



Reclaiming our rights

Trade union bureaucrats are not so happy with Blair now - but they distrust the rank and file far more

As the Socialist Labour Party initiated 'Reclaim our rights' conference convenes this weekend, leaders of some of Britain's biggest unions are threatening - in word if not deed - to do battle with Tony Blair's anti-working class New Labour government.

In a speech to the Trades Union Congress women's conference on March 12, TUC president, and general secretary of the General, Municipal and Boilermakers, John Edmonds, talked of mobilising huge demonstrations, matching the recent Countryside Alliance rally - should Blair renege on Labour's manifesto commitment on union recognition.

Then, last week, Transport and General Workers Union general secretary, Bill Morris, stated his intention to call for an emergency TUC congress should Blair's proposals, to be published in a white paper in June, favour employers. Morris's militant talk came after TUC leaders met Blair on the issue, and was immediately backed by Ken Jackson, leader of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union, and Lew Adams, of the train drivers' union, Aslef.

The pledge to create a statutory requirement for an employer to recognise a union, where a majority vote for it in a ballot of the workforce, was the thin sugar coating on a general election manifesto which affirmed that the key elements of the Tories' anti-union legislation of the 1980s - on ballots, picketing, and industrial action - would stay. In an election campaign during which Blair made it clear that New Labour was now "the party of business", he made great play of the fact that, even after all his proposed legislation had been enacted, Britain would still have the most restrictive trade union laws in the western world. Taken together with all

Labour's other promises to attack the working class on behalf of capital, Blair's commitment to continue the Tory subjugation of the unions was crucial in securing the backing of key sections of big business for a New Labour government to replace John Major's deeply divided Tories.

Now, Blair's capitalist backers, quite understandably in view of the current balance of class forces in Britain, see no reason why any concession should be made to a pathetically weak and ineffectual trade union movement. The Confederation of British Industry is pressing Blair to water down his union recognition proposals to a point where some existing recognition agreements could be undermined. The CBI's main demands are: that a majority of the whole workforce which is eligible to vote, rather than a majority of those voting, should be required in recognition ballots; that all firms with fewer than 50 employees should be exempted from the legislation; that industrial action in recognition disputes should be outlawed; and that the employer shall decide which groups of workers are to be balloted.

The union leaders fear that Blair favours the CBI view. Seeing how he is the leader of the "party of business" this is hardly astonishing. According to *The Guardian's* labour editor, Seamus Milne, writing on March 17 1998, Morris has suggested that the views of press baron Rupert Murdoch may have been particularly influential with Blair. Murdoch's News International led the way in the 1980s, driving the unions out of what was then Fleet Street, and it would not be keen to see union recognition at its Wapping plant.

From the perspective of effective trade union organisation, statutory union recognition procedures are un-



Morris: hollow threats

likely to be at all useful. The evidence from the USA, where such a system exists, is that most recognition ballots are lost, and that recognition campaigns have often been accompanied by the targetting and victimisation of union activists. Such procedures are no substitute for building workplace organisation, and actually exercising the right to strike from a position of strength - including solidarity action - law or no law.

The union recognition proposal, together with Blair's pledge to introduce a statutory minimum wage, the level of which is to be decided "according to the economic circumstances of the time, and with the advice of an independent Low Pay Commission", was necessary in order to at least show a semblance of a difference between Labour and Tory on industrial relations. It was also necessary to allow the supine trade union bureaucracy to maintain an iota of credibility. To the latter, who are confronted by the loss of 5 million members in the last two decades, statutory trade union recognition is a necessary complement to the "social partnership" agenda, as the bedrock of their desperate survival plan.

The alternative strategy, that of smashing the anti-union laws

through making propaganda and preparation for a generalised working class political and industrial offensive, is of course unthinkable to the bureaucracy, since it would mean a head-on clash with the New Labour government. Given the build-up of discontent from below - for example on London's underground - here is Scargill's opportunity.

The thinking of the trade union bureaucracy was illustrated in the exchanges in the letters page of *The Guardian*, immediately following the ending of the Liverpool dockers' dispute. Answering charges that the TGWU leadership had betrayed the dockers by refusing to either mobilise, or to sanction, support for them, and to simultaneously launch an assault on the anti-union laws, Bill Morris suggested, "That the dockers' solidarity and resilience did not succeed in securing their just demand for reinstatement is down to the most repressive anti-union laws in the western world, not the T&G ... The view that victory could have been achieved if only the T&G had been prepared to ignore the law and put the entire union at risk is a fantasy, disproved by the history of the last 20 years" (*The Guardian* January 30 1998).

Possibly because he viewed Morris's contribution as being open to criticism from the right, TUC general secretary, John Monks, weighed in with the following, "No union today is going to ignore the boundaries of the law. That is because they know from the 1980s what happens when you do ... No group of workers can expect to take action in breach of the law and then expect their union to ride to their rescue. To act unlawfully immediately gives an employer, set on union busting, a golden opportunity and, as at Liverpool, such employers are quick to take advantage ... The future of unions depends neither on lawbreaking nor on selling insurance. Our job is to work in partnership with good employers to expand opportunities and improve rewards for their employees, and to take on the bad employers, showing that unions can make a real difference to the way that

people are treated at work" (*The Guardian* February 4 1998).

Monks has already described his philosophy, entitled 'New Unionism', as being based upon "unions becoming part of the solution for companies coping with change and competitive pressures". This is unashamed *business unionism* and you can guarantee that its champions are not going to confront the government with demonstrations of Countryside Alliance proportions, nor take any such militant action. We can be fairly certain that backroom contacts are continuing between all three parties aimed at producing some face-saving compromise for Monks and co.

Will the 'Reclaim our Rights' conference then, become "the beginning of an historic trade union initiative to repeal anti-union laws" and "the start of an organised fight back against the damage done to workers and unions by years of savage legislation" as its organisers, SLP national executive committee members, Bob Crow and John Hendy QC, promise (*Socialist News* April-May 1998)?

Eight national trade unions have backed the conference, together with a flood of regions and branches, the *Socialist News* article tells us. But the term "conference" appears to be a misnomer. The event is clearly a rally, with a lengthy list of platform speakers, headed by Tony Benn MP and of course SLP general secretary Scargill. There is no facility for participating organisations to submit resolutions on the way to build the movement that will be required to confront the state. It seems unlikely that anyone on the floor of the "conference" will have any opportunity even to speak.

Probably the true purpose of the event is to try to rebuild the somewhat reduced political stature of Scargill. The type of working class organisation that can smash the anti-union laws will have to be fully democratic and accountable. We need a National Militant Movement of the rank and file not a jamboree of the left talking Labourites and trade union bureaucrats ●

Derek Hunter

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Party notes

Leaving the Party

I regret to inform comrades of a number of resignations from our organisation over the recent period. While the number is not large, significant comrades have gone. In particular, I wish to concentrate on the departure of our two leading members in Scotland, a loss that represents a serious setback for the work of reorganising the Party. In effect, this temporarily stops our *practical* intervention in a very fluid and potentially rewarding political situation. There exists a layer of supporters, but for the moment we can do little more in Scotland than make propaganda through our paper.

In all forums that have discussed this situation, a deep sense of regret has been palpable. Not only for the Party, but for the individual comrades concerned. The departees have raised no principled or programmatic differences with the majority of Party members. In fact, when confronted with criticisms, the comrades have been at pains to emphasise their *agreement*, that disagreement is that of nuance or style.

Thus I remind readers - and the comrades themselves - of their shocked outrage when accused by comrade Jack Conrad of "pessimism" and "liquidationism" (*Weekly Worker* October 23 1997/November 13 1997). These charges were "aunt sallies", "red herrings", a "phantom" of Jack's febrile imagination (Nick Clarke and Mary Ward *Weekly Worker* November 27 1997). It is tragic that the comrades now negatively confirm Conrad's characterisation by dejectedly resigning, without a political fight, thus liquidating an important arena of Party intervention in the process.

None of these comrades can really expect sympathy for the manner of their leaving, but we are not sectarians who brand every resignation a desertion by 'traitors'. Sadly, these comrades have 'betrayed' themselves - who they once were, what they once stood for - rather than the Party.

Fundamentally, what we are seeing is the surrender of communists in a period of reaction. We have consistently warned of this problem and even suggested that we were "perhaps a little blasé with our characterisation" ('Party Notes' October 16 1997). The problems that the Party is currently facing up to underline how wrong it was of some comrades "to believe that our correct characterisation of the period renders us immune to its corrosive effects" (*ibid*).

The loss of our ability to practically intervene in Scotland is a major setback and we should not underestimate its potential effect. Now, whatever the abstract strength of our arguments against Scottish Militant Labour's growing nationalism, the McCombes leadership is able to point to the implosion of one of their most prominent opponents as evidence against the fight for all-British unity. The SML leadership, as astute opportunist politicians, were aware of the tensions between the Provisional Central Committee and its Scottish comrades and had already attempted to utilise them. Therefore, our forced retreat is a gift to SML and provides further ammunition to the national socialists in its ranks.

And this at a time when the rifts are beginning to open up between SML and the London leadership of the Socialist Party. At its last National Committee meeting, SP's Lynne Walsh denounced moves for a breakaway in Scotland, complaining that he has not spent decades building a national organisation to see it destroyed by petty nationalism. Walsh - number two in the organisation - would not have made such a move without the approval of Taaffe and the SP's leadership faction. Thus - at last - the SP leadership appears to be moving into battle against the nationalist drift of SML. This is bound to produce tensions and opportunities within SML as well as the SP. The chance for a positive resolution in Scotland - without the conscious, organised intervention of communists - is now more difficult however.

