

Indonesian regime fails to buy off masses **No turning back**

A week is a long time in politics. For the tottering ruling regime in Indonesia, the past seven days must have seemed an excruciating eternity. As they try to divert the burgeoning mass revolutionary movement into safe constitutional reform, splits and schisms are emerging above. It is time for the masses to regroup, debate and move forward.

Suharto has gone. The hated dictator who systematically depoliticised Indonesia through cronyism, corruption and nepotism has stepped down to prevent a popular uprising against the entire 'new order' regime, which came to power in an anti-communist bloodbath three decades ago. It was obvious that the withdrawal of support from the US State Department was a crucial factor in the timing of Suharto's resignation. Yet it is clear that his replacement, former vice president Jusuf Habibie, personifies the regime's continuation.

The 'reform' cabinet that Habibie unveiled on May 22 is stacked with Suharto stooges. Only the most unacceptable figures have been removed, such as Suharto's daughter Tutut and his billionaire crony and golfing buddy, Bob Hasan. If anything, the military's role is strengthened. The ministers of defence, home affairs, security and political affairs, information and transmigration are all military men.

Habibie's problem is that his government is seen as a stop-gap administration by almost everyone: from the US state department, to *The Guardian*, and from Islamic leader Amien Rais to the students. While announcing a range of limited reforms, his political goal seems to be his own personal survival as the real power struggle amongst the ruling elite begins.

All the changes announced so far remain incredibly vague. They include a suggestion of electoral reform. However, the new president has stated his desire to remain in office until the end of Suharto's term, which is in 2003. Habibie has said he may allow the formation of new political parties. He has legalised the unofficial Indonesian Prosperity Labour Union (SBSI) and released its leader, Sri Bintang Pamungkas. Other prisoners have also been released, but those who most threaten the regime's continuation remain inside. Xanana Gusmao, leader of Fretilin, the East Timorese resistance movement, is still imprisoned. As are political prisoners from the 1965 counterrevolution. Eight leaders of the illegal Peoples Democratic Party (PRD) have been in jail since 1996. A government spokesperson has indicated that such people are not to be released.

Habibie is committed to the IMF's restructuring package drawn up in response to the financial turbulence in Asian markets. No doubt some elements will be eased in an attempt to buy off mass resentment. There are concerns in the bourgeois media that the masses' response to the economic and political crisis may spread to other affected countries. Let us hope they all catch the Indonesian 'disease'.

The other plank of the Habibie 'reforms' is a supposed commitment to curb the economic privileges of the Suharto clan. This has already affected lucrative deals. The contracts to supply Jakarta's water for the next 25 years, finalised by Suharto's son without any tendering process, have been scuppered. One of the contractors was to have been Thames Water. Arms contracts must now also be up for question. With the UK government up to its bloody neck in supplying weapons to this regime, a key focus for any solidarity movement here must be the role of British imperialism in the region.

As expected, a close look at Habibie's personal financial empire shows he has not been doing too badly out of the regime himself. More than 80 Habibie family companies have stakes in sectors ranging from construction to real estate, chemicals, transport, telecommunications, farming and engineering. While Indonesian law prohibits direct business holdings by government leaders, this does not apply to family members.

Most important of these companies, the Timsco Group, is headed by the new president's younger brother, Timmy Habibie. Also involved are Habibie's sons, Ilham Akbar and Tereq Kemal, along with younger sister Sri Rahayu Fatima and various in-laws. Nephew Didit Ratam is tied up with the Suharto family in oil and gas exploration.

The move by the regime to head off the mass movement seems to have bought it some time. But at what cost? The whole credibility of the past 30 years is called into question. Merely changing the president will not sate the masses' hunger for change. There has been no substantial shift in the way the country is ruled and people are crying out for more. Most common is a call for the stripping of Suharto's wealth. But where will the demands end? As every concession is given, so in the eating grows the appetite of the until now quiescent masses.

While for the moment the movement may have lost some steam, no one believes that it is over. Attempts to divert it into safe constitutionalism will not succeed easily.

A space has opened up for mass revolutionary ideas. There may soon be the opportunity to stand candidates in what will undoubtedly be phoney elections. Revolutionary organisations would have to consider carefully whether to put up candidates or boycott such a poll. It would depend on the momentum of the mass movement.

But any opening up of legal opportunities should in no way divert - on the contrary it should serve - the practical drive to arm the working class and prepare it for insurrection. A revolutionary situation is either resolved through revolution or counterrevolution. While it has not yet arrived, the decisive moment is approaching.

At present 'the democracy', the movement itself, seems largely spontaneous. No clear differentiation of class forces has emerged. Everyone called for Suharto to go: Clinton and Albright, the head of Golkar, the ruling party; Amien Rais; and the students. Government forces and purported reformers are aware of this and are at pains to prevent a conscious element taking a lead.

According to a report in the *Green Left Weekly*, newspaper of the Democratic Socialist Party in Australia (May 27) during the occupation of the parliament, moderate student leaders "set up security to check that people entering the parliamentary compound had student ID cards. This was carried out with the agreement of the armed forces on guard at the parliament." Such a move was to prevent more radical people and their ideas influencing the occupation.

The report continues: "A statement on behalf of the People's Democratic Party (PRD) was read out to the students, [yet] moderate activists tried to hinder the distribution of PRD leaflets calling for the overthrow of the government through a people's uprising."

