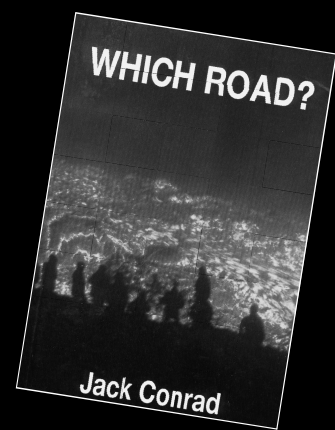


Which road?

Jack Conrad provides a sustained critique of the 'revolutionary' reformist programmes of the Eurocommunist CPGB, the CPB and the Militant Tendency (now the Socialist Party). It is the preliminary groundwork for our draft programme around which the struggle to reforge the CPGB is focused (pp267, £6.95 - available from the CPGB address).



Hague rallies to Blair peace

Over the weekend the imperialist-sponsored peace settlement for Northern Ireland made another advance. On Saturday, the ruling council of the Ulster Unionist Party voted by 540 votes to 210 in favour of the British-Irish Agreement. After the vote, David Trimble, leader of the UUP, commented that the agreement represents "an end to misrule, an end to direct rule".

Then on Sunday at Sinn Fein's 92nd *ard fheis* (annual conference) in Dublin, the overwhelming majority of the 1,000 delegates effectively gave a veiled - or some might say tactical - 'yes' to the agreement. Gerry Adams claimed that it was the "basis for advancement". In turn, as soon as he heard of the decision taken by the UUP, he delivered a simple message: "Well done, David."

Events now appear to be accelerating. There is talk of Tony Blair, Paddy Ashdown and William Hague running a joint campaign in favour of the peace deal struck last week. Indeed Hague has used the pages of *The Times* to propose 'all-party' solidarity on the question of the May 22 referendum, if it would be a "helpful step for the peace process" (April 20).

If there was a joint Blair-Ashdown-Hague campaign it would be a near unprecedented step. The last such display of total 'national unity' was during World War II and the 1975 referendum on whether to join the European Community. Legislation to set up the Six Counties referendum and the Northern Ireland assembly is being rushed through the House of Commons. And of course Bill Clinton is going to be drafted in to give the peace offensive an extra air of imperialist gravitas. He has plans to visit Northern Ireland just before the referendum.

The peace settlement is not home and dry yet - even if Tony Blair does think he can go to Palestine and 'do an Ireland'. *The Times* editorial has already predicted that "a 'yes' vote in the May referendum, while not quite a formality, is now overwhelmingly likely" (April 20).

Perhaps. However, there are elements that will not easily be persuaded that a settlement which so clearly entrenches British occupation of the Six Counties is a step towards Irish unity. It was not for nothing that Adams has not *explicitly* endorsed the agreement - yet. Sinn Fein is to hold a special conference within the next two weeks, which will formally decide whether to accept or reject it. To do this, the Sinn Fein leadership has to change the party's constitution which forbids such an accommodation - and this will require a two thirds majority. Though such an endorsement is likely, it is not guaranteed, even if Pat Doherty of the SF national executive has made light of opposition, joking: "Dissidents? What dissidents? These are just powderpuffs." (Perhaps in a move to mollify the "powderpuffs", it now seems possible that the



National unity: Blair also seems to have support from the Socialist Party and the SWP

SF leadership might campaign for 'yes' in the Six Counties but 'no' in the Irish Republic.)

But the biggest threat to the agreement comes from the unionist camp - particularly from Ian Paisley and his followers. Contrary to what *The Guardian* has foolishly implied, Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party is most definitely not finished. It retains a substantial base in the Six Counties. The DUP will almost certainly gain hegemony over the 'no' movement - in alliance with the Orange Order and the respectable types associated with it.

There is also dissent brewing within the UUP. Five out of nine UUP MPs voted against Trimble and the agreement - it is possible that some of them might *actively* campaign against it. William Thompson, MP for West Tyrone, has damned the agreement on the grounds that it "repeals the 1920 Government of Ireland Act which set up Northern Ireland". He has said he might join Paisley's 'no' campaign and has already predicted a major UUP split during the May referendum and June election campaigns.

Importantly, we must not dismiss the possibility of the 'no' campaign coming home to the British mainland: ie, disgruntled Tories, who see the introduction of cross-border institutions as a diminution of British sovereignty and representing a threat to the United Kingdom state itself, bypassing parliamentary channels. The hostility of rightwingers like Norman Tebbit - he has made plain his opposition to the entire peace deal - could find expression in the mobilisation of plebeian elements on 'anti-IRA' marches. As an indicator, the National Front has already called for a 'March against the IRA' on May 23 in London. The NF accuses the "Marxist Labour government" of "betraying the loyal people of Ulster" and is inviting "all patriots" to protest against the Northern Ireland settlement.

Let us not forget either the not-so plebeian House of Lords, which contains its quota of implacable 'no' men and women - many of whom will have deep sympathies for the sentiments of the NF even if they will not actually turn up for the march itself. These ultraconservative elements may well link up with the DUP and UUP dissidents.

After all, this would hardly be a new phenomenon in Irish politics. As we have pointed out, in 1912-14 the Tories illegally conspired to scupper Irish home rule by financing Carson's armed rebellion against the Liberal government. - and conniving with mutiny amongst the officer corps.

In other words, the main threat to the agreement comes *from above* - ie, from a section of the old Orange Order establishment in the Six Counties and from within the Tory establishment in the British mainland. That would not of course preclude the possibility of thousands of loyalists taking to the streets.

So we can see why William Hague has talked about the urgent necessity "to build as broadly based a coalition as possible". He can see that there are threats to the settlement. Hague must also be conscious that the ever more triumphalist Blair is sidelining the Tories. "The rhetorical and political defence of the United Kingdom behind which Conservatives once sheltered may now become the new home for Blairites and followers of Mr Trimble," as *The Times* put it (editorial, April 20).

It is as clear as day that no revolutionary can back Blair's imperialist scheme by voting 'yes'. Neither can we support the status quo by calling for a 'no' vote. The only principled position is one in favour of a boycott.

Yet it remains to be seen whether Hague's "broadly based" coalition around the 'yes' cam-

paign will incorporate a large swathe of the nominally revolutionary left. So far, both the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party have remained typically agnostic and slippery about their position on the May 22 referendum. But seeing how these organisations enthusiastically said 'yes, yes' during the September 1997 Scottish referendum campaign - and will say 'yes' to Blair's puppet mayor and weak Greater London Authority on May 7 - we will not be waiting on tenterhooks for their decision.

In fact, the SWP positively desires an *imperialist* peace. If anything, it thinks British imperialism should be more resolute: "The only way to secure real peace in the future is if the British government stands up to Paisley and confronts the Orangemen during their anti-catholic marching season. The question is, will Tony Blair have the guts to do it or will the British government once again stand in the way of peace in Ireland?" (*Socialist Worker* April 18). It goes on to say: "It was the mood for peace from below, among ordinary protestants and catholics, which forced a politician like David Trimble to sign up to an agreement he had previously tried to wreck."

The SP is oblivious and ostrich-like towards the politics raging around it. While the bourgeois parties and the media fiercely debate the peace deal and the nature of the Northern Ireland statelet, the SP goes into action ... against the erection of a BT transmitter for Cellnet mobile phones: "Socialist Party members have helped organise the Omagh Anti-Masts Campaign. This organised a picket on the site, then a meeting of 120 people to discuss the health risks" (*The Socialist* April 17).

Mercifully, the editorial puts us out of our misery and makes clear its position - almost. The British-Irish agreement is a step forward of course, but just "will not satisfy people's longing for lasting peace or justice". Tragically, the Northern Assembly "will have few powers" and "little power over the state machinery". But - thank heavens - there are some "opportunities" for what it calls "class politics". For instance, "loyalists close to pro-ceasefire paramilitaries called [Paisley] a dinosaur and criticised Paisley's wealthy lifestyle. The potential for a class split exists there" - towards the proto-fascists of the Progressive Unionist Party and their allies. Also, the Assembly will give "local politicians, unionist and nationalist, a (small) degree of power for the first time for decades".

The response of the left towards the agreement is incoherent, atomised and undisciplined. The workers' movement needs to take on board the lessons of the revolutionary republican tradition - in order to equip itself with a Marxist programme that alone can inflict a permanent defeat on imperialism ●

Eddie Ford



Party notes

Strengthening the cause

The April aggregate of Communist Party members devoted the major part of its agenda to discussion on the recent resignations from our organisation. Anger and disappointment was expressed by comrades at the harm that has been done to our project in the short term - particularly in Scotland where the resignations of two key comrades has given strength and legitimacy to the forces of nationalism in SML and the SSA. However, there was no feeling of personal acrimony. The mood of the meeting was an honest and combative one, determined to deal with the situation in a positive way.

Comrades spoke about recognising the pressures - internal and external - we are all under. We are in a period of reaction which has lasted some considerable time. The working class does not exist in any self-acting political sense, and the left on the whole is paralysed by a lack of political courage and fear provoked by the collapse of social democracy (old Labour). What is important about our organisation is the fact that we have fought and continue to fight ruthlessly for open ideological struggle in the tradition of the Bolsheviks. That we are committed to a socialism of the majority, where the self-emancipation of the working class implies continuous struggle - not privileges for 'great leaders'. That we have exceptional confidence in our ideas. But neither this nor the fact that we have consistently warned about the danger of this period leaves us immune. Because we are waging a conscious struggle, going against the tide of reaction, pain and crisis - both political and personal - is a natural consequence.

But crisis can be positive. It is essential for change - all of us as political personalities have been made through crises. Through facing fears and overcoming them. Through fighting to carry out difficult decisions. Through striving for theory.