Over the years, we have seen too many times comrades leave saying 'we have no political differences' only for a self justifying 'theory' to be conjured up subsequently. Nevertheless a retrospective rationalisation of deeds carries little weight, however. I believe that the comrades are well aware that their course of action is unjustifiable. That is why they are actually - incredibly - telling others to "stay in and keep struggling" even as they attempt to justify surrendering to the perverted morality of bourgeois society. That is why they evidence a pronounced reluctance to even speak to the leaders of our organisation.

There are already some common themes of criticisms emerging at least in outline form. These are:

- The "rampant optimism" of the PCC, notably leading comrade, Jack Conrad;
- That we are attempting to "run before we can walk";
- That we have the name of the Party, not the reality;
- That practical tasks "get in the way" of the education of our comrades, so vital in this period of reaction.

Were these criticisms 100% correct - and they are not - none justify abandoning the project of human liberation. The weaknesses of our organisation are very easy to point to, far harder to produce collective, communist solutions for. It is deeply disappointing that instead of trying to engage critically with their comrades in order to produce such a collective analysis and plan of action, the comrades now seem to be parroting the arguments of those who have *defined* themselves historically by their *opposition* to the fight of our organisation. They also seem to have adopted the method of such groups - practical abstention from the fight to reforge the Party in the here and now.

We will do our utmost to maintain relations. They will be treated firmly, but comradely. Their place is in the Party, warts and all, theirs and ours ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Rough neck

I did not reply to Terry Watts ('Clique politics' *Weekly Worker* February 26) quite deliberately. It was not because his article was without merit. On the contrary, he made some valid points about the SLP left. But I was not prepared to be diverted from the main point at issue - the truth of the Stalinist-Yagoda-police-doorkeeper-Sikorski-Rock thesis, and of course John Bridge who lit the blue touchpaper and then retired.

I notice that Terry Watts is more polite. He only connects comrade Rock with Sikorski. Yagoda seems to have been dispatched to the dustbin of history. Better still if John puts the whole thing in the same bin.

My main point was that we are dealing with the policies of definite organisations and their leadership - the Democratic Platform, SLP Republicans, *Marxist Bulletin*, the 'exit faction' and supporters of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Colin Ansell accepts there is a difference between "legitimate exclusions" and "witch hunting exclusions" (*Letters Weekly Worker* March 19). He claims that I obscure the difference. On the contrary, it is Colin who does this. He simply deals with individuals and not policies. His evidence is all about Lee and whether he was rude, threatening, or accusatorial. Surely all doorkeepers are like that. It is part of the job specification.

Apparently Lee stated ("accused") that Colin was a member/sympathiser of the CPGB. This does not tell us why he was excluded. Was it because he was a suspected member of the CPGB or because the 'exit faction' excluded all who were for staying in the SLP. This included the CPGB. If you are going on strike, it is reasonable to exclude those from the planning meeting who intend to go to work.

Colin was treated on the same basis as the SLP Republicans and the *Marxist Bulletin*. He was singled out only when he singled himself out by trying to stay in the 'exit faction' meeting. The fact that Colin and CPGB sympathisers were present and participated fully without restriction or objection in the first part of the meeting is consistent with this explanation.

Colin should tell us whether he was an ill-disciplined supporter of the CPGB "acting on his own behalf", or whether he was carrying out the policy directives of the CPGB when he attempted to stay in the meeting.

The key question is the policy of the CPGB and the 'exit faction' on the day. Significantly both these organisations have kept totally silent. Colin ignores the key question of policy and focuses on an individual. Lee picked on me. Lee excluded me. Therefore he witch-hunted me. Whether this makes Lee the hunter or the hunted is open to question.

The CPGB (PCC) should now come out and state their policy and stop hiding behind John Bridge. Equally the 'exit faction', now called Socialist Perspectives, should state why they excluded comrades Colin, John and Stan. So far they have left Lee to take the flak on his own. They let him 'hang out to dry'. If both these organisations continue to keep silent we will learn a lot.

Terry Watts is the only person who makes a real defence of the CPGB. He says the CPGB was ignorant of the planned agenda, which all other organisations and the vast majority of participants accepted as sensible. Presumably it was out of ignorance that the sympathisers of the CPGB tried to enter the 'exit' meeting or stay in it. Presumably it was out of the same ignorance that John wrote his "offending paragraph".

Terry Watts may think this is all very "tiresome". But there are important issues of principle here about how individuals and organisations behave.

Jan Berryman
London

Anti-party leadership

The Socialist Workers Party is possessed of a lamentable duality. It is the largest 'Marxist-Leninist'-styled organisation in Britain. Its publications attack the Labour government and the membership is mobilised against it - demonstrating at every suitable opportunity: war in the Gulf, tuition fees, benefit reforms, etc.

But at the same time, the SWP is Labour's most unlikely advocate - calling for Labour votes in elections. True, back in May 1997 the SWP slogan was, 'Vote Labour or socialist'. In reality, the 'or socialist' was added as an afterthought and after hundreds of 'Vote Labour' posters had been fly-posted around the country. There was no declaration of support for those politically close to the SWP. The SWP voted for its own enemy rather than act as an organisation of the militant working class which puts into practice an alternative completely independent from bourgeois parties.

For this they must be ashamed. Every benefit cut, every grant abolished and every warpath trod by New Labour carries the SWP vote of approval behind it. The 'vanguard' SWP deserted its post in May 1997 and is about to desert it again in this May's local elections and the London referendum. If there is to be a socialist alternative, the SWP must break with Labourism by ending its electoral ceasefire.

Such a move would not be easy for the leadership - the change of line would upset the equilibrium. But, by not changing line the leadership is stoking up a powder keg under itself. You cannot run campaigns such as 'stop the fees' without a membership that positively dislikes New Labour. But then to call for a New Labour vote, means any credibility built on campus, workplace or community risks been thrown away.

Whatever the SWP chooses to do, it is in danger of shrinking if not breaking up into factions and going boom, Workers Revolutionary Party-style. To carry on voting Labour is to run the risk of losing thousands of members, in a conflict that has been brewing longer than the ones over organising methods, lack of programme, the Irish question, etc. Conversely, to change line would be to pick a fight with members who are semi-Labourite. Among those who believe the present line should be set in stone are some of the most prominent members - Paul Foot, for one.

It is possible that the SWP Central Committee could resolve the inherent contradiction in its politics. But I cannot see how. When it comes to this fundamental issue - deciding whose side the SWP is on in the class struggle - Tony Cliff is damned if he does, and damned if he does not. His sectarian project is entering an endgame scenario. The only solution is for a pro-party leadership of the SWP to join or open up to a process of rapprochement which has as its aim a reformed mass democratic centralist party.

The inadequacy of the SWP's current approach to Labour is demonstrated by its approach to the recent Gulf crisis. The spontaneous economic and pacifistic outlook of the SWP stands in complete contrast to the Leninist programme. Two slogans stick in my mind: 'Tell Blair: stop the war' and 'Welfare not warfare'.

The first slogan is an appeal to Tony Blair via the working class. What makes the SWP think that the working class cannot stop a war by making class war against Blair and his New Labour government? Hence we see in the SWP leadership a lack of belief in the working class as a potential political alternative, a refusal to acknowledge it as a political class and a pathetic hanging onto the coat tails of New Labour.

Where the first slogan is tailist, the second is pure pacifism. To repeat. Revolutionaries are for class war.

This leads me to my final comment - to



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

stress the importance of a party programme with which to guide strategy and tactics, and in particular as a rallying point for SWP dissidents like myself who want to save the SWP for communism.

GA Shanks
Manchester

All fake

Mary Ward, it seems to me, has a hell of a job (*Weekly Worker* March 5). On one hand showing why all the things suggested as making the Scottish people 'a nation' are fake, but then at the same time making out a case - without even the benefit of such things as the tartans and the pipes - as to why Britain, a collection of ruling classes, is actually 'a nation'.

After all, 'The Brits' were the Celtic inhabitants of most of this island before the Saxons and 'the English' (the Angles) - through a genocidal war far worse than the Norman's later did to them - left 'the British' clinging to Wales, Cornwall and various lumps of Northumbria and Cumbria.

Mary makes me hold my breath in anticipation of bold revelations, as she launches into unbridled, debunking attacks on 'Scottishness'. Favourite up front is 'the kilt' of course. It is fake, it is English, it is an invention - so Scotland is fake, English and an invention by extension.

But actually what *is* the truth. The Scots - highlanders in this case - must have worn *something*. Did not the blokes wear a big blanket effort, called a plaidie, which was wrapped round the body and either hung as a dress, or was wrapped up between the legs tied with a belt. Was not this held in place by muckle big Celtic brooches and was not the cloth more often than not *tartan*? So where is the myth?

Later the British army, in a turn around, sought to capture the savage Scottish beast and put it at its own disposal, raised Scottish regiments with distinctive tartans - and, incidentally, inventing all the rules on correct kilt protocol, as Scottish clans tended not to have distinctively named tartans until around the same period when it became fashionable. Today, a rising Scottish people wish to identify with the varying visions of 'Scotland' and so wear the current version of the kilt. It is hardly "a myth" as such, is it?

I will not bore Mary with the history of Northumbria folk, except to say as a people we frequently have not identified with the notion of 'Englishness' let alone 'Britishness'. I, for one, see far more invention in the notion of 'the English' than I do in 'the Scottish'. Modern 'Geordie' (a misnomer) and Northumbrian youth identify with our long and warlike past by wearing the 'broon ale blue star' - or black and white football strip shouting, 'Toon army'. But does that make our distinctiveness a myth?