On the other side of town, a self-appointed, 50-strong 'reform' committee, calling itself the Peoples Council, has been established to act as 'watchdog' in relation to the Habibie administration. It is full of 'new order' types, and includes Amien Rais. Other figures are: Emil Salim, a former Suharto economic adviser and minister; retired general Rudini; Islamic scholar Nurcholish Madjid; lawyer Adnan Buyung Nasution and academic Sudjana Sjaafei; Arifin Panigoro, a leading member of Golkar; Frans Seda, a former minister of finance; and Muhammad Sadli, another Suharto economist. Clearly a putrid lot.

Splits at the top are likely to deepen over the coming period. Armed forces

chief Wiranto has just sacked his two main rivals in the military, including Suharto's son-in-law. No one believes Habibie will be able to contain either a power struggle at the top or rebellion from below. He is there to buy time.

For perhaps the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War we are witnessing a genuine mass democratic revolution. The Zapatista uprising in 1994 may have reminded us all, not least US imperialism, that revolt was not only still possible, but immanent in the very system. However, that movement did not grip an entire country, let alone threaten to export itself across a very fragile region.

Regimes in Malaysia, South Korea, Burma and beyond are clearly worried. The Chinese government blocked the live CNN broadcast of Suharto's resignation.

What lessons to learn, what way to move forward? The only visible leftwing group with a national programme and organisation in Indonesia is the PRD. It has strong links with the Democratic Socialist Party in Australia (once affiliated to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International). While small at present, the PRD's orientation to the mass movement is likely to see it grow substantially. All manner of other left groupings and programmes are likely to be thrown up as the regime is forced to give concessions.

Given its influence with the PRD, of concern is the DSP's abandonment of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution in the early 1980s in response to the victory of the Sandinistas and other Latin American struggles. The DSP comrades now seem to favour a two-stage theory for the underdeveloped world. This should sound warning bells for us all - Trotskyite or non-Trotskyite.

Even so, it would be patently stupid to dismiss the PRD, a party only formed in 1996. A solidarity movement in Britain will need to engage with it. Yet it must be clear that solidarity entails the right to criticise. Solidarity cannot be diplomatically tailored to the needs of one organisation such as the PRD. Especially given its lack of revolutionary clarity.

The PRD currently calls for the overthrow of the regime and its replacement by a constituent assembly. But recent pronouncements point to confused thinking. A statement released after Suharto's resignation sets out seven action points: "1. withdrawal of the 1985 five repressive political laws [allowing only three parties]; 2. abolishing the dual role of the military; 3. the accountability and trial of Suharto; 4. nationalisation of

Suharto's and cronies' companies; 5. nationalisation of the wealth produced by corruption; 6. holding new elections which are multi-party, free and democratic; 7. freeing of all political prisoners."

In a recent article in *Green Left Weekly*, 'What kind of transitional government?' (May 27), Edwin Gozal, Asia Pacific representative of the PRD, calls on Indonesians to reject Habibie as president and to push the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), the Indonesian upper house, to hold an extraordinary session within one month. The MPR is the hand-picked body which appoints the president. This call falls far short of the immediate demand for a constituent assembly and fails to reflect the mood of the most militant sections of society.

Further the article says: "If the MPR refuses to hold an extraordinary session, the PRD calls for a general election be held within three months. This general election would have to be supervised by a transitional government composed of the different forces and individuals which have and are playing a critical role in the struggle against the dictatorship. They include the students, workers, urban poor, human rights activists and radical academics." This is a call for the formation of what the PRD calls an Independent People's Council - in short a constituent assembly. The PRD is agitating for such a body to implement its seven action points. Yet it wants the MPR to initiate it.

Of course, tactics for day-to-day struggle on the ground are difficult to appraise from such a distance. But a programme relying on organs of the Suharto regime such as the MPR - which only a few months ago re-appointed him for a five-year term - alongside the formation of a constituent assembly seems jumbled and opportunistic. While subjectively the tactic may be designed to further expose such conciliatory leaders as Rais, the danger is that if such a programme were popularised, it could easily be taken on board by the 'new order'-dominated Peoples Council or some other counterrevolutionary body.

It is crucial that a solidarity movement in Britain not only delivers material support to the Indonesian mass movement, but acts as an inspiration for our own struggles. The Indonesian revolution shows us what is actually possible once the masses start to move. It points a way forward in the worldwide struggle against imperialism, oppression and exploitation. There are lessons for us all in this carnival of the oppressed. ●

Marcus Larsen

Welcome move

The announcement by the Socialist Workers Party that it now intends to enter the field of electoral politics should be welcomed throughout the workers' movement. Leading member Lindsey German told an SWP council meeting of Sunday May 17 that the organisation is "in a position to put forward class politics and stand candidates on a class basis" in "elections to the Scottish parliament and other elections in the future" (*Socialist Worker* May 23).

The SWP is the biggest organisation to the left of the Labour Party. Its decision to stand candidates against Blair's party is a positive break from the automatic pro-Labour vote it has advocated for so long. Inevitably, this relatively large group - that has previously sealed its comrades off from the rest of the left behind a wall of sullen sectarian hostility - will be opened up to new arguments, debates and pressures. Whatever the subjective intentions of the leadership, this 'Scottish turn' creates fluidity and an important opportunity for the theoretical and political clarification vitally needed amongst revolutionaries as a prerequisite of principled unity.

The Socialist Alliances and other left organisations willing to fight Labour at the ballot box should immediately approach the SWP both at a local and national level in a call for joint work and united platforms. However, we should not be surprised if in the short term the SWP attempts to maintain its disdain for the rest of the revolutionary movement. It is indicative that *Socialist Worker's* short announcement of this new turn does not even mention the other organisations that are already regularly fighting in this field. Yet if it is to maintain any sort of credibility, the SWP will have to try to hammer out agreements with other groups, particularly in Scotland.

