

**Blair's proposed new settlement in Ireland is part of a wider plan of constitutional reform**

# For a united Ireland

**W**e could be entering the final lap of the imperialist-driven 'peace' process in Northern Ireland. George Mitchell, the United States senator and chair of the Stormont talks, insists at the time of writing that the Thursday deadline for completion of the talks can still be met. It is almost beyond question that some sort of settlement is imminent. *The Independent*, for one, certainly thinks so and can hardly wait for the signatures to hit the paper: "We suspect that the momentum and will for peace are now too great to be defeated". It went on to implore that, this time, all the parties involved make "the peace process a peace settlement" (Editorial April 4).

For anyone who doubts the imperialist sincerity of the British government, just take a stroll around the castle buildings at Stormont or the government quarters in Dublin. British and Irish officials are burning the midnight oil. The current level of diplomatic activity has been described as "feverish". For the first time in 21 months all the respective parties attended the Stormont talks on Sunday. According to one of the delegates: "More work has been done in the past week than in the previous umpteen months". Tony Blair is now in Belfast to help the final push for 'peace'.

The obvious question remains. Will both the loyalists and the nationalists swallow, compromise and accept Mitchell's terms?

It has not been an easy ride for Mitchell or the forces of imperialism. The 'peace' process is inherently volatile. Crisis, setbacks and delays can surface at any time. This is clear. Hardly surprisingly, the US senator has been less than happy with the conduct over recent days of Blair and Bertie Ahern, the Irish prime minister. Last Friday, Mitchell was asked right at the last minute to withhold his 65-page document, which was on the verge of being released. Blair wanted to consult with David Trimble, Ulster Unionist Party leader and Ahern with Sinn Fein (in other words, the SF and UUP leaders are almost certainly negotiating directly through the two prime ministers). Old oppressive hab-

its do not exactly help as well. Unhelpfully - though with an element of black humour - Gerry Adams was stopped at an army checkpoint on his way to the Stormont talks meeting on Friday.

All this intensive diplomatic toing-and-froing - and British army crassness - demonstrates of course the fragile and complex nature of the imperialists' peace negotiations. It requires some very deft manoeuvring on behalf of the British and Irish governments. Just one clumsy move there, one awkward or badly formulated phrase here, and perhaps ...

But bit by bit, talk by talk, deal by deal, the forces of revolutionary nationalism - and those of counterrevolutionary loyalism - are being drawn into the diplomatic net. After years of hardship and frustration, the carrot being dangled by Mitchell and his backers might prove too hard to refuse. Lord Alderdice of the 'nonsectarian', pro-union Alliance Party summed up the collective desires of the pro-imperialist bourgeoisie in Northern Ireland: "Not only are most of the outline agreed, most of the detail is too. We are looking to get there. It's looking good". Even David Trimble sounded upbeat and positive: "I think the difficulties can be overcome if people are sensible in their approach to the negotiations."

Under the aegis of Mitchell, three strands are being negotiated simultaneously: the powers and functions of a Northern Ireland assembly; the scope of cross-border institutions; and the relationship between Dublin, Belfast and London and the Scottish and Welsh assemblies. SDLP wants a power sharing executive, which will have some 90 members, with each community having a veto over all decisions. The loyalists want a committee-style assembly to run Northern Ireland's six departments.

Many are dubbing the current negotiations 'Sunningdale II'. Indeed, Seamus Mallon, the SDLP's deputy leader, has called the new deal taking shape in Stormont "Sunningdale for slow learners". However, the differences far outnumber the similarities. The general world situation has

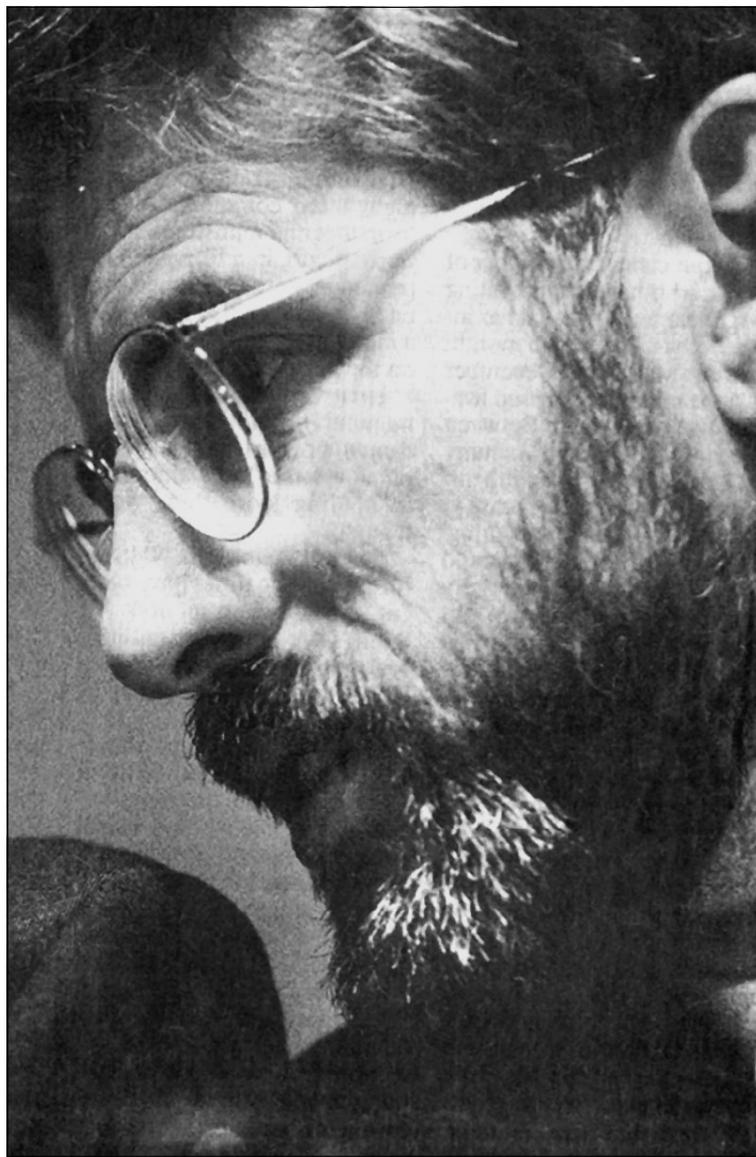
changed out of virtually all recognition. The ignoble collapse of the 'socialist bloc' left only one superpower on the map - US imperialism. Naturally, the vastly increased clout of American imperialism narrowed the scope for manoeuvre for national liberation movements. Hence the defeat or - usually - the integration of revolutionary nationalist organisations (ANC, PLO, etc) into the imperialist framework. Nelson Mandela and Yasser Arafat are now loyal accomplices to the imperialists' plans and schemes.

Crucially, at Sunningdale the paramilitary forces were on the outside, frowning and scowling in. Now they are talking *from the inside*. In addition, Ian Paisley's intransigent Democratic Unionist Party has been effectively sidelined by the Ulster Democratic Party and the Progressive Unionist Party - at least for the time being anyway.

The differences between then and now were also apparent to *The Independent*. Discussing Sunningdale, it confidently claimed: "This settlement will be superior. It will, through the twin referendum on both sides of the border, be more legitimate" (April 4).

The sticking point remains as ever on cross-border institutions. The loyalists want to make sure that any such bodies have no executive power. But they might concede that if they *are* to have executive-powers, then they should be enshrined in legislation at Westminster rather than deriving from the proposed northern assembly. Nationalists, whether constitutional or revolutionary, maintain that the northern assembly - Stormont II, if you like - will have *de facto* executive powers. It will have an "inbuilt dynamic to grow" executive powers, was how one Sinn Fein delegate delicately put it. There is also the ever thorny question of policing and (the release of) prisoners.

Sinn Fein/IRA might well acquiesce to an imperialist-driven deal. The pressure is immense. If it does, it is important to stress that we are not witnessing a resounding defeat for the forces of revolutionary republicanism in Northern Ireland. The Provisional



Gerry Adams: today a revolutionary nationalist, tomorrow ...

IRA fought heroically for 30 years against the might of British imperialism - with its death squads, assassinations, internment, intimidation, repressive laws, etc. The Crown forces were unable to defeat PIRA. The peace talks are a recognition of this fact.

But communists understand that PIRA - and, for that matter, Continuity IRA - are not *proletarian* revolutionaries. As a petty bourgeois nationalist movement it is inevitably pulled between the rock of guerillaism and the hard place of secretive, back-handed diplomacy with the imperialists - with the oppressed masses acting as pawns.

Mitchell proposes a north-south ministerial council, drawing its representatives from the northern assembly and the Dail, with up to 14 implementation bodies operating under a council of ministers - trade; tourism; transport; health; culture and the arts, etc. This fudge will not bring joy

to the hearts of Sinn Fein or moderate unionists - but not too much dismay either. As part of the overall imperialist package, a snap referendum will be held on April 23 both north and south, with elections to the assembly this summer. The Blairite passion for rule by referendum - ie, from *above* - continues.

Mitchell was very concerned that the settlement details were *kept secret* for as long as possible. "Lives and deaths are at stake here. It would be incredible and deeply disturbing for anyone in this process to engage in that for short term advantage when we are so close to a conclusion," he announced. He also told journalists he believed it better that the 'settlement papers' be delivered late and right, then on time but wrong.

Whatever deal is made - or not made - this week, the oppressed in the north of Ireland remain undefeated ●

Eddie Ford



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

## USSR school

Participants judged the Party school on the USSR over the weekend of April 4-5 a success and one of the most useful we have organised in recent years. It was a pity that a series of unavoidable circumstances kept the numbers attending low, but the presence of comrades from other trends greatly enriched the debate. In particular, I would highlight the contributions of Phil Sharpe as consistently challenging and useful.

Over the two days, a great deal of material was analysed, many important theoretical questions aired. In this week's report however, I want to look at a recurring theme of the school - the question of method, theoretical development and definition.

Opponents on the revolutionary left often accuse our organisation of being 'agnostic', or even 'philistine' concerning the key political question of the 20th century - the nature of the Soviet Union. The latest - and amongst the crudest - has been comrade Richard Brenner of Workers Power who tells our readers of "the CPGB's insistence that there is something 'bureaucratic' or 'sect-like' about an organisation deciding on its policy after internal debate, and then requiring its members to fight publicly for the majority position" (*Weekly Worker* April 2).

With a dishonest - and laughably clumsy - sleight of hand, the comrade makes the profoundly complex and pivotal question of the nature of the Soviet Union a matter of binding "policy", like perhaps our attitude to action around a particular demo, election or picket. It would be difficult for me to provide more conclusive evidence of the 'sect-like' nature of WP than comrade Brenner gives us every time he writes.

But what of this charge of 'agnosticism'? In fact, our school made clear that we are striving for a collective view of this phenomenon. We do want the Communist Party to be characterised by an understanding of the nature of the USSR and the reasons for its failure. After all, this awareness will hopefully inform - though it need not be explicitly present in - our programmatic approach to the task of working class state power. The key question of the 20th century cannot be met with a shrug. However, unlike a sect, we will not make such an understanding a requirement of membership of the revolutionary party.

