliged to campaign with it. But it is not a mass organisation or anything near to it. Nor is it possible to fight within in for revolutionaries ideas." If none of that is possible, why did WP send so many experienced cadres into the SLP and why did it try to gain affiliation for its youth organisation?

The real reason why WP can no longer fight for its ideas amongst SLP supporters is that they have been alienated by all its zigzags. WP has, in fact, had the most contradictory characterisations of and policies towards the SLP. In December 1995 it welcomed its imminent establishment and committed itself to fight for a "revolutionary SLP", but within months it was labelling Scargill's party a "Stalinist sect". Yet by June 1996 it was claiming that "the struggle for the political soul of the SLP has only just begun". Inside the SLP WP supporters were in favour of standing candidates in elections against Labour, while outside it WP called on workers to vote for Blairites against the SLP.

WP says that it could only participate in mass organisations. Its paper carries a permanent column which states that it is "for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party". So why does WP not do any work inside it? WP was absent from the movement amongst Labour's left and rank and file to stop the nomination of Blair, the abolition of clause four, the attacks on the union link, etc.

Brenner claims that SLP members "have now drawn the conclusion that it is necessary to leave the party and build a consistent alternative to it: Workers Power". However, no ordinary members at all have left the SLP to join WP. What has happened is that some WP supporters inside the SLP have now decided to make public their WP membership. WP's entryist adventure finished in disaster.

WP is incapable of any constructive intervention in working class organisations. Its method is to build a 'pure' propaganda sect uncontaminated by "people worn down and tired" - ie, the rest of the left. Hence the CPGB is described as a "tiny sect", while the LCMRCI and the other seven groups who have some influence amongst the SLP left are rubbish as "tiny groups".

Brenner writes: "Of course it is possible to organise an alternative to the SLP. That is exactly what WP is doing." To prove it, he claims that WP's youth organisation is bigger than the SLP's. The reality is that WP is itself just another "tiny group". It only sells around 500 papers per month. It is not in the position of being able to influence, led alone lead, any section of the workers' movement, and does not even have members employed in

John Stone of the Liaison Committee for a Revolutionary Communist International looks at the further degeneration of the Workers Power group

industry. The SLP is a left reformist party that contests elections and carries some influence in the unions. But WP's proudest activity is "campaigning against BP in Colombia". However worthy this might be, it only involved a handful of activists and went unnoticed as far as British or Colombian workers were concerned. LCMRCI supporters in Britain have been involved in far more successful campaigns of solidarity with Bolivia or Peru, but we do not go around boasting about it.

A revolutionary organisation would have reason to take pride if it had roots amongst the industrial unions, the anti-racist movement and the

.....

"Such schizophrenic behaviour characterises an organisation which no longer has any confidence in itself or its members. It cannot intervene in the SLP or Labour, or in any regroupment process, because it has nothing serious to propose"

.....

rank and file of the Labour Party or socialist organisations. But that is precisely WP's biggest weakness.

The reason why WP is unable to make telling interventions in the SLP, Labour or anywhere at all, and why it has to take refuge in a self-comforting mantra ('We are the only revolutionaries and the rest are tiny sects') is because it does not trust in its own policies. The twists that we saw over the SLP are characteristic of its line changes in all major areas of policy.

On the national question WP had the most incredible contradictions. In July 1996 *Workers Power* carried a centre-page article arguing against the majority of Scots who want their own parliament in favour of a centralised British state. It said that an autonomous Scotland would threaten the unity of the UK and therefore its proletariat. This position capitulated to Great British nationalism and explains why in its 22 years of existence WP has proved incapable of recruiting in Scotland.

However, a few months before the 1997 referendum WP realised that its position was untenable and suddenly decided that it would champion Scotland's autonomy and campaign for a double 'yes'. But in Wales, it contradictorily maintained its previous position and campaigned against the slightest degree of autonomy.

WP opposes the pro-autonomy movements of the various stateless nations on the European continent and is for centralised states, while in the EU it takes an abstentionist position on the question of the march towards centralisation.

