

## Irish referendum

# Boycott May 22

**S**inn Fein's historic *ard fheis* on May 10 overwhelmingly accepted British partition of Ireland along with the protestant veto - inevitably dressed up as a stepping stone towards Irish unity. By 311 to 39, delegates backed the leadership's recommendation for a 'yes' vote in the May 22 referendum - north and south. An emergency motion allowing Sinn Fein members to take seats in the proposed Northern Ireland assembly was also carried with a huge majority.

Not surprisingly all manner of "legitimate qualifications" and gestures towards "republicans who may wish to vote otherwise", were included. Splits had to be prevented or at the very least limited. It was stressed that the referendum did not "constitute the exercise of national self-determination". Changes in articles two and three of the Irish constitution were subject to a number of caveats. Nor did Sinn Fein formally recognise "the legitimacy of the Six County statelet" (*An Phoblacht* May 7 1998). In other words the May 22 'yes' vote will be openly critical. Hence decommissioning weapons was contemptuously rejected. Demands for the IRA to disarm were "nonsense", said Gerry Adams, and would be "resisted" (*The Daily Telegraph* May 11 1998).

Yet for all that the Sinn Fein of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness has made a momentous turn. To all intents and purposes it is following the footsteps of Michael Collins, Eamon de Valera and Tomas MacGiolla. The republicans "have abandoned their central article of faith", crowed orange 'Marxist' Paul Bew (*The Express* May 11 1998). The Irish and British governments were likewise delighted. Indeed Westminster and Dublin were prepared to risk loyalist wrath by sanctioning the temporary release of 12 specially selected IRA prisoners so that they could put their immense moral authority behind the Good Friday British-Irish Agreement at the *ard fheis*.

From now on Sinn Fein will pursue a totally unarmed strategy and rely on demography to achieve its ultimate objectives. By 2015 present birth trends would result in a catholic/nationalist majority.

After nearly 30 years the revolutionary situation that gripped the Six Counties and which throughout that time implicitly endangered the constitutional existence of both the United Kingdom and the Twenty-six Counties is about to be resolved negatively. The peace of the oppressors has overcome the violence of the oppressed.

The Good Friday agreement must be set against the backdrop of the worldwide period of reaction ushered in by the ignominious collapse of bureaucratic socialism and the triumph of United States imperialism. In the

1970s Sinn Fein came to consider itself an integral part of a global fight against US imperialism, epitomised by the Vietnamese national liberation movement. Now it looks upon that blood-sucking monster as an ally. Bill Clinton and his plenipotentiary, former senator George Mitchell, played a well publicised role in ensuring Sinn Fein's compliance.

Besides the US-dominated New World Order the Northern Ireland peace deal has to be understood in the context of Tony Blair's drive to remake the UK constitutional monarchy system. Since the late 1960s there has been a growing popular alienation from the state. Thatcher's class war against organised labour successfully shifted wealth from the 'have-nots' to the 'haves'. However, in so doing she further undermined the ideology of the UK state.

In the name of democracy, but against democracy, Blair is attempting to re-win popular identification. He has already dealt with Scotland, Wales and London. Other planks in his so-called 'third way' programme are due to follow in rapid succession. European integration and Emu, the most undemocratic form of proportional representation in European and Westminster elections, the de-Labourisation of Labour and party realignment, a House of Lords based on patronage not heredity, a slimmed down royal family and - perhaps most important of all - Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has not just seen a loss of popular identification. From 1969 the masses refused to be ruled in the old way. The ruling class could no longer rule in the old way.

Northern Ireland was established amid anti-catholic pogroms in 1920-1 explicitly as a counterrevolutionary protestant statelet. Catholics were forcibly driven from their workplaces and homes in their tens of thousands. The Irish national democratic revolution - begun with the 1916 Easter uprising in Dublin - was stopped halfway by the British offer of 26 counties and an all-Ireland council (if agreed by the southern and northern parliaments). Claiming that it was a temporary phase along the long road to Irish freedom, Michael Collins signed the treaty dissecting the country. The IRA and Sinn Fein - which gained a big majority of Irish votes in the 1918 election - split. Internecine civil war pitted IRA volunteer against IRA volunteer. With British aid and collusion the pro-treaty forces won.

By dividing Ireland, the British ruling class successfully imposed a "carnival reaction both north and south". James Connolly's prediction of March 1914 proved correct (P Berresford Ellis *James Connolly: selected works* London 1973, p275). Progress was thrown into reverse and the possibility of

working class unity indefinitely put off. Britain anchored its continued rule in the industrial northeast through the institutionalised oppression of the large catholic minority and reinforcing the labour aristocratic mentality amongst protestants. They loyally rallied to Edward Carson's UVF, voted Ulster Unionist, remembered an invented tradition of 1688, and fought and connived against catholics, at work as in politics, so as to secure better conditions.

Gerrymandering and draconian laws, 'no popery' bigotry and economic bribery, sufficed for nearly 50 years. However, in the late 1960s the student-led movement for equal civil rights - one person/one vote and measures against discrimination - collided with the sectarian statelet. Demonstrations were met by RUC attacks. Ian Paisley stoked up hatred. But resistance only became wider, fiercer and more conscious. Irish nationalism informed. Black civil rights in the US inspired. Paris ignited.

The British government of Harold Wilson made clear its desire for quick reforms. Northern Ireland prime minister, captain Terence O'Neil, duly unveiled a package of legislative proposals in November 1968. These moves from above provoked both more radical demands from the catholic/nationalist population and splits in the Ulster Unionist monolith. William Craig emerged as a key oppositionist. Civil rights agitation increased and demonstrations were broken up by rampaging loyalists. O'Neil sought compromise. The right wing of the Ulster Unionist Party under Brian Faulkner sought confrontation and made substantial gains in Stormont elections in February 1969. The Mid-Ulster by-election on April 17 saw Bernadette Devlin - an avowed socialist - defeat the Unionist candidate. Two days later street fighting erupted in Derry's Bogside district.

Teenagers and republican militants in Belfast followed the example. Northern Ireland had proved itself unviable. O'Neil resigned. Loyalist reactionaries besieged catholic areas. Barricades went up in Derry and Belfast. Bogside became a self-governing no-go area. The British army was rushed in by the Labour government in August 1969. The RUC and the B-specials could no longer prevent what James Callaghan called "a breakdown in law and order" (quoted in K Kelly *The longest war* London 1982, p121). The revolutionary situation could not be denied.

The IRA was initially nowhere to be seen. However in 1970 'Provisional' Sinn Fein and the 'Provisional' IRA were formed after the pro-abstentionist wing walked out of the January *ard fheis*. Within six months PIRA were "looked upon as rough and ready" defenders of imperilled catholic-na-

tionalist communities (K Kelly *The longest war* London 1982, p146). There was an influx of young, mainly working class, recruits. In August 1971 the British and Northern Ireland authorities introduced internment. Torture was routinely used. In protest the respectable SDLP withdrew from Stormont. The southern government of Jack Lynch announced support for 'passive resistance' in the north. Following the Bloody Sunday massacre of January 30 1972 the war was taken to Britain. Ted Heath abolished Stormont in March 1972 and 'temporarily' imposed direct rule. The IRA had killed the protestant parliament.

Tragically the revolutionary situation was safely confined to Northern Ireland. The south remained passive. The left and the workers' movement in Britain refused to actively side with the oppressed and demand the unconditional withdrawal of troops. In the main it piously condemned terrorism and economically made the plea for normal trade union politics in Northern Ireland. The British government was thus able to 'normalise' the revolutionary situation.

Sinn Fein had no strategy to positively break the impasse. Instead, from the early 1990s the Adams leadership began pursuing a pan-nationalist alliance embracing the SDLP, the southern bourgeoisie and pro-Irish elements in the US ruling class. Hence, despite the fact that the British state was unable to defeat the IRA militarily, its diplomatic victory was in sight.

Blair's government gave ground to Adams on prisoners of war and dropped Major's insistence on decommissioning. But no real concessions were given in the Good Friday deal on the vital matter of sovereignty. In "some respects", argues Paul Bew, New Labour "has been tougher on republicanism" than the Tories (*The Express* May 11 1998). The protestant veto is enshrined in the British-Irish Agreement. In return for the freeing of prisoners and what are essentially minor constitutional concessions Sinn Fein now accepts *de facto* the Northern Ireland statelet and the "principle" of consent.

Yet though there could be a steady trickle of defections to Republican Sinn Fein, the IRSP, the Thirty-two County Sovereignty Committee and the "true" IRA, Adams and co should be able to deliver Sinn Fein's mass base for the May 22 referendum.

That does not mean Northern Ireland is about to return to the pre-1969 status quo. The deal creates what the SDLP's Seamus Mallon rightly describes as a "new set of rules" (*The Daily Telegraph* May 11 1998). Throughout this century the central thrust of unionism has been to say 'no' to equal rights for catholics. Blair's project aims to win the consent,

if not the active support, of the catholic/nationalist population. Partition post-1998 will no longer go hand in hand with crude gerrymandering and overt discrimination. Ireland's national right to self-determination has been denied. But so has old loyalism. The labour aristocratic politics of anti-catholic bigotry and protestant supremacism hardly dovetail with Blair's 'cool Britannia'.

That is why it would be foolish in the extreme to dismiss the 'no' campaign of Paisley and McCarthy as the Neanderthal rantings of an isolated and irrelevant minority. David Trimble heads a deeply divided Ulster Unionist Party. Six out of its 10 Westminster MPs oppose the deal. They know full well that the British-Irish Agreement redefines the union with Great Britain and necessitates a fundamental change in the nature of Ulster Unionism ... which they, and no doubt a whole swathe of the protestant population, are unwilling to countenance. Even with a big 'yes' vote on May 22 dangers for Blair lurk round the corner.

As Gladstone, Asquith and Lloyd George found to their cost, Ulster can provide the focus for all manner of privileged reactionaries and malcontents. At present most Tory opinion has joined the chorus of praise. However, faced with Blair's constitutional project which is about to abolish their inbuilt Lords majority at a stroke, and the prospect of permanent opposition with the advent of PR politics, the Tory right could be tempted into extra-parliamentary methods - including a united front with Ulster rebels.