The meeting sympathised with and understood in a very genuine way the individual crises which led to the comrades' resignations. We know very profoundly just how difficult it can be. We all have our own experiences. Not to have crises is impossible, but overcoming them positively can certainly be achieved. Evidently the comrades who left resolved their crisis in a very negative way - one that can in no way seriously be said to have advanced the cause of communism and human liberation, which by definition requires the unity of the highest level of theory with organised practice. They left the project into which they put many years of commitment for no good political reason. It was political collapse.

We as an organisation can learn a lot about ourselves in this process, but not by anything those comrades will tell us, at least not at this point in time. Their need to find some kind of self-justification has led, at least with two key former members in Scotland, into political purdah. It is impossible to treat criticisms as honest when those making them are, according to their own admission, determined not to be convinced, when they are determined not to enter any form of genuine dialogue and debate.

It is not that we deny that there are many things that need changing. Which political organisation is entirely without its problems and never makes mistakes? Neither does it mean that we simply accept our shortcomings passively. No, we need to continue the fight. But *inside* the organisation, as *part* of the CPGB project, *not* by walking away. What does that imply for the rest of us? Should we all do the same? That is the implicit message sent out by our former members.

A discussion was had on the meaning of 'political hardness'. The general attitude was that we need to overcome the idea that to be 'hard' is to be macho and unfeeling. Yes, we have to be tough and combative. But that means developing ourselves as communist personalities - from the raw material that we ourselves possess as individuals. Repression of our individual personalities leads to burnout and a feeling that being a communist is life-denying. It was recognised that we need to develop ourselves and our organisation in a more fully rounded way. We discussed various avenues, which would draw others in around us. It was agreed that these questions are not in any way trivial, but are an important part of building an organisation and steeling ourselves against the slings and arrows of this period.

Comrades left the meeting feeling greatly strengthened by the forthright and thought-provoking discussion. The development of the communist character is tremendously important, not just to us, but to the whole movement. Backing away from struggle weakens not only the cause, but ourselves. Fighting for political hardness - by fighting to be fully human - strengthens the cause and the individual ●

Anne Murphy

Endless debate

I fear there is much to disagree with in Richard Brenner's piece in the *Weekly Worker* (April 2). I am extremely sceptical as to why organisations should have positions on theoretical issues that are not within their horizon. I do not know why capitalism was (or is being) restored peacefully in eastern Europe, but I doubt anyone does. I agree wholeheartedly with Richard's sentiments that communists should seek to give guidance to advanced workers, but then probably no one at all ever reads his (or your) paper in eastern Europe.

Endless rarefied debate on such issues becomes just a search for differences and has no guarantee of achieving the 'right' result. It does not direct any practical work. An individual may have less success in picking shares than a group of fund managers, but both use no more than inspired guesswork and are often wrong.

To make matters worse, Richard's organisation also has a rule barring public disagreement by members to the near random outcome of their internal discussions. This inevitably leads to splits. Their overly detailed policy pronouncements also distance them from other 'intellectuals' who have also convinced themselves of the correctness of their (different) view.

The best we can do is concentrate on where we could get a result. I regret that means concentrating on practical tasks with workers in Britain, with only enough theory as stops this from being just blind activism. We need to walk before we can run.

The influence of the far left in this country is at the lowest point this century. Nit-picking polemics understood by few are just the tailspin of a tradition that could go extinct. The only use for the theoretical article in the *Weekly Worker* on Althusser and "epistemological breaks" is as tinder for a picket line brazier. Add some politics and the *Socialist Worker*-type approach is the way to reach workers.

Clive Power
East London

General strike

On April 1 the Bolivian Trade Union Congress (COB) declared a national and indefinite general strike.

Bolivia is ruled by the new government presided by ex-general Hugo Bánzer. He was the man whose coup smashed the People's Assembly in 1971 and established a seven-year bloody dictatorship, a model which was immediately copied by Pinochet and the Uruguayan and Argentinian juntas.

The Bolivian workers and peasants are fighting for better wages. Currently a Bolivian worker or teacher is only earning £30 (\$50) - not per day or per week, but per month! With that amount of money it is impossible for a family to pay for half a week for the most elementary subsistence goods. However, the majority of the Bolivians are unwaged.

There is no social security or welfare state. The government is privatising the few sectors (like education, health or petrol stations) which are in public hands. Bolivia is South America's poorest and least literate country. Nevertheless, the government is heavily attacking the teachers and cutting the education budget.

Currently there are more than 100 trade union prisoners. There is no information regarding the location of around half of them, just like during the dictatorships. More than 100 peasants and workers have recently been wounded by state bullets or other military weapons. Twelve civilians (including one child) have been killed.

Chapare, located in Cochabamba (the heart of Bolivia's grain-producing area), is under military rule and curfew. Every hour military planes fly over the rural communities aiming to terrorise them. The government proudly declares that at least 90% of the country's road are under direct police or army control.

The government refuses to respect parliamentary immunity. They have arrested a United Left MP and are threatening to jail Evo Morales, a peasant MP who is leading the Chapare union and struggle. Bánzer is

threatening to suspend constitutional guarantees and to impose a state of emergency. This would be the fifth one declared since the introduction of the neo-liberal model in 1985.

In the past Bánzer persecuted the unions under as "reds". Today he is making a more fashionable accusation: that they are drug-dealers. That is because the peasants are against the violent eradication of coca production. This crop has been cultivated for many centuries, is used for religious reasons and has very good medical and nutritional qualities. Just as potatoes can be used to produce vodka, several kilos of coca could be mix with modern chemicals to produce a few grams of cocaine. However, it is imperialism and big business that produces and distributes cocaine, not the impoverished and persecuted peasants. In fact, it has been conclusively proved that all the government parties and the military are involved with the drug Mafiosi.

We are calling on all democrats and trade unionists:

- to support the Bolivian general strike
- to demand immediate freedom for all the trade union prisoners and an end to the persecution of left MPs and other trade unionists
- to demand the withdrawal of the military from the roads and the cities; and of the US troops (DEA) from Bolivia
- to speak out against the curfew in Chapare and any state of emergency in Bolivia
- to write letters of solidarity with the COB and in protest against the government
- to give financial support to the strike funds
- to put forwards resolutions in their organisations and unions calling for solidarity with the COB
- to participate in pickets and events in support of the Bolivian strikes.

Bolivian Union Solidarity Committee
BCM 3213, London WC1N 3XX

Raw deal ahead

I notice that Simon Harvey of the SLP used the slogan, 'With or without the TUC', in last week's *Weekly Worker* (April 16). A perfectly correct slogan of course, but I fear that militant workers will have to stress more and more the 'without' bit of the slogan!

I say this after reading about the TUC's latest 'compromise' - though *betrayal* is probably a much better term. I am talking about the row over a legal right to union recognition. Both Blair and the bosses' union, the CBI, have been arguing that there should be some sort of minimum turnout - or threshold - of those eligible to vote in a ballot. In fact, the CBI has demanded that there be *at least* a 50% turn out to make it kosher. (This is a 'model' imported from that workers' paradise, the United States of America.)

Previously, and correctly, our fearless TUC tops flatly rejected such a grossly anti-democratic restrictions on workers' rights. They argued for a simple majority of those voting - like in normal general elections. That was the bottom line. Take it or leave it. Some union bureaucrats even mumbled something about 'doing a Countryside Alliance' if Blair would not listen.

It could not last. British union bureaucrats and labour aristocrats are almost congenitally incapable of sticking to a principled line. Give them a couple of days to think about it and ... watch them collapse like ninepins. So, we had the unedifying spectacle of John Monks at the Scottish TUC conference in Perth on Monday strongly hinting that the TUC would accept the "principle" of a minimum 'yes' vote and some form of small firm exemption - despite the well known fact that it is *precisely* workers in small firms and businesses that normally get the rawest deal. Monks said a 30% threshold would be acceptable.

And what was the latest excuse from Monks? Why, that such a concession to Blair and the CBI was necessary in order to show "flexibility" and to "try and advance the discussion". What weasel words - and how incredibly short-sighted, even by the miserably short-sighted standards of the British TUC tops. If you give an inch, they

will take a mile - or two, or three, or ...

Predictably, New Labour will want its yet another pound of flesh hacked off the workers' movement. You can bet that Blair's soon to be published *Fairness at work* white paper will make a mockery of its title and outline a bosses' agenda - it could be far worse than Monks thinks. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that it will insist on a two-thirds turnout to win legal recognition rights - the Blairites have been floating such a prospect. Super-exploitative small bosses' may well become Blair's best friend after reading *Fairness at work* - the sort of 'fairness' they like and would love more of.

However, this sordid little tale has a little twist to it. Some union officials have grumbled that Monks had "exceeded his brief" by adopting such a nakedly Blairista line. Rodney Bickerstaffe of Unison has 'assured' the conference delegates that Monks was talking crap and that the TUC has given no agreement to any sort of ballot threshold.

I must admit to not being very reassured by Bickerstaffe's comments. While hordes of pro-Labour left Trotskyites and 'official communists' will probably get all excited by the toughish talk current emitting from the mouths of left bureaucrats like Bickerstaffe, it will all vanish into thin air when it comes to the crunch.

I mean, come on - can anyone *really* imagine the TUC 'doing a Countryside Alliance'? If they can, then they must have a better imagination than me.

Billy Waddington
Wolverhampton

Struggle hijacked

During my present visit to South Africa I decided to take advantage of the commercial tours around Robben Island that are now being organised. You may be surprised to learn that these are now a must for all tourists, and the apartheid regime's notorious jail for political prisoners is amongst the most popular of destinations.