If at home WP adapts to national-centralism, in other parts of the world it adapts to liberalism. It called on im-

perialism to help bourgeois separatist movements inside the degenerated workers' states and claimed that the national fragmentation of the semi-colonies could provide a starting point for proletarian revolution - actually, in most cases, it led to fratricide (Liberia, central Africa, etc).

WP maintains its correct defence of the Irish republicans and Iraq against imperialism. However, in new conflicts it appears to take its line from the imperialist media. At the time of two of the most important US attacks of the last few years, WP was against defending Haiti or the Serbs.

On the Basque country WP maintains a complete silence over the massive campaign of persecution against Herri Batasuna (the sister organisation of Sinn Féin). Keith Harvey refuses to defend ETA against the Spanish state and to fight for the unconditional release of its 500 prisoners.

On the question of the political characterisation of the present period WP's position contains contradictions of a most bizarre kind. If you characterise the world period as revolutionary, that ought to mean that revolutions are imminent in many countries and that it is possible to build mass revolutionary parties. If however you characterise the world situation as counterrevolutionary, your main task is to resist new attacks and to maintain your principles through building strong, albeit small, organisations.

WP upholds these two mutually contradictory characterisations simultaneously! On the one hand the Harveyites could write - à la Pablo/Mandel - that the working class is disappearing in most of the third world, that Latin America had been experiencing a decade of heavy defeats and that it is important to find new social subjects for revolution. On the other hand WP endorsed the Argentinean PTS's analysis that Latin American and the world is about to undergo mass, pre-revolutionary upheavals.

WP cheered on the capitalist overthrow of Communist Party rule in eastern Europe, typifying those events as pro-democracy revolutions, yet it also said that they produced historic defeats.

These incompatible contradictions result from the juxtaposition of two different methods. WP began life as a group which claimed that all the former 'socialist' countries were state capitalist. After 1980 WP rejected that concept and adhered to orthodox Trotskyism. These are two different ways of analysing the world. The first rejects any defence of the 'socialist' states against capitalism and rejoices in their destruction, even at the hands of reaction. The second holds that it is important to defend the degenerate workers' states against internal and external bourgeois counterrevolution, while at the same time it is crucial to fight for their regeneration through a political revolution. Over recent years WP has moved towards a confused hybrid of these two mutually antagonistic methods.

Today WP seems to have adopted the idea that there is no major difference between a capitalist state and a degenerate workers' state. Both are characterised as bourgeois states,

although one has a ruling bourgeoisie while the other has temporarily displaced it. For WP it is possible to accept that for eight years a workers' state could be ruled by an anti-communist and openly capitalist regime that put most of the economy in the hands of the private sector (as in most of eastern Europe), or that a workers' state could be administrated by fascists (like the Bosnian Serbs) or by a capitalist class (as in Albania).

For WP the class nature of the state is not decisive. It saw nothing wrong in siding with internal pro-imperialist counterrevolution against the bureaucracy. In the former USSR WP called for a united front with the capitalist parties to defend the bourgeois parliament in 1991, while in 1992 it labelled Zyuganov's communist-patriotic bloc "fascist" and refused to defend it against Yeltsin's repression. Inexplicably WP then called for a vote for Zyuganov against Yeltsin in the presidential elections.

In former Yugoslavia WP was all over the place. When war broke out between Croats and Serbs WP called for the defence of both groups in areas where they were in a majority. It initially condemned the independence of Bosnia and called for the defeat of all sides. In mid-1992 it organised a united front with Greater-Serbia monarchists in Vienna. Later it called for the military victory of the muslims in their bid to reconquer the whole of Bosnia. Some months after it said it would only support the reconquest of the 10 to 20% of Bosnian land in which muslims were in a majority before the conflict.

WP said it would reverse its support for the muslims if they formed a new bloc with Croatia or became supporters of imperialism against the Serbs. When that happened, instead of changing its position, WP refused to defend what it called the Serb 'workers state' against imperialism. Even worse, it called on Nato to send arms and men to their anti-Serb local proxies.

WP claims that its main achievement is its programme. However, its consistency of the 1980s is now totally absent. Today its 'method' consists in constantly shifting its positions in almost any direction. Such schizophrenic behaviour characterises an organisation which no longer has any confidence in itself or its members. It cannot intervene in the SLP or Labour, or in any regroupment process, because it has nothing serious to propose.

