

Boycott Blair referendum

Government proposals for a strong London mayor and a weak Greater London Authority must be rejected

Tony Blair and his New Labour government are in the midst of carrying out a far reaching programme of reform from above. Though some, for their own narrow nationalist reasons, deny it, notably Scottish Militant Labour's Alan McCombes, there is indeed an evolving plan "to reform and modernise the union" (A McCombes *Scottish independence and the struggle for socialism* p6). Because it is so unpopular the constitutional monarchy system needs to be thoroughly 'updated'. In other words, change to prevent change.

Naturally there exists a complex inter-relationship between reform from above and discontent below. That explains why Blair does not merely want to overhaul and repackage the way we are ruled. He needs to win popular acceptance for and identification with 'cool Britannia'.

Scotland and Wales have already been successfully dealt with. The referendums on September 11 1997 gave the government an overwhelming majority in Scotland and a wafer thin one in Wales (since the 1970s discontent with the old constitutional arrangement was palpable and deep seated in Scotland). Edinburgh will therefore soon have its parliament, Cardiff its assembly. The House of Lords, proportional representation, the European Union and the single currency, Northern Ireland and the extended royal family are, as a recent editorial in *The Times* notes, all "elements" in a wide "modernisation project" (March 10 1998). So too is London. The May 7 referendum is designed to gain a mandate for the Blairite version of local government.

Compared with every other city in Europe local government in London is a farce. Since Thatcher abolished the Greater London Council in 1986, Londoners have been governed by some 60 shadowy quangos, 32 ineffective and squabbling boroughs and the City of London Corporation. Be-

hind the pomp and circumstance of the so-called City lies the interests of the banks, insurance companies and the stock exchange. A million people work within the 'square mile', but few if any live there. When it comes to the elections for the Lord Mayor and the City Corporation, money and invented tradition counts. What of the real city, the city of seven million in Greater London and the 12.5 million in Metropolitan London?

For London as a whole and its M25 environs there is no elected body to coordinate housing, health, transport, environmental protection, education or other vital matters. Neither the boroughs nor the quangos fight for the people. They are dominated by cabals of Labour and Tory politicians who, when not corruptly serving themselves, carry through expenditure cuts ordered by the treasury. Bankers, property speculators and contractors have made fortunes while services in London have deteriorated to the point of breakdown.

Rush hour travel by underground is a daily hell - the system is overcrowded and squalid. Roads are so clogged that the average speed at which traffic moves "has fallen to 11mph" (R Rogers and M Fisher *A new London* Harmondsworth 1992, p17). Streets are filthy with litter. Schools crumble. Hospitals are being systematically closed. Houses, shops, offices and factories lie empty. Young people beg by day and sleep in doorways. Women are frightened to go out alone at night. London is in visible decay.

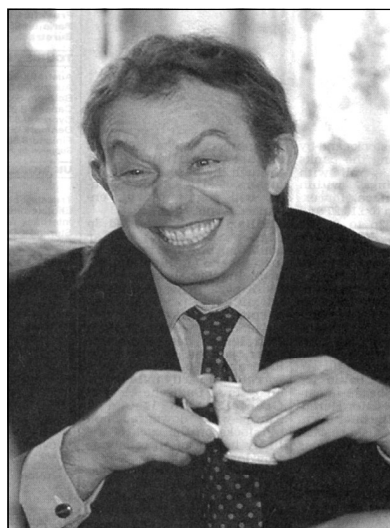
Blair says his strong US style mayor and a weak Greater London Authority is the solution. The idea is not only illusory but a travesty of democracy. To all intents and purposes Blair's London mayor would be a combination of an elected dictator and a puppet. He or she will have executive powers to "make things happen". The 'slimline' assembly can "question" the mayor's proposals and plans but do

nothing more than "disagree or suggest changes where necessary" (Department of the Environment *New leadership for London*, p3). But while the mayor will be all-powerful in telling the people of London what *cannot* be afforded and why they have to pay extra taxes, he or she will dance to the tune of big business and Whitehall mandarins when it comes to deciding lucrative contracts and dishing out public funds. Like every other 'reform' of local government it will not take long before general disillusionment sets in and another round of reorganisation becomes necessary.

Thanks to the ignominious collapse of 'municipal socialism' and the absence of a viable alternative to Labourism there is no mass movement in London, latent or otherwise, which at the present time is committed to, or yearns for something higher than the gimmick Blair has on offer. There is not even a sentiment for the return of Ken Livingstone's GLC. That does not mean communists and socialists should meekly or even 'critically' accept Blair's mayor and his GLA. Though that will surely be the position of the pro-Labour left - from the Socialist Workers Party to 'official communism'.

The May 7 referendum contains only one pre-set take-it or leave-it question. Hence the referendum is rigged in the classic manner of a Bonaparte, a Mussolini or a Hitler. It is a catch 22. To vote 'yes' is to vote against democracy. To vote 'no' is to vote against democracy. Blair's referendum is designed not to present and freely test all options before the people of London but to get the predetermined 'yes' result the government wishes for. Those on the left who stand for the maximum of democracy under capitalism have no official opportunity on the ballot paper to put their proposals forward and measure the support for their ideas.

The Communist Party of Great Britain has no truck with the status quo. Hence we do not want to be associated with any 'no' campaign. To urge a 'no' vote under present circumstances might easily be seen as support for the present system. We therefore call for a boycott of Blair's London referendum. Not on the basis of passively rejecting Blair's GLA. But positively on the basis of actively



Blair wants a London puppet

fighting for a London Assembly with real powers.

A London Assembly must be able to raise its own revenues. We are for a local income tax - tax the rich, no tax on the working class. The undemocratic City of London Corporation must be abolished. The London Assembly must have responsibility throughout the city as a whole for transport, planning, economic development and policing (the CPGB is for the disbanding of the brutal Metropolitan police and its replacement by an armed popular militia). We believe that all elections, including those to a London Assembly, should be on the basis of proportional representation. Those elected must also be recallable and subject to the supervision and criticism of council workers. They know what really goes on behind the scenes. The leader of the London Assembly should not be some tin-pot dictator. They must reflect and be chosen by the majority of elected representatives. We oppose fat-cat allowances and expense accounts. Unlike Labourites, Lib Dems and Tories, elected communists do not want to enrich themselves. They are committed to take only the average workers wage - no more.

Furthermore, because the May 7 referendum is an integral part of Blair's constitutional programme from above, we will make propaganda through our boycott campaign for an all-Britain constitutional programme that relies

on working class self-action from below. Democratic local government is only possible in the context of a complete transformation of the constitution.

Where Blair proposes to tinker with the constitutional monarchy system, we fight for the end of all hereditary privileges and undemocratic practices. That means the abolition not only of the House of Lords but the monarchy itself. Communists look forward to a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales. We are for the free unity of the peoples of Britain, not the unity of crowns. Scotland and Wales can then really have the right to self-determination - the right to freely determine their own relationship with the rest of Britain. Scotland and Wales ought to be able to separate and establish independent states. But they must also have the right to voluntarily unite with the people of England.

As we have argued before, boycotting a "rigged referendum" is "not the same" as boycotting normal bourgeois elections (J Conrad *Blair's rigged referendum and Scotland's right to self-determination* London 1997, p17). However much things are stacked against us in European, Westminster and local elections, our candidates have the opportunity to argue for, defend and test our programme of revolutionary democracy and socialism. Hence there is no contradiction between urging a boycott of the May 7 referendum in London and standing candidates for the local elections on the same day and fighting for a leftwing candidate for the London mayor if the referendum gives the government the 'yes' result it expects. The CPGB will indeed be standing candidates, including in London, on May 7. We also want voters to support candidates of the Socialist Alliance and all other socialists who stand on a principled platform (see back page).

Our boycott of the May 7 referendum is not merely due to some sense of moral disapproval, because it is rigged. Boycott of the May 7 referendum is a tactical question decided on the basis of concrete circumstances, not least the necessity of making propaganda for the democratic alternative to Blair's GLA and his reformed constitutional monarchy.

Jack Conrad

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Party notes

Don't get paranoid

I presented the March 8 members' aggregate of the Communist Party with the rough working draft of a Party security document. The production of this is long overdue. We have been talking about it for perhaps eight years or more. We have even included openings on the whole question to various schools we have organised, but until now nothing seemed able to induce its birth. A far more substantial draft for discussion has gone out in internal mailings to comrades this week with my apologies for its long gestation period.

Of course, no doubt there are comrades out there who would object to me even openly mentioning this fact. There is a certain brand of nervous hysterical posture that Victor Serge characterised as "conspiracy mania". One of the main points in the preamble underlines Serge's stand "against posing, adopting airs of mystery, dramatising simple events, or 'conspiratorial' attitudes" (V Serge *What everyone should know about state repression* London 1979, p57).

There is perhaps all the more reason to emphasise this fact given this reactionary period. A narrow obsession today with maintaining 'security' at the expense of our ongoing political work - even if born of a healthy desire to protect cadre during difficult times - would be in effect to do the job of the state's security services for them. Of course, they *are* plotting against us, but we shouldn't get paranoid about it.

As the draft document makes clear, our approach to this question is essentially political, not technical. Thus, we can - and should - all have a giggle at the expense of the 'secret squirrels' in our movement. These are comrades who think that they can fool the 'spooks' by putting on funny voices or - seriously - *whispering* on the telephone. If BT could install a handy volume knob on the handset for my old mam, I dare say MI5's budget may run to something even more sophisticated.

Thus, in any straight 'technical' duel between organisations of the workers' movement and these special departments of the state, we will always lose. But as the draft document underlines, "the ultimate guarantee of the freedom of the Party to make revolution is the correctness of its scientific world view and its ability to merge with the broad masses of the class. We thus guard against infiltration, state provocation and sabotage primarily through our open fight for correct politics".

I think we see a wonderful example of this if we look to the experience of the Russian revolutionary movement, in particular its Bolshevik section and specifically the brilliant career of one Roman Malinovsky.

A highly talented individual, elected to the Bolshevik central committee at its Prague conference (1912), Malinovsky went on by the end of that year to be elected to the tsarist дума. In 1913 he became president of the Bolshevik parliamentary fraction. At the same time, he was an *okhrana* (tsarist secret police) agent from 1910, the "pride of the service" according to Beletsky, the director of the police department (*ibid* p16). Of course, in such a prominent position he was able to betray scores of revolutionaries. Yet - and as Lenin pointed out in hindsight - through his дума speeches denouncing tsarism and his other mass work for the party, he 'made' tens of thousands of others, despite his intentions and those of his paymasters. In order to be a prominent Bolshevik, one that was "being groomed to be one of the leaders of the party" he had to promote Bolshevism. As Serge puts it, "when you have on your side the laws of history ... then you are invincible" (*ibid* p43).

