



Socialist Party in crisis

Bombshell - p2

SML nationalism - pp4-5

Taaffeism - pp6-7

Easter reaction

Easter witnessed an orgy of celebration across virtually the whole spectrum of establishment politics (nor could elements of the pro-Labour left restrain their economic glee). Everyone suddenly seemed to be friends. Tony Blair and John Major, Bertie Ahern and David Trimble, Mo Mowlam and John Hume. Obviously they were united not by the mythical resurrection of their man-god. It was death not life that brought the normally fractious and bickering representatives of capital together. After nearly 30 years the revolutionary situation that gripped the Six Counties and which throughout that time explicitly endangered the constitutional existence of both the United Kingdom and the Twenty-six Counties is to be resolved negatively.

Good Friday was therefore good news for reaction at home and abroad. Once the British-Irish Agreement was announced congratulations instantly poured in. Bill Clinton - whose ally George Mitchell painstakingly brokered the deal - blessed it as a "great achievement." Naturally Elizabeth Windsor "shared the delight." William Hague warmly praised Blair and said "it is a very exciting day." Jacques Chirac described it as an "example" for what he called "the international community", showing as it does that "peace and reason eventually overcomes violence." He is right, of course, in the sense that the peace of the oppressors has overcome, or at least replaced, the violence of the oppressed.

Easter's settlement must be set against the broad background of the US dominated New World Order and the associated period of reaction ushered in by the ignominious collapse of bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Objectively bureaucratic socialism was the opposite of working class socialism. Despite that, not least because of mutually reinforcing cold war ideology, working class militants subjectively identified with it as a positive break with capitalism and a system of social organisation to be emulated. That grand illusion of the 20th century has been utterly destroyed. But unfortunately not by the self-liberating activity of revolutionary proletarians. It is capital and its cult of the atomised family and the alienated individual consumer which stands triumphant as humanity psychologically prepares itself for the next millennium of the common era. Seemingly history has been thrown into reverse gear.

Ever since the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1986, where Mikhail Gorbachev offered the US cooperation in dealing with what he cynically called "international hot spots" - ie, revolutionary situations - imperialism has had a free hand to reassert its

divine right to rule, rob and rape the planet. The New World Order was baptised in the blood sacrifice of 100,000 Iraqi soldiers. The 1992 Gulf War was used to send an unmistakable message - we are in the era of Americana Rex. Today, there being no rival superpower, the World Trade Organisation - an extension of Gatt and US hegemony - ruthlessly dictates economic policy over whole tracts of Africa, South America and Asia. Transnational corporations thereby enjoy unfettered access to national markets while millions are enslaved and impoverished through massive state debts. As to the USSR, it is only a history book memory - nostalgically mourned in Britain by Stalinists, Scargillites and Trotskyite defenders of so-called 'proletarian property forms'.

The robber capitalism of Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, etc, gestated and emerged from within 'official communism'. Eastern Europe has likewise been transformed. Moreover it exists within the Nato sphere of influence and Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic are being actively readied for EU membership.

In step with each of these developments the capitalist order has been stabilised in the "international hot spots". Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Cambodia, Palestine, South Africa and now Northern Ireland have seen deals struck and the forces of revolutionary nationalism tamed or/and integrated into the machinery of state and government.

Besides the US dominated New World Order the Northern Ireland peace deal has to be understood in the context of Blair's drive to remake the UK constitution. As we have argued in this paper, since the 1960s popular identification with the UK state has been slipping away. In the Thatcher years slippage became a slide. The anti-trade union laws, the miners' 1984-85 Great Strike, Trident, ending benefits for under-25s, the abolition of the GLC, the Wapping dispute, Section 28, the poll tax and privatisation of state assets caused deep resentment and a search for other forms of identity. By breaking the economic power of organised labour and reinventing Victorian values, Thatcher unintentionally undermined the ideology of the UK.

In the name of democracy and in the absence of a real democratic movement from below Blair is attempting to re-win popular identification. He has already dealt with Scotland and Wales. They are to have a parliament and an assembly, crucially with an inability to freely exercise self-determination. Other planks in the Blair programme are due to follow in rapid succession. London and a dictatorial mayor, European monetary integration, the most undemo-

cratic form of proportional representation in European and Westminster elections, the de-Labourisation of Labour and party realignment, a House of Lords based on patronage not hereditary, a slimmed down royal family and perhaps most important of all Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has not just experienced a loss of popular identification. The masses refused to be ruled in the old way. The ruling class could no longer rule in the old way.

Northern Ireland was established amid anti-catholic pogroms in 1920-21 explicitly as a counterrevolutionary protestant statelet. The Irish national democratic revolution - to all intents and purposes begun with the 1916 Easter uprising in Dublin - was stopped halfway by the British compromise offer of twenty-six counties. Internecine civil war and defeat was the tragic result. The Ireland of Pierce, Larkin and Connolly thereby metamorphosed into the Free State of Collins, Griffith and de Valera.

Through dividing Ireland the British ruling class successfully imposed a "carnival of reaction" north and south. Britain anchored its continued rule in the industrial northeast through the institutionalised oppression of the large catholic minority and fostering a labour aristocratic mentality amongst protestants. As a result they loyally voted for the aristocrat Sir Edward Carson and Ulster Unionism, remembered an invented tradition of 1688, and fought and connived against catholics at work as in politics so as to secure better conditions.

Gerrymandering and draconian laws, bigotry and bribery, did for nearly 50 years. However in 1969 the rising movement for civil rights burst through the safe banks of protest politics and became insurrectionary. State sponsored pogroms produced only fiercer and more conscious and heroic resistance. The British army was rushed in by the Labour government of Harold Wilson in August 1969. The notorious B-specials could no longer impose law and order. Baricades went up in Derry and Belfast. Bogside was briefly a self-governing no-go area. The IRA experienced an influx of young recruits and encadred a generation. The war was taken to Britain. Heath abolished Stormont in 1972 and 'temporarily' imposed direct rule. Nevertheless the nationalist/catholic tide moved inexorably towards the IRA and Sinn Fein. Internment, Ulsterisation, the March 8 1973 border referendum, Diplock courts, the peace people, the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the SAS all failed. To this day the IRA remains militarily undefeated. Sinn Fein breathes down the neck of the respectable SDLP in terms of voter support. Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness won West-

minster seats in the May 1997 British general election.

The majority section of the population was no less affected by the crisis. As a labour aristocracy, working class protestants look to the state to give them privileges against and over catholics. Each concession gained by the revolutionary minority created tensions in the loyalist camp. The monolith of unionism shattered under the strain. Paisleyism got itself a large constituency. Orange gangs like the UDA and UVF turned to full blown and often random terrorism. The Ulster Workers Council strike of May 1974 brought down the power-sharing Sunningdale agreement and its Unionist chief executive Brian Faulkner - the Labour government decided against using troops. Loyalist Ulster said 'no' again and again to other British peace initiatives - the Downing Street declaration, the Framework Document and the Anglo-Irish Agreement. How will the new settlement fair?

Blair is much better placed than Heath in 1972-74 or for that matter Thatcher in the 1980s. There has been a marked narrowing of Sinn Fein's ideological vision. In the 1970s it considered itself an integral part of a world wide liberation struggle. Its enemy was not only British but US imperialism. Moreover, for Sinn Fein the Dublin government was illegitimate, a stooge, an agent of Britain. How times have changed.

Gerry Adams now thinks of Ahern, the SDLP and Clinton as allies in a pan-nationalist front, if not partners. Even if it overtakes the SDLP, Sinn Fein is unlikely to immediately participate in the proposed Northern Ireland assembly. Yet the fact is that in return for the freeing of prisoners and what are essentially minor constitutional concessions it *de facto* accepts the Northern Ireland statelet and the sacred unionist "principle" of consent.

Though there could be a steady trickle of defections to Republican Sinn Fein, the IRSP and the Thirty-two County Sovereignty Committee, Adams and co should be able to deliver their mass base for the May 22 referendum. That means the British-Irish Agreement is well placed to win the catholic/nationalist vote in the north - the SDLP fully supports the deal. The simultaneous referendum in the south is in turn almost unproblematic. So there only remains the protestant/unionist side of the equation.

Trimble leads a divided party. Five out of ten Ulster Unionist Westminster MPs oppose the deal, with its pledge to release prisoners and the north-south ministerial council. Blair, Trimble, Major and other mainstream bourgeois politicians are undoubtedly telling the truth when they insist that the British-Irish Agreement greatly strengthens the UK state - it

will, if it goes through, help to gain the consent and acceptance of the catholic/nationalist minority if not their active support. Despite that, the UUP rebels know full well that the agreement redefines the union with Great Britain and necessitates a fundamental change in the nature of Ulster Unionism. The politics of anti-catholic bigotry and protestant ascendancy hardly dovetail with Blair's 'cool Britannia'. Messrs Donaldson, Thompson, Biggs, Forsythe, *et al* will therefore line up with the Rev Ian Paisley and the Orange Order in the 'no' camp in defence of narrow sectionalism and a disappearing status quo.

The dangers for the British-Irish Agreement are real for all that. Even with the pre-referendum boost provided by Clinton's visit, the result is by no means certain. As Gladstone, Asquith and Lloyd George found to their cost, modern Ulster was born with the bawling cry of 'no' on its lips. The protestant/unionist majority are of the same ilk as the white supremacists in the US deep south and apartheid South Africa. There will be mass opposition.

At present most Tory opinion has joined the chorus of praise. However, developments in Northern Ireland might act to alter that. Norman Tebbit has already voiced trenchant criticism. Faced with Blair's constitutional project, which is about to abolish their inbuilt Lords majority at a stroke, and the prospect of permanent opposition with the advent of PR politics, the Tory right could be tempted by extra-parliamentary methods - including a united front with Ulster. It is very germane to recall that back in 1912-14 the Tories illegally conspired to scupper Irish home rule. They financed Carson's armed rebellion against the Liberal government and promoted mutiny by the officer corps.