Internal democracy is being restricted. WP members are trained to support their leaders, rather than their policies. A ruling clique around a supreme leader is being developed. Critical members are excluded or eased out of the organisation.

After the August 1997 congress of WP's international organisation, the League for a Revolutionary Communist International, Don Preston pointed out in the *Weekly Worker* (September 11 1997) that the group had changed many of its political positions without discussing them in front of the class or even their readers. In a desperate reply Brenner wrote: "Every charge is false. Worse, in his polemic Preston tries to mislead his readers through the time-dishonoured methods of falsification:

quote-doctoring, distortion and plain slander" (*Weekly Worker* October 2 1997).

Brenner did not have the honesty to admit WP's shifts. Instead, he abused a CPGB comrade Healy-style in the CPGB's own paper. One can imagine how difficult life must be for any comrade inside WP who dares to call into question any of its U-turns.

In the exchange in the *Weekly Worker* on the LRCI congress six different articles were published. A healthy organisation would have been proud of the interest shown and encouraged the debate. Yet not a word of it was carried in *Workers Power*. Instead WP accused the CPGB in its own paper of being anti-democratic, although it has never published any letter from the LCMRCI or any CPGB critique in its own press.

WP's intervention in the SLP was based around its call to SLP branches to adopt a different programme in opposition to the official one and to publicly attack the entire leadership as counterrevolutionary and Stalinist. This was not the most cleverly conceived way of winning support for revolutionary policies against Scargill. However, WP would never tolerate any such opposition from within its own ranks.

Brenner asked: "Can you name a single example of anyone, ever, being expelled from any LRCI section for expressing disagreement within the organisation with any policy, theory, perspective ... or anything at all? If by 'past history' you are referring to the expulsion of José Villa in 1995, as you know he was expelled for publicly denouncing the LRCI at a public meeting ..." (*Weekly Worker* October 2 1997). In fact, can Brenner name a single example of anyone who ever led a tendency within the LRCI and who still remains in the organisation? The only faction allowed to function is the undeclared, secret one around Harvey himself. It may even be possible that comrades who did not agree with Harvey's new line on the state are no longer represented on the International Secretariat.

In actual fact Villa had already been expelled when he spoke at the meeting Brenner referred to. When in mid-1995 we were setting up a left opposition in the LRCI, Harvey dismissed the only New Zealand full-timer, suspended our comrades, forbade us to communicate with each other by e-mail, intervened in the New Zealand and Bolivian sections and prevented the attendance at the IEC of his most critical opponent. The comrades were denied the right to defend themselves and to appeal against their expulsion. Meanwhile LRCI members were forbidden to socialise with the 'deserters'.

In an effort to cover the sun with his finger Brenner lies through his teeth about the size of his organisation: "We have more members in the LRCI now than before the splits" (*ibid*). The reality is that the LRCI now has fewer members and sections and nobody at all in the third world or the industrial working class. Its 1997 congress had 50% fewer delegates than its previous one (1994). Over the last decade WP has lost two or three times more members than the number remaining within the group.

Today WP attempts to survive through aping the SWP. Its paper intentionally resembles *Socialist Worker*. It is moving towards the position of claiming to be the party and therefore does not deem it necessary or desirable to engage in discussions with the rest of the left or even with its own dissidents ●

Morning Star strike begins

Morning Star journalists set up a picket line on Wednesday February 25 outside the Islington offices of the “daily paper of the left”. They also called for a mass picket/lobby of the 15-member management committee of the Peoples Press Printing Society (the co-operative which owns the Morning Star) from 10.30am this Saturday, when it meets at Ardleigh Road.

The day before the strike began a 250-strong rally of Star supporters in Conway Hall on February 24 threw down a powerful challenge to the despised “North Korean” Hicks-Rosser family dynasty which at present rules the paper.