The two major alternative theories confronting us at the school were that of 'orthodox' Trotskyism - represented by the Marxist Bulletin - and the variant of state capitalism held by comrades of the Revolutionary Democratic Group and the Worker Communist Party of Iraq. Our essential criticism of these currents is of their flawed, atrophied method. Take for example the way that Trotskyism has laid hold of the man's partial, unfinished definitions and categories and frozen them into vacuum-packed dogmas. A definition is a brief, logical description of a thing, stating what is perceived of as the essential distinctive properties determining its content and parameters. Definitions are thus indispensable tools for humanity's comprehension of the world and the fight to change it.

However, they are conditional understandings, circumscribed by cultural levels, the data available and the stage the phenomenon being studied has reached in its process of development. Social phenomena therefore have no 'fixed' or 'eternal' elements or character but are subject to constant change. A definition can fix the superficial attributes of a thing at any given moment or period, and thus transform these attributes into something permanent and unchanging.

Definitions are rendered further contingent through the very nature of human cognition of a world characterised by flux and change. Lenin thus writes that "the representation of movement by means of thought always makes coarse, kills - and not only by means of thought, but also by means of perception, and not only movement but every concept" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 38, pp259-60).

Trotsky's provisional categories represent enormously profound attempts by a Marxist of genius to develop an understanding of a unique, totally unprecedented social phenomenon in the very course of its birth and consolidation. Trotsky's problems were exacerbated by his conditions of exile and the extreme pressure from Stalin. But despite lapses, his thinking on the USSR continued to show flexibility and development. Hillel Ticktin considers that "logically, he was on a trajectory of gradually admitting the reality of the formation" of a system that could not be subsumed under the definition of 'degenerated workers' state' " (H Ticktin and M Cox *The ideas of Leon Trotsky* London 1995, p77).

Such a judgement has a degree of historical speculation to it, of course. Yet there is surely no excuse for those of us who have before us the beginning, the middle and end of the phenomenon that was the USSR and thus are able to stand on the shoulders of giants such as Trotsky.

Yet the vast bulk of the revolutionary left have viewed the collapse of the USSR and bureaucratic regimes of eastern Europe simply as bland confirmations of their own particular theoretical shibboleths, whatever the facts scream at them. We believe that it is perhaps the key theoretical task of Marxism to account for the horrors that the first attempt to build a workers' society produced. Despite the sanguine nature of the left, almost all conceptual models that have attempted to explain this unique social formation have proved either one-sided, or simply wrong.

We must surely use the empirical raw material now available to us to grasp its fundamental laws of motion. Any investigation which starts with the *a priori* method of simply hammering the available evidence into an existing definition is not simply useless to the working class; it is positively reactionary ●

Mark Fischer  
national organiser

## Errant nonsense

In his letter (*Weekly Worker*, April 2), J Reilly uses two quotes from the Red Action initiated open invitation to all working class militants, as follows:

"According to *Open Polemic*, 'addressing the contemporary problems of the working class' or even attempting 'to provide progressive working class thinking with a strategical and theoretical cutting edge' is certainly counter-productive if not counter-revolutionary. Have you ever heard such errant nonsense?"

It is really Reilly who is indulging in errant nonsense because *Open Polemic* is addressing the problems and attempting to provide a cutting edge.

Reilly even claims that *Open Polemic* argues that "until they (the working class) come to their senses they should be ignored".

As members of the working class we are far from ignoring it. In fact, our response to the open invitation stated that:

"While we agree with Red Action's statement that the battle for hearts and minds must begin with the battle of ideas, we fervently disagree with it and other anarcho-communist trends that the battle of ideas begins with the undifferentiated class, ie, the mass of the class. On the contrary, life dictates that it begins with the most advanced sections, those already engaged in some form of revolutionary activity. Until we, the revolutionary section of the class, are united in the nucleus of a party, we can offer little but pious rhetoric to the class as a whole".

**Open Polemic**  
West London

## Bureaucratic flock

Last week I read comrade Richard Brenner's fourth contribution in the *Weekly Worker*. However, it shocked me how Workers Power could completely ignore many crucial arguments which were pointed out many months ago by different comrades in this paper. If he would like to deserve some respect he should answer the following questions:

1. When will WP, *Trotskyist International* or any other League for a Revolutionary Communist International publication carry a critique from one of the many comrades who wrote for the *Weekly Worker*, or inform/debate with their readers about the prolific discussions which have evolved in this paper?
2. Comrade Brenner said that WP's U-turns on Scotland and Eastern Europe showed a healthy internal life. However, WP never acknowledge the fact that other currents (like the LCMRCI, the LTT, the CPGB, etc.) previously hammered WP's opposition against Scottish self-determination and its insistence (until August 1997) that all the countries east of Germany were workers' states. Why do they not recognise the influence of their own dissidents and other currents in their political shifts?
3. The fact that an organisation has so many different lines is not synonymous with internal democracy. It could show a high degree of confusion and that it is a bureaucratic flock around a despotic ruling and eclectic clique. When will WP explain how they mouth the most untenable contradictions? How they voted Labour for 23 years of existence and promoted a 'revolutionary tendency' in it while they do not do the slightest work in Labour's ranks?
4. In relation to the LRCI's new line on the character of the "workers' states". What happened in August 1997 which caused the LRCI to decide that henceforth the most prosperous eight Eastern European states had crossed the Rubicon and become bourgeois states?

How can LRCI say now that it is possible to have a bourgeois state that can expropriate the bourgeoisie and that a workers' state can perfect the bourgeois state?

5. WP justified its clandestine methods as being imposed by the needs of Bolshevik homogenisation. However, its line is entirely erratic. They decided to have closed discussions because they are incapable of debating them in front of the class and even their readers? If Brenner is so proud of the LRCI's lively internal life, why does he totally ignore its dissidents? In the 1940s the Fourth International invited the Schachtmanite and Poulantzas splinters to discussions with their own papers and internal conferences. However, the LRCI threatens its dissidents. In fact, one of the reasons why Brenner is so keen in writing in the *Weekly Worker* is because this paper has served as a tribune for the LRCI's dissidents. However, the LRCI has decided to consider all of them as non-persons. They never reply directly to them.

**J Sheridan**  
Birmingham

## Sensible challenge

I was chastened to read, in the *Weekly Worker* (March 26) that not only am I "fond of portraying" myself as "the very model of the sensible Marxist", but I even personify an especially iniquitous trend in the labour movement - "sensible Bob Pitt types". I mean, we can't have the far left going around being *sensible*, can we? It is reassuring to know that the *Weekly Worker* will be maintaining its resolute stand against this particular ideological deviation.

**Bob Pitt**  
North West London

## Anti-racist crusade

Racism is everywhere. You cannot move for racists. No section of society is immune from this terrible social evil. Something must be done.

Yes, welcome to New Britain - which does not allow for 'old' racism. Anti-racism is the official ideology of the bourgeois state. For liberal - or even not so liberal - anti-racists this presents no problem or dilemma. Surely, at the end of the day, only racists could object to the state passing what it terms 'anti-racist' legislation?

But in the real world of class society and class struggle, 'official' anti-racism divides the working class. For all its fine talk, 'official' anti-racism actually ends up dividing the working class along 'racial' lines - not uniting them. To get your grant from the council, you have to fulfil its quotas - lo and behold one 'race' competes with another for scarce resources. Instead of uniting and fighting, there is division in the fight for favours.

The latest target for the state's anti-racist crusade is football. Or rather, football *spectators and fans*. The nice, civilised and impeccably anti-racist Blairite team are going to sort out those 'orrible, racist yobs who attend football matches. Hence the *The Independent's* approving headline, "Blair moves to kick racism into touch" (March 31).

Tony Banks presented last Monday the first report by the government's Football Task Force. This was set up in July 1997 under the chair of David Mellor. Banks revealed that the current legislation in the Football Offences Act would be amended to enable criminal charges to be brought against individual spectators who chant racial abuse. We could soon have scenes on television of police anti-racist snatch squads diving into football crowds.

The Football Task Force has also proposed that anti-racist pledges should be put in the contracts of players and managers - even referees should be given

new anti-racist guidance. Blair has welcomed the task force's report, saying: "I am proud of the multi-cultural society we live in, proud to lead a government that believes nobody should be shut out of society's mainstream".

Jack Straw is also doing his anti-racist bit. He has told black MPs that complaints about the treatment of black prisoners can be raised *directly* with him. Straw's directive follows the outcry over the comments by Richard Tilt, head of the prison service. Tilt gave a TV interview last month in which he made the much criticised and derided claim that black people were more likely to suffocate being restrained than whites because they were "physiologically different".

From reading some left papers you would get the distinct impression that this is all part of a diabolical racist masterplan by Blair and the bourgeoisie. This is pure self-deception. When our bold prime minister talks about "stamping out racial abuse" at football matches, he *really means extending social control by the state*.

Though it likes to think so, the left does not have a monopoly on anti-racism. This must be the case - just look at the ex-Tory MP, David Mellor. As chair of the Football Task Force he has already come up with 40 different sets of ideas for tackling racism. Like Blair, he fulminates that there "must be zero tolerance to racism. Our main concern is to propose practical measures to stamp out racism wherever it occurs".

Is he kidding? I do not think so.  
**George Midway**  
Hull

## Irresponsible actions

After an Oldham school was daubed extensively with swastika stickers - a situation aggravated by comments in the local press that the majority of attacks in the area were on whites by coloureds - the Anti-Nazi League made a hasty response.

It set up a stall in Oldham town centre last Saturday to carry out petitioning and paper sales. One of the volunteers told me that the atmosphere was not encouraging and that "people on the street openly used racist language". This, however, did not prepare these comrades for an open physical attack upon them. In a hit-and-run operation ten fascists overturned the stall, severely kicking and punching the volunteers. Workers at a nearby Boots store gave assistance, despite objections from their management at becoming involved in 'gang warfare'.

There are serious questions raised by this event. It is well known that the British National Party has a base in the nearby town of Rochdale. The supposed 'mobilisation' of the SWP only extended to those areas where the Anti-Nazi League has influence. No other left or local community groups were approached. The actions of those who parachuted into this area may leave locals in a worse position.

The failure to defend this event will only give strength to the fascists and their periphery support. The ANL has endangered its supporters in what can only be considered an irresponsible manner.

It is not the job of the left in general to defend other organisations' paper sales - that is up to them. But no one can be oblivious to the fact that the fascists are trying to spread their ideas, organisation and terrorism in Manchester. This threat needs to be met in a united, planned and military style manner.

**Raymond Gregory**  
Manchester

# Making a mass impact

**action**

This was an upbeat and positive meeting. It brought together supporters and members from a range of left groups - the Socialist Labour Party (albeit in an unofficial capacity), Socialist Democracy Group, Socialist Outlook, Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain. There was also a representative from the London Federation of Green Parties.