The biggest political demonstration so far this year has been the 750,000 strong Countryside Alliance. Only a simpleton could imagine that display of privilege, arrogance and rural reaction was merely about hunting foxes. It was the Tory right flexing its extra-parliamentary muscles.

Divisions above demand not a defence of Blair's new constitution and a 'yes' vote on May 7 in London and May 22 in Northern Ireland. As the last general election and the September 1997 referendums in Scotland and Wales prove, there is no hope in choosing the lesser evil. What is urgently required is independent working class movement from below. Where Blair proposes to reform the constitutional monarchy from above, we communists organise to single-mindedly fight for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales and a united Ireland ●

Jack Conrad

Party notes

Bombshell?

Either the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party is being deliberately disingenuous, or it is composed of the dimmest set of leaders on the British left. The notion that the proposals coming from Scottish Militant Labour to dissolve their organisation into an amorphous 'Scottish Socialist Party' are an unexpected "bombshell" is simply nonsense (see pages 4-7 of this paper)

Any comrade who has followed our coverage of developments in Scotland - and some of our most avid readers are to be found on the Socialist Party EC - will have expected the move. For years, we have chronicled in detail the growing nationalist infection in SML and through it, the pollution of the Scottish Socialist Alliance over which it has hegemony over. Time and again we have denounced the failure of SP leaders - centrally, Peter Taaffe - to take up the cudgels against the nationalist turn of SML. We have sounded alarm bells continually. Indeed in this column I warned that we were "witnessing the nationalist disintegration of the Socialist Party without a peep of protest or hint of a fight from the organisation's leadership" (*Weekly Worker* February 16 1998).

At the 11th hour, the SP tops have moved to prevent the imminent departure of its organisation in Scotland. They do so reluctantly, with a heavy heart. When comrades write that "any discussion within our ranks at the present time is inevitably carried into the public domain", they are tacitly acknowledging the fact that some SP members have recognised what they as a leadership have not. That these political struggles are not the narrow property of any particular organisation. The struggle against nationalism that has contaminated the movement in Scotland is the concern of all partisans of our class, in Britain and world-wide.

It is this understanding by members of SP that ensures that the *Weekly Worker* is able to carry - and intervene in - this vitally important debate. Clearly, the SP leadership is right that "it is vital that there is a full discussion" on SML's breakaway proposal: however, it is instructive that "full", for it, means being confined to the "all-British organisation and in the Committee for a Workers International" - ie, the SP's international co-thinkers.

Even at this late stage, the SP EC seems determined to keep discussion of principle out the exchange. The reply disputes *tactics* with their comrades in Scotland. The "main issue" according to Taaffe and co is not the principle of one state, one party, and the fight for unity against the existing state but "the situation opened up by the coming elections for the Scottish parliament". SML is criticised for its *tactical* approach to a "unified platform" of the left - the liquidation of SML is apparently "too high a price".

The SP reply thus studiously avoids mentioning the underlying issue at stake here - that is, SML's complete adaptation to the nationalist milieu it operates in. It is this that explains the "bombshell" to liquidate. Taaffe and the central SP apparatus have all along made concessions to the sectionalism which is now destroying their organisation in Scotland. Outrageously, they justified the formation of SML as a separate nationally defined organisation in an utterly opportunist fashion - ie, opinion polls not principle: "The decision to go for autonomy in Scotland on financial matters, but also on organisation issues, arose from the objective situation in Scotland itself. The growth of a distinct national consciousness requires a change in the form of organisation adopted ..." (my emphasis *Members Bulletin* No16, March 18 1996).

Finally - and perhaps fatally late - Taaffe tries to lead his followers into battle. Unfortunately he simply does not have the theoretical or political weapons to fight - crucially programme.

Thus, the SP reply talks of the danger to "our distinct organisational identity and political cohesion", or even of "the distinct character of our organisation and its links with the CWT". Without being snotty, it might be expected that by now - after a succession of similar problems - the comrades would have come to realise something about the nature of having "a distinct organisation and political cohesion".

When in the Labour Party, political cohesion was provided negatively, by the enclosed environment it worked in. Because it was brittle programmatically, the revolutionary Trotskyites of the Revolutionary Socialist League themselves became Labourised. As Jack Conrad put it, "...far from changing Labour it is they who have been changed. The pressures and demands necessary to maintain deep entryism on already weak politics ... produced assimilation" (J Conrad *Which road?* London 1991, p207).

Since detaching itself from that host, the SP has suffered over and over again from the ideological centrifugal pressures of the wider world and again sought to overcome contradictions by adapting to them. Outside Labour, SP activists spontaneously took on the coloration of their political surroundings, whether that be black separatism, trade unionism, feminism or Scottish nationalism. Thus, the SP leadership can bleat on about the political 'distinctiveness' of its organisation in Scotland. In truth, the politics of SML are now virtually indistinguishable from others in the left nationalist swamp. It is an entirely logical opportunist step for SML to thus propose sloughing off its old pink skin for the tartan of Scottish nationalist socialism.

This paper will spare no effort to fight nationalism in the workers' movement in Scotland - and to fight it openly, not in internal bulletins, or through the type of committee room compromise that the SP leadership seems to specialise in so unsuccessfully. Fundamentally, we know that this battle must be won *programmatically*. This is why the SP leadership has proved itself so inadequate●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

New Blair?

'The mayor is dead, long live the mayor!'. This appears to be the motto of some comrades in the LSA - or perhaps it should be, 'The mayor is still unelected, elect the mayor now'.

I say this in response to a resolution which was forwarded to the London Socialist Alliance Ad-Hoc Steering Committee meeting on April 7. The author of this resolution, comrade David Lyons of the soft Trotskyist Socialist Democracy Group, wants the forthcoming LSA conference to directly "elect a representative to stand on the national SA Steering Committee".

How ironic. Comrade Lyons was united with the CPGB in opposing the "principle" of a directly elected London mayor, as opposed to one appointed by (the democratically elected) assembly. But now he advocates the creation of a LSA 'mayor', who will not be accountable to the elected LSA leadership. I wonder if Tony Blair would approve of comrade Lyons' resolution?

Phil Kent
Brent SA

No gods

In his documents explaining his recommendation that the SSA becomes positively identified with the cause of separatism, Alan McCombes has sought justification in the writings of two great revolutionary Marxists, VI Lenin and John Maclean (*Scottish independence and the struggle for socialism* - see *Weekly Worker* February 19 1998).

No Marxist, not even Lenin, was right at all times on all questions. But on the national question, as on so many others, Lenin has to be our point of departure. Maclean was also a great revolutionary. But on the specific question of Scottish independence he was wrong. Disastrously so. In my humble opinion, the latching on to John Maclean by comrade McCombes has little if anything to do with the strength of his arguments, and a whole lot to do with the country of his birth. If so, this is a mistake of extraordinary proportions.

Comrade McCombes should take note that if the SSA is to endorse John Maclean's attitude towards Scottish independence then perhaps it would also be forced to endorse some of the views which kept him isolated from the British section of the Communist International - a personal tragedy for Maclean; a serious blow to the workers' movement in Scotland and the rest of Britain.

We have to recognise that Maclean's prescription of an independent Scottish Workers' Republic was built upon a false premise. Maclean's prescription was for a revolutionary war of Scottish workers to tear apart the United Kingdom. He was thinking along the lines of emulating, on a far grander scale, James Connolly in Ireland. Britain today however no longer occupies the core of the world imperialist system. Any nationalist redivision of the UK territory would not have anything like the consequences intended by John Maclean. It would not aid the struggle of the equivalent today of millions of colonial slaves itching for an opportunity to take on their imperialist oppressors. I can find little if anything in common between John Maclean's analysis for striking a hammer blow at world imperialism and promoting world communism on the one hand and, on the other, Alan's proposal that we need a second Scottish National Party (albeit a left-wing version).

John Maclean's analyses, for all their faults, had their roots in several of the key elements of Lenin's approach to the national question. Look carefully at *The right of nations to self-determination*, and many other writings. Maclean was endorsing the prescription Lenin gave to Marxists in oppressed nations - in particular the colonies, areas of the world still awaiting their bourgeois democratic revolutions. The point of such revolu-

tions is to create new centres of capital accumulation, develop the forces of production, and in particular the most important such force - capitalism's gravedigger, the working class itself.

Alan also has to recognise that while Marxists in a country with a significant separatist movement have a special responsibility (are in effect the eyes and ears of the international socialist movement), they have absolutely no extra rights. They certainly cannot determine, on their own, the socialist attitude to the separatist movement in question. Both the Third International of Lenin and Trotsky and the Fourth of Trotsky insisted all decisions of national sections of the International would be subordinate to the world organisation.

Alan appears to have departed radically from these Marxist norms. He is a leading member of SML which through the Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International. The decision to adopt Alan's position in Scotland has been taken in isolation from any Marxist outside Scotland. All the indications are that support for Scottish independence within the CWI beyond Scotland is not greater but rather less than it is inside. We have here a complete reversal of the role of revolutionaries inside and outside a country with an emerging pro-independence movement.

Although Scotland cannot even be described as an 'oppressed nation', it does have a large, and growing, separatist movement. Marxists in Scotland do therefore need to adopt an attitude towards it, one which goes beyond the crossing of fingers and praying it will go away. But today - and for as long as the majority of Scots don't register, not in an opinion poll but in a referendum, an unequivocal desire to go down the separatist route - rather than bowing down before the rising tide of separatist sentiment in Scotland, our task has to be to challenge it.