During the 30-minute boat trip from Cape Town passengers are shown a video of South African history in general and that of Robben Island in particular. It is a sanitised version, where, despite the harsh conditions the prisoners endured, much is made of the fact that many were able to study in preparation for "the new, democratic South Africa" that has at last been achieved. According to the video, even the brutal prison guards learned from the common experience and are now able to play their part as reconstructed democrats as a result.

Fortunately, a more accurate picture is painted on the island itself. This is because all the tour guides are themselves ex-political prisoners. For example a former regional secretary of the Pan-Africanist Congress provided the commentary for my party on the island bus, while a member of the ANC, himself a prisoner for 16 years, showed us round the jail itself.

In answering our questions in all too gruesome detail, he brought out the full reality of the regime's inhumanity: the punishments of solitary confinement and starvation diets for those who committed such 'offences' as failing to answer a guard's question in Afrikaans, attempting to speak to a fellow prisoner while working or not fulfilling the day's quota of broken rocks.

Despite the commercialisation, these guides ensure that the tours are an emotional experience for all partisans of the anti-apartheid struggle. But how long will it be before the guides are replaced? The bourgeoisie has attempted to hijack the history of that struggle, and will no doubt seek to portray a more comfortable image, with the recent revolutionary fight consigned to museum settings as a safe curiosity attraction.

Peter Manson
Cape Town

Simon Harvey of the SLP Reclaim Our Rights delegate recall conference

Over 100 delegates from a broad cross section of unions and political organisations participated in the Reclaim Our Rights recall meeting on April 18 in London. The main business on the agenda was to elect an interim committee and officers and begin planning a programme of activities aimed at achieving the repeal of the anti-trade union laws.

This initiative of the SLP has a good chance of success in instigating a mass movement. Blair supports existing anti-union legislation and is committed to only the smallest concessions - that is why Morris and Edmonds are talking tough. However, ROR is no 1920s-type Militant Minority Movement. So far, it has all the hallmarks of a lash-up of leftwing bureaucrats and various leftwing campaigns.

The meeting was chaired by SLP NEC member and RMT assistant general secretary Bob Crow. John Hendy, also an SLP NEC member, gave the secretary's report. SLP supremo Arthur Scargill played his favourite role as a populist demagogue from the floor.

The meeting was squeezed into two hours. Comrade Crow - formerly of the CPB and its Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions - successfully kept things within the narrow scope intended by the organisers: to establish the interim committee and pass one motion on organising a mass demonstration to 'reclaim our rights'. All other business, including motions moved from the floor, was bureaucratically sidelined.

The initial proposals from the platform prompted a tortuous debate about the composition of the committee. Despite its interim nature, the political balance will determine the trajectory of the campaign, before a conference in the summer elects a full committee and considers a constitution.

What was finally agreed was for a chair, two joint secretaries, two representatives from the existing campaigns (the Alliance for Workers' Liberty-sponsored Free Trade Union Campaign; the Communications Workers Union campaign and the CPB-led LCDTU), one representative from each of the major, current or recent industrial disputes (Liverpool dockers, Crichtley, Magnet and Hillingdon), and one representative from each affiliated national union. A dispute arose when delegates from the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison pointed out that such a structure excludes the militant minorities in the unions - affiliated or otherwise. The CFDU cannot affiliate, but if Unison does, the representative will be Bickerstaffe or some loyal crony, they said.

Clearly the Alliance for Workers' Liberty had done a deal with the SLP. The AWL-backed FTUC has a guaranteed position. Scargill spoke against the comrades from CFDU, arguing that ROR should not be seen to be meddling in the internal affairs and divisions of unions. He was backed by Mark Sandell of AWL/FTUC, who urged delegates: "Let's not worry too much about seats" - with the comforting knowledge that he had already secured himself one.

Without any concrete solutions coming from the CFDU as to how it should be included on the committee, the suggestion from the platform passed unanimously. Lee Rock - ex-SWP, ex-RDG, ex-RWT, ex-SLP and now Socialist Perspectives - nevertheless urged that the campaign's constitution make provision for the inclusion of the militant rank and file.

Bob Crow was elected unopposed as chair. The nominations for the joint secretaries, John Hendy and Lol Duffy of the FTUC, were also unopposed, further underlining the deal done between the ROR organisers and the Workers' Liberty-backed FTUC.

The meeting then moved on to activities. Bob Crow recommended a national demon-

stration for March 27 1999. There was an amendment from the floor for the demonstration to be on May 1 1999. CWU activist and AWL/FTUC partisan Mark Sandell also spoke to a written proposal of four complementary actions: a lobby of the special TUC conference on May 6, which will be discussing the government white paper on union recognition; a lobby of parliament on the white paper; support for the second March for Social Justice on May 30, initiated by the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards Committee; and organising regional conferences along the lines of the ROR conference held on March 28.

The other concrete suggestion came from SWP members Brian Butterworth (Brent Unison) and Candy Udwin (secretary UCLH Unison). Comrade Udwin moved a motion that the campaign agree to lobby the Labour Party conference on September 27.

This highlighted a strategic tension within the conference. A number spoke in favour of pressurising Labour, including SWP comrades, Martin Wicks of Socialist Perspectives and a comrade from the Workers International League. Without directly addressing the issue, comrades from the SLP downplayed the idea of engaging with the Labour Party (incidentally no one referred to their political affiliations - you had to be in the know).

Another tension emerged around the issue of the TUC. Speaking from the floor, Arthur Scargill disagreed with the line of John Hendy and Bob Crow. They have been arguing, particularly in their pamphlet *Reclaim Our Rights*, that the campaign to repeal the anti-trade union laws can only be successful with the support of the TUC. Scargill, "speaking from bitter personal experience", warned of the dangers of putting faith in the TUC. He argued more along the lines of 'with or without the TUC'.

Scargill also spoke stridently against suggestions that there were those in the room who only wished to follow official channels and were not prepared to break the law. Despite comrade Hendy's legalistic overtones, there was a general mood that in order to win, demonstrations were not enough and that illegal solidarity action would be required.

With just over half the agenda completed, comrade Crow began to wind the meeting up. He suggested that all outstanding business be considered by the committee after a vote be taken on the national demonstration. Many delegates were unhappy. There were calls for all proposals to be voted on, including those from comrades Sandell, Butterworth and Udwin. They were brushed aside. There was, as it turned out, unanimous support for a national demonstration on May 1 1998. Amidst considerable confusion and hubbub the chair then moved that all outstanding business be referred. This passed by around three to one. Meeting safely sown up.

During John Hendy's secretary report, the tense relationship between ROR and the Li-

aison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions came into the open. Comrade Hendy read a letter he sent to LCDTU secretary George Wake on April 2 inviting it to the ROR meeting on April 18, a clash of meetings notwithstanding. He reassured the Liaison Committee that he would be recommending that a seat be reserved for them (this was duly agreed).

However in reply, LCDTU chair Halpin complained that Bob Crow had known that the LCDTU would be meeting on the same day since early in the year. He claimed to see no reason why the Liaison Committee should not continue to perform the role it has been playing since 1969 and that the correct approach was to strengthen the LCDTU rather than launching something new.

To placate them comrade Jimmy Nolan of the Liverpool dockers was sent to the Liaison Committee meeting - held just around the corner, in order to urge them to affiliate to what is now a broader, more significant campaign. The LCDTU allowed comrade Nolan to speak but made no decision to affiliate.

The Liaison Committee is caught between a rock and a hard place. Should it subordinate itself to Scargill's initiative or continue to operate as a go-it-alone shell? The relationship should become clearer after the CPB has dealt with its internal wranglings over the *Morning Star* dispute.

After the two meetings, the Lucas Arms on Gray's Inn Road filled to the brim with participants from both Reclaim Our Rights and the Liaison Committee. Much to the disgust of Bob Crow, Mike Hicks - former general secretary of the CPB - was amongst those from the LCDTU. Hicks was a prime mover behind the factional sacking of *Morning Star* editor John Haylett - done under the cover of management's right to manage. This hypocrisy was too much for comrade Crow (himself a dab hand at supporting the sacking of SLPers deemed to have fallen foul of Scargill's factional constitution).

Inasmuch as Reclaim Our Rights aims to build a mass campaign against the anti-trade union laws, it deserves the active participation of trade union militants. However, as it stands, it is not the weapon union militants need in order to forge the sort of fighting unions we need. Essentially, at present ROR is an organisation subordinate to the leftwing union bureaucracy. Despite the relatively nonsectarian nature of its launch, it is being fashioned as a safe option for general secretaries. No wonder the organisers see rank and file militancy as something to be turned on and off like a tap.

Such an approach is one that suits Scargill. Whether the divisions emerging between Crow/Hendy and our party general secretary are real or stage-managed is so far unclear. Nevertheless, there is space in the campaign for the emergence of a rank and file movement ●

action

■ CPGB Manchester seminars

May 4: The minimum wage

May 18: 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.

■ Lambeth Socialist Alliance election rally

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

■ London Socialist Alliance election rally.

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

■ Brent Socialist Alliance

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

■ 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 Socialist Alliance

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

■ Glasgow Marxist Forum

Is capitalism in decline?

Wednesday April 29, 7.30pm at Partick Burgh halls. Speaker - Hillel Ticktin. All welcome. Sponsored by SLP (Glasgow) and the SSA.

■ 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: Fuascait, PO Box 3923, London NW5 1RA. Tel: 0181-985 8250 or 0956-919 871.

■ Morning Star victory celebration

Friday April 24 - 7.30pm to midnight at The Corrib Rest (formerly Brent Irish Centre), Salusbury road, London NW6 (nearest tube Queens Park, nearest BR station Brondesbury Park).

Robb Johnson will be performing with Phil Burdett. Speakers include: John Haylett (editor of the *Morning Star*); Jeremy Corbyn MP; Amanda Kendal (*Morning Star* Mother of Chapel); Camden Unison strikers.

