

Victory to the Indonesian masses!

*Picket the Indonesian embassy
Grosvenor Square, 5pm, Saturday May 23
Called by the London Socialist Alliance*

Indonesia in revolt

The masses are gaining a sense of their own power

Indonesia stands on the brink of democratic revolution. President Suharto, who has ruled the archipelago for three decades since coming to power in a bloody counterrevolutionary coup, has been forced to resign on May 21.

His replacement by vice president BJ Habibie leaves the regime intact. But the ruling elite can no longer rule in the old way.

The masses, spurred on by weakness and division at the top, are defiant. Student demonstrations are being swelled with support from the urban poor. The military is beginning to show signs of splitting - both from above and below - with troops openly fraternising with demonstrators. The masses refuse to be ruled in the old way.

This upheaval has roots both within Indonesian society and beyond. Clearly, the economy has suffered more than others from the crisis in the Asian financial system. The steep price rises on fuel, electricity and transport forced by the IMF's emergency \$40 billion bail-out provided the immediate spark. Yet to reduce this political crisis to the sudden economic slump is to miss the point entirely.

For the past two years, the pro-democracy student movement has been growing. It is explicitly against the Suharto regime and encompasses other democratic issues such as self-determination for East Timor. The July 1996 crackdown against the newly formed revolutionary Peoples' Democratic Party and the more moderate Indonesian Democratic Party certainly led to the swelling of the ranks of the student movement. The fact that the PDI was led by the daughter of former president Sukarno, ousted by Suharto in 1965, ensured that events were given wide coverage and confirmed the anti-democratic nature of the regime in the minds of the mass of the population.

For over two weeks now, the student demonstrations have begun to spill onto the streets. The regime's strategy had been to contain them on the campuses. But the shooting dead on May 12 of six peaceful demonstrators from Jakarta's elite Trisakti University made that impossible. The action by the military - whether or not instigated by one faction of the military trying to discredit another, as some speculate - was the turning point. At this moment the students won the leadership of a large section of the population.

Rioters began to loot. Suharto, attending a G15 meeting in Cairo, was forced home. Yet on his return he dithered while Jakarta burned. All sections of Indonesian society recognised that the nation's politics were at the crossroads. Revolution had now become possible. Action by a committed mi-

nority had become a mass movement. The regime is splitting, the masses are demanding radical political and social change. The hated dictator Suharto going is not enough. So must his undemocratic constitution.

The gravity of this situation for world imperialism was recognised by the G8 leaders meeting in Birmingham last weekend. Where for years a blind eye was turned to the dictatorship, there were now demands for Suharto to resign, Madeline Albright being the latest. Yet imperialism faces a dilemma. Because Indonesian society was systematically depoliticised by Suharto's so-called 'new order' regime, no popular alternative leader is ready in the wings. Politics is being reclaimed by the people who are steadily learning their own power to effect change. Sops from the regime - such as the rescinding of price rises or even Suharto stepping down - now only spur the masses on, whetting their appetite for a new beginning.

What we are seeing is a rising mass movement in a maturing pre-revolutionary situation ('pre' only in the sense that a frontal - ie, armed - assault on power would at the present time be premature). Such a situation can be resolved positively or negatively. The way forward, for the classes and strata of Indonesia, is unclear, not least to themselves.

A crackdown now, favoured by some factions in the military, could well compound existing splits. Yet the movement for change is by no means fully conscious. All sorts of programmes are competing and are being tested.

The lessons for not only the Indonesian masses, but for ourselves, will be rich. No matter what the outcome, Indonesia will never be the same again. History is in the making. Its forward surges, its backward slips, its heroism and its sacrifice - all are being driven from below.

Wednesday's mass demonstration on the 'National day of awakening', which marks the birth of the nationalist struggle against the Dutch 90 years ago, went ahead throughout the country, despite being called off in Jakarta by the 'leadership' for fear of bloodshed. The students still occupy the parliament building, determined to remain until the regime goes, despite increasing intimidation from sections of the military.

Rumours that generals may be prepared to 'do a Tiananmen' have been instigated. The present army chief, Wiranto, is supposedly a dove. His rival Subianto, Suharto's son-in-law, is supposedly a hawk. Yet so far the military has remained intact. Nevertheless splits in the regime continue to grow.

Much to the shock of the military the speaker of the parliament had



From now on consciousness is key

joined the call for Suharto to resign. Such divisions at the top can be used to the advantage of those below.

Without doubt the emerging revolutionary movement is spontaneously democratic and leftwing. From now on consciousness will be key. Marxists must organise themselves and merge with the movement. In that way the workers can be formed into a class and become the hegemon of the democratic revolution.

As the elemental movement unfolds, people will be hungry for ideas and answers to the crisis. A positive way forward will be sought. How did Suharto stay in power for 30 years? Why did the west support him? What about the Chinese-Indonesians? The East Timorese and national self-determination? The role of the military? And the IMF? All these matters - in fact the entire basis for present Indonesian society - are thrown into question by the struggle to oust the regime.

And there are dangers. The role of Amien Rais, leader of the 28 million-strong Muhammadiyah Islamic education and social group, has become crucial. He is attempting to place himself at the head of the mass movement. But on what programme? Should this reactionary receive any support from the revolutionary forces?

In an interview with the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (May 14) he went out of his way to prove his respectable credentials as a safe bourgeois alternative to Suharto: "Without doubt, the IMF is the only alternative. I could call it a necessary evil. We cannot get rid of the IMF if we want to overcome the crisis. But it is not of course a proud moment to be giving away our economic sovereignty to the IMF." Further he argues: "I say the United States cannot escape from its global responsibilities ... we need moral support from the US to push forward our democratisation efforts."

This fits well with imperialism's own general programme. Since even before the end of the Cold War, the US was

using its hegemony to replace anti-communist dictatorships with anti-communist neo-liberal democratic regimes. This occurred in Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, South Korea, the Philippines - even South Africa. In that sense, Suharto was a relic from the past and the corrupt regime is a barrier to the programme of the World Trade Organisation, the IMF and the World Bank.

Even if Rais is prepared to put himself forward for power, in whose interests will he take it? This raises the question of the current tactics being pursued by the Peoples Democratic Party. In a statement released on May 14, its central leadership makes this call: "To all pro-democratic figures; to Megawati Sukarnoputri [ousted leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party], Amien Rais, Budiman Sujatmiko [jailed chairperson of the PDP], Sri Bintang Pamungkas [jailed chairperson of the Indonesian United Development Party] and others. It is time for you to state your readiness to replace Suharto. This must be done soon, because Suharto is no longer wanted by the people and is ready to step down."

This tactic is in line with the PDP's call for a people's - read cross-class - coalition government. While this is supported by a call to "quickly prepare an independent people's council to replace the parliament and the People's Consultative Assembly [which 'elects' the president]", the inclusion of Amien Rais as part of a coalition has the danger of handing the initiative over to counterrevolutionary forces. The example of the Iranian revolution of 1979-81 and its slaughter by the clerical-fascist mullahs should not be forgotten.

While the muslim forces in this, the world's largest Islamic nation, are not of the same fundamentalist ilk, a nationalist beheading of the revolution at the hands of a figure like Rais would be only too likely.

It was the crisis of 1965-66 which saw the birth of Suharto's 'new order'. This came about in response to

an alleged coup being plotted by the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI). The PKI had three million members and was the world's largest non-ruling Communist Party. Its semi-Maoist 'official communist' programme hinged on support for the 'anti-imperialist' national bourgeoisie, personified by the then president Sukarno, who came to power through the anti-colonial removal of the Dutch after World War II.

The coup of 1965 seems to have been engineered by Sukarno himself to purge the right wing of his regime. This was supported by the PKI. The strategy turned into disaster. In a counter-coup to 'defend the constitution', Suharto seized power. In the months which followed, the PKI was all but liquidated. Up to 1.5 million people were killed in an anti-communist, anti-Chinese bloodbath.

Amien Rais sickeningly refers to this period as an example of 'people power'. In the *Far Eastern Economic Review* he stated: "Indonesia gained its independence through peoples' power. And again in 1966, when students mobilised forces together with the military to topple Sukarno, it was a form of people's power."

Clearly the PDP's call to give power to Rais would be fatal.

On other fronts, the national question in Indonesia will certainly come to the fore. While the Javanese majority in this, the world's fourth most populous country, is overwhelmingly muslim, there are substantial minorities, including the Chinese-Indonesians, East Timorese (who are largely catholic), West Papuans and the Sumatran Ache people.

For these oppressed minorities, the current situation could be their opportunity. Any consistently democratic programme must champion the rights of the nationally and ethnically oppressed.

In the heat of revolution, new politics will be born, old certainties jettisoned. While the old Maoist strategies have largely been discredited, not only in the Indonesian context, but in the nearby Philippines and in China itself, the fact that the PKI was a mass phenomenon means that its negative legacy will not have been completely erased.

One thing is certain: history is being made by the masses. Whatever the outcome - whether the regime can organise a stable transition, whether there is a bloody crackdown, whether the masses surge forward to pose and answer new questions - the world will begin to 'learn Indonesian', just as the Indonesian movement will be learning the lessons of previous revolutions. No doubt the Iranian revolution and the Indonesian crisis of 1965, having ended in slaughter, are being studied.

The Indonesian revolution has the possibility of setting the tone for the new millennium. Long live the Indonesian democratic revolution! ●

Marcus Larsen

Education, education, education

Communist University '98 is starting to loom on the horizon of the Party's annual calendar. This year, the venue is London and so we hope for greater input from other trends and organisations in the movement, a feature which always adds edge to the debate and accelerates the learning process. Over the coming few weeks, our Centre will produce more structured reading lists and suggested areas of discussion for participants in the school, especially newer comrades. Please ensure your place by paying your £25 deposit as soon as possible.

Controversy has recently surfaced around the question of Party education - or more precisely, around the theoretical development of our comrades. This question was taken up by comrades who have since resigned. What they advocated was a retreat from practical intervention in order to study. It was proposed to replace the *Weekly Worker* with a fortnightly paper - a move which would have produced exactly the opposite result of what was intended.

This question had raised its head before. From July to September 1992, members of the Communist Party were embroiled in a vigorous struggle around the meaning of democratic centralism. A minority charged that the Party leadership dominated the organisation as a bureaucratic clique, strangling initiative and causing the sclerosis of our entire group. Party education was also one of the banners these comrades fought under, demanding the task be approached with "far more seriousness and rigour" (J Conrad *Problems of communist organisation* London 1993, p53). What characterised this little group was also a retreat from the hard practice of the organisation - as comrade Conrad pointed out in an intervention that produced near apoplexy amongst them, "backsliding ... has characterised members of the minority" (*ibid* p37).