The May 22 referendum therefore demands the clearest response from the left. Mealy-mouthed 'yes' calls by the Socialist Workers Party, *Workers' Liberty*, the *Morning Star* and the Socialist Party reveal a complete lack of anti-imperialist principle. Nevertheless the 'no' advocated by *Socialist Outlook*, *Workers Power* and dissident republican elements, while not unprincipled, will undoubtedly be swamped by the Paisley-McCarthy campaign.

There is nothing genuinely democratic about the May 22 referendum. If it was there would be an all-Ireland referendum around the fundamental question of the border. Communists therefore call for a boycott. We are for a democratically elected, all-Ireland constitutional assembly, whereby the Irish people can freely decide their own future without Blair or Clinton setting the agenda. Where Blair proposes to reform the constitutional monarchy from above, we communists single-mindedly fight for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales and a united Ireland from below ●

Jack Conrad

## Sad Taaffe

Peter Taaffe's 'short thesis' is sad really. The Socialist Party general secretary has already lost the theoretical fight to Scottish Militant Labour by agreeing to its formation in the first place - conceding the fundamental principle of 'one state, one party'. That was the Scottish turn, part one. Now he is reduced to fighting the concomitant proposal for a nationalist breakaway - Scottish turn, part two - with essentially technical arguments.

Thus, in the very first line of his intervention, Taaffe speaks blithely of the SML as "an autonomous part of the Socialist Party" (see p7). This was the fatal concession Taaffe had already made to the growth of Scottish nationalism and its reflection in the ranks of his own organisation. He explained at the time that "the decision to go for autonomy in Scotland, on financial questions, but also on other organisational issues, arose from the objective situation in Scotland itself. The growth in a distinct national consciousness requires a change in the form of organisation adopted ... the development of national consciousness means that the form of organisation appropriate to the rest of Britain is no longer appropriate to Scotland." Yet he warned that "if the arrangements adopted between the National Committee/Executive Committee and the Scottish organisation were applied now to the rest of Britain it would mean the collapse of the national centre" (P Taaffe 'A discussion on democratic centralism', Militant Labour *Members Bulletin* No16, p6).

Clearly, his opportunist sop had nothing in common with a Leninist understanding of 'autonomy' within a revolutionary organisation. This means that "in questions specifically concerning the proletariat of a given race, nation or district ... [it] is left to the discretion of the organisation concerned to determine the specific demands to be advanced in pursuance of the common programme, and the methods of agitation to be employed. The party as a whole, its central institutions, lay down the common fundamental principles of programme and tactics; as to the different methods of carrying out these principles in practice and agitating for them they are laid down by the various Party organisations *subordinate to centre*" (my emphasis, VI Lenin *CW* Vol 17, Moscow 1977, p95).

Thus, constituent elements of the party must have autonomy to apply the programme concretely. However, "in matters pertaining to the struggle against ... the bourgeoisie ... as a whole, we must act as a single and centralised militant organisation, have behind us the whole of the proletariat, without distinction of language or nationality, a proletariat whose unity is *cemented by the continual joint solution of problems of theory and practice, of tactics and organisation*; we must not set up organisations that would march separately, each along its own track; we must not weaken the force of our offensive by breaking up into numerous independent political parties" (my emphasis, VI Lenin *CW* Vol 6, Moscow 1977, p333).

Taaffe's attempt to confine the 'autonomy' granted to Scotland to "financial" and other "organisational issues" was clearly a philistine attempt at damage limitation. I noted when reviewing the SP's perspectives for 1997 that Taaffe failed to even mention Scotland (*Weekly Worker* January 23 1997). The political - not "organisational" - implication was clear. Scottish issues were to be dealt with by the Scottish comrades, not the all-Britain organisation. Taaffe had buckled before Scottish nationalism.

His thesis takes as given that the SP is blessed with "a clear revolutionary programme, perspectives, strategy and tactics". Evidently all untrue - except in the doublespeak world of centrism, where left reformism *is* revolutionary and state nationalisation *is* socialism. But even if it were true that Taaffe's *What we stand for* is a revolutionary, not a reformist programme, how could we explain SP's course towards fragmentation and - in the case of SML - liquidation into left Scottish nationalism?

Of course, it could be that constituent elements of the party are *breaking* from its 'programme' and the methodological approach that informs it. After all, this is a hard period for partisans of our class - Taaffe's blather about the "red 90s" notwithstanding.

In fact the present crisis situation actually represents the culmination of tendencies immanent in the SP's politics. Taaffe - despite himself - illustrates that, while his organisation is in the process of disintegrating around him, this disastrous method - of impressionistic and opportunist adaptation - remains constant.

Thus, he writes of 'democratic centralism' and manages - as seems to be the man's unique gift - to get the worst of all possible worlds.

He talks of the "new generation" since the collapse of Stalinism in the 1990s that reject anything that "smacked of 'authoritarianism' and which gave the appearance of being undemocratic". Yet while these young people evidence a certain "hostility" to traditional forms of working class organisation, "particularly if it has a 'top-down' approach", they also had a "preparedness to discuss ideas".

Yet, in the very same document, the man defines 'democratic centralism' as "the fullest possible *internal* discussion and debate ... and ... the carrying out of commonly arrived at decisions by the whole organisation" - my emphasis.

This dichotomy between 'internal' and 'external' and the subsequent treatment of political questions as a matter of conspiracy has led many advanced workers and youth to view revolutionary organisations in much the same way as they look on religious cults. For example, the debate between SML and the SP is a vital one for the whole workers' movement, with direct ramifications for the Socialist Alliances in England and Wales. Yet it is regarded by Taaffe as purely an internal affair of the SP and SML. Without the intervention of the *Weekly Worker*, advanced workers or the "new generation" that Taaffe is so excited about (the one that so enjoys the opportunity to "discuss ideas", you'll remember) would remain totally unaware of the dispute until it was over and its results could be spoon-fed to them in a blandly digestible fudge. We treat advanced workers and youth as serious people capable of reading opposing views in the same newspaper without becoming "confused". The SP patronisingly treats them as children.

Taaffe may have a garbage method, but no one can reproach him for a lack of consistency. The mood of this new generation tends towards a "'spontaneous' approach", a certain 'looseness' politically. In response to this - and the smear campaigns of the capitalists - Taaffe casually suggests dumping the term 'democratic centralism'.

Now, I am all in favour of what the SP calls "the need to analyse the new features of this period ... to elaborate in a fresh way programme, policies, political names, slogans ..." ("Clarification of proposals for a Scottish Socialist Party" *Members Bulletin* No28, April 1998, p31). But this reflects something rather more, of course. Without a revolutionary programme as a compass, SP adapts opportunistically to the political milieu in which it finds itself - be that Labourism, feminism, black separatism or Scottish nationalism.

This is why an anarcho-libertarian spirit has "undoubtedly spilled over at certain stages into the ranks" of the SP itself, and thereby generates toleration for the Scottish nationalism that is threatening to fragment the organisation as a whole - Taaffe of course bears prime responsibility.

He hypocritically and technocratically tells his comrades that it is "absolutely fatal" to take measures that result in "dissolving ... the distinct character of our revolutionary party ... at all times the consciousness of a separate revolutionary organisation must be engendered in the minds of our members by the leadership ... it is essential that we meet separately and regularly, preferably on a weekly basis, to discuss the way forward, to collect dues and to recruit to our party."

Yet the 'distinctive' character of a revolutionary organisation cannot be defined nor defended through the technicalities of dues collection and "separate" meetings. The need for separate organisation flows from a programme that expresses proletarian independence, the distinct revolutionary interests of the working class as a whole. Unless the SP's drift towards the precipice can be fought on this level by elements of the party, the abyss beckons ●

Mark Fischer  
national organiser



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

## Intolerance

Congratulations on a heroic headline regarding Mary Bell ('State attacks right to think' *Weekly Worker* May 7). There is something very creepy when the prime minister of the country comes on TV to urge you not to buy a book and to add another log on the fire of blind intolerance and hate.

The backlash against this book is the tip of the reactionary iceberg of censorship. In the same week we had frenzied calls to ban the film 'Lolita'. One guest on a radio phone-in said she would ban the original book as well.

It just shows how far attitudes have changed. I don't remember this book causing any outrage when it came out - I've always thought of it as a love story with comic contradictions. The only outrage I recall in the original film was the actress playing the 12-year old nymphet looked about 25. The current film, to calm sensitivities, sets the girl as 14 - and she looks 35 or so, I am told. But it won't do apparently. According to outraged phoners, the film justifies abuse, brutality and murder of children.

In fact any debate on any question of this kind always ends up with some sort of attempt to brand people who oppose censorship and hysterical reactions to moral panics as advocates of infanticide. There is a sort of mental terrorism and public vilification which forces all but the very brave - or foolhardy - to just shut up and say nowt.

One expects that something of this climate happened during the witch trials and the un-American trials in the USA. We have all seen what the mob, whipped to a frenzy by baying press headlines, can do. A public lynching is by no means out of the question, and the danger for free speech and rational thought in this climate cannot be overstated.

Dave Douglass  
Doncaster

## Rail fiasco

Recent events in the north of England have shown yet again the complete stupidity of the rail privatisation project. A project that, despite its weasel words when in opposition, the Labour Party are not prepared to end now they are in government.

North West Trains, recently taken over by the bus operator First Bus, now renamed First Group, have decided to go head to head with Richard Branson and challenge the Virgin Trains monopoly of the west coast route to London.

NWT plans for the Rochdale and Blackpool trains to meet at Warrington Bank Key station and for the units to be coupled together, then proceed to London as one train. Problem: Branson controls Warrington BK station and blocked NWT from using its platforms to couple the trains together. NWT and Railtrack then decide they can couple the trains together in a freight loop line just outside the station. Problem: Aslef drivers point out that this is contrary to safety and the rule book. Solution: Railtrack allows NWT to couple units at Crewe station, owned by Railtrack.

It now appears that Virgin are resorting to the type of dirty tricks that Branson successfully took British Airways to court for. Allegedly the Virgin West Coast driver manager has been visiting the NWT drivers' mess room and recruiting the NWT drivers who have just finished learning the London route.

Lack of funds has not stopped Regional Railways North East going ahead with a rebranding exercise. The company will be known as Northern Spirit, more appropriate to a brewery than a railway, and the inevitable repainting of trains and issue of new uniforms will take place at some considerable cost.

Railworkers would like to know why deputy prime minister Prescott, despite all the promises made, has not used his powers to take RRNE back into the public sector. New Labour, Old Labour - same old Labour.