The meeting reflected the mood of anger mounting against Blair's anti-democratic, arrogant rule. His rigged, take-it-or-leave-it referendum on May 7 in London is typically New Labour - a dictatorial device which aims to gain the acceptance of Londoners to the absence of democracy under the guise of 'bringing democracy'. Those who attended, whatever their view on actually how to vote come May 7, were all united in opposition to Blair's 'strong', US-style mayor and a weak assembly. As said by a number of comrades during the discussion, the proposed puppet mayor represents the further Blairisation of British politics and society - ie, the appearance of democracy but the actual rule of capital.

The mood among the local SAs is undoubtedly swinging towards a boycottist position. Brent SA has adopted this position. Lewisham SA is asking voters to spoil their ballot paper by voting on it, 'Bring back the GLC'. Other organisations, not least the CPGB and the London SLP, have adopted a boycottist stance - demanding a democratic assembly and a republic.

Ex-SLPer Ian Driver gave a militant speech decrying Blair's "sham" referendum. In comrade Driver's opinion the old GLC, for all its faults, did "act as a redistributive mechanism". The same could certainly not be said about the proposed GLA and mayor - which will be working hand in glove with big business. "There will be no genuine democracy," said the comrade.

Indeed, continued comrade Driver, the whole process leading up to the May 7 referendum has been a textbook example of Blairite authoritarianism. Last year's London conference of Labour Party members - intended explicitly to discuss the whole referendum question - was 'mysteriously' cancelled at the last minute. In other words, suggested comrade Driver, Blair got wind that the majority of local Labour activists did not want a mayor. Therefore, purely in the interests of democracy of course, no more conference ...

Given these conditions, comrade Driver said there was no way he could vote 'yes' or 'no' on May 7. To vote 'yes' would be to endorse the Blairite project. To vote 'no' would be tantamount to saying the status quo is satisfactory. There was only one option left - spoil the ballot papers in protest.

Comrade Driver was keen to stress that any boycott campaign should be viewed as a *positive* step. That is why it was vital that there was a left slate for the the assembly if it happens - and to stand 'anti-mayor' candidates in the local elections which are to be held on the same day. In the elections, the left should campaign for a 'peoples assembly' - on a programme of local taxation. Tax the rich and big companies that will be 'sponsoring' the mayor and assembly.

The other platform speaker was comrade Julie Donovan from the Socialist Party. Significantly she was the only SP member to attend the

## Danny Hammill reports on the April 7 meeting of the London Socialist Alliance, where it discussed which position to take on Blair's May 7 rigged referendum

meeting. The comrade sympathised with the comments of comrade Driver, however, despite her opposition to Blair's plans, she could not see the wisdom of a boycott. In the view of comrade Donovan "there was a lack of mood" for a boycott. It was just "not possible to organise a mass boycott". She also stated that "most people do not care" about the referendum - there is an "apathetic mood" in general.

Those that can motivate themselves to vote on May 7, suggested the comrade, will see the London mayor and GLA as a "small step forward". She strongly implied that socialists should always 'be with the masses', by which she means the majority - a hopelessly tailist perspective. The task of socialists, as the comrade put it, is not to get excited about the referendum as such but to highlight what she economically called the "real issues" - transport, jobs, defence of the emergency services, etc.

For all this, the comrade left it dangling in the air as to what *exactly* is the position of the SP come May 7. Surely a very concrete situation deserves concrete answers. A comrade from Socialist Outlook interjected at this point: "So, how is SP going to vote on May 7?"

After much squirming, comrade Donovan finally admitted, "Well, the GLA will not be a quango - as such". The comrade went on to say *she* would be voting 'yes' - something being better than nothing. Later, after some good-humoured taunting, she blurted out the classic 'lesser of two evils' view that Blair's assembly *will* represent "some sort of advance". As we know this was the stageist argument used by Scottish Militant Labour to vote 'yes, yes' in the September 11 Scottish referendum. (Interestingly, comrade Donovan's views were strongly echoed by the Green representative, who maintained on behalf of her organisation that "any authority is better than no authority" and that a boycott is not "constructive" - that we "must engage in the process" of politics," not step aside from it, despite that she personally would be voting 'no').

We were told by comrade Donovan that the SP has prepared a leaflet that will "explain" to Londoners what sort of authority they need. Hopefully, it will also clarify the SP's position, which remains delphic. The leaflet, said the comrade, outlines how the SP favours a "large assembly with tax-varying powers". It will also demand that there should be three separate questions on the ballot paper: 'yes' or 'no' to a mayor, a London assembly and a London assembly with tax-varying powers.

In her final assessment the comrade sounded distinctly downbeat - if not miserabilist. Directly quoting from John Bridge's discussion paper - submitted to the LSA on behalf of the CPGB - about concrete circumstances and tactical options. On this basis she attempted to justify her claim that there was "no possibility of a mass, active boycott". In the spirit of "accepting reality" - a phrase we hear so often from the

lips of the left nowadays - we have to recognise that it is "inevitable" that most Londoners will vote for Blair's proposals. Indeed, said the comrade, it "does not make much difference what we do".

In which case, as various speakers pointed out, why bother standing in elections? Also, if SP is *so* against boycotts, why did it not come in force to the meeting and get the LSA to adopt a 'yes' (critical or otherwise) position - we are told it still has some 30-40 activists in the London area. It would not be wild speculation to see this unwillingness to mobilise as evidence of faultlines in the ranks of SP over the referendum question.

Comrades from Socialist Outlook in their turn argued for a 'no' vote. Using the SP formula - but in reverse - they argued with undeniable logic that Blair's mayor/GLA will indeed be a "stepping stone" - but to *something worse*. By voting 'yes' on May 7, the SO comrades thought, "We will be giving credibility to Blair". Post-referendum, "life will be more difficult for socialists", not easier, as the SP comrades seems to imagine. Do not let Blair "get away with it" in London, was how one SO comrade put it.

It therefore followed for the comrades that a boycott can only feed apathy, not combat it. "Always" telling workers to boycott "generates apathy". Hence an "active boycott" is a contradiction in terms said one SO comrade. Unfortunately the comrades never *really* explained how voting 'no' with the pro-status quo sections of the Tory Party was going to activate the working class or present an absolutely distinct position. The fact that there will be left candidates standing in the local elections on the same day was also swept under the carpet by the SO comrades. It somewhat spoils their thesis that the CPGB in particular is developing a boycottist mania.

John Bridge of the CPGB forcefully outlined the boycott position. The London referendum is all part and parcel of Blair's project to stabilise Britain from above - to make the workers "identify" with the institutions of the state. But for all Blair's intentions, the referendum offers an opportunity for the left to "make a mass impact", said the comrade. To vote either 'yes' or 'no' is to actually make ourselves "inarticulate".

Seeing how a "window of opportunity" was opening up before our eyes, maintained comrade Bridge, "we need a clear and distinctive argument". The left can make a difference - if it draws clear demarcation lines. For instance, Ken Livingstone is railing Blair's proposals. But at the end of the day he will vote 'yes' anyway. The left must not 'do a Livingstone' and merge into the Blairite/establishment camp.

Standing left candidates in the local elections shows something positive. Comrade Bridge thought it crucial to counter the almost instinctive pessimism of the left, which seems to think that they are "automatically irrelevant" - so why bother doing anything bold or imaginative?

This gloomy mindset appeared to have gripped the SP comrades. On the other hand, comrade Bridge emphasised, the recent decision of London SLP to boycott the referendum shows courage - and the potential for an effective and determined left opposition to New Labour.

Mark Fischer, also from the CPGB, cited the example of Scotland and SML. By advocating what they thought was a clever-clever 'yes, yes' vote, SML virtually disappeared from sight during the referendum campaign. No doubt they thought they were being 'with the masses'. But look where it got them - nowhere. In terms of publicity and general media impact, the CPGB and its boycott campaign made far more of an impression than SML - precisely because it was principled and thus stood out. Unfortunately, it looks like the 'English' SP is in danger of repeating the same mistake as SML.

Comrade John Bulaitis of the Socialist Democracy Group agreed that SP was "avoiding the big question". How are we going to "make our voice heard", asked the comrade? By presenting what he termed the "third view" - ie, a boycott position as opposed to 'yes' or 'no' - the left can potentially gain access to the media. If the left is bold, then it makes its mark on society.

Comrade Bulitus, like other comrades, wanted to be clear that a boycott was only - at the end of the day - a *tactic*.

A comrade from the SLP - there as an unofficial observer - reinforced the view that a boycott campaign could help to unite the left. The SLP - encouraging - has adopted a boycott campaign. This puts it *to the left of SP* and has to be applauded. It also shows that there is fluidity on the left - even in the supposedly 'dead' SLP. An effective boycott campaign, said the comrade, has the chance to "connect with a layer of activists".

Seeing how London SLP has a "radical position" - so should the LSA. The comrade made the case that adopting a boycott position enables the LSA to become a "party of protest" and offer a "positive alternative". Fellow SLP member, Stuart Goodman - also at the meeting in an unofficial capacity - endorsed this sentiment. The left must engage in a "constructive boycott".

In his summation, Comrade Driver admitted that there was "tactical divergence" on the referendum question. This is only to be expected, given that the Alliance represents a very broad spectrum of left opinion. But, without doubt, there was "absolute unanimity" that Blair's proposals are "flawed, corrupt and wrong". Like other speakers, comrade Driver thought that we now have a "unique opportunity to get the left together and strengthen the position of the Alliance".

The meeting ended with a decisive indicative vote in favour of spoiling the referendum ballot paper and against the idea of a 'no' campaign. It also voted unanimously for the London authority to be made "more democratic" ●

### ■ CPGB Manchester seminars

April 20: *The state remade*

Blair's project aims to consolidate the UK state within a wider European context. His entire project is only possible because the class struggle is moribund. He can loosen the bolts of the state only while there is nothing rumbling underneath. Therein lies his danger and our opportunity. Communists must fight for change while the state is in flux.

May 4 and May 18: *The minimum wage* and *The reserve army of labour*  
Short term contracts, job insecurity, attacks on welfare provision, etc - all made enforceable by high unemployment and new production techniques. The introduction of a minimum wage is not neutral in this process. When union leaders argue for a low minimum in order to maintain differentials they behave like merchants thinking only of what they can bargain for, not of the use values required for the reproduction of labour power both physically and socially. For Marx the differential between skilled and unskilled wages lies only in their relative productivity - depress one and the other necessarily falls. For more details contact Steve Riley 0161-798 6417

### ■ 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.

### ■ London Socialist Alliance

Election rally.  
Sunday May 3 - 2pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, EC1. Speakers include Hugh Kerr MEP.

### ■ Brent SA

To get involved contact Brent SA, Galaxy News Box 100, 37 Walm Lane, NW2 4QU. Tel: 0181-451 0616.

### ■ Lewisham SA

Election meeting.  
Friday April 17 - 7.30pm, Calabash Centre, George Lane, SE13. All socialist and community campaign candidates have been invited.

### ■ Lambeth SA

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

### ■ Scottish SA

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.