Organised by: Committee To Save the *Morning Star*.

■ Right to stay

Wednesday April 29 - 1.30pm to 3.30pm at St Stephens Gate, House of Commons. Followed by a public meeting in parliament from 3.30pm to 5.30pm. Add your voice to the campaign to stop deportations, the declaration of amnesty for all asylum seekers and immigrants, and the abolition of all immigration laws and controls.

CPGB London seminar series

April 26: Dictatorship in 1848 using Hal Draper's 'Karl Marx's theory of revolution: the dictatorship of the proletariat' as a study guide.

May 3: 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



Around the left

Desperate justification

Almost every day produces fresh evidence of the unstable and crisis-ridden nature of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. Extinction surely beckons. Its British - and hegemonic - section, the Workers Power group, is looking increasingly fragile. Clearly, the stress of living in Tony Blair's 'New Britain' is beginning to tell - at least on the WP's carefully maintained and well policed dogmas.

Over the weekend of March 21-22, WP (Britain) held its national members' conference. The aim of the conference, in the words of *Workers Power*, was to deal "with a range of issues facing Workers Power - our youth work and the building of Revolution, the independent revolutionary youth movement; our trade union work; plans for campaigns and the major features of the current political situation. The conference was optimistic about our opportunities for growth today, an optimism based on the enormous success of Revolution, which held its founding conference in November last year" (April).

Some readers with a more sceptical disposition might be less than impressed by references to the "enormous success" of Revolution - or indeed the idea of the WP doing any sort of meaningful "work" at all. May 1 general election - no sign of WP candidates. Labour Party conference debates - no sign of WP. Reclaim Our Rights - no sign of WP. SLP congress - no sign of WP.

However, as seasoned WP followers will know, a conference inevitably means ... an abrupt line change. This

is usually followed by reassurances to the effect that nothing has *really* changed whatsoever - and how the WP will carry on in exactly the same fashion as before. Whatever happens in the real world, nothing must disturb the WP's unshakeable pro-Labourism - hence its ingrained sectarianism towards the rest of the left.

The report confesses: "That the assessment we made at our last conference, before the general election, of developments in the Labour Party, and consequently in the Labour left and the Socialist Labour Party, *overestimated the speed with which a conflict between Blair and the trade unions would take place* ... In fact, [Blair's] victory margin was massive but for almost a year, basking in the glow of the landslide, he has *continued his attacks using the trade union leaders as allies*. He is playing on an extensive mood of relief among workers that the Tories have been crushed which, in turn, has produced a large measure of tolerance for New Labour. The union leaders are more than just tolerant. These bureaucrats are doing everything they can to shield Blair" (my emphasis).

Excellent news - perhaps. Surely this can only mean that WP is going to throw off its passive tailism and take a positive orientation towards the SLP, Reclaim Our Rights, the Socialist Alliances and other anti-Labour left developments? After all, it can only make sense to start the fightback *now*, if what we read above is true.

No such luck, it seems: "Our belief that major struggles would break out

with Labour shortly after the election reinforced our view that the SLP might be the vehicle that would rally disillusioned workers to a 'socialist alternative'. Clearly this has not happened, a factor that contributed to the SLP's demise."

A significant factor in the SLP's "demise" was the sectarian and dogmatic attitude of most of left, who thought that the SLP was dead on arrival. Whatever we may read in the conference report, WP never took a *serious* position on the SLP. It veered from the call for a "revolutionary SLP" to writing it off as "Britain's newest reformist sect", then back again to support for the "the struggle for the political soul of the SLP" - all within the space of a few months (December 1995 to May 1996). Now it has veered back again, dismissing the SLP as a "tiny Stalinist sect". (It is always amusing to hear pro-Labour left micro-groups like WP grandiosely writing off the SLP which now claims through Reclaim Our Rights to represent 750,000 trade unionists.)

The "key political conclusions" reached by the conference are, apparently, ones "that Blair cannot draw comfort from. For although he has enjoyed a honeymoon neither the health of the economy nor the patience of the working class will last forever. *The split we predicted lies further in the future than we originally thought*. But Blair's election victory has not removed it, or the class struggles that will provoke it, from the agenda" (my emphasis).

Unfortunately, the "key political conclusions" drawn by the WP con-

ference are a mixture of the asinine and the banal - as usual. For instance, the very first conclusion could have come straight from the lips of any member of the SWP: "The massive Labour victory in May represents a major shift to the left in Britain." (If anything, you could reasonably argue that while society as a whole has moved to the right, within that shift the establishment has looked to its 'left' wing.) Everything will be alright in the end, reassures the report. We are told that the Labour left has "a greater sense of confidence and is taking steps towards assuming an identity", and that it will "become more vociferous and more organised over the next period". We even get a blast of that old-time orthodox Trotskyist faith again, when the anonymous author prophesies that "Blair's success ... will increase the possibility of a split in the Labour Party and this is now far more widely acknowledged on the Labour left than it was in the 1970s and early 1980s". All this smacks of hopeful and rather desperate justification of its April 1997 banner headline call to "vote Labour".

Thus, during last May's general election in Newport East, WP actually issued a leaflet which called upon workers to vote for the Labour candidate, ex-Tory MP Alan Howarth, as opposed to an obscure class fighter by the name of ... Arthur Scargill. Still, in the eccentric world WP inhabits, this is probably an example of "fighting for a political alternative to New Labour's entire policy", as the conference report claims.

We all know that Trotskyist

grouplets like WP have the totally erroneous belief that revolutionaries ought *automatically* to support and vote for bourgeois workers' parties like Labour - did not Lenin say so in *Leftwing communism* and elsewhere? The fact that Lenin was giving concrete advice under specific circumstances does not faze WP. Having said that, at least there is a sort of perverse consistency and 'logic' to such an outlook.

But it appears that our headless WP will in the not so distant future not even have that theoretical defence any more, no matter how specious it is. In the conference report, it states that "Blair is leading a *rightwing reformist* government" (my emphasis) - and one of its "key political conclusions" is that the "Blairite faction's long-term goal [is] to ... transform Labour into a second bourgeois party on the model of the US Democrats".

Now, maybe we are wrong, but it would be very pleasing if the revolutionary proletarian thinkers and theoreticians that staff WP could explain why revolutionaries should support a party of the bourgeoisie that is openly peeling off its working class veneer and exposing its true historic identity - that really would be worth knowing. Or, when we have PR in Britain, will the "revolutionary communist" WP do a Vanessa Redgrave and advocate a 'tactical' vote for the Liberal Democrats in order to keep the Tories out?

We look forward to clarification. But, of course, this is all based on the assumption that WP will remain in the land of the living ●

Don Preston

Alarm bells ringing

Just over 40 people attended the Socialist Forum '98 meeting in Glasgow on Saturday, April 18 to discuss how to "shape the future of the left" in Scotland, as the flyer advertising the event put it. This leaflet outlined the important areas of discussion the meeting would be looking at:

"Will support for progressive policies increasingly be linked to demands for greater powers for the Scottish parliament? Should socialists call for an independent Scotland? ... should a new Scottish Socialist Party be born in time for the May 1999 elections?"

The forum's low turnout possibly reflects the fact that for many, the 'debate' was actually over before it began. Working class politics in Scotland are now thoroughly contaminated by nationalism. Scottish Militant Labour looks set on a course of liquidation into a Scottish Socialist Party, taking at least the majority of the Scottish Socialist Alliance with it. The bulk of discussion on the day therefore revolved around details of the form and timetable.

However such a move is dressed up, it is in fact a collapse into left nationalism. The class struggle in Scotland is not qualitatively in advance of the rest of Britain. The consciousness of the Scots is not - as some platform speakers claimed on the day - somehow genetically programmed towards 'socialism'. In fact, it should be the task of socialists in Scotland to fight the growth of nationalism and

oppose separatism, not accommodate and actually champion it.

Some comrades in Glasgow cited recently published opinion polls that show a small majority in favour of independence. So the left should argue for unity from a minority position. Yet the sickening truth is that if you conducted the same survey on the left, you would also end up with an overwhelming majority for independence. Organisations like SML are now in the vanguard of advocating the break-up of the workers' movement in Britain along the lines of nationality.

We have made the point repeatedly that nationalism must be fought with the principle of 'one state, one party'. At the 11th hour, Peter Taaffe of the Socialist Party is trying to beat this growing cancer with nothing more than tactical disagreements. Taaffe does not reckon that getting Tommy Sheridan into the Scottish parliament is a price worth paying for losing his organisation in Scotland - he thinks like a merchant. Even at this level however, some perfectly correct points can be made.

In last week's paper, we reprinted the reply of the SP executive committee to the proposals coming from Scotland. These comrades make the point about the potential space such an SSP would occupy: "We ... 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" (*Weekly Worker* April 16). Similarly, the SP EC ask if there is any "guarantee [of] the inclusion of a significant section of the Scottish Labour Party dissidents in the new party".

In fact, the space that the projected SSP is attempting to occupy could easily be closed even by a tactical feint by the Scottish National Party. This much larger and well established political formation already has a defined leftwing image, and leaders quite capable of talking 'socialism' if it suits their purposes. A member of the SNP at Saturday's meeting spoke enthusiastically of the development of an SSP. It broadens the nationalist camp and might be a prelude for a leftwing influx into the SNP itself.