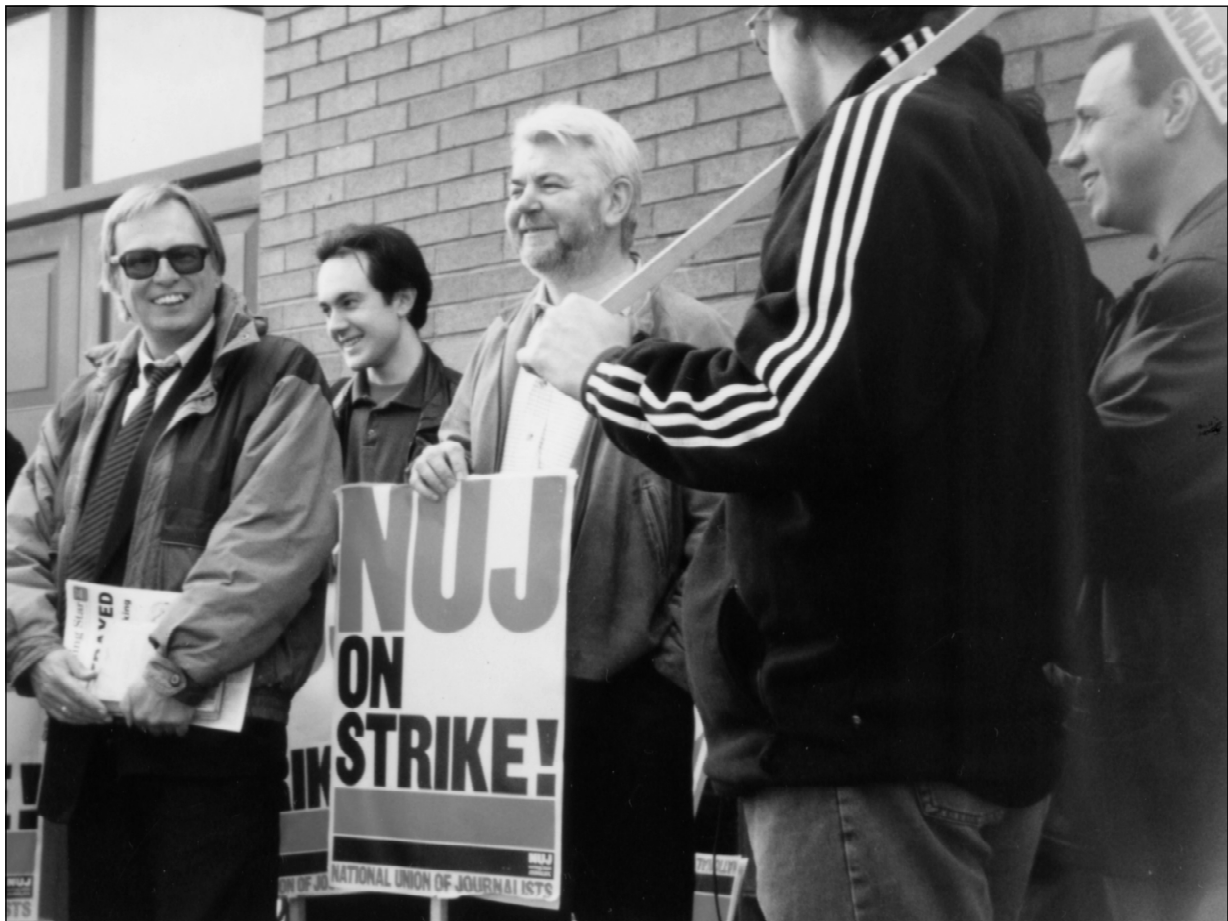
The NUJ strike is official and indefinite. It threatens the Star’s precarious existence - as well as the survival of the Communist Party of Britain, which was formed as a Morning Star supporters’ organisation after the paper rebelled against political control by the then Eurocommunist-dominated CPGB in the mid-80s.

The three journalists who voted against the action, including deputy editor Paul Corry, are not scabbing. John Haylett - whose sacking as editor was the immediate cause of the dispute - remains suspended. But Acas talks previously refused by the NUJ began on the first day of the strike. However, they are unlikely to resolve the dispute unless management backs down. Whether or not Haylett is reinstated, the chances of PPPS chief executive Mary Rosser and her cohorts surviving a shareholders’ general meeting - the AGM in June, or a requisitioned special meeting - are slim. Those who are CPB members will almost certainly face the prospect of disciplinary action within the organisation.