Danny Geest  
Warrington

## Too long

A little over a month ago, over 2,000 locked out Detroit Newspaper workers 'celebrated' a most solemn occasion. On April 8, the Detroit Newspaper strike/lockout passed its 1,000th day.

The strike/lockout went from mass pickets that stopped production to isolation and strangulation. Why is this? Is it because the Detroit Newspaper workers don't want to fight? Absolutely not! Is it because strikes are unwinnable? Tell that to UPS workers, or the Australian wharfies. No, this strike/lockout collapsed because of a treacherous and cowardly leadership that would rather be eating steak and lobster with the Gannett bosses than leading a militant strike.

The leaders of these unions must be swept out and replaced by an elected, rank and file strike committee, armed with a class-struggle programme of action. Otherwise more defeats and more surrenders are on the horizon. Time and again, the MCNU bureaucrats stabbed the workers in the back, and then kicked them while they were down. What was necessary for the mass action to be successful was a class-struggle leadership willing to see the struggle through all the way. But for Lou Mleczko and co that would challenge their control over the union.

So the 'corporate campaign' was brought in to shackle the striking workers to the capitalists and their representatives in the government. But this was still not enough. The striking workers were still mobilising, defying injunctions and threatening to shut down the scab papers.

This was the background for the 'unconditional back-to-work offer'. The MCNU bureaucrats' message to the membership was clear: stay in line or you'll never get your job back. This 'offer', far from being a "bold new strategy" for the strike, was an admission of defeat - it was an unconditional surrender. But it was not a surrender authored in the name of the membership. On the contrary, only one of the six unions was allowed to actually vote on the 'offer', and that union turned it down.

To turn this dying strike into a living victory would mean ousting these treacherous and cowardly bureaucrats, and building an elected, rank and file strike committee on a class-struggle programme.

A convention of the six unions, where all members of the MCNU would be allowed to discuss and vote, would be called. At that meeting, an elected strike committee, composed of the rank and file, would be given the power to make decisions in the name of the membership of the MCNU. The strike committee would serve as the general staff of the strike, directing its every movement. All decisions of the strike committee would be subject to the approval of the membership as a whole, and members of the strike committee would be subject to recall at any time.

As for the programme, the 'unconditional back-to-work offer' would be immediately withdrawn (as it was undemocratically adopted by the bureaucrats), and mass picketing would be reinstated. Mass picketing would not simply be a weekend event, but a 24-hour, seven-day action - unrelenting and unyielding. All injunctions and restraining orders would be defied, and militant action to stop the scab papers from going to press or being distributed would be initiated.

The strike committee would initiate a massive campaign among other unions in the area, among unorganised and unemployed workers, and in the black community in Detroit. Throughout this strike, the Detroit Newspaper bosses have used 'diversity' as a way to keep black workers from supporting the strike. A class-struggle programme would fight for unity among black and white workers in support of the Detroit Newspaper workers.

Finally, an appeal to trade unionists would be issued. As part of this, a demand would also be placed on the bureaucrats at the head of other local unions. This demand would be clear in tone and forceful in meaning: 'If you can't act like real unionists and help us, instead of helping the bosses, then at least have the decency to stand aside and let us fight our battle.' We did it before, and we can do it again.

Jim Paris  
Cleveland, USA



From The Call, paper of the British Socialist Party, May 16 1918

## John Maclean's trial and sentence

The trial of comrade John Maclean MA, Scottish representative on the BSP executive and Bolshevik consul in Glasgow, on a charge of sedition, took place in the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh on Thursday last.

The interest taken in the trial was considerable, and long before the proceedings commenced the court was crowded. For the first time in the history of criminal trials in the high court the quota system of admission was introduced and many who sought admission were turned away. On the Wednesday evening a body of Clyde comrades and workers left the International Hall in Stockwell Street, Glasgow, and marched to Edinburgh, as a demonstration against the trial, reaching the court after a 13-hours' journey through the night.

... Comrade Maclean conducted his own defence and, on being asked if he adhered to his plea of 'not guilty', replied: "I refuse to plead." The lord justice general intimated that that would be taken as a plea of 'not guilty'.

There were 11 charges in the indictment, which accused Maclean of making statements which were likely to prejudice the recruiting, training and discipline of his majesty's forces; and to cause mutiny, sedition and disaffection among the civilian population; and to impede, delay and restrict the production, repair and transportation of war material and other work necessary for the successful prosecution of the war, contrary to the Defence of the Realm Acts ...

The sort of statements Maclean was alleged to have made were that tools should be downed, that a revolution should be created, that the Clyde district had helped to win the Russian Revolution, and that the revolutionary spirit on the Clyde was at present 10 times as strong as it was two years ago.

In another he was stated to have said the workers on the Clyde should take control of the city chambers and retain hostages, and take control of the post offices and the banks; that the farmers in the country districts should be compelled to produce food for the workers; that the present House of Commons should be superseded by a soviet, and that he did not care if they met in the usual place of Buckingham Palace ...

On another occasion he was said to have suggested that the food stores on the Clyde and the ships should be seized; that the soldiers and sailors were with them; that the workers should profit by the experiences of their Russian brothers; that he was prepared to run any risk if he thought he could bring about a social revolution; and that the workers should leave the owners of the land, mines and factories to man the trenches.

The only witnesses were those called by the prosecution. Comrade Maclean stated that he had been locked up and had been unable to get evidence, and he declined to go into the witness box himself.

The lord advocate said ... there was nothing in the law to prevent any man talking about socialism ... But there came a point at which discussion of socialist questions changed its character; they could not afford at the present time to have the people invited to active violence and rebellion while the enemy was at their gates.

Comrade Maclean, addressing the court, said that ... nobody was going to take from him his right to protest against wrong, to tell the truth and do anything for the good of mankind ... His trial was the most historic that had ever taken place in Scotland, in that the working class and the capitalist class met face to face. He was not there as the accused; he was there as the accuser of capitalism dripping from head to foot with blood.

If he went to prison he would take no food, and if anything happened as a result, it would not be his responsibility, but that of the British government.

The jury brought in a verdict of guilty without retiring, and the judge pronounced sentence of five years' penal servitude, which will begin after the remaining

year of Maclean's previous sentence had been served.

Before his removal by the gaolers, our comrade turned to the public gallery, courageously crying, "Keep it going, boys. Keep it going" ●

# Our flag stays red

The local election and London referendum results produced no great surprises. Neither New Labour nor the Tories notched up any great successes or victories. Labour lost almost 100 councillors, while the Tories emerged with net gains of more than 200 seats nationwide. The Liberal Democrats took Liverpool from Labour, but lost a string of other authorities in the south of England.

Everyone from the bourgeois to the left press has commented on the phenomenon of mass apathy. The turnout for the London local election, which many believed would be bolstered by the referendum on Blair's proposals for a London mayor and Greater London Authority, was 34.13%. This was far below the 45 to 48% turnout in past local elections. In many parts of the country, especially in the northern cities, the turnout was far lower. This meant that the electoral fate of the major cities sometimes depended on the say-so of no more than 25% of the electorate. Therefore - in theory - any party that can attract 12% of the vote could win control of cities like Liverpool or Manchester.

Blair conclusively won his 'yes' vote for a puppet, US-style mayor and a weak Greater London Authority - with 72% in favour and 18% against. In some respects though this is hardly a resounding success for the Blair project - though it has certainly been advanced. Almost two thirds of London's five million electorate could not even be bothered to express an opinion. Blair would certainly *prefer* to mobilise overwhelming popular support for his vision of New Britain. The low turnout also hands the trade union bureaucracy a convenient weapon in the tussle over recognition. As Peter Kellner wrote in the *Evening Standard*: "If this was a ballot for union representation in a private company, then Labour's new law would almost certainly deem the workforce to be far too unenthusiastic to warrant any disturbance in the status quo" (May 8). Not that Blair will let the turnout deflate him too much. Confidently - and with the 'yes' vote safely behind him - Blair announced that the result was "a great boost for the capital" and told reporters that he was "delighted that the people of London have voted so convincingly for a mayor and an assembly". So full steam ahead - still - for the remaking of Britain and the constitutional monarchy system.

The left did not have a particularly good night on May 7 - nor did it have a disastrous one either. The Socialist Party, who stood 45 candidates, lost its sitting councillors (all had been defectors from Labour), such as Ian Page in Lewisham, who received 836 votes. It must also be very disappointed with the poor results from Merseyside, its former 'power base'. It won 174 votes (12.7%) in Sefton Orrell, but in some other Liverpool

wards it only managed to secure between one and two percent of the vote. Bucking the trend, Dave Nellist gained a seat in Coventry. He got by far the largest vote for any SP member, with 1,799 votes (52.7%). But Nellist is almost a national politician with a high profile in Coventry - he lost his parliamentary seat by a whisker in 1992 and performed respectably well in 1997.

But as a whole the May 7 results were not good for the SP. All the grinding local work, of 'digging roots in the community', of being the 'sensible' local politician ... wasted? Fragmenting organisationally and declining electorally, its prospects for the future are not bright.

The SLP stood some 50 candidates in London and up to 200 nationwide. Unfortunately it is very difficult to secure any reliable information about the exact number of candidates - let alone what votes they got. When the *Weekly Worker* phoned the SLP's headquarters, comrade Dave Collins could not say how many candidates had stood. Indeed, he was so much in the dark about the actual election results that in desperation he contacted the government's statistical office. They were unable to help him.

Despite the complete lack of national coordination or any sort of meaningful local base - and the continued Blair honeymoon - the votes of some of the 'star' SLPers stood up relatively well. Imran Khan in Central ward (Newham) got 478 votes, beating the Tory candidate who got 321. Similarly, Harpal Brar, editor of the Indian Workers Association's journal *Lalkar*, got 606 votes in Northcoate (Ealing), trouncing the three Tory candidates whose *highest* vote was 198. Steve Cowen in Mount Pleasant ward got 315 votes while Carolyn Sikorski in Wall End got 206. In Bidston on the Wirral Alec McFadden got a good result with 183 (13%).

CPGB candidates in London secured the following votes: Mark Fischer - Rectory 79; Phil Kent - Kilburn 54; Anne Murphy - North Defoe 52; Danny Hammill - Manor Lee 48. In Manchester on an extremely low turnout our results were: John Pearson - Moss Side 29; Steve Riley - Hulme 18.