Now, it should be underlined here that I am not drawing a direct line between the two sets of 'oppositions'. The 1992 battle was a far more fraught affair and the personal intentions of individuals in that minority consciously malign, in my opinion. The comrades who have left recently have more honourable records of work and commitment to the Party - which made the manner of their leaving all the more wrong. However, the core of the problems besetting both has been the pressures of being a communist, the wearying demands that can be made on the individual. It is instructive for us therefore that 'Party education' has come up in a manner that - implicitly or explicitly - counterposed it to the practical work of the organisation. Of course, the comrades' complaints had a basis in reality. The demands of the Party's day-to-day interventions are exacting, especially for those comrades who have jobs to hold down. This is why events such as Communist University - which afford cadre the luxury of a week of intensive, full-time study - are so precious. But there is a deeper question touched on here - just how does a communist learn to be a communist?

A recent London seminar in our series studying Hal Draper's examination of Marx's theory of revolution uncovered an interesting insight into this problem. Far from Marx being a 'theoretician' who arrived at understanding through abstract study, throughout his life practical work and intervention also guided him, uprooted his previous theoretical positions and showed him new truths. As Draper writes: "Marx entered active political life at the age of 24 as a liberal democratic journalist, the champion of political democracy. This period opens at the beginning of 1842, when he wrote his first published political article, and closes toward the latter part of the following year when he became a communist. The development in between, which transformed him from a radical-democratic liberal into a revolutionary-democratic communist is centred around his work for the *Rheinische Zeitung* ...

"The transition was not primarily a philosophical process, nor one made through philosophical lucubrations. This young Marx is often portrayed as having come to a revolutionary understanding of society through a critique of Hegel's texts on the state and society. The biographical fact, however, is that he came to the content of his critique of the Hegelian view of the state through a year and a half of rubbing his nose against the social and political facts of life, which he encountered as the crusading editor of the most extreme leftist democratic paper in pre-1848 Germany..." (H Draper *Karl Marx's theory of revolution: state and bureaucracy* London 1977, p31).

Communist University '98 is an invaluable opportunity for comrades to reflect on and learn from the all-year-round work of the Party. Please confirm places as soon as possible ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Toeing Moscow's line

Just why Phil Watson wishes to have a go at us in his review of Phil Cohen's *Children of the revolution* (*Weekly Worker* May 7) I don't know, but I do take exception to his assertion that we at *Revolutionary History* adhere to "the morbid functioning of Trotskyist orthodoxy". If you actually read what Bruce Robinson wrote in *Revolutionary History* Vol 6, Nos2-3; or what I wrote in my article 'Cornering the chameleons' in that issue; my review of Kevin Morgan's *Against fascism and war* in Vol 3, No3; and my account of the 'International communism and the Communist International conference' in Vol 6, No1, you will see that we eschew this "Trotskyist orthodoxy" that views every single action by British Stalinists as being ordered by Moscow. This is not surprising because, as Bruce said, the idea that communist parties obeyed Moscow unvaryingly to the last dot and comma is a caricature raised by those aiming to present a 'native' communist tradition.

What I dislike about the revisionist historiography of the official communist movement (it is not limited to the British party) is this insidious attempt by some Eurocommunists and their academic pals to try and dodge the foul legacy of Soviet Stalinism by concocting a 'native' communist tradition. The fact is that on every major issue from the late 1920s onwards, the Communist Party of Great Britain loyally followed the Moscow line, and even when there was a little local difficulty, such as when Harry Pollitt disobeyed the Comintern's anti-war turn in September 1939, it was quickly ironed out.

As far as Bruce and I are concerned, the peculiarities of the CPGB during the Stalin era were merely matters of interpretation of the line sent down from Moscow. The shift to ultra-leftism in the late 1920s, the shift towards class collaboration in the mid 1930s, the uncritical support for the Moscow Trials, the turn against World War II in 1939, the turn to support it in 1941 and the abject class collaborationism that continued from then until 1947, the Cominform turn in 1947, the parroting of the slanders against Tito in 1948 - all this was common to all communist parties, not least the CPGB. Only after Khrushchev's partial denunciation of Stalin and the fall-out following the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 did cracks start to appear in the official communist movement, and Moscow's instructions were not adhered to automatically. This is not to say that members of the CPGB did not have qualms about the Comintern's line or about events in the Soviet Union, but what evidence do we have of any oppositional movements within the CPGB, as opposed to individual grumbles, between 1932 and 1956?

If anything, the British party was probably one of the worse for toadying to the Moscow line. Not one leading British communist took an oppositional stand against the Stalinisation of the Comintern. Unlike Cannon and Shachtman in the USA, Brandler and Thalheimer in Germany, Van Overstraeten in Belgium, Sneevliet in Holland, Treint in France, Chen Duxiu in China, to name just a few central committee members who became organised oppositionists, nobody above district committee level did so in Britain, and even then not until 1932. Some may see that as evidence of strength. I see it as demonstrating the low theoretical level of British communism.

As for the possibility of Arthur Horner disappearing in the purges, several important non-Soviet communist party figures did disappear, and there was going to be a show trial of many Comintern leaders. It may have been partly through concern about workers' reactions in the west that the purge was cancelled. But had it gone ahead and Horner was up before Vyshinsky as a 'wrecker', do you really think that Pollitt, Dutt and co would have

broken step with the Moscow line and championed a 'Free Arthur Horner' campaign amongst Horner's Welsh miners and other workers in Britain?

Paul Flewers
Revolutionary History

Proud achievement

Many thanks for the back issues of *The Leninist* and *Weekly Worker*, and the note which preceded them. It's fascinating to trace the CPGB's development since 1981 and, whilst you are obviously not in the business of gathering compliments, I think you can and should be very proud of what has been achieved. Looking over the back issues it is remarkable to think how distant the era of Soviet bloc/Cold War politics already seems; how profoundly the political context has changed, and how apparently complete has been the collapse of 'socialist' (albeit imperfect) consciousness amongst the working class.

That is not intended to sound pessimistic, as it surely presents new opportunities, and the 'end of history' is a long way off from where I am sitting.

I look forward to reading the back issues in more depth. Please find enclosed £30 towards the Summer Offensive. Not much, I know, but I only 'earn' less than £8,000 pa as a temp. I'll send more before the Summer Offensive ends.

Robert Field
Liverpool

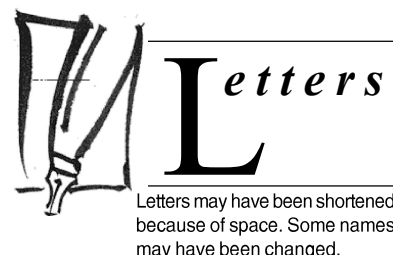
War-weary hack

Simon Harvey's article, 'Reclaim Our Rights delegate recall conference' (*Weekly Worker* April 23), supports the campaign against the anti-union laws like a rope supports a hanging man. The picture he draws of the campaign is marked by his own experience as a war-weary SLP opposition hack. To read the article one would suppose the newly united campaign for the repeal of the anti-union laws is a thinly veiled sub-committee of the SLP NEC open to some guests from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. In fact the new campaign offers an opportunity to build a rank and file movement against the anti-union laws. Despite Harvey's SLP-inspired gloom the Reclaim Our Rights conference did unite the vast majority of those campaigning to get rid of the anti-union laws, including the Free Trade Unions Campaign, the SLP initiators of the Reclaim Our Rights conference and the anti-union laws campaign initiative of the CWU. Harvey's article is silent about the FTUC or even CWU campaign, so let me explain.

The FTUC was set up by rank and file trade unionists from all over the country at a conference in Liverpool last July. The conference was called by Liverpool Union who were at the time involved in a strike to defend local steward Lol Duffy, sacked for fighting cuts. It was supported by all the major disputes at the time. Representatives of the Liverpool dockers, Hillingdon strikers, Magnet strikers, Critchley Labels dispute, Project Aerospace and Liverpool CWU all spoke and over 200 delegates attended. In short it was a major rank and file workers' event. Since its foundation the FTUC has campaigned within the workers' movement against the anti-union laws.

The CWU (the postal and telecom union, Simon) has a policy of scrapping the anti-union laws and replacing them with positive rights for workers. This policy was won by the left and militants in the union with a rich history of defying the laws. FTUC supporters on the CWU national executive were able to win the setting up of a committee open to all national unions to campaign for this policy - an important break from the old policy of hiding behind the TUC's non-campaigns.

The SLP set up the Reclaim Our Rights



conference after the FTUC and the CWU had launched their campaigns. That could have led to the sort of stupid disunity on the left seen in the Gulf War or the fight against racism, with competing campaigns doing each other down and providing the right wing with an ideal excuse not to support any campaign. Fortunately good sense prevailed and we now have a united campaign on a principled basis. Of course no such alliance will be easy, combining as it does different ideological traditions and different elements of the movement, but if we can build a mass campaign against the anti-union laws I think it is worth the effort. Needless to say it will not stop the AWL saying exactly what we think of the behaviour of the union leaders who support the campaign in the RMT, CWU or anywhere else.

As to Harvey's fascinating blow-by-blow account of the first recall Reclaim Our Rights meeting, he manages to miss the main point that this meeting was only to set up an interim committee to get things moving and to prepare for the delegate recall conference in July that will have the authority and the breadth to elect an executive, decide on policy and adopt a democratic constitution. It was in that context that I supported the temporary structure designed to aid unity and organise action until July.

Harvey and the *Weekly Worker* missed the point for two reasons. Firstly their lack of involvement in the campaigns against the anti-union laws and secondly a war-weariness in relation to their comrades from the old CPGB and SLP. The AWL have been central to campaigns and are not weary or pessimistic about the chance to build a rank and file movement against the anti-union laws.

Mark Sandell
Alliance for Workers' Liberty

Not contradictory

John Pearson (Letters, May 7) is formally correct to pick me up on my assertion that fiscal capping policies such as the South African 'growth, employment and redistribution' programme (Gear) *necessitate* spending cuts and attacks on the working class.

It is of course possible for taxes to be increased by more than the reduction in government borrowing, but in reality such capping policies are almost inevitably accompanied by a refusal to increase taxation. I omitted to state in my first article ('Capital backs Mandela' *Weekly Worker* April 30) that Gear also provides for tax cuts for big business - although this point was made in my second article, 'Delivering the masses', which coincidentally was published in the same edition as comrade Pearson's letter. Taken as a whole therefore, Gear does indeed *necessitate* public spending cuts.

I would however like to take issue with the comrade when he states: "The working class agenda should not be to argue for opposition to Gear, Maastricht, or any other fiscal policies of individual capitalist states or economic blocs ... Rather, we should be arguing that the capitalist class must pay for the universal working class demands for what we need in order to live anything like a decent life."

The two are not mutually contradictory. Comrade Pearson goes on to raise a package of demands to tax the rich and the capitalists. How can we support a fiscal policy in favour of our class without opposing those of the bourgeoisie? Of course communists are against Gear and Maastricht, just as we are against any attacks on the working class.

Peter Manson
London

Harpal Brar backs Blair on Ireland

Follow my leader

The Socialist Labour Party failed to pronounce on the British-Irish Agreement. The most recent edition of *Socialist News* (April-May) did not mention Ireland at all, despite the May 22 referendum and the evident approach of a turning point in the struggle against the British occupation of the Six Counties.