Strikers distributed No1 of The Workers’ Morning Star, explaining their case and listing messages of support received from 13 trade union general secretaries including Arthur Scargill, 25 former Morning Star employees, five MPs including Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn (interestingly Mike Ambrose reported how Ken Livingstone refused support), and the political committee of the CPB, listed under “other organisations”.

The strikers write that if management’s actions go unchallenged, “it would represent a defeat for the Morning Star itself ... all the years of campaigning for trade union rights and justice for workers would mean nothing.” They also stressed their loyalty to the paper and its history. “Who would buy a paper that said one thing and behaved like the worst capitalist management that it has spent decades exposing? ... The NUJ chapel is fighting to save the Morning Star from dynastic dictatorship for the movement to which it truly belongs.”

The February 24 rally, chaired by ex-tobacco workers union leader Terry Marsland, ended with an overwhelming vote for the immediate reinstatement of editor John Haylett, suspended since January 24 on “trumped up charges” (NUJ chapel) by a management which is making a despicable stand on the Thatcherite principle of “management’s right to manage”.



Suspended editor John Haylett (with placard) fell foul of ‘management’s right to manage’

Fire Brigades Union leader Ken Cameron pilloried this “disgusting” anti-working class formulation from the platform, disclosing how he had written a reference backing John Haylett for the job of editor, and had been lobbied by unnamed “people” to withdraw it - indirectly confirming the longstanding civil war between factions at the top of the CPB.

Management committee member and Institute of Employment Rights director Carolyn Jones (who works with John Hendy QC, but is not an SLP member) explained how she withdrew from its three-person committee of enquiry because there was no case to answer, and it was, in her opinion, flouting agreed procedures and natural justice. The last straw was Mary Rosser’s comment: “You’re not here to put the union case. You’re not here to defend the editor. You’re here to uphold management’s right to manage.”

The remaining two members of the committee - accuser Rosser and chief witness Bob Newlands - have tabled five charges which “do not amount to a row of beans” (Haylett). Among these, Haylett is accused of using a “different” name during the 1997 trip to China, a charge which damns the accusers. He took a new name years

ago in order to evade the security forces of apartheid South Africa, an entirely honourable reason.

Haylett went to great lengths to report, and deny, the “smear” that the strike was politically motivated: “MPs have been approached and told that what is taking place is a plot, a conspiracy, by leaders of the CPB to merge with the SLP and to make the Morning Star the mouthpiece of the new party.” Haylett quoted a fax sent to Tribune alleging that what was taking place has its roots in the SLP’s interest in the Morning Star. He also produced a fax sent to Tony Dubbins, GPMU general secretary, from management committee member Annie Marjoram. It contained, “as requested at the GPMU Women’s Conference”, the minutes of the CPB political committee. Haylett demanded to know where Marjoram, who is a member of the Labour Party, gets the CPB political committee minutes. Marjoram and her friends on the management committee have, he said, invented a story linking Haylett with Scargill, the SLP and what she calls the “sectarians”. Haylett asked rather strangely therefore whether it was “an industrial dispute, or is it a political vendetta?” His perspective was as a result typically trade unionist. “Pressure must be put on management committee members to put loyalty to the movement before loyalty to cliques or individuals.”

The stand of Star workers against an oppressive management regime is principled, and deserves support. There is a rotten political line-up around the Hicks-Rosser clique. Socialist Action, the group associated with Socialist Campaign Group News, is said to be on their side. Livingstone, perhaps the left MP most likely to secure a safe place within Blair’s New Labour, declines to add his support to the strikers. The New Worker, paper of the Stalinite New Communist Party, which has sold itself to North Korea, refused a paid advertisement from the strikers.

Paul Corry, Star deputy editor and CPB executive committee member, admits there are political differences. Where those in the Rob Griffiths camp see only personal conflict and bad

management, Corry, for the Hicks camp, advances a clear British road to socialism programme. “If there is a difference,” he told me, “it is whether we should work to save the old labour movement, the old Labour Party, or whether it should be ditched and something new built.”