Significantly, all the CPGB comrades scored over two percent of the vote - a figure comparable to many and better than some SP and SLP candidates. This is not bad considering our supporters - including those who stood as SLP or Socialist Alliance candidates - did so defending an explicitly revolutionary manifesto. So what is particularly notable is that we were not unduly punished.

Standing on principle loses only a few votes. Abandoning principle gains little or nothing in electoral terms. A useful antidote to the 'heads down' localists, who think such a principled approach is akin to political suicide ●

Paul Greenaway

## action

### ■ CPGB seminars

London: May 17 - Sentimental socialism. For more details call 0181-459 7146.

Manchester: May 18 - The reserve army of labour. For more details call 0161-798 6417.

### ■ Party wills

The CPGB has forms available for you to include the Party and the struggle for communism in your will. Write for details.

### ■ Brent SA

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

### ■ Scottish Socialist Alliance

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

### ■ Glasgow Marxist Forum

Discussion - Lessons from the struggles of the Liverpool dockers. Wednesday May 20, 7.30pm, Patrick Burgh Hall

### ■ Ireland: what should Marxists say?

Debate between the SLP Republicans and the *Marxist Bulletin*.

Thursday May 21, 7.30pm. Call 0171-482 3752 for details.

### ■ Irish political prisoners campaign

Downing Street picket - first Sunday of every month, 12 noon to 1.30pm. Release the prisoners! For more details contact: Fuascailt, PO Box 3923, London NW5 1RA. Tel: 0181-985 8250 or 0956-919 871.

### ■ Justice

Second march for social justice, called by the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards Committee.

Saturday May 30. Assemble 12 noon, Thames Embankment, Temple tube.

For more information, contact Liverpool Dockers London Support Group: 31b Muswell Hill Place, London N10. Tel: 0181-442 0090.

### ■ Stop the fascists

The assembly details for the National Front march against the Northern Ireland peace agreement are as follows:

Saturday May 23, 2.15pm. Little Sanctuary, London SW1 (just off Parliament Square).

All anti-fascists are urged to mobilise against this demonstration.

### ■ For jobs, services and democracy

International demonstration - assemble 1.30pm, Cooper's Field (behind Cardiff Castle), Saturday June 13. March to Euro summit.

For more details or to book a seat on Cardiff coaches call 0181-800 7460.

### ■ Defend the Campsfield Nine

Monday June 1 - 8.30am at St Aldates, Oxford.

Mass Picket at Oxford Crown Court and every Monday until the end of the trial.

Following a disturbance at Campsfield House detention centre on August 20 1997, when Group 4 tried to send two detainees to prison, nine asylum seekers from Nigeria, Gambia, Ghana and Liberia are facing charges of violent disorder and riot, which carries a maximum 10-year sentence. Their trial starts on Monday 1 June 1998 at Oxford Crown Court and may last eight weeks.

Organised by the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, 22 Berners Street, Birmingham, B19 2DR. Tel: 0121-554 6947.

### ■ Seeing red

A festival of dissent

**Part one: May 6-24**

Fragmenting red, by Tony Craze

Know your rights, by Judy Upton

The head invents, the heart discovers, by Peter Barnes

Election night in the yard, by Roddy McDevitt

I'll cry if I want to, by Aidan Healy

The cows are mad, by Jon Tompkins

**Part two: May 26-June 14**

The Mandelson files, by Paul Sirret

The big idea, by Helen Kelly

On the couch with Enoch, by Tanika Gupta

The ballad of Bony Lairt, by Roney Fraser-Munro

The (bogus) people's poem, by Kay Adshead

**Part three: June 16-28**

Made in England, by Parv Bancel

Thanks mum, by David Eldridge

Stick stack stock, by Dona Daley

Slow drift, by Rebecca Prichard

Les événements, by James Macdonald

Venue: Battersea Art Centre, Lavender Hill, London SW11.

Tuesdays-Saturdays 7.30pm; Sundays 5.30pm.

Tickets: £8 or £5 (concessions). Box office: 0171-223 2223.

# 1918

Russian Revolution  
this week 80 years ago

# Let them eat tacks

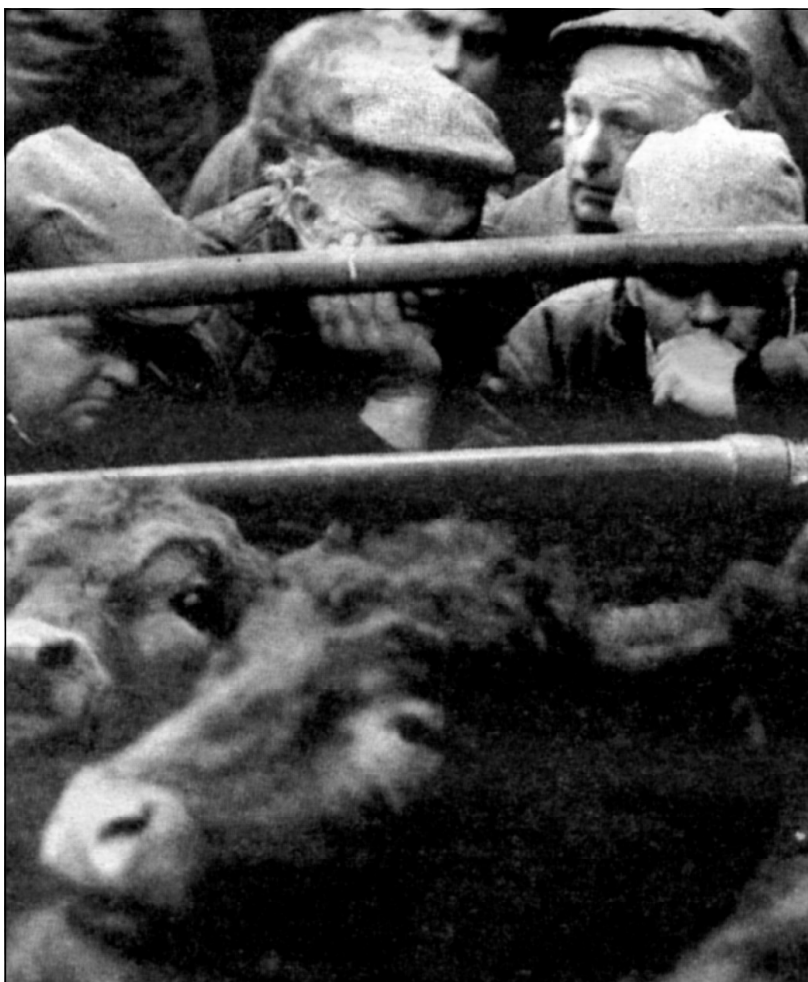
**T**hough politicians and the media never tire of telling us how lucky we are to live in a parliamentary democracy, the reality is somewhat different. The governmental machine operates behind our backs, making countless decisions in private rooms - and in alliance with powerful vested interests. The business-military-government complex always tends to win *over and above* democracy in capitalist society.

In recent weeks we have had two clear examples of how the system works - 'superbugs' and the dumping of nuclear waste. The latter case is particularly instructive. An embarrassing leak appeared in *The New York Times*. The British government was forced to admit that Blair had hatched a deal with Bill Clinton to accept a cache of highly radioactive, weapons-grade material from the ex-Soviet republic of Georgia for reprocessing at the Dounreay plant in Scotland.

This secret deal - codenamed Operation Auburn Endeavour - was done despite a ban on Dounreay operating commercial contracts to import nuclear material while a safety review is in progress. Blair and Clinton claimed "special dispensation" on the spurious grounds that this was not a commercial contract and that the amount involved was tiny. This dangerous material had to be smuggled out of Tbilisi, we were told, because it was vulnerable to being stolen by "terrorists and the agents of rogue regimes". Strangely enough though, 'responsible' governments like the French and the United States refused to accept the material. So Scotland it had to be. But just make sure the Scottish people are told *nothing* about it. Cross your fingers and hope the news does not get out. Unfortunately for Blair and Clinton, the gamble failed.

Caught on the hop, a government spokesperson came out with the following justification: "Circumstances in Georgia are such that it makes sense according to our various obligations, not least with the G8 [the leading industrialised nations, plus Russia] in relation to nuclear safety and non-proliferation that it should be brought from Georgia. For obvious reasons the movement of this sort of stuff is kept confidential. There is no sense in making public the transportation of material of this type."

Naturally, the Scottish National Party had a field day in terms of easy propaganda. Alex Salmond, not without some truth, accused Blair of "prostituting Scotland as a world nuclear dustbin to curry favour with the Clinton administration. It seems



Superbugs - superprofits

the prime minister is secretly offering Scotland as a nuclear waste bin without so much as a 'by your leave' and certainly no public debate."

This same arrogant and anti-democratic attitude also informs the *whole* of the food industry from top to bottom. The regular and constant use of growth-promoting antibiotics in intensive farming, against all independent expert advice, is a pristine example of how the pursuit of quick and fat profits - and grotesquely fat animals in many cases - now possibly threatens human health. All the danger signs since at least the 1950s - when this was first discussed with some degree of anxiety - have either been ignored or covered up. Why? In order to protect the financial interests of farmers and the drugs companies, who have everything to gain from feeding animals with a cocktail of antibiotics (mixed with the carpet tacks and bits of other animals' brains which passes for fodder). Make the money, bugger our health and our environment - and pocket the handsome subsidies. Then they round it off by blaming workers for having the

audacity to demand food they can afford to buy.

Unsurprisingly, bacteria in animals dosed with antibiotics develop resistance. These bacteria are released into the wider environment and infect the entire farming community - and from there enter humans. Now we are seeing the ominous emergence of 'superbugs', some of which appear to be immune to just everything we can throw at them. As a recent report apocalyptically warns: "There is a dire prospect of returning to the pre-antibiotics era." Thanks to the obsessively secretive and venal men and women who control the 'food industry', hospitals are now becoming dangerous places. For instance, the life-threatening MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus*) 'superbugs' are prevalent in hospitals. What next?