This will create its own pressures, of course. Indeed, it is already quite amusing to watch reality obliquely reflected in the pronouncements of leading SWP cadre, the only ones currently allowed to think. Thus German warns the rank and file that, while "we can look big in some workplaces and on demonstrations ... elections are not the best area for us"; and that "we have no idea what vote we will get". This warning of potentially small polls sits a little uneasily with comments elsewhere in the German article that "a significant number of people are dissatisfied with [Labour's] performance". Similarly, the rest of *Socialist Worker's* report of the party council (consisting of delegates from all SWP branches) is replete with bubbly talk of SWP branches that have "doubled in size" and of "massive interest in the ideas of Marxism".

Leading Scottish member Chris Bambery - introducing the main session on 'Blair one year on' - is a little more downbeat. He admits that the period can be "frustrating for socialists in Britain" in comparison with other parts of the world. But even he suggests that, while "we can't offer mass strikes" to new recruits, there is a smouldering "anger against Blair", a "discontent [that] was ... shown in the local election results".

But if all this rumbling anger with Blair and New Labour is finding an electoral expression in a situation where there apparently is a "massive interest in the ideas of Marxism", why is the leadership preparing the members for small votes?

These types of discrepancies in the SWP schema will become more glaring as the organisation tests its strength via the ballot box and against the tide in bourgeois society.

Yet, given its infamously authoritarian internal regime, how will it resolve these contradictions without blowing apart? The turn has not been preceded by any debate. It is simply announced to an almost apolitical membership.

The majority of the SWP are actually constitutionally banned from thinking or developing their ideas on any other level than the most mundane and technical (article 9c of its constitution bans permanent factions). Reviewing contributions to the three internal bulletins that preceded last year's SWP conference (the SWP does not have a regular internal bulletin), I noted that "not even one percent of the membership felt itself able to contribute to the discussion concerning the fundamental direction of their own organisation" (*Weekly Worker* November 13 1997).

Essentially this membership is atomised, befuddled and utterly confused by the jarring discrepancies between the leadership's excited perspectives for quick and dramatic growth and the reality of the class struggle in contemporary Britain. To ensure continuity, an organisation thus characterised by constantly telling itself lies must have a bureaucratic internal regime and a pulverised membership almost unable to respond in political terms at all.

Ian Birchall of the SWP writes in the latest issue of *What next?* that in his organisation, permanent factions are "rooted out with a degree of ruthlessness" (No8, p18). But then if factions are "organisations within the party ... united not by place of work, language or other objective conditions, but by a particular platform of views on party questions" (my emphasis, VI Lenin *CW* Vol 17, Moscow 1977, p265), Birchall is actually thuggishly boasting of the fact that SWP members are banned from thinking, prohibited from collectively developing their ideas according to their "views on party questions".

With the move of the SWP into the difficult field of electoral intervention, how much longer will this organisation be able to maintain this fragile monolithic regime? ●

Mark Fischer, national organiser

Spoilt votes

In his report of the May 7 referendum for a London mayor and assembly, Paul Greenaway writes: "Almost two thirds of London's five million electorate could not even be bothered to express an opinion" ('Our flag stays red' *Weekly Worker* May 14).

Of the 34.6% who did cast a vote, the official figures show a large majority in favour of Blair's scheme for an elected dictator - 72% voted 'yes', while the remaining 28% said 'no'. But these figures do not take into account the 26,188 spoilt papers, which were included in the turnout percentage, but excluded from the count. The precise result should have been: 'yes' - 70.9%; 'no' - 27.6%; spoilt - 1.5%.

The proportion of spoilt papers was clearly higher than those normally obtained in elections (around one percent) and also markedly up on the figure for the concurrent council polls. The biggest single category of spoilt papers appears to have been the 'blank' vote. Voters were given a ballot paper for the local elections along with their referendum slip, but many thousands cast their council vote and simply returned their referendum paper unmarked. However, in addition there must have been at least a couple of thousand 'conscious' spoilt papers, including those who followed the advice of left groups such as the CPGB.

According to my calculations, Blair's plan received the backing of only 24.54% of all those entitled to vote.

Ted Jaszynski
London

Disjointed

It was good to see comrade Mark Fischer emphasising the need for education in 'Party notes' (*Weekly Worker* May 21). I wish to voice a couple of concerns I have regarding the subject.

Firstly, despite the strong emphasis from comrade Mark about the necessity for the theoretical development of all comrades, for a long time now the Party leadership has been too formal in its approach to the subject. Despite the vigour of argument I have heard for many years from the PCC about the importance of political education for all Party members and supporters, I believe there still exists a disjointed approach to the question as well as the existence of an unhealthy theoretical gap not only between the leadership and membership but also within the leadership itself. Serious solutions must be provided to overcome this situation. Unless these are produced I fear the theoretical development of our organisation will continue to be given lip service and not the fullest attention it deserves. During the current political period this will only further exacerbate the general problem of recruitment and Party building.

Secondly, I think it is important to point out that not all comrades who recently resigned from our organisation did so primarily on the question of education, although I believe the issue indirectly played some part in their departure. I have also raised concerns over the question prior to this letter and I am still a member of the organisation. Political education was raised by one former member who did not advocate a significant retreat from practical politics as implicated by comrade Mark. Her philosophy was a commendable one: to 'take stock' of Party organisation and redress the balance between theory and practice. I did not agree with her proposal to replace the *Weekly Worker* with a fortnightly publication, but the comrade did produce other credible suggestions with which to improve Party education. I am glad to say that after debate some have now been accepted. However, I believe we need to go much further before real results are achieved which will benefit not only the current individuals within our organisation but those attracted to the Party due to the increased richness of debate.