One of the SLP's national executive members is not so shy, however. The May-June edition of *Lalkar*, bi-monthly paper of the Indian Workers Association (GB), carries a long article on Ireland written in the inimitable style of its editor, Harpal Brar, who was elected onto the SLP NEC at the party's December 1997 congress. Not only does comrade Brar give 100% uncritical support to Sinn Fein/IRA, as its leaders begin to transform themselves into respectable bourgeois politicians; but he also lambastes the "so-called left", which is "totally useless and impotent in Britain". "To this category", according to comrade Brar, "belongs Mr Jack Conrad, the guru of a dozen-strong third class Trot outfit personating as the CPGB".

In contrast to the "Trot doom and gloom" of "this would-be Leninist" comrade Brar offers a "rigorous Marxist-Leninist analysis" of the agreement. In his six-page piece he manages to ignore the role of the working class almost completely. Instead, in his haste to avoid judging the accord - in the words of Martin McGuinness - "through the filter of unionism", he presents his appraisal in an unadulterated nationalist-republican light. Not content with quoting lengthy passages from the speeches of McGuinness and Gerry Adams, he uses Sinn Fein's nationalist logic and phrases himself.

Comrade Brar concedes that "the agreement just concluded, since it does not put an end to the partition of Ireland, leaves a lot to be desired". However, against the "mumbo jumbo" of "Mr Conrad," he wants to give an entirely positive and, when it comes down to it, unproblematic spin on Sinn Fein's historic retreat from principles it once regarded as sacred: "While not achieving immediate Irish unity, national struggle and resistance have forced Britain and the unionists to make important concessions, which not only make for an equal and honourable existence for the nationalist minority, but also provide the basis for advance in the direction of the long-cherished and ardently held desire of the Irish people for the reunification of their forcibly divided country."

This in fact is the dual argument of Sinn Fein. On the one hand, the concessions achieved have been so significant that they permit "an equal and honourable existence" in the Six Counties statelet - so much so that both SF and the IRA have now amended their constitutions so as to permit the participation of their members in the Northern Ireland Assembly - a move for them which *de facto* recognises partition and British jurisdiction.

It is clear that the SF leadership does not intend to make use of the assembly for purely propaganda purposes: Adams has his eye on power-brokering, if, as he hopes, his party gains the largest number of representatives from the nationalist community. In this scenario he will shore up and pressurise a Ulster Unionist Party/SDLP administration headed by David Trimble - unless of course Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party rides on the back of a protestant backlash

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"... just as he cannot bear to hear a word of criticism of Sinn Fein, so he views attacks on the authoritarianism and 'revisionist' *British Road* politics of Arthur Scargill and the SLP leadership as high treason"

.....

and replaces the UUP as the largest single party.

On the other hand, while preparing to take seats in the new assembly - in effect helping to run the Six Counties - SF claims this will be done in the name of "weakening the union". Of course many unionist leaders, most loyalist paramilitaries and just about the entire British establishment say that the opposite is the case. For example *The Daily Telegraph*, having previously condemned "the long-running farce called the 'peace process'" (January 10), abruptly changed its tune once it saw the 'propositions on heads of agreement' on which the final accord was based. Blair's plan, according to the *Telegraph*, "copper-fastens the union". So much so that, back in January, the paper fully expected SF/IRA to abandon the peace process altogether and resume its armed struggle.

The advantage of an as yet untried constitutional arrangement is that both loyalists and republicans can present it as serving their entirely opposite and contradictory aims (indeed it potentially could serve the aims of those committed to bourgeois legal forms - on either side of the divide). Nevertheless the reality is that while continuing partition is written into the agreement, the IRA is to end its armed resistance. Diplomacy is a legitimate tactic for revolutionaries, but how can it hope to succeed unless it has armed power and self-activating mass support behind it?

So does comrade Brar see the accord as leading to a *revolutionary* unity of Ireland, backed up by this combination of armed power and mass support? Far from it. He puts forward four reasons why the settlement will lead, slowly but surely, to a united Ireland.

Firstly, with "the abolition of the petty privileges of the protestant working class, the latter lose much of the material incentives that turned it into an aristocracy of labour", resulting in a reduction of "religious bigotry and anti-catholic fanaticism". A highly dubious proposition, in that the opposite could equally be the case. But it gets worse.

Secondly, according to our friend, "As cross-border structures begin to operate and bring the benefits of co-operation on a national scale, workers and capitalists alike in the unionist camp will fear less and less the prospect of reunification."

Thirdly, whereas in 1920 "the north constituted the industrialised part" while "the republic was characterised by near-absence of industry", today the "very opposite" is the case.

Therefore "there is much for [the northern bourgeoisie] to gain from economic and political integration with the south". Another extremely doubtful contention.

Finally, Britain is just itching to get out. It wants to free itself of its "subsidy of £2 billion a year". In addition, "The troubles in Ireland" tie up "a huge number of British army personnel, thus curtailing British imperialism's ability to attend to other hot spots in the world which threaten its economic interests".

The last three points are all arguments why the accord is in the *interests of imperialism and the Irish bourgeoisie*. They amount to the contention that conditions are now favourable for a peaceful, imperialist-led transition to a united, bourgeois Ireland. As if communists have the slightest desire to see such an outcome. We are not nationalists. We do not view a united Ireland as an end in itself. Inasmuch as nationalist struggles - peaceful or violent - aim to defeat the imperialist state, we support them *in this respect* unconditionally. Through the revolutionary fight for self-determination, in which the working class becomes hegemonic, the possibility arises for anti-imperialists to see the potential for their *self-emanicipation* - ie, the building of genuine democracy through the world struggle for socialism.

In other words, comrade Brar's uncritical tailing of Sinn Fein has led him into the bourgeois nationalist mire. But what if, as seems more than likely, a section of the republican movement forcefully opposes the accommodation of SF/IRA with the British state and continues to wage anti-imperialist struggle? Will he join with both SF and the state in condemning them? Will he back their physical elimination?

Comrade Brar lays into the *Weekly Worker* for its assertion that the agreement is "an imperialist-driven deal" (April 9), and for its observation that Sinn Fein "now thinks of Ahern, the SDLP and Clinton as allies in a pan-nationalist front" (April 16). Waxing lyrical about "the art of politics", he informs us that "Sinn Fein is in the real business of winning real power, and that requires winning allies, no matter how unreliable or how temporary such allies may be". So "unreliable" indeed that Ahern, the SDLP and Clinton are also allies of British imperialism. Can comrade Brar deny it? Or when Clinton poses for photographs with Blair at his side, when he joins with Blair in an appeal for a 'yes' vote in the May 22 referendum, is he secretly in opposition to the British plan for a British peace in Northern Ireland? Perhaps Blair is reluctantly following Clinton's lead as the US president obligingly pursues Sinn Fein's agenda?

The *Lalkar* editor also attacks "the unnamed writer" of the *Weekly Worker* article, 'For a republican boycott' (April 16), whom he assumes is a CPGB member. In fact the article was clearly headed, "Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group (faction of the SWP)", and did not represent an agreed CPGB position. On the basis of this article - and despite the call in its headline for a *boycott* - comrade Brar muddle-headedly writes: "The *Weekly Worker* is recommending that the nationalists should vote against accepting the agreement when the referendum is held on May 22!"

No, comrade, we did not side with Paisley, Thompson and McCartney in calling for a 'no' vote. Nor did we, like

yourself, follow Blair, Clinton, Trimble and Adams - not to mention the UVF and UDA - in recommending a 'yes' vote. We have made it clear in numerous articles that we were for a *boycott* of the referendum (we shared this conclusion with the RDG). Neither the 'yes' nor the 'no' option was acceptable to us as revolutionaries and democrats. To vote 'yes' was to accept the imperialist-sponsored settlement and continued British occupation. To vote 'no' was in effect to back the status quo.

Just as comrade Brar claims that SF's alliance with US imperialism is "temporary", so he pretends to believe that its abandonment of the bomb and the bullet is "for the time being". The truth is that Adams and McGuinness, aware of the virtual impossibility of an IRA military victory in the post-USSR world, are in the process of calling a *permanent* halt to the armed struggle and have opted for the more attractive vision of bourgeois respectability on an all-Ireland basis.

By the way, in this context comrade Brar seems genuinely unable to grasp the connection between the ending of SF/IRA's armed resistance and the new world situation following the collapse of the USSR. The removal of this major counterbalance to global imperialism has greatly weakened all forces of national liberation and permitted the negative resolution of revolutionary situations and world 'hot spots'. But that does not mean that the USSR was a positive force for human emancipation. There is no contradiction - except in the eyes of Stalin Society stalwarts like comrade Brar - in declining to mourn for the Soviet Union on the one hand and acknowledging that its fall has strengthened imperialism on the other.

However, the fact that many leaders of national liberation movements have - like SF/IRA - sued for peace in the conditions of the New World Order does not cause us "hurl abuse" at them, as Brar states. Perhaps he would like to give us an example of this alleged "abuse". We can hardly blame petty bourgeois nationalists for not being communists - although, judging by the *uncritical* backing offered by the comrade, perhaps the two are identical in his eyes.

And just as he cannot bear to hear a word of criticism of Sinn Fein, so he views attacks on the authoritarianism and 'revisionist' *British Road* politics of Arthur Scargill and the SLP leadership as high treason. Explicitly linking the SLP and Ireland, and opposing the struggle for communist clarity in both spheres, comrade Brar writes, referring to the CPGB: "These despicable creatures are doing everything in their power to disorganise the working class. Hence, for instance, their attacks on the Socialist Labour Party."

Apparently to criticise left reformism is "to disorganise the working class". Just as to point out the fatal inadequacies of petty bourgeois nationalism is for Harpal Brar the equivalent of "condemning the foreign victims" in imperialism.

As both his "rigorous Marxist-Leninist analysis" of the British-Irish Agreement and his uncritical support for Scargill make abundantly clear, there is no place for the *self-liberation* of workers in comrade Brar's 'socialist' master plan. According to his schema, the job of 'communists' is simply to follow the latest Great Leader - whether it be Gerry Adams, Arthur Scargill or JV Stalin ●

Alan Fox

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: May 24 - The dictatorship of the democracy - Marxism in 1848. For more details call 0181-459 7146. Manchester: June 1 - Reaction today, revolution tomorrow. For more details call 0161-798 6417.

■ Party wills

Forms are available for you to include the Party in your will. Write for details.

■ Brent SA

Galaxy News Box 100, 37 Walm Lane, NW2 4QU. Tel: 0181-451 0616.

■ Scottish Socialist Alliance

To get involved, contact PO Box 80, Glasgow G14 9QQ

■ Hillingdon hospital workers fight on

The Hillingdon strikers in west London, deserted by Unison, still need your support. Send donations urgently, payable to Hillingdon Strikers Support Campaign, c/o 27 Townsend Way, Northwood, Middlesex UB8 1JD.

■ 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.

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

■ Seeing red

A festival of theatrical dissent

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 and 8pm.

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

Red Room Conspiracy

An evening of art, entertainment and agitprop.