At the February 24 rally question time Stan Keable, whose father once owned the forerunner of the Morning Star, the Daily Worker - and sold it to the PPPS for a shilling - asked CPB general secretary Griffiths and ousted general secretary Mike Hicks to explain the political differences between the two factions in the CPB leadership. Alas, no straightforward answer was forthcoming.

Nevertheless Griffiths related how the CPB executive committee meeting in January received no warning of the suspension of Haylett which followed only two weeks later. He spelt out “the threat” posed “to the very existence of the party”. Significantly he went on to attack “the attempt to try and smuggle through the sacking of John Haylett,” and “lever in” Paul Corry, “the candidate who a whole number of members of the management committee have obviously wanted to be editor ever since the retirement of Tony Chater”. He finished by “nailing the latest in a whole series of lies” that there is “some kind of plot taking place between the SLP and the CPB leadership to hijack the paper.”

The October meeting of the CPB executive committee had agreed, with the support of both Hicks and Rosser, to discuss matters with the SLP where there may be some common ground for cooperation and to discuss the undoubted disagreements that lay between them. “All this stuff that we read in faxes from Annie Marjoram about an SLP-CPB conspiracy is a pack of lies,” Griffiths insisted.

Hicks, who brought half a dozen bodyguards with him, succeeded in antagonising an already hostile audience through his uncomradely, petulant attitude. He certainly destroyed his reputation as a militant trade unionist with a disgraceful defence of “management’s right to manage” ●

Ian Farrell

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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Iraq retreats, but imperialist build-up continues

War threat remains

Almost at the 11th hour, the “madman” Saddam Hussein backed down from any military confrontation with the might of US imperialism. In full view of the world’s media, a deal was struck with the representative of western imperialism, the UN secretary general Kofi Annan. For anyone who doubted the old dictum that peace - and diplomacy - is a continuation of war by other means, here was conclusive proof.

Under the deal, “the government of Iraq reconfirms its acceptance of all relevant resolutions of the security council”, and also “undertakes to accord to Unscm [United Nations special commission] and IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] immediate, unconditional and unrestricted access in conformity with the resolutions referred to”. As a slight sop, or carrot, Annan agreed to “bring the lifting of sanctions to the attention of the security council”. Speaking in Paris on Monday, Annan summed up his achievements: “President Saddam and the Iraqi government accept that we can visit all eight places. Tomorrow.”

But the imperialist threat to Iraq remains. Bill Clinton - and hence his loyal sidekick, Tony Blair - warned that the use of force would be “automatic” if Saddam Hussein did not stick to the exact letter of the agreement. Clinton also rammed home the message that the US would remain “in force” in the Gulf in order to police the deal. There are some 30,000 US troops in the region, and more are still arriving - just in case. It looks like Iraq will have a vast expeditionary force permanently camped next to it - a modern day Sword of Damocles.

Calls by Tariq Aziz, Iraq’s deputy prime minister, for imperialist forces to leave the Gulf have been met with arrogant refusal. Blair was particularly belligerent. In reply to Aziz, he confirmed that Britain would be seeking a tough new security council resolution giving the UN the right to respond “by whatever means necessary” if the Iraqi dictator broke his word to imperialism. “A piece of paper signed by Hussein is not enough,” snapped Blair. “Only force brought about this success.” The Clinton administration continues to make provocative remarks, egged on by Israel. The imperialist hero, Kofi Annan - who has become transformed into a strange mixture of Jesus, Gandhi, Gorbachev and Kissinger, politely summed it up: “You can do a lot with diplomacy, but of course you can do a lot more with diplomacy backed up with firmness and force.”

There has been widespread relief, though the *Sun* is probably disappointed - last week it was looking forward to a nuclear strike on Baghdad. But even the Labour left joined in the congratulations. Tony Benn claimed that “Kofi Annan has rescued the UN”, which may well be true. He also said on Tuesday that he was “very disappointed with a Labour government” that sought to defy the will of the majority on the UN security council and the “world community”.