Communists demand transparency and full accountability in all state and commercial dealings. Such shortsighted and cynical malpractice must be stopped. Workers' health must come first ●

Eddie Ford

# SACP tensions

Vusikaya Mvuyisi is the chair of the Khayelitsha district of the South African Communist Party. Peter Manson spoke to him in the shack township outside Cape Town

**C**ould you tell me about the living conditions in Khayelitsha?

There are about 300,000 inhabitants, although nobody knows the exact figure, as more people continue to arrive. Eighty percent of the people live in shacks, while the remainder have 'low-cost' council houses or self-built homes. Most of the shacks are now on officially allocated plots. This means that they have access to standpipes and toilets, and electricity is supplied by overhead cables.

These residents are charged for rates and services, but only around 25% actually pay. Only a tiny minority have work, and those who do have jobs are mostly domestic workers, earning around 800 rand [£95] a month.

**What sort of conditions have these people left behind in order to come and live in a shack?**

The conditions here are worse than from where we came. In the rural areas we say shacks are meant for pigs. But there is often no possibility of getting work. The government was a major employer in the countryside, but many people have lost their jobs. For example my father was a school teacher in the Eastern Cape, but he was retrenched and had to join me here. The few people in work have many others to support.

**What is the SACP membership in Khayelitsha?**

There are more than 700 members in 14 branches. We recently held four induction workshops for new recruits.

**What is the relationship between the SACP and the ANC here?**

They are two separate, independent organisations. We accept the leadership of the ANC and want to ensure it remains a strong organisation. The main SACP leaders refrain from taking up responsibility in the ANC locally, but all the ANC leaders in Khayelitsha are either SACP members or sympathisers.

**What campaigns is the party involved in at present?**

We are supporting the national Triple H campaign - concerning hunger, homes and health. Linked to hunger is the question of bringing down crime. We have called a crime summit and all the church leaders have got involved.

**What do you think of comrade Randy Pieterse's statement at a recent SACP rally that people should hand their children to the police if they commit a crime?**

It was a very responsible statement - we can no longer take the law into our own hands.

**But surely we are for the dispossession of the capitalists. We want that to take place in a politically organised manner, but how can we condemn those who commit individual acts of 'dispossession' against capitalist property?**

I agree with the arguments for the organised dispossession of the capitalists. There is no way we can make progress while a tiny minority hold the mass of wealth.

**And the police - are they neutral? Surely they are an arm of the bourgeois state. Didn't the party once help to organise the community itself to control anti-social elements?**

Yes, you are right. We have given up our role and handed it to the state. We have disarmed ourselves and it is one of the biggest mistakes we have made. The police will not do the job. They only pitch up if there is a workers' rally. But we are campaigning for a proper community structure to give residents more say. **Perhaps the problem lies in the party's overall view that it is necessary to defend the 'national democratic revolution'. Doesn't that mean supporting the capitalist state, including its police?**

The talk of a two-stage revolution is giving us problems. There are very conflicting views within the party. The SACP has been infiltrated. Some forces want to see it dead. It is impossible to dent the party from the outside - you can only do that from within. We must identify the careerists within the party - the people who say they are communists, but whose analysis and actions are so contrary to what they call themselves.

Many of those who say we must "deepen the national democratic revolution" actually want to hold back the advance to socialism. On the other extreme there are those who say that the NDR is simply replacing the white bourgeoisie with a black bourgeoisie.

The party is saying, 'Socialism is the future - build it now.' Our members in Cosatu and other organisations are continuing to propagate the ideas of socialism. But it is high time that these tensions and differences within the party came out in the open. The ANC could become a toy of the bourgeoisie - it depends on how we act within the ANC.

**It seems to me that the party has all but lost its separate identity. Its publications are infrequent and do not contain the necessary open debate.**

At present the position is very problematic. We don't have a good leader who is prepared to speak out about what we need. We are recognised at the lower levels - within the ANC and Cosatu. They would be nothing without the help of the party. But we have no national face, no national profile.

**The party continues to give full support to the government despite its blatantly pro-capitalist policies - even the 'growth, employment and redistribution' programme (Gear).**

We have called on the ANC to renegotiate Gear. Some people do say, 'What is so stupid about what I have done that the capitalists are praising me?' We admit that the ANC is not delivering on some issues, but workers know that life is much better now.

As for ourselves, the Communist Party has been the only one to fight. The SACP has roots. It is the only party my father knew ●

## PCC solidarity

# Communists murdered

To the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq

Dear comrades,  
Please accept our deepest sympathy and condolences at the loss of two leading members of your party, comrade Shapoor Abdul-Kadir and comrade Kabil Adil, brutally murdered by Islamic terrorists on April 18 in the city of Erbil in the so-called 'safe haven' created in northern Iraq on the authority of the United Nations.

We are aware that the 'safe haven' has been allowed by the UN

to fall under the armed rule of reactionary Kurdish bourgeois nationalist parties and that in the city of Erbil, Masoud Al-Barzani's ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party has, since March 8, been turning a blind eye not only to the murders of comrades Shapoor and Kabil, but to the use of mosques and Islamic institutions as centres for the issuing of fatwas promoting the killings of communists, women activists, equality activists and progressive and secular people generally.

Communist leaders embody the

experience of struggle of the masses. They can only be replaced at great cost to the masses.

Communists of such calibre as Shapoor and Kabil, willing to fearlessly put themselves forward despite being fully aware of the dangers, and capable of leading millions of working people, are the salt of the earth. Their deaths are a tragic loss to the working class worldwide in its struggle for human self-liberation.

Stan Kelsey

Provisional Central Committee, Communist Party of Great Britain

# For revolutionary unity

In the last of three articles on South Africa Peter Manson examines the state of the left

In South Africa 'socialism' is not a dirty word. It is firmly entrenched in the tradition and language of the revolutionary struggle against apartheid. Not only are the South African Communist Party and the main trade union centre, Cosatu, officially committed to a "socialist South Africa", but many groups and individuals within the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and the 'black consciousness' Azanian Peoples Organisation (Azapo) also claim adherence to their own version of socialism.

In March this year a new group, the Socialist Party of Azania (Sopa), was formed by a group of Azapo members. It immediately boasted of 20,000 adherents (an exaggeration). Its leaders declared against the agenda of the International Monetary Fund and for the working class. Whites would not be barred from Sopa, it announced, although they would be required to accept the ideology of black consciousness.

When the populist Bantu Holomisa was expelled from the ANC for exposing corruption within the organisation last year, he set up the National Consultative Forum and called for submissions regarding the nature of a future party. 'Socialism' was explicitly mentioned as one option in his first programmatic document. A couple of small left groups took up the invitation and used the opportunity to put forward a revolutionary working class perspective. Needless to say, Holomisa preferred to join forces with Roelf Meyer, former National Party minister, to form the United Democratic Movement - an attempt to create a more 'leftwing', multiracial NP. Nevertheless the UDM too no doubt contains a fair sprinkling of 'socialists'.

What of the revolutionary left itself? A decade ago the SACP could have been placed in this category, but today its leaders see their main task as containing and suppressing the masses' revolutionary aspirations. Whereas the SACP has around 75,000 card-holders, the forces to its left are

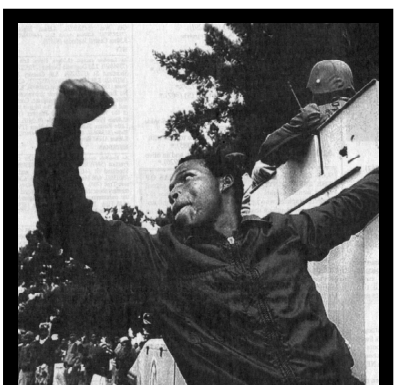
tiny by comparison.

The Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (Wosa) comes from a tradition of anti-apartheid struggle independent of the ANC. Although it claims several hundred members, the organisation is a loose one with very few activists. It has no regular publication. Its national chair, Neville Alexander, told me that it was "very difficult" for the left to publish in South Africa. He appeared to believe that even the SACP does not have the resources for anything more than its two quarterly publications. He said that "nobody reads in South Africa" - apart from the thousand or so left activists. Not a bad target to aim for initially, I would have thought.

The bulk of Wosa's membership and support is in the Western Cape, among the 'coloured' population. A majority of 'coloureds' preferred the National Party to the ANC in 1994, leaving the Western Cape the only province with an NP administration. For that reason Nelson Mandela has been wooing what he sees as 'coloured' groups - including Wosa - trying to persuade them to back the ANC in the 1999 elections. Comrade Alexander told me he informed Mandela that Wosa would not back any capitalist party, although it would support any measure it viewed as favourable to the working class.

In December 1997 Wosa hosted an international conference of revolutionary socialists in Cape Town. It was jointly sponsored with the Italian group, Socialismo Rivoluzionario. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty (Britain) was an original sponsor, but dropped out over differences with RL (apparently, amongst other things, over the definition of the Soviet Union).

Apart from Wosa, the other left organisations all originated as offshoots of various British or US revolutionary groups. The Socialist Party's sister organisation, Militant, is still in existence, I am informed, but has not published for several years. The minister for the environment, Pallo Jordan, describes himself as a "socialist of Marxist persuasion" and is said to be very



## After apartheid

close to the Militant comrades - if anybody can find them.

The SWP clone, the Socialist Workers Organisation, last published the South African *Socialist Worker* in November 1997, despite having received financial backing of several thousand rands from London. The Workers International Vanguard League broke from the British Workers Revolutionary Party and is currently in search of a new 'international'. Other Trotskyite groups have liquidated themselves into organisations like the International Labour Resource and Information Group and the Alternative Information and Development Centre, which receive funding from international bourgeois and church sources.

One organisation which appears to be making a genuine attempt to build a non-sectarian revolutionary current is the International Socialist Movement, whose founder-members broke from the Socialist Workers Organisation in 1994 after Cliff loyalists informed them their SWO membership had "lapsed". The comrades had objected to the way certain (incorrect, they believed) policy decisions had been bulldozed through as 'directives' from London and they had called for a democratic conference. The ISM describes SWP-type regimes as "centralised democracy", where "a centralised bureaucracy holds all the levers of power and manipulates other groups and its own members while allowing them a level of local democracy" (ISM statement, 1996).

However, in reacting to their experience of SWP bureaucratic centralism, the comrades are in danger of bending the stick too far - against the whole notion of active leadership. The ISM's bi-monthly paper, *Revolutionary Socialist*, rebukes those who believe that "a revolutionary leadership can emerge to encourage, educate, assist and 'bring on' the 'lesser' cadre in a top-down way. Such structures inevitably end up with self-perpetuating leaderships, despite their protestations to be, at root, democratic" (February-March 1998).