Bob Paul
East London

Leaders held

We ask that you make a campaign for the immediate liberation of the factory workers: Graciela Mamani, secretary of the women's network of the Confederation of Factory Workers of Bolivia, and Freddy Chipana, general secretary of the union. They have been illegally detained for having led a strike and occupation of the MEX factory, in April 1997. The employers sacked 90 workers who participated actively in the conflict and now are looking to severely punish the labour movement, imprisoning its leaders.

Opposition Trotskyista-Bolivia
La Paz

Maoist CPGB?

I am interested in the way you conceptualised the current situation in Indonesia (*Weekly Worker* May 21). With regards to this I would like the CPGB to give me a better understanding on how the Party analyses the actual situation. Does the Party use Marxist-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, like the Communist Party of the Philippines, as the main weapon to equip itself in studying the concrete situation?

Furthermore I am interested that some day you will know our cause and work hand in hand with us, in the spirit of internationalism.

Serve the people!
Nimrod
Manila

... or Stalinist?

To be honest, I thought you had collapsed along with the Soviet Union, and I thought all that was left was the Democratic Left.

It is good to see you still exist. Just one question - you are not Stalinists are you, or tankies? You do not go in for suppression of the masses, vicious propaganda fed through communication and the education system, censorship of the news, massacring supposed opponents and destroying democracy, I take it? Because, as far as I know, under Stalin the CPGB was very much in his favour.

Ron Ablett
Salford

Hunger strike

For decades the Turkish oligarchy has been in crisis politically, economically and socially. As a result of its crisis, the state is trying to make the regime stable by attacking people who are in the opposition front. The existence and functioning of the system are defined by the level of torture done or the number of revolutionaries and patriots killed.

The state wants to silence the people who do not submit by the policy of disappearance. Up until now the corpses of two people have been found and given to their relatives, out of more than 400 disappearances. Between 1991-95 304 people have disappeared after being detained by the state security forces.

Another four more people have just been abducted in an attempt to have them disappear by the Susurluk state. Neslihan Uslu, Metin Andac, Hasan Aydogan and Mehmet Ali Mandal were amongst the people less than two months ago. They were tribunes of the people.

Until we know their fate and obtain information on their safety, we will be going on a continuous and alternated hunger strike starting from Sunday May 24.

The state is responsible for the disappearances and massacres - we shall bring them to account!

Stop the Disappearances
Committee (UK)

London

Complicated matters

The Communist Party describes the present situation as a period of reaction in



which the working class does not exist politically. It is questionable whether the working class has ever been political in the sense meant by the CP: that is, clearly identifying itself as a class in contradiction to the ruling class on every major political issue.

Throughout the last 50 years it is hard to point to a 'workers' movement'. The poll tax rebellion was very much a rebellion of the people, not the class. Its make-up was one of cross-class unity of small capitalists, skilled and unskilled workers as well as the unwashed lumpenproletarians and middle class drop-outs of suburbia. The miners' strike was just that - a fight by just one section of the skilled working class; the miners united rather than the workers united.

The unrest of the 1970s could possibly be seen as the workers' golden era, but was not a fully fledged conscious working class alternative. Workers happily returned candidates who promised national unity and an end to the conflicts of the day; the class consciousness of the 1970s was the desire for social peace and an end to national decline; a return to the comfort of the post-war consensus. That had been rocked by the militant actions of socialist intellectuals and the slowing down of the boom as it turned to recession. The consensus which the ruling class had begun to renege on - the consensus that had been born of the conscious working class - the real consciousness of the class is one of cooperation and social cohesion, not of conflict and revolutionary social chaos. This theory of the working class is of a working class that is not revolutionary, never has been and probably never will be unless something extraordinary occurs.

The British working class is much like the Russian bourgeoisie of 1917. It lacks the spine to overpower the class above it. It will not act because it fears the unknown. The British working class is conservative, just like the Russian bourgeoisie.

A symptom of this conservatism is a tendency towards an expression of populism - the people's demands and desires as opposed to the workers'. Hence the mass political parties make appeals to the people and not the workers when the contests over how many workers they can get to vote for them are held.

That is why the parties exist - to compete over the votes of the plebs, using the language of the plebs. The people, the public, the community - anything but a flat-out admission of what we are - working class.

Something extraordinary must occur. The consciousness of the working class has to be transformed into the Communist Party ideal - in effect reality must be changed. That is, unless a revolution can be made with the existing consciousness; evolving a plan for social revolution that does not involve changing the working class, but being as radical as reality itself and using the existing conditions to transform society.

Or we start to look for a different agent to act as the force which will deliver us into socialism (look forever).

If the consciousness of the working class must be changed then we undoubtedly need to forge a Communist Party which includes every communist, not just orthodox Marxist-Leninist ones. Marxism-Leninism is not true - it is just one of a multitude of ideas which people seek to portray as 'truth'. The truth is whatever the majority believes. Marxism-Leninism is only true if you convince the majority of people that it is.

I do not see why we should complicate matters by insisting all communists are Marxist-Leninists. The rapprochement process has thus far only involved Leninist communists. Is it not possible to widen the process to non-Leninist communists?

GA Shanks
Reading

Around the left

SWP tails charities

One of the most unfortunate characteristics of the left in Britain today is its utter timidity. Devoid of all confidence in its own ability to make a difference, it lazily tries to paint ‘left’ almost all or any protest movement or demonstration. Even the most backward-looking cry of despair is invested with great revolutionary profundity. Socialism, under this schema, is either a banal extension of liberal hand-wringing or a lifeless moral abstraction.