Hugo Young, writing in *The Guardian*, echoed the sentiments of Annan: “Without the threat of bombing, Saddam would not have conceded. His record shows that very plainly. So it is important the threat was made credible.” The paper’s editorial also thought the deal was a “significant achievement”, and like Benn was glad that the UN secretary-general had “done something to restore the authority of the UN - in danger of being bypassed by unilateral military action” (February 24).

There was however some liberal dissent in the same issue of *The Guardian*. Martin Woollacott called it a “bad peace” - a “deal has been done with a uniquely evil man”. The ‘left’ feminist writer, Linda Grant, was also not com-

pletely happy. She was tired of the “prattle” of those who adopted a spirit of “principled anti-bellucosity”, concluding: “What is wrong with America and Britain is that we don’t have the means to get rid of him, not that we are wicked to want to.”

In contrast to the liberal moans - whether for or against the imperialist war drive - the left, of course, has been utterly opposed to the imperialist manoeuvres. Unfortunately, this has been mainly of a social-pacifistic nature. Thus the main propaganda slogan of the SWP and the SP was ‘Welfare not warfare’.

This slogan implies that revolutionaries abdicate the use of violence and war - not true. We are not opposed to warfare - if it be *revolutionary* war-

fare. For all their good intentions - and their formally anti-imperialist stance - the statements of neither group so much as hinted at the aim of revolutionaries in the event of conflagration - ie, turning a reactionary, imperialist-driven war into a revolutionary civil war *at home*. They are more concerned with swimming in the left liberal/social democratic milieu of Harold Pinter and Tony Benn, pacifists, etc, and with assuming a suitably ‘respectable’ appearance.

The SWP, it needs to be noted, has resurrected the facile myth that any war in the Gulf will be an ‘oil war’. As the editorial in *Socialist Worker* says, “If Britain and the US launch war on Iraq it will be for oil and US power ... This is what happened after the last

Gulf War in 1991 when the West’s bombs massacred, burned and maimed Iraqi civilians to protect oil supplies” (February 21). Hence the SWP’s subsidiary slogan, ‘No blood for oil’. As we have pointed out many times, Gulf War II - Gulf War I was between Iran and Iraq and cost some one million lives - was fundamentally about the US drive to stamp its image upon the ‘post-communist’ world.

Naturally, during Gulf War II many left groups from the ‘orthodox Trotskyist’ school raised the erroneous slogans, ‘Defend Iraq’ and ‘Victory to Iraq’ - which amount to the same thing. Supporting the military violence of the small slave-owner against the large slave-owner, as Lenin put it. This time round though, there appears to be a marked reluctance to raise such slogans. Even the Spartacist League, which likes to imagine it is the most orthodox of the orthodox, has been coy to date. In its paper, *Workers Vanguard*, it says: “During the Gulf War the Spartacist League and Spartacus Youth Clubs raised the call: ‘Defeat US imperialism! Defend Iraq!’” - which was in contrast to the “liberals”, of course, who refused to lend military support to Iraq. Now, they just say, ‘US bloody hands off Iraq!’ and inform us obliquely that “we give absolutely no *political* support to the capitalist regime there” (my emphasis, February 13). But what about what you grandly call *military* support, comrades? Come clean.