Terry Bell, the editor of *Revolutionary Socialist*, told me that the ISM thought a rotating leadership was desirable. In my opinion it is utterly utopian to believe that the latest recruit can be the equal of an experienced leader, when it comes to questions of politics and organisation. It is one of the leadership's duties precisely to "encourage, educate, assist and 'bring on'" the whole organisation, but it must seek to *persuade* the member-

ship through democratic debate.

The ISM makes clear that it still adheres to the theory of state capitalism. However, it adds: "We do not make this definition of the Stalinist system in Russia a central point of our theory; it is not the party 'line'. Rather it is the result of the application of what we see as classic Marxist analysis. And we must at all times remain open to arguments which may put an alternative. This not only sharpens our own arguments; it may also provide more or better insights" (*Revolutionary Socialist* February-March 1998).

In a previous pamphlet the group stated: "A revolutionary workers' party bases itself on the active minority inside the class which wants to fight against the whole system. This is crucial because most of the time only a minority of workers are directly involved in this struggle." It continued: "A genuine revolutionary party ... must also be the 'memory of the working class' - the place where history is discussed and lessons of struggle are debated. Above all it is a party which functions on the basis of the search for theoretical clarity; it does not hide nor blur its differences in order to maintain an organisational unity" (*Mass workers' party or revolutionary party* undated).

These statements clearly represent a very positive break from the sterile method of Cliffism.

Nevertheless it is a matter of regret that the ISM reduced the frequency of *Revolutionary Socialist* in 1997, up to which time it appeared monthly. Comrade Bell told me that this was done to allow the group to concentrate on study. But surely researching, debating, writing and intervening with a *serious political paper facilitates* continuous and enriching study - not only for the editorial team, but for the whole collective.

The comrades should not be complacent in the knowledge that they are "the only group producing a regular ... paper" on the South African left ('Updated note', April 1998). That places a huge responsibility on their shoulders to inform and provoke discussion amongst advanced workers.

Although both the ISM and Wosa are formally committed to cooperate with other left groups, the ISM comrades did not attend the main sessions of Wosa's international conference. Comrade Alexander states that they refused to come, but comrade Bell says his group was excluded because of its unwillingness to sign the conference 'base document'. He rightly contends that such a conference should have aimed to achieve unity through discussion, and participants

should not have been expected to give *carte blanche* to a document they played no part in producing. Nevertheless, unless the ISM's differences with the base document were of a fundamental nature, it might have been better to ignore secondary differences of emphasis in the pursuit of revolutionary unity.

The ISM has started to win support among workers from the black nationalist tradition. Clarence Hadebe, formerly secretary general of the Pan-Africanist Students Organisation (affiliated to the PAC) has now joined the group. While still secretary general of Paso, he wrote in the pages of *Revolutionary Socialist*: "The only genuine route to socialism is the formation of a clear revolutionary socialist party with the ultimate aim of organising the working class to seize power and impose their own dictatorship, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The working class, through the principle of socialism from below, alone can overcome the yoke of capitalism and impose its own democracy ... But the working class can only achieve this if it crushes the bourgeoisie - and that includes the African bourgeoisie" (March 1997). Quite a break from the politics of black nationalism.

A group of left Paso members seemed set to follow comrade Hadebe when - unbelievably - the ISM decided to introduce the 'principle' of banning dual membership. The potential recruits preferred to deal with their unfinished business in Paso rather than immediately join the ISM. In my view this 'ban' was profoundly mistaken. The only organisational principles should be those that aid the building of the revolutionary party. Members of mass organisations - whether they be the PAC, Azapo, Sopa or indeed the SACP itself - ought, while working under revolutionary discipline, to use their positions of influence to shape those movements.

A prime site for this type of work must surely be the South African Communist Party. Here is an organisation which uses the language of revolutionary Marxism to cover its blatantly reformist policies. As our interview with comrade Mvuyisi (see opposite) demonstrates, the SACP is full of contradictions. It contains thousands of militants with genuinely revolutionary aspirations.

It is certainly ironic that elements of the revolutionary left can, on the one hand, place their greatest emphasis on work within the Labour Party in Britain, while, on the other hand, avoiding like the plague any contact at all with the 'Stalinist' SACP.

## Summer Offensive '98

## Printing money

Unpaid voluntary work at the Party's printshop brought in £492 in the first week of the CPGB's 15th annual Summer Offensive fundraising drive. Other sums raised by the printshop comrades brings their total to £607, almost 21% of their £2,900 worth of personal pledges. Next week I hope to see them lead the way in raising their cautious initial pledges to levels which can put our organisation within reach of the campaign target of £20,000 by June 29.

Other comrades are invited to participate in the good work of building the Party's print business while boosting their own Summer

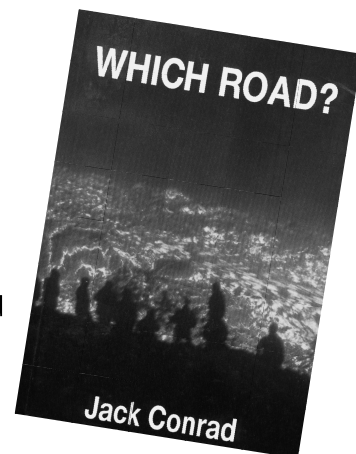
Offensive totals. Printshop work by 'extra hands' when needed will be credited to your SO total, as will 25% of the 'profit' gained on any new custom arising from your sales lead. Remember, the printshop can serve any locality in the country.

The £1,480 total, achieved in week one of an eight-week campaign, represents 12.9% - or roughly one eighth - of the £11,500 pledged by individual comrades at the start. While this puts us on course to fulfil pledges, it falls well short of what is needed to achieve £20,000.

Stan Kelsey

## 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 of England and Wales). 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).





*Around the left*

# People in glass houses

**A** workers' organisation without a revolutionary programme is like a ship without a compass. It will never be able to lead self-liberatory movements in society to the goal of socialism. Instead it will be tossed from pillar to post, from one position to another, from fantastic optimism to deep despair - destined only to react to events. This is the ABC of communist politics.

Or so it should be. Unfortunately, the two largest organisations on the revolutionary left - the SWP and the Socialist Party - eschew the revolutionary programme. They prefer mechanical schemas and the worship of spontaneity. In the case of the crisis-ridden SP its *What we stand for* is distinctly left reformist. Something which has led this organisation to embrace nationalism, strikeism and mundane campaignism. So while women members concern themselves with women's issues and Scottish members propose a Scottish breakaway, workers should properly confine themselves to trade union politics like wages, conditions and workplace rights.

Not surprisingly then, in his endeavours to put forward a coherent line on the May 1968 events in France, comrade Garret Mullen, a Newcastle student and SP member, gets hopelessly confused. He begins by stating: "There had been a period of consistent healthy growth of the French economy. Living standards had increased on average by five per cent year on year" (May 8). This should indicate that increased eco-

nomie confidence and better living conditions can actually bolster political daring and radicalism - not diminish it, as some left groups imagine. Particularly in the case of the students, cultural and political horizons were expanded dramatically. The popularity of American and British 'underground' music, new fashion and dress codes, drugs, breakdown of the old sexual mores, etc were integral to this 'awakening'. Even more so was the inspiration - and horrors - provided by the Vietnam war and the excitement generated by the Cultural Revolution in China. All this made the students and some young workers feel part of a worldwide struggle against repressive and authoritarian political systems. The French educational system was the representation *par excellence* of a regimented consumer society, its petty sexual segregationism and crass conformity conspiring to stifle individual and collective creativity.

But the comments of comrade Mullen on the 'May days' and the build-up to the May 13 general strike betray a fatal inability to *really* understand this essential point. The comrade even manages to make it all sound a bit dull, telling us: "The general strike movement was not just a movement of sympathy for students, although that sympathy helped in linking up the workers and students. The movement represented a desire on behalf of the working class for *economic change*" (my emphasis).

Comrade Mullen has firmly grasped the wrong end of the telescope. In France we saw the possibility of work-

ers - by transcending the narrow economic struggle - making themselves into a political class which wins the battle for democracy and becomes the hegemon of society. For a few brief moments, when they aligned themselves with the protests of the student radicals, the workers threatened to break out of the 'economic' strait-jacket imposed upon them by capitalist society and become a universal class. In so far as the workers' movement remained "a desire for economic change", it was a sign of *defeat*. The spontaneous upsurge had been diverted into the safe conduit of 'bread and butter' politics and economic reforms.

Comrade Mullen evades this core political question. He prefers to develop his circular economic thesis: "Expectations had been rising as a result of the long economic upswing. Some theorists believed that because working people had cars, washing machines and televisions, meant that they had been bought off by the system. However, inflation and mass unemployment were potent threats to living standards. Workers on average worked longer hours in 1968 (45 hours) than they did in 1938 (40 hours)."

The simple fact is that people will move mountains if they are inspired by *ideas* - by an alternative vision of society. This might come as an astounding revelation for the SP, which believes that socialism will result from winning workers to a dishonest programme and, stage by stage, taking them through trade union-type struggles inexorably to the realisation that

they need to elect a socialist government - ie, classical economism.

By a wonderful and also rather stupid irony, comrade Mullen criticises the French Communist Party for diverting the movement into a set of demands ... "for economic change". The PCF-led CGT union negotiated large pay increases and greatly improved working conditions. The party told workers to end their strikes and vote in a new government. Effectively it was carrying out the left reformist programme of the SP. In that sense, to criticise the opportunistic PCF leadership is to criticise Taaffeism and the SP.

Oblivious to the eclecticism of his words, comrade Mullen goes on to lecture the PCF on the necessity for revolutionary initiative and - gasp - revolutionary programme: "The possibility was there for a revolutionary transformation of society. This could have been very quickly internationalised, given the huge movements taking place in other countries."

"But the Communist Party did not want power. De Gaulle saw that the Communist Party wanted to dissipate the movement and he took the initiative. He dissolved parliament and declared an election. The Communist Party turned their attention to the elections declaring that they were the party of law and order ... In reality, the Communist Party had failed to act as a revolutionary party and to put forward a programme that could take the working class to power. At no stage did they give the workers a sense of their power. Their lack of activity can

be explained by their inability to act independently of the Soviet Union. A revolution in France would have had a massive effect not only in nearby countries but also in the states east of the Iron Curtain."