The liquidation of SML and the SSA into a Pilsudskiite SSP should set alarm bells ringing throughout the workers' movement. The historically progressive unity of the working class in Britain is being attacked in, of all things, the name of socialism. We have more than sufficient sufficient examples from history to understand that SML now seems set on a course that takes them into very dangerous waters ●

Mark Fischer

**Our flag is red:
workers have no country**



Struggle for science

In the *Weekly Worker* (April 2), Phil Watson criticised my characterisation of Althusser as a theoretical proletarian revolutionary. In reply to comrade Watson, I would argue, firstly, that a short letter can only establish a one-sided, schematic and polemical Althusser, or an Althusser without the full range of his theoretical contradictions. Althusser's work is not without flaws and major limitations. In this regard, Althusser's work, following that of Bachelard, uses philosophical arguments in order to reject the importance of philosophy. All philosophy, except Marxism, is regarded as a form of idealism. This is the same position as that of Marx in *The German ideology*, who essentially equated philosophy with the illusion of ideology.

Secondly, the problems of Althusser's rejection of philosophy can be shown by a brief study of some important Marxist philosophers. Lenin's *Philosophical notebooks* show the importance of dialectical philosophy for understanding contradiction in reality and thought, and that dialectics represents the highest level of class struggle in relation to showing the philosophical aspects of the counterrevolutionary role of the Second International.

Adorno developed his understanding of subject-object non-identity reasoning in opposition to the idealist and mechanical materialist adaptation to capitalism. Rigid identity reasoning defines reality in an oppressive manner, and is a philosophical obstacle to revolution. This is why the struggle to construct an open and fluid dialectic is the highest form of class struggle, and is directed against the counterrevolutionary content of existing philosophy.

Roy Bhaskar elaborates Adorno's negative dialectic with an emphasis upon negativity and open rather than closed totalities, and shows that in the last instance philosophy is primary for explaining social reality and the problems involved in trying to change it. The philosophical hegemony of irrealism (empiricism, idealism and positivism) helps to understand the domination of capitalism, and why there has been a failure to establish a viable socialist society, which is expressed by the limitations of Soviet diamat philosophy.

It is idealist to deny the importance of philosophical consciousness when trying to explain social reality. For example, Fukuyama's rightwing Hegelian thesis that the end of history has culminated in capitalism expresses the dominant and prevailing ideological view, and which has a material impact in the collapse of the Soviet Union and in relation to the political crisis of the working class on a world scale. Fukuyama's views are not just a reactionary response to events with an origin in his political views: rather they relate in a complex way to real developments in objective reality, and connect to the prevailing moods within the intelligentsia, bourgeoisie and working class about the events of 1989-91 and the consequent needs to interpret these developments in a philosophical manner. Thus it is not sufficient to develop an economic and political critique of Fukuyama: the basis to establish a revolutionary alternative to his views must begin with a challenge to his interpretation of a Hegelian view of history.

In the context of the importance of history for defining our understanding of history in a dialectical manner,

Phil Sharpe continues our debate on Althusser

Althusser's conception of the emergence of Marxism does not sufficiently show the importance of philosophy for developing historical materialism. He was aware of this problem in that he concedes it is possible to locate a positivist interpretation of his conception of the epistemological break, because in the emergence of Marxism from pre-Marxist ideology science supersedes and incorporates philosophy. He also argues that dialectical materialism lags behind Marx's breakthrough with the development of the science of historical materialism, but he never satisfactorily describes what dialectical materialism should be like if it is to catch up with historical materialism, despite this being his stated intention and aim to show the importance of dialectical materialism.

Yet paradoxically Althusser is aware of using philosophy in the positivist terms of calling for an end to philosophy in its reduction to being the conscience or criticism of science, but he still continues to accept a positivist standpoint in his call for Marxist philosophy to be constituted and defined in the historical materialist standpoint of differentiating the young and old Marx, and in showing Marx's idealist break from Hegel.

So how do we define Althusser as a theoretical proletarian revolutionary? This definition can be developed in relation to his views about historical materialism. Firstly, Marx's works, the *Theses on Feuerbach* and *German ideology* (Althusser was still critical of the latter's emphasis on science at the expense of philosophy), represented a break with Hegelian idealism and Feuerbach's mechanical materialism and idealism, or a break with these ideological limitations in the early writings of Marx. To deny this rupture is to imply either that Hegel's and Feuerbach's ideas are of no real significance and do not constitute an ideological problem for Marx; or alternatively to effectively suggest that there was an inherent teleological (inevitable, fatalistic) break by Marx with Hegel's view of history as the teleological realisation of the absolute spirit (labour in its materialist form, as found in the *Paris manuscripts*) and a similar smooth break with Feuerbach's realisation of human species being.

Phil Watson seems to be arguing that Althusser's epistemological break is static and does not establish the process of Marx's theoretical development, but Althusser's approach is dynamic rather than rigid in that he locates the contradiction and struggle with Hegel and Feuerbach in the development of a new science of historical materialism. Althusser shows that Marx's emphasis upon social relations rather than timeless transhistorical categories is developed with *The German ideology*. In order to criticise Althusser's epistemological break, Watson is silent about Marx's theoretical relationship to Hegel and Feuerbach, because to comment on this relationship would invoke the necessity to re-establish the criteria and precise moment (epistemological break) for us to objectively evaluate the break of Marx from the idealist conceptions of history and Feuerbach.

Secondly, in his study of contradiction and overdetermination, Althusser brings out the profound theoretical importance of Lenin, the

.....

“Althusser never politically broke with Stalinism, but at the level of historical materialism and ideology he shows the limitations of Stalinism”

.....

proletarian revolutionary. Lenin understood that social reality, which created the conditions for proletarian revolution in Russia, could not be reduced to one basic principle, or contradiction, in contrast to Hegel's reduction of history to the simple contradiction of the realisation of the spirit. To Lenin there was an overdetermination of contradictions that produced revolution.

Lenin's studies on the concrete situation, and in his attempts to develop revolutionary perspectives as a guide to action for the party and the working class, was also a challenge to the domination of Hegelian idealism within the Second International in connection to historical materialism. The Second International based itself on the main contradiction between the bourgeoisie and proletariat in order to define history upon endist and inevitable premises.

In contrast, Lenin's emphasis on the balance of class forces and the multiplicity of contradictions shows an open-ended and more contradictory view of history, and which can be theoretically elaborated on the basis of overdetermination and structure in dominance. What remains in a raw and untheorised state in Lenin's writings of 1917, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, etc, can be developed into a more complex approach in relation to understanding the structures and relations of social reality.

Thirdly, Althusser maintains that theoretical practice is necessary for principled political practice to occur. Theoretical practice involves the transformation of limited ideological (idealist) knowledge into scientific knowledge that is needed to help explain social reality, and thereby facilitate the possibility to change reality in a revolutionary manner. Dialectical materialism is the theory of theoretical practice, and helps to differentiate between materialism and idealism in the process of producing knowledge about reality.

The dynamic aspect of the means of production in the development of knowledge is theoretical labour. This means 'generalities 1' (raw material of knowledge) is not primarily explained by the immediacy of sensations and facts, but is instead the potential for transformation into con-

cepts through the application of 'generalities 2' (means of production - the scientific theory) and this leads to the production of new knowledge, of 'generalities 3'. We only get to know concrete reality through the concrete of thought, or theoretical interpretation which is immediately tested in practice.

Consequently, we may conclude from the theory of theoretical practice that if we neglect the development of 'generalities 2', the means of production - for example the theory of imperialism - we end up with opportunist political practice, as with the Second International. In contrast, Lenin's *Philosophical notebooks* show that if we are concerned to understand reality profoundly, it is necessary to enrich the concept of dialectical contradiction for this purpose. Hegel's *Science of logic* is his 'generalities 2', or his methodological tool to facilitate analysis of the new counterrevolutionary role of the Second International and to show the necessity to construct a new Third International. The possibility for new revolutionary practice is the outcome of a dialectical philosophical revolution, and there is also a new distinct contribution to historical materialism with the theory of imperialism. So at the level of theoretical practice, the 'generalities 1', the facts of imperialist war are connected to 'generalities 2' (Hegel's *Science of logic*), and the result of 'generalities 3', which shows the intensification of class antagonisms and the need for a qualitative leap in class consciousness and practice if proletarian revolution is to be possible.

It is now necessary to tackle Phil Watson's criticisms of Althusser in terms of his alleged rigid conception of the ideology-science relationship, the role of Stalinism, and an apparent static theory of knowledge. Firstly, to Althusser, ideology is both a lived relation, or essential to the structures of society (we accept the ideology of the capital-labour relation in order to justify working to obtain a means of subsistence), and is also imaginary. The bourgeoisie can only justify their domination through developing a mythical ideology of freedom, which goes alongside the reality of operation of the laws of political economy. In class society, ideology is vital to enable us to be "equipped to respond to the demands [of] their condition of existence" (L Althusser *For Marx* London 1990, p235).

Thus, like it or not, we all are dominated by bourgeois ideology under capitalist society, and there is no easy way to overcome this problem. Much of the existing ideology has an idealist and empiricist character, and so the struggle for science is the struggle of materialism and dialectics against idealism and empiricism. Contrary to Watson's claims that Althusser has an abstracted, or separated and distinct understanding of the relationship between science and ideology, the powerful existence of ideology means there is a ceaseless struggle by historical materialist science not to become ideology and for historical materialist science to continually try and show the limitations of ideology at the level of theory and practice. For unless this theoretical labour is continued it will always be possible for historical materialist science to succumb to ideology and acquire its limitations, as with the popularity of idealist Marxist humanism.

Secondly, Watson argues that

Althusser examines the Soviet Union on the basis of separation of the supposed healthy socialist economic base from the problematical political structure in order to gloss over the full extent of the counterrevolutionary activity of Stalinism. In reply to Watson, I would maintain that whilst politically supporting the Soviet Union as socialist, Althusser actually helps us to understand why a reactionary humanist ideology has become dominant in the USSR as a result of its historical conditions and the dynamic ideological interpretation: "Now it is obvious that these conditions too, bear the characteristic mark of the USSR's past and of its difficulties - not only the mark of the difficulties due to the period of the 'cult of personality', but also the mark of the more distant difficulties characteristic of the construction of 'socialism in one country', and in addition in a country economically and culturally 'backward' to start with. Among these 'conditions' first place must be given to the 'theoretical' conditions inherited from the past" (*ibid* p238).