# Lessons of history

The post-World War I economic boom soon turned to slump. Unemployment increased rapidly - from 250,000 in autumn 1920 to 2 million by June 1921. Trade union membership plummeted and the ruling class launched an offensive on wages and conditions in the name of national recovery. On March 31 1921 the miners were locked out when they refused to accept swingeing pay cuts and an end to national bargaining. They appealed for solidarity strike action to their associates in the Triple Alliance - the railway and transport unions. Lloyd George's government prepared for a showdown by invoking the Emergency Powers Act, which had been enacted in autumn 1920 after it had been forced to drop its plan for war against Soviet Russia by the threat of a general strike.

Troops were dispatched to the coal fields. The leaders of the railway and transport unions crumbled. On Black Friday, April 15 1921, JH Thomas, leader of the National Union of Railwaymen, announced that there would be no triple alliance strike. The miners were left to fight alone, but surrendered after 11 weeks. With the miners down, one section after another followed. By the end of 1921 6 million workers had suffered pay cuts, averaging 6 shillings a week.

J Klugmann - the 'official communist' historian - suggests, "It was the right wing domination of the trade union leadership that ... led to disastrous a retreat before the employers' offensive. The reformist policy within the trade unions was class conciliation, arbitration, acceptance of the state as a neutral body above classes that could play an 'impartial' role in arbitration, avoidance of conflict, retreat before attack, rejection of class solidarity within nations and on an international scale", (J Klugmann *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* Vol 1, London 1969, p108).

Klugmann goes on to suggest that such a policy was reflected, on a world scale, in the leadership of the Amsterdam based International Federation of Trade Unions. Responding to this situation the Communist International initiated the establishment, in 1920, of the Provisional International Council of Trade and Industrial Unions, with the aim of building an alternative, revolutionary international union centre, and of winning the trade union movement from reformist class collaboration.

A number of prominent British trade unionists, including AA Purcell, and Robert Williams of the Transport Workers Federation, associated themselves with the project. In January 1921 the PICTIU published a 'Manifesto to the Organised Workers of Britain', which called on British trade unions to withdraw from the Amsterdam International, to support PICTIU, and to elect delegates to a world congress of trade unions. The congress took place in June-July 1921 and resolved to establish the Red International of Labour Unions. In January 1921, the Communist Party of Great Britain initiated the setting up of a British Bureau of the PICTIU. Following the world congress, this became the British Bureau of the RILU, with Tom Mann as chairman and Nat Watkins as secretary. Harry Pollitt later took over as secretary.

Klugmann argues that, in its early days, the British Bureau's work was primarily of a propagandist nature, "concerned with winning trade unionists away from reformism and reform-

## Following the successful Reclaim Our Rights conference Derek Hunter re-examines an invaluable chapter in working class struggle

ist leadership and towards an understanding of revolutionary principles ... From the outset, however, it made clear that it did *not* stand for the splitting of the trade unions, however reactionary the leadership might be, but for a fight against reformism and class conciliation *inside* the official trade union movement", (*ibid* p110).

He goes on to say that this approach was changed, under the guidance of Pollitt, such that the Bureau became less concerned with general propaganda, "which was the job of the Communist Party", and began to fight for a militant line of struggle within the British trade unions, to fight to stop the retreat, for effective action on issues of wages, hours, and factory conditions, to campaign for trade union amalgamation, for solidarity between unions and to explain the general aim of industrial unions.

As the official trade union leadership went from retreat to retreat, the Bureau began to emerge as a rallying ground for militant resistance to the capitalist offensive. It held many meetings in the industrial centres and took over the newspaper of the Glasgow Shop Stewards' movement, *The Worker*.

In June 1922, the National Administrative Council of the Shop Stewards movement decided to merge the organisation with the British Bureau of RILU. Towards the end of 1922, the Bureau initiated the development of a number of rank and file organisations, in the mining, engineering and shipbuilding unions, which were called Minority Movements.

During the early months of 1924, the rank and file Minority Movement organisations put down roots in transport, building and vehicle building. As a result at the 6th congress of the CPGB, in May 1924, the following resolution was passed, "The Communist Party welcomes these Minority Movements as the sign of the awakening of the workers. The CP will throw itself wholeheartedly into the struggle of the Minority Movements and will do all in its power to assist them in their struggles. The Communist Party, however, declares unhesitatingly to all the workers that the various Minority Movements cannot realise their full power so long as they remain sectional, separate and limited in their scope and character. The many streams of the rising forces of the workers must be gathered together in one powerful mass movement".

A need for a national coordinating centre that would have a deeper base in the mass movement than the British Bureau of RILU was recognised and, on August 23-24 1924 the conference which founded the National Minority Movement was held. It was attended by 270 delegates, from organisations representing 200,000 workers.

The following aims and objects were adopted:

1. To organise the working masses of Great Britain for the overthrow of capitalism, the emancipation of the workers from their oppressors and exploiters, and the establishment of the socialist commonwealth.
2. To carry on a wide agitation and propaganda for the principles of revolutionary class struggle, and to work

within the existing organisations of the workers for the purpose of fighting for the adoption of the programme of the National Minority Movement, and against the present tendency towards a false social peace and class collaboration and the delusion of a peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism.

3. To unite the workers in their everyday struggles against capitalism and to at all times advance the watchword of the united front of the workers against the exploiters.

4. To maintain the closest relations with the RILU and to work for the unity of the international trade union movement.

The conference also adopted a manifesto addressed to the TUC which proposed the following demands -

*Wages.* An increase of £1 per week, and a minimum wage of £4 per week.

*Hours.* A 44 hour working week, and abolition of overtime.

*Nationalisation.* Nationalisation of mines, minerals, banks, land and railways without compensation, and with workers' control.

*Housing.* Carrying out of an adequate housing scheme and the requisitioning of all empty houses, large and small, and the rationing of available rooms for the workers until the new houses are built.

*Unemployment.* The application of the demands of the six point charter, as agreed upon by the general council of the TUC and the National Unemployed Workers' Committee movement.

*Foreign policy.*

1. The repudiation of the Dawes report.

2. Ratification of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty.

3. The establishment of closer relations with all workers in the colonies and dependencies.

*Organisational.*

1. Formation of workshop committees, the members of which are to be guaranteed from victimisation.

2. The reorganisation of the trades councils.

3. Affiliation of the Unemployed Workers Committee movement and the trades councils to the Trades Union Congress, and representatives on the general council.

4. Creation of a general council with full powers to direct the activities of the unions, and under obligation to the Trades Union Congress to use that power.

5. The unification of the international trade union movement, and the bringing of the world's workers under a single fighting leadership."

An executive committee, based upon representatives from the different sections of the Minority Movement was elected, and this in turn appointed Tom Mann as president, and Harry Pollitt as general secretary. Within two months, it had organised district conferences in Glasgow, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, and other industrial centres. New sections taking in distributive workers, dockers, seamen and railway workers were formed. On October 10 1924 the NMM organised a rally in Trafalgar Square, attended by 10,000, around its demands

on wages and the 44 hour week, and for rejection of the Dawes plan for German war reparations.

Ramsay MacDonald's minority Labour government fell in October 1924. During the subsequent election campaign, the Foreign Office published the infamous forgery, the 'Zinoviev letter', in which the president of the Comintern was said to have explained the crucial importance of MacDonald's ratification of the British-Russian trade treaties in the preparation of communist revolution in Britain. Although Labour's vote once again increased, the Liberal vote collapsed in a middle class rush to the Tories, who secured an overwhelming majority. At its next meeting, the executive committee of the NMM adjudged the time right to publish a pamphlet, entitled *What the Minority Movement stands for*.

In the foreword a warning was given of a forthcoming capitalist offensive on wages, working hours and living conditions. This offensive had been immeasurably assisted by the election of the Conservative government, which had signified "the consolidation of all the reactionary forces in the country". Turning to the international situation, it stated that "the imperialist policy of British capitalism is being pursued more relentlessly than ever" and explained that the danger of new wars was growing. Workers struggling to free themselves from British rule in the colonies were being brutally suppressed. Germany had been virtually colonised by the Dawes plan, as a result of which the German workers were suffering low wages, long hours, high prices and increasing unemployment, although there was "fierce resistance from many sections of the German working class". At the same time, a new attack on Soviet Russia was being prepared.

Explaining that the working class can only defeat the capitalists when they can fight as a class, and not as a number of subdivided craft and sectional unions, the pamphlet called for redoubled efforts to forge national and international trade union unity. The manifesto adopted by the inaugural conference of the NMM was then reproduced as the 'Workers' Charter', with an appeal that all workers urge their organisations to demand that the joint council of the Labour Party and the TUC call a special congress to discuss the charter.

The next section of the pamphlet, headed 'What is the minority movement?', explained that "it is a movement of active workers in the working class movement, anxious that the interests of the workers as a class shall come before all other interests, either individual or sectional. The purpose of the Minority Movement is to gather these active workers together, to organise them, so that they can decide upon common programmes and policies, and to actively agitate and pursue (these) in their respective organisations".

It was stressed that the NMM was not a separatist movement, but that, on the contrary, it actively opposed any attempts to split the trade unions, or to establish an alternative TUC - Arthur Scargill take note. It continued, "In all the great trade unions there has developed a central bureaucracy which frequently acts as a barrier to swift and conscious action on the part of the workers. This bureaucracy is often under capitalist influence .... The very fact that the trade union leaders and officials ... have refused to lead

and have consistently opposed efforts towards amalgamation compels the active workers to band together and to take the initiative in formulating programmes and policies. Hence the formation of the Minority Movement".

A brief summary was given of the work being done by the miners', the transport workers' and the metal workers' Minority Movements in pursuing the objective of 'industrial unionism', ie, the formation of one union per industry. The importance of factory committees as a unifying force and as the basic unit of industrial unions was stressed. The need for a parallel, geographical organisation of the working class was asserted in describing the movement's policy on reorganisation of trades councils.

Not only should trades councils secure the affiliation of trade union branches, but their constitutions should be altered to permit the affiliation of *all bona fide* working class organisations - industrial, political, cooperative and social. The workplace committees should also affiliate to the trades councils, and trades councils should work to encourage the formation of workplace committees in all the industrial undertakings in their constituencies, with the aim that these committees would ultimately become the basic organisational units of the trades councils.

Workingmen's clubs should come under the trades councils' jurisdiction and workers' representatives on the municipal bodies should be subject to trades councils' discipline. "In every way - in every phase of working class life - the trades councils should be the true, local guardians of all working class interests, pressing forward industrially, politically and cooperatively to the conquest of all local power".

This was effectively a plan for the construction of soviets. Whether the NMM was also attempting to pre-empt the construction of a 'central executive committee of the soviets' is a question that might be asked, in studying the next section of the pamphlet, entitled 'Central power in the general council'. This proposed "the concentration of working class power in the general council of the TUC, so that for common programmes and on all matters of vital importance to the workers such as questions of war or peace, the whole of the forces of our movement can be immediately mobilised". The general council would have the power to call a general strike and to take such other action as is necessary. It should also have the authority to discipline the trade union movement.