When it comes down to it Scotland, or Geordieland for that matter, can be a nation if the people of that bit of land want to be, it needs no more no less than that. The same is true in reverse. You can tell us all were British, and more, that British is a nation. But if people do not identify with such a notion, reject such an identity, that is where the argument ends. By the way, four years *after* Culloden, the Newcastle poor and mining proletariat rose to declare James the true king of Northumbria. Bit late mind, but that was Charlie's fault for marching down the opposite side of the country - could be that he would not have known what to do with an armed proletarian column in his ranks, so he gave them a body swerve.

Dave Douglass
Doncaster

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

The altruistic friends of Russia

We are about to allow Japan to invade Asiatic Russia for the good of the latter. As good friends we must intervene and help Russia against her enemy - Germany.

Of course the present Soviet government has not been consulted - that goes without saying. But what is equally, if not more, interesting is that, according to the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, Germany's action against Russia at the present time is activated by pure consideration of humanity and the general interests of the world.

Says this paper: "Even the most inveterate enemy of Germany must allow that it is rendering valuable service to *Kultur* and humanity in ridding North Livonia, Estonia and perhaps Finland from the bestial hordes of the present government in Petrograd. Austria-Hungary is doing a similar service in protecting the Ukraine peace with its sword, and thereby the Ukraine itself, and is utterly frustrating the devilish proceedings of the Bolsheviks in that country ...

"For a number of reasons the Entente should view the new position of the Central Powers with a certain goodwill ... Again the redemption of Russia from Bolshevism means the saving of France from financial ruin. Germany is really executing a French and American mandate as much as one of her own."

After pointing out that Germany was instrumental in bringing about the downfall of tsarism, and thus delivering the world, and Britain in particular, from a Russian domination of the world, the paper considers that now another world mission has been laid on Germany: "to deliver Russia from the Bolshevik plague, and thereby to rescue the world from the peril of a general revolution".

And both the Entente and the German apologists are, from the bourgeois point of view, quite right. By destroying the Russian proletarian revolution, they are destroying the deadly foe of the capitalists of the whole world. But what of the workers of the world? Are they going to assist or tamely acquiesce in this unholy war against their class? ●

1918

Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

French elections

Mainstream right gets bloody nose

Official politics in France has taken a bit of a jolt. The recent regional and county elections, representing the second and third tiers of government, have eroded even further the position - and confidence - of the Gaullist RPR and the Union of French Democracy (UDF), both of which represent the mainstream right in France.

The national elections last year saw the RPR and UDF get a good bashing at the hands of the Socialist Party. This recent round of elections has seen their vote squeezed yet again, from both right and left. The fact that a system of proportional representation operates has also given the Gaullists and the conservatives a fright. The panic, horse-trading and frantic wheeler-dealing of the last week has triggered the Gaullists' "worst ever crisis", according to the former RPR prime minister Alain Juppé. *Le Monde* also thought that the mainstream right was in a state of "utter panic" after the elections (March 17).

The regional elections saw Le Pen's Front National get 3.3 million votes - 15.27% of the total, compared to 13.26% in 1992. This gives it an extra 36 seats, amounting to 275 in total. The RPR, led by Philippe Seguin, now have 285 seats; Philippe Leotard's UDF 262; Lionel Jospin's Socialist Party (SP) 396; the French Communist Party (PCF) 147; and the Greens 68. The abstention rate was 42%.

The overall effect was that the RPR and UDF lost 10 of the 22 regions to the SP-PCF-Green coalition. The FN became the biggest single party in Marseille, holding 37 seats, equivalent to the combined seats of both the RPR and the UDF. (The county elections the following Sunday continued this trend - the 'left' coalition took more than 400 seats and 11 councils from the right, leaving it in control of 31 county councils, as opposed to the right's 62.)

As soon as the results were known, the FN saw an opportunity to make a big splash. Le Pen knew that the local Gaullist barons were desperate to hang on to their regional power base, threatened by the march of the 'left' coalition and the relative success of the FN. Time to dangle some carrots before the local RPR and UDF. This called for a change of tactics from the FN. Previously it had rather let SP win seats rather than help Chirac or the Gaullists, whom Le Pen despises.

Le Pen openly stated that the FN will back RPR/UDF candidates if they accept six demands - which include pledges not to raise taxes and to defend French cultural identity. In his words: "This offer is aimed at all those who want to save their regions from six years of socio-communism". Le Pen left out any overtly racist, anti-immigrant demands, in case it pushed his potential partners just a bit too far. After all, the FN's policies also include the mass arrest and expulsion of immigrants in a programme partly inspired by the Vichy government's anti-semitic legislation - not something the 'patriotic' RPR and UDF are overly keen to be associated with quite yet.

Many of the local barons found it hard to resist the temptation - and ignored pleas by RPR leader, Seguin, who implored 'pro-FN' rebels not to embrace "the extremists". François Mancel, a former secretary general of the RPR and an adviser to president Chirac, was promptly expelled after calling on the



Le Pen courts respectability

FN to support his re-election as chairman of the Oise *départemental* council, thus breaking a 10 year taboo on pacts and alliances with the FN. Mancel, adding insult to injury, crowed: "From Monday the traditional right will have exploded and should be considered totally dead". In the Rhone-Alpes region (Lyon) the former defence minister, and prominent UDFer Charles Millon, also entered into an alliance with the FN. Alain Madelin, ex-leader of the far-right organisation Occident and another faction leader in the UDF, publicly supported the rebels as well.

The RPR and UDF leadership faced the prospect of revolt 'from below'. Many senior members expressed the fear that the mainstream right might be left with merely a rump. "Anything was possible", declared a prominent right-wing French historian. This was no wild statement. FN swung its votes on Friday in favour of UDF candidates in the Centre (Orleans), Languedoc-Roussillon (Montpellier), Picardy (Amiens), Bourgogne (Dijon), Franche-Comte (Besançon). The five regional chairmen belonging to the UDF who benefited from FN backing, including Millon, were immediately expelled.

Throughout last week speculation mounted that 'anti-left' deals were likely in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (Marseilles) and the Île-de-France (Paris), the two most populated areas of France. The RPR leadership was terrified that 21 'rebel' deputies would support Le Pen for president in Marseilles - where the actual voting had been delayed in order for the RPR to get its act together. So dire was the situation that Chirac issued an urgent appeal on television on Monday, in a bid to save conservatism from the hands of the FN. It worked. Just hours before the Marseilles assembly was due to meet, the 'rebels' caved-in. Michel Vauzelle of the SP was elected regional chairman. The same thing happened in Île-de-France.

But the fallout continues. Jean-François Mancel insisted that it was crucial for the mainstream right to start talking seriously with Le Pen - especially about his anti-immigration plans.

Many will see the recent developments as a vindication of the strategy advocated by the FN's second in command, the 48-year old Bruno Megret. Urbane, Berkeley educated, and cool (unlike Le Pen), he has for a long time

called for alliance with elements of the mainstream right in order to make FN 'respectable'. After the regional elections Megret exulted that the FN is a "democratic, legitimate and representative political party. The Front is now the true opposition".

Robert Hue, chairman of the PCF, declared that the FN-backed UDF councillors had trampled on the choice of voters and "betrayed" rightwing promises to reject "extremism". The PCF has long had faith in social democracy. Now it appears to be investing hope in conservatism too.

All the mainstream press with the exception of *Le Figaro* - roughly the equivalent of the *Daily Telegraph* - agreed with Hue. The French media has an official ideology of anti-racism which serves admirably to divide the working class and disassociate the establishment from any taint of fascism. For them, alliances with the FN worryingly recall the establishment's anti-communist collaboration with the Nazis during the Pétain years. Not something to be repeated by anti-racist France. Looking darkly over La Manche, *The Independent* sighed in chauvinist relief: "In Britain we should be grateful to the conservative establishment for keeping racism unrespectable ... Whatever the faults of the recent Tory administration it must be said that John Major showed the kind of leadership that matters when it came to refusing to compromise with racism" (March 23).

The revolutionary left for its part also put up a good show. Lutte Ouvrière got 738,000 votes (20 candidates elected), while 200,000 voted for the Communist Revolutionary League. Between them these two Trotskyist groups got more than 10% of the vote in the Haute Garonne *département*, where Jospin keeps his county council seat near Toulouse. Nationally, the revolutionary left secured 4.38% of the vote. LO's Arlette Laguiller - who has been its presidential candidate in every election since 1974 - will enter the Île-de-France regional council.

This healthy vote for the revolutionary left should form a good basis for a concerted fightback against *all* the establishment parties - whether left or right. The FN need not be so cocky nor should the 'left' coalition feel so secure. Tragically, however, Lutte Ouvrière is stuck in the mire of economism - with an almost religious belief that spontaneous strikes and demonstrations will somehow provide the answer. There has been a wave of mass demonstrations against unemployment, which has excited LO. But without a Leninist minimum-maximum programme, LO will not be able to generalise mass discontent. To date, it bears more of the characteristics of a trade unionist-cum-electoral organisation rather than a revolutionary vanguard one.

Maastricht and the coming single European currency will send shock waves throughout France. The abolition of the franc, recession, economic dislocation, rises in unemployment, etc, promises to end the post-1968 social contract. The FN-right in these circumstances is a clear danger. The left must organise the working class not only in resistance but as the *positive alternative* to the anti-human system of capitalism. The first step must be a workers' programme of democracy to abolish the 5th Republic ●
Eddie Ford

action

■ 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.

■ Brent Socialist Alliance

Candidates wanted! Brent Socialist Alliance is selecting candidates to put the case for socialism and democracy. Tuesday March 31 - 7.30pm, Willesden Green Library, High Road NW10.

■ South London Socialist Alliance

Election rally. Thursday April 2 - 7.30pm, Old White Horse pub, 255 Brixton Road, SW9.