And conversely, precisely because the organs of the bourgeois state are not - by definition - motivated by an understanding of "the laws of history" (or even of mundane, day-to-day revolutionary politics, normally), they are eminently beatable. For example, in 1914 the tsarist police department received information on worrying tendencies towards reunification of the Russian Marxists, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

They reacted energetically to this bad news. The intelligent but hapless Beletsky immediately dispatched a circular to his sub-directors of all investigative institutions instructing them to deploy their full complement of agents in the field to prevent this reunification.

Beletsky subsequently admitted using Roman Malinovsky to widen the split. "Beletsky's point of departure was that the threat posed by a revolutionary organisation was in direct proportion to its size. The police also arrested Bolshevik leaders who were seeking to reunite the RSDLP in the wake of the resolutions adopted at the plenum of the central committee in January 1910" (Nurit Schleifman *Undercover agents in the Russian revolutionary movement* London 1988, p21).

The well spring of Beletsky's political philistinism did not lie in his personal psychological profile, but in world view of the class that he served. The healthy functioning of a democratic centralist Party - animated continually by the open fight for revolutionary politics - generates what Paul Le Blanc calls the "anti-bodies" within itself to counter the infection of provocateurs" (P Le Blanc *Lenin and the revolutionary party* New Jersey 1993, p193).

It is this essentially political approach that comrades must always bear in mind as they come to discuss and suggest amendments to the draft security document before them ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Marxist forum

The first of a series of meetings planned by the Glasgow Marxist Forum took place on February 25 in Partick Burgh Hall. Approximately 30 people attended a discussion on the topic of 'what is socialism and how can it be achieved?', introduced by Hillel Ticktin.

Comrade Ticktin's introduction, based on his article in *Critique* 25, entitled 'What will a socialist society be like?', stressed that the demise of Stalinism and the decay of social democracy helps the struggle for the development of an authentic movement for socialism. He emphasised the international, democratic and egalitarian nature of the socialist project and the fact that the objective potential for the realisation of socialism was continuing to develop.

The objective tendency of society is towards a situation where machines make machines and thus towards the elimination of the law of value - ie, the move towards production to meet human need rather than production based on the extraction of surplus value from the proletariat. The representatives of capital attempt various delaying tactics to prevent the objective potential for socialism being realised but in the last analysis, barring a highly unlikely accident, socialism is inevitable. The bourgeoisie's delaying tactics can however cause immense suffering to the majority of the world's population.

After a lively discussion and many questions comrade Ticktin again stressed that the movement to socialism had to be international and although the working class could take power in one country, it could only successfully counter the forces of capital if the revolution quickly spread to take root in the advanced countries of the world. He also stated that the failure of the workers' movement to realise socialism was not simply a failure of consciousness or the subjective factor but was a result of objective features capital developed or supported in order to prevent the workers forming a collectivity - eg, imperialism, social democracy, nationalism, Stalinism, etc. These objective features or subjective features have prevented the working class from forming a collectivity. Since these features are in decline, the objective potential for the workers to form a class is again on the agenda. The formation of such a collectivity would sound the death knell for capital.

The Glasgow Marxist Forum was initiated by the Socialist Labour Party (Glasgow) and is jointly sponsored by the SLP and the Scottish Socialist Alliance. The purpose of the forum is to stimulate debate on the left and encourage working class activists towards a critical assimilation of the basic categories of Marxism in order to clarify the nature of the attacks we face from the forces of capital and identify the potential that presently exists to take forward the struggle for socialism. The forum is open to all those on the left who wish to engage in an honest debate on where we are and how we can move forward. The forum aims to meet on a fortnightly basis. A draft program of 16 discussion topics has been produced and it is hoped that relevant reading material will be made available prior to each meeting to encourage informed discussion.

The next forum is entitled 'The labour theory of value' and will be held on Wednesday March 25 in the Partick Burgh Hall at 7.30pm. The suggested reading suggested is chapter one of *Capital* volume I.

Sandy McBurney
Glasgow

Nation or class

If the majority of the Scottish people ever unambiguously support independence, no socialist would dream of standing against the tide. But what is being proposed by Alan McCombes, *Scottish Socialist Voice* editor, goes well beyond this.

The SSA is being encouraged to actively promote the independence option. I for one am far from convinced. Although I am opposed to this course of action for principled as well as tactical reasons, I will confine myself for the moment to the latter.

While Alan has denied (*The Herald* February 27) that his is a stages theory, one which would postpone the struggle for socialism until after independence is achieved, there is a logic underlying his position which would relentlessly push the SSA in precisely this direction.

We need to appreciate that while some of the elections we will be contesting will soon be fought under some limited form of proportional representation, many will not. Were we to adopt Alan's position in parliamentary by-elections and local council elections, our candidates would be condemned for splitting the pro-independence vote, handing victory to those people we ourselves have identified as the principle enemies of the Scottish people. This would be a charge our members would find impossible to refute. There would thus be intense pressure on our local branches to give the SNP a free run in many, if not most, seats.

Not only would we spectacularly undermine our ability to mop up the SNP's soft periphery, a layer which has gravitated towards them principally out of revulsion at New Labour, but also as a result of a decade plus of pre-Tony Blair Labour Party betrayals. We would also, insanely, be throwing hundreds of thousands of workers' votes, workers who ought to be our strong supporters, in the direction of the pro-independence party with the best prospects (in most cases the only credible prospects) of defeating New Labour candidates.

We would also be squandering the potential we once had to unite the anti-capitalist left. Arthur Scargill's SLP in particular is far less likely to respond positively to overtures for an electoral agreement with us. Sectarians within the SLP (whose grip, we must hope, is more precarious than it looks) would be delighted to see us turn our backs on, and hand them on a plate, the significant constituency of pro-worker, pro-common ownership socialists, which regards Scottish nationalism as an insidious poison dissolving bonds of solidarity between workers on opposite sides of some arbitrary border.

For so long as we maintain neutrality on Scottish independence, these workers can join us and vote for our candidates. If however we drop this neutrality, we will not just be throwing away an invaluable potential base of support, we will be helping to crystallise the present unhappy situation of having not one but two poles of attraction fighting each other for workers disenfranchised by Tony Blair's post-clause four New Labour. (It goes without saying, I hope, that by "neutrality", I am not suggesting we do not fight the irrational prejudices of Scottish workers who believe they cannot coexist peacefully, in a single state, with their English counterparts; nor am I arguing that if Scotland does become independent, we should bow down before this, acknowledging it as the "settled will of the people" rather than taking it as a stage on the road to a federal Britain.)

As if capitulation (unconscious though it undoubtedly is) to the present split in the socialist vote was not bad enough, Alan's proposal, should it become Alliance policy, will almost certainly prove a recipe for splitting our potential vote not just two ways, but three.

Since *Socialist Worker* supporters are probably just months away from entering electoral politics, this is hardly the time for the Alliance to refine its policies in a manner calculated to rule out their possible affiliation, or that of any other significant anti-capitalist force. This party (by far the largest on the far left) should face up to its responsibilities by playing a key role in pressurising Arthur Scargill to agree to the standing of a single socialist candidate, is in danger of being



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

pushed in an altogether less friendly direction. For a brief period they might be prepared to stand on the sidelines, satisfied with trying to play the part of 'king maker' by endorsing our candidates or those of our SLP competitor. Given however that they will be robbed of any influence in the selection of either set of candidates, or of our respective campaigns, this is most unlikely to prove a stable set of affairs. Sooner or later, out of exasperation at our mistakes, or what they perceive to be mistakes, they too will throw their hat into the ring.

There cannot be the slightest doubt that were the Alliance to follow the path proposed by Alan, the SWP will not long resist the temptation to transform the competition for the socialist vote from a two-into a three-horse race. This is turn will kill off, once and for all, the prospect of any of us making the major breakthrough we so badly need.

While a truce might *eventually* be reached by all three parties, it is impossible to predict in advance just how much time and energy will have been wasted in fruitless and bitter internecine warfare. And even if a truce is reached (and this is by no means a certainty), massive damage will have been inflicted in the interim on the credibility of all of us genuinely fighting for a non-sectarian alternative to all the pro-capitalist parties, north and south of the border.

All SSA members need to think very carefully before we abandon our original project of working for unity between the anti-capitalist left. *Socialist Worker's* editor could, incidentally, help us make the right decision by *immediately* confirming that the SWP will be standing candidates in the not too distant future.

Tom Delargy
Paisley

Dislocated

I want to thank Jack Conrad for his kind words (Letters, February 19), but flattery will get him nowhere in relation to the disputed philosophic issues.

Since Althusser it has not been possible to impose a single, monolithic or authentic reading of the Marxist text. There are no more innocent readings. A text is the site of contradiction and disputed interpretation. Indeed, this is why Jack Conrad disputed my particular reading of John Maclean at the 1997 CPGB summer school. He challenged my apparent imposition of left communist (Bukharinist) themes onto Maclean, with regards to the question of the Scottish workers republic. So how then do we evaluate between two competing views of the text? My own answer would be to suggest that what is principled and explanatory can provide the objective criteria without descending into relativism. Hence Maclean's call for a Scottish workers' republic is not a nationalist deviation and instead links with Luxemburg's perspective that no national question can be resolved outside of proletarian revolution.

The point can be illustrated most forcefully in relation to the Soviet party dispute about socialism in one country. Both Bukharin and Stalin were able to use articles and quotes from Lenin in order to prove he was a supporter of socialism in one country. Bukharin used the article 'On co-operation' and Stalin used the 1915 criticism of the slogan for a united states of Europe. Yet the result is a caricatured Lenin, a Lenin dislocated from his standpoint of world proletarian revolution. The point being made here is not that it is necessary to search for the authentic Marx, Lenin, etc, but rather how do we situate them in a manner which facilitates the most principled development of historical materialism and political practice.

Phil Sharpe
Nottingham

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From The Call, paper of the
British Socialist Party,
March 7 1918

Law and order in Ireland

The continual delay in meeting the just demand of the Irish people for the right of self-government is creating a situation of the gravest nature in Ireland.

During the last few weeks there has been a serious revival in cattle-driving, accompanied by sporadic attempts by the people in some districts to take actual possession of their country. The journalists call it land-grabbing.

It is important to note that these evidences of the subjection of a small nation were exhibiting themselves while the Allied 'socialist' conference was drawing up the charter of liberty for the small nations subjected to the rule of the Entente countries. Nothing is contained in their memorandum on the freedom of Ireland.

It is interesting also to compare the present condition in Ireland with the lurid picture which our press has been painting of the conditions in Russia under Bolshevik rule as a warning to the workers against any attempt to interfere with the established order.