Sundays 8pm. Tickets: £4 or £2 (concessions).

SML liquidation into nationalist swamp

A bold step forward?

1) We are writing to express our disappointment at your response to our statement, 'Initial proposals for a new Scottish Socialist Party'.

(...)

4) As we indicate in a separate letter, we do not fully accept that our proposals came as a "bombshell". However, we do recognise that the proposals, if implemented, would signify a radical new turn for the forces of Marxism in Scotland - in effect, a 'Scottish turn, part two'.

5) Nonetheless, we believe that the proposals are entirely consistent with the traditions of Marxism and Trotskyism internationally. We are sure that the British EC would not dispute the fact that the history of the Marxist movement internationally is not solely a history of arithmetical progression. At different stages, fusions, mergers and amalgamations have been carried out in order to enlarge the active forces of socialism and to expand the influence of Marxist ideas.

6) The British EC acknowledges some of the historical examples that we have provided, including the example of the founding of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920.

7) However, the comrades then go on to present an over-simplified and misleading version of the story of the formation of the CPGB.

8) The comrades effectively gloss over the political differences that existed among the various groupings that came together to form the CPGB. The biggest of these forces was the British Socialist Party which, in turn, evolved from the Social Democratic Federation - which subscribed to Marx's economic analysis, but which Engels had described as "a sect which has ossified Marxism into a dogma". It had opposed strikes and denounced the trade unions as reformist organisations which diverted the working class away from the struggle for socialism.

9) Later, a section of the BSP leadership had supported the first world war. Even at the time of the formation of the CPGB, the BSP leadership was extremely weak politically, its weakness reinforced by the departure of its only leader of any real standing, John McLean, who characterised the BSP as "a heterogeneous mixture of anarchists, sentimentalists, syndicalists, with a sprinkling of Marxists". Leaders of the BSP included Cecil Malone, previously an active anti-socialist who just two years previously had been elected to parliament as a Coalition Liberal.

10) Other groupings which combined to form the CPGB included branches of the reformist Independent Labour Party; syndicalists from the Socialist Labour Party; and assorted sectarians and centrists (defined by Trotsky as those trends that are between reformism and Marxism).

11) When the new party was formed it had 5,000 members - a much smaller organisation proportionate to the population than the likely size of the Scottish Socialist Party that we have proposed.

12) It is true that the new party formally accepted the "programme, perspectives and statutes of the Communist International". But it is an oversimplification to suggest that what emerged was "a politically unified party on the basis of clear principles".

13) In fact, syndicalist and sectarian methods continued to hold sway for the first few years of the CPGB's ex-

We reproduce extracts of 'For a bold step forward' (from the Socialist Party's *Members Bulletin* No28, April 1998). It is the reply of the executive committee of Scottish Militant Labour to the Taaffe leadership (see *Weekly Worker* April 16). Clearly the battle lines have been drawn between a compromising and politically impotent Taaffe and the Scottish national socialism of Alan McCombes and co. Having failed to fight SML's unprincipled formation and thus abandoning the position of 'one state, one party', having conceded SML's programmatic turn to a break-up of Britain scenario, Taaffe is reduced to mere technical arguments in his desperate attempt to prevent SML formally breaking from the Socialist Party of England and Wales and in due course its Committee for a Workers International. The SML leadership are thereby allowed the luxury of posing as Marxists and Leninists as they swap British reformism for a Scottish version of Pilsudskiism

istence. Thus in the East Woolwich by-election in March 1921, the CPGB launched an abstentionist campaign, denouncing the Tories and Labour as "two of a kind" - even though Lenin and the Communist International had argued strongly for communist participation in the Labour Party. The CPGB even boasted that their campaign had cost Labour the seat (by 683 votes out of 27,000). This, of course, was at a time when Labour had never been in power; and when a radicalised working class was turning *en masse* to Labour. Numerous other examples could be cited to illustrate the political inexperience and weakness of the leadership of the CPGB in that period.

14) We have to ask the comrades to contrast the role of that leadership with the track record of the existing leadership of SML and to pose the question point blank to the British EC: "Do you seriously believe that the formation of a new party, led primarily by the existing leadership of SML (with 150 years' collective experience of the Marxist movement embodied in the eight-strong SML EC alone), will lead *unavoidably* (our emphasis) to the 'erosion of a principled commitment to the perspectives, programme and strategy of revolutionary Marxism'?"

15) Such extreme pessimism and lack of confidence in the leadership of SML stands out in dismal contrast to the approach of Lenin, Trotsky and the other leaders of the Communist International who worked with material in Britain and in many other countries which was far less experienced and far less tested and proven in action than the current leadership of SML. We will return to this point later in the reply.

16) The EC reply, we believe, artificially counterposes the concept of a revolutionary party to the idea of a broad socialist party in a rigid and undialectical fashion. First of all, there is no such thing as a chemically pure revolutionary party. There can be, it is true, at different stages of history small, tightly-knit, homogenous, Marxist organisations. Some of the international sections of our own organisation are precisely at this stage of development.

17) At the other end of the spectrum there have existed, and continue to exist, broad workers' parties which are, in effect, loose coalitions. The early Labour Party is perhaps the most clear example of such a formation; indeed, Lenin suggested that the British Labour Party was "not a party at all in the ordinary sense of the word".

18) However, in between these two polar opposites there can exist transitional formations in which the features of a revolutionary party and those of a 'broad socialist party' coexist side by side.

(...)

32) When the Communist International was formed with the enormous prestige of the victorious Russian Revolution behind it, a diverse range of formations gravitated towards it. These included the Norwegian Labour Party; the 500,000-strong Italian Socialist Party; the 150,000-strong French Socialist Party; the million-strong Spanish anarchist trade union federation, the CNT; and other large anarcho-syndicalist movements in Italy and France.

33) Of course, this was a revolutionary period where the Russian Revolution exerted enormous gravitational pull. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that the parties and organisations which came together to form the Communist International consisted of a diverse ragbag of Marxists, anarchists, syndicalists, left reformists, centrists, and ultra-left sectarians.

(...)

38) Yet all of these diverse formations, many of which were themselves awash with internal tendencies and factions, were welcomed into the Communist International. Few of them could be characterised as pure revolutionary parties with political cohesion on all issues of "perspectives, revolutionary strategy, strategy on the national question, tactical methods of struggle and methods of party building" (to quote from the EC letter). Most were broad parties with a mass membership and influence. Yet they were simultaneously, in a very general sense, revolutionary parties dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism.

(...)

40) This is not to argue that conditions in Scotland correspond exactly to the tumultuous decades of the 1920s and 1930s. We have come through a period of prolonged political stability - which will eventually make way for a rerun of the mighty class battles of the past. But we are still in a preparatory period rather than a revolutionary period. Consequently, the construction of a party of socialist revolution will be a more protracted process.

41) We do not pretend that we are on the verge of creating either a mass revolutionary party or a broad, mass socialist party in Scotland. The forces which we are working alongside and discussing with are relatively small, although not insignificant. However, there are general lessons to be learnt from the approach of Lenin, Trotsky and the leaders of the Comintern. Lenin warned of "communist vanity that claims to know everything and is too infatuated with itself" - and argued for engaging with forces outside the ranks of the communist movement.

42) Yet, paradoxically, the task of organisationally and ideologically delineating the forces of revolutionary

Marxism from other socialist currents was in the period 1919-1920 a much more crucial task than is the case today.

43) At that stage, with the battle lines being drawn across Europe between the forces of capitalism and the forces of socialism, strategic and even detailed tactical questions assumed life or death importance. It is precisely in a period of that character that the differences that separate revolutionary Marxism from other socialist trends take on potentially monumental significance.

44) This point was made very effectively by Peter [Taaffe] during the name-change debate in England and Wales last year. During this debate, the leadership of SML supported the name-change proposal from the outset. It is worth quoting one of Peter's central arguments in favour of the name change in detail, because the wider political points are highly relevant to this discussion:

45) "The 1930s was a period of intensified struggle between the classes when the choice before a number of countries was either revolution or counterrevolution. This was the case in Germany, Italy, France at certain stages, and in Spain. We also had the existence of the first workers' state, the Soviet Union, which, despite the Moscow Trials and the one-party totalitarian regime, still attracted the advanced workers through the existence of the planned economy. There was a broad socialist consciousness and a big layer of advanced workers who considered themselves not just socialists but revolutionaries and Marxists. Trotskyism's main task was to differentiate itself from reformism and Stalinism... The main task facing us now is to win support for a socialist programme and for socialist ideas generally." ('Name change debate' *Members Bulletin* No18).

46) Peter did correctly go on to say that we also faced the task of building a revolutionary party; however, in all of the written and verbal discussions during the name-change debate, the task of rehabilitating the basic programme of socialism was correctly given the strongest emphasis.

47) The British EC also promoted the idea during the name-change debate of building a "small mass party numbering tens of thousands, particularly in the next two, three or four years". This perspective was dismissed as ridiculously over-optimistic by opponents of the name change. However, although we are not in a position to judge exactly what the prospects are in England and Wales over the next two to three years, we can say that there is at least a strong prospect of building a 'small mass party' in Scotland during the next period.

48) Given the population differential, a party in Scotland numbering 2,000 would be the equivalent of a 20,000-

strong party across Britain as a whole. It is not pie in the sky to suggest that such a party could be built, given the looming political developments in Scotland and given also the central role which our organisation now plays on the left of Scottish politics.

49) However, we would have to add the proviso that there are two preconditions for accomplishing such a task: firstly, the unification of the existing forces of the Scottish Socialist Alliance (and, as far as possible, other socialist forces) into a more tightly-knit and cohesive party structure; and, secondly, the redirection of our existing apparatus towards the single-minded task of building such a party.

(...)

75) The British EC letter takes us to task for suggesting that our organisation has also "adapted politically and organisationally" to new conditions. We did not anywhere state that "we have abandoned key ideas which were at the heart of the Trotskyist tradition". That suggestion in the British EC letter is a misrepresentation of our position. We are not sure if the comrades are attempting to deny that "partly in response to external conditions, and partly because we have been more and more involved in the living struggles of the working class (we have) been forced to adapt politically and organisationally".

76) It is an indisputable fact that we have made radical political and organisational changes, especially in the past seven years. We changed our long-term orientation to the Labour Party and launched independent organisations fighting elections in Scotland, England and Wales. In Scotland we have made far-reaching changes to our policy on the national question. We have no need to be defensive about these changes: any organisation which does not exist in a state of rigor mortis will regularly adapt and change as conditions themselves evolve.

77) In the article, 'Future electoral strategy in Scotland' (from *Militant Labour Members Bulletin* No12), written in September 1995 - before the SSA even existed - we made the point: "There are important political divisions within the left which could not be overcome simply by declaring a new party. At this stage for example, groups like the Scottish Socialist Movement and Communist Party of Scotland are cautious about advancing a full-blooded socialist programme for Scotland. They are also inclined to expect that significant reforms can be achieved by a Scottish parliament. And, in addition, the national question will inevitably be a source of debate and contention within the left generally in Scotland."