■ Lambeth Socialist Alliance

Election rally. Sunday April 26 - 4pm, The Brix, St Matthews Peace Gardens, Brixton Hill, SW2 0181-671 8036 for details.

Morning Star strike**Management retreats**

After more than three weeks of strike action by *Morning Star* journalists, backed by swelling support among readers and supporters both inside and outside the so-called Communist Party of Britain, management has been forced to step back from its intransigent position of no talks without a return to work.

At the aborted hearing for sacked editor John Haylett on March 14, the management committee majority implicitly acknowledged their unfitness to hear the appeal. On the CPB executive committee the same weekend the Hicks-Rosser faction was routed and told to toe the line. Disciplinary action within the CPB seems certain to follow.

No 3 of *The workers' Morning Star*, the strikers' publication, has expanded from an occasional four page A4 bulletin to a weekly eight page tabloid with a 6,000 print run. It is being distributed nationally via CPB branches, *Morning Star* readers and supporters groups and bulk orders from national trade unions. This will have shaken the confidence of the Hicks-Rosser faction. Even if they hold out against Haylett on the management committee, their fate seems already sealed by the evident balance of forces amongst the rank and file shareholders of the Peoples Press Printing Society - the cooperative which owns the *Morning Star* - and in all districts of the CPB. If the "unhealthy elements" are not removed by a specially requisitioned PPPS general meeting, they can expect to be outnumbered on the management committee after the annual general meeting in June.

That is why, after a week of intransigence at Acas, on March 24 management committee officers Mary Rosser, George Wake and Pat Hicks, who have been delegated responsibility to handle the dispute since March 14, eventually agreed to the formation of an independent committee of persons acceptable to both sides to hear Haylett's appeal *without a return to work* - a crucial victory for the strikers. The appeal tribunal members proposed are Alf Parrish of the GPMU (which also has members employed at the *Star*) as chairperson, professor Keith Ewing of the Institute of Employment Rights as the NUJ's choice, and Lloyd Wilkinson of the Cooperative Union as management's choice. A decision is to be reached within a fortnight, probably sooner.

If Haylett's appeal is won, the strike will be over. Mary Rosser's March 16 circular to trade union general secretaries makes clear that "in order to ensure the survival of the paper" the PPPS "will accept the results of such a body."

However, this should not be mistaken for binding arbitration, which the strikers, wisely, still refuse to accept. If the appeal is lost, even at the hands of this mutually agreed tribunal, they can be expected to fight on for reinstatement, just as they would have if the management committee itself had rejected the appeal. A return to work for CPB level wages under the discredited 'North Korean' dynasty of pseudo-communists is out of the question. Better to get a real salary from a confessed capitalist.

As we pointed out last week (*Weekly Worker* March 19), the Griffiths-Haylett faction of the CPB would be crazy to allow the Hicks-Rosser faction editorial control of the

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.....

Morning Star in the campaign for the allegiance of PPPS shareholders. The real dispute - the faction fight in the CPB for control of the *Star* - will surely be settled at the forthcoming PPPS general meeting.

■ Committee to Save the Morning Star

As one who has proposed, with the CPGB Provisional Central Committee, that all sections of the left be drawn into the fight to save the *Morning Star* from extinction - by opening its columns to all shades of opinion on the left - I was disappointed not to have been invited onto the Committee to Save the *Morning Star* which has just announced its existence in a circular letter from the same address as the strike office.

Placing the blame for "non-publication" of the paper "solely" with those PPPS management committee members who accepted Rosser's dossier as the basis for a charge of gross industrial misconduct against Haylett, the circular claims "a torrent of protest from a large number of trade unions, Labour MPs, readers and supporters groups, the Communist Party of Britain, the Communist Party of Scotland and many individual readers."

"The management committee majority," it continues, "acted without due consideration of the predictable consequences of their disregard for established procedures and natural justice. They should have known that an editorial workforce that proclaims and defends justice in the workplace on a daily basis would not tamely accept such an injustice on its own doorstep."

The circular includes a carefully worded petition form that must be signed by 2% (about 800) of PPPS shareholders so as to requisition a special general meeting under rule 8 of the association. Since PPPS rules "do not allow a special meeting to instruct the management committee over its actions," the purpose of the meeting is, under rule 9, "to remove those management committee members implicated in the original attack on John Haylett," namely Joan Bellamy, Terry Herbert, Pat Hicks, Anni Marjoram, George Wake and Francis Wilcox.

● Petition forms are available from: Committee to Save the *Morning Star*, 422 Kingsland Road, London E8

4AA. Tel: 0171-254 5000, Fax: 0171-254 5151.

■ The workers' Morning Star

Both sides in the dispute are producing their own propaganda. The management majority's position is argued in the scab *Morning Star* which I reviewed last week - the poorly presented bulletin of the Save Our Star Campaign, produced by "unions, staff and friends of the *Morning Star*". In opposition, the Griffiths-Haylett faction has its *The workers' Morning Star* - the strikers' news-sheet. Interestingly, hiding the CPB's civil war behind the facade of an industrial dispute means that in *TWMS* the CPB appears only in the form of advertisements.

Nothing is told of the CPB's executive committee debates and decisions on the crucial weekend of March 14-15, no information about which EC members took the side of the strikers and which did not. Far from *explaining* the point of view of the EC majority, the Griffiths-Haylett faction, or *refuting* the view of the minority, the Hicks-Rosser faction, even the decisions themselves are not reported. Readers are left guessing, groping between the lines in a vain attempt to establish who is who, what is what, and why.

It is obvious that the sacking of Haylett was an expression of the struggle between two factions in the leadership of the CPB, as a result of which "the labour movement has been deprived of vital information and comment, together with a forum for advertising events and messages" (*TWMS* No3, March 21).

The *Morning Star* classifies itself as the paper of "the left" or "the labour movement." This 'internal' CPB struggle which determines the fate of the *Star* affects us all. Yet it is treated as a private matter, a 'members only' question.

This lack of openness about political differences will not do. Lasting unity cannot be built by concealing differences, ostrich fashion. This only produces weak, superficial unity. It is precisely this method which has produced the present crisis - a sudden outburst onto the public scene of a faction fight which has been festering behind closed doors for years. What it needs is the light of day.

Revolutionary communists must fight for their ideas in front of the working class, so that the working class can learn how to liberate itself. Parliamentary reformists and trade union bureaucrats, on the other hand, ultimately only require workers to passively vote. The CPB's 'revolutionary' reformist programme, the *British road to socialism*, the basic cause of 'official' communism's long decline and liquidation, also underlies the paucity of perestroika at the *Star*. Open polemic is the way to sort it out.

The *Star* strikers are surely not fighting to hand the paper over from one clique to another. Yet by limiting their arguments to the industrial relations question, by covering their eyes and blocking their ears to the political conflict of which their dispute is only the manifestation, they are certain to produce precisely that unhappy result.

■ Left unity?

The Socialist Campaign Group's



Mary Rosser - the joy of surrender

bland statement urging "all those involved in the dispute to find an early settlement," claimed to replace "previously expressed individual views and early day motions" - ie messages of solidarity with the strikers from MPs Jeremy Corbyn (who joined the picket line on the first day), Harry Barnes, Tony Benn, Harry Cohen, John Cryer, Dennis Skinner, etc, and Livingstone's motion attacking the strike.

Livingstone's hostility to the strike reflects what *Star* parliamentary correspondent Mike Ambrose, who has had the job of tracking him for decades, calls "close political links with those associated with the Trotskyite faction Socialist Action. Two of its closest allies are on the *Morning Star* management committee. Chief executive Mary Rosser has relied on their support in her campaign to sack editor John Haylett" (*TWMS* No3, March 21).

Socialist Action, one of the remaining descendants of Tariq Ali's once media famous International Marxist Group, is a small Trotskyite group which, in place of open politics, operates as a political sect manoeuvring deep in the Labour Party. Paradoxically, these unprincipled leeches are blocking with the Hicks-Rosser faction. Anti-Haylett management committee members Anni Marjoram and Kumar Murshid are known to have strong connections with Socialist Action - of course, they will deny being members, but then they would, wouldn't they? Livingstone's personal researcher, Simon Fletcher, has a similar reputation.

Ambrose goes on to reveal the unsavoury story of the rotten compromise which Livingstone extracted from the Campaign Group to supply *Star* management with a modicum of succour. "If anyone is looking to Mr Livingstone for support" in industrial disputes, he says, "they should be aware of the role he has played in opposing the *Morning Star* journalists' strike. Mr Livingstone became the first Labour MP under this government to put down a parliamentary motion attacking a strike.

"At a meeting of the Socialist Cam-

paign Group of MPs he agreed to withdraw his hostile motion - which had failed to gain even a single supporter - but only on the condition that left MPs did not table a motion supporting the strikers. An eyewitness talks of Mr Livingstone shaking with rage when other MPs opposed him on this issue.

"Over the years, Mr Livingstone has had an up and down relationship with the Labour left. Many were critical of him during the last days of the GLC, when he failed to fight to the finish with the Tory government. Coming to parliament, he did not immediately join the leftwing Campaign Group, but stayed out for several months while it became increasingly clear that he would not be offered a shadow ministerial post."

Full marks, then, to Socialist Labour candidate Stan Keable, who contested Brent East against Livingstone in the 1997 general election, against the better judgement of Arthur Scargill and others who regarded him as a 'good leftwinger'.

■ Blind revolutionaries

While reports of the *Morning Star* strike and the faction fight in the CPB which lies behind it have appeared on TV news and in such papers as *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Observer* and *Financial Times*, and been treated weekly in *Tribune*, by ex-*Morning Star* journalists Mike Naughton and John Blevin, the subject has been studiously ignored by the revolutionary left - ie, nothing in *The Socialist*, *Socialist Worker* and *Workers Power*. These comrades, it seems, refuse to believe in ghosts. Having declared 'official communism' dead after the events of 1989-1991, they dare not acknowledge its existence for fear of damaging their present dogmas. Best look in the other direction and hope it goes away.