In other words, the PCF behaved like a typical right-centrist Menshevik organisation - eager to come across as a 'responsible' (and patriotic) candidate fit for government. It had no inkling of the necessity of fighting for a democratic sixth republic using revolutionary methods. As a result it handed the slogan of democracy to de Gaulle and the forces of reaction. Comrade Mullen may point his accusing finger at the Soviet bureaucracy, but we can easily think of a home-grown centrist organisation that is and always has been organisationally independent of the Soviet Union but still reproduces - at an even lower level - the same parliamentary cretinism as the PCF leadership. Yes, the Socialist Party of England and Wales. Nowhere in SP literature will you find something that "could take the working class to power" or "give workers a sense of their power" through *revolutionary* methods. If it has any such perspective, it has kept it a well guarded secret.

The real lesson of May 1968 is of the primary and overriding importance of programme. Without a minimum-maximum revolutionary programme to guide us, we will be magnetically drawn to the pitfalls of either leftism or rightism - towards opportunism and ultimately counterrevolution ●

Don Preston

*Star wars*

## Secret censorship and secret solidarity

**T**he *Morning Star* management committee's 1992 policy decision not to mention the CPGB or *Weekly Worker* in "the paper of the left" is still in effect. When striking *Star* journalists accepted our advertisements in *The Workers' Morning Star*, we received a spate of enquiries from old *Star* readers who had been kept in ignorance of our existence. But now the strike is over we are still ostracised from the paper by management decree.

In the 1992 general election, when the ban was fresh, editor Tony Chater was forced to drop his previous practice of reporting the votes of *all* parliamentary candidates in *all* constituencies. In this way he avoided admitting the ban publicly. Even now, *Star* readers can expect no report of how CPGB candidates fared in the May 7 local elections, despite the journalists' strike victory.

The Socialist Party, however, is favoured with a mention. The *Star* is always low-key about its close connection with the so-called Communist Party of Britain, whose own electoral efforts were played down. So alongside the meagre May 9 report, "Communist candidates pleased with results", we find "Socialist Party celebrates Coventry election victory".

This rare mention of the fortunes of another left organisation might, of course, be ascribed to a new policy of openness at the *Star* following

sacked editor John Haylett's reinstatement on the back of the journalists' militant action. However, a more specific connection is revealed by Mick Cotter in the SP's internal *Members Bulletin*. The piece was evidently written before the strike finished:

"The Socialist Party's printers, Eastway Offset Ltd, have recently been printing *The Workers' Morning Star*... When the journalists began strike action in February the management committee's response was equal to that of any reactionary employer in an attempt to silence and intimidate the strikers."

"The strikers, producing a weekly paper, recently approached us to print it for them. The *Morning Star* was previously printed daily by the SWP's printing company [East End Offset - IF] but, when the strikers began producing their own weekly paper, the SWP conveniently couldn't find a slot in their printing schedule, despite no longer having a daily edition of the *Morning Star* to do."

"We can only speculate as to why the SWP couldn't find the time to show a bit of solidarity with workers in struggle. It may be that they want to preserve their relationship with the PPPS management committee in the hope that they can resume printing after the dispute is over. Or it could be that the SWP bottled it after the PPPS management committee faxed



Morning Star picket line - the Socialist Party printed the strikers' paper

printers in the London area, threatening legal action against anyone who printed the strikers' paper. (We know of one other printing company who pulled out after being threatened, but they were an entirely commercial firm). Either way, it seems a shabby way for a so-called revolutionary party to behave.

"We decided we would not be in-

timidated by the threats and would continue to print *The Workers' Morning Star* until the dispute is over. The long-term future of the *Morning Star* is unclear, but we have established a relationship with the strikers which may benefit us in the future."

A commendable decision. *Star* journalists, and Mick Cotter, will know precisely to what extent this noble

choice was influenced by the fact that the CPGB's printshop had already guaranteed that *The Workers' Morning Star* would appear.

What a pity none of this telling tale of solidarity will be made known to the readers of the *Star*, or *The Socialist* ... or *Socialist Worker*. Long live openness! ●

Ian Farrell

# Short thesis on the revolutionary party

Peter Taaffe, the Socialist Party's general secretary, having already surrendered to SML's nationalism, now contradictorily tries to prevent a Scottish breakaway by appealing to technical internationalism. His 'short thesis' appears in the SP's *Members Bulletin* April 1998

Scottish Militant Labor (SML) is an autonomous part of the Socialist Party, which is a revolutionary party. The Socialist Party is the British section of our international revolutionary organisation/party, the Committee for a Workers International (CWI). The CWI is present on all continents with official sections or groups in 54 different countries, with sympathisers in many others. The Socialist Party and SML are based upon a clear revolutionary programme, perspectives, strategy and tactics, and a separate revolutionary organisation.

The aim of the SP/SML and the CWI is to build mass revolutionary parties in Britain and throughout the world, and a mass International. The whole of working class history attests to the fact that the socialist revolution, which will be the greatest change in history and yet the most difficult, cannot be realised without the creation of mass revolutionary parties, the nuclei of which are in the affiliated sections of the CWI. The programme, the main documents and the decisions of the CWI which all affiliates accept, are democratically decided at a World Congress.

The need for a party flows from the position of the working class as it has developed in capitalist society. The working class is the most united class because of its role in production and society. The middle class is scattered, with its upper layers tending to merge with the capitalists, and its lower layers forced by large-scale monopolisation into the ranks of the working class. However, while the working class is the most united, it is still divided into many different layers: men and women, on racial lines, skilled and unskilled, young and old, etc. The ruling class throughout history has skillfully learned to play on these divisions in order to perpetuate its rule. A revolutionary party is designed to overcome these divisions, to unite the working class for common objectives, the day-to-day struggle against capitalism, and its eventual overthrow and replacement with a socialist society.

The movement of the working class is, of course, the main motor force in history. But the history of the working class in the last 150 years shows that without the role of the 'subjective factor' - that is, mass party with a far-sighted Marxist leadership - the task of the socialist revolution will be stillborn. There have been many opportunities for the working class to take power in the 20th century which have been lost because of the absence of a mass revolutionary party and leadership and the conscious counterrevolutionary role pursued by the Stalinists and the social democrats. In 1918 the German workers could have taken power, as could the Hungarian workers in 1919. Other examples of where the absence of a mass revolutionary party and leadership led to

Party, and its leadership, primarily Lenin and Trotsky. This party was based upon the ideas of democratic centralism. In essence, this means the fullest possible internal discussion and debate, both orally and in the written form (access to the internal bulletin) and, at the same time, the carrying out of commonly arrived at decisions by the whole organisation.

However, today the capitalists and reformists, both left as well as right, have linked the idea of 'democratic centralism' to the experience of Stalinism. It is, therefore, better now to use the term 'democratic unity' to explain the character of the CWI and its different national sections or parties.

The conditions which we face today in Britain, Scotland and elsewhere, are not those of Russia in 1917. The democratic rights of the members must be safeguarded at all times, but whether the democratic or centralist aspect of 'democratic centralism' predominates depends upon the concrete situation. In this period the pace of events and our ability to openly organise allows even more democratic freedom of discussion and debate.

The character of the internal regime of a revolutionary party is shaped to some extent by the developments in society and the labour movement. In the period following the collapse of Stalinism in the 1990s, there was a challenge, particularly from the new generation, to anything which smacked of 'authoritarianism' and which gave the appearance of being undemocratic. A certain hostility to anything which is 'organised', and particularly if it has a 'top-down' approach, is a feature of the outlook of the new generation. This was linked with a more 'spontaneous' approach and a concentration on single issues, usually organised through umbrella 'networks'. This was to some extent a favourable factor for us because it opened up, amongst this new layer, a preparedness to discuss ideas with many travelling into the ranks of our organisation. But the underlying assumption of all these movements is that a general, 'broad', loose movement is capable, by itself, of defeating the attacks of the capitalists as well as enhancing the position of the youth and the working class.

This mood has undoubtedly spilled over at certain stages into the ranks of our organisation. This has sometimes meant that the perception of our organisation as a clear, distinct, revolutionary organisation - a party, albeit a small party - has become blurred in the minds of some comrades. Compelled to undertake activity of a 'united front' character, the role of our party, its special, distinct character, and differences with other parties, can be lost sight of unless there is a constant effort on behalf of the leadership to delineate our position with regard to other organisations and trends on programme, perspectives, strategy and tactics.

Paradoxically, the flexible approach which we have adopted towards the idea of a new mass workers' party can have a negative effect on our ranks unless there is a clear perception of the difference between mass reformist, left reformist or centrist parties, and a Marxist revolutionary party.

We have emphasised, particularly in the name-change debate, that we have a dual task in this period. We

have, on the one side, the task of rehabilitating and popularising the ideas of socialism, redeveloping socialist consciousness and, at the same time, the building of our revolutionary party. We also have to raise and campaign for the establishment of a new workers' party. We also have to engage in united front type activity in this period. Examples are the 'broad left' activity in the trade unions and also in the struggle to save free education. We have a long history of such work: in Liverpool, in the poll tax, and in Scotland in the Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA). In the 1990s we have seen the collapse of the mass workers' parties into bourgeois formations and with it the collapse of the reformist left. It is, therefore, particularly difficult to lead broad movements particularly when they have a mass character - as with the poll tax - and, at the same time, develop, build and emphasise the clear differences between the broad formations and our party.

It is easier to avoid this danger when it involves single issues, like the poll tax, the battle against water privatisation, etc. It is more of a problem when the revolutionary party works in broader formations of a general political character such as the SSA, particularly when we constitute the overwhelming majority of the active forces involved. It is quite easy for the perception to grow, both on our periphery and within our ranks, that it is 'easier' to join the broader formation whose programme appears to be close or similar to our own.

That is not the end of the matter. We possess separate perspectives, strategy and tactics for the building of mass parties on a national and international scale. Above all, the internationalist character, the affiliation of SML and the Socialist Party to the CWI, cannot be blurred. Even in those circumstances where we enter broad formations we must maintain our party press, separate branches, finances, etc.

This does not preclude us building broad formations - either the SSA or a broad party. But it would be absolutely fatal to give up, to weaken, or to accept measures, no matter how well intentioned, which would have the effect of dissolving into a broad formation, the distinct character of our revolutionary party. It is absolutely essential that separate branches of all those who subscribe to the CWI should meet and discuss on a weekly basis and seek to recruit members to the CWI.