After giving examples of the activities of the Minority Movement, including agitation for the economic demands of workers, contesting all trade union office elections with NMM supporters, solidarity action - both on the national and international levels, and propaganda work through literature and meetings, the pamphlet ends with a ringing proclamation of the revolutionary causes, "The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the workers themselves. Join with us in our struggle to overthrow capitalism and to conquer all power for the working class".

This, the programme of the Minority Movement, is surely a wonderful challenge to those left groups today who insist that any mass movement can only be built by confining itself within the existing consciousness of

the working class.

The solid growth of the NMM was evidenced by the attendance at its unity conference, on January 25 1925, of 630 representatives from bodies with a membership totalling 600,000 workers. A fraternal message from AJ Cook, the leftwing general secretary of the Miners' Federation, who was not a Communist Party member, stated his pride at being "a disciple of Karl Marx and a humble follower of Lenin", and ended with the warning, "We are in danger. A united enemy is knocking at the gate ... My slogan is be prepared".

Cook was right and, as so often in the history of the class struggle in Britain, the miners - who were then one sixth of the male workforce, and nearly one fifth of all trade unionists - were first in the capitalists' firing line. On June 30 1925, the mineowners issued a demand for an increase in the seven hour day to eight hours, for wage cuts, and for abolition of the minimum wage. The miners immediately appealed to the TUC for support in defending their hard won gains. The same day, the TUC general council responded by calling an embargo on the movement of all coal. The following day, Red Friday, Baldwin's government made a humiliating climbdown. It announced the establishment of a royal commission of inquiry into the coal industry and granted subsidies to the coal owners for a period of nine months.

Although some have sought to explain the TUC's determination to stand firm against the government, on this occasion, by referring to the changed composition of the general council - Thomas and other rightwingers had been replaced by left reformists such as Swales, Hicks and Purcell, the true reason is to be found in the organisational strength which the Minority Movement had built. Under the NMM's leadership, the working class had decided, enough was enough on wage cuts and was ready for a united fight. Without the TUC's action, Ernest Bevin feared "unofficial fighting in all parts of the country" and "anarchy" (A Hutt *The post-war history of the British working class* London 1937, p134). Ramsay MacDonald, too, thought that, "Had no general strike been declared industry would have been almost as much paralysed by unauthorised strikes", (J Klugmann 'Marxism, reformism and the general strike' in J Skelley (ed) *The general strike: 1926* London 1976, p99).

The ruling class had decided to buy time, and the government set about its preparations for the deferred attack. Along with detailed contingency plans for deployment of police, army, navy, and civil service, the government gave behind the scenes backing to the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies, which had been set up by a group of retired army and navy officers with the intention of forming an army of strikebreakers.

The second annual conference of the National Minority Movement took place on August 29-30 1925. In his presidential address, Tom Mann called for the preparation of councils of action for the coming battle, stressing the role trades councils could play in this respect. He also stressed the important role of the National Unemployed Workers' Committee movement in preventing strikebreaking, and warned of the need to be ready to respond to the potential danger of the growing fascist organisations.

The annual TUC congress met at Scarborough just over a week later. The agenda items reflected the influence of the Minority Movement. A resolution moved by Harry Pollitt stating, "This Congress declares that the trade union movement must organise to prepare the trade unions, in conjunction with the Party of the workers, to struggle for the overthrow of capitalism," was carried by a majority of more than two to one (J Klugmann

*History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, Vol 2, London 1969, p49). The same resolution pledged the TUC's support for the building of workshop committees. Resolutions reflecting NMM positions on the Dawes plan, on international trade union unity, and on the right of self-determination for the colonies were all carried.

But, on those concrete questions pertaining to preparation for the impending battle, the bureaucrats operated true to form. The bureaucracy clearly had no intention of matching the preparatory work being done by the ruling class. A motion proposing reaffiliation of trades councils to the TUC was ruled out of order. The issue of the powers of the general council was referred to the general council itself. The newly elected general council showed a turn to the right.

Harry Pollitt noted, "the reluctance of the leftwing of the general council to come out openly and fight the rightwing on every possible occasion, for there could be no doubt that the rightwing leaders, as represented by Messrs Thomas, Clynes and Cramp, had very effectively marshalled their forces and were organised to take up the battle whenever an opportunity presented itself" (Harry Pollitt 'The Scarborough Conference' *Labour Monthly* October 1925). Clynes had stated the position of the bureaucracy perfectly when, during the debate on the powers of the general council, he had stated, "I am not in fear of the capitalist class. The only class I fear is our own", (J Klugmann *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* Vol 2, London 1969, p49).

The 'lefts' were again conspicuous by their silence at the Labour Party conference two weeks later, when an executive committee recommendation that communists be barred from individual membership of the Labour Party, and that unions be urged to refrain from electing communists as their delegates to Labour Party bodies, was carried. The bourgeois press, led by *The Times*, had campaigned vigorously for such a decision, and the bourgeoisie no doubt perceived the result as a green light. Just two weeks later, police raided the offices of the Communist Party, the Young Communist League and the National Minority Movement. Twelve leading communists, including NMM secretary Harry Pollitt, were arrested on charges of seditious libel and incitement of the armed forces to mutiny. The defendants were convicted and sentenced to between six and 12 months imprisonment.

The royal commission report, released on March 6 1926, unsurprisingly supported the coal owners case that - to restore the profitability of the industry - heavy wage cuts and an end to national agreements would be required. The NMM called a special conference on March 21 1926. It was attended by 883 delegates, from 547 organisations, representing around 957,000 workers, almost a fifth of the number affiliated to the TUC. The conference issued a call to all trades councils "to constitute council(s) of action by mobilising all the forces of the working class in its locality (the trade union branches, the organised unemployed, the cooperative guilds, and the workers' political organisations)". It also urged the general council of the TUC to convene a national congress of action.

The general council's initial reaction to the royal commission report was, however, to urge the miners to use it as a basis for negotiation. After the miners rejected the report unequivocally, the general council eventually called a meeting of union executives on April 29. Still its efforts were concentrated on seeking to secure a negotiated settlement with the government. When it became clear that Baldwin was not playing this game, but required unconditional sur-

render, and that the mine owners had already started locking miners out, the TUC general council found itself the reluctant general staff of a general strike.

On May 2, the eve of the strike, the headquarters of the NMM sent out instructions to all its sections on the creation and operation of councils of action. The councils should ensure that all places of work were continuously picketed, reporting failures and gaps to the appropriate union. They should help to carry out all the decisions for the struggle of the general council and the union executives, but should not, in any circumstances, take over the work of the unions themselves. They should elect press and propaganda bodies to counteract the lies of the capitalist press. They should also set up workers' defence squads to protect union offices, printing presses, mass meetings, pickets and trade union officials holding important positions, and to maintain peace and order, preventing the efforts of government and employers' agents provocateurs. The commanders of the defence squads should be trade union officials.

Four hundred or so councils of action were formed. The level of organisation varied. Klugmann describes the work of the council at Methil, in the Fife coalfield, one of the Communist Party's strongest areas, "Everything was stopped - even the railway lines were picketed. The council had a courier service second to none in Britain, with three motor cars, ... 100 motor cycles, and as many push bikes as were necessary. They covered the whole of Fife, taking out information and bringing in reports, sending out speakers everywhere, as far north as Perth ... After police charges on mass pickets, the Defence Corps, which 150 workers had joined at the outset, was reorganised. Its numbers rose to 700, of whom 400, commanded by workers who had been NCOs during the war, marched in military formation through the town to protect the picket. The police did not interfere again ... A daily bulletin was issued by the council of action, which took over the cooperative hall as its headquarters", (*Ibid* p155).

In Glasgow, contrarily, the official central strike committee was inactive, and to compensate for this, CPGB and Minority Movement members set up 15 local councils. Following the rather lamentable failure of the CPGB nationally to make contingency arrangements for publication of a *Workers Daily* throughout the strike, publicity in Glasgow was handled by a joint committee of the Party and the Minority Movement. During the first week, 18,000 copies of an emergency edition of *Workers Weekly* was printed. After the police picked up the night shift team, 6,000 copies of a pa-

.....



Reprint of 1924 NMM pamphlet. £1 (inc p+p) from the CPGB address

per entitled *Workers Press* was produced in the second week.

In Sheffield, the trades council was reluctant to constitute a council of action, instead forming its existing industrial section into a central dispute committee. It refused an offer of co-operation from the Communist Party. CPGB members holding union positions nevertheless fully cooperated with the official committee, whilst a parallel unofficial strike committee was organised by the CPGB and the Minority Movement. This produced a daily bulletin of around 10,000 copies, until the duplicator was seized by police after five days. A sixth edition nevertheless appeared, printed at different premises, until these too were raided by police the following day.

On the first day of the strike, the London Trades Council called a meeting of union district committees and set up a formal central strike committee. Here too, CPGB and Minority Movement members also worked to set up local councils of action. Fifteen such councils existed by May 8, and 70 by the end of the strike.

Rudiments of dual power began to develop in some areas, especially in the matter of movements of transport. Klugmann reports on officially recognised permit systems operating in Edinburgh, Ashton-under-Lyne, and, most notably, throughout the North-umberland and Durham region, (*ibid* pp159-162).

The general strike was remarkably solid. When the TUC general council called it off, on the ninth day, it was not through any fear of failure, but rather because of their fear of success. They abhorred the working class self activity they had seen. The 'lefts' on the TUC general council played a craven role. All of them voted to call off the strike unconditionally. The Minority Movement had failed to clearly explain to the working class that the right and left bureaucracy were merely two sides of the same coin. The slogan of 'All power to the general council of the TUC' had been exposed as a serious and culpable mistake.

Jack Conrad rightly notes that "The TUC did and does represent collective sectionalism. Unless it is led by communists there is not the remotest chance of it representing the interests of the working class as a whole". Furthermore the comrade argues that the Party's slogans were woefully centrist. "The 'All power' slogan, not only smacked of an artificial transplantation of the Russian slogan, 'All power to the soviets', but totally misunderstood the real content of Bolshevism ... There was also a distinct whiff of conservatism in the Party's call for a Labour government ... The Communist Party should have reformulated the slogan it employed in the early 1920s, 'All power to the workers' ... The general strike was the moment to concretise it with the call for a constituent assembly and linking that transitional demand to the perspective of a workers' government based on the new mass organisations of the workers, ie 'All power to the councils of action' to bring it about" (J Conrad 'Essays on the general strike' part IV *Weekly Worker* May 2 1996).

The third annual conference of the Movement was held at the end of August 1926, attended by 802 delegates from bodies representing 956,000 workers. The conference approved an 'open letter' to delegates to the forthcoming TUC congress, appealing for them to "insist on the miners' fight being discussed ... Send out a call to the workers of Britain and the world for an embargo on coal, and a levy on wages. Stand by the miners", (J Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* Vol 2, p251). However, the efforts of the NMM influenced TUC delegates were to no avail at a congress during which miners' leader AJ Cook himself spoke against debating the general council's action of calling off the general strike.