This living fossil is worthy of study, however, because it shows how even the most mighty, like Ozymandias, can be reduced to dust by the deadly logic of opportunist politics ●

Ian Farrell

Welsh road to *British road*

Mark Fischer highlights some moments from the career of Robert Griffiths, general secretary of the CPB

What does the ascendancy of Robert Griffiths over Mike Hicks mean for the so-called Communist Party of Britain? In spite of the split over the *Morning Star* crisis it is still hard to say. The CPB comes from a political tradition in our movement that believes that political openness is actually a sign of weakness, not strength. Thus, in the battle for the leadership of the CPB, we have had no clarification of political platform, but only nuance or shade.

But then, the same can be said of comrade Griffiths as an individual political personality. He has travelled a long and winding road since his younger days. From revolutionary Welsh nationalist, through extreme left 'official communist' to today's pinnacle as CPB general secretary - an organisation synonymous with reformism and pro-Labour cretinism.

Griffiths has had an interesting political past. Brought up in Cardiff, he graduated from Bath university in the early 1970s with an economics degree. He became the parliamentary research officer for Plaid Cymru from 1974-79 when he was made redundant in a storm of controversy (although the organisation always claimed that financial, not political, considerations led to his departure). Griffiths was thus a prominent figure on the left of Welsh nationalism just as its traditional face had started to change.

Gwyn Williams writes of this Plaid Cymru that "whereas the party built up some strength in the Welsh-speaking areas and registered a presence in some of the South Wales valleys, its parliamentary record was one of marginality and lost deposits. It was in its abrupt breakthrough over the late 1960s and early 1970s that equally abruptly became a distinctly modern and radical movement, less concerned with language and cultural is-

sues, moving rapidly into a European left and provoking a crises in its own ranks in the process" (G Williams *When was Wales?* Harmondsworth 1985, p290)

From personal experience, I know the young rank and file leftists of Plaid Cymru tended to define themselves as Welsh working class revolutionaries, reflecting an understandable "disillusionment with the Labour Party". Labourism in South Wales is mired in corruption and graft.

The heavy defeat of Labour's Welsh devolution proposals in the 1979 referendum caused real ferment in left nationalist circles. Into this fluid situation stepped Griffiths, still then Plaid's research officer. In July 1979, he and Gareth Miles, then organiser with UCAC, the Welsh school teachers' union, put out the influential pamphlet *Sosialaeth i'r Cymru*, later published as *Socialism for the Welsh people*. This damned the mainstream Welsh nationalist movement - and in particular the "rural right" of Plaid Cymru - for its timidity and reformism. The leadership of the movement claimed that Welsh nationhood could be achieved "without any stand up fight, any subversive activity, certainly without any violence (let the Welsh nation perish rather than that!)" (cited in J Osmond *Police conspiracy?* Ceredigion 1984, p27).

Early in 1980, a halfway house between PC and a projected "Welsh Socialist Party" was founded - the Welsh Socialist Republican Movement. It is claimed that at its peak, this organisation had over 300 members, organised in 12 clubs throughout Wales, although this seems an exaggeration.

Very quickly, the new group faced a crisis or orientation. Was it to be merely a pressure group on mainstream constitutional nationalism? If

it subordinated its perspectives to the arson campaign against holiday-homes in Wales, the WSRM could "easily degenerate into being merely the political wing or 'voice' of violence", as a discussion paper presented to the organisation's first conference in Aberfan, June 1980, put it.

The prospect of transformation into a political party was the only serious option. But this raised the fundamental problem - reform or revolution? The Aberfan discussion paper leaned towards revolutionism. It called on a new party "to organise and assist in the self-organisation of the Welsh working class, to resist attacks upon it, to develop self-confidence and the ability to take on British capitalism, the police and, ultimately, the armed forces" (*ibid*, p29).

The WSRM was clearly a heterogeneous grouping. A majority retained electoral allegiance to Plaid Cymru and would define themselves primarily as nationalists rather than socialists. Sitting uneasily atop of this was a leadership - with Griffiths as the "central figure ... certainly as far as the police were concerned" (*ibid* pp33-4) - inclined in the direction of an independent revolutionary party of some sort. In its micro-form it thus replicated one of the main tensions in the revolutionary nationalist movement in Ireland. Clearly, both the nationalist and socialist elements within the group looked at this stage to events Ireland both for inspiration and - to a certain extent - political models.

Thus, in Robert Griffiths' first annual report to the WSRM (February 1981), he characterised the holiday-home arson campaign as "understandable expressions of popular anger and frustration ... we sought to explain them" (*ibid* p32). Certainly the South Wales police were sufficiently concerned to launch systematic surveillance and harassment of the organisation, explicitly linking it with the IRA (particularly after the appearance of paramilitary colour parties of the WSRM at various Welsh marches and events).

In a report broadcast by Nationwide news programme (March 12 1980), Griffiths was interviewed in his capacity as secretary of the WSRM and had this to say about the arson campaign: "Our attitude is that in the past peaceful methods have been tried, democratic methods ... These have got nowhere, no one has taken any notice of them. Therefore, we quite understand, as a movement, why these people have been driven to these sorts of methods ... this seems to be the only language that the authorities, and the British government in particular, seem to understand" (*ibid* p40).

Through its campaign of harassment, arrests and surveillance, the South Wales police were laying the basis for a conspiracy charge. Things culminated in the Cardiff Explosives Trial in 1983 which featured leading members of the WSRM, including Griffiths as the accused. In many ways, it was this trial - which collapsed in a storm of accusations against police fabrication and malpractice - which killed off the politically unviable WSRM. In the wake of the fiasco, Griffiths applied to join the Communist Party of Great Britain. He explained the fate of the WSRM thus:



1982: Robert the Welsh revolutionary

"There was an unholy alliance between nationalism and ultra-left anarchism that undermined what the WSRM was intended to become - a socialist party of the Welsh working class ... Our resistance to this attempt was based on political principle, not on naivety or fear of the British state. We are not in a Northern Ireland situation here in Wales" (*ibid* p137).

Griffiths' move to the CPGB was undoubtedly a positive one. He did not initially dump the 'Welsh road to socialism' for the *British road to socialism* (the CPGB's then opportunistic programme). At first, he retained his revolutionism, shorn of its Welsh nationalism, as his criticisms of the BRS made clear (see *Weekly Worker* March 19 for an edited reprint of his critical analysis from 1987). Yet as Jack Conrad showed at the time in *The Leninist*, forerunner of this paper, his critique remained partial, one-sided and in danger of slipping into apologia. Centrally, while Griffiths and his co-thinkers in the left-inclined Communist Campaign Group in Wales failed to go to the core of the opportunist canker eating away at 'official communism' in Britain - the pernicious influence of the Soviet party after it had become dominated by opportunism from the mid-1920s onwards. As comrade Conrad put it, "this [was] something the South Wales CCGers [fought] shy of even considering" (*ibid*).

It was the pull of Soviet 'invincibility' that was eventually to prise Griffiths free from his petty bourgeois revolutionary moorings and set him on a route to support for Gorbachev's counterrevolution. From that denouement it was a logical step for a man of drive and personal ambition such as Griffiths to set himself the goal of unthroning Hicks as CPB general secretary. Having succeeded, Griffiths now rules a fractured CPB, which was formally established to defend the *British road* programme against the infringements of the Eurocommunists.

However, none of this was inevita-

ble. There was a possibility of Leninism - albeit weak and inchoate. In June 1985, he wrote to *The Leninist*, complaining about remarks he considered ill-judged in an article about Wales. Nevertheless, he was not unsympathetic. Griffiths told us that "a number of comrades in South Wales subscribe to your paper and largely agree with a number of positions put forward by it. In particular, your treatment of the women's question, Ireland, the Labour Party has been excellent ...". Furthermore, we "rightly [oppose] the British nationalism that infests the working class movement and, to some degree, all sections of the Communist Party - and which we see in some of the arguments about import controls, the EEC, Ireland, etc". In a two-fingered salute to the Eurocommunists who were then busily purging the Party, he defiantly ended his letter "please print my real name and not a pseudonym" (*The Leninist* June 1985).

Today, comrade Griffiths finds himself the leader of a political organisation that calls for import controls to protect "our" economy and advocates withdrawal from the EU; has condemned the struggle of revolutionary nationalism in Ireland as "terrorism" and supports New Labour as the vehicle to bring socialist change. Ideologically, the comrade surely has some explaining to do ●

'South Wales discussion papers' and Jack Conrad's full response (pp8, £2) available from the CPGB address

Fighting fund

Future generation

Three cheers for professor Michael Barber, who heads the standards unit at the department for education and employment. Our 'red' professor said pupils should learn the ethics of "global citizenship" rather than the myths of religion. All that remains in the western countries, continued the professor, is rampant consumerism and a "growing realisation that an amoral society of unfettered individuals competing in global markets on mobile telephones is consistent with ensuring a planet fit for future generations". Professor Barber concluded like this: "In the absence of god and Marx, what are we to do?"

Well, readers, Karl Marx may be dead and buried, but the Communist Party of Great Britain needs to be and can be resurrected. If the vision of society outlined by Barber fills you with dread, then you

know what to do - give us your support. A real, as opposed to pseudo-"global citizenship", relies on revolution and in due course communism - something with which we suspect our esteemed government educationalist disagrees.

For that we need our reformed CPGB. For this a strong and effective *Weekly Worker* - and eventually a *Daily Worker* - is an absolute necessity. As you can imagine, this does not come cheap.