78) Perhaps we were unfair in our political assessment of these comrades who are now our allies within the SSA.

Or perhaps they have shifted. But one point is clear: within the SSA there are now no differences of opinion on advancing a full-blooded socialist programme. Nor are there any illusions that Labour's devolved Scottish parliament will be capable of introducing radical reforms.

79) And on the national question itself, there is now general agreement. Our latest policy document which advocates an independent socialist Scotland with an internationalist outlook - and which appeared in a condensed version in the *Scottish Socialist Voice* - has generally been welcomed within the SSA and within the left generally. We have even had ex-Labour Party members joining SML on the strength of that document; and SNP activists moving into the orbit of the organisation, because they agree not just with the conclusions we draw, but with the Marxist analysis we provide on the national question.

80) With perhaps a few isolated exceptions, we believe there is today a much greater degree of political cohesion than was the case when the above article was written. And we should also add that the article itself predicted: "On the basis of experience, these organisations could be won to accept our analysis and be won to our programme. Ultimately a fusion may be possible, on a much more clear-cut political programme than it would be possible to agree at the present time," (*Militant Labour Members Bulletin* No12, September 1995).

81) At that stage, there was no opposition forthcoming from the British EC, which would suggest that either the comrades have changed their opinion on tactics; or that they are prepared to accept the possibilities of fusion, merger, etc, in the abstract - but as soon as the issue is posed concretely the comrades recoil.

82) We also have to pose the question: 'What is a revolutionary party in the present era?' Is it a party that describes itself as a 'revolutionary party'? Clearly that is not the case: neither the Socialist Party nor Scottish Militant Labour would meet that criterion.

83) In England and Wales, even the name Militant was dropped because of its aggressive connotations in the eyes of the broad mass of the public. The comrades also argued that the description 'revolutionary' in the context of Britain (although not in the context of France, for example, with its different traditions) would be even more ultra-left. Indeed, whenever Scottish Militant Labour has used the word 'revolutionary' in our paper or other publications, we have been taken to task by the British EC for posing our political aims in an ultra-left fashion.

84) Clearly, a new Scottish Socialist Party is not going to describe itself as a revolutionary party. And of course, no serious socialist or Marxist organisation would fail to declare its aim of achieving a broad base of membership and support.

85) Therefore, from a purely formal point of view it would be possible to conclude that we are dissolving the 'revolutionary party' in favour of a 'broad party'. But if the comrades were to examine the proposals in a more rounded out, dialectical way, they would surely draw radically different conclusions.

106) We also have to say that the comrades appear to have a light-minded attitude to the electoral possibilities that are posed. We can debate the exact wording of the original statement; frequently socialists - not just in Scotland - are accused of exaggerating the potential that exists. But what cannot and should not be disputed is the key importance of election results and successes in the eyes of the broad mass of the working class.

107) The comrades suggest that we are "gambling the whole future of our organisation on achieving a unified

platform". Leaving aside the wild exaggeration of the comrades, the fact is that "achieving a unified platform" is just one consideration out of many that we have to take into account.

108) A serious possibility is now presented of creating a sizeable socialist party in Scotland with significant forces, some trade union links, a clear revolutionary programme and outstanding electoral potential. That is the prize that we are fighting for in the short term. But in order to win that prize it will be necessary to display a certain degree of organisational flexibility, and to consider transitional arrangements which may not conform exactly to the recent norms of our International.

109) Specifically, we are proposing that, subject to political agreement with the other forces involved, we consider merging the apparatus of SML with the apparatus of the SSA and possibly of other socialist forces. It is premature to attempt to set out detailed criteria for negotiation at this stage, before we have even begun to seriously raise the general principle.

110) Of course, once we have established broad agreement to enter into negotiations, and when we know exactly who is prepared to participate in these discussions, we can then proceed to work out more detailed proposals as a basis for further negotiations. No one is suggesting that we write a blank cheque, to be filled in by our negotiating partners. At each stage, we would seek the agreement of the organisation before entering into any commitments.

111) On the other hand, the implication by the comrades that we should at this early stage, before the general idea has even been seriously floated, draw up a list of demands and preconditions would be completely counterproductive. Of course we can set out some general preconditions, most of which are self-evident in any case.

112) For example, the existing programme and policies of the Alliance will almost certainly be accepted as the political basis of a new Scottish Socialist Party - although we will probably want to insist on a more clear-cut policy on socialist independence, given the increasing intensity of the national question.

113) We would also insist on a proper branch structure which provided political education and coordinated campaigns, recruitment, fund-raising, etc. We would obviously also argue for tighter political cohesion than currently exists within the SSA, including a commitment to 'unity in action'.

114) And of course we would oppose the monolithic type of structure which has proven so disastrous for the SLP; instead, we should argue for a more open structure which, as well as allowing for affiliation of trade union organisations, will also guarantee the right of tendencies, factions and other groupings to exist and to produce their own publications and circulate their own material. Other aspects of the constitution, including internal elections, leadership accountability, and democratic policy-making procedures will also have to feature on the agenda of future negotiations.

115) These points can be further discussed and elaborated within our own organisation before and during negotiations. But what we are essentially

aiming to achieve is the drawing together of our existing internal organisation and the SSA - the organisation through which all of our public activity is conducted. To achieve that type of merger, it is likely that an organisational compromise will be required; we cannot realistically expect to impose the current structure of SML upon the new party, even if we wanted to.

116) And of course the fact that we have opened up this discussion flows from our conviction that that the current structure of the Alliance is inadequate to carry us forward into the next period.

117) Understandably, the comrades have expressed anxiety regarding the difficulties we have explained about setting affiliation to the CWI as a precondition of any merger. Yes, we can raise the issue in a general way, and have done so in initial informal discussions. But all the indications are that if we attempted to pose the question of affiliation to the CWI as a precondition for the establishment of a unified party, we would not get past first base.

118) This is not a question of disloyalty to our comrades internationally. The greatest disservice we could do to our comrades internationally would be to fail to grasp every opportunity to advance the struggle for socialism in Scotland. Lenin himself made the point clearly that the first task of any internationalist is "to strengthen the revolutionary forces in one's own country".

119) Nonetheless, we will make this point crystal clear: we have not at any stage proposed that the existing members of SML break with the CWI. In the original statement we posed one of two possibilities: either forming within a Scottish Socialist Party an organised formation (whether it be called a tendency, a platform, a society or whatever) which would be part of the CWI; which would promote the ideas, literature, etc of the CWI; which would ensure the continuation of at least the existing level of financial support for the CWI; and which would organise meetings, etc with CWI speakers.

120) The other alternative we posed, albeit in a roundabout way ("the new party would become the vehicle ... for maintaining British-wide and international links"), was that the new party itself may affiliate to the CWI. It is quite frankly bare-faced scaremongering for the comrades to suggest that "the document's proposal is really for the dissolution of our organisation and the detachment of our comrades from the CWI".

121) On the other hand, we have openly explained that the issue of international affiliations will pose difficulties for us at least in the short term. The British EC appear really unable to comprehend these difficulties. Instead of assisting us address them, the comrades pronounce - again in an extremely formalistic fashion - that this difficulty "precisely points to the underlying political differences that still exist".

132) At this stage, the CWI does not possess the authority in Scotland that SML possesses; nor does the Socialist Party. For a layer of activists who work closely with SML there remains a residue of suspicion of London-based political leaders. This in turn partly reflects attitudes and, in some cases perhaps, even prejudices - linked to the national question - which extend into all sections of society in Scotland.

133) We also believe it is necessary to challenge the comparison that has been drawn between the CWI today and the Fourth International and its international forerunners under the leadership of Trotsky.

134) It is true these did not involve mass parties in the way that the Communist International did in its early stages. Nonetheless, during the 1950s,

Trotsky's international organisation was the only anti-capitalist, anti-Stalinist revolutionary International - and it was headed by the most outstanding leader of the October Revolution, who had spearheaded the battle against Stalinism in the Soviet Union, had suffered ferocious repression, including the physical liquidation of his closest collaborators and members of his immediate family, and who was himself so feared by the international bourgeoisie that he was shunted from one country to another in exile.

135) The authority of such an International was clearly on a different plane from that possessed by the CWI today. Even then, as the British EC letter concedes, when the idea of a new party was posed in the USA in the 1930s, the Trotskyist CLA [Communist League of America] did not insist that affiliation to Trotsky's international organisation be a precondition for the merger. In fact, although Trotsky kept in touch with former CLA leader, James Cannon, the new merged party (the Workers Party of the United States) did not have any organisational connection with Trotsky's international organisation.

136) Moreover, there are many other historical examples of Marxist parties developing independently of any formal international affiliation. In the USA itself, under the Voorhis Act of 1940, any organisation linked to a wider international organisation was required to turn a list of all its members' names and addresses over to the government for publication - thereby opening up all members to reprisals by employers, fascists, etc. As a result, the American Trotskyist party - then known as the Socialist Workers Party - formally discontinued its affiliation from the Fourth International. Of course, that did not stop informal collaboration between the leadership of the SWP and the Fourth International.

137) Here in Britain our organisation evolved independently of any international organisation particularly in the period 1964 to 1974, the year that the CWI was formed. Even the Bolsheviks' international links were with the discredited and reformist Second International.

138) However, in case there is any misunderstanding we will repeat the point: we have no intention of "detaching our comrades from the CWI". What we are suggesting is that insisting on affiliation to the CWI as a precondition for the creation of a new party is in effect to erect a brick wall between SML and all other forces in order to satisfy formal protocol.

145) The comrades predict "outrage throughout the International" because we have made the point that "the idea has been posed of the new party itself having an open relationship with several or more internationals". The British EC letter inadvertently, we assume, misquotes this statement so that it reads: "The idea of the new party itself having an open relationship with several or more internationals has been posed in the longer term" (sic). This is not to quibble over words; the original statement actually goes on to say: "In the long term, a broader regroupment on the left in England and Wales and on an international scale could begin to resolve this dilemma."

146) The comrades are surprisingly silent on this critical point - therefore let us clarify exactly what we meant in the original statement and pose several pertinent questions. First, the idea of an 'open relationship' was not posed by us, but by others in the Alliance - precisely because they do not clearly understand the political differences that exist on the left internationally; nor do they understand the necessity for separate organisations which appear, at least on the surface, to have broadly similar aims and objectives.

147) In the past, as we indicated at the National Committee, the same point has been posed in relation to British politics. Peter himself has informally and tentatively pointed out that most ordinary workers would require a magnifying glass to discern the political differences between ourselves and the SWP. This in turn raises inevitably in the minds of many people moving towards political activity: why are these organisations separate and should they not be united?

153) Lynn [Walsh] in one of his contributions at the National Committee drew a comparison between the type of structure that we are proposing as a transitional compromise to maintain relations with the CWI and the so-called Fourth International Supporters Caucus. This point is repeated in the British EC letter.