The miners were forced back to work defeated, after six months of brave struggle. Shortly afterwards, in January 1927, the government enacted the Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act, which made all sympathetic strikes, mass picketing and "intimidation" illegal. There had been a significant shift in the balance of class forces. The implications of this defeat for the whole working class were to be profound. The forces of class collaboration in the trade unions were given a great boost. They soon opened up a new drive to witch hunt communists.

The TUC congress in September 1926 had already resolved, by a large majority, that affiliation of trades councils to the Minority Movement was "not consistent with the policy of the congress and the general council". In February 1927, the executive committee of the General and Municipal Workers Union decided that no member of the Communist Party or the Minority Movement could hold any union position, and branches were prohibited from sending delegates to Minority Movement conferences.

In December 1927, the general secretary of the TUC, Walter Citrine, launched an attack on the Minority Movement in the pages of the magazine, *Labour*. His series of articles was later reproduced in a pamphlet entitled *Democracy or disruption*. Citrine argued that the future line of development of the trade union movement should be "in the direction of making workers' organisations an integral part of the economic machinery of society". To allow the trade unions to be used as instruments of social upheaval would be "fatal to our hopes of ordered progress". From its inception, he said, the aim of the Minority Movement had been "to set the rank and file of the working class movement in bitter opposition to its elected and responsible representatives". Citrine's signal was soon acknowledged. During 1928, bans on communists holding union office, and on branches associating with the Minority Movement, were adopted by a large number of union executives. The outlawing of the Minority Movement was confirmed at the TUC congress in September 1928.

That the movement was considerably resilient to these attacks, was evidenced by the attendance of delegates from 287 union branches and 19 trades councils at its annual conference in August 1928, hardly less than the previous year. One year later however, the number of branches and trades councils attending the NMM conference was less than half of that in 1928.

By then, the Comintern had made an opportunist turn, categorising reformist working class organisations as 'social fascist' - that admirably served the internal purposes of JV Stalin who had just launched his socially counterrevolutionary 'second revolution', ie the first five year plan. Deep splits opened up amongst Party members active in the NMM. The 1929 conference adopted a radical change of approach. It was no longer deemed desirable to recruit unorganised workers into existing unions and the principle of "independent leadership" was to be applied, whereby strikes were to be led by committees of action uniting organised and unorganised workers.

The NMM did not survive this disorientation and was wound up as a national organisation soon afterwards. During its short existence however, it had been a highly successful and dynamic revolutionary rank and file movement, which had laid the basis for the self organisation of the working class during the general strike. Important lessons, which are relevant to the contemporary tasks of communists, can be learned by studying the experience of the Minority Movement, and the successes and errors of its Communist Party leadership ●

Simon Harvey of the SLP

# Frustration grows in SLP

**R**esignation continues to plague the Socialist Labour Party. The tone and orientation of Nick Long's letter of resignation (see below) letter is indicative of a certain mood amongst a layer of democratic party activists, current and former. The debacle of the last party congress, failure of the party to grow and a general frustration at the lack of any mass movement against Blair's ongoing attacks has led to a degree of demoralisation and lack of clear direction.

Comrade Long - former activist in Lewisham and Greenwich SLP - begins by announcing that he has "decided to leave the SLP and have decided to concentrate all my efforts in building the Socialist Alliance". It later continues: "Sadly, many socialists have left the party and the Stalinist regime [sic] and sectarianism of the party leadership seems to be gaining strength".

On the surface of things, this seems to be decisive action in the face of the outrageous and unsustainable character of the internal life of the party. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Comrade Long argues that Scargill was and is correct to call for a new socialist party, but maintains that the SLP is not up to the job. Hence his orientation to the Socialist Alliances. While I wholeheartedly support work in the Socialist Alliances, I reject that this necessitates an 'either one or the

other' approach and believe that comrades who are already in the SLP should maintain their party cards while pursuing activity in the SAs.

Comrade Long - now a supporter of the eclectic soft-left Socialist Democracy Group - himself points to the fact that the SLP project is not over. While grasping that it is not the answer (which has been the case since the first congress), he nonetheless fails to convince it is dead in the water. He states: "It is possible that the SLP will gain members in the coming period and establish itself as a significant influence in a number of industrial trade unions". The success of the recent SLP-organised Reclaim Our Rights conference adds significant weight to this claim. In such a case, it seems premature to tear up one's party card, no matter what the current regime. In fact, comrade Long has been openly operating within the Socialist Alliances for some time without his party membership being threatened. Surely this points to a certain degree of manoeuvre possible within the SLP despite (or perhaps because of) Arthur's 3,000 back-pocket block vote.

Another pointer to the *relative* room-to-manoeuve in the SLP and the failed perspective of merely walking out is the recent letter Arthur Scargill sent to now-Socialist Perspectives comrade, Martin Wicks. Comrade Wicks had become the *de facto* self-appointed leader of the ex-

clusively run 'clever tactics' democratic opposition prior to the last congress. His heads-down, do not pre-empt any splits, keep-it-all-in-the-family approach evaporated on January 10 at a meeting of the Democratic Platform when he advocated a moralistic walk-out of the SLP.

Socialist Perspectives was established to work in the Socialist Alliances and other areas. Scargill did not even notice it and sent comrade Wicks a letter *after* his resignation calling on him to desist his work in the Socialist Alliances. It was not even an expulsion letter. I think this shows what little real impact the walk-out had.

There is an important error to correct in comrade Long's letter. He states: "Those comrades who had been leading the calls for greater democracy in the party have decided to leave and work to build Socialist Alliances". It is true that there have been many resignations by soft-left democrats since the December congress. Many have gone on to undertake SA work. However it must be remembered that the Democratic Platform received almost a third of CSLP votes at the December congress. The January 10 meeting of the DP was split down the middle over whether to stay in the SLP or leave. Apart from the *Marxist Bulletin*, the remainder of Democratic Platform comrades remain within the party. Many are also active in Socialist Alliances.

Whether comrade Long was indulging in a little wishful thinking or had merely forgotten that other SLP democrats remain within the party's ranks, I do not know. What is significant still is the fact that, although the SLP is not reformable into a mass democratic workers' party, it retains a degree of *party* culture which is lacking in the Socialist Alliances. The SAs are today, at best, a united front for socialist propaganda. In many cases, they are yet to develop *any* coherent identity.

I still maintain that comrades should hold on to their SLP cards, struggle for democracy within the party and work with the Socialist Alliances. To cohere this position falls to those comrades around the Democratic Platform. While a layer of democrats remains active in the party, it is yet to define its tasks.

This lack of clarity is visible in the recent Democratic Platform bulletin (March 1998). The bulletin is merely a collection of recent articles published by elements of the SLP left combined with a number of NEC election statements from December, Terry Burns's general election platform, and a statement from the SLP Wales regional executive on the December congress.

The merit of the bulletin is that the editor has acted in publishing *something* in the absence of any substantial contributions. It shows that despite comrade Wicks's disappearing act and comrade Long's wishful thinking, there are still democrats active within the SLP.

Nevertheless, from the nature of the Democratic Platform bulletin, it is clear that some thinking and regrouping needs to be done. What is the general line of attack for SLP democrats? How oppressive is the current internal regime? How easy/difficult is it to operate as an oppositionist? What of the necessity of working in the Socialist Alliances? What programmatic debates should we be pursuing in the SLP? Should the Democratic Platform bulletin be a limited discussion paper? Is a separate open publication required? What articles are being written for *Socialist News*? All these questions need addressing.

It remains a frustrating period in general. Despite the plethora of predictions that the election of a Labour government would produce a crisis of expectations nearly one year down the line, this has failed to materialise. The promised mass movement against Blair remains imaginary. This is not surprising, especially as many left activists passively assumed it would happen automatically with Blair's election and just fall into their laps. The mini-rebellion by MPs around single-parent cuts, the expulsion of MEPs Kerr and Coates and the election of Livingstone over Mandelson to the Labour Party NEC point to the fact that there are rumblings of discontent behind the spin doctoring. Yet they remain mere rumbles. The Labour 'left' is completely marginal. Ken Livingstone lacks the courage to stand for London mayor unless picked by Millbank.

The Socialist Alliances, while containing much promise in the wake of failed expectations around Scargill's regroupment project, remain immature in their development. To be walking out of the SLP in such a climate smacks more of individual frustration than a serious political orientation ●

## Letter of resignation

**I** am writing to inform you that reluctantly I have decided to leave the SLP and have decided to concentrate all my efforts in building the Socialist Alliance. The call for the formation of a new socialist party by Arthur Scargill was and is still correct. However, Arthur Scargill and the SLP are, sadly not, in my view capable of fulfilling that role.

In January following the debacle of our party 'congress' and the secret 3,000 'block vote' I argued for remaining in the party and working to make the party more democratic and acceptable, especially if the party was able to draw in more members in the face of New Labour betrayals. Sadly, many socialists have left the party and the Stalinist regime and sectarianism of the party leadership seems to be gaining strength.

Locally [ie, in Lewisham and Greenwich] a number of active members have decided to leave and others were reluctantly persuaded to remain in the party. Some members have even considered rejoining the Labour Party! This is the real scale of the missed opportunity of the SLP.

In December MEPs Hugh Kerr and Ken Coates were expelled from the Labour Party and were not attracted to join the SLP. They have set up the Independent Network which has been contacted by hundreds leaving the labour party, but again not joining the SLP. In September a number of MEPs could also leave the Labour Party and it is unlikely they will be drawn into the SLP.

Those socialists in the party who had been arguing for more accountability and democracy decided to leave in January. Recently Terry Dunn, a member of the party's conference arrangements committee has resigned from the NEC as a result of being kept in the dark at

the 'secret' block vote. In a mirror image of the tactics of the Stalinist regime in the former Soviet Union, Terry's name was removed from one of those elected to the NEC in the party paper and a photograph of Terry supporting a lobby of Harriet Harman's surgery in Peckham was substituted with a photo that obscured Terry from view!

Those comrades who had been leading the calls for greater democracy in the party have decided to leave and work to build socialist alliances. The attendance and activity of our branch is rapidly falling off. We have not been successful in drawing into membership a single new member for over a year! It is clear that many members are demoralised and less than keen on a prolonged 'dog fight' with the party leadership. The recent cancellation of the party's industrial school and London conference all point to the conclusion that it is time to continue the struggle elsewhere.

As a branch we raised a number of concerns regarding the conduct of the December conference and asked questions concerning the finances of the party. Recent events at the *Morning Star* have revealed that our general secretary was in secret talks with both the CPB and PPPS regarding an attempt to 'buy' the *Star* for £250,000 and close down the friendly society that owns the *Star*, yet at the party conference in December, Arthur Scargill argued against a call for the party to openly play a more active role in supporting the *Star*.

It is possible that the SLP will gain members in the coming period and establish itself as a significant influence in a number of industrial trade unions. That will only compound the perception of the SLP as an *exclusively trade un-*

*ionist type* party. In my view it is also on the cards that the SLP and the CPB could be drawn into convergence, especially in the light of events concerning the *Star*. However I no longer believe the SLP is going to be the vehicle to develop into a significant socialist influence outside of the declining membership of the trade union movement and able to appeal to women, young people, those active in defending the environment and black people.