These sentiments are based on a reactionary and irrational despair as to the progressive potential of the English working class. Alan himself has clearly fallen victim to these prejudices. Alan's ambitions for the anti-capitalist left in Scotland, and even more so in England and Wales, are extremely low. His horizons for several years ahead seem to be limited exclusively to contemplating the ebbs and flows in support for the four capitalist parties. He entertains little, if any, hope of making substantial inroads into the electoral base of any of these parties - not at any rate without making opportunistic accommodations to the nationalists. If Marxists adopt such a pessimistic attitude, ours will be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I feel I cannot duck the question, 'Can Scotland achieve socialism before England?' This is a non-question, but one to which Alan answers in the affirmative. He should acknowledge that when Stalin redrafted his *Foundations of Leninism* he produced a theoretical counterrevolution every bit as earth shattering as anything introduced by Eduard Bernstein. In his *History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky argues that it is forgivable that in 45 thick volumes of his collected works, Lenin made two careless statements which did imply you could have socialism in one country.

Alan has not learnt this lesson. In his *Scottish independence* document, there were ten times more such careless remarks than in Lenin's entire political career. If Alan has not been converted to 'national socialism', or Stalinism in the narrow sense of endorsing the idea of socialism in one country, then he has to learn to be a damn sight more careful in what he writes in the future.

Tom Delargy
Paisley

Morning wars

I would like to use the letters page of the *Weekly Worker* to add a few points on the *Morning Star* strike. When the strike



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

for editor John Haylett's reinstatement began on February 25, Haylett characterised the dispute in *The Workers' Morning Star* No1 as "a totally needless self-inflicted wound." Near the end of the strike, when the independent appeal tribunal dismissed the charges against him, he called on management to return the paper to "a state of normality."

According to this scenario, a totally pointless conflict came out of the blue, threatened the very existence of the so-called Communist Party of Britain's "priority number one", and then, thank god, melted into thin air. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, "normality" now reigns.

The factional struggle within the CPB leadership is "normally" not on display. For at least four years it festered behind closed doors, concealed from the CPB rank and file, "the left" and "the broad labour movement" which the *Star* claims to serve. The tit-for-tat sacking of Hicks as CPB general secretary and then Haylett as *Star* editor forced the civil war into public view.

Now the strike is over, and Rosser, Hicks and their collaborators can be blamed, the winning faction apparently does not see the need for a political explanation. It was all due to personalities, "unhealthy elements". These are being removed, and the CPB can resume ploughing its *British road* furrow.

This reminds me of Krushchev's 1956 denunciation of the 'personality cult' around Stalin. Despite the list of 'errors' and crimes, fortunately the problem was, he said, only superficial. The general line of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of Soviet society had been correct all along. How lucky! How unlikely. How un-Marxist not to recognise the foul nature of the leadership of the CPSU as a direct product of its fantasy of communism in one state.

Likewise with the liquidation of the 'official' CPGB. True, the Euros (misnamed 'Eurocommunists') who came to dominate the Party executive were directly culpable for organisational liquidation, but merely blaming them misses the point. A programme for national socialism logically leads to accommodation with one's own state: it produces liquidationists. Parting company with them, while retaining the programme, as the CPB has done, guarantees a re-run, albeit in miniature.

Hicks and Rosser were part of the anti-Euro *Morning Star* faction in the 80s. Now that camp has divided against itself. Once again comrades were called upon to take sides in confusion, on the basis of blind loyalty to this or that leader, trying to read between the lines to divine what on earth the conflict was all about.

"Normality" for Haylett means attempting to put the lid back on the pot of festering differences below the surface of the CPB's superficial unity. This may prove difficult, because although the strike has ended, the battle for control of the *Star* is not over, at least until the "unhealthy elements" have been ousted. In any case, limiting debate is the wrong method. CPBers who fear that the open clash of ideas may disperse their fragile organisation are quite right. Yet openness, freedom of criticism in public, in print, is the only route to durable communist unity in practice.

Opening the *Star's* columns to all shades of opinion on the left could make it into a sharp weapon for overcoming the dogmatic differences which at present divide the advanced section of our class into sects, and organising it again into a Communist Party in which normality is established as 'unity in action, freedom of criticism'.

Ian Farrell
North London

From The Call, paper of the British Socialist Party,
April 11 1918

White sepulchres

If anything were wanted to fill the bitter cup of our disappointment and humiliation, the behaviour of the German socialists has done it.

We have all read the reports of the recent speeches made in the Reichstag by Scheidemann and David on the Russian peace, and their tenor has helped to soften the mortification which everyone among us felt at the apparent acquiescence of the German socialist proletariat in the march of Prince Leopold's troops against the Socialist Republic of Russia. A protest, be it only in words, is still a protest, and helps to salve a ruffled conscience. But it was just because they know this that the leaders of the German majority socialists delivered their orations, knowing that ... they would help to weaken the impression, both at home and abroad, created by their acceptance of the peace of force concluded at Brest.

... The socialists had been fully warned of what was coming by the amazing somersault executed by the German negotiators between December 25 and December 27. Their press at once noticed it, and condemned it in severe terms. The demonstrative strike movement which then spontaneously broke out in many places in Germany, involving in the aggregate a million workers, was the proletariat's way of reacting against the treacherous conduct of German imperialist and militarist diplomacy towards Russia.

Here was a lever placed in the hands of the socialists, which, if they had only been their former selves, could have been used by them with deadly effect, both against the war and the hated junker-capitalist domination. But just because those who now represent the majority among the socialists of Germany had long been emasculated by opportunism and debauched by the war, the effect of the strike movement on them was exactly opposite. Frightened by the spectre of revolution and attacked by the bourgeois parties, the Scheidemannites hastened to put out the incipient fire and to proclaim at the top of their voices that they were not Bolsheviks and would in no circumstances permit a revolution amidst the war ...

The result was a further stiffening of the German negotiators at Brest, the rupture of negotiations, and the treacherous attack on the defenceless Russians with the subsequent imposition of still harsher terms at Brest.

... The Scheidemannites ... recognised that the peace was not a proper one, but asked who was to blame for it. None but the Bolsheviks themselves, who had disorganised their country and delivered it defenceless into the hands of the German imperialists and had moreover, by their obstructive tactics at Brest, aiming much more at a revolution in Germany than at peace, paralysed the strong arm of the German socialists.

... It is a fact, which but a few years ago would have seemed perfectly monstrous and impossible, that the German majority socialists have deliberately betrayed the Russian Socialist Republic into the hands of the junkers and capitalists of their country.

Are the hands and honour of the minority - the so-called independent - socialists who follow Haase and Kautsky any cleaner? ... In reality they are in their way as complete a set of political bankrupts as the others ... On August 3 this 'revolutionary' opposition dared not propose anything more drastic than abstention from voting the war credits. Kautsky afterwards set out to prove in long and elaborate articles that the war was not "entirely" an imperialist war ...

The real influence among them soon passed to the former revisionists, with Bernstein at their head, whose anti-revolutionary tendencies became conspicuous after the Bolshevik Revolution. Kautsky and the principle organ of the party did their best to prove that the Bolsheviks were mere usurpers and a disgrace to socialism ... It is not surprising that they too failed to make use of the revolutionary temper of the people ...

What is the moral of this tale of shame and bankruptcy? The Germans have only shown us what in similar circumstances would be the action of the French and other 'patriotic' and opportunist socialists, who at present are either for 'national defence' or prate about a "peace by understanding", meaning a peace of governments. They are whited sepulchres, and revolutionary socialists can have nothing to do with them either in the present or in the future ●
WAMM

1918

Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

Simon Harvey of the SLP With or without the TUC

The SLP-initiated Reclaim Our Rights delegate recall conference takes place this Saturday following its successful launch rally on March 28, which drew 676 registered participants. The timing of the campaign could not have been better. A conflict between Blair's New Labour and the trade unions looms over promised union recognition legislation. Trade union bureaucrats are talking tough.

Two positive aspects so far have been its relative democracy and Reclaim Our Right's non-sectarian orientation - it wants to include (take over) other campaigns against the anti-trade union laws.

The recall conference is open to delegates from any trade union organisation and officers from already existing campaigns. Its declared purpose is to elect "officers and a central campaign organising committee on a non-sectarian basis". From there, the "elected committee should: formulate a programme of activities by May 1 1998; select a unifying name for the campaign; call a further delegated meeting before July 1 1998 to endorse the programme and name; continue to invite further sponsorship/affiliation from trade union bodies" (March 28 conference resolution).

However, there are some serious weaknesses in general approach. Delegates should vigorously argue for changes. Reclaim Our Rights (ROR) is basically pitched at the union bureaucracy. Centrally, as outlined by SLP NEC members Bob Crow and John Hendy, the "campaign can only succeed if led by the TUC". Their joint pamphlet concludes: "the task is to commit the entire ... movement, through the TUC to these goals, and for the TUC to lead the campaign, as it did in the 1970s, to achieve these objectives", namely the repeal of the anti-trade union laws. (Such an approach is a far cry from the outlandish suggestion floated by Arthur Scargill at the last TUC congress for the formation of an alternative trade union centre.)

The TUC sponsored campaign of the 1970s against Heath's Industrial Relations Act resulted directly from the pressure the CPGB was able to exert. While it had not been a revolutionary organisation for decades, it still organised many of the best militant trade unionists. The victories of the Pentonville Five, Saltley Gates and the smashing of Heath's laws was in no small part due to the CPGB's industrial organisation and strength.

Comrade Jimmy Nolan obliquely and perhaps unconsciously pointed to this in his contribution to the March 28 ROR conference. He stated that one of the reasons he had joined the SLP was because its manifesto was similar to that of the Communist Party of old. And herein lies part of the tragedy of the SLP. Rather than

becoming a mass socialist party of all working class militants, Scargill is trying to build it as a 1950s CPGB. He forgets that the CPGB was what it was because it had revolutionary origins - not least in the Councils of Action in 1920 and 1926, and the National Minority Movement.

Scargill therefore has another problem. In pursuing his strategy, he is attempting to occupy a space in British politics previously held by the 'official' CPGB, not least through the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions. With the liquidation of the 'official' CPGB, the so-called CPB has maintained the LCDTU albeit as a pale shadow of its former self. Neither the social nor the political weight is there. A vacuum exists and Scargill sees an opportunity.