154) We do not pretend to be familiar with the details of this organisation. And we accept that the type of structure that we are proposing would not simply be a continuation of SML. It would, in effect, be an extra safeguard to ensure the continuation of a formal link with the CWI and the Socialist Party until such time as a formal link can be established via the Scottish Socialist Party.

155) However, we believe that the comparison with Fisc betrays an obsession with organisational forms. The comrades appear to be suggesting that the source of the apparent disintegration of Fisc is its organisational character. Perhaps that is the case. But then again, perhaps it would be more productive to examine the political track record and outlook of the individuals concerned and compare them with the leadership of the SML.

156) These individuals are, in fact, notorious opportunists who in decades of political activity have failed to build anything. Their political adaptation to the methods of the leadership of the SLP has led these former self-proclaimed Trotskyists into playing the role of the SLP's in-house KGB.

181) Trotsky in the 1930s wrote that: "Whenever a movement enters a new higher stage, there are always elements who defend the past. A wider perspective frightens them. They see nothing but difficulties and dangers."

182) We accept that there are risks and dangers associated with this proposal as there are with any new initiative. But there are even greater dangers and risks involved in accepting the EC analysis: not least of which is the danger that we lock ourselves away in an organisationally pure prison cell. Yes, this would guarantee that we would remain uncontaminated by opportunism, reformism, ultra-leftism, etc; but it would also guarantee that we would fail to move forward and build the type of mass party necessary to defeat capitalism.

185) In the same article quoted above, Trotsky also said: "Long experience has shown that precisely when an organisation is ready to get out of the narrow alley into a wider arena, elements can always be found who have grown accustomed to their alley, know all their neighbours, are used to carrying all the alley news and rumours." He explained that they invariably justify themselves with terribly "revolutionary" and "principled" arguments.

184) The British EC has in the past, we believe, been prepared to accept and even initiate bold new tactics when the need has arisen. We are, therefore, appealing to you to withdraw your opposition to this proposal, campaign in support of the initiative within the British and international organisations and, on the basis of obtaining agreement from the organisation, assist us to work out the details of how this exciting new leap forward can be implemented ●

SSA conference

Glasgow City Halls,
Albion Street,
June 20, 10am - 4pm

CPGB fringe meeting
'Against separatism, for
workers unity'
Opening speaker
Jack Conrad

Manchester SA collapses

The collapse into bureaucratic cliquism of the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance, which has been apparent for several months, was consummated at the organisation's annual conference on May 16. At a meeting attended by 23 members, including representatives of the Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, International Socialist League, the Campaign for a Democratic Socialist Labour Party and the CPGB, the only protest against at the appallingly bureaucratic and abusive conduct of the meeting by GMSA's convenor, John Nicholson, came from CPGB and CDSLP comrades. By their silence in response to those protests, and by their abstention upon, or even positive support for, Nicholson's procedural and constitutional manoeuvrings, the comrades from the Trotskyist groups - without exception - were complicit in an anti-democratic charade.

Originally billed as an all-day event, the start time of the conference had been put back by three hours, at three days notice, by Nicholson. This decision, taken without consultation with steering committee members, was ostensibly to allow conference participants to attend a demonstration in support of striking careworkers in nearby Tameside. It prepared the ground however, once the guest speaker from the Green Party and the discussion on the convenor's report had been taken, for Nicholson to get away with suggesting that the "debates" on motions and amendments be restricted to one speaker on each side, with a time limit of *one minute*. The tyranny of the clock also became the excuse for a decision that candidates in elections for officers and steering committee should not be permitted to speak in support of their candidatures. Since nominations had not closed until the conference opened, no prior facility had been afforded either for circulation of election addresses.

Expressing his enthusiasm for the socialist alliances project, Spencer Fitzgibbon of the Green Party thanked the outgoing steering committee for the invitation to address the conference and looked forward to the forthcoming comparative discussions on Green Party policies and GMSA's 'Charter for socialist change' which the GMSA leadership was proposing as a priority for the year to come. Repeating his mantra that a fully implemented Green Party programme left no room for capitalism, he welcomed the fact that "socialism has been greening itself". Stressing his opposition to any suggestion that Socialist Alliances should eventually give way to a new mass workers' party, Fitzgibbon made known his preference for "coalition around electoral and campaigning activities". Although he omitted to explain why the Green Party had stood against socialist candidates in nine out of 11 city of Manchester wards contested by the SP, the SLP and the CPGB, Fitzgibbon insisted that the greens were not inflexible on electoral pacts. He reminded his audience of the greens' decision to stand down in the Rusholme ward, just a few years ago, after the then Militant Labour candidate, Margaret Manning, had issued a manifesto which embraced green positions, for example on opposition to the second runway at Manchester airport, and on waste incineration.

Steve Riley, of the CPGB, made the only direct challenge to the notion that a "greening" of the Socialist Alliance was required. We actually need a

.....

"The Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance has effectively now reverted to the proprietorial control of the small clique"

.....

"redding" of it, he insisted. "Although there are some socialists in the Green Party, there are many greens who are certainly not socialists. There are Malthusians, and those who see humanity only as part of an eco-system rather than as the centre of our project." It is spurious to pursue illusions about "class-free" politics, the comrade concluded.

Spencer Fitzgibbon must have been bemused to find that, after expressing green willingness to be "flexible" on electoral pacts (and no doubt thinking that this issue was one of the main reasons why the Socialist Alliance wanted to talk to him), there was a distinct lack of enthusiasm for electoral work amongst the majority of those present. Chris Jones, of Socialist Outlook, with customary brevity asserted that there had been a drift into electoralism at the expense of "campaigning". The emphasis should be very much the other way round, he suggested. Mark Catterall, of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, echoed comrade Jones's views. Neither of these comrades were honest enough to admit that the idea of the Socialist Alliance standing candidates in elections caused them problems because of their respective organisations' determination to continue to call upon workers to vote for the Labour Party. A string of 'independents', whom the author cannot resist likening to tired and oh so worldly-wise cynics, condemned the utter futility of socialists trying to create an independent working class electoral challenge. Steve Wallace, of the Socialist Party, stated that electoral work was important, whilst leaving us guessing whether he meant electoral work by the Socialist Alliance or independent Socialist Party campaigns. Only a comrade active in the Troops Out movement expressed explicit support for electoral work under the GMSA banner, before the opening discussion was guillotined.

Chris Jones then introduced a discussion on publicity. A regular bulletin for GMSA supporters had been produced during the last year. More recently, it had been decided to launch a magazine. A pilot issue, under the working title 'GMSA Review', had been produced in time for the conference, with the assistance of the office of Euro MP Michael Hindley. The review was intended to be an infrequent publication, whereas the bulletin was to continue to be regularly produced. There had been a major problem however, comrade Jones continued. The bulletin had functioned like an internal discussion document. This should not continue. The matter had come to a head at a recent steering committee meeting, over two articles from the CPGB which Jones thought should not have been pub-

lished. One of these was in opposition to an article written by Jones himself in which he propounded Socialist Outlook's 'stop Emu' position. The SO policy coincided with the consensual view of the GMSA, Jones asserted, whereas the 'Working class agenda' position on European integration, in the article written by John Pearson, was discordant with the consensus and polemical in nature. Similarly, an article by Steve Riley entitled "Left builds campaign against Labour", which described the challenges being conducted in this year's local council elections by the CPGB, the SLP and the SP, and which looked forward to a united GMSA campaign in next year's local and European parliament elections, was in contradiction to the steering committee's decision not to pursue the objective of a united electoral challenge this year.

The article should therefore not have been printed. At the steering committee meeting, Jones had proposed that articles submitted by comrades Pearson and Riley for the next bulletin should not be published because they would inevitably also be expressing minority and discordant views. Jones had been in a minority of one at the steering committee, but now returned to the attack. Only agreed GMSA positions should be published in the bulletin in future, he proposed. The infrequent review could be used for discussion purposes.

John Pearson, delegate from the CDSLP, condemned Jones's attempt at censorship and linked this controversy with Nicholson's attempt, in his convenor's report, to brand as sectarianism the expression of minority views and attempts to draw out differences for debate. Comrade Pearson went on to detail the steering committee's recent decision to abandon a previous commitment to hold a debate on Europe in favour of hosting a public meeting with a homogeneous platform of speakers, chosen by Socialist Outlook, who would all support the latter organisation's views on Europe. It was the latter behaviour which was truly sectarian, comrade Pearson suggested.

Nicholson once again guillotined the discussion. He had another, far more effective, way to resolve the problem of dissidence - exclusion! He proposed a revised 'structure' for the GMSA, which contained two major changes from that adopted by the previous conference just 10 months earlier. The condition for GMSA membership had previously read, "Any individual, organisation or group which broadly agrees with the 'founding statement' (as updated), and agrees to abide by the structure, may join the GMSA". The revision was to add "and the anti-sectarian way of working involved" to the conditions which must be abided by. The structure introduced in July 1997 had entitled all affiliated organisations to a seat on the steering committee. Now Nicholson proposed to delete this provision, replacing it with the right of affiliated organisations to make nominations (without limit of numbers) for 10 steering committee places.

The CPGB proposed two amendments to Nicholson's amended structure. These would have reinstated the automatic right of all affiliates to a steering committee seat and inserted a statement in the membership conditions clause, to the effect that no organisation would be excluded for expressing its political beliefs. Nicholson proposed that there be just one speaker for, and one against, the CPGB amendments, with a one-minute

time limit on the speeches. When John Pearson objected that Nicholson was misleading the meeting as to the status of his own proposals, which were also amendments to existing practice, the latter brushed aside the point of order with an injunction that the authority of the chair be respected. Pearson refused to give way, only to be ordered to "shut up" by Nicholson, who was by now increasingly resembling a manic Gordon Brittas. Trotskyists, who have sometimes boasted of political careers based upon fighting bureaucracy, sat in silence.

Steve Riley used his one-minute speech to implore comrades to remember that the Socialist Alliance was a unity project. Unity could not be achieved by the suppression of minorities and the exclusion of organisations who sought to argue for what they believed to be the truth. The deletion of the formula for reserved steering committee seats would inevitably mean that the large organisations - or secret caucuses - would monopolise the steering committee, thus discouraging smaller organisations from joining the alliance. The CPGB amendments were defeated by 10 votes to six, with only the two International Socialist League comrades adding their support, and seven comrades abstaining.

Nicholson then called the officer elections, firstly that of convenor, where the candidates were himself and John Pearson. He relinquished the chair only after comrade Pearson had pointed out the potential conflict of interest. Pearson went on to request that the candidates be allowed to speak in support of their candidatures. This was rejected by a majority of the meeting. Nicholson was re-elected as convenor by 19 votes to four. By the same majority, the incumbent editor, Steve Riley, was removed in favour of his predecessor who had resigned the position halfway through the last year, John Clegg. The steering committee elections followed. Twelve nominations had been submitted for the 10 non-officer positions. The political affiliations of the 12 were not announced as their names were read out. John Pearson, CDSLP, and Steve Riley, CPGB, were the two nominees not elected. The incoming committee includes three SP members. One of these, Margaret Manning, did not attend a single committee meeting last year. Her 100% inactivity record earned her 16 votes. Of course, nothing prevents disunity as effectively as total inactivity! The AWL, SO, and ISL retained their seats, scoring the same maximum 19 votes as the eight 'independents', who are overwhelmingly from the founding group around Nicholson. A newly elected Labourite, Derek Clarke of the Socialist Movement, received 16 votes, as did the SP members. Clearly, Labour Party loyalty attracts a premium in today's Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance.