The governing class can only maintain law and order by peaceful means so long as the people agree to be subjected to them. But immediately there is any sign of dissent, law and order exhibits itself in force and violence, which is met by force and violence, resulting in disturbances and disorder. Thus we have the extension of martial law in Ireland, as ruthless as in Alsace-Lorraine or Poland. If the ruling class would agree to get off the backs of the people quietly, order would always be maintained.

Sinister rumours are afloat as to the origin of some of the disorderly incidents. The Sinn Fein organisations are repudiating them, and there are hints in the press that they are instigated by enemies of the convention. That the Irish people in the main have no faith in the results of the convention is pretty evident, but they have nothing to gain by wrecking it in this way. The blame cannot rest on that side.

That reactionaries deliberately provoke disorder in order to prevent reforms is no new thing. But such tactics usually recoil on the heads of those who are preventing the settlement of the Irish problem. In doing so it would establish some belief in the purity of its motives in dealing with the world problem.

1918

Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

Roisin McAliskey

Straw concedes

After much protest - and outrage - the extradition order on Roisin McAliskey has been lifted. The daughter of the tireless republican activist, Bernadette McAliskey - former Independent MP for Mid-Ulster - Roisin has been the victim of state terror and inhuman vindictiveness.

After months of torturous deliberation by the British government, Jack Straw eventually decided to halt the extradition order so long hovering over her, on the grounds that she was suffering from very poor mental health and that any extradition order would be "unjust and oppressive". But she has to remain in hospital for further medical treatment.

Thanks for nothing. Roisin was arrested in November 1996 in Germany, on suspicion of being involved in an IRA mortar bomb attack on the British army base at Osnabruck. The evidence essentially consisted of one eyewitness and fingerprints on a cellophane wrapping. The eyewitness later retracted his statement on German television.

The treatment meted out to her ever since by the British authorities has been so severe that her health could be permanently damaged. She has developed osteoporosis (brittle bone disease) due to a stretch in solitary confinement - deprived of daylight, her body became chronically short of calcium. She has spent time in the Castlereagh 'torture centre', Belmarsh, and Holloway prisons. Last May, while on bail, she gave birth to a daughter, Lionir, which meant she was sent to the less than charming mother-and-baby unit at the Maudsley hospital. Strange that she now suffers from post-traumatic stress.

But Roisin is still being pursued. German prosecutors have demanded that Roisin stand trial in Britain. "We are requesting that the British take over the prosecution", said Eva Schuebel, spokeswoman for the Karlsruhe prosecutors office. However, the German government seems keen to close the book on the whole affair. Roisin's fate still hangs in the balance.

Her mother, Bernadette, was less than impressed by the British government's sudden display of humanitarian sentiment: "Roisin is ill and she is ill as a consequence of being arrested and detained in Castlereagh detention centre and being moved to Holloway and to Belmarsh and back to Holloway. My understanding from the home office is that my daughter is not expected to make a 100% recovery. Roisin's reality is that she may walk with a limp for the rest of her life".

The McAliskey's are now contemplating legal action for compensation.

Predictably - though not without some truth - loyalist politicians have been outraged, seeing Roisin's release as a crafty manoeuvre in the 'peace process'. Yet another 'concession' to Sinn Fein, who were just about to meet Blair. Ian Paisley (junior) of the Democratic Unionist Party spluttered: "I am totally disgusted but not surprised at this sop to the republican movement." Ken Maginnis in turn predicted: "No one will be surprised if she now makes a miraculous recovery".

At the end of last week, Gerry Adams told *Ireland on Sunday* there was no imminent prospect of the unification of Ireland. Instead he presented what has been called a 'wish-list' to Bertie Ahern, the Irish prime minister. Adams' conditions to agreeing to a political settlement include cross-border bodies with executive powers, the dismantling of the RUC, the withdrawal of the



US demonstrators demand the release of Roisin

British army, release of all republican prisoners, voting rights for Northerners in the Dail, etc. Some chance. Ahern has been sending strong hints to the British government - and the unionists - about 'altering' articles two and three in the Irish constitution, which claim jurisdiction over the Six Counties. Such a blunt abandonment of any hope for Irish re-unification would be very hard for Adams to swallow - and could serve to antagonise the republican rank-and-file in the catholic ghettos.

Sinn Fein plans to return to the conference table on March 23. Very conscious of Sinn Fein/IRA's grassroots supporters, Adams addressed a rally at Milltown cemetery in west Belfast to mark the 10th anniversary of the SAS killings of three IRA volunteers in Gibraltar. He said any deal would be regarded by Sinn Fein as purely an "interim agreement", concluding "republicans want to go much further and we will go much further".

Worried by latest events, the Loyalist Volunteer Force has issued death threats against protestants who collude in the 'peace process' - whoever they are. Nerves are fraying; a nice and neat imperialist-dictated 'peace' is far from guaranteed.

The Guardian is well aware of this. Its editorial talked urgently about how we are entering the "last and most crucial stage" of the 'peace process'. This is a reference to the British and Irish governments, which have pencilled in May 22 as the day for simultaneous referendums, north and south, which will either approve or reject the 'peace' settlement cooked up by the respective parties. The rules of the Irish constitution mean any referendum bill has to be passed in the Dail 30 days earlier. As *The Guardian* concludes: "So nationalists and unionists have perhaps six weeks to settle a war which has divided them for decades, even centuries ... No, the only peace worth having is an inclusive one - an accord respected by the representatives of the men of war ... The road to Northern Irish peace might just run through Dayton and Oslo" (March 9).

In other words, just as the new imperialist world order delivered 'peace' in Palestine, and flexed its muscle in Bosnia, so it thinks it can resolve the 'Irish question'. We are confident that the undefeated nationalist masses in Northern Ireland will prove to be no pushover. ●

Eddie Ford

Fighting fund

Open affair

Allegations of corruption, financial impropriety and dirty deals have been hitting the news over the last few days. Even 'Honest' John Prescott has been accused of being less than 100% straightforward when it comes to financial affairs. As mentioned in this edition of the *Weekly Worker*, he has been rebuked - mainly by that upstanding and decent Tory, Norman Fowler - for failing to register a £28,000 donation from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. The rules that govern these things forbid the beneficiaries from knowing the identity of the donors. Strange.

Well, that is certainly not the case with the *Weekly Worker*. We want to receive your donations but also hear from you, talk to you, and know you - whoever you are. (Of course,

if you want to send us cheques anonymously - or even set up a blind trust for us - feel free to do so). However, the *Weekly Worker* is not some semi-secretive venture which exists to pay our journalists but is an entirely self-funding paper that *openly* fights for our class and universal human liberation. You can guarantee that the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust will not be sending us £28,000 towards our cause. So, therefore, it is up to *you*.

Special thanks this week to the Manchester comrades who raised £150. Also thanks to JH from London (£5), RG from Cardiff (£5), and DH from South London (£20). Follow these examples and send us as much as you possibly can. So far, this month's total stands at £298 ●

Katrina Haynes

action

■ CPGB schools

London: The USSR: what was it? April 4-5
Communist University '98: One 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 workers and for more information contact the strike committee 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

National network meeting. Saturday March 21 - 10.00am-4.00pm at the Koco Buildings, Spon End, Coventry. Tel: 01788-569766.

■ South London Socialist Alliance

Election rallies
Thursday April 2 - 7.30pm, Old White Horse pub, 255 Brixton Road, SW9
Sunday April 26 - 4pm, The Brix, St Matthews Peace Gardens, Brixton Hill, SW2
0181-671 8036 for details

What have Hitler's SS, Stalin's henchman Yagoda, Carolyn Sikorski, Mark Fischer, and Lee Rock all got in common? I'll leave you to work that out while I proceed with the rest of the article. In *Weekly Worker* (January 15) John Bridge wrote a very good analysis of developments in the SLP and the split within the SLP Democratic Platform, which led to the exit and foundation of Socialist Perspectives. I found myself in agreement with about 98% of it. However at the end of the article he singled out one comrade, Lee Rock, for special criticism. In my opinion this was unfair and unnecessarily offensive.

I certainly do not write articles about everything I disagree with. There are not enough hours in the day for that. So John Bridge's offending paragraph would have passed by. Then Lee wrote in to *Weekly Worker* to complain (Letters, February 12). This was followed by a full page reply to Lee from Terry Watts (*Weekly Worker* February 26). This included a picture of Carolyn Sikorski with the sub-head, "Scargill's doorkeeper". This repeats John Bridge's line of argument, drawing a direct parallel between Sikorski and Lee Rock as doorkeepers. As a participant at the Reading meeting, I now feel I must comment.

First it is surely John Bridge who should reply to Lee's specific complaint, either with an apology or with further explanation or justification for the original comments. A reply from Terry Watts is all very interesting. But

In defence of Lee Rock

Jan Berryman responds to the criticisms levelled against a former SLPer in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*

he cannot sort out or solve the original complaint. Only John Bridge can do that. Worse still, if Terry Watts had been asked to reply on John Bridge's behalf without this being acknowledged. This would be more reprehensible. It would seem as if John started a fight and then retired to a safe haven, whilst employing some ruffian to do his fighting for him.

Let us begin with the offending quotation. After a reference to Martin Wicks "cultivating his own policeman" (implied reference to Lee), John Bridge goes on to say: "Carolyn Sikorski can serve as Scargill's Yagoda because of her knowledge and intimate contacts with the revolutionary left. In Socialist Perspectives that unenviable role is performed by Lee Rock - a man who previously defended communists with a degree of honour. Sad to say, he ensured that any communist who attempted to discuss the formation of a new grouping at the Reading meeting was fingered and excluded".

First there is a correction of fact.

John says that "any communist who attempted to discuss the formation of a new grouping was fingered and duly excluded." This is simply untrue as Lee pointed out. There were communists (ie, revolutionary Marxists), including Lee himself, who participated in the 'exit faction's' meeting. John Bridge and Stan Keable were not excluded because they were communists.

The *Weekly Worker* will not be able to find a single independent witness to support John's claim that he was excluded because he was a communist. Yet John has so far failed to correct his own false statement. It is possible that John and Stan were excluded because they were thought to be members of the CPGB. I say "possible" because this is conjecture not proven fact.

There is a clear difference between being excluded because you are alleged to be a communist or alleged to be a supporter of the CPGB. This is no minor quibble. Unless John takes the view that they are one and the

same? But that would betray a sectarian point of view.

Perhaps John's factual error was a slip of the pen. All the more reason to correct it quickly rather than employ Terry Watts to avoid it. To tell the readers of *Weekly Worker* that Lee Rock is anti-Marxist or anti-communist, when you meant to say he is anti-CPGB is an important error. We must place a high priority on the truth. John's statement was simply untrue. Whatever the reason for John and Stan's exclusion, it was not what was stated by John.