Despite the March 28 conference resolution 'recognising' the work of the LCDTU, it seems that it is, as yet, not prepared to dissolve itself at Scargill's call. This was made clear during the strike of the *Morning Star* journalists. Their NUJ strike bulletin, *The Workers' Morning Star*, reported the ROR conference. In referring to this weekend's recall meeting it reported: "Unfortunately, the proposed date clashes with a meeting already arranged for the same day by the Liaison Committee".

Reading the tea leaves further, an advertisement appeared in the re-born *Morning Star* from Reclaim Our Rights. Signed by Crow and Hendy, it said: "Reclaim Our Rights ... welcomes the return of the *Morning Star*, the daily paper for the labour movement". It then refers to the March 28 conference motion which contains the details of the recall conference as being supported by "anti-union law campaigns: those of the CWU and the FTUC (Free the Trade Unions Campaign). The Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions have been invited". Obviously it is not playing ball - yet.

How this tension between ROR and the Liaison Committee is resolved remains to be seen. Clearly, ROR is attempting to occupy the same political space. Given that it is on a broader basis with fresh impetus, it should be supported. However, tying the success of the campaign to winning over the TUC is tantamount to surrender. It relies on the likes of Monks, Edmonds and Morris turning into militants prepared to break the law.

Comrades attending the conference this weekend must remove the over-reliance on legal reform and the self-defeating reliance on the TUC. Rather than appealing and pressuring the current pro-capitalist labour bureaucrats, our method must be to organise the rank and file. With or without the TUC - smash the anti-trade union laws ●

Fighting fund

One party

Unlike SML and the 'English' SP, the CPGB remains resolutely committed to the Leninist and internationalist principle of one state, one party.

We clearly need to intervene throughout the UK state - our main

enemy is at home. That is why we are particularly pleased this week to have received a splendid £100 donation from comrade BD in West Scotland. Other thanks this week to KV from Cheshire (£25), JM from Manchester (£15), SB from Portsmouth (£15), AC from Cardiff (£15), SW from Matlock (£5). A total of £165. Not bad comrades. Our £500 monthly fighting fund stands at £270. Make a special effort next week ●
Katrina Haynes

action

■ 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.

■ Lambeth SA

Election rally.

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

■ London mayor?

Do we want a US style mayor for London? How shall we vote in the referendum? Speakers invited: Ken Livingstone MP, John Hendy QC, Ted Knight, former leader Lambeth council, Ian Driver, Southwark councillor. 6pm Saturday April 25, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. Organised by Southwark Trades Council.

■ 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.

From British reformism

In this internal Scottish Militant Labour document Alan McCombes presents his nationalist proposals for a Scottish Socialist Party which would, if put into practice, make the break with the Socialist Party of Peter Taaffe complete

The purpose of this draft statement from the Executive Committee of SML is to present the case for a new merged Scottish Socialist Party based on the forces that are currently organised within SML and the Scottish Socialist Alliance. There are other socialist organisations and groupings we would like to approach for discussions about the formation of a new socialist party. These include the Communist Party of Scotland, the Socialist Labour Party, the Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Workers Party and socialists within the Labour Party, the Scottish National Party and the Green Party.

This proposal has taken shape partly as a result of various informal discussions involving SML representatives, other leading members of the SSA and representatives of the SLP in Scotland. These discussions are still at a very early stage; as yet there has been no agreement reached on the way forward for socialist unity in Scotland. At the same time, there is growing recognition that 1999 will be a decisive year for the socialist left. Three separate sets of elections will take place in Scotland during the first half of 1999; local council elections on May 6 in which Labour will be under siege as never before; the first elections to the new Scottish parliament conducted under PR which will take place on the same day as the council elections and the Euro-elections the following month which will also be conducted under a form of PR.

The stakes are high. If the socialist left in these elections fails to make a breakthrough, the advance of socialism could be slowed down. On the other hand, socialist victories in the local elections - particularly if accompanied by the achievement of even a foothold in the new Scottish parliament - could dramatically accelerate events. In the 1989 Euro-elections, the Green Party came from virtually nowhere to take 15% of the vote across Britain. Although the Greens were unable to sustain this level of support, their 1989 electoral success nonetheless had a profound and lasting impact, dragging the issue of the environment from the periphery to the centre of politics in Britain. A breakthrough of anything like that magnitude for the socialist left in Scotland would have earth-shattering repercussions - not just in Scotland, but throughout Britain as a whole. In one fell swoop, the memory of fifteen years of defeats would be erased and a new dawn would begin to break through. Even a modest triumph for the socialist left - eg the winning of a handful of council seats and one or two in the Scottish parliament - would stimulate the start of an unstoppable revival of socialism in Scotland.

■ The Additional Member System

Whether or not an advance can be achieved depends partly on events and conditions which are beyond our control, including imponderables such as the future state of the economy. For example, if the British economy begins to slide into a new

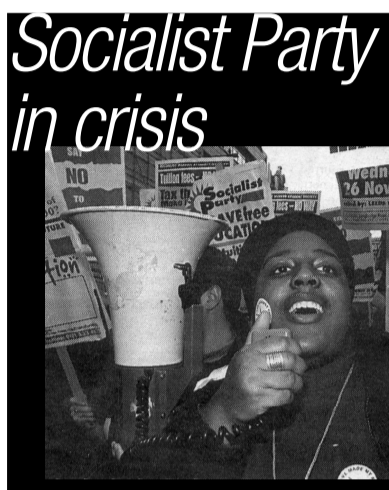
recession within the next 12 months, the idea of a socialist Scotland could begin to catch fire very rapidly. Nonetheless objective processes constitute one side of the equation. Equally important in determining whether socialism can make a breakthrough in 1999 will be the calibre and cohesion of the socialist opposition itself. The specific form of PR under which both the Scottish and European elections will be conducted poses sharply the need for socialist unity. Under the transferable vote system that operates in southern Ireland, voters can vote for more than one party in descending order of preference. The party obtaining the lowest number of votes then drops out and their second preference votes are reallocated. The same process is then repeated until an overall victor emerges. Under this type of system, multiparty politics are liable to flourish. It is possible for two or more left parties to compete against one another without fatally undermining the prospect of an eventual left victory. But under the Additional Member System that will operate in Scotland, there is absolutely no room or political justification for two or more socialist parties to stand in opposition to one another.

In Glasgow for example, a socialist party would be required to obtain between 6-7% of the vote across the city to obtain representation in the Scottish parliament. But if two socialist parties stood in competition with each other, one obtaining 5% the other 2%, neither party would achieve representation. A unique opportunity would have been criminally squandered. To pose this hypothetical possibility is not to indulge in exaggerated scaremongering; it is to highlight a serious danger that has to be honestly confronted by socialists and ultimately resolved.

■ Divisions on the left

At this stage there are two serious forces - the SSA and the SLP - which offer a socialist electoral alternative to New Labour and the SNP. There is also ferment within the Scottish Labour Party and the possibility of at least a new breakthrough formation emerging over the summer months - especially if it becomes clear that all potential dissidents on the left and so-called 'nationalist' wing will be ruthlessly prevented from standing in the Scottish parliamentary elections. In addition, there exist organisations like the SWP which up to now have shown no inclination to enter the electoral battlefield - but which could easily be forced into a tactical U-turn for fear of being further marginalised in Scotland. This poses the danger of a fragmented left playing into the hands of New Labour and the SNP. Up until now, we have promoted the SSA as the vehicle which will unify the socialist left in Scotland, supplemented if necessary by electoral pacts and agreements. Certainly, the SSA has played an important role in drawing together various groupings and individuals from different political backgrounds and traditions.

Although there have been certain overheads for SML, the decision to



launch the SSA has been vindicated by events. As a result of our involvement in the Alliance, SML and the SSA now stand at the centre of left politics in Scotland, with influence and links which stretch far beyond the boundaries of the Alliance itself.

■ A difficult period

As we acknowledged at the time of the launch of the SSA, it would be at least several years into a Labour government before conditions would begin to mature for the development of a serious mass socialist alternative. The fact that the Alliance has held together and even made modest progress during its first two years of existence is an achievement which should not be underestimated. This two year period has been one of the most difficult in the history of the socialist movement in Scotland. The combined active forces of socialism in Scotland - and across Britain as a whole - have been reduced to a fraction of what they were ten or fifteen years ago. If we were to empirically compare election results and membership figures for SML five years ago with the situation today, it would be easy to draw the superficial conclusion that our strategy has been mistaken. On both counts, the position would appear to be weaker now than in the past. However it is necessary to set any comparison against the wider political, economic and social background.

At the time of the launch of SML, socialists faced serious difficulties. The demise of Stalinism had strengthened the ideological grip of free market capitalism - even though our organisation and others from the Trotskyist tradition had been consistent opponents of the totalitarian perversion of socialism in the USSR and other eastern European states. But there were other, more favourable, tides flowing in our direction. For example, the impact of the poll tax victory and the defeat of Thatcher was still fresh in the mind of big layers of the working class. There was also a disparate backlash in 1992-93 against the failure of Labour for the fourth time in succession to remove the Tories; SML was able to capitalise on the sense of utter despair that gripped many working class communities as they braced themselves for another four to five years of Tory government. At that stage, even the temporary ideological victory of capitalism following the collapse of the

Berlin wall was partially cancelled out by the unfolding economic recession that took its toll on the British economy in the period 1992-94. In contrast, the period since the Alliance was formed has been more complex.

For several years the British economy has been on an upward curve. Even though the basic problems of poverty, low pay and long term unemployment remain endemic, the psychological effect of several years of economic growth and falling unemployment has been to reinforce the grip of free market ideology. In addition, the Alliance was launched in a pre-general election climate where the prevailing mood was to get rid of the Tories at all costs. The defeat of the Tories then led to a further phase of being prepared to give New Labour the benefit of the doubt - heightened in Scotland by the referendum result and the feeling that Labour was in the process of delivering radical constitutional change.