Steve Riley was granted one minute to propose the CPGB's motion seeking to commit GMSA to stand candidates in future elections, and to work for unity on the basis of a minimum platform approach. The motion was defeated by 11 votes to eight, with four abstentions. An identical vote took place on the CDSLP's motion seeking to commit the GMSA to fighting for an all-Britain federation of Socialist Alliances, and for the demand for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, and a united Ireland. 'Independent' Declan O'Neill's one-minute argument against this motion was to the effect that, if separation from the UK state was a good thing for Ireland, then it was equally so for

the Scots and the Welsh.

After an all too brief flirtation with the idea of striving for genuine socialist unity, through the affiliate structure, through an open press, and through a programme of debate, the GMSA has effectively now reverted to the proprietorial control of the small clique which initiated its foundation. The closeness of the votes on two motions addressing important matters of principle, however, shows that this group can only maintain its grip in small meetings, and with the active or passive collaboration of opportunists within the revolutionary left.

Nicholson identified his group, in a report produced for the first national meeting of Socialist Alliances, held in Coventry on October 5 1996, as "individual socialists, not in any grouping, who had been formerly Labour Party members, councillors, and activists, for many years." Others had been leading comrades in the Defend Clause Four - Defend Socialism campaign, alongside Arthur Scargill. "We proposed the first draft of what became the GMSA 'founding statement', to the secret meeting in the London hotel which, instead imposed the unconsulted and exclusive SLP constitution upon us."

Thus Nicholson's group were self-confessed SLP *refuseniks*. They had jumped aboard the left unity bandwagon that had been put into motion by Scargill when he broke with the Labour Party in October 1995. Their fortunes have shadowed those of the SLP. As the latter has waned, so has the GMSA. They have experienced the same difficulty as did Scargill in handling genuine proletarian democracy and revolutionary politics.

The 1997 'democratic' relaunch of the stagnating GMSA was, in essence, a reaction to the bureaucratic degeneration and witch hunting which had occurred in the SLP. This was soon followed by excitement over the prospects presented by the Hugh Kerr/Ken Coates break from Labour, and at overtures received from another MEP, Michael Hindley. The clique resolved upon moves to forge a greater coherence as an organisation. Plans were laid, in close consultation with Hindley, for a magazine. A Socialist Alliances internet site appeared. The previous snail's pace rate of progress in forging an English federation of socialist alliances was accelerated, with the calling of conferences at Walsall in November 1997, and then Coventry in March 1998. A fillip was given by the entry into the socialist alliances of a significant number of SLP deserters.

But Kerr and Coates did not come over. Adopting instead the role of arbiters, they founded the Independent Labour Network, whilst still making themselves available as speakers at Socialist Alliance public meetings and offering subsidies from their Strasbourg largesse to set up SA publications. Simultaneously, the largest left group participating in the alliances, the SP, consciously stepped down its level of involvement. In GMSA, as in other alliances, only token attendance and participation have been forthcoming from the SP. The latter further decided, early in 1998, that its intervention in the May 1998 council elections would be under its own independent banner, rather than as part of a united Socialist Alliances platform. This gave confidence to Socialist Outlook and other Labourite groups involved in alliances, to try to deliver the death blow to the prospects of an SA-coordinated electoral challenges to Labour ●

John Pearson

From The Call, paper of the
British Socialist Party,
May 23 1918

The Irish 'plot'

The steps taken by the British government in Ireland last weekend could not have come altogether as a surprise to Ireland or to those who have been watching developments in the government's policy of imposing conscription on the Irish people.

The militarisation of the Irish government and the military preparations; Sir Edward Carson's letter to the press, in which he said that the government had "the clearest evidence in their possession that the Sinn Fein organisation is and has been in alliance with Germany"; ... Mr George Barnes' representation of Irish nationalism as "pro-Germanism", to be put down with a firm hand - were so many straws that served to indicate which way the wind was blowing. All were regarded in Ireland as attempts to throw dust in the eyes of her sympathisers in the Allied countries.

The arrest of the Sinn Fein leaders implies an accusation of complicity in the 'German plot' ... But what is the evidence? ... The Sinn Fein leaders have been arrested and deported, but there is nothing to show that any of them have had any connection with the alleged 'plot'.

So far the government has not even charged them with complicity, and a semi-official statement suggests that *such parts as can be published* of the evidence on which is based the charge of complicity between the leaders of the Sinn Fein movement and the enemy are being prepared, and will shortly be issued to the press.

All this lends colour to the assertion that it is not the government's intention to charge them or bring them to trial, but to use its unlimited and undefined powers under the Defence of the Realm Act to keep them indefinitely in custody under suspicion ...

The All-Irish Conference at Dublin, in the name of all sections of Irish nationalism - constitutional, Sinn Fein and labour - has issued a calm but determined protest against "an attempt to discredit and disrupt Ireland's united resistance to conscription" and "to poison the English minds against the Irish prisoners". It appeals "to all friends of human freedom throughout the world to inquire for themselves whether the present attempt to force civil war upon Ireland on the transparently false pretext of military expediency does not really cover a wicked plot of English politicians to relieve themselves of their broken pledges, in view of their profession that they have entered the world war with the object of securing self-determination for every other small nation in Europe".

We cannot believe that the British working class will be impervious to this appeal. Ireland is on the brink of the precipice. British labour can save her from ruin and disaster if it speaks and speaks now ●

Around the left Begging the question

The workers' and revolutionary movement as a necessity requires *political* openness and honesty. This means the fullest possible debate of all the possible nuances, ramifications and consequences of political ideas. It also means a frank discussion of our own strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of other left groups.

The Socialist Workers Party falls far short of what is required in this respect. Its instincts are to protect its members from any 'harmful' facts or influence. For instance, it very rarely admits in its publications that other left groups exist, let alone enters into debate or polemics with them. When it does concede, almost grudgingly, that there is leftwing life beyond the SWP, it does its confused best to smother this embarrassing fact. It therefore came as a welcome surprise when last week's *Socialist Worker* made mention of rival organisations in *two* articles. The first concerned the election of Dave Rix as general secretary of Aslef, while the second covered the May 7 local elections.

Last week Simon Harvey commented upon the fact that in the *Morning Star* report on the Aslef elections, "comrade Rix's political affiliations are mentioned only in passing" (*Weekly Worker* May 14). *Socialist Worker* does the same. The report states: "Rix is not a full-time officer of the union. He works at a depot in Leeds, is an Aslef branch secretary and a member of the SLP. At 35 he will become the youngest trade union leader in Britain when he takes up his post in January" (May 16). It completely overlooks however the important *state-electoral* political implications of Rix's election victory. The article prefers to keep the story within purely *trade unionist* political parameters.

It goes on to say: "Every trade unionist and socialist should welcome David Rix's victory as general secretary of Aslef. It is a long time since the left have won such a leading trade union position. Union leaders know that this is a significant victory. They also know that anger among ordinary union members is not just confined to Aslef. In every union members are demanding their leaders stand up to management and to this New Labour government. Rix must build on the confidence his election has given to union activists ... Rix should encourage solidarity action between the two unions. Joint Aslef and RMT meetings should be held in depots up and down the country."

All this is fine, of course. But what about joint SWP and SLP meetings? And why did the SWP not explicitly support SLP, Socialist Party, Socialist Alliance and CPGB candidates at the general election last May and in the local elections two weeks ago? These and many other questions are implicitly raised by the article - but not even vaguely addressed.

Similarly, in its coverage of the May 7 elections themselves, *Socialist Worker* admits the existence of other left groups, but the absence of relevant comment begs many questions. It states: "In some wards candidates to the left of Labour stood. Former Labour MP Dave Nellist, now a Socialist Party member, got elected to Coventry council with 53% of the vote. One SP candidate won 38% in Lewisham, south London. Another SLP candidate polled over 20% in Peckham, south



The SWP helped put him in power

London. Three 'Independent Labour' candidates were elected in Hull. But in most areas socialist candidates did not do as well as that and the results were uneven. The votes for left candidates reinforce the picture of people looking to the left of New Labour for answers as the government betrays their hopes."

The SWP, of course, advised workers to vote Labour on May 1 1997, knowing full well that the government would "betray their hopes". In the run-up to May 7 the SWP kept quiet about what its members should be doing. In the midst of the elections throughout England and a referendum in London *Socialist Worker* refused to take sides in the ballot box. Should workers continue to support the New Labour butcher? Or should they back the growing left challenge - albeit fragmented and uncoordinated?

Be that as it may, does the approving tone of this report of electoral interventions by left candidates signify a change of approach? Will the SWP now abandon its pro-Labourism and look to actively cooperate with other left groups? There are rumours that Chris Harman - editor of *Socialist Worker* and effective number two in the organisation favours SWP candidates. We are also told that he is in a minority position on its central committee. Nevertheless life is on his side. Each month that passes with New Labour in power increases the deep stresses and strains within the SWP's leadership. Sooner or later something will give. A split or fragmentation cannot be ruled out.

Either way we look forward to the day when SWP members join us in putting forward a working class alternative at the ballot box ●

Don Preston

Summer Offensive '98

Raising sights

New pledges totalling £680 were made during week two of our eight-week fundraising drive, including from two comrades in the North West who are taking part in the CPGB's Summer Offensive for the first time. Being low earners, they have understandably begun with very modest initial targets. But the first step is the most important, setting us off in the right direction.

Independent working class politics requires independent working class money.

By participating in the Offensive, we are accepting personal responsibility for reorganising the mass Communist Party which our class needs in order to sweep the anti-human capitalist system of exploitation and oppression into the dustbin of history. Having taken such a momentous decision, comrades can set about learning how to do the job most

effectively.

Collectively we are not new to the task of political fundraising. Those who begin now do not have to start from scratch. There are many fundraising skills developed over 15 years of Summer Offensive campaigns which can be passed on.

As anticipated, voluntary workers at the Party's printshop have raised their initial cautious pledges by £1,000. Together with the new pledges, this brings the total up to £13,380 - still only two thirds of our £20,000 target by June 29. Monies in this week include £403 from North West comrades, £250 raised by the *Weekly Worker* team and £495 from the printshop, bringing the week two total to £2,628. Only 13.1% of target after 25% of the campaign period! Time to get busy, comrades ●

Stan Kelsey

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1918

Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

Simon Harvey of the SLP *Encouraging returns*

The May 7 local elections reveal some interesting patterns for those who want to challenge Blair's New Labour from the left. We can say that the left made no overall breakthrough. All sitting socialist councillors lost their seats. However, Dave Nellist of the Socialist Party/Socialist Alliances in Coventry, with long-standing local support as a former Labour MP, was elected as a councillor. This was an excellent result.