The second problem is that we are presented with the very powerful imagery of Stalin's secret police henchman Yagoda. Stalin's right hand man controlled the entrances to meetings. Yagoda, Carolyn Sikorski and Lee Rock are linked together. But why limit ourselves to only these three. What about the Gestapo or the SS who stood guard at the entrances to various prisons and concentration camps. What about Mark Fischer, who guards the entrance to CPGB seminars? What about other CPGBers who take a turn on guard duty? Is it really helpful to lump all or some of them together in a rather arbitrary way?

I have yet to hear of any organisation that does not have doorkeepers or stewards. Of course under commu-

nism not only will classes have been abolished but doorkeepers too. Anybody will be able to go to any meeting, anywhere time or place. Lee Rock and Mark Fischer are unfortunate to have been born in class society and not communism. Consequently they or their comrades may be called upon to act as stewards and doorkeepers. As such they carry out the policies of definite organisations.

It is the policy of a definite organisation that has to be examined. If Mark Fischer excludes someone from a CPGB seminar, it is reasonable to assume he is carrying out the policy of the CPGB and not doing so at his own whim. In case anybody believes that the CPGB practices total and absolute openness at all their meetings, let me assure you that I witnessed one person being physically ejected from a CPGB seminar (not by Mark).

Door keeping, like war, is a continuation of policy by other means. We should have started with policy, rather than personal criticism of Mark or Lee as Chief Door Keeper, Yagoda's younger brother or whatever. John was too busy having a go at Lee and getting carried away with his own anti-Stalinist polemics. He should have concentrated on seriously examining the policy decisions of the Democratic

Around the left Extending the witch hunt

Life in the SLP is certainly colourful. Just like the notorious 'Russian' labour dictator he seems to admire so much, Arthur Scargill has accumulated some strange and unexpected allies. Of all these lickspittle sycophants, none come much stranger than the ultra-Stalinite and homophobic authors of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*.

These converts to Scargillism - itself a unique cross between left social democracy, 'official communism' and NUMism - are masters *par excellence* of hysterical, sometimes near surreal, abuse and foaming invective. Our modern day, wannabe Yezhovs and Berias in the *EPSR*, naturally, are always desperate to do their master's bidding. To this end they will go for the jugular of anyone who appears to have incurred Scargill's displeasure, and hence earn some more loyalist brownie points. The latest target of *EPSR* wrath is the Fourth International Supporters Caucus and its cohorts.

The SLP's black section was Fisc's pride and joy. At its congress last December, Harpal Brar of the Indian Workers Association and editor of its Stalinite journal *Lalkar*, proposed that the black section be closed down. When Scargill pulled his 3,000 North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners' Association block vote out of the hat, it was curtains for Fisc's power base. They were shattered. *EPSR* was delighted, but now wants to broaden and intensify the witch hunt in order to safeguard and extend this 'victory' for the organisers of defeat. As it cack-handedly explains:

"Sinister agenda of middle-class individualism continues onslaught to prevent the SLP from being built, whipping up black nationalism and other reactionary liberalism to spread more insults and disinformation to damn unitary party discipline on sections,

democracy, card votes" (March 3). If only. By a splendid irony, the Fiscites have not started any campaign to abolish the block vote - or "card votes" as the *EPSR* puts it. Yes, turkeys do vote for Christmas. As we know, the first the "unitary party" knew about the NWCCMA block vote was on the first day of the congress. Pandemonium broke out. Congress dissolved into farce. Here we have the *EPSR*'s precious "party discipline".

EPSR continues: "The nonsense of 'left' black nationalism - the latest concerted Trot attempt to disrupt the building of the SLP - is simply proved by the near-feudal hierarchical exploitation rampant within ethnic minorities inside Britain. Conditions of hard-driven poorly paid factory work as bad as anything anywhere in British industry can be found everywhere, ethnic owners living wealthily off their 'own' ethnic workforce. And the same applies to all workers in the country, whatever their race or colour, or their majority or minority ethnic position. All are cheated or oppressed at some stage by the same capitalist system, whether on housing, jobs, pay, education opportunities, or whatever. And although the burdens of racist persecution and discrimination on top of routine exploitation make things far worse for minorities, the only answer for the whole working class is to get rid of capitalism."

Here we are treated to the *EPSR*'s essential economism - black workers should forget their specific experiences and specific oppression in British society. In many respects, this is a variant of the SWP's 'black and white unite' slogan. But at least the SWP's approach is not based upon obsequious toadying to the latest whims of the Scargillite leadership:

"The claims being made for black 'self-organisation' as a solution (as

opposed to working class self-organisation to abolish capitalism) - are a divisive reformist delusion. Separate black organisations within a class party for socialism *weakens* the struggle by dividing the forces and feeding illusions that boosted-ethnic pride and cultural-identity will have such an appeal that they will make the trouncing of capitalism that much easier and sooner.

"But this is a diversion which has already failed within each community. If anything, the record shows that it is too much concentration on ethnic questions which conflicts with building up a class party across all divides with which to overthrow the capitalist system which is oppressing everybody. Many ethnic communities lack nothing in being culturally 'self-organised'. In general, such social structures tend towards a class-colaborative political influence rather than promoting the philosophy of class war, working class against the bourgeoisie, including black and Asian working class against black and Asian bourgeoisie ...

"The SLP is currently being targeted for abuse by the ideological culture of black nationalism and its supporters among the white fake-'lefts' petty bourgeoisie [ie, Brian Heron, Carolyn and Patrick Sikorski, etc - DP]. Up and down the country, Trot opportunists are subverting the agendas of womens' groups, education forums, etc, in order to launch wrecking attacks on the immediate past decisions of SLP congress, one enlightened aspect of which was to discontinue the divisive practice of organising the party along separate racial lines via the so-called 'black sections'. Black middle class opportunists [eg, Imran Khan, Roshan Dadoo, Trevor Wongsam, etc - DP] are in uproar over this, having seen the SLP as a possi-

bly ideal political-career vehicle noting that Diane Abbot, Paul Boateng and Bernie Grant have already captured these positions inside the Labour Party, and in view of Blairism rapidly becoming unpopular with the working masses, giving a new left party a chance for political success."

Yes, it is true that "up and down the country" Fiscites like Roshan Dadoo and Trevor Wongsam have been visiting constituency SLP's, promoting their case for the reinstatement of the black section.

"Trot individualism and opportunism argues that it is the absence of 'black self-organisation' from the SLP (as from society itself) which would impose 'ghettoisation' on black SLP members (as on blacks in society itself). It argues thus out of a petty bourgeois belief in the brilliance of individuals as the making of society, or the guaranteed triumph of any political party, etc ... The talk of being 'ghettoised' within the SLP gives the game away. Either it means that the SLP is itself incurably racist (continuing the notorious slander in the black sections pre-congress leaflet, augmented by the renewed slur that a black section-less SLP can 'no longer represent black people adequately') and can therefore never succeed as a party of socialism. Or it means that certain black individuals are not going to get the chance to star in the SLP as anticipated - with the same consequence of the SLP therefore failing"

As we have said in the *Weekly Worker*, under the aegis of the 'black members group', Dadoo, Wongsam, etc, have argued for the absolute necessity of the black section in order for the party to be relevant to the black community in Britain. It should be added that the 'black members group' is unconstitutional.

"The Trotskyite wish for special leadership representation without which it is claimed the SLP cannot possibly speak for black people is just pure petty bourgeois conceit, and not even black nationalist petty bourgeois conceit as its 'excuse', since the SLP has black leaders anyway. Leadership ambition is normal. Ultimistic leadership ambition is crass. Ultimistic black leadership is crass black nation-

alism. No workers' party needs such handicaps". The Fiscites dramatically withdrew themselves as NEC candidates on the first day of the SLP's congress, only to pathetically climb-down on the second. Now it seems the *EPSR* faction wants Scargill to witch hunt them.

"And the SLP is not a federated party either, in spite of what other destructive Trot attacks from within Socialist Labour try to pretend. Women [but not black people it seems - DP] get together because of special organisational problems; affiliated trade unionists develop industrial policies, and come the closest so far to work place branches. Constituency parties are the best organisational structure for tackling the daily living problems of capitalist democracy for the moment. Why would separatist ethnic organisation stop at just black sections? If that was the way to better black SLP recruitment, then would not Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, etc, all be better organised separately too for better recruitment? And why stop there, why not separate sections for the Irish, for Greek Cypriots, for Turkish Cypriots, etc etc? To ask the question is to give the answer to this bureaucratic schematicism seeking idiotic short-cuts through the very hard and conscientious graft of communist party-building.

"The insulting slanders against Socialist Labour by the black sections-agitators are just ruthless and philistine opportunism by petty bourgeois careerists and their like-minded middle class friends, guilt-ridden over white imperialist injustice but subjectively horrified at the thought of real communist revolution in Britain ... and [is] no use to the SLP".

Political psychoanalysis, *EPSR* style. The author of this "separate and distinctive propaganda" - as the SLP constitution bluntly puts it - is none other than ... Royston Bull of Stockport SLP and failed candidate for Pat Sikorski's post of vice-president. No pen name, no pseudonym. Bull must be very confident that the witch hunt in the SLP is not going to be a permanent state of affairs and that he is always going to be in favour with Scargill ●

Don Preston

Platform, the 'exit faction', the CPGB, *Marxist Bulletin*, SLP Republicans etc. Then we would have got a more rounded view of the truth.

Let us begin with the policy of the Democratic Platform. The platform had no elected leading committee. Martin Wicks was acting secretary. As a proxy leadership, we can take those comrades who stood for the NEC - Martin Wicks, Lee Rock, Terry Burns, Chris Jones (Republican), Chris Earswell, and Terry Pearce. At SLP congress it was decided by a meeting of rank and file supporters of the platform to hold a meeting in London early in January to decide what to do after SLP conference.

Of the leading six, three decided to leave the SLP and three were opposed to that. The 'exit faction' planned to set up a new socialist group for those who wanted to leave. The 'exit faction' (comrades Wicks, Rock and Pearce) decided amongst themselves to hold the meeting in Reading, in defiance of the previous democratic decision. Comrade Wicks then tried to impose a certain agenda on the meeting which would have been helpful to his own faction. These decisions were undemocratic and opposed by comrades Jones, Burns and Earswell and myself.

One option was to hold an alternative meeting in London in line with the previous democratic decision. It was felt that this would defeat the object of the meeting. We were determined to meet the 'exit faction' and try to persuade them to stay in the SLP.