■ The turning tide

Only now is the tide beginning to turn. That is not to say that there will be a simple and straightforward growth of a socialist opposition. While there will be bitter disillusionment with New Labour among big sections of the working class, that mood could be complicated by a feeling that perhaps a Labour government in Scotland will be different from the Labour government in Westminster. In addition we face the complication of a powerful rival to the left of New Labour in the shape of the SNP; although the SNP explicitly defends free market capitalism, it can appear on the surface at least to offer a radical alternative. On issues like welfare, public spending and Trident it is well to the left of New Labour and can serve to complicate the task of building a genuine socialist opposition. But even taking these difficulties into account, there is immense potential for the building of a socialist party in Scotland capable of expressing the ideals of socialism in the language of the 21st century. At this stage, there is an extraordinary and unprecedented contradiction in Scottish politics reflecting a similar disparity in politics across Britain. On the one side, there is widespread and deep rooted abhorrence of the inequalities and injustices that lie at the heart of the free market capitalist system. Yet due to a lack of confidence that there is any viable alternative to the free market, the combined active forces of socialism are weaker than perhaps at any time this century.

However, in Scotland various factors have combined to ensure that the ideas of socialism have continued to exert a strong influence, even if only passive at this stage. Not least of these factors is the role played by SML between 1992-95 and by the SSA in the period since then. The impact especially of our electoral intervention cannot be underestimated. In Glasgow for example, SML or SSA candidates have stood in over fifty election campaigns in that period, including in 11 parliamentary constituencies, the city-wide Euro constituency, ten former district council wards, eight former regional council seats and 21 city council wards. As a result Glasgow has been bombarded with literally millions of leaflets and broadsheets outlining the socialist alternative, at least in rudimentary form. This has been accompanied by hundreds of public meetings and street meetings and thousands of individual discussions on doorsteps and street stalls. Over the same pe-

riod, SML and the SSA have spearheaded numerous campaigns across Scotland, for example over water privatisation, VAT on fuel, the Criminal Justice Act, council cuts, environmental issues, benefits, the minimum wage legislation and solidarity activity on behalf of workers in struggle. At least partially as a result of the role played by SML and the SSA, parts of Scotland, including Glasgow, Dundee, Leith and parts of Lanarkshire have become highly politicised.

The high level of socialist consciousness in Glasgow can be gauged from the fact that SML took third place in the 1994 Euro elections and that in Pollock the SSA took the highest percentage of any socialist anywhere in Britain in the last general election. The 8,000 votes for the SSA in Glasgow last May under extremely difficult conditions was the equivalent of taking 80,000-90,000 votes in a city the size of London.

■ A necessary phase

However, while recognising the achievements of the past, complacency and inertia would be fatal. In the world of commerce and industry, those industries that refuse to innovate are those which invariably go to the wall; those which continually update their technology and marketing techniques are those which prosper. We also have to continually reappraise our methods, structures and tactics in the light of experience and of changing circumstances. In particular, we now have to pose the question, "Is the current format of the SSA the best way forward towards the building of a strong, unified socialist force in Scotland?" And - without in any way detracting from the vital role that the Alliance has played in the past two years - we have to explore whether there may be a more effective organisational and political structure that can carry forward the struggle for a socialist Scotland into the new millennium.

At its inception, the loose structure of the SSA itself represented a compromise which took into account the natural fears and suspicions of people coming from entirely different experiences and backgrounds. That period was necessary: it enabled various groups and individuals to collaborate together in elections and other campaigns, and to debate programmatic and tactical questions, without having to take the psychological leap of forming a fully fledged political party. Even at the outset, we tentatively posed the perspective that the Alliance may eventually evolve into a more cohesive political party: "It is not ruled out that the Alliance could become more cohesive and begin to take shape as a fully fledged socialist party rather than a loose coalition. Within the Alliance, there will unavoidably be policy differences in a number of key areas, especially in the short term. Over a longer period, however, there could evolve a political convergence on the basis of experience and events as well as through debate and discussion. Ultimately a fusion of all forces involved in the Alliance may even be possible" (Conference statement, 'SML and the Scottish Socialist Alliance' April 1996).

Not only in Scotland, but internationally, the traditional ideological battle lines which divided the left have become blurred. This has arisen partly as a result of the failure of social democracy and the disintegration of the bureaucratic one party states of the Soviet Union and eastern Europe.

to socialist nationalism

Organisations and individuals which in the past subscribed to these ideologies have been forced to re-examine their positions. As a result, many former Communist Party members and Labour lefts hoisted the white flag and made their peace with capitalism. But a more principled and courageous minority moved in the opposite direction towards greater acceptance of a political programme which advocates full-blooded socialism combined with workers' democracy. In the past, such a programme would have been dismissed as 'Trotskyism'. At the same time our own organisation, partly in response to external changes and partly because we have become more and more involved in the living struggles of the working class, has been forced to adapt politically and organisationally.

These general long term processes, combined with the specific experience of working together within various campaigns, have led to a breaking down of political barriers which at an earlier stage may have appeared almost insurmountable.

■ Alliance: a federation or a party?

From the outset, the SSA was a hybrid, combining elements of a united front with the features of a party. If anything, the balance has tilted further in the direction of a party over the course of the past two years. When the idea of a SSA was first floated in August 1995, it was visualised as a federation of organisations such as SML, the Scottish Socialist Movement (a grouping with its origins in the Labour left), the Communist Party of Scotland and Liberation - a left wing grouping within the SNP. (See *Militant Labour Members Bulletin* No12, 'Future electoral strategy in Scotland' September 1995). Measured against the objective of establishing a broad federation, the Alliance project has not yet succeeded in involving significant forces. Of the four initial organisations involved in discussions, only SML is affiliated *en bloc*. The SSM has wound up, with most of its members now participating in the Alliance as individual members. The CPS has kept its distance organisationally, although individual members of the CPS participate in the Alliance. And while some former Liberation activists have now thrown in their lot with the Alliance, they have done so as individuals rather than as an organised grouping. Although most SLP activists in Scotland are open to the idea of the Alliance, they have been actively discouraged from participating in it by their national party leadership. Some animal rights and environmental activists have joined the Alliance - but again as individuals rather than in an organised fashion. Several shop stewards committees have affiliated to the Alliance, as have some very small socialist groupings, including the CPGB and the Republican Worker Tendency. That leaves the Alliance extremely lopsided, with SML by far the largest organised grouping (even though there are a number of SML members who are not yet registered members of the SSA).

On the other hand, the SSA has succeeded in attracting sizeable numbers of previously nonaligned socialists. Of the 400-500 registered members of the SSA, more than half are individual members who belong to no other organisation. It is also the



McCombes wants to liquidate the Scottish Socialist Alliance as well

case - and this is a key point - that the Alliance has evolved towards much greater political cohesion than we would have perhaps anticipated. The Charter for Socialist Change is a very clear and concrete programme for the overthrow of capitalism and the building of a new socialist Scotland with an internationalist perspective. Although there is a case to be made that the Alliance has failed to evolve into a genuine federation of the left, there is an equally strong argument to suggest that the first two years of the Alliance has at least laid the foundations for a new broad socialist party.

■ Torn between two tasks

Of course, it is necessary to have a sense of balance. Without SML, the Alliance would scarcely be viable. But the other side of the coin is that without the Alliance, SML would be more isolated and marginalised than is the case at the present time. It is true that SML has suffered to some degree by the lack of single-minded concentration on the task of building the organisation. Any discussion on the way forward must take that problem into account. But the worst mistake we could possibly make now would be to turn back the calendar and return to the strategy of building an independent Marxist organisation in isolation from the rest of the left. There are periods, such as the early 1990s, when such a strategy is both viable and necessary. But with conditions beginning to ripen for the emergence of a fifth political party in Scotland based on clear socialist principles, such a strategy today would be politically incompetent. We believe that a single, unified party, with a clear programme, a broad structure that would allow for the affiliation of trade unions; and a flexible constitution which tolerates the right to exist of tendencies/groupings/factions is the way forward now for socialism in Scotland. At this stage, it would be impossible to sketch in every detail. If we achieve broad agreement with the principle of proceeding towards

the formation of a new party, in-depth negotiations would be required with other forces. But for the sake of clarity, we have to emphasise that we are not simply proposing the continuation of the SSA under a different name.

It is not specifically the name of the Alliance that poses a problem - although there is at least a strong case to be made that, even in terms of presentation, a SSP would have a greater cutting edge and would attract more recruits (on the basis that an Alliance implies to most people a federation of existing organisations rather than a party which anyone can join). However, from the standpoint of SML, the main problem that we face is the strain involved in attempting to build two parties with similar programmes simultaneously. This is an awesome burden; there is a danger that we will fail to do justice to either. Over the next three, four and five years, the present arrangement is likely to prove unsustainable.

■ Implications for SML

Therefore we are proposing that, provided we can reach agreement with other forces, the apparatus of SML, including our paper, our finances, our membership, our premises and our full time staff would be transferred to a new Scottish Socialist Party. This in turn would mean that SML would cease to exist, at least in its present form. In some areas, where there are no other left forces present, our existing branches of SML would become branches of the SSP. In other areas, our branches would merge with the existing branches of the SSA. If the SLP - or any other left groups - agree to participate, they too would be asked to merge their branches. And if any existing groups, including SML, wanted to retain an organisational structure within the new party, they should be able to be accommodated within the constitution of the new party. It is not possible to gauge at this stage whether or not it will be necessary to retain a separate SML structure, at least as a transi-

tional arrangement. That would partly depend upon the degree of political and organisational cohesion that could be achieved in the new party; it would partly depend on the outcome of negotiations with other forces.

One potentially contentious problem is the present relationship between SML and the SP in England and Wales and the wider international organisation, the Committee for a Workers International. To impose the question of affiliation to the CWI as a precondition for any merger would almost certainly lead to a stalemate. Such a condition would be interpreted as an attempt by our organisation to simply swallow up the Alliance and other forces on the left.