There is no once-and-for-all tactic for building the revolutionary party. In the past we have been compelled to employ a variety of tactics: entrism, open work, faction work in broad formations. We do not preclude fusions with organisations where principled agreement on programme and perspectives is achieved. Flexibility and variety in methods of work will undoubtedly be required in the building of mass formations of the CWI. But at all times the consciousness of a separate revolutionary organisation or party must be engendered in the minds of our members by the leadership. Where we work in broad formations it is essential that we meet separately and regularly, preferably on a weekly basis, to discuss the way forward, to collect dues, and to recruit to our party.

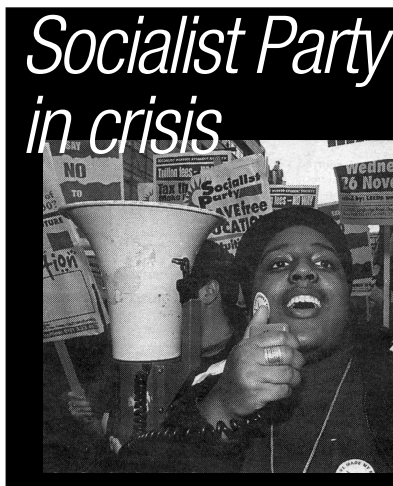
## What we fight for

- 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.



All over bar the shouting?



defeats or lost opportunities for the working class are: the revolutionary upheavals in Italy in 1920, the 1926 general strike in Britain, the Chinese revolution of 1925-27. In Spain between 1931-37, Trotsky commented that not one but 10 revolutions would have been possible if a mass party and a clear revolutionary leadership had existed.

In May-June 1968, power could have been taken by the working class in France but for the leaders of the Communist Party and Socialist Party. In Portugal between 1974-76, the pressure of the revolutionary masses compelled the taking over of 70% of industry. *The Times*, then the most authoritative organ of the British capitalists, commented that "capitalism is dead" in Portugal. They had, however, failed to reckon with the counterrevolutionary role of Mario Soares, the leader of the Socialist Party, which, together with the false policies of the Stalinised Communist Party, derailed the revolution.

Only once, in Russia in 1917, did a consciously organised working class take power and carry through the socialist revolution. This would not have happened without the existence of a revolutionary party, the Bolshevik

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Simon Harvey of the SLP

# Rix win boosts Scargill

**T**he election of Dave Rix as general secretary of Aslef, the train drivers' union, has underlined the potential for Socialist Labour to widen its support and influence in the trade union bureaucracy despite its anti-democratic regime and lack of grass roots activists. The unexpected ousting of incumbent Labour left Lew Adams should prompt all honest trends in the workers' movement to reassess their dismissal of Scargill's party.

Comrade Rix is a former member of the SLP NEC who resigned after attending only seven executive meetings. Nevertheless because he is a 'Scargillite' the bourgeois press got into a panic about the whole affair. It has been quite some time since so much attention was devoted to what are normally routine union elections. Victory for "Scargill's man", screamed the front page of *The Daily Telegraph* (May 7). The *Financial Times* headline of the same day read: "Hard left ousts rail union chief" and claimed that the "Aslef ballot could herald fresh industrial conflict". *The Guardian* went straight to the point: "Scargill party takes rail union leader's scalp."

While comrade Rix's election is a shot in the arm for Scargill's project, it also points to a space which could widen as the trade union bureaucracy is further compromised by Blair's 'third way' social consensus with big business. You do not have to do much in terms of workers' rights and pay to stand well to the left of the existing leaderships. While Scargill and his allies will be able to capitalise on Rix's triumph, it seems that the outcome owed more to an anti-Adams vote than a positive endorsement of the SLP. Comrade Rix defeated Adams in a 55%-turnout, second-round election by 4,558 votes to 3,357. Significantly, Adams received 45.1% in the first round compared to Rix's 23.9%.

While the bourgeois press has been unusual in its candour in recognising the importance of the poll, the pro-Labour left is at sixes and sevens. Predictably, the *Morning Star* - supposedly favouring openness after its recent factional war - led the story as "Rix rejects merger claims: Leeds official beats Adams in Aslef poll". Comrade Rix's political affiliations are mentioned only in passing. In *Tribune* (May 8), John Blevin claimed that the vote would whet the appetite of those wanting to break the sacred union link, with the definite implication that this was not a good thing. He echoed Adams' lament that he was particularly disappointed that he had lost the election to an SLP member because "as a consequence our union will not now have the same relationship with the Labour government". Adams, regarded as a Labour left, is a friend of deputy prime minister Prescott and thus, in good old Labourite fashion, 'has the ear' of government.

Other elements of the pro-Labour left look sillier, especially those who recently resigned from the SLP be-

cause it was supposedly irrelevant. Martin Wicks and Lee Rock of Socialist Perspectives, more economic and union-oriented than most, must feel particularly foolish. Then there is Workers Power who on past form would, if they had any relevance in Aslef, have campaigned for Adams against Rix, perversely in the name of being with the majority.

SLP democrats, revolutionaries and all partisans of the working class should welcome comrade Rix's success. Within the SLP itself it was a morale-booster, as our modest local election results were coming in. Comrade Bob Crow, assistant general secretary of the RMT, will no doubt be greatly heartened, as he eyes the top spot in his own union's forthcoming election this autumn. Clearly Reclaim Our Rights will gain greater authority, despite Rix's relative isolation on Aslef's executive.

The Aslef result in itself will not automatically produce SLP membership growth, but it does point to a thin layer of left union bureaucrats articulating their membership's discontent through the SLP's official language of state socialism. Nevertheless a major strike led by an SLPer could yet bring us a wave of recruits.

The bourgeois press has invented a Crow-Rix-Scargill axis. Yet despite Scargill's well known support for industrial unionism, it is significant that comrade Rix did not stand on a programme which included organising unions along industrial lines. Comrade Rix has been making all the 'proper' noises an incoming general secretary should to reassure con-

servative members and warn off other union leaders. He said: "I don't intend to be the last Aslef general secretary. Aslef will continue into the next millennium as a strong and independent union." Merger rumours have been rife, ranging from a Scargill-

**D**ave Rix's election as general secretary of Aslef has thrown the bourgeois press into apoplexy. The reason is not hard to find. Just about every media commentator has read the last rites over socialism and dismissed trade unions as relics of a bygone age. Then out of nowhere comes a leading member of the Socialist Labour Party who deposes John Prescott's confidant and creature, Lew Adams. What rubs salt into the wound is that Adams had to face an election because of Tory anti-union laws that were supposed to stop candidates like comrade Rix. Laws incidentally that the Labour government refuses to repeal and trade union leaders such as Adams refuse to fight.

The bourgeois press are heavily hyping the SLP connection and implying that some conspiracy is being hatched by Arthur Scargill and SLP



Dave Rix (left) with Lew Adams: Prescott's man deposed

servative members and warn off other union leaders. He said: "I don't intend to be the last Aslef general secretary. Aslef will continue into the next millennium as a strong and independent union." Merger rumours have been rife, ranging from a Scargill-

ite triple alliance of the NUM, RMT and Oilc to a TGWU takeover of both the RMT and Aslef.

All this underlines the fragile nature of the SLP as the party of left trade union leaders that Arthur envisages. Now rid of the 'nuisance' of many SLP

revolutionaries (as a result either of the McCarthyite witch hunt or of moralistic walkouts), Scargill must get down to the 'serious business' of keeping the peace between fractious, naturally sectional and, in practice, reformist trade union tops ●

## Opportunity for rank and file

### An Aslef militant looks at the reality behind the defeat of Lew Adams

**D**ave Rix's election as general secretary of Aslef has thrown the bourgeois press into apoplexy. The reason is not hard to find. Just about every media commentator has read the last rites over socialism and dismissed trade unions as relics of a bygone age. Then out of nowhere comes a leading member of the Socialist Labour Party who deposes John Prescott's confidant and creature, Lew Adams. What rubs salt into the wound is that Adams had to face an election because of Tory anti-union laws that were supposed to stop candidates like comrade Rix. Laws incidentally that the Labour government refuses to repeal and trade union leaders such as Adams refuse to fight.

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members within the rail unions. All the papers have suggested that an alliance will be made between Aslef and the RMT and a campaign of political industrial action launched. Unfortunately all this is just fantasy. Comrade Rix's success owed nothing to his SLP membership, which was not mentioned in his election address.

Rix won due to the anger felt by drivers at the way Adams had been instrumental in forcing through productivity changes against their wishes - for example through 'driver restructuring initiatives' (DRI) agreed with the new private operators. Although these deals gave drivers a large increase in basic pay, a sizeable portion was not reckonable for pension purposes. The working week, although reduced to 37 hours, involved shifts of up to 12 hours. 'On call' was introduced and 'lodging'

(compulsory stay-overs between shifts) came back. Adams was also blamed for the defeat of the 1995 industrial action over pay when he ignored a ballot result rejecting a renewed offer and accepted terms worse than what had been tabled before the action started.

There is also growing concern with the relationship between Adams, Prescott and Richard Branson. Aslef was praised by the government earlier this year for going into business with Branson to form Millennium Drivers, a company set up to train new drivers for the private operators. Profits are to be split between the two. While Adams turns Aslef into an employer, Branson has started to show his anti-union credentials within Virgin Trains. Senior conductors (guards) at Birmingham who have been active in or supporters of the RMT and who will not be pushed around, are told to apply for redundancy or they will be targeted for dismissal. Drivers applying for vacancies at Manchester who have any record of trade union activity have been re-

jected out of hand. One of them was told by a manager that Virgin did not want any "Jurassic Park drivers".

The election of Rix however does represent a major change within Aslef. Comrade Rix was well known as a leader of the unofficial left opposition and was a star performer at conference, responsible for many of the progressive policy decisions taken. He is a member of the SLP and was elected onto its first NEC. Comrade Rix has been heavily influenced by 'official communism' and has been a long-standing supporter of the *Morning Star*. He has been the main negotiator within Regional Railways North East and was responsible for producing one of the best DRI deals, containing safeguards on working hours and 100% pensionable pay.

Dave Rix has promised a lot, not least a more robust attitude to negotiations and towards the anti-union laws and this government. Aslef drivers will be expecting him to deliver on these promises when he takes office in January. The rank and file must organise to make sure he does ●