Nevertheless the stage was set for a fairly acrimonious meeting. Fortunately common sense prevailed and a compromise agenda was agreed. The vast majority of the Democratic Platform realised that a split was inevitable and wanted to maintain good relations afterwards. The agreed agenda began with a debate for staying and building the SLP versus leaving the SLP. Afterwards an indicative vote would be taken. The meeting would then split into two. Those remaining in the SLP would meet to discuss the way forward for the SLP. At the same time the 'exit faction' would meet to set up their new group. After we would reconvene as one meeting to discuss future cooperation.

This plan was known to all participants at the meeting. *Marxist Bulletin* and the CPGB were not formally part of the Democratic Platform. In the case of the CPGB, it is an independent organisation and not a faction of the SLP. There was no reason to consult with the Provisional Central Committee. This did not prevent the PCC from writing to Martin Wicks and putting forward objections. They did not do so.

The planned structure for the meeting was known and accepted by all participants. Nobody objected at the start of the meeting to the structure of the agenda. The meeting therefore implicitly endorsed the plan around which the pro and anti-exit factions of the Democratic Platform agreed. No SLP member, voided or not, was excluded from the meeting. Everybody present was allowed to speak and vote.

When the first part of the meeting finished, there was a break, after which it was agreed to convene the separate meetings. *Marxist Bulletin*, SLP Republicans, some independents, plus those sympathetic to the CPGB, agreed to meet in one room. The reason for this was definite policy. The CPGB, *Marxist Bulletin* and the SLP Republicans were in favour of staying in the SLP and were totally opposed to other comrades leaving to form a group. We were not in favour of disrupting or breaking up the other meeting. This would have been wrong in principle and counter-productive in practice.

It was suggested to me in the break that Stan and John try to go to the

other meeting. I mistakenly went along with that on spurious libertarian grounds - 'If they will let you in why not?'. This was an error on my part that I freely acknowledge. But this in itself should not have been a problem. A polite request to attend and an acceptance or a polite refusal should surely have been the end of the matter. I did not realise that John would present the resulting refusal publicly in the *Weekly Worker* as an anti-communist plot, masterminded by Lee Rock, the jack-booted henchman of Martin Wicks.

The reason for the exclusion of Stan and John was in line with pre-agreed policy. The 'exit faction' were more than generous. They allowed John to address the meeting as to why they should be allowed to attend. This was despite the fact that the SLP Republicans, *Marxist Bulletin* and the CPGB were totally opposed to what they were doing. The 'exit faction' then voted unanimously to ask them to leave. As far as I know this was carried out democratically and politely on all sides.

I am well aware that some members of the 'exit faction' are anti-CPGB and possibly one is anti-communist. This may have clouded their judgement. But Lee is neither anti-communist nor anti-CPGB. He disagrees with the CPGB, holding different views on programme and tactics. Whatever the disparate motives of various individuals in the 'exit faction' they were united on a common policy to hold separate meetings. This was accepted by SLP Republicans, *Marxist Bulletin*, independent lefts, all the Democratic Platform candidates, the 'exit faction' and as far as we can tell the CPGB.

We are not trying to guess what is in heads of each individual member of the 'exit faction'. We are dealing with the policies of definite organisations. Had Lee turned up to attend our meeting, I would have had no qualms about excluding him on the grounds that he was in favour of leaving the SLP. We did not hold our 'stay in the SLP' meeting in Reading for a general chat with Tom, Dick and Harry, but for the serious business of planning future work in the SLP.

Neither the SLP Republicans nor the *Marxist Bulletin* sought to disrupt the 'exit faction' meeting that day. Despite the fact that Martin Wicks had behaved in a provocative fashion in the run up to the meeting, it was not our intention to reply in kind. We need to ask the PCC about their policy. Did they oppose the split into two meetings? Did they intend to disrupt the 'exit faction' meeting. Was it their plan to stage a provocation, ie try to enter the meeting knowing that they would be excluded, and then make political capital out of this by singling out Lee as a Stalinist and witch hunter? We need some answers from the PCC.

The 'exit faction' now call themselves Socialist Perspectives. The acid test of whether this is a sectarian organisation is not that they wanted to hold their own meeting. It is how they relate to other organisations on an open and honest political basis or on a petty bourgeois prejudice - 'We don't like this or that group so we are ignoring them'. The real test for Socialist Perspectives is whether they can establish proper political relations with the CPGB. If I was a betting man it is a test they will fail.

Unfortunately John's offending paragraph does not help. It gives them an excuse. So I hope that this matter can be quickly sorted out by John. His article would have been better without that paragraph. Of course everybody can get carried away with the power of their own polemics. I include myself in this. But equally we need to be able to recognise this and have our feet sufficiently close to the ground to know when we get it wrong. What John said against Lee was offensive. But the real problem is that it was not true ●

Simon Harvey of the SLP London manifesto conference cancelled

The special London regional conference to decide upon the SLP's London manifesto for the upcoming May 7 local elections has been called off. The meeting was to have been held this Saturday, March 14. A recent meeting of the London committee considered submissions and amendments to the manifesto.

No substantive reason for cancelling the conference has been given. In its place, the London regional committee, with delegates from London constituency SLPs, will finalise the SLP's local election manifesto. Bearing in mind the deliberations at the last regional committee meeting, it is likely that the manifesto will be little amended.

The SLP will be left with an election document in London which is bordering on the apolitical. Instead of a militant action plan for the people of London to take collective control of their own lives, we have a 'blue print' for a 'better managed' city. As I mentioned in a recent *Weekly Worker*, the SLP will not even be campaigning for socialism, but will go to the electorate on the slogan, 'For a fair, safe and beautiful city'. Given such an anodyne message, I would not be surprised if local CSLPs add a little spice to the campaign by developing their own, socialist, platforms.

■ Marxist Bulletin abandons fight

The SLP's self-styled, home-grown revolutionaries, the *Marxist Bulletin*, have resigned from the party. They look set to publically form yet another Trotskyite grouplet with its really-really correct programme. What a pity. Despite coming from the ultra-sectarian world of the Spartacist League/International Bolshevik Tendency, through engaging with a real political process in the SLP, many of the *Marxist Bulletin* comrades seem to have been developing in a partyist direction. It will be interesting to see how they develop - if at all - from now.

Even so, not all supporters of the *Marxist Bulletin* have resigned from the SLP. The supposed reason for this is that those remaining members are involved in branches with a degree of life and activity. But I do wonder if the recent split in the IBT over whether to be neutral to, or oppose, the Maastricht treaty may have more to do with it.

Much of the critique of the SLP in their resignation letter is correct, of course. But it did not take the *Marxist Bulletin*'s airing of these grievances to make us see the light. Just as I asked comrades from Socialist Perspectives, I now ask the *Marxist Bulletin* comrades: where are you going to? In their letter they state:

"Marxists, and all those committed to a socialist future, must look elsewhere for joint activity, discussion and debate". Firstly, where? This is not made clear. And secondly, why resign from the SLP in order to develop "joint activity, discussion and debate" with other socialist forces? Surely they are not mutually exclusive.

These comrades are stuck in a sectarian world outlook which prevents even the slightest critique of their 'parent body' in the public domain - ie, in

front of the working class. All differences are to be hidden, but when they inevitably force themselves into the open, a split is the outcome.

Comrades, we will never build a mass party of the most militant, revolutionary and committed workers with such a method - whether it be around your or some other particular credo.

Open letter of resignation

March 4 1998

Dear Arthur Scargill,

This letter is the joint resignation of the undersigned comrades from the Socialist Labour Party.

As supporters of the *Marxist Bulletin*, we have always declared our support for the aims on which the SLP was founded - to build a party capable of destroying capitalism and instituting socialism. We have participated fully in party discussions on how to achieve this aim, and in building the party as a step towards that, for over two years.

Your break from the Labour Party and call to form a new party was a courageous step forwards. It opened up a political space in the British workers' movement and contained the potential for a real break from the Labourism that has long handicapped our movement.

Since then, however, you and other members of the SLP leadership have systematically set out to destroy the potential which the creation of the SLP represented. You have imposed your own programme on the party. You have set up a maze of petty, contradictory and impractical organisational obstacles to a dynamic internal life - based on a constitution which the membership has never had a chance to vote on, or even properly discuss.

At the party congress last December this process came to a head. The congress voting structure, based on tenuously established Constituency Socialist Labour Parties, was overwhelmed by a sudden and undemocratic block vote which rendered the political views of every constituency activist in the party virtually meaningless. We were expected to endorse the constitution and the leadership's arbitrary rulings without discussion. It was a tragic moment for the working class when the majority of the delegates at the congress did exactly that. We can no longer be part of this process.

We no longer believe that building the SLP is a step towards a socialist society. The SLP in its present form is a barrier to the British working class building a party that can really struggle for its interests. We cannot take responsibility for this. We cannot continue to recruit good comrades to this fiasco. We cannot continue to sell a newspaper which endorses this.

We find ourselves in a position where we are no longer proud to describe ourselves as members of the SLP.

Since the congress we have published an issue of *Marxist Bulletin* analysing events at the congress. We have spoken to a wide range of SLP activists from across the country and across a spectrum of political views.

We find that many of the principled militants who joined the SLP are leaving in disgust. Others retain their membership but are sorely disappointed in their party and have little hope for its future.

We say to those militants that remain in the SLP: comrades, you are wasting your time. The party was worth something once, but that potential has been destroyed. We have a better chance of building a mass working class party that can fight for our interests if we are outside the straightjacket of the SLP.

Many past and present members of the SLP will play an important part in the future of the British workers' movement. But the SLP is no longer the arena in which they can do so. Marxists, and all those committed to a socialist future, must look elsewhere for joint activity, discussion and debate.

The need for a working class alternative to Blair's Labour Party is stronger than ever. The need for a party with a Marxist programme that can lead the working class to victory is an absolute necessity. The Socialist Labour Party is neither.

Supporters of the *Marxist Bulletin* will be establishing a group outside the SLP. We will be working for the same objectives and arguing for the same programme as we did inside the SLP. We look forward to continued work with any comrades who wish to build a real, revolutionary, alternative to Labourism and with broad layers of individuals and groups on specific issues where we have agreement. We will engage in and encourage the process of political debate the SLP has stifled - the programmatic struggle necessary for the future of the working class.

Socialist greetings
Ian Dudley, Barbara Duke, Alan Gibson, Gary Henson, Christoph Lenk, Gill Plimmer

■ 'Black nationalist Trots'

I had to laugh. The latest issue of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* is yet another piece of frothy, sociopathic venom. Reading a standfirst attacking "petty-bourgeois individualist Trot wreckers" in the SLP, I was sure I knew who or what the target was - the CPGB, yet again.