We see this in the attitude of the Socialist Workers Party towards the recent G8 summit at Birmingham, where the main issue was debt relief to the ‘third world’. *Socialist Worker* (May 21) approvingly - and uncritically - reports on *The Guardian*-Christian Aid-sponsored hand-holding plea to this much-hyped gathering of top world leaders. From the glowing descriptions, it becomes clear that that the SWP believes that revolutionary or socialist consciousness is somehow immanent in these demonstrations. Who needs a programme? Spontaneous ‘good will’, a ‘love of humanity’ and loads of pity for ‘third world victims’ are all that matters. Alienated and disconnected philanthropic urges become ‘internationalism’, and revolution an extreme form of charity-mongering, with ‘cancel the debt’ as a central slogan.

Communists are nor heartless automatons immune to the fact that thousands of people starve to death each day in - to use the jargon - the ‘HIPC’ (heavily indebted poorer countries). Our heads are not in the clouds. We do not hanker for utopia at the expense of real human suffering. But as Kathrin Maurer pointed out in the *Weekly Worker* (May 21), “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.” In other words, many exploiters would also make the plea for ... the cancellation of ‘third world’ debt.

Socialist Worker displays a ‘sentimental anti-imperialism’. Underneath the headline, “50,000 demand, ‘cancel the debt’”, there

.....

“For all of its declarations that the masses swung to the left last May, it can offer only liberal protest as proof”

.....

is a photograph of protesters with Christian Aid T-shirts and banners’. The caption reads: “‘This shows that ordinary people care,’ said protesters who circled Birmingham city centre last Saturday.” The article provides a mealy-mouthed ‘left’ echo to Christian Aid.

It goes on to describe the gathering as “a moving and powerful demonstration of the outrage millions of people feel at a system which starves tens of millions of children in order to widen the profit margins of the world’s biggest banks. But the leaders of the world’s largest economies at the G8 summit turned their backs on the calls for justice” - which in SWP/Christian Aid-speak translates into the blanket call, ‘cancel the debt’.

Ironically the state capitalist SWP - which quite correctly believes that socialism is international or it is nothing - seems to believe that African countries like Niger or Rwanda would be taking a step towards that goal if they went it alone and opted out of the global economy. The anonymous author tells us: “This ‘HIPC scheme’ forces poor countries to slash whatever welfare measures they have, *open their economies to the free market and make themselves further prey for big business*. It sucks money from ordinary people in the poorest countries to pay the debts run up by the corrupt elites at the top” (my emphasis). Such an analysis fails to account for the fact that these ‘HIPC countries’ are dirt poor precisely because they are on the ab-

solute *margins* of the global economy. Our busy and hard-pressed entrepreneurs look at such places and say to themselves, ‘no thank you - no profits there’. World capital leaves most of the ‘third world’ to rot.

This is fundamentally a *political* question, but the SWP is quite content to leave it on an abstract moral-sentimental plane. It quotes from Ann Pettifor, director of the Jubilee 2000 campaign on Blair’s failure to get a better deal: “This is a huge disappointment for those who formed the human chain in Birmingham and the hundreds of millions around the world who suffer under the burden of unpayable debts.” And from Andrew Simms of Christian Aid: “Each year the G8 promises to give meaningful debt relief to the poorest countries and each year they remain trapped in a world of aid dependence and disaster after disaster.”

We can also see the sort of social forces the SWP is orientated towards: “The human chain was organised by the Jubilee 2000 campaign. The initiative started with Christian charities like Christian Aid and Cafod. Campaigning organisations like the World Development Movement and Third World First added their names. The International Confederation of Trade Unions and Britain’s largest union, Unison, joined them. The call for the Birmingham demonstration captured a mood. *The Guardian* backed the campaign. Large numbers of Christian groups took part but the response went way beyond that.”

The conclusion is dismal. The SWP even endeavours to give a shot in the arm to its ‘class vote’ thesis: “The demonstrations showed that the mood for change which *swept the country a year ago is still there*. It is shot through with increasing discontent with the government and a deep questioning about why the world is in such a mess and getting worse. That is producing the kind of explosive cocktail which transformed last Saturday’s protest into a major political event” (my emphasis).

In reality, the SWP is abjectly bowing to spontaneity. For all of its declarations that the masses swung to the left last May, it can offer only liberal protest as proof●

Don Preston

action

■ **CPGB seminars**
London: May 31 - Towards the principle of self-emancipation
For more details call 0181-459 7146.

Manchester: June 1 - Reaction today, revolution tomorrow.
For more details call 0161-798 6417.

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

■ **London SA**
To get involved contact London Socialist Alliance, Box 30, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS.

■ **Scottish Socialist Alliance**
To get involved, contact PO Box 980, Glasgow G14 9QQ or ring 0141-552 6773.

■ **SSA conference**
Glasgow City Halls, Albion Street, June 20, 10am - 4pm
CPGB fringe meeting ‘Against separatism, for workers unity’. Opening speaker Jack Conrad.

■ **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.

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

■ **Free Josephine Hayden**
Despite a serious heart complaint Josephine Hayden, courageous Irish liberation fighter, continues to be held in Limerick prison.
Lobby the Irish embassy, Saturday June 6, 12am, 17 Grosvenor Place, London SW1.
Called by the Workers Republican Forum

■ **Justice**
Second march for social justice, called by the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards Committee.
Saturday May 30. Assemble 12 noon, Thames Embankment, Temple tube.
For more information, contact Liverpool Dockers London Support Group: 31b Muswell Hill Place, London N10.
Tel: 0181-442 0090.

■ **For jobs, services and democracy**
International demonstration - assemble 1.30pm, Cooper’s Field (behind Cardiff Castle), Saturday June 13. March to Euro summit.
For more details or to book a seat on Cardiff coaches call 0181-800 7460.