So, send off your donations now before Saddam Hussein launches his diabolical duty-free anthrax attack. Special thanks this week to TR from Bishop Auckland (£16), RW from Carlisle (£60) and AF from South London (£5). This brings our monthly total to £433. Almost made it to our £500 comrades, but do not let us down at the last minute ●

Katrina Haynes

Two years of Socialist Labour

Balance of failure

Martin Blum examines some of the lessons the revolutionary left must learn

Two years ago, comrades were preparing for the founding congress of the Socialist Labour Party. Many were brimming with optimism. A mass workers' leader - the hero of the miners' Great Strike, no less - had broken from the Labour Party and was establishing a party which aimed to abolish capitalism. Not only that, the initial hype would have you believe that the SLP was to be the natural home of all socialists, communists, environmental activists, feminists and all progressive opponents of the current system.

There were those on the left from all stables - Labourite, Stalinite and Trotskyist - ready armed with crystal ball, dismissed the entire project as folly, preferring to stick to old formulas. Others positively engaged with and welcomed the process initiated by Arthur Scargill in October 1995 with his 'Future strategies for the left' document.

Two years down the track the opportunities which abounded have all but disappeared. The SLP has fallen spectacularly short of its potential. On many, if not all, fronts the organisation has stagnated to the point of virtual collapse. Morale is extremely low. Real membership, despite the claims of the leader, has failed to grow at all, and in many places has haemorrhaged. The SLP has congealed as a Scargillite party. No other adjective - Stalinite, Labourite, syndicalist - is adequate.

But this process has not been even and has certainly not occurred without struggle. So what lessons for the left? What can be garnered for the workers' movement as a whole? Since the December 97 congress various left groupings and individuals have been attempting to answer such questions. So far, most arguments put forward have been done in a fairly narrow way, more in the manner of self-justification for previously held positions.

Most responses to the SLP's seeming demise have tended to further reinforce the very sectarianism which its birth promised to overcome. Yet, thankfully, a certain dialogue does exist between disparate forces, precisely due to the SLP experience.

Naturally most of those who opposed the SLP from the outset are now firmly in the 'I told you so' camp. These people seem to have some fantastic schema about the way a 'real' mass break from Labour will occur. All in one lump, it seems. Bob Pitt, editor of *What Next?* is certainly among them. Comrade Pitt is fond of portraying himself as the very model of the sensible Marxist. Yet in comrade Pitt's world, life outside the Labour Party is akin to death. If that is the case, I do not know why he bothers publishing his journal, read and written by those mainly outside the Labour Party.

In a recent article (*What Next?* No7) he argues: "The SLP leadership's bureaucratic methods flowed directly from the premature character of the SLP itself, launched as it was in advance of any mass break from the Labour Party". He argues that given a small organisation to start with, Scargill's project was bound to be descended upon by the ultra-lefts, "lunatics taking over the asylum" no

less. This is nonsense on a number of levels. Firstly, it blames Scargill's authoritarianism on the revolutionaries, sorry 'ultra-lefts', in the SLP who opposed his witch hunt and the Labourite/British road-type project.

This is a fundamentally unscientific approach. Where, then, does comrade Pitt assume Blair's, or Kinnock's, or MacDonald's bureaucratic methods came from? Of course, like them Scargill's approach flows from his programme, from his vision of 'socialism'. Something to be delivered by a socialist parliament, rather than workers' revolutionary self-liberation.

Secondly it defines 'mass' simply as a large number. This is not the Leninist understanding of the term. In this context, Lenin defined *mass* as those elements of the class who were moving towards or are engaged in independent political action. He stated that at certain times this could mean dozens, at other times, millions.

Thirdly, it assumes that a mass break from Labour will be devoid of the bureaucratic deformities of Scargill's project because ultra-lefts will be swamped by the tens of thousands of 'ordinary members'. Sensible Bob Pitt types, no doubt. This approach identifies bureaucracy in the workers' movement as a mere whim of individual leaders, rather than in its objective basis within trade unionism, which, in the final analysis has a material interest in the survival of the wages system.

I do find it odd that in a period when society continues to drift to the right - witness the Countryside Alliance - comrade Pitt's greatest fear seems to be ultra-leftism. In reality, the main pressure on the revolutionary left continues to be liquidationism of a rightist trajectory. Witness Scottish Militant Labour forming itself as the leftwing of Scottish nationalism.

While Bob Pitt's 'I-told-you-soism' around the SLP is of a decidedly Labourite nature, the other variety comes from the self-preservation instincts of sects like the Workers Power group. Its intervention in the SLP was decidedly unstable, shifting from left to right, abstention to involvement, almost exclusively based on the narrow project of rewinning lost supporters. It can now safely inoculate its membership from engaging in the rough and tumble of such politics. The SLP is therefore neatly put away in its fixed-categorical box - Stalinist sect.

So much for the raiders, red-professors and Labourite abstentionists from the SLP project. What about those who constructively engaged? I will not deal here with those who have basically sold themselves to Scargillism: Brian Heron and the Sikorskis' Fourth International Supporters Caucus, or the rag-bag of Stalinites like Harpal Brar or Royston Bull.

We can identify basically three approaches and reactions by those comrades who ended up engaging with the project. There are those whose basic approach was a narrow recruitment drive around one ossified set of beliefs or another. For example, *Marxist Bulletin*, aka the International Bolshevik Tendency and *Socialist Labour Action* aka Workers Power. Another tack was that taken by our

own organisation, the Revolutionary Democratic Group, and various individuals. This basically viewed the SLP as a site of struggle for a revolutionary party rather than any sort of short cut.

The third approach came from those who viewed the SLP as the 'last chance saloon'. A now or never opportunity. This approach largely came from comrades who have had long political careers either inside Labourism or failed sects. The most 'theorised' version of this comes from comrades such as Dave Osler and Roland Wood who maintain that some sort of social democratic or centrist regroupment is a necessary predetermined stage between now and a future revolutionary party.

We have pointed out that such formations as the SLP, Rifondazione Comunista or the Party of Democratic Socialism in Germany, rather than representing a positive recomposition, are more parties of 'decomposition' of previous perspectives, the detritus of the defeat of 'official communism' and the crisis within social democracy. In countries like Italy or Spain, it is not surprising they have a mass character given the historical role of the 'official communist' parties there. At the same time such processes should be engaged with and where they are heading in a positive direction, encouraged. This, however, is not to posit them as a necessary stage and artificially create them when life itself has not. Our central strategic aim remains the reorganising of a mass, revolutionary democratic Communist Party.

Ian Dudley's article in *What Next?* No7 is a narrow self-justification for the *Marxist-Bulletin*/IBT. According to comrade Dudley, everything was going just hunky-dory for the *Marxist Bulletin* in the SLP, though they are "not so well known outside the SLP". In fact, things were going so well for these comrades that they nearly had a comrade elected to SLP vice-president! If everything was going so swimmingly, why leave? Why are you leaving behind that layer of militants you influenced?

More seriously, the most outrageous claim is that the CPGB attempted to finger these comrades, former members and now "co-thinkers" of the International Bolshevik Tendency, to the SLP leadership. This is just not true. On October 10 1996 the *Weekly Worker* carried a back page article 'Wretched' which was a response to an attack on the CPGB in the IBT's journal *1917* (No18 - undated). That article itself described those who had dissolved the IBT's public organisation in Britain as "IBT supporters". These comrades went on to form the *Marxist Bulletin*. What the CPGB was responding to was a dishonest call by the 'former IBT members' for all revolutionary organisations to liquidate themselves in order to join the SLP.

We pointed out at the time that for the IBT paying the price of dissolving was "cheap to the point of being free". No one had heard of the IBT. Its journal *1917*, won a prize amongst strikers during the Timex dispute as being the most obscure leftwing journal discovered on the picketline. Before going ahead and printing the 'Wretched' article, we contacted the IBT in New Zealand and America by email. We also contacted their comrades in Britain. How were we meant

to refer to them in polemics? No response was forthcoming. Either way, apart from attacking the politics of liquidationism no names were mentioned. Mark Fischer fingered rotten politics and hypocrisy - no more.

Comrade Dudley explains why the *Marxist Bulletin* has now left the SLP. At the December 1997 Congress the SLP supposedly "crossed the Rubicon and consolidated on a reformist, anti-communist basis".

During 1996, the IBT actually described the internal life of the SLP as being on the whole "quite open and democratic". The truth is, the SLP was established on an anti-communist basis. Communists were witch hunted from the beginning of the SLP's internal life and democracy was severely curtailed by the imposition of the Scargill constitution. The exclusion clauses of Scargill's constitution, originally designed to keep out Militant Labour, were quickly turned on alleged CPGB supporters.

A central problem to fighting the witch hunt was that many - including the ex-IBT - thought that by distancing themselves from the *Weekly Worker*, rather than using it as their weapon, they thought they could avoid the purge.

Moreover, for democrats a grouping coming out of the weird world of the Spartacist League, now to describe the SLP as a collection of eccentrics not only reminds one of those in glass houses, but to the extent that it is a true description of the SLP it applied from day one.

Nevertheless at the first congress, everything was up for grabs, there was nothing inevitable about how the SLP would end up. Scargill's 'constitution' was presented as a *fait accompli*. This did not mean it had to be accepted as one. Up until December 1997, there had not been a vote on the constitution.

Of course, the anti-communist witch hunt in the form of voidings initially against those branded CPGB has characterised and shaped the entire political life of the SLP. Comrades who entered the fray with a fundamentally opportunist position, either of a sectarian nature - ie, to come out with a few recruits (the *Marxist Bulletin* have not even managed this), or of a liquidationist approach adapting to Scargillism (like former Fiscite Martin Wicks now of the breakaway *Socialist Perspectives*) tried to distance themselves from CPGB supporters.