Recently a Socialist Alliance was formed in the borough and the majority of the active members of the branch have supported the idea of building an inclusive, broad and democratic alliance, aiming to work in cooperation with other socialists and trade unionist and local campaigners. A number of socialists have agreed to stand in the local elections in May, giving more people the opportunity to vote for socialist candidates and register a protest against New Labour.

A meeting of the National Alliance Network on March 21 in Coventry heard that over 20 SAs have been formed, networking with hundreds of socialists and campaigners and are growing from the ground up. The meeting further decided to consult on adopting a loose constitution, with the prospect of launching a broad based 'party' in September with an aim of standing candidates in the PR Euro election in 1999. The experience and lessons of the SLP are being taken to heart.

I hope that in the future we all might be able to belong to a broad inclusive socialist party that is able to rival the Labour Party and advance the interests of the working class.  
Yours in comradeship,  
Nick Long

From The Call, paper of the  
British Socialist Party,  
April 4 1918

## A speech by Lenin

The following is a summary of a speech made by Lenin at the sitting of the All-Russia Congress of Soviets:

Comparing the Soviet government with the Paris Commune of 1871, he pointed out that the former had profited by the experience of the latter and constituted itself exclusively on the authority of the workers and poorer peasantry, to the exclusion of capitalists and imperialists.

The way the peasantry had grasped the meaning of the regime was remarkable. They had now become the most faithful friends and allies of the working class, because they realised that the socialisation of the land would only be brought about in conjunction with the nationalisation of the banks and the establishment of working class control over production.

During the protracted period of transition that must necessarily elapse between capitalism and socialism the proletariat must exercise a dictatorship. Socialism could not however be forced on the peasantry, and it was necessary to do what they were doing - namely, educating the peasants in socialist theories and practice.

He pointed with satisfaction to the alliance between the Bolsheviks and the left Revolutionary Socialists becoming more intimate every day. Referring to the reproaches of the right section of the congress against the establishment of a dictatorship and the use of force, he exclaimed that it was a mistake for anyone to imagine that socialism would ever be brought them on a platter. Never in history have the questions at issue in the struggles between classes been solved in any other way than by violent methods. When it was a question of suppressing the exploiters in the interests of the exploited classes, he frankly confessed he was all for violence ...

The new regime would create a new socialist Red Army, able to secure the triumph of socialism both at home and abroad - the Russian Federal Republic would then be invincible. There would be many difficulties in the way. They might have to fight the bourgeoisie of foreign countries, such as England and France, who had not permitted a single Bolshevik paper to enter their country during the whole time of the Revolution.

But the workers of those countries would come to their assistance. In due course he was confident the Revolution would spread to other countries, which would learn by the Russian experience. The Russian Socialist Republic of Soviets would be a standing torch for international socialism, and what the Russians had begun would be completed by the German, French and British peoples ●

# 1918

Russian Revolution  
this week 80 years ago

# Drop the dead dogma

Dave Osler replies to Martin Blum's evaluation of the first two years of the SLP

**A** mass socialist party, hegemonic over an even larger network of industrial militants. Pulling wildcats in key sectors, organising non-unionised workplaces, and widely held responsible for a dramatic upsurge of coronary thrombosis among law-abiding general secretaries.

Revolutionary elected representatives at all levels, exploiting their positions as tribunes of the oppressed. A newspaper with a six-figure - maybe even seven figure - circulation, daily breaking scandals that rock the establishment. Pro-party intellectuals exerting wide influence in public life. An uncontrollable youth wing, deeply committed to Marxism, rampant promiscuity and sustained drug abuse, but not necessarily in that order.

That is the vision. Now the questions start. How do we get there? Should our new party be a reformed Communist Party or a party of recomposition? What do the two terms mean, anyway? Are they incompatible? Why not a revolutionary socialist tendency inside a larger class struggle leftwing formation?

The remarks on the subject made in comrade Martin Blum's recent discussion of the Socialist Labour Party (*Weekly Worker* 'Balance of failure' March 26) seriously misrepresent the politics of socialist recomposition. Blum lambasts "those who viewed the SLP as the 'last chance saloon'. A now or never opportunity. This approach came from comrades who have had long political careers either inside Labourism or failed sects. The most 'theorised' version came 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."

In that immortal expression of Alastair Campbell, "crap". First, there

.....  
 "Blum's is a woefully one-sided assessment, possibly clouded by residual Stalinist nostalgia for the mass continental CPs of old. From a revolutionary viewpoint, parties of recomposition are politically superior to former communist parties, which despite their mass character, were for the bulk of their existence reduced to acting largely as reformist adjuncts of Kremlin foreign policy"  
 .....

are no last chance saloons in socialist politics. So long as capitalism exists, there will be class struggle. It will take on different organisational expressions in different countries, times and circumstances, but it will persist until the revolutionary abolition of classes themselves. Doubtless Roland and I will be forced to drink in many more downmarket spit and sawdust boozers before we reach the

political equivalent of a bar on a moonlit Caribbean beach serving endless supplies of half-price 10-year-old single malts.

Accordingly, the SLP was not a last chance opportunity, simply a missed opportunity. Think where the far left could be now if the SLP had chosen to go down the road of recomposition. Yet if anything, the tide of opinion for a broad-based party is stronger than two years ago. It now takes in the Socialist Alliances, Socialist Democracy and at least some comrades in the Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook and Socialist Perspectives. Next year's likely campaigns by two (or possibly more) rebel Labour Euro-MPs also point in this direction. Even the Scargillites might be forced to play ball.

Lastly, I have explicitly rejected all suggestion of historical necessity: "It would be the crudest determinism to suggest that a British party of recomposition is in some sense inevitable or unavoidable. But it remains possible, perhaps likely, and healthy from the standpoint of Marxism informed by praxis". ('Recomposition and the British left' *What's Next?* No6).

Blum argues that continental parties of recomposition are in reality parties of decomposition, the product of crises in 'official communism' and social democracy. Up to a point, undeniable. It is through just such a process that a British party of recomposition is likely to emerge. Moreover, anyone following recent developments in Izquierda Unida will know that all is not sweetness and light inside such formations.

Yet Blum's is a woefully one-sided assessment, possibly clouded by residual Stalinist nostalgia for the mass continental CPs of old. From a revolutionary viewpoint, parties of recomposition are politically superior to former communist parties, which despite their mass character, were for the bulk of their existence reduced to acting largely as reformist adjuncts of Kremlin foreign policy.

Their forced turn to multi-tendency democracy has enabled revolutionary socialists - primarily but not exclusively of Trotskyist origin and affiliated to the United Secretariat - to break through their historic isolation from key sections of politicised workers.

All of this takes me to the heart of the argument, which is the profoundly ambiguous nature of the call for a 'reformed Communist Party' itself. What meaningful content can it possibly have, if not a party of revolutionary recomposition, in which the bulk of the cadres will come from the Trotskyist tradition? How can it take place outside a wider regroupment of class struggle forces, bringing together reformists, Marxists of all shades, probably anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, and just possibly

even sections of the Old Labour right and the trade union bureaucracy?

The convention in political journalism is to use initial capitals only when referring to specific parties. Yes, in the scientific sense of the term, we need a reformed communist party. But we need a reformed Communist Party like Boris Yeltsin needs another blockbuster hangover tomorrow morning.

Let us remember that the CPGB's revolutionary period was short and not particularly sweet. A drift towards centrism was evident as early as the general strike of 1926. In Trotsky's assessment, the parties of the Third International were 'dead for revolution' by 1933. Granted, the track record of British Trotskyism has been if anything yet more abysmal. But then, no one is seriously arguing for a reformed Workers Revolutionary Party.

In short, the British far left doesn't need to reforge anything. We need to create something we have until now never had, namely a sizeable broad church Marxist-centred formation with a serious implantation in the working class.

Let me concede Blum's contention that I have had a long political career 'inside Labourism and failed sects'. At least I have learned one or two things from the experience. First, while the Labour Party remains a bourgeois workers' party, there is now no case for serious entry work.

Second, for most of the last 17 years, I publicly supported the view that the USSR was a degenerated workers' state, while privately having reached a bureaucratic collectivist position. It was a useful firsthand experience in doublethink. Now the question is settled by history, even if - incredibly enough - some numbskull orthodox Trotskyists still can't get their heads around the reality of capitalist restoration.

But the rethinking has to be a two-way process. It's drop the dead dogma time for the entire thinking left. Let today's CPGB come to terms with its own past, starting with a re-evaluation of the basic questions of Trotskyism versus Stalinism.

I am told that one or two Trotskyists have joined the CPGB before, but were not successfully integrated into the party. Let us have an explanation of why this is so. If the CPGB genuinely seeks to be an inclusive revolutionary organisation - by implication, incorporating many militants from a Trotskyist background - there is clearly a need for political clarity on this point. If only in the name of regroupment or 'communist rapprochement', perhaps the not-yet-party's leading theoreticians could produce a formalised set of theses on Trotskyism, to which the Trotskyist left could then respond, rather than continually attempting to nail the *Weekly Worker's* jelly to the ceiling ●

## Fighting fund

### Serious work

This is a very busy time for the left. Or, at least, so it *should* be. On May 7 we have the local elections in England and Wales and Blair's take-it-or-leave-it London referendum. Do we want a big-shot, mafia-type 'business' mayor (and a powerless London authority) or the status quo? Frankly, we do not want either.

Therefore it is very important that the left intervenes. We must not allow Blair to have it all his own way. The voices of those championing the interests of the working class must be heard. During the next month the dreaded 'd' word must enter the arena - ie, *democracy*.

The CPGB will be standing candidates within the Socialist Alliances, and energetically working for the other SA candidates. Naturally, we will be critically support-

ing all candidates standing on a principled left slate - weather they be from the Socialist Party, the Socialist Labour Party, etc.

Being communists - who treat electoral work seriously - we also fight at the same time to sustain and build the circulation of the *Weekly Worker*. That is where our monthly fighting fund comes in.

Last month we fell just short of our monthly target of £500. Given the importance of the month ahead, we cannot afford to do so again. Amongst others, thanks go this week to MW from Exeter (£15), GH from North London (£15), AJ from Macclesfield (£5), PA from Suffolk (£5), AD from Bexley (£5) and JA from South London (£20). This gets us off to a start of £105. Let us try and double - at least - that figure for next week ●

Katrina Haynes

## CPGB London seminar series

● **April 12: Character and revolution** using Hal Draper's 'Karl Marx's theory of revolution: state and bureaucracy' as a study guide.

● **April 19: Dictatorship in 1848** using Hal Draper's 'Karl Marx's theory of revolution: the dictatorship of the proletariat' as a study guide.

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



## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I wish to subscribe to the **Weekly Worker**.

ww subscription £ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation £ \_\_\_\_\_

Cheques and postal orders should be in sterling.