This begs the question as to whether 'socialism in one country' helps to generate a utopian ideology, and whether this might represent an ideology of a new ruling elite or class. Althusser also notes that: "The present disproportion of the historical tasks to their conditions explains the recourse to ideology" (*ibid* p238). Hence recourse to ideology relates to "problems of the form of economic, political and cultural organisation that corresponds to the level of development attained by socialism's productive forces" (*ibid* p238).

So whilst Althusser restricts the problem of the cult of personality to the level of the superstructure, he is also indicating that there is a deep and profound ideological crisis of the system, and which is based upon antagonisms at the level of relations between the cultural, political and the economic. What he is effectively describing within the limits of his own Stalinist ideology is the role of ideology in propping up a contradictory and crisis-prone bureaucratic system. The very utopian character of this ideology means that ideological crisis of the system could facilitate vast political changes within the USSR. Althusser could not explicitly conclude about the utopian humanist ideology of the elite that it was unreal, because it was an idealist counterrevolutionary expression of reactionary social interests, but he helps us to arrive at this conclusion. Althusser never politically broke with Stalinism, but at the level of historical materialism and ideology he shows the limitations of Stalinism.

Thirdly, Watson argues that Althusser had a static and contemplative theory of knowledge. However, as I tried to show in relation to his conception of theoretical practice, the possibility to develop knowledge is not a rigid and completed process. It is entirely possible that knowledge may remain ideological and limited, or that it is undiscovered in a raw and untheorised state. In order to arrive at the finished product of new knowledge it is necessary to develop theory as consciously and systematically as possible if the various contradictions and difficulties of knowledge production are to be overcome.

This is not an idealist exercise divorced from the class struggle. Rather it is an essential part of developing the theory and practice of international proletarian revolution ●

Pub crawl to socialism

Martin Blum replies to Dave Osler

In his response to my recent comments on the SLP, comrade Dave Osler ('Drop the dead dogma' *Weekly Worker* April 9 1998) offers what he imagines to be an inspiring - and optimistic - vision of the mass working class party of the future. But is it really revolutionary, merely centrist or perhaps left reformist? When it comes to answering fundamental questions facing our movement, comrade Osler woefully fails to reach any satisfactory conclusions.

In the *Weekly Worker* (March 26) I asserted that for comrade Osler "some sort of social democratic or centrist regroupment is a necessary predetermined stage between now and a future revolutionary party". In response, the comrade referred to his article in *What Next?* ('Recomposition and the British left', No6 1998) where he states: "It would be the crudest determinism to suggest that a British party of recomposition is in some sense inevitable or unavoidable. But it remains possible, perhaps likely, and healthy from the standpoint of Marxism informed by praxis."

So who is saying what here? For all his huff and puff about big times just round the corner, comrade Osler prefers to deal with phantoms and imaginary mass regroupments which tower above the current revolutionary diaspora.

I have no problem whatsoever in intervening in and helping to shape all manner of *real* progressive developments in the workers' movement. But what is our reason for nurturing and honing such developments? It is certainly not because we think that in and of themselves they provide 'the answer'. This surely must be one lesson we learn from the experience of the Socialist Labour Party.

Our organisation posits the main task for the revolutionary left in Brit-

ain as the reforging of the Communist Party. In no way is this intended as a substitute for broad political activity. To an extent, I agree here with comrade Osler concerning communist rapprochement when he rhetorically asks: "How can it take place outside a wider regroupment of class struggle forces?" Yet this is not to present the unity of these 'broader forces' as some absolute prerequisite for communist unity. It is undoubtedly the case that when there is widespread militant political activity by our class many of the petty or secondary differences among revolutionaries will assume their proper place. Life itself will begin to sort out who is right and who is wrong, what is important and what is not. Splits and walkouts which today so frequently result from minor differences and tantrums will rightly be seen for the childishness they are.

Yet, do we rely on the *spontaneity* of our class alone to spur us on to communist unity? Comrade Osler seems to regard spontaneity and consciousness as equal parts of an equation. Yes, connected they are. Leninists however emphasise *consciousness*. For that reason *for them* the organisation of communists is primary.

But this is not comrade Osler's method. In fact, he is decidedly opportunist. What are our immediate tasks? Communist rapprochement or broad church 'recomposition'? While rejecting any accusations of crude determinism, comrade Osler has been banging away about recomposition as the main task of revolutionaries for some time. Two years ago it was the SLP which was then 'the answer'. That god failed. The new god now seems to be the "small, but perfectly formed" Socialist Democracy Group, as he describes it in the latest issue of *Socialist Democracy* (April-May

1998). In fact this new grouping is essentially an unprincipled and cowardly split from the Socialist Party, plus quiet decampments from the SLP and Socialist Outlook.

I characterised Dave Osler, Roland Wood and other such 'clever' tacticians in Scargill's SLP as drinkers in the last chance saloon. Comrade Osler argues that "there are no last chance saloons in socialist politics". He thinks that he will be "forced to drink in many more downmarket spit and sawdust boozers" on his long pub crawl to socialism.

In this context, he correctly sees the SLP as a missed opportunity. But whose missed opportunity? Ours or Scargill's? His method now, and then, relies on *others* providing a political framework in which he can comfortably sip on "half-price 10-year-old single malts". In place of the conscious activity and the disciplined organisation of communists openly struggling for what is necessary, comrade Osler cosied up to the Scargill regime, and when *he* was finally voided as a by-product of the anti-CPGB witch hunt, he blames the SLP for rejecting 'recomposition'!

Comrade Osler's vision of a broad church 'class struggle party of recomposition' is decidedly social democratic: hence his admiration of organisations like the PDS in Germany and Communist Refoundation in Italy. Are such formations what we need for victory? Does not history tell us that such halfway houses end up handing over the masses over to counterrevolution? Remember Chile 1973 and the slaughter of thousands of socialist and communist workers.

In his *Socialist Democracy* article declaring himself a convert to the SDG, comrade Osler casts his mind "back to the early months of the Socialist Labour Party. [He] finally felt part of a socialist organisation with at least the potential to break with the sectarian past of the British left ... How cruelly those hopes were dashed." Now he has found yet another new home. But is the SDG really "small, but perfectly formed"? Hardly.

The SDG does not really say what it is. Is it Marxist, red-green or a Fourth International discussion group? It certainly rejects Leninism. In its blurb, its purported form of organisation is one in which decisions are based on consensus: "Through discussion we try to reach a consensus on any question." Logically then, how could such a flabby organisation be *perfectly* formed? Is comrade Osler himself *explicitly* repudiating democratic centralism and top-down organisation as necessary for the victory of the working class? It appears so.

Comrade Osler's method is essentially centrist. He seems prepared to accept any soft compromise. While he desires a 'broad church, Marxist-centred recomposition', in practice he will settle for a party dominated by old Labour, reformists, greens or Stalinists - so long as there is a comfortable space for 'Marxist' advisers to the men and women of power. In reality, this is just a variation on Fiscism in the SLP. The difference being that Pat Sikorski, Brian Heron and co have slightly stronger stomachs.

The practice of the CPGB is to energetically support all movements of red 'recomposition' - that is movements of the working class - be it Socialist Labour or the Socialist Alliances. But we have not entered into such processes unarmed, liquidating ourselves organisationally and programmatically - or even *pretending* to. Our method is to support such initiatives

in so far as they provide a site for communist rapprochement and throw up the raw material necessary for the reforging of a mass Communist Party. Necessarily therefore we fight to retain *complete liberty* to carry on agitation, propaganda and political activity.

Here is the rub for comrade Osler. Almost as if he has never read a copy of the *Weekly Worker*, he refers to the "profoundly ambiguous nature of the call for a 'reforged Communist Party'". This is deliberate obtuseness. How often does it need to be spelt out? We see no golden age of British Bolshevism. No period to which we nostalgically hark back. We do not wish to

"Trotskyism, crudely put, is an ideology built around the defence of the theory of the degenerated workers' state. That is why I am not a Trotskyist"

.....
recreate the CPGB of 1920, 1926 or any other date. Rather, we have struggled for and won the banner of the CPGB, which represented the highest concrete manifestation of working class organisation yet achieved in Britain.

Comrade Osler has kindly left the door open. Referring to our approach of communist rapprochement he asks: "What meaningful content can it possibly have, if not as a party of revolutionary recomposition, in which the bulk of cadres will come from the Trotskyist tradition?" At present, with no fresh forces entering the field of communist politics, I have no fundamental disagreement. The only forces on the immediate horizon come from either a Trotskyist or state capitalist theory tradition. The Revolutionary Democratic Group, Socialist Democracy Group, Socialist Perspectives and others are welcome. But, comrade Osler, are we welcome in your supposedly 'broad church' projects?

Comrade Osler claims to have learned one or two things from "a long political career inside Labourism and failed sects". Yet it seems that the method of open ideological struggle is not one of them. The comrade casually writes: "For most of the last 17 years I publicly supported the view that the USSR was a degenerated workers' state while *privately* having reached a bureaucratic collectivist position" (my emphasis). In other words, he has been consciously lying to his comrades and the class as a whole for the past 17 years on one of the most fundamental questions of the 20th century, and then has the nerve to call on us to "come to terms with [our] own past" and come clean on Trotskyism!

Since the foundation of *The Leninist*, ironically 17 years ago, our current has *openly* articulated its developing position on all subjects, including the character of the USSR, in front of the class. Comrade Osler - a new convert to openness, it seems - has discarded Leninism for a left-liberal pluralism. For nearly two decades, the comrade has lived with the illusion that the organisational norms

practised by Trotskyism were democratic centralist. However, his "first-hand experience in doublethink" (the reality of bureaucratic centralist Trotskyism) has led him to reject Bolshevik democratic centralism.