■ **Defend the Campsfield Nine**
Monday June 1 - 8.30am at St Aldates, Oxford.
Mass picket at Oxford Crown Court and every Monday until the end of the trial.
Following a disturbance at Campsfield House detention centre on August 20 1997, when Group 4 tried to send two detainees to prison, nine asylum seekers from Nigeria, Gambia, Ghana and Liberia are facing charges of violent disorder and riot, which carries a maximum 10-year sentence. Their trial starts on Monday June 1 and may last eight weeks. Organised by the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, 22 Berners Street, Birmingham, B19 2DR.
Tel: 0121-554 6947.

■ **Seeing red**
A festival of dissent
Part 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
Red Room Conspiracy
An evening of art, entertainment and agit prop.
Sundays 8pm. Tickets: £4 or £2 (concessions).

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.

Profiting from crime

Yet again, sections of the bourgeois press and official society went into one of their regular fake moral spasms. This time it was the case of the nurses, Lucille McLauchlan and Deborah Parry, recently returned from a none too pleasant sojourn in a Saudi Arabian jail. Acres of media space have been filled with the subsequent ‘scandal’ - this time about the fact that both their nurses have published their prison diaries in *The Mirror* and *The Express*.

In some respects this is a re-run of the recent Mary Bell affair. Then, as now, we had MPs and newspaper editors thundering about ill-gotten gains. The nurses’ diaries stung George Galloway, the eccentric Labour MP with a history of ‘left’ Arabism, into commenting: “Criminals are not supposed to profit from their crimes.”

One of those who cried loudest was ... the *Daily Mail*. This is monstrous hypocrisy - as *The Mirror* was quick to point out with some glee. The source of the *Mail*’s extreme annoyance is, of course, that it was successfully outbid by *The Mirror* for Lucille McLauchlan’s diaries. The *Daily Mail*’s offer of £175,000 was easily trumped by its tabloid rival. It seems its ‘morality’ is dictated solely by the ratings war.

We live in a commodity society. Why should not these nurses be allowed to sell

their commodity - ie, their story - on the market just like everybody else?

The current scandal is not good news for the unstable Saudi regime - propped up as it is by the US and Britain who ensure it is armed to the teeth. Its extreme reactionary nature was exposed once before by the dramatised account of the execution for ‘infidelity’ of a member of the Saudi royal family which appeared on British television, ‘Death of a Princess’. The regime’s reaction provoked a crisis in relations which threatened lucrative British investment. No wonder British businessmen stumped up the £750,000 in ‘blood money’ required to waive the death penalty on Parry - and eventually get both nurses out of jail.

By a wonderful coincidence, Robin Cook outlined his ‘ethical’ foreign policy guidelines at a Brussels meeting of foreign ministers on Monday. Immediately a row developed. Claims were made that he had diluted his new ‘ethical’ codes. Cook backed the position of France, which ensured that any verdict on human rights violations that would prevent arms sales had to be delivered by a “competent body” - such as the European Union, the Council of Europe or the United Nations. Governments suspected of such violations have the power to refuse access to official monitors. Cook also assented to the French “no

undercutting” rule. If a country seeking to buy arms is turned down by Britain, and then goes to France, France will inform Britain only *in private* that they are considering the request, rather than notifying all other EU countries.

In summing up the attitude of the British government, Cook declared: “The key criterion of this code is whether the arms are to be used for internal repression or external aggression. From now on, our arms industries will compete on price and on quality, but not on the standards that we will all apply on human rights.” Translated: at the end of the day, Cook will not allow ‘ethics’ to interfere with the proper and correct business of making and selling arms.

Isn’t it terrible how Mary Bell, Lucille McLauchlan and Deborah Parry are profiting from crime? ●

Eddie Ford

Journalist seeks ...
information on major companies and public sector workplaces.
Confidentiality assured.
Tel/Fax: 0171-226 5025

Rapprochement stalled

At the end of January, the Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency was established at its founding meeting in London. Since then very little progress has been made. But last week we received good news. The Dundee Group within the Scottish Socialist Alliance confirmed their support for the tendency in a leaflet given out to Alliance members.

There are now three autonomous groups within the tendency - Dundee, the RDG and the CPGB. This was a welcome boost for a rapprochement process that has effectively stalled. We need a better understanding of the problems. The current impasse has its roots not only in the low level of class struggle, but in the policies of organisations both within and outside the tendency. Those communists who are committed to genuine rapprochement will be doing everything we can to solve these problems and to try and get the process moving again.

The first problem has been the crisis within the CPGB. Their intervention in the Scottish referendum created real internal tensions and led to the resignations of the editor of the *Weekly Worker* and the CPGB's Scottish Committee. This has not yet been satisfactorily explained by the *Weekly Worker*. One reason is that we have not heard from the comrades who resigned. We have to hear their view of the problems if we are to take an all-round view of the situation.

Mark Fischer and Anne Murphy have put the official view in the *Weekly Worker*. Anne explained that times are hard and things go wrong. A number of comrades had personal problems and have gone off to spend more time with their families (April 23). I did not believe this when it happened to Tory ministers, and we should be equally sceptical when this fate befalls good communists. Anne assured us that there have been mistakes. 'And who doesn't make mistakes?' I can hear her say. But as to precisely what these "mistakes" were, or Anne thought they were, the *Weekly Worker* has given us very little clue.

The fact that the letters from Mary Ward and Nick Clarke, two of the comrades who had resigned, were not printed, has blown a big hole in the policy of 'openness'. Yet without hearing directly from these comrades, we cannot begin to work out where things have gone wrong.