When comrades did pass motions and at times stuck their necks out in support of those being voided, they acted as if they were doing favours for the victims of the witch hunt. It was not until 1997 that the realisation dawned that the witch hunt was being directed against them too. Just like we always said it would. First they came for the communists ...

Rather than start a militant fight in the SLP and in front of the class through the Campaign for a Democratic SLP, as this paper had been urging, comrades ducked-and-dived and after a brief skirmish have now largely decamped to their own exclusive projects. This walking out has largely been based on moral indignation or a narrow perspective of 'we can't stand any more'.

There has been no fundamental crackdown on debate in the SLP since Scargill pulled out of the hat a 3,000 block vote at the December congress. In fact, there has been a considerable

easing off of the witch hunt against the left. With the SLP in crisis, it is Fisc, Harpal Brar, the Stalin Society, the Bullites and the NUMists who are at each others' throats. The democrats can anyway be left alone - for now - while Arthur has 3,000 votes in his back pocket.

Marxist Bulletin and Socialist Perspectives's method of keeping debate internal was self-serving, not about serving the wider interests of the class. That is what formed the basis of their 'Swindon bloc'. Despite himself therefore Ian Dudley makes a correct point, when he says: "A layer of activists have learned ... the treacherous role of 'left' bureaucrats like Scargill and the need to break with their methods and... their politics. For the question of democracy in the SLP was above all a programmatic question".

We in the CPGB were always aware of and stressed this. However, it is not through the *Marxist Bulletin* where most learned about Scargill. It was through the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. Here all breaches of democracy were exposed. And this coverage was not through any narrowly defined motive. Although our circulation has improved, our exposure of the internal shenanigans of the SLP comes from our general method of openness.

We reveal our own internal debates, not through any liberal inclinations, but because communists believe that through an open culture, wrong ideas can be rectified or defeated. This way advanced layers of the class can understand what is true and what is false, who is right and who is wrong. What we apply to ourselves we apply to others, including the SLP.

Where the *Marxist Bulletin* cut their cloth to suit their narrow aims of winning ones and twos to their 'correct programme', we posit the main fight around democracy precisely to win the space for open programmatic debate between *all* tendencies. What the IBT and Machiavellian operators like Martin Wicks do not seem to have learned is that programmatic debate, internal life and the struggle for socialism must become the conscious property of our class. For instance the Campaign for a Democratic SLP was proposed as an organisation of SLP members but with a public - ie, open profile. It would actively seek to recruit militant democrats into the SLP, rather than more Scargillites. This unfortunately explains why the *Marxist Bulletin* picketed the founding meeting - urging no support for "this anti-SLP lash up!". The CDSLP was attacked for not having "a serious approach to changing the structures and practices of the SLP." It was dismissed as a "call to split and form a new organisation". How hollow that all rings now. Just who are the splitters?

The SLP is not yet a spent force. Anne Scargill recently polled 17% in a local by-election, beating the Tories and the Liberal Democrats. The SLP could still grow and attract thousands. Scargill's 'Reclaim our Rights' could give him *political* hegemony in any trade union fight against Blair. Anyone who thinks that militant workers and trade unionists do not join bureaucratic organisations have not been taking notice of the entire history of the 20th century. They are merely projecting their own desires onto reality ●

Republicanism and the national question

First, this is not a debate between a federal republic and a workers' republic. This is a false way to present the question. Both SLP Republicans and the *Marxist Bulletin* are in favour of a workers' republic based on workers' councils. The question is how we get to a workers' republic. Is it a question of propaganda? Calling for a workers' republic and opposing anything less than that. Or is it a matter of transitional politics - taking definite political steps towards a workers' republic. This is the approach of the SLP Republicans. We believe that a federal republic is a step forward, a step towards a workers' republic.

I am going to begin by looking at what Lenin said in *State and revolution*. Then I will consider the idea of transitional politics, then the case for republicanism, before finally considering federalism and the national question.

In *State and revolution* Lenin says: "Even in regard to Britain, where geographical conditions, a common language and a history of many centuries would seem to have 'put an end' to the national question in the various small divisions of the country - even in regard to that country, Engels reckoned with the plain fact that the national question was not yet a thing of the past, and recognised in consequence that the establishment of a federal republic would be a 'step forward'" (VI Lenin *Selected works* p291).

Let us consider the arguments against what Engels and Lenin said. First is the obvious point that just because they said it does not mean it is true. They could easily have been wrong. Quotes prove nothing. On the other hand, just because they said this does not mean they were wrong. They could possibly have been right.

Either way, no Marxist can simply ignore or dismiss such a statement out of hand. Given the importance of Engels and Lenin for our movement, any Marxist, serious about the national question, would have to give due weight to this statement. *Marxist Bulletin* needs to explain why Engels and Lenin were mistaken to say this, and why their own view is superior.

Second, it seems 'common sense' to say that they were wrong. As Engels himself implies, England, Scotland and Wales have been so integrated for many centuries that the national question was solved years ago. It is surely obvious that the national question is a thing of the past, not for the future. This 'common sense' is reinforced by the Menshevik-Stalinist theory of stageism. This implies that the national question is a problem of the bourgeois democratic revolution. In a

Should Marxists fight for a republic now under capitalism? Or should republicans wait till the socialist revolution? We reprint a speech given by comrade Dave Simpson, a supporter of the SLP Republicans, in the debate with *Marxist Bulletin* held in central London on March 4

highly developed country like Britain, the bourgeois democratic revolution was sorted out in the 17th century. This Menshevik-Stalinist theory supports 'common sense'. It is the common sense of the British left.

Any Marxist knows that 'common sense' is often nonsense, or in fact bourgeois sense. Quite clearly, in this case, neither Engels nor Lenin are impressed by it. They seem quite happy to ignore the straightjacket of the bourgeois democratic revolution. Engels sees the national question as something for the future. So the next question is whether life has proved them wrong and 'common sense' right?

Certainly when this prediction was made and for many years after, with the exception of Ireland, it would seem they were wrong. Until the late 1960s it appears that the national question was a thing of the past. However, for the last 30 years the national question has slowly but surely come onto the political agenda. The new assemblies in Wales and Scotland are the latest development and by no means the last. The United Kingdom has not become a federal system. There is no English parliament. But we are well on the way. Federalism is the logical constitutional next step. At the same time the British monarchy is also under fire and republicanism is becoming part of a new political agenda.

The issue is no longer whether their prediction is coming to pass, but why it has taken so long. The answer is surely the success of the British empire and the post-war 'social monarchy' in holding back social and political change. Now the impact of decolonisation, the end of the long post-war boom, the impact of Thatcherism, the integration into Europe means that the whole constitutional structure is unravelling.

The road towards a federal republic, which Engels perceptively saw on his political map, is now opening up. Engels' and Lenin's 'futurology' about the British state was not misconceived. They understood not only the bourgeois state in general, but the historically evolving British monarchist and unionist state in particular. They were not mistaken. They were far sighted. The *Marxist Bulletin* is puny in comparison. Their understanding of the development of the British state compared to Engels and Lenin is zero.

The national question is propelling the UK towards a federal republic and there is very little that *Marxist Bulletin* can do, except watch in amazement and wonder what the hell Engels and Lenin were talking about. Perhaps they will try to play the socialist King Canute, while the tide of history washes over them.

My main argument is not based on a quotation. A case should be made quite independently of what Engels and Lenin said. A democratic republic (whether federal or not) is a transi-

tional demand. It is a very powerful demand because it is not invented out of thin air, but rooted in the historical movement of the British state. Between today's conditions and the future workers' republic are a set of transitional demands, which do not in themselves constitute the abolition of parliament. By mobilising around these demands and winning them, the working class changes itself and becomes ready for power.

We can use the analogy of a game of football. Our enemies are on the attack. We are penned in our own penalty area, on the defensive. As soon as we win the ball, someone shouts "shoot". Whilst it is formally correct that we cannot win without shooting, it is a piece of leftist nonsense to think we can score from our own penalty area. Our task is not to shoot but to pass the ball up through mid-field to our star striker, who is in their penalty area. Then shooting is practical politics.

Transitional politics is not about scoring the winning goal, but rather about getting the ball from our defence into an attacking position. But our striker may fail to score. We may be tackled or shoot over the bar. The enemy may counter-attack. Of course a federal republic will not automatically become a workers' republic. Passing the ball to the star striker is not the same as scoring the winning goal. *Marxist Bulletin* want to warn everybody of this. They want to avoid it by keeping the ball in their own penalty area!

A democratic republic is a progressive democratic demand, not the final goal. The case for this is also made in *State and revolution*. The weakest argument is that of formal logic. A democratic republic is more democratic than a constitutional monarchy - the democratic and hereditary principles clash. We are comparing the conservative democratic republics of France, Germany, and the USA with Britain. This is not to have any illusions in conservative republics. Capitalism and exploitation exist in all cases.

Formal logic is not the main argument. We are concerned with dialectics - the process of becoming a republic. Some Marxists seem incapable of thinking beyond the static comparison of the USA and France with the United Kingdom in 1998. Our concern is about how a country becomes a republic. There are many examples to draw on including England in 1649, US in 1778, France in 1789, 1848 and 1870, Russia in 1917, Germany 1918 and Spain in 1930.

A state can become a democratic republic, either from above, or from below. If it comes from above, it will be a conservative republic. Australia seems set to follow this path. If it comes by mass action from below, it will be a revolutionary republic. A workers' party cannot afford to ignore the republican question or sit on the side lines. It must ensure that the republic is fought for and won by means of working class action. Premature talk about the workers' republic diverts the working class from militant republican struggle and makes a reformed monarchy or a conservative republic more likely.