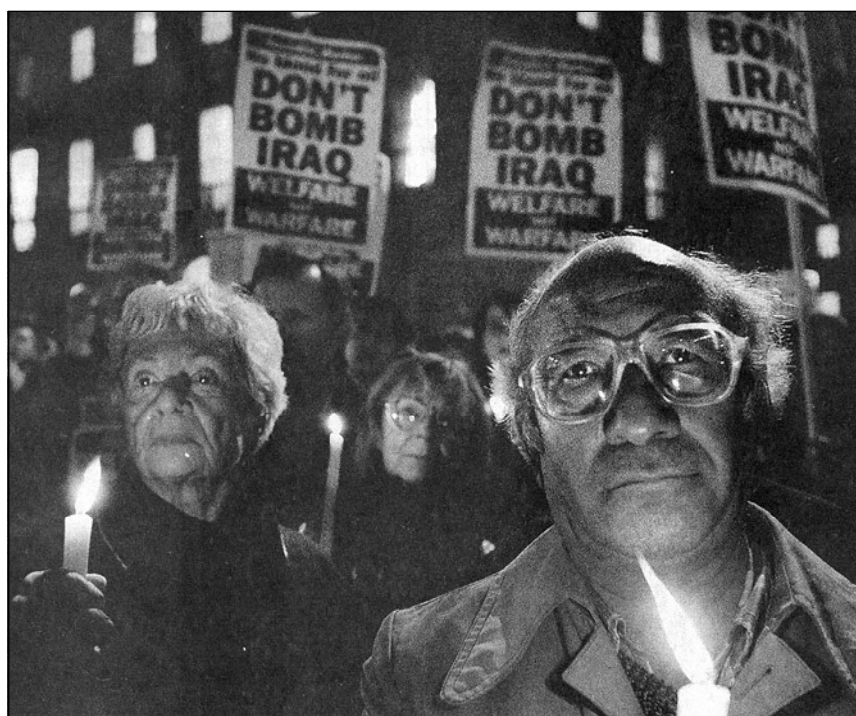
At the anti-war rallies, demos and vigils, only the obscure *Revolutionary Fighter*, bulletin of the Revolutionary Internationalist League, has raised the explicit slogan, ‘Defend Iraq’, explaining: “We unconditionally defend Iraq against an imperialist attack. We support Iraq’s right to defend itself and its people by any means militarily, including shooting down British and US planes going to bomb Iraq, or the launching of Scud missiles against US allies in the region ... If the planned attack develops into a full-scale war we will campaign in Britain for victory to Iraq, just as we did in 1991 Gulf War” (February 20).

Still, however much we may criticise the above groups and slogans - not least the ‘orthodox’ Trotskyist ones - they are light years ahead when it comes to principle in comparison with the Communist Party of Britain. In a leaflet distributed at last Saturday’s anti-war demo outside Downing Street, it calls for “an international UN tribunal to try Saddam Hussein for crimes against humanity, with international inspection of his prisons”. In other words, the CPB accepts the legal and moral legitimacy of imperialism. Pure, wretched liberalism - but what else would we expect from this crisis-ridden ‘official communist’ rump?

Because other ‘Iraqs’ are inevitable we urgently need to build a workers’ movement which is independent of any liberal, pacifist agenda, and which is based upon a *fully* Marxist understanding of the current epoch and the tasks ahead of us ●

Derek Hunter

Eddie Ford



The SWP joins forces with liberals in the name of pacifism

United left response

The threat of a Gulf War III eventually produced a united response in Manchester, with the launch of a Coalition against War in the Gulf, after two previously separate campaigns joined together last week.

Public meetings had been called, by chance, on the same date, and at the same venue, by Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance, and by the Socialist Workers Party (jointly with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament).

Those attending the meetings needed little persuading that a united front was the most effective way to start to build a movement that can take on the warmongering Blair government. The 150-strong gathering agreed a strongly worded statement and went on to accept a programme of action commencing with a mass street meeting in the city centre. This was intended to build upon work done

over the previous four weekends, with the support of the GMSA, and upon the previous Saturday’s ‘Welfare not warfare’ activity by SWP. Plans for an immediate response in the event of a military strike taking place were also outlined, and agreement was given in principle to “direct actions” as appropriate.

The steering committee elected was dominated by the SWP, although the meeting did act to counterbalance this bias by deciding that future mass meetings would elect a chair on each occasion.

The need for such a check was demonstrated just two days later, when the first leaflet produced to list the forthcoming events included the SWP, but excluded Socialist Alliance speakers for the proposed rally.

At the close of the inaugural meeting, an impromptu march took place to the regional BBC studios. The

entrance hall of Broadcasting House was occupied and we demanded to be interviewed by the northwest regional TV news. Our protest agreed to disperse after receiving a promise of coverage of the anti-war movement. Readers will not be surprised to learn that, at the date of writing, the pledge remains unfulfilled.

On Saturday, about 70 people participated in the city centre street activity, with most of the left groups represented. The anti-war coalition showed that it is possible for the left to engage in joint work. It provided a forum for communist intervention, not only in order to argue for deeper, organisational, unity of revolutionaries, but for the perspective of working class hegemony as the only way to permanently defeat imperialist militarism and its high-technology barbarity ●