Nevertheless there was no dramatic increase in support for left candidates as a whole, and some votes for the SLP, the SP or the Socialist Alliances were distinctly discouraging. Yet other results hint at an untapped, albeit uneven, electoral discontent with New Labour.

Another point we can note is, apart from limited local factors and individual personalities, there was little difference between the Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party. Comrades standing on a principled revolutionary minimum programme, such as those from the CPGB, did not achieve noticeably worse results.

In London, some results for the SLP were encouraging. Harpal Brar, who retained his deposit in the general election, secured 606 votes (26%) in Northcoate. Other returns in Southall, where the SLP stood eight candidates, included 480 (13%) in Mount Pleasant and 11% in Glebe ward. Everywhere we stood in Southall, we came second to the Labour Party. No mean feat.

In the London borough of Newham the SLP fielded eight candidates. We campaigned vigorously in two wards and as a result Tawfique Choudhury received 758 votes and Ann Brook 553. Votes were lower in wards where only a leaflet was distributed.

Tony Link, sitting councillor for Hither Green, Lewisham, failed to retain his seat, gaining only 237 votes, which represented around 10% in a three-seat contest. In other areas, it was clear that the more comrades pitched into work, the higher the vote. In Southwark, the SLP stood in three wards. In two, where comrades were no more than paper candidates, results were 88 and 184 votes. In the more targeted Friary ward, our three candidates polled 265, 262 and 248 votes.

The SLP contested 16 of the 22 wards comprising Barnsley Metropolitan Council. Interestingly, in an arrangement resulting from local cooperation, the Socialist Party stood in two of the six remaining wards. As our Barnsley candidates included NEC member Anne Scargill, I can only hope that this represents a break from Arthur's previous sectarian insistence that there should be no electoral pacts. Either way, it is a positive development.

The turnout was only 20% in Barnsley, yet the SLP managed to

attract a total of 1,633 votes - 6.5% of the poll in those wards. Good results were obtained by Joy Yoxall in Brierley (176 or 12.8%) and Steve Logan, who came second in Ardsley (129 or 11.5%). In the Worsbrough ward, where Anne Scargill recently stood in a by-election, Terry Robinson received 244 votes, or 15%, also coming second to Labour. Comrade Scargill herself won 103 votes for the SLP in Hoyland West.

The Socialist Party contested Wombwell North, where Mike Forster polled 66 votes (7.1%) and Wombwell South, where Ruth Waller attracted 124 votes (7.3%). It is interesting to note that results in terms of percentage were just about the same for the SP and SLP.

It is certainly encouraging that socialists are receiving such reasonable results. Especially in a period where Blair's popularity remains unprecedentedly high for a government a year into office. Once his fortunes begin to ebb, we are well placed to capitalise on these modest returns. What is vital now is for socialists, communists and revolutionaries to debate and determine in practice the programme needed to achieve working class advance. This cannot be done through lowest-common-denominator, populist manifestos, where we claim to be able to make a better job of running local councils than the bourgeois parties. We need to contest elections on a revolutionary platform, seeking to win workers themselves to fight for what we need.

■ Adams cries foul

Lew Adams, defeated general secretary of the train drivers union Aslef has cried 'foul' over the result of the recent ballot. Adams claims that Socialist Labour's Dave Rix, who won by a 1,200 vote majority, has broken the union's archaic rules - by openly campaigning for election!

Adams and his supporters on the Aslef EC have resorted to consulting 'my learned friends' in an attempt to overturn the result. The charges against Dave Rix are that he produced and circulated 'unofficial' circulars: namely, 'don't vote Adams' stickers; that he took time off from work in order to campaign; and, the most heinous crime, that RMT members were also advocating a vote for Rix. This last allegation is an attempt to bring into play the SLP factor and the alleged conspiracy with Bob Crow, RMT national official and SLP member, to merge the two unions.

The Aslef EC was to have met on Thursday May 21 to decide its position on the election result and to make a choice between backing Adams or affirming the democratic decision of the membership. Any attempt at overturning the result must be vigorously opposed ●

No to 'sentimental anti-imperialism'

The fanfare surrounding the 'Group of Eight' meeting in Birmingham last weekend saw Tony Blair being treated as some sort of hero. According to *The Guardian*/Jubilee 2000 alliance, he could be relied upon to pull out all the stops to win G8 agreement on debt relief to the 'third world'. Not surprisingly then, her majesty's minister Clare Short got a standing ovation when she addressed the church-organised, "60,000"-strong 'human chain' around the G8 meeting. They came to support New Labour, not to threaten New Labour. So do we have a case of an imperialist government recognising its 'responsibility' for world hunger and misery?

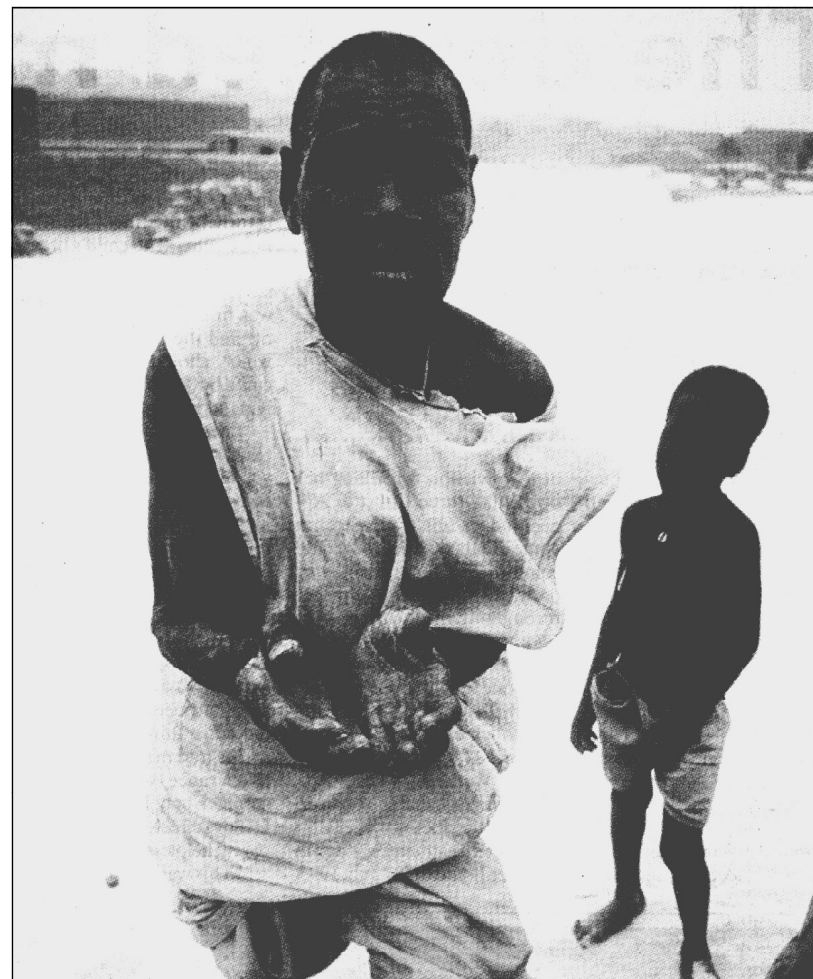
Hardly. New Labour and Blair are peddling sentimental 'anti-imperialism' for the sake of cheap popularity. The G8 agreed statement was more honest about why debt relief is on its agenda: "Globalisation has the power to bring immense economic benefits to all countries and people. But the Asian financial crisis has revealed that there are potential weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the global financial system" (quoted in *The Guardian* May 18). Capitalism is not in good shape. There is a consensus amongst the 'experts' of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank that financial crises and therefore political crises are to be expected with increasing frequency.

The debts of the most undeveloped countries as such are not the problem. Economically they are peripheral. Debts allow the world capitalist metabolism to extract the surplus labour from these countries, but they also represent a collective burden. Credits were given in the main for political - ie, anti-Soviet/anti-communist - reasons. Kleptocracies like Mobutu's Zaire were rewarded by the west. Hence the masses were robbed twice over. First by the regime. Second by debt repayments. Financial crisis turns into a revolutionary crisis however.

The much celebrated 'Mauritius mandate' of chancellor Gordon Brown attempted to ease the burden - and therefore crisis potential - of the 'heavily indebted poorer countries' (HIPC) by cancelling debts and advancing new loans. Only six countries have so far been declared eligible. This extra money is, like all IMF financial 'aid', linked to an austere economic programme which includes cuts in social spending, wages and public investment and wholesale privatisation.

It is of course workers and the poorest who lose their jobs and suffer under such programmes. It is they who go hungry from the axing of subsidies on staple foods. It is they who cannot afford health and education. Such neo-liberal programmes are fundamentally inhuman. They serve dead labour, not living labour.

But with the support of *The Guardian* and the Jubilee 2000 campaign Tony Blair is able to sell British in-



His rulers - not their debts - are the problem

volvement with such schemes as acts of altruism. *The Guardian* ran a week-long campaign on 'new slavery' and published a 'special eight-page pull-out' with the evocative title, 'breaking the chains'. And of course there was a long interview with Blair who insultingly told us: "It's about taking the values of the left - social justice, solidarity, community, democracy, liberty - and recasting them and reshaping them for the new world" (*The Guardian* May 15). Short likewise talked of how, having lost an empire, Britain had at last found a role in working for justice in the 'developing' world. Syrupy notions no doubt heartily endorsed by Jubilee 2000 (an amalgam of 70 liberal and 'third world' organisations, which takes its name from the primitive biblical idea of a 'jubilee' every 50 years when debts were cancelled). The campaign claims to be for "economic justice", not charity (quoted in *The Guardian* May 15).

Try to define "justice". That is the problem about arguing with such abstractions - there is no single valid definition. Everybody believes in humanity, love and of course justice as long as they can have their own versions. Nobody considers themselves champions of falsehood, hate and injustice.

Arguing with moral abstractions means substituting a material analysis of social conditions with what Engels described as an "eternal truth"

- a feature of 'sentimental socialism', just as much as 'sentimental anti-imperialism'. Engels wrote that "from a scientific standpoint, this appeal to morality and justice does not help us an inch further; moral indignation, however justifiable, cannot serve economic science as an argument, but only as a symptom" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 37, p320).

The danger of adopting sentimentalism lies mainly in its denial of historical materialism - the rejection of the fact that societies have always been changed through class struggle. Class struggle, which humanises the exploited, is labelled by such pious moralisers as an expression of 'hate'. 'Love' negates struggle. 'Humanity' negates class. We are all the same.

Of course it is an 'injustice' that 18,000 people starve to death every single day. But if gut feeling is not linked to a real analysis, the response to this injustice is the abstract demand to "cancel the debts". Ignoring the fact that this is the programme of a section of capital and that the main beneficiaries of such debt relief would be the ruling cliques who leech off the backs of the impoverished masses - not the masses themselves.

The question is not 'will the debts be cancelled?', but *who* will cancel them: international capital, or the people themselves through revolution ●

Kathrin Maurer