From a different standpoint, the SLP leaders have floated the idea of a merged party which would be seen as a Scottish organisation of Scargill's party. Just as that proposition would be unacceptable to our organisation, others in the Alliance would at this stage resist the idea of becoming the Scottish section of SML's international organisation. On the other hand, the idea of individual members and leaders of a new SSP participating in the CWI and the SP in England and Wales would not pose any problem: nor would we seek to prevent any involvement by others in different international formations. In addition,

the idea of the new party itself having an open relationship with several or more international organisations has been posed. In the long term, a broader regroupment on the left in England and Wales and on an international scale could begin to resolve this dilemma. In the meantime, it may be desirable to retain an organised structure through which to conduct relations with England, Wales, Ireland and the CWI as a whole. Through such a structure, in-depth Marxist political education could be organised perhaps at a city-wide level on a monthly basis, and an analytical/theoretical publication produced.

That is one possible variant; another is to throw everything into the new party, which would become the vehicle not just for fighting elections and waging campaigns, but for political education and for maintaining British-wide and international links. What is not an option - or at least what would be the worst option - would be to attempt to trundle on as before, for fear of confronting some of the difficulties that are inevitably posed by such a significant strategic turn. For that reason, we are asking the organisation to agree to begin immediate negotiations that we hope will lead to the formation of a new Scottish Socialist Party sometime before the end of 1998 ●

March 6 1998

CPGB London seminar series

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

April 26: Sentimental socialism using Hal Draper's 'Karl Marx's theory of revolution: critiques of other socialisms' as a study guide.

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



Fighting liquidationism

The reply of the Socialist Party executive committee to Scottish Militant Labour

We are writing to you at very short notice in response to your statement 'Initial proposals for a new Scottish Socialist Party', written by Alan McCombes on behalf of the SML EC (March 6). We received a copy of this document on March 12. It is no exaggeration to say that its contents were a bombshell for the EC. When the Scottish NC members discussed with Peter [Taaffe], Mike [Waddington] and Lynn [Walsh] at our national conference in Morecombe in September 1997, they told us that their position was that SML should change its name and continue to work within the SSA. Evidently, things have developed since that time and comrades have to respond to events. But nothing prepared us for the proposals which are now being put forward.

The document states: "We are proposing that, providing we can reach agreement with other forces, the apparatus of SML, including our paper, our finances, our membership, our premises and our full time staff would be transferred to a new SSP". SML branches would merge with the branches of the new party. There are some ambiguous, if not contradictory, suggestions to the effect that "if any existing groups, including SML, wanted to retain an organisational structure within the new party, they should be able to be accommodated". But in our view, the whole emphasis of the document is on the merging of our organisation into a new formation, without any proposals that would guarantee our distinct organisational identity and political cohesion.

It is claimed that the new party, like the SSA, would be based on "a very clear and concrete programme for the overthrow of capitalism and the building of a new socialist Scotland with an internationalist perspective". Yet neither the SSA's Charter for Socialist Change (April 1996) nor 'Some preliminary suggestions for a Scottish socialist manifesto' (January 1998) actually fits this description. Moreover, it is clear from the document that the proposed SSP would be "a new broad socialist party" and the references to "in-depth negotiations with other forces" do not outline any criteria which would ensure the new party would adopt the perspectives, programme, party-building methods and so on which would ensure the continuation of a Marxist revolutionary party. On the crucial question of international affiliation, the document in effect accepts that the new SSP would not be affiliated to the CWI. As you know, the EC proposed last year that we should begin a discussion on whether SML under a new name should become a separate section of the CWI, which we favour. But what is proposed in this document is fundamentally different.

We believe that if the document's proposals are accepted they would lead to the dissolution of our organisation and the loss of our clear and cohesive political identity. Many of the ideas posed in this document, in our view, pose an extreme danger for our organisation.

The Scottish comrades have every right to raise any political issue, however controversial. But the EC feels very strongly that the Scottish NC members should have raised these issues in discussion before producing a document, especially only two

weeks before the Scottish conference. We recognise that events are moving fast in Scotland, and it is urgent to clarify our strategy. But such far-reaching proposals cannot be discussed and rushed through in a couple of weeks. It is vital that there is a full discussion, both in the all-British organisation and in the CWI.

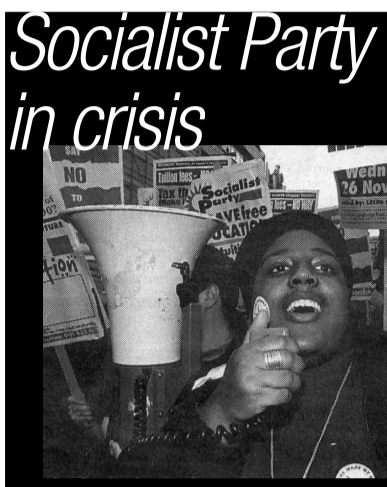
We recognise that any discussion within our ranks at the present time is inevitably carried into the public domain. Nevertheless, it is still essential that key issues of perspectives, strategy and tactics are clarified and the implications fully discussed. We cannot limit our internal discussion on account of the possible reactions from others on the left. Because of the urgency of the discussions, we are making a number of brief points in this letter, which we will elaborate as the discussion continues.

While agreeing with many of the points made on perspectives, we consider that some points need more discussion. For example, the point that the recent upward curve of the British economy has "reinforce[d] the grip of free market ideology" is too one sided. The recovery has been extremely weak and one-sided, alleviating the conditions of some sections of the working class but at the same time widening the gap between the rich and the poor, fuelling enormous resentment against the system.

The main issue at the moment however, is the situation opened up by the coming elections for the Scottish parliament. It is clear to us from the document that the reasons being put forward to justify these new proposals are primarily electoral. Elections are important, and we have always been ready to seize the opportunities for strengthening the political influence of socialist ideas and our party through election campaigns. Winning positions in parliament or on local councils can be an extremely important lever. However, electoral considerations do not override all other issues and have to be weighed up in relation to the future influence and gains of our party.

We fully accept that the coming elections for the Scottish parliament, the next round of council elections and the Euro-elections will provide us with important opportunities which we should use to the full. However, the comments in paragraph three of the document are, in our view, quite exaggerated. If the socialist left fails to make a breakthrough in these elections, it says "the advance of socialism could be slowed down". Socialist victories, on the other hand, "dramatically accelerate events". Winning a handful of council seats and one or two seats in the Scottish parliament "could stimulate the start of an unstoppable revival of socialism in Scotland". The document itself accepts that 15% for a new socialist party, similar to the Green's vote in the 1989 Euro-elections, is extremely unlikely. However, "a modest triumph", while a big step forward, would not in itself dramatically alter the course of developments in Scotland. We also have to keep a sense of proportion about the strength of our forces at this stage and those forces which could be attracted to a new party.

In Ireland, for example, the victory of Joe Higgins in Dublin North was an important breakthrough for the left



in general and the SP in particular. It has opened up new possibilities, which have to be followed through, but it would be an exaggeration to say it has transformed the political situation in Ireland. Moreover, it should be noted that Joe fought two by-elections before winning the Dail seat in June 1997.

The document starts out from the electoral imperative of avoiding "two or more socialist parties ... stand[ing] in opposition to one another" in the Scottish parliament elections. The elections will use an Additional Seat PR system, which poses a particular tactical problem, which we have to try to overcome. But whilst striving to achieve a unified socialist platform, we cannot be ready to pay any price for this. Forming a new broad socialist party will not, in any case, absolutely guarantee that there will be a unified platform. But even if it did achieve this, it would be too high a price to pay if our political cohesion is eroded. We have to preserve our political and organisational capacity to make gains in the future.

A divided left platform, says the document, would lead to "a unique historical opportunity [being] criminally squandered". But it is a serious mistake to think that this tactical problem can be solved by proposing a new formation, a broad socialist party with a broad programme, into which the SML would be effectively dissolved.

For instance, the document now speaks of a "ferment within the Scottish Labour Party and the possibility of at least a new breakaway formation emerging over the summer months - especially if it becomes clear that all potential dissidents on the left and so-called 'nationalist' wing will be ruthlessly prevented from standing as candidates in the Scottish parliamentary elections". But do the comrades seriously believe that the proposals for a new SSP outlined in this document will guarantee the inclusion of a significant section of the Scottish LP dissidents in the new party? The primary concern of the left is their prospects for gaining Scottish parliamentary and council seats. At the recent [Scottish] LP conference there were votes against the national leadership on Trident and child benefit cuts. But the left of the [Scottish] LP has not waged anything like a consistent, serious campaign against the leadership on key political issues. Their primary concern is seats. If they come to a new SSP, their first question will be, "Who are the candidates going to be? What seat am I going to get?" It is inevitable that there will be a scramble for seats. The formation of a new SSP will not automatically solve this problem, no matter how 'broad' the programme or membership requirements.

We have to fight for a united socialist platform in the forthcoming

elections. But we cannot gamble the whole future of our organisation on achieving a united platform. If we cannot achieve unity, whether because of political differences or because of opportunist and careerist motives on the part of some of our potential allies we have to be prepared to contest elections with the forces we can bring together.

The document implies that the next round of elections will pose a make-or-break situation. But it would be entirely wrong to bank everything on one throw of the dice. There is an important opportunity before us. We have to weigh up the best way of exploiting it. We should be extremely flexible in our tactics. But we cannot abandon long-term consideration of perspectives, programme and party building - and risk losing past gains. It is not enough to win public positions: we have to be in a position to use them effectively as a platform and link them to our campaigning activity. This depends not merely on our public profile and elected positions, but on the political coherence and fighting capacity of our forces. We have to weigh up the urgent need for a unified platform in these forthcoming elections with a realistic assessment of the way things will develop at a later stage.