I was wrong. Yet, I still could not quite work out what this mysterious "Trot" force is, travelling the country, wrecking SLP meetings, putting glass in the butter, arsenic in the tea, arguing for the return of the SLP black section etc. Royston Bull, unashamed author of the article, is usually not one for withholding the identity of the target of his spleen. But this time he is staying uncharacteristically mum.

So, who are they Roy? Surely, you aren't attacking our recently elected Fiscite vice president Pat Sikorski, or his comrades-in-deceit, Brian Heron, Carolyn Sikorski, Roshan Dadoo and Trevor Wongsam?

Of course not, that would be taking internal differences into the open - something king Arthur does not approve of. And the SLP leader must always be right, just as the *EPSR* can never be wrong. Welcome to the world of the (ex, of course) 'International Leninist Workers Party' ●

*Morning Star strike***Reluctant Griffiths forced to debate**

The Communist Party of Britain held a rare public meeting on March 5. According to district secretary Anita Halpin, it was the CPB's first in London "for a very long time". Despite its title, 'How to stop New Labour,' it in fact served as a rally to support one side in the factional war in progress in the CPB - and a pitiful mobilisation it was, given that "the very survival of the *Morning Star*" (Griffiths), on which the future of the CPB depends, is at stake. Attendance rose gradually throughout the evening from an initial 28 to, eventually, just over 50, with the Hicks-Rosser-Corry faction not showing a single face let alone raising a voice.

Perhaps I should remind *Weekly Worker* readers that public meetings are, in general, dangerous for the CPB. There is a risk of real debate, of comrades thinking for themselves and challenging the unreal, and nowadays ridiculous, dogmas of 'revolutionary' reformism. The fragile unity of the CPB, protected from uncomfortable truths by the soothing hand of the *Morning Star* editor, may be easily shattered. Therefore the CPB only risks public meetings when the differences endemic to such an opportunist organisation inevitably erupt into open conflict. Then public discussion becomes unavoidable. Suddenly, we are offered the rare opportunity of at least a glimpse at what CPB comrades really think - an opportunity not to be missed!

Instead of turning the meeting over to a political discussion on how the *Star* came to be in danger of extinction and how to save it, as would be logical, general secretary Griffiths pretended he was addressing a routine meeting criticising the New Labour government. Only after a turgid hour of this did he reluc-

tantly raise the *Morning Star* dispute, because "there may well be some discussion comrades want to have on that question." In other words, CPB members wanting to confront the schism in their organisation is a bit of a nuisance.

At question time the proposal was made that, since the *Morning Star* portrayed itself as "the paper of the left", its columns should be opened up to "all shades of opinion on the left". In this way the whole of the left could be mobilised in support of the *Star*. Unfortunately, the proposal did not meet with the approval of the platform. Claiming the *Star*'s letters page under Haylett's editorship "stands in stark contrast to the Chater regime", Griffiths doubted whether the features pages should be opened up to the kind of "views which sow disunity and confusion, to absurd, inaccurate gossip". The foolish example, our verbatim report of Ken Livingstone's early day motion against John Haylett and the *Morning Star* strike (*Weekly Worker* March 5). We believe this sort of factual information is needed by workers, not least in order to help them identify Livingstone as an opportunist and careerist. Patronisingly, Griffiths thinks this sort of information, freely available to journalists and 'leaders' of all kinds, will divide and confuse his rank and file. Perhaps he is right.

Far from seeking discussion, Griffiths tried to dampen it down. "I shall continue to do everything I can do - not necessarily things that can be discussed in a public meeting - but everything possible to help to bring a principled solution to this dispute which will ensure that the *Morning Star* comes out again." The role of CPB members, in his mind, is that of an unthinking rank and file, to be mobilised as voting fodder when called upon - nothing more.

Not able to identify the political causes of

the conflict in the CPB, Griffiths merely complained that the suspension and sacking of editor John Haylett, a member of the CPB political committee, was carried out, not only "in a disgraceful fashion, tearing up trade union agreements," but also "in an almost clandestine way, with none of the consultation that should take place between communists and comrades before taking such a drastic decision which anyone could have foreseen would place the existence of the *Morning Star* in jeopardy."

Whereas the overriding duty of the management committee of the Peoples Press Printing Society, the cooperative which owns the *Morning Star*, is "to ensure that the paper comes out every day", the striking journalists, on the other hand, "are carrying out their duty to defend their rights and to defend the rights of working people everywhere".

Mother of the *Morning Star* NUJ chapel Amanda Kendal waxed eloquent about the change which has come over the CPB, which has "altered out of all recognition" since Rob Griffiths replaced Mike Hicks as general secretary. "We are now seeing leadership where we did not see it before," she says. Paradoxically, she also praises the CPB for "not interfering," for "not trying to take over the dispute" from the NUJ. The CPB's "solidarity and support has been magnificent."

Leadership of a kind has, of course, been given to the *Star* strikers. But it has been trade unionist, not communist, leadership. Treating the conflict as a mere industrial dispute, holding the paper to its disastrous pro-New Labour path, even if Haylett wins his reinstatement, means, is sooner rather than later, condemning it to death ●

Ian Farrell

Open letters

The CPGB PCC has written to the NUJ *Morning Star* chapel and the CPB executive committee, declaring its support for the strike aims

NUJ *Morning Star* Chapel
Wednesday March 11 1998

Dear Comrades,

The Communist Party of Great Britain fully supports the current strike action by *Morning Star* journalists for the immediate reinstatement of sacked editor John Haylett and in defence of their rights as workers.

We recognise the self sacrifice of comrades who choose to work for a pittance at the *Morning Star* as their personal contribution to the workers' movement. If *Morning Star* journalists and employees failed to stand up for their own rights as workers, they would be incapable of fighting for workers' rights elsewhere, and their self sacrifice would be rendered meaningless.

In solidarity, we wish to offer the NUJ *Morning Star* Chapel space in the *Weekly Worker*, for the duration of the strike, to report developments, argue their case and mobilise support for their action.

Yours in solidarity,

Ian Farrell

for the Provisional Central Committee

Communist Party of Britain Executive Committee

Wednesday March 11 1998

Dear Comrades,

The Communist Party of Great Britain welcomes the replacement of Mike Hicks by Robert Griffiths as general secretary of the CPB, in the hope that this signifies a step away from the bureaucratic suppression of differences of opinion, towards a more open regime in both the CPB and the *Morning Star*.

The sacking of editor John Haylett has placed in jeopardy the very existence of the *Morning Star*, established and sustained by the hard work and self sacrifice of generations of communists. We call upon the CPB executive committee to recognise the need to open the columns of the *Morning Star* to all shades of opinion on the left, so that it can truly become "the daily paper of the left". On this basis, all sections of the left could be drawn into the immediate struggle to save the paper from extinction, and then to sustain and develop it as a weapon in the class struggle.

As a gesture of comradeship, and as an encouragement to pursue the path of openness, we offer the CPB executive committee space in the *Weekly Worker* to make use of as it sees fit, for so long as the *Morning Star* is not available to it.

Yours in comradeship,

Ian Farrell

for the Provisional Central Committee

■ Strike social

Cuban music from Club Clandestino on Friday March 13 at 8.00pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1
£5/£3 (Holborn tube).

■ Mass picket and lobby

Morning Star management committee hear the appeal of sacked editor John Haylett 10.30am Saturday March 14 at 1-3, Ardleigh Road, Islington N1 4HS
Highbury tube (plus 20 minutes walk).

■ Strike HQ

Donations, support and info: NUJ *Morning Star* Chapel, 422, Kingsland road, London E8 4AA. Tel: 0171-254 5000 (Fax: 5151).

■ Communists and parliament

A modern introduction to the crucial question of communists and elections is Jack Conrad's *In the enemy camp* (November Publications 1993, 142pp, £4.95 - available from the CPGB address).

CPB: still loyal to Blair

Isn't it time to reconsider our relationship to the Labour Party as identified in the *British road to socialism*?" This was the first question put to Robert Griffiths at the CPB's London public meeting on March 5. The questioner had left Labour for the CPB, only to find herself in a Labourite 'Communist Party'. "It is really a self-defeating argument for recruiting into our party," she continued, "to project the idea that those who are in the Labour Party *should* be working to make it a more socialist organisation."

While another recent recruit from New Labour protested that the CPB leadership "doesn't understand how much the Labour Party has changed," industrial organiser Kevin Halpin stubbornly repeated the fading mantra that "Labour is still the mass party of the working class".

Griffiths, unfortunately, displayed the most abysmal pro-Labourism. Whether the class struggle rises or falls, whether socialist consciousness develops or withers - either way, this "will be" reflected in Labour's fortunes in parliament. Evidently not in the way Griffiths imagines. The 1910-1914 upsurge in the class struggle, for example, saw a turnaway from Labourism by militant workers. ILP branches declined. After the strategic defeat of the 1926, the Labour vote doubled. In more recent times the miners' 1984-85 great strike took place in the teeth of Labour Party opposition and sabotage. The anti-poll tax movement likewise. Certainly neither the defeat of the miners nor the victory by the anti-poll tax movement was *positively* reflected in Labour's "fortunes in parliament".

Nevertheless Griffiths makes parliament the focal question of class struggle. Hence despite his assertion of the primacy of extra-parliamen-

tary over parliamentary struggle, he could not imagine the British revolution except through the medium of a left Labour government. Though he claimed not to be in "the business of predicting" how a revolutionary "scenario would actually unfold", mass struggle would "always" be channelled into the Labour Party. Therefore the CPB is "against disaffiliation".

"If the major trade unions in the TUC ... decide to endlessly cover up, make excuses for or even agree with the class collaboration approach of the rightwing Labour government ... and the left can't shift them from it, then how on earth can we imagine that that trade union movement is going to disaffiliate from the Labour Party and help to build some kind of left or socialist alternative? If, on the other hand, large sections of that movement are prepared to go into struggle, they don't need to disaffiliate from the Labour Party to do that."

Paul Corry's fear (*Weekly Worker* February 26) that the Griffiths faction favours ditching the old Labour Party and building something new, seems to be quite unfounded. Unfortunately, both factions of the CPB leadership are steeped in the congenital pro-Labourism of the *British road to socialism* programme. "If there is a potential for struggle," Griffiths explained, "it will be reflected not just in the labour movement, it will be reflected in the Labour Party... Our [CPB] position is to be there when that struggle is fought, with our left allies, doing what we can to support them insofar as that battle is reflected in the Labour Party."

Although "ultimately" the decisive battles in the class struggle "will be decided outside parliament", nevertheless they "will be reflected in parliament, unless Britain embarks on a completely new course and breaks from all previous

habits, traditions, loyalties and so on... How could we imagine, in foreseeable circumstances, that there could be a mass struggle outside parliament, a mass movement led by the working class, but nobody goes out and votes Labour? Of course, when the struggle reaches a significant level it is going to be reflected at the ballot box."