	6 m	1 yr	Institutions
Britain & Ireland	£15	£30	£55
Europe	£20	£40	£70
Rest of World	£28	£55	£80

Special offer to new subscribers: 3 months for £5.00

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

TEL \_\_\_\_\_

Return to: CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX.  
 Tel: 0181-459 7146 Fax: 0181-830 1639.  
 CPGB1@aol.com



# Haylett reinstated

After five weeks on strike *Morning Star* journalists returned to work victorious on the morning of Monday April 6, with sacked editor John Haylett reinstated. The Committee to Save the *Morning Star*, initiated by the strikers, is continuing its campaign for a special general meeting of shareholders of the Peoples Press Printing Society, the cooperative which owns the *Morning Star*, to remove "unhealthy elements" from the management committee.

Sixty supporters marched the half mile from the Kingsland Road strike office back to the Ardleigh Road, Hackney, *Morning Star* building, fronted by a Scottish bagpiper and the National Union of Journalists' banner, complete with new poles for the occasion. John Haylett thanked everyone for their solidarity, and spoke of "the vital role of the *Star* in giving guidance to the labour movement". In the absence of "the usual preparatory work", he rallied the journalists to use the enthusiasm of victory to "get the paper out tomorrow." With the bagpipes playing, he was carried into the building on the shoulders of Gary Davis and Stan Keable.

Suspended on January 24 on "trumped up charges" as part of the longstanding factional struggle within the leadership of the so-called Communist Party of Britain, Haylett was formally sacked the day after the official NUJ strike began on February 25. This Murdoch-style decision was taken by Mary Rosser and her pitiful dupe Bob Newland, overplaying their hand as the remaining two members of the disciplinary subcommittee appointed for the case, after Institute of Employment Rights director and management committee member Carolyn Jones resigned in disgust. Newland is not a management committee member, merely a *Star* employee. Rosser is appointed by the management committee as PPPS chief executive and secretary.

On February 28 the management committee majority around Rosser retreated in disarray, conceding their own incompetence to hear Haylett's appeal by agreeing to pass the job to an "independent appellate body" of three to be agreed by both sides. At the same time, they delegated responsibility for handling the dispute to their officers - Mary Rosser, chairman George Wake and vicechair Pat Hicks. Subsequently, management's chosen representative on the appeal tribunal "could not be contacted". Acas supplied a replacement, a Mr N Cowan, who regularly appears for the employers' side in such tribunals.

After only a single sitting on April 1, the tribunal unanimously "ruled against the procedure that led to the dismissal and the charges themselves" (*The Workers' Morning Star* No5, April 4). Haylett had no case to answer - but since the tribunal decision was not binding, his re-

instatement was not guaranteed. Mike Ambrose reported that "tight-lipped management representatives heard the decision in silence and made no immediate moves to end the injustice" (*ibid*).

The NUJ *Morning Star* chapel, "unanimously welcomed the decision," which "raised questions over management's competence." They called for "Mary Rosser and her sidekick Bob Newland to resign for having created a situation which had silenced the paper for five weeks and threatened its very existence". Deputy father of chapel Chris Kasrils urged management to "end its vendetta and allow a return to work under the proper editor" (*ibid*).

Management's acceptance of defeat, however, only became evident at the Acas talks on April 2, during which the terms of victory were negotiated. The strike could only be declared over when the return to work terms were endorsed by the NUJ *Morning Star* chapel on the morning of Friday April 3.

Management agreed to pay the difference between the strike pay and normal wage of each striker, so there was no loss of earnings. The journalists agreed to cease publication of *The Workers' Morning Star*, but insisted on their right to campaign. So they are free to pursue, for example, the removal of unwanted management committee members through a special PPPS shareholders meeting - or any other campaigning they wish to take part in. Management also agreed to drop its threat of legal action against the printers of *The Workers' Morning Star*.

Before the return to work march, as supporters gathered in Kingsland Road, a gift box together with the following letter to each striker from the CPGB Provisional Central Committee was gracefully received.

Dear comrades,

Congratulations on fighting a successful struggle and achieving the reinstatement of sacked editor John Haylett through militant means - indefinite strike action combined with the mobilisation of readers, supporters and cooperative shareholders through *The Workers' Morning Star*.

As an industrial dispute, right was always on your side. The charges against John were spurious. The real reason for his sacking was the factional fight within the CPB leadership.

After at least four years of factional strife on the CPB executive and political committees, with general secretary Mike Hicks in a minority on the political committee but hanging on by the skin of his political teeth on the larger executive committee, this secret struggle came into public view only when Hicks was defeated on the executive committee in January. Your strike, and the mobilisations in support of it, brought the leadership struggle to the rank and file.

This factional struggle, because it impinges on the very existence of "the paper of the left", "the paper of the broad labour movement", cannot be the private business of the CPB leadership, nor even of the CPB as a whole. The fact that it festered so long in secret, concealed from the mass of *Star* readers, supporters and CPB members, not to speak of the rest of the left and the 'broad labour movement', is shameful, both for the *Star* and for the CPB as a whole.

The bureaucratic 'North Korean' Hicks-Rosser clique, which treated both 'party' and paper as their personal property, has just been ousted from power in the CPB. Nevertheless, the victorious faction around Robert Griffiths, Richard Maybin and John Haylett is equally guilty of keeping the struggle under wraps. With that same method, they will reproduce the same crisis again later.

Revolutionary struggle for self-liberation requires that political differences be thrashed out *in print, in public*, because revolutionary politics must become the property of the masses in order to be put into practice. That is why we call for the *Morning Star* to open its columns to every shade of political opinion on the left.

As you are aware, we have argued that this crisis in the CPB and its paper, or the *Morning Star* and its 'party', is generated by the 'revolutionary' reformist *British road to socialism* programme, just as the liquidation of the 'official' CPGB was the result of the selfsame programme.

The struggle to reforge the CPGB is synonymous with the struggle for a communist programme, and this must begin with an exhaustive critique of the failed 'revolutionary' reformist *BRS*.

This is the purpose of Jack Conrad's *Which road?*, a copy of which we ask each striker to accept in commemoration of the 1998 *Morning Star* strike.

In solidarity,  
Ian Farrell

for the Provisional Central Committee

### ■ The Workers' Morning Star

The fifth and final issue of *TWMS*, dated April 4, led with the following front page statement: "To the managers of the *Morning Star*: This is not your paper. It is the strike bulletin of the National Union of Journalists *Morning Star* chapel. We demand that you stop trying to gag our union during an official dispute and call your lawyers off our printers at once. Your actions, at first disgraceful, have now descended further - to the lowest tactics of gutter management."

The *Star* management, Mike Ambrose wrote in his lead article 'Cleared on all counts', had "successfully threatened one printer and unsuccessfully tried to stop the present printer from producing *TWMS*. Despite the threats, the pa-

per has come out, with striking journalists saying that they refuse to be gagged."

'Kingsland's Diary' - renamed from the usual 'Ardleigh's Diary' in response to management's accusation of "passing off" *TWMS* as the *Morning Star* itself, contained a couple of noteworthy items. "The Campaign for Diversity and Pluralism has been strangely silent about management attempts to gag *TWMS* by threatening our printers. This could be because the campaign is being organised by Anni Marjoram, a management committee member and a close political ally of Labour MP Ken Livingstone."

Kingsland's other point concerns the Kim Jong-ilist New Communist Party's paper, "which once took a principled stand on major issues" (*sic*). *The New Worker* "has been critical of *TWMS*, with leading members alleging that it has links with *Straight Left*. That's a funny excuse for not backing workers in struggle, especially as, for many years, *The New Worker* ran a Malcolm Airley column, written by the first person to edit *Straight Left*."

Kingsland highlights the hypocrisy of *The New Worker*, but he should think again about its one-time "principled stand". This is the paper you could once buy in Prague, Kabul or Addis Ababa - or any other state which would buy a few hundred copies of an English language 'communist' newspaper willing to act as its mouthpiece. More like principled prostitution ... but then there is the question of the Soviet order for the *Morning Star*, and how that affected the political line of the *Morning Star* and the 'official' CPGB. As for *Straight Left*, the fact that its first editor could get a column in the paper of the living dead gives us a clue to its nature. A modest prize awaits the first reader to send me an example of its constructive criticism - indeed, any criticism - of any state it regards as socialist.

Last point on *TWMS*. No5 carried an advertisement which the *Morning Star* proper cannot carry because of the management committee ban on our organisation: "CPGB Provisional Central Committee - *Weekly Worker* - for the politics behind the strike". Clearly, such an advertisement is not a problem for the journalists. Can we look forward to the lifting of this ban, along with the opening of the columns of 'the paper of the left' to all shades of opinion on the left? ●

Ian Farrell

● Saturday April 25, 7.30pm-1.00am, £5/£3: A night of music for the Campaign to Save the *Morning Star* and the *Morning Star* NUJ Strike Committee, City University Student Union, Northampton Square, Spencer Street, London EC2 (Angel tube).  
● Save the *Morning Star* Committee, 422 Kingsland Road, London E8 4AA. Tel 0171 254 5000, Fax 0171 254 5151

## Management unrepentant

On April 7 the first *Morning Star* proper after the strike carried the full statement of recommendations of the "appellate body on the dismissal of John Haylett" alongside the points of view of both the strikers and management. Both sides describe the dispute in terms of a meaningless industrial conflict devoid of any comprehensible cause.

Neither connects the dispute to the struggle in the CPB, and the CPB itself does not avail itself of the opportunity of the reappearance of what is, to all intents and purposes, its own paper, to explain its position. A report of the CPB political committee's deliberations appears on page 7, welcoming "communist advances in the Ukraine," calling for "extensive support" for the April 18 meeting of the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, but keeping mum on the matter of greatest importance to itself.

Perhaps this is what John Haylett meant when he called for a "return to normality". What are we to make of his declaration in the editorial that "The *Morning Star* will continue to put forward its clear and distinctive political line, while providing a forum for different points of view within the labour movement"? Fine words, but the CPB even conceals its own point of view!

Under the headline, 'Practising what we have preached,' Chris Kasrils, deputy father of the NUJ chapel, justifies the strike. He argues, quite rightly, that "*Morning Star* journalists would not have been taken seriously by the rest of the movement if they had failed to react against what we saw as a fit-up against John Haylett. When we write of workers' rights and trade union or political principles in future, the movement will know that we practice what we preach."

Only by implication does he hint that there must have been more to it. "Management gave every impression of having made its mind up from the start that it wanted John sacked. All that it lacked was any credible charge to lay against him." Yet political journalism, Chris, requires that we uncover the political causes behind things.

Mary Rosser, unrepentant, declares that management "did not agree with the recommendations of the appellate body, but accepts them" in order to meet the "deepest desire" of the *Star* readership to "get the paper back on the road." She also casts aspersions on the fairness of the appeal hearing. Alf Parrish was appointed chairperson of the appeal tribunal on the recommendation of media union GPMU, which not only has members employed at the *Star* who were campaigning against the strike, but is the power base of Mary's husband, ousted CPB general secretary Mike Hicks. It is with dismay, therefore, that she complains how management "did not realise" that Parrish "is a member of the board of *Tribune*, a paper with a record of hostility to the *Morning Star* management." I recall that paranoia was one of the complaints which led to the downfall of Hicks and Rosser in the CPB executive ●

Ian Farrell