It is quite wrong in our view to counterpose the proposal for a new broad socialist party to "turn[ing] back the calendar and return[ing] to the strategy of building an independent Marxist organisation in isolation from the rest of the left". We do not accept that at any stage in our history we have worked in isolation from the rest of the left. Since the mid-1980s, we have worked with a variety of left and even broader forces in campaigns against the poll tax, against water privatisation, against the Criminal Justice Bill, in the YRE and so on. But even when we were working in the Labour Party, we always worked together with other lefts. In the mid-1970s for instance, we worked in a left caucus with Tony Benn on Labour's NEC and participated in a joint campaign with other lefts, the 'Defend the Manifesto Campaign'. Our first anti-Labour Party witch hunt rally at Wembley was called under the name of the 'Labour Steering Committee Against the Witch hunt', with speakers including Terry O'Neil (Bakers' union president) and Ken Livingstone, who was president of the campaign.

The document says that "with conditions beginning to ripen for the emergence of a fifth political party in Scotland based on clear socialist principles, such a strategy [building an independent Marxist organisation] would today be politically incompetent". Such conditions may well point towards the need to strengthen the SSA or move towards the formation of a new, broad socialist party, with a federal structure which would allow the participation of various organisations, trends etc, including our own. We are certainly not saying it is enough to trundle on as before. But it would be fatal to abandon the task of building an independent Marxist organisation whatever the character of the new formation we decide to work in.

We believe that in this document the comrades are confusing two different questions, two types of party. One is a newly formed revolutionary socialist party, based on the programme and methods of Marxism. The other is a new, broad socialist party which brings together a variety of left forces around a broad socialist pro-

gramme. The first type, a Marxist revolutionary party, can be formed by the fusion of various forces, not all of which necessarily come from a clear Marxist tradition. The example has been given of the formation of the British Communist Party in 1920. But the CP was formed under the impact of the Russian revolution and it was created as a section of the Third, Communist International, accepting the programme, perspectives and statutes of the International. That clearly provided the starting point for the merging of different forces into a politically unified party on the basis of clear principles. This however is not what the document is actually proposing - it is proposing the formation of a broad socialist party which would not, in reality, be a fusion on the basis of a cohesive programme and method.

In the discussions at the National Committee, the comrades also invoked the tactics of the American Trotskyists in the 1930s in relation to the American Workers Party led by a former preacher AJ Muste. Care must be taken when drawing on experiences of the past to justify tactics today when the conditions are quite different. The AWP was described by James Cannon as "a political menagerie, which had within it every type of political species", but it was a small, but quite effective, predominantly workers' party, which had been energetic in industry and amongst the unemployed.

They were "dead earnest about fighting capitalism" and had attracted a body of rank and file militant workers. It was numerically a bit less than the membership of the Communist League, the Trotskyist organisation at that stage.

But the approach of the US Trotskyists was fundamentally different to what is suggested in the Scottish comrades' document. The merger of two parties led to the creation of a new revolutionary party and not some broad formation, which is suggested in the Scottish comrades' document. Moreover, support for the Fourth International was clearly stated as a negotiating aim of the Trotskyists in the lead-up to the formation of the party. Cannon states "for us the question of internationalism is a paramount question, as it has always been for revolutionary Marxists ... It is from this point of view that we raise the question of the Fourth International as a fundamental consideration in the discussion of a new party in America. We take part in the discussions of a new party in America not merely as American revolutionists, but as internationalists, as adherents of the Fourth International" (March 10 1934).

Cannon further writes: "A party is needed ... an International is needed ... We said at many times, and we underscore it here once more, that the organisation of an American party cannot be separated in any way from the struggle to form a new International, but on the contrary is an inseparable part of that struggle".

It is true that for tactical reasons, after the fusion, in what was actually a transitional formation even though it declared itself as a revolutionary party, open adherence to the International organisation of the Trotskyists did not take place for a time. Nevertheless, AJ Muste did sign the Open Letter, written by Trotsky and adopted at the International Communist League conference in 1936, advocating the Fourth International.

The circumstances of the 1930s in which fusion of the Musteites and the Trotskyists took place, as well as the

with Taaffeism

way in which the international organisation of the Trotskyists was dealt with, is entirely different to what is now being outlined. The document is not advocating a clear revolutionary party, as the Trotskyists did in the negotiations with the Musteites. They are arguing for a broad party but are prepared to give up the distinct character of our organisation, and the links with the CWI.

The document claims, without seriously examining the question, that the proposed new SSP would be formed on the basis of a clear socialist programme, it would be "based on clear socialist principles". However, we feel the comrades are taking too much for granted in relation to the programme of a new broad party. Adoption of the SSA Socialist Manifesto statement would give a new party a clear programme which raises radical demands for improving the rights and conditions of the Scottish people. But can it be said that it is yet a "radical socialist programme"? Does it, in reality, call for the "overthrow of capitalism and a new socialist Scotland with an internationalist perspective"? The Socialist Manifesto statement itself states that "this programme takes account of the limitations of parliament" and so "simultaneously prevents our opponents simply dismissing our manifesto as dishonest or utopian - and at the same time allows us to continue to expose the serious shortcomings of a parliament with no control over the welfare state or the wider economy". But even if it were a radical socialist programme it would not make the party a revolutionary socialist party. There have been many examples in the history of the international workers' movement where different trends or parties have formally adhered to a socialist programme, even a Marxist programme, but do not by any means consistently base their activity on Marxist strategy and tactics.

We believe that the document is far too sweeping and superficial in referring to the blurring of traditional ideological battle lines which divided the left" in the past. Some of the best groups and individuals may have moved "towards greater acceptance of a political programme which advocates full-blooded socialism combined with workers' democracy". But it is too simplistic to say that "in the past, such a programme would have been dismissed as 'Trotskyism'". We have been able to reach agreement on a campaigning, fighting programme with others on the left, including some from a Stalinist tradition. Nevertheless, the Trotskyist tradition includes fundamentally important ideas on perspectives, revolutionary strategy, strategy on the national questions, tactical methods of struggle and methods of party building which are far from being accepted by many others on the left. It is true to say that in the last period we have adapted our political and organisational methods to the new conditions, but it would be entirely wrong to say that we have abandoned key ideas which were at the heart of the Trotskyist tradition.

The document says that if there is broad agreement among other forces with the principle of proceeding towards the formation of a new party, "in-depth negotiations would be required". But the document does not begin to even outline the key political criteria which, from the standpoint of our organisation, would be the starting point for such negotiations.

Comrades may argue that, if we were to make acceptance of a rounded-out

Marxist position a condition of fusing together in a new organisation, then it would never happen. But this is the case for recognising that, if it is possible to go beyond the stage of an alliance at this stage, it has to be towards a broad party, with a federal structure, which allows freedom for different groups accepting a common platform, including our own organisation. However, when we are by far the biggest force involved in the Alliance, this raises the question, is there, at the moment, sufficient basis for such a development, when most of the troops, the apparatus and the energy would come from our organisation?

The document says that relations between a new formation in Scotland and the SP in England and Wales and the CWI is a "potentially contentious problem". It says that to make affiliation to the CWI a precondition for any merger "would almost certainly lead to a stalemate". But if there is a high degree of agreement on a socialist programme, including "a socialist Scotland with an internationalist perspective", why would it not be possible to campaign for the affiliation of a new SSP to the CWI? In reality, it is evident that most of the other groups who might be might expected to join a new formation would not, at this stage, readily accept the idea of CWI affiliation. But this precisely points to the underlying political differences that still exist. It makes it clear that the prospect of fusing the present left forces into a unified organisation into which our organisation would be dissolved is entirely premature. On the other hand, the question of CWI affiliation would not be immediately posed in a broad socialist organisation of which our organisation was a clearly defined component part.

Dissolving our organisation would be much too high a price to pay for a broad socialist party, which could not at this stage have the character of a revolutionary Marxist party. Although there are some contradictions and ambiguities in the document, it seems quite clear to us that the emphasis is on merging and dissolving our organisation: "The apparatus of SML, including our paper, our finances, our membership, our premises and our full time staff would be transferred to a new SSP". There would be a complete merging of SML into the new party. The document says that "if any existing groups, including SML, wanted to retain an organisational structure within the new party, they should be able to be accommodated within the constitution of the new party". Even on this, however, the document says that it is not possible at this stage to say whether it will be necessary to retain a separate SML structure "at least as a transitional arrangement". Whether or not there is a complete dissolution of SML, will depend partly on "the degree of political and organisational cohesion" in the new party and partly on the "outcome of negotiations with other forces". Again, it does not say what the criteria for negotiations would be. What would be the minimum conditions for our organisation as far as programme, policy and strategy are concerned?

If the overwhelming bulk of the political and organisational resources for the new party are coming from SML, why should we enter into such a venture if it means the dissolving of our organisation - which, under the conditions proposed, would mean an inevitable dilution of our political identity.

The very next point the document deals with is the question of CWI af-

filiation. Posed as a precondition, it says, this would lead to stalemate. But the document does not even put the position that SML comrades should advocate affiliation to the CWI. It says that individual members and leaders could "participate in the CWP". Its also says that "the idea of the new party itself having an open relationship with several or more internationals has been posed in the longer term". This is astounding. This proposal will cause outrage throughout the International. More than anything else, the comments on the CWI make it clear that the document is really for the dissolution of our organisation and the detachment of our comrades from the CWI.

At the end of the document, it says that "one possible variant" is that "it may be desirable to retain an organised structure through which to conduct relations with England, Wales, Ireland and with the CWI ... Through such a structure, in-depth Marxist political education could be organised perhaps at a city-wide level on a monthly basis, and an analytical/theoretical publication could be produced". This would effectively reduce our organisation to a study group or at best a caucus within a broad socialist party. Such a caucus would be an exclusive inner core within the party. If it recruited at all, it would be from amongst party activists, not through its direct involvement in activity and struggle.

Such a position would be similar to the grouping formed by ex-members of the British section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International who joined the SLP at the time of its formation and formed (at first secretly) the Fourth International Supporters Caucus. At least they had the justification that they were an extremely small group, with no resources. They were not contributing substantial forces or resources to the SLP, as SML would, according to this proposal, be handing over to a new SSP. Fisc, of course, disintegrated almost as soon as its existence became public knowledge.