This parliamentarian 'common sense' (or cretinism, as Lenin called it) should leave CPBers - members of a 'Marxist' party, according to Griffiths - feeling a little uneasy. Marx and Engels, like Lenin and the Bolsheviks after them, were opposed to parliamentarianism. Likewise, the resolutions of the first four congresses of the Comintern (ie, during Lenin's lifetime) confirm the communist view that parliament, as part of the bourgeois state apparatus, must be smashed by the revolution.

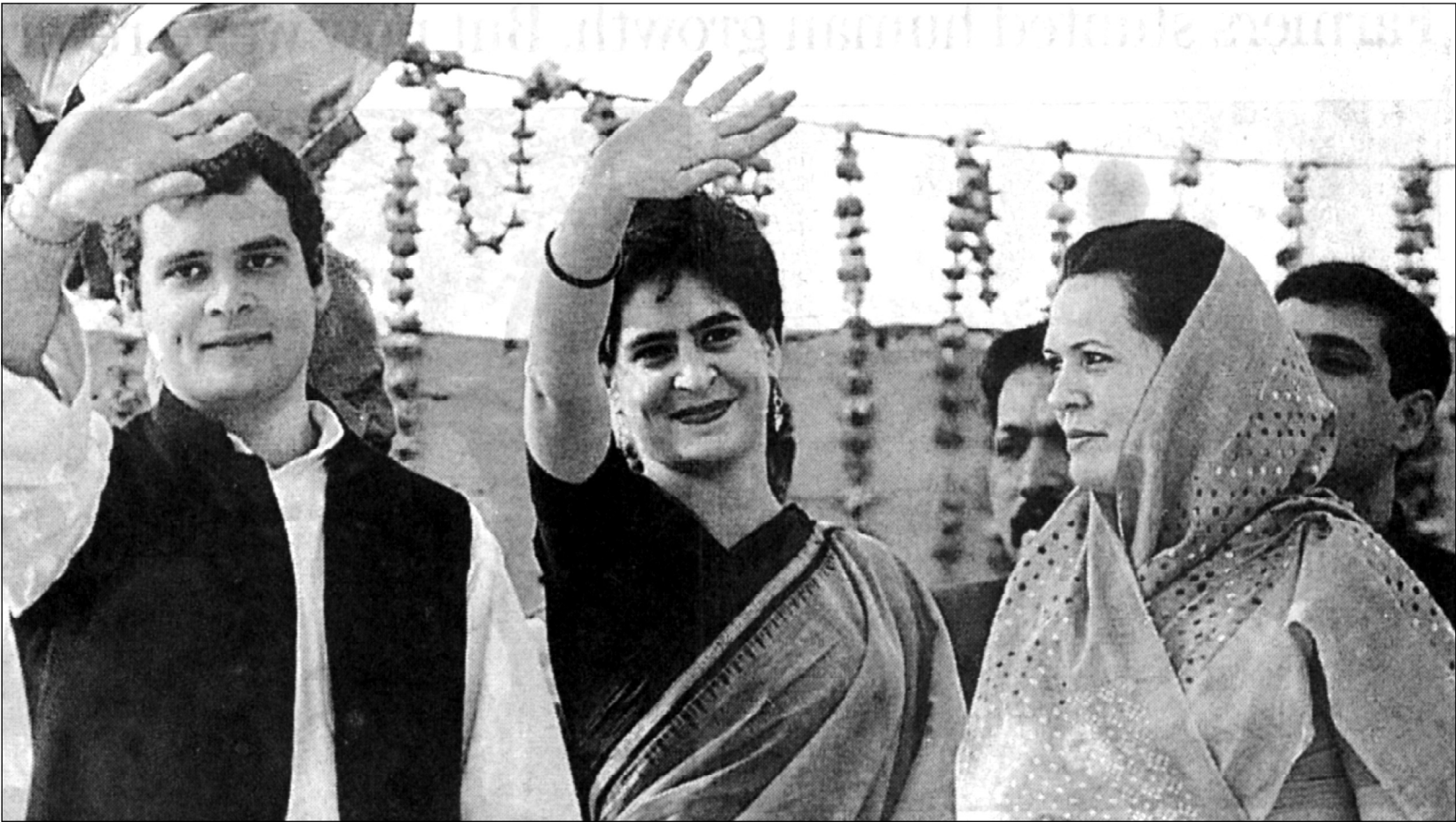
Of course, the Bolsheviks stood candidates, even for the tsar's sham parliaments - but they did so in order to put before the masses their *revolutionary, anti-parliamentarian* programme. The *BRS* view that revolutionary mass struggle must be channelled into parliamentary struggle in order to fulfil itself ultimately means, despite Griffiths' denials, that mass struggle is subordinate to parliamentary struggle. It shows no appreciation that when the chips are down, when faced with a real revolutionary situation, a general election is precisely the weapon of counterrevolution, not of revolution. Against the revolutionary masses moving into collective action, the bourgeoisie appeals to the passive, atomised - and therefore conservative - mass of voters, subject to the sway of the mass media, to block and confuse the revolutionary upsurge.

In 1968, DeGaulle successfully defused the revolutionary situation in France using the general election tactic. A revolutionary Communist Party might well have been correct to boycott such a counterrevolutionary general election, just as the Bolsheviks did in 1905 - an approach which Griffiths "cannot imagine" ●

Ian Farrell

Indian elections

Reaction fills the gap



Family affair: Sonia Gandhi (right) on the campaign trail with her children, Rahul and Priyanka

Backwardness and regionalism have emerged as clear winners in India's recent elections. As horse-trading continues apace, the smaller, religious and regional parties are placing their imprint on whichever party is asked to form a minority government by president Narayanan. That task looks almost certain to fall to the hindu-nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party and its leader AB Vajpayee.

And a minority government it will be. The BJP and its allies have won 251 seats on the Lok Sabha, India's 543 seat lower house. Deals with smaller independent forces seem unlikely to take the BJP over the 272 seats required for a majority. Congress and its allies have 168 seats, while the former United Front government has been reduced to 97 seats.

For most of the 90s India has endured unstable governments built on dubious coalitions. Less than two years ago, the BJP formed a government which lasted a mere 13 days, pulled down by the collective efforts of Indian National Congress and the United Front, a coalition of convenience which includes regional secular parties as well as the Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist).

The 1996 elections saw the formation of a United Front government

which relied upon Congress support. Withdrawal of this support led to these most recent elections.

In order to form a government, the BJP will need to curb the more extreme elements of their programme, such as its economic isolationism, anti-islamism and plans for an open nuclear weapons programme. Many of their potential coalition partners rely on maintaining harmonious relations with muslim forces at state level.

Within this context J Jayalalitha, leader of the AIADMK party in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, is emerging as a key player. Jayalalitha and her smaller regional allies have taken a crucial and unexpected 30 seats in the Lok Sabha. Her demands to the BJP include sacking of her opponents from government in Tamil Nadu and protection from the many corruption cases pending against her. She is emerging as the king maker, but insists she will not form part of the government.

In contrast, Congress has been courting the UF and its constituent parties to form a government around a secular platform against the BJP's rampant hindu-nationalism. Prospects for this are slim, as many of the regional players in the UF see Congress as the main enemy. The irony that it was Congress which forced this election, and the instability of another

Congress-UF alliance, will not be lost on president Narayanan, who must appoint a government by next week.

Amidst all this back-room dealing, Congress's octogenarian president Sitaram Kesri has resigned, with pressure being placed on Sonia Gandhi - wife of assassinated prime minister Rajiv - to replace him. A continuing Gandhi-Nehru dynasty, though by no means universally popular, is one of the few remaining symbols of stability and continuity left for Congress.

So what is going on? For 45 of the 50 years since independence, India has been ruled by the Indian National Congress. Its stable centre government was the mainstay of India's post-colonial development. While regional disputes raged in the Kashmir and Punjab, war ever occurred with Pakistan and China, and the military intervened in Bangla Desh and the Tamil war in Sri Lanka, Congress, under successive leaders of the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty, maintained and developed a fragile Indian national identity.

But to what extent can we speak of India as a nation? Its hundreds of languages and religious and ethnic centripetal forces all suggest a myriad of nationalities which predate the imperial-colonial construct that was the Raj. Moreover as the *Economist* notes: "In recent years, Indian politics has been breaking up, as Congress's decline has enabled smaller parties based on caste, region and religion to spring up" (March 7-13). In the main, most of these parties have not been separatist. Again, the *Economist* identifies the main vote-winning gambit of these forces is 'Vote for me, I'll give you more subsidies'.

During the cold war, Congress tried to portray India as a neutral nation, but aligned more to the USSR than USA. With the collapse of the USSR and the subsequent shifts in the Middle East and South Asia, the basis for India's supposedly 'third-way socialist', secular, post-colonial identity evaporated. With it, Congress has withered. Previously, Congress was able to manage the centripetal forces

through subsidy, patronage and its direct control of foreign investment. With the neo-liberal wave washing through the sub-continent in the early 90s, such possibilities were no longer within Congress's reach.

In place of the 'third-way' facade which Congress tried to maintain, the BJP has a decidedly reactionary hindu-nationalist outlook. Coming to international prominence in 1992, BJP supporters razed the mosque at Ayodhya, claiming it as a sacred site of the hindu god Lord Ram. Building a temple on the ruins remains a plank of the BJP's manifesto. Other aspects include replacing the personal law of muslims and other minorities with a common civil code, a rampant economic nationalism which calls for stringent curbs on foreign investment and a bellicose military policy which aims to take India's long-standing nuclear weapons programme into the open. While the BJP may have to temporarily curb the more extreme elements of this programme to form a government, it will attempt to build on its recent successes to push through its agenda which is based on prejudice, ultra-nationalism and the reactionary caste system.

Whatever the immediate outcome, India looks set for a continued period of instability at the centre. Such instability provides both difficulties and opportunities for socialist forces. It must be remembered that India is one of the few countries where mass communist parties are a reality, albeit with programmes laden with the nationalist-socialist legacy of 'official communism'. Nevertheless, the working class and its peasant allies have by no means been wiped off the political map as is the case in so many other countries.

Yet the failure of independent working class politics to come to the fore in India has partly paved the way for the BJP's hindu-nationalism to fill the gap opened up by the fading fortunes of Congress. But the millions upon millions of workers and poor peasants remain a powerful force ●

Martin Blum

What we fight for

- Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.
- The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers' movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.
- Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.
- We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.
- The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single Party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.
- Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs: ie, communism.
- We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.
- War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world's problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

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

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

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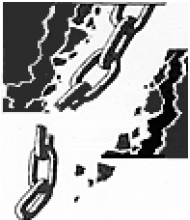
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CPGB London seminar series

March 15: Towards a class theory of the state using Hal Draper's 'Karl Marx's theory of revolution: state and bureaucracy' as a study guide.