Finally on Trotskyism. The comrade wants the CPGB to "produce a formalised set of theses on Trotskyism, to which the Trotskyist left could then respond, rather than continually attempting to nail the *Weekly Worker's* jelly to the ceiling". I have no principled objection to the comrade's proposal. Yet I do not apologise for not fitting neatly into his inadequate categories. It may be "jelly" to comrade Osler, but pretty damn concrete to me.

Our opinions on Trotsky and Trotskyism are there for all to read. Just take a look at the same edition of our paper in which comrade Osler's article appears. In reference to our recent school on the USSR in his 'party notes' column, our national organiser, Mark Fischer, states: "Trotsky's provisional categories represent enormously profound attempts by a Marxist of genius to develop an understanding of a unique, totally unprecedented social phenomenon in the very course of its birth and consolidation ... Despite lapses, his thinking on the USSR continued to show flexibility and development" (*Weekly Worker* April 9). So what about our supposed past? Try the supplement by Jack Conrad, 'Anti-Cliff: initial remarks on the ideology of state capitalism' (*Weekly Worker* December 1993), in which the comrade writes: "Let us repeat our evaluation of Stalin. He was a monster, a terrorist and a butcher. Stalin was a 'labour dictator' who represented, not the continuation of Leninism, but the interests of a bureaucracy which siphoned off social wealth and suppressed the remnants of workers' and Party democracy." Clear enough?

I personally do not think some attempt at all-encompassing theses on Trotskyism would be very constructive. Given that comrade Osler has just 'come out' as a bureaucratic collectivist, it actually seems more appropriate that *he* undertakes this task and hence comes to terms with his own past. To my mind, he has declared himself a non-Trotskyist. Trotskyism, crudely put, is an ideology built around the defence of the theory of the degenerated workers' state. That is why I am not a Trotskyist.

Yet, on the united front versus Stalin's 'third period', I am a 'Trotskyist'. On the fight against fascism in the 1930s, I am a 'Trotskyist'. In recognising that the revolutionary flame snuffed out by 'Stalinism' remained as a dwindling flicker with the Left, then United, then International Opposition, I am a 'Trotskyist'. But I oppose the formation of the Fourth International. I defend the Leninist tradition of open ideological struggle in the forging of a revolutionary workers' party against the epigones of Trotsky. In this I am sure this view represents an overwhelming majority of our current membership.

Rather than learning the lessons of a career in Labourism and failed sects himself, comrade Osler wants *us* to repeat the same mistakes. Some apostatical CPGB theses on Trotskyism will not solve anything. What is at stake here is that comrade Osler, despite all protestations, is in practice opposing the primary task of *organising* communists in favour of what is fundamentally a liquidationist project of struggling for a 'broad church recomposition' dominated by social democracy ●

Fighting fund

Politics of plenty

Some people really know how to spend money. Take a look at Derry Irvine, otherwise known as the Lord Chancellor. He has decided to redecorate his 'Gothic revival' apartment, which is nicely situated on the river side of Westminster - and all out of the 'public' purse.

Thus, he has chosen Pugin wallpaper at £350 a roll. In the end the wallpaper bill alone came to £57,233. Then there was the antique dining table at £14,000, and three Gothic beds which came to £49,773. The total spent to date on Irvine's pad is £590,000.

Now, the CPGB is totally opposed to the politics of envy. Yes, we certainly want a communism of plenty, not a communism of poverty. But any revolutionary could be forgiven for entertaining 'primitive communist' thoughts when taking a peek at the decorators' invoice ...

However, the CPGB also knows

how to spend money. If someone donated £590,000 to us we very quickly find a use for it - have no fears about that. And we would not be spending it on Pugin wallpaper and ersatz Gothic furniture (though our offices could certainly do with a lick of paint).

No. We use our money to enhance our revolutionary effectiveness, especially in this moment of Northern Ireland and London referendums and local elections. Unfortunately, the rate and size of donations slowed down a tad over the last week. But special thanks to comrade GJ in Wrexham (£50). Also thanks to RJ from Swansea (£15), PW from Wakefield (£15), AH from Kettering (£10) and BS from North London (£5). This is a total of £105. Our £500 monthly fighting fund now stand at £385. There is still time to reach and exceed our target - if you dig deep ●

Katrina Haynes

Iraqi Kurdistan

Fight for separation

Following the latest near war between the USA and the regime of Saddam Hussein, comrade Tahir Hassan of the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq visited several European countries including Britain. Comrade Hassan - who has special responsibility for work among Kurds - spoke to Ian Farrell

In the recent US-Iraq confrontation, what was the real motivation of imperialism?

This was a continuation of the chain of events since the 1991 Gulf War. The US is in its weakest position at the moment. All its policies in the Middle East have failed. In Palestine, Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran, south and middle Iraq, the no-fly zone, all its policies have failed. The latest conflict is the final stage before removing sanctions from Iraq. The US knows sanctions have

caused suffering to the people of Iraq and strengthened the regime. The pressure of world opinion, even the UK, is against sanctions. This makes another US military attack unlikely.

During the years since the Gulf War, the Iraq-US conflict over sanctions has been one of the determining factors of the political situation. The recent crisis was a last step in the process. The US cannot remove sanctions quietly: it needs to make a big fuss. It needs to create a crisis for a few months before finally removing them.

Tell us about the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan and your proposals.

The WCPI organises in all parts of Iraq, not only in Kurdistan. Our aim is to lead the opposition of the people of the whole of Iraq to overthrow the Baath regime and establish a workers' state. As a serious political party, we are also endeavouring to put an end to the tragedies that the people are facing in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Our current effort in these visits outside Iraq is not simply to show the world the atrocities of the Iraqi regime and the plight of the people of Iraqi Kurdistan, who are supposedly under UN protection but are suffering the terrible effects of the economic blockade. Nor is it to expose the role of the US in the region. We want to bring to light the reality of the Iraqi opposition and gain solidarity for our party's alternative proposals for self-determination for the people of the UN-controlled area, north of the 36th parallel.

After the Gulf War, US policies were imposed through the UN, in the name of defending the people of Iraqi Kurdistan. The area was separated from the rest of Iraq and placed under the control of nationalist tribal parties. Since then Iraqi Kurdistan has been transformed into a huge refugee camp. Right now there is not any kind of law operating. The people are deprived of the simplest rights which normally come from being part of a state.

Is there a solution to the Kurdish question both in Iraq and as a whole?

Any solution to the situation in Kurdistan must deal with two issues: the uncertainty of living like refu-



Tahir Hassan: against sanctions

gees, and the question of Kurdish national oppression. These issues are linked.

The Kurdish national question in Iraqi Kurdistan is different to Palestine or to Kurds in Turkey or Iran. In Iraqi Kurdistan there is no law or state to provide political, civil or cultural rights, not even a backward or regressive law. For example, if workers want to strike against low wages, there is no state which can determine wages. There is no definite border to this geographical region, and every now and then Iran attacks, Turkey attacks, the Baath regime attacks. During the last seven years this has resulted in the most severe cultural and material regression.

Nationalist, tribal and religious parties control the area. These armed parties are the ones who determine economic and political rights, in addition to terrorism, hunger, poverty, the killing of women or children, the selling of children, and so on.

What we have been campaigning for over the past four years is the right of the people to determine their own destiny. We are campaigning to gain support for our proposals for ending this situation, by putting pressure on the UN. The armed forces of all the political parties must withdraw from the populated areas and allow six months for all political parties to express their views. Then a free referendum must be held for the people of Kurdistan to decide whether they want to remain a part of the Baath regime - with all their rights protected - or whether they want a separate state. The UN must recognise the people's decision and give it legitimacy.

What does the CWPI want the people to decide?

Under present conditions, because the regime in Iraq is a national-fascist regime with laws based on an Arabic nationalist definition of Iraq, any linking of Kurdistan to this regime would mean accepting second class citizenship. Therefore the least painful and most humanitarian solution for the people of Iraqi Kurdistan is to establish an independent, non-national, secular state. We would not call for separation if there was a change in the regime, if Iraq became a secular, non-nationalist state. As there is no immediate prospect for such a change in Iraq, and because the current situation in Iraqi Kurdistan cannot continue, we call for this solution right now.

What do you think are the implications of your solution for other Kurdish areas, in Turkey, Iran and Syria?

It will obviously have an effect, but what we are proposing is not a Kurdish

state. A certain geographical area, not controlled by the Baath regime, is living in uncertainty. We want to make it into a state. That geographical area does not include all the Kurdish areas within the Iraqi borders.

Imperialism created this area 'to protect the Kurdish people'. What are the real reasons?

It was one of the things used by the US to put pressure on the Baath regime to make it comply with UN resolutions. The nationalist parties believed the US would create a state for them, so they established a Kurdish parliament in 1992. However, the US did not recognise their parliament. Fighting began, leading to the current situation.

What about other areas? Is it possible to organise political support for this or other campaigns in the middle and south of Iraq?

Our activity in Iraqi Kurdistan, where most of our members are, is different from our activity in the rest of Iraq. But we are still active in the middle and south of Iraq. Many of our comrades are in the Baath regime's prisons.

We see the UN as an imperialist instrument. How do you deal with the contradiction of appealing to imperialism to solve this problem?

We too regard the UN as an imperialist agency. We have written many articles against the UN and its role in the Gulf War, and particularly against the UN policy of economic blockade, which has resulted in the death of more than 1.5 million Iraqi people since 1991. But, like it or not, today the UN is a recognised international organisation that determines geographical boundaries. We are not expecting that the UN will come forward and listen to us. The UN would be obliged to listen to what the four million people of Kurdistan say. I wish there was a communist international which we could approach. But in its absence we must approach the UN and force it to listen. This is not diplomacy, but struggle.