Finally there is the question of federalism. Unlike nationalists we do not begin with a prejudice in favour of separation. There can be economic and political benefits for the working class of a single state. Of course, as democrats, we uphold the principle of national self-determination, which includes separation as an option. Separation is preferable to forced unity imposed by the bourgeoisie, as we see in the case of Ireland.

We are fighting for the unity of the international working class. This includes fighting for the unity of the English, Scottish and Welsh working class around the demand for a federal republic. We want to abolish the unionist monarchy in favour of a voluntary federal republic. The Scottish, Welsh and English people should be asked to join the new federal republic. The principle of self-determination should be written into the constitution, so that even if the Scottish and Welsh people agree to join, there is a peaceful and democratic means of leaving if the people change their minds.

This is the case for a federal republic as a progressive, democratic and transitional demand. It is a demand whose main strength is that it is centrally concerned with rebuilding the political unity of the English, Scottish and Welsh working class and winning the principle of self-determination. We do not need quotes from Engels and Lenin to make our case. It stands on its own merits. But we should not ignore the brilliant insights that some of our greatest leaders have left behind for our consideration.

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● 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.

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Socialist Alliances - all-Britain unity vital

Simon Harvey of the SLP SLP to boycott Blair's referendum

The London regional committee of the SLP is calling for a boycott of Blair's referendum for a London Government Authority. The decision was unanimous. That there was no dissent indicates a shift in position by Brian Heron, who had previously spoken against a boycott at CSLP meetings. Comrades from the London regional committee have been assigned to develop a campaigning strategy.

I welcome the decision and look forward to campaigning against Blair's rigged referendum. The government's white paper on a London authority is out. It has one take-it-or-leave-it, question: do you want a mayor and local authority for London? More akin to a dictator's plebiscite than a genuine referendum.

There is no genuine extension of democracy for Londoners envisaged in the new authority. The mayor will be a US-style executive dictator, working hand-in-hand with the City and other vested interests of the ruling class to develop policy set to be approved or otherwise by a 'slimlined' elected authority. Blair has in mind a complete transformation of local government. Old Labour sleaze to be replaced by a thoroughly modern variety - a caste of professional decision makers hand picked from the bourgeois parties. Small business graft and influence of a petty nature to be pushed aside by big business, big bucks and Branson. Such is the 'new Britain' of New Labour.

So far, the response of the SLP to Blair's top-down constitutional reformation has been haphazard. In the Scottish devolution referendum the party voted 'yes, yes' along with Labour, the Scottish National Party, Liberal Democrats, Scottish Militant Labour and dissident Tories.

In Wales, the story was different. In the lead up to the referendum, Scargill single-handedly ordered the postponement of the Welsh party conference to head off criticism and probable removal of Welsh secretary, 'his man in Wales' Dave Proctor. This left the party completely unarmed in the face of Blair's proposals.

It now appears that elements of the SLP in Scotland are calling for Scottish independence (see below). A dog's breakfast if ever there was one. This comes from Scargill's incoherent method of party building. A thousand flowers are allowed to bloom, so long as his central bureaucratic authority is left unchallenged. On certain questions which are integral to Scargill's authority, such as Europe, debate is severely curtailed. Other issues of little concern to our general secretary, such as constitutional change and the national question, are left to spontaneity.

The Fiscite spin on this is *de facto* regional autonomy within the party. A tendency to geographical federalism based not on political principle, but on an opportunist approach to 'unity'. It is thought that Scottish comrades should decide on Scottish issues, Welsh on Welsh, Londoners on London ... Such an approach

has plunged Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party into crisis beginning with the desertion of Panther UK, Scottish Militant Labour declaring for independence and various regions, like Liverpool, declaring financial independence.

■ Socialist News

The eleventh issue of our party's paper is out. Again it is characterised by its extreme eclecticism. Apart from reading about Malcolm Mead's holiday in Cuba, we get a lesson from Paul Lockwood on the difference between the incorrect term of 'command economy' apparently used to describe the USSR by "left sneerers" and the correct term of 'planned economy'. And Paddy Lloyd argues that we need to "broaden our perception of fighting for the disenfranchised to include animals"!

Of more substance is Chris Herriot's article, 'Hidden history: Scotland's past of oppression and insurrection'. According to comrade Herriot, through the Act of Union (1707), "Scotland was reduced to the status of a mere commodity and sold to her neighbour by a 'parcel of rogues'". While he does not directly call for Scottish independence, it is implied. The entire article is prefaced as arguments against "those who argue against Scotland's independence".

The comrade's descent into nationalism is clear when he points out the act of union was agreed by a Scottish parliament "drawn from the rich and the powerful; neither elected by nor accountable to the majority of Scottish people" - as if the English and Welsh masses had a democratic say.

The comrade then unwittingly undermines his indirect argument for Scottish independence. He states: "the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745 further complicated the question of home rule, since it posed one dynasty against the other, and pitted highlander against lowlander". The national oppression of the Scots, which is central to his mystified argument, is revealed as aristocratic feuding, no doubt fought with the blood of the toiling masses, as ever such wars were.

Fending off arguments about Scotland's integral role in the British empire's rapacious and blood-thirsty plunder of the world, comrade Herriot feebly argues "there is nothing unique about oppressed peoples being used by imperialism as the tools to crush other oppressed peoples".

Homophobic ranter and ex-Trotskyite raver Royston Bull is given the back page this issue. "Arrogance? Hypocrisy? Absolutely, and almost (but not quite) beyond belief" argues the editor of *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*. Alas, he is not talking about himself or the SLP regime, but the Lord Chancellor's luxurious refurbishments. The irony is most beautiful: "Hypocrites or what?" screams the headline. "Double standards rule the roost, says Royston Bull". For once, I agree with you Roy ●

English Alliance moves at last

The national meeting of the Socialist Alliance Network of England was held in Coventry last Saturday. The meeting represented an important step forward in developing an alternative to the Labour Party. John Nicholson of the National Liaison Committee opened the meeting. He explained that it had been reconvened earlier than expected because of events in the Labour Party, especially the rebellion in parliament over welfare cuts and the expulsion of Euro-MPs, Hugh Kerr and Ken Coates. Pete Brown, representing the MEPs, conveyed their full support.

Although the attendance was down a little on the last meeting, it was far more representative, with 30 organisations present. Among the participants were representatives of the Green Party, including its chair, Claire Wooding. They had come with the aim of finding some way to work together with the SAs around the 1999 Euro elections. However, instead of the expected non-aggression proposal - ie, not fighting each other, the Green Party said they had already made their selection and would be standing in every constituency. This provoked anger. People had not made the break from Labour to stand down for the Greens. However rumours circulating throughout the day suggested that the Greens might not be so inflexible after all. Apparently Wooding says in private that they could well be prepared to do a deal. The fact of their attendance certainly shows how seriously they take the potential of the Alliances in the Euro elections.

The morning discussions centred on report backs from various alliances. A debate developed on standing in elections. Alan Thornett from Socialist Outlook expressed his horror at the idea of the London Alliance aiming to stand 100 candidates in the forthcoming elections to the 32 borough councils. This was pure "adventurism", according to Thornett. His comrade Pete Firmin argued that standing in elections must not be about propaganda. It apparently "means far more than that". Obviously SO has deep illusions in bourgeois elections. The very reason the CPGBers stand is to make revolutionary propaganda. Not because we actually believe in the legitimacy of bourgeois elections. The other problem of course for SO is that they are part of the Alliances but still support Labour. While Hugh Kerr, Ken Coates and others are making the break, but still sadly



Ken Coates gives full support

cling on.

The aftermath session discussed a position paper put forward by the Liaison Committee and other documents put forward by Martin Wicks of Socialist Perspectives, and Nick Long from Lewisham SA. They all concerned the future direction of the Alliance. No vote was taken but it was agreed through consensus that a September conference would be held at which documents, including proposed rules for an interim structure would be discussed and voted on. The general idea of the Liaison Committee was to make the first moves towards creating a structured organisation. Some discussion was had over how quickly we should move forward. It was suggested by Martin Wicks that the main lesson to be learnt from the SLP experience was that Scargill was wrong to create a party when he did. He was also against what he termed the "electoralist approach". In contrast however another member of his organisation Socialist Perspectives, Dave Spencer, argued that this was completely wrong. Scargill was quite right to take the initiative. The problem was his absolutism and the disservice he has done the working class by creating a bureaucratic monster. Nick Long also put forward a far more positive approach. To take what he termed this "window of opportunity" it was important not to be hesitant. It was vital to take a bold approach.

London SA Ad-Hoc Convenor Anne Murphy put forward an amendment to the Liaison

Committee's proposals to the effect that the Alliance should have political aims that are *accepted* rather than *agreed*. In doing so she emphasised the importance of differences and debate. Socialism is about working class self-emancipation which of necessity implies debates and majority-minority votes, not everybody having to agree and differences brushed aside. John Nicholson of the Liaison Committee supported the amendment and it was generally agreed that having stated aims did not mean they could not continue to be discussed and other positions put forward.

It was a positive, open and relatively frank meeting. The Socialist Party comrades in attendance restated their commitment to the project and to standing as part of their Alliance. They insisted that reports of lack of commitment were completely untrue. Hopefully we will now get a more positive involvement on the ground, where there has been decided unevenness in approach.

Dave Nellist in the closing speech expressed his passionate belief that the Alliances could provide the left and the working class the possibility of having a voice. Not before time the Alliances in England have taken a step forward. There is of course a long way to go and issues such as the need for an all-Britain Alliance rather than creating divisions between the Welsh, Scottish and English working class still need to be resolved. But we are on our way ●

Anne Murphy