March 22: Socialism and dictatorship using Hal Draper's 'Karl Marx's theory of revolution: the dictatorship of the proletariat' as a study guide.

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



While New Labour fiddles, the left prepares to fight

London Socialist Alliance press release

Socialist challenge to New Labour in London elections

The newly formed London Socialist Alliance has announced that it intends to stand over 100 candidates against New Labour in the forthcoming London council elections.

The Alliance is a broad based democratic organisation which has brought together leftwingers from across the capital who are disgusted with the policies of Tony Blair's New Labour Party.

In recent years Labour councils have forced through massive rises in Council Tax and rents, introduced changes in essential services such as meals on wheels, homecare and day centres. They have sacked thousands of front-line staff and closed down hundreds of vital community services.

In the past it was easy to blame the Tory

government for these actions. Now that Tony Blair is in power these excuses cannot be used. Yet the attacks on vulnerable Londoners continue.

The LSA says enough is enough. Its time to fight against the cuts and present a genuine working class alternative. This is why we are contesting the elections - to offer working class people throughout London the opportunity to vote for real socialist candidates who will fight to defend their interests.

The Alliance has the backing of Euro MEPs Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr ●
For further details contact
Southwark councillor Ian Driver on
0171-701 8090 or Anne Murphy on
0973 231 620.

Draft minimal electoral platform submitted for discussion by the London Socialist Alliance

Where no Socialist Alliance candidate is standing, we urge voters to support any candidate who can support the following minimum demands. Anyone that cannot do so deserves no support from the working class:

- Democracy: there must be the fullest democracy in society. All elections should be on the basis of proportional representation. No to Blair's London Mayor - yes to an elected assembly. All hereditary privilege in the constitution must be ended. The monarchy and the House of Lords should not be reformed. They must go. The people of Scotland and Wales must have the right to self-determination - the right to determine their own relationship with the rest of Britain. Oppose separation - yes to the voluntary unity of the peoples of Britain in a federal republic.

- Ireland: no to Blair's 'peace process'. Britain must unconditionally withdraw from the north of Ireland, leaving the people of Ireland free to determine their own future.

- Minimum wage: the minimum wage should not be set at what Blair says this decrepit, anti-working system can afford. Workers needs at least £285 for a maximum 35 hour week in order to live decent, dignified lives.

- Pensions and benefits: older people are treated as excess baggage. After a lifetime of work, they must have the right to full lives with access to all the necessities of the modern society that they have helped create. Pensions and all other basic state benefits should be set at the level of the minimum wage.

- Unemployed: no to 'welfare to work'. Ob-scenely, the unemployed are blamed for being unemployed. In fact, capitalism produces unemployment and all parties - not least

Blair's New Labour - which defend capitalism share blame for the plight of the unemployed. Benefit should be set at the level of the minimum wage. The unemployed must be guaranteed a full life whether or not the bosses can employ them profitably.

- Anti-trade union laws: nothing indicates more starkly the anti-working class nature of Blair's Labour Party than the decision to retain the Tory's draconian anti-union laws. Trade unions - the basic organisations of self-defence of the workers - must be free from state shackles and interference and be democratically run by the workers themselves.

- Women: for real not just legal equality between men and women. Women must have real control their own bodies. There must be free abortion and contraception on demand. The state must provide free 24 hour nursery provision. There must be moves towards the socialisation of housework.

- Immigration: the product is free so should be the worker. Commodities move freely around the globe in the pursuit of profit. Workers should also be free to move wherever they wish. No to all immigration controls.

- End discrimination against homosexuals and lesbians: no to discriminatory legislation such as the age of consent. For the right of gays and lesbians to adopt children.

- Transport: in the major cities - not least in London - people are charged exorbitant prices for substandard, antiquated and overcrowd transport. Coordination is nonexistent. The system must be integrated and buses, trains and the underground must be provided free of charge. Mobility is a right for the able-bodied and disabled alike ●

Resolution on London referendum unanimously agreed by CPGB members' aggregate March 8 1998

1. Blair's proposals for a powerful directly elected mayor and a weak Greater London Authority are an integral part of his project of reforming the constitutional monarchy system. However unlike Scotland there is no mass movement in London, latent or otherwise, which is committed to, or yearns for something higher. There is not even a sentiment for the return of the GLC.

2. The May 7 referendum, because it contains only one pre-set take-it or leave-it question, is rigged, designed to get the 'democratic mandate' the government wishes for. Those on the left who stand for the maxi-

mum democracy under capitalism have no official opportunity to test support for their ideas through the official referendum. The CPGB will therefore call for a boycott of Blair's London referendum.

3. Boycotting a rigged referendum is not the same as boycotting normal bourgeois elections. There is no contradiction between urging a boycott of the May 7 referendum and standing candidates for the local elections on the same day nor fighting for a leftwing candidate for the London mayor if the referendum gives the government the 'yes' result it expects ●

New Labour, new corruption

Almost every day sees an example of New Labour's determination to reshape Britain from above. Last Wednesday the Institute for Public Policy Research, a 'left-of-centre' think tank, published a pamphlet on local government. This pamphlet called for full-blooded town hall reform and warned councils to "embrace radical change" or be pitilessly swept aside. The author of this pamphlet? Tony Blair.

The bellicose tone - and intention - of the IPPR pamphlet was clear. Blair and the New Labour team are definitely *not* Old Labour. Old Labourism will not be tolerated - even if it means resorting to suspiciously Tory-sounding rhetoric and means to combat it. As Blair explains: "If you are unable or unwilling to work to the modern agenda, then the government will have to look to other partners to take on your role ... And, if necessary, it will look to other authorities and agencies to take on duties where an authority is manifestly incapable of providing an effective service and unwilling to take the action necessary to improve its performance."

The pamphlet also outlined a very New Labour, New Britain vision. Castigating the remoteness and incompetence of local government, Tony Blair mooted the idea of citizens juries, the holding of referendums on controversial issues, the introduction of postal ballots, and so on. He also emphasised that local government should separate the executive role from the representational role: directly elected mayors, the abolition of many committees and the strengthening of the role of backbench councillors would all help towards this goal. In other words local government is to be further de-democratised albeit under the guise of democratisation. Big business and New Labour corruption will have a field day.

Hilary Armstrong, the local government minister, has just unveiled a new pro-business ethic in local government services - the so-called Best Value standard. She also proposed "tough penalties" for councils that failed to deliver the 'Best Value'. This was a theme repeated in a recent government consultation paper. Failing councils will be forced to hand over control to "other authorities and agencies" - ie, external management teams, or "hit squads", will intervene, in a manner similar to the one proposed for schools. Government ministers have insisted that the changes will not necessarily mean fewer services being contracted out to private providers. Of course not. This is the New Labour 'alternative' to the deeply resented - Tory introduced - system of compulsory competitive tendering of council services. As Armstrong was at pains to stress, all these reforms were about putting "local people in the driving seat".

Unfortunately for Blair, there is already a strong whiff of New Labour corruption in the air. This week we have seen the 'John Prescott' scandal - John Prescott *junior* that is, as well as senior. Allegations of corruption, dirty deals, smears, cronyism, etc, have been levelled against Hull council and the local Labour Party - which amounts to the same thing, with Hull being an archetypal Labour 'one-party state', with its near stranglehold - 58 out of 60 seats - over the council going back to the year dot. Hull is, of course, John Prescott's constituency.

Suspicion lurks around a housing deal involving his own son, Jonathan. Houses said to be derelict and worth up to £500,000 were sold by North Hull Housing Action Trust for £108,000. They were sold to Wyke Developments, a company for which Jonathan works and part owns. Jonathan claims to have "stood well back" and

said his father knew nothing. However, a public inquiry inspector stated that most of the houses earmarked for demolition - of which there was a total of 630 - were sound and well-maintained. To some ears the whole venture sounded like a get rich quick operation.

The scandal does not end there. Indeed Hull - which has a council leadership which speaks enthusiastically about its pace-setting partnerships with private developers, has been shrouded in sleaze for some time. John Black, senior councillor, chair of the housing committee, principle powerbroker and a long standing friend of Prescott's, has been the subject of a police investigation into £42,000 of civic hospitality claimed when he was Lord Mayor. The stories about Hull council and Black are very lurid, and are suggestive of *The Godfather* in places. Claims of bogus membership, fraud, corruption, intimidation involving late night phone calls, punch-ups, etc, are normal. In turn, Black has spoken of a hate campaign against him, which at one stage involved excrement and rotten meat being shoved through his front door. Whatever Blair might say, very New Labour.

As if all that were not enough, Norman Fowler, has lodged a complaint with Sir Gordon Downey, the parliamentary commissioner for Standards, against Prescott for failing to declare a £27,750 donation for political research from the Joseph Rowntree Trust in 1996. Prescott put the Rowntree money into his blind trust - thus contravening the supposedly strict rules on blind trusts which forbid beneficiaries from knowing the identity of the donors. Prescott's trust gave money to fund a commission he established to report to him on regional development issues (Margaret Beckett has also been challenged to close her personal blind trust which funds her office).

Stung by these accusations, Prescott told *The Times*: "I do not know who it is or why they are doing it. But for the last few months people have been trying to blacken my name, and is time to say something about it. It is a vendetta. Somebody wants to get me". Prescott's paranoia is not without foundation. Last year his garage in Hull was broken into and old computer papers - mostly containing financial details - were stolen. Dustbins have also been stolen. Regular anonymous calls by people making allegations - false or otherwise - to newspapers. Someone even telephoned Prescott's bank manager trying to find out details of his account. Rumours persist that 'anti-Prescott' councillors commissioned a shadowy organisation called Research Systems to dig the dirt on Prescott.

Whether there is a "vendetta" or not against Prescott (junior or senior), and whatever the exact truth is about Hull council, we can smell the sewer that is New Labour. But this is still petty corruption compared to the *big* money that is attracted to Blair. We have seen how the wealthy - such as Bernie Ecclestone of Formula One fame - now have instant access to Number 10. Instead of small fry expenses fiddling and subsidised trips abroad under 'town twinning' schemes, the top Blairites mix easily with high-powered Japanese businessmen and City types.

Blair's sanctimonious crusade against Old Labour - such as in Glasgow - cannot disguise an essential hypocrisy. Underneath the 'clean' rhetoric we can see an authoritarian, statist and anti-working class agenda. Bureaucrats, careerists and agencies, "local" or not, will continue to rule *over* the working class - and still have a price tag on their foreheads. But 30 pieces of silver are no longer anyway near enough ●

Paul Greenaway