Rapprochement between the CPGB and the RDG is hardly likely to be moving forwards when rapprochement within the CPGB has been going backwards. Unless of course those comrades who resigned were opposed

.....
"The RDG has sought to maintain principled relations with both the Provisional Central Committee and the dissidents"

.....
 to unity with the RDG. In which case their departure would make the process easier. However, knowing these comrades over the last few years, there is nothing to suggest that was the case. The fact that the Dundee Group has now confirmed its support for the 'rapprochement tendency' surely proves it.

The crisis within the CPGB has had its impact on the RDG. It has placed us on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand we have sought to maintain principled relations with both the Provisional Central Committee and the dissidents. To interfere in the internal relations of the CPGB or do anything to cause or widen the split would seriously damage rapprochement. We have had to keep a certain distance from these events. On the other hand, as communists, it is our right and duty to comment on matters which are of concern to all communists. I have certainly voiced my concerns at CPGB aggregates. It should be said that the CPGB have not tried to exclude me or other RDG comrades from those internal discussions. Our comments have been taken in a positive spirit. Nevertheless it has been a difficult line to tread.

Now the high tension of the crisis has begun to wane. The fog of battle has begun to clear. We need to take stock of where we have reached. There will certainly be new matters arising from this crisis that will need to be thrashed out. The agenda for rapprochement has surely shifted. Exactly where, it is too early to say. But, for example, the question of openness, which was not on the previous agenda, will need discussion. What we had previously thought was a common understanding is now open to doubt.

None of this explains the policies of the other Marxist groups we have been trying to encourage to join the rapprochement tendency, such as Open Polemic, the Republican Worker

Tendency, *Marxist Bulletin*, the Socialist Democracy Group, Socialist Perspectives and, we should add, the Trotskyist Unity Group. These are all organisations that we have worked with in some form or other over the past period. We invited all of them to attend the founding conference.

Since the founding conference we have sought no more than to clarify their views on the revolutionary democratic communist platform. So far, and for a variety of reasons, none of these groups has been able to state their views. However, I am hopeful that this might change. Refusal to comment on revolutionary democratic communism is in itself a statement of definite politics. The problem is trying to guess what those politics are. So I will put forward my best guestimates, and hopefully these comrades will write to the *Weekly Worker* to explain their reasons in their own words.

The RWT and Open Polemic have so far been silent on the statement. The RWT has refused to state its views because it is protesting against comments by Jack Conrad in his pamphlet, *Blair's rigged referendum and Scotland's right to self-determination*. OP has also avoided direct comment on the statement. They do make an extensive criticism of the thesis on factions (see *Open Polemic* No5, February 1998). That is positive. But they dismiss 'revolutionary democratic communism' as too narrow. They put forward an alternative proposal for a 'communist tendency'. It would appear they are not too keen on revolutionary democracy. The RWT quite independently took a similar position. They changed their name to the Communist Tendency. If I was a betting man, I would guess that both these organisations would have a problem with the rejection of 'socialism in one country'. I am sure that eventually they will come out of hiding and clarify where they stand.

The *Marxist Bulletin* does not have a problem with 'socialism in one country'. They have been very reluctant to say where they stand. But it was reported to me that recently Barbara Duke and the rest of the comrades have said they agree with the revolutionary democratic communist platform. Perhaps 'don't disagree with it' would be a safer guess. Barbara has been a bit worried in case saying they agree with these basic points means that we will force them to join our tendency. No, we won't. They are not keen on clarifying points where we agree. They continually want to emphasise why we disagree. Ian Dudley, former supporter of the *Marxist Bulletin* and now editor of a new journal, *Revolution and Truth*, does not agree with point 1. He has promised to provide us with critical comments.

We have had no reply from the Socialist Democracy Group. Ian Driver has said he is in agreement and intends to find out what the others think. But so far nobody has been able to enlighten us. Finally Socialist Perspectives has not replied yet. There are two reasons for this. First I suspect some of this group are not communists. Even to discuss the document would create internal divisions and it might even split them. Added to self-preservation is the fact that Martin Wicks does not like the CPGB. None of this is a sound basis for serious politics.

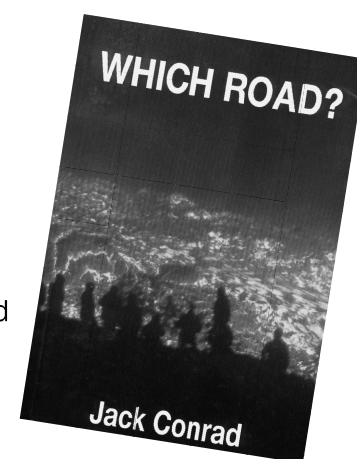
Despite these setbacks and failures,

the new tendency has passed its first test. The split within the CPGB has been partially contained within the tendency. The very existence of the tendency has meant that the divisions have been less damaging than they might have been. The internal problems of the CPGB are now the collective property of the tendency as a whole. The RDG, CPGB and the Dundee Group remain committed to revolutionary democratic communism. We have seen at first hand many practical difficulties of building communist unity. Not least of which is the fact that small Marxist groups seem reluctant to say openly where they stand in relation to our tendency ●

Dave Craig
(RDG - faction of the SWP)

Which road?

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



No choice for voters

Open letter to John Nicholson, Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance convenor, from GMSA member John Pearson

Congratulations on winning a *Big Issue* T-shirt for your 'star letter' in the current edition of *Big Issue in the North*. You wrote:

"So, low turnout is to be blamed on polling stations being in the wrong place. It would apparently be better if they were all in supermarkets. It couldn't be that all the main parties looked identical in most parts of the country and so there wasn't much of a choice for most voters? It couldn't be that most of the powers have been removed from local government and so there isn't much to vote for? And it couldn't be that the 'spin doctors' want fewer elections, just for the occasional mayor (and prime minister?) who can be trusted to do everything for us? A one-stop shop indeed."