Besides the Kurdish question, what are the other main political questions in Iraq, and what are the other weak points of the Baath regime?

A major issue is the economic blockade. In contrast to the US claim that the blockade would weaken the regime, it has weakened people's morale and helps the regime to suppress protests against poverty, hunger, unemployment, and even the lack of electricity or water supplies. Eight years of economic blockade would ruin any society. All bourgeois Iraqi opposition groups, from far left to far right, hoped that economic sanctions would weaken the regime and enable them to take control. This shows an inhuman stance.

What attitude do the bourgeois opposition take to your proposals on Kurdistan?

All bourgeois organisations and groups oppose separation and the referendum plan. All the nationalist parties in Kurdistan have the same strategy as the US. They are against the removal of national oppression. What they want is to share power in the regime.

The history of Kurdish nationalism has been a cycle of wars and negotiations, as with nationalists everywhere, like the PKK or Arafat. When they have support, they fight. When they are weak, they negotiate and sell out ●

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I wish to subscribe to the Weekly Worker. ☐

WW subscription £ _____

Donation £ _____

Cheques and postal orders should be in sterling.

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

Special offer to new subscribers:
3 months for £5.00

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TEL _____

Return to: CPGB, BCM Box 928,
London WC1N 3XX.

Tel: 0181-459 7146 **Fax:** 0181-830 1639.
CPGB1@aol.com

1918

Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

State hits dockers

Picketing Australian dockworkers - or wharfies - received a setback after the Australian federal court suspended an order demanding that the rogue stevedoring company, Patrick, reinstate the 1,400 workers it sacked on April 7-8. The suspension lasts until the end of legal proceedings.

The decision came after a fortnight of mass mobilisations by the Maritime Union of Australia and the Australian Congress of Trade Unions. Across the country there have been well supported and militant picket lines. In contrast to the virtual two-year isolation of the Liverpool dockers, the Australian wharfies have gained real trade union solidarity. Particularly at the Webb dock in Port Melbourne, at Port Botany in Sydney and at Fremantle in Perth, massed unionists and non-unionists have formed successful pickets. Moreover truck drivers from the Transport Workers Union have been respecting them, forcing employers to fly in their replacement workforce by helicopter. Scabs were secretly trained in Dubai last year under the auspices of Special Air Service personnel.

Late last week, the Victorian state supreme court issued an unprecedented injunction against the entire population, banning them from assembling within 200 metres of the Webb dock entrance. The order was met by a picket of 5,000, including the president and secretary of the ACTU. Indicating the widespread sympathy, the cast of 'Neighbours' have financially sponsored a wharfie's family.

The International Transport Workers' Federation has faced injunctions in the UK high court against its calls for worldwide bans on all Patrick-loaded ships. Dockers in Papua New Guinea and Fiji have already acted. Longshoremen in the US have also refused to handle Patrick cargo (see below). The International Transport Workers' Federation seafaring affiliate in Japan, the AJSU, has donated one million yen to assist the families of the sacked dockers.

Ever since coming to power in 1996, the conservative Liberal-National coalition government of John Howard has had the militant Maritime Union in its sights. The wharfies have occupied a key position in the working class movement, similar to that held by the British miners until their defeat in the Great Strike of 1984-85. If Howard can beat the wharfies, the entire balance of class forces will be shifted.

Citing the necessity of increasing international competitiveness, the government, in collaboration with the reactionary National Farmers Federation, has been demanding waterfront restructuring and reform. (Interestingly, much of the language used is an echo of the previous Labor governments of Paul Keating and Bob Hawke.)

Late last year the ITWF blew open the Dubai union-busting scandal. The training of scabs was stopped after threats of a boycott.

Then in January this year, an 'anti-terrorist' operation was carried out on

an Maritime Union of Australia-staffed freighter off the West Australian coast. Heavily armed Special Air Service troops selected out trade union activists.

The MUA could not but know that a fight with the federal government, the NFF and the employers was inevitable. However, rather than choosing the turf, the leadership has been content to let the enemy decide.

The MUA has been making all manner of concessions on 'productivity' - industrial relations code for screwing workers. These concessions started under the previous Labor government. When this latest dispute first broke on April 8, MUA secretary John Coombs called for the wharfies to 'fight clever' and win the hearts and minds of 'middle Australia'. The leadership claims there is common ground between wharfies, stevedoring companies and the NFF on the need to improve productivity.

The spontaneous support for the picket lines and an intransigent attitude from the militant rank and file seems to have moved the leadership of both the MUA and the ACTU. Forced to act, the ACTU executive announced that it would ignore the Victorian supreme court's injunction, urge illegal picketing and begin organising illegal secondary strike action amongst its affiliates. The traditionally rightwing and passive Australian Workers Union has threatened to close down the strategically important oil industry. Toyota Australia have already stopped production, unable to access spare parts. It has asked its entire workforce to take annual leave.

After the initial court ruling in favour of the wharfies, Paul Corrigan,



Fighting for the working class

chief executive of Patrick Stevedores, said: "We can't afford one workforce, let alone two." Patrick has binding contracts with the 400 scabs and an

agreement with the NFF to provide union-free labour. Peter Reith, the minister for workplace relations, stated on Tuesday: "One court decision is not

US union backs wharfies

As Patrick Stevedores and the Australian government continue their attack on the members of the Maritime Union of Australia, class solidarity is finding its expression on both sides of the Pacific Rim.

The leadership of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) met in San Francisco last week to "discuss their options" and work out a strategy. The initial decision, backed by the executive board of the AFL-CIO, calls for a boycott of all Australian imports, including beef and other agricultural products.

But, according to the ILWU, this is only "phase one" of its campaign to support the sacked dockworkers. President Brian McWilliams sees the actions taken by Patrick and the Australian government as "part of a larger global strategy" by shipping companies and various governments to bust maritime workers' unions around the world.

The ILWU has 60,000 members along most of the North American west

coast. The next steps by the ILWU are only speculation, but there is a strong possibility that the longshore union will call strike action in defence of the Australian wharfies. Several union leaders, including McWilliams, were arrested last week, charged with attempting to obstruct the Australian consulate in San Francisco.

Sometime this week, it is expected that the first scab ships from Australia will reach the west coast of the US. When these ships attempt to pull into the ports of Oakland, Los Angeles and Vancouver, they will be met with protests and refusals to unload.

"If there's a ship that picks up cargo in Australia loaded by scabs, the odds of it being unloaded in a timely fashion are extremely low," said one union port official. "An Australian dockworker will come out with a sign and picket, or workers will find some sort of a health or safety problem with the goods and refuse to work."

This is reminiscent of the protests last year in Oakland against the dock-

ing of the Neptune Jade, the Liverpool scab ship. A hastily organised picket by supporters of the sacked Liverpool dockers stopped the ship from being loaded anywhere along the west coast of North America.

The ILWU is considered to be one of the more 'progressive' unions in the AFL-CIO and a founding affiliate of the recently formed US Labor Party. Any strike action taken is not likely to stay confined to the west coast docks. Already, talk about joint action by the two major maritime unions in the US has been openly discussed.

These kind of discussions by union leaders must be influenced and encouraged by the actions of union members, or else they become impotent moral posturing - at best. The implications of such an 'influence' by the union rank and file would go a long way in strengthening the class solidarity between workers on both sides of the Pacific, and around the world ●

Jim Paris

going to stand in the way of this country having a decent and efficient waterfront." The subsequent judgement, effectively reversing the wharfies' legal victory, should not have come as a surprise in view of such statements.

Throughout the dispute, the opposition Labor Party has posed as the force which can unite the country, branding the actions of Patrick and the Howard government, as 'un-Australian'. Opposition leader Kim Beazley has said that Australia needs a 'nonpartisan' government. This stands in stark contrast to Kim Beazley's attitude as Labor minister of defence in 1989-90 during the pilots' dispute. The Labor government, in cahoots with the ACTU, backed the deregistration of the pilots' union. Kim 'bomber' Beazley used Royal Australian Air Force pilots to defeat the union.

In short, Labor has put itself forward as the party of class peace. During the 1980s, it was able to tie the unions to a class collaborationist 'Accord' while pushing through many of the 'reforms' imposed in the US and Britain. Where Thatcher had to break the unions, Hawke and Keating got their voluntary subservience.

The wharfies' dispute has ignited at a time when a number of other significant issues have emerged in Australian politics. The Liberal-National coalition is set to go to the polls later this year after the Senate rejected the government's Native Title (Amendment) Act.

This dispute over Aboriginal land rights was given fresh impetus after a high court decision in 1990 which overturned the previous legal fiction of *terra nullius* - that Australia was an unoccupied continent when Europeans landed. A further case brought by the Wik people of Queensland found that pastoral leases for massive cattle stations on crown land did not necessarily extinguish native title.

The Liberal amendment to the act seeks to give preference to pastoral leases over native title. The forces supporting Patrick are the same reactionary sections of Australian-based capital with most to gain from the victory of the government's native title legislation.

To fight an election over Aboriginal land rights will be highly divisive and racially charged. Coming on top of the current wharfies' dispute and splits over whether Australia should be a republic or a monarchy, the stage is set for a watershed election.

This situation cries out for a political alternative which can generalise and unite the opposition to the union-busting, anti-Aboriginal, monarchist government. At present the Australian left only acts as cheerleaders in the wharfies' dispute. A programme of revolutionary republicanism, for the right to strike, for recognition of Aboriginal land rights, in solidarity with the democratic movement of Indonesia and East Timor, is one which could capture the imagination of those drawn into the sectional disputes now flaring in Australia ●

Marcus Larsen