The document, however, proposes another variant. "To throw everything into the new party, which would become the vehicle not just for fighting elections and waging campaigns, but for political education and maintaining British-wide and international links". The document does not even state a preference for the caucus variant over the complete dissolution variant.

Whatever gloss is put on the proposals, the document, in our view, unmistakably argues for the dissolution of our organisation. The suggestion ("it may be desirable") for our organisation to continue as a grouping within the party would not guarantee the continuation of our present forces as a coherent, organised political force. Even within an alliance or a broad socialist party in which we remained an organised force, there would be enor-

mous pressures on us, posing all the dangers of opportunism. These can only be resisted through a strong political structure, firmly linked to the CWI. There is a real danger that the pressures towards opportunism within a broad party in which we no longer had a coherent formation could be overwhelming. It is not a question of comrades' intentions, but of the logic of such a formation.

The document states that "despite the considerable success of SSA, SML has suffered to some degree by the lack of single-minded concentration on the task of building the organisation". Unfortunately, it is quite evident in our view that the enormous demands of campaigning activity, election campaigns and so on, has resulted in quite a weak internal situation, in terms of the development of cadres, organisational structures and finance. If SML merges into a new SSP without commitment to a strong organisation of its own, as part of a federal structure, the internal position would be eroded away very rapidly.

It was argued by Alan at the NC (March 15) that the overwhelming priority now is to bring about a new formation and the task of political differentiation and clarification can take place at a later stage. But how will such clarification take place? Unless, from the start, we maintain an independent revolutionary organisation linked to the CWI, whether in an alliance or a new broad party, there will be no guarantee that our comrades in the future will have the capacity or the forces to achieve a clear political differentiation or clarity.

It has been raised that some EC comrades' reaction to the Scottish document has been extreme. However, we have stated frankly what we consider to be the real character of the document's proposals and the extreme dangers which, in our view, they pose. We are extremely alarmed by the proposals in this document, as are members of the International Secretariat and the International Executive Committee who have been told of the proposals. We believe that whatever the intention of the Scottish EC comrades and regardless of some qualifications within the document, this proposal is in reality for the dissolution of our organisation as an effective, independent revolutionary organisation. Revolutionary ideas and revolutionary organisation go hand in hand. We believe that if our independent organisation is dissolved this will unavoidably lead to the dissolution of our political identity, to the erosion of a principled commitment to the perspectives, programme and strategy of revolutionary Marxism. If the proposals are implemented, we would be in serious danger of losing all our past gains. We therefore believe that before any decisions are taken on these proposals, there should be a full discussion both on an all-Britain and an International level ●

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Blair's rigged referendum and Scotland's right to self-determination

In this pamphlet, Jack Conrad offers a serious critique of the Scottish Socialist Alliance's decision to support a double 'yes' vote in the September 11 1997 referendum.

He makes it clear why the Alliance's leadership, in the form of Scottish Militant Labour, is unable to take up the challenge of leading the working class away from national reformism towards revolutionary politics around the national question in Scotland. (pp44, £1.50 - available from the CPGB address).

For a republican boycott

All Irish republicans, whether nationalist or socialist or republican communists, should actively campaign for a boycott of the referendum on May 22nd, both north and south of the border. A mass boycott organised by Irish republicans would strengthen the struggle for self-determination and a united Ireland. It would represent a vote of no confidence in the British-Irish Agreement, which the capitalist governments of Ireland and the UK are trying to foist on the Irish people.

The agreement will provide for a Northern Ireland Assembly, a north-south ministerial council, plus a Council for the British Isles. It should lead to release of prisoners and decommissioning of weapons. There is to be a new Civil Rights Commission and an Equality Commission. On the face of it, the agreement might seem to many people to be a step forward. It may even be presented as a transitional move that will lead to a united Ireland. Therefore we need to assess the situation quite carefully.

The agreement is a compromise - some have called it an historic compromise - between unionism and nationalism, between royalism (loyalism) and republicanism. The core of this is a deal between the capitalist governments of the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic made in their secret talks. But we can be sure it is a deal that will be good for business interests. On the ground the governments are represented by the Ulster Unionist Party and the nationalist SDLP. This is the central axis around which the whole agreement hangs. It became very clear at the end of the negotiations.

The strategy of British imperialism has been to make limited concessions in order to reincorporate Northern Ireland into the union. The purpose is to restabilise British rule in Ireland. This is why it has been called 'Sunningdale II'. It has clear parallels with the previous failed agreement of 1974. This last attempt at "power sharing" collapsed when a majority of unionists were not prepared to make concessions to nationalists. The Ulster Workers Council destroyed the deal.

Today the situation is different. The whole UK state structure is in need of change. 'Sunningdale II' is part of a broader strategy of the 'reformed (constitutional) monarchy' or 'new unionism'. It involves constitutional change not only for Northern Ireland, but Scotland, Wales, House of Lords, local government, the London mayor, proportional representation etc.

The Tories rejected constitutional reform. But they were forced by the struggle to adopt it for Ireland alone. Blair's programme is thus the logical step on from the Tories, to fully develop and embrace the strategy. The New Labour agenda fits more closely with the needs of the state. John Major's government spent 17 months insisting on IRA disarmament as a precondition for talks. When the IRA ended its ceasefire, that unrealistic nonsense was blown away. The weak Major government, dependant on



Two years of work: a historic compromise

Unionist votes, could not deliver. The new prime minister is not encumbered by any of that. The Blair victory freed the state to push the agreement through.

It would be wrong to think that this agreement is simply the result of a cunning strategy by British imperialism. It is also the product of the long war. It represents a military stalemate. Since 1974 the republican movement is much better organised both politically and militarily. They have forced the British government and the Unionists to the negotiating table. But they are not strong enough to defeat the British army or force withdrawal. Of special significance in this regard was the ability of the IRA to plant bombs in the City of London. More than any other action, this went to the heart and pocket of the British establishment. The future of the City as a world financial centre, and the huge profits associated with that, would be seriously damaged if the IRA could mount further explosions. It was the billionaires of the City that told John Major in no uncertain terms to pull his finger out and cut a deal to neutralise the IRA.

The IRA forced Major and then Trimble to get a grip on reality. As a result of the struggle by the republican movement, the unionist camp is now sharply divided. Paisley has remained intransigent. But he has been partly neutralised by having the loyalist paramilitaries inside the negotiating process. It is difficult for Paisley to mobilise the loyalist working class against the will of the paramilitaries. Being in the front line of a deadly war, the loyalist paramilitaries are less impressed by demagogues in the rear. When Paisley turned up at the talks, he was heckled by supporters of the paramilitaries as "an old windbag". They are not going to be the stage army for Paisley to wheel on. Without the loyalist workers it will not be possible for the agreement to be sunk by direct action.

The agreement is not a step forward, rather a recognition of the stalemate. This is what has been achieved so far. It is bringing us up to date with what has been achieved so far. It is bringing the theory of unionism into line with reality. If workers organise themselves and then go on strike for a wage increase. In recogni-

tion of the increased strength of the workers, the boss offers a pay rise. The purpose of this is to bring the strike to an end and begin to re-establish control over the workforce. Later the boss can begin to chip away at any gains. Even if a majority vote for a return to work, the boss will be concerned if there is a significant militant minority that does not.

Sinn Fein's support for the agreement is very desirable, but not absolutely necessary. The political deal can be done without them. As long as the Hume-Trimble bloc remains in place to unite the majority of the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists. Having said that, it has been an essential part of the plan to neutralise the IRA. If Sinn Fein will back the agreement then so much the better. If they will end the armed struggle and decommission weapons in exchange for prisoner release, that is a significant gain. But if on the other hand the agreement splits and demoralises the IRA, then that weakens their ability to function effectively. Sinn Fein needs to be kept on board only so that it can be stitched up.

Will the agreement prove to be tran-

sitional to a united Ireland? Ultimately only time will tell. But there is nothing inherent in the agreement that automatically leads in that direction. On the contrary, there is much more that leads in the opposite direction. What leads to a united Ireland is not this agreement, but the struggle of the people themselves. This agreement means erecting a new barrier to a united Ireland, which might survive five years or 105 years. It depends on who is going to fight to overturn it.

This brings us back to the referendum. This is the first opportunity that republicans have to defeat the agreement or weaken it. We will find out who is going to back the deal and who is going to oppose it. We can of course recognise reality without voting for it. We can recognise that a sort of stalemate exists. Republicans should not give this stalemate our seal of approval. Such approval will provide moral and practical arguments against republicanism from now on. We must not spread the illusion that this agreement will lead to a united Ireland.

If this agreement gains overwhelming support, then that will greatly strengthen new unionism. On the other hand, if there is strong opposition, then the agreement is unlikely to survive for very long. Paisley's brand of old unionism will not be resurrected without a significant political shift to the right in the rest of the UK. If there is strong and distinct opposition from republicans then it won't be too long before a united Ireland and British withdrawal comes to be the only option. The republican movement should not call for a 'no' vote and confuse their opposition with Paisley's 'Ulster says no' campaign.

There should be a mass active boycott. This means mobilising opposition on the streets. We should deny Tony Blair the 'oxygen of publicity' that a large 'yes' vote will provide. Let us make sure this agreement looks very wobbly, because the republicans are standing out firmly for a united Ireland.

A mass republican boycott might not secure a majority to defeat the agreement. But it would provide the most fertile ground to continue the struggle for republicanism. An agreement would be in place, but its days would surely be numbered.

After the referendum, Irish republicans will have to take stock of how to advance towards a united Ireland. At one time Irish republicans either ignored England or carried out military campaigns or looked to the Labour Party. What they have failed to do is to see the republican struggle in an all-UK context. We need to work for a united republican movement involving the English, Scottish and Welsh working class. The demand for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales and a united Ireland is something which all republicans should support.

Without doubt the growth of a republican movement in other parts of this 'union' would greatly aid the Irish cause. ●