Perhaps your letter had been ruthlessly edited, but I was surprised that you did not go on to explain why the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance, which at present you lead, decided against standing a slate of candidates in those same elections, on a social-

ist platform. If GMSA had done this, then many more voters in Greater Manchester could have had a real choice. It is quite true that local councils have very few powers, and that Blair's constitutional reformation is fundamentally anti-democratic. It is precisely such issues that GMSA candidates could have emphasised in a campaign that was certainly not "identical" to those of the bourgeois parties, but which could have advocated a fight for real meaningful democracy and demonstrated the need for the working class to seize political power.

Quite frankly, your lamenting the lack of choice for voters comes a bit rich when, only a week ago, the GMSA, under your influence, rejected a motion from the Communist Party of Great Britain which would have committed the Alliance to work for a united electoral campaign in future local, parliamentary and European elections. You appear happy to win prizes for describing a problem, whilst at the same time you obstruct the solution ●

Revolutionary democratic communism

1. For revolutionary democracy

We hold a revolutionary democratic attitude to all questions of bourgeois democracy (eg, civil liberties, women's rights, national question, racism, constitutional change, etc). We utilise bourgeois democracy, defend it against all anti-democratic forces, including the capitalists and the fascists. We seek to extend all democratic rights by mass struggle and revolutionary action. We consider the working class is the only genuinely democratic class under capitalism. We consider that the working class can become the leading force in society by championing the struggle for democracy.

2. For workers' power

We support the democratic self-organisation of the working class in trade unions, workplaces and communities. We are in favour of workers' control of all industries and

services. We are in favour of replacing parliamentary democracy with a more advanced form of democracy, based on workplace councils electing delegates to a workers' parliament. This must be defended by an armed working class organised as the state (ie, the dictatorship of the proletariat).

3. For international socialism

Socialism must be developed by the international organisation of the working class. Socialism is the transitional period between world capitalism and communism.

4. For world communism

Our aim is to abolish the world market system of capitalism and replace it by world communism. Communist society is a classless worldwide community based on global planning, cooperation and mutual solidarity between the people of the world ●

Alliances at crossroads

Since it was established in February at the initiative of Brent comrades, the London Socialist Alliance has taken some modest, though nevertheless significant steps forward. Brent apart, alliances have been set up or given new life in Lambeth, Lewisham, Hillingdon and Hackney. Evidently the top-down approach facilitates and in no way stands in contradiction to building borough alliances from below.

In the May 7 local elections the London alliances stood or actively supported dozens of candidates. Despite the continued, and historically unprecedented, popularity of Blair and the New Labour government they gained what must be considered respectable votes. With a democratic system of proportional representation we would surely have councillors. There is every reason to confidently look forward to the forthcoming London assembly and European elections. Labour's strategists admit the real possibility of the socialist left winning a seat in the Euro elections in London.

The London SA has not only acted as an electoral front. On May 23 it sponsored a spirited picket of the Indonesian embassy in solidarity with the unfolding democratic revolution. It was addressed by representatives of the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Socialist Party (all other groups present on the day - including those not affiliated to the London SA - were offered speaking rights). London SA has also staged a number of successful meetings which brought together individual socialists and a range of left organisations - eg, the SP, CPGB, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, the Socialist Democracy Group, Revolutionary Democratic Group, Socialist Outlook, Workers Power, Socialist Perspectives - as well as MEPs Hugh Kerr and Michael Hindley (the Green Party sent a representative to the debate on the London referendum - she urged us to vote 'yes' for Blair's dictatorial mayor).

Sectarianism has been combated in the school of united practice. It has not been used as a code word for minority opinions which have to be bureaucratically silenced or excluded. On the contrary everything has been conducted in a spirit of principled democratic tolerance. Differences are considered natural and their open expression is positively encouraged. Thankfully the foolish attempt by the Socialist Party to stop the circulation of controversial views in London SA mailings was defeated.

The London SA is obviously at a very early stage of development - though clearly in advance of borough alliances or for that matter the national network. No one is, or should be, content with existing individual membership or level of support and activity. We have a long way to go. That said, it would be wrong to underestimate or dismiss, let alone jeopardise, what has been done thus far. Indeed there is every reason to build on our strengths.

At present the strength of the London SA derives from three main and mutually reinforcing factors.

Firstly unity. The London SA plays the role of a rudimentary united front of left organisations. The fact that representatives of the SP, the CPGB, Socialist Outlook and Socialist Democracy meet and discuss common actions every month is no small achievement. The appointment of Anne Murphy as coordinator and Ian Driver as chair took place in that spirit - the former from the CPGB, the latter

from Socialist Democracy. The recent decision by the SWP to contest elections is a break from automatic pro-Labourism which creates excellent conditions for widening and deepening the London SA as a united front.

Secondly politics. In the midst of Blair's de-Labourisation of Labour and his unashamed orientation towards big business we have the chance of providing an organisational and electoral alternative for masses of traditional Labour voters and trade union activists. That does not mean resuscitating Labourism, but renewing genuine socialism - both in terms of Marxist theory and as a class movement. Social democracy and all variants of national or bureaucratic socialism are reactionary and anti-working class. Our willingness to fight Labour at the ballot box, especially on a revolutionary platform, is therefore correct and needs to be developed. Again the SWP's 'Scottish turn' is encouraging.

Thirdly democracy. The London SA is an inclusive project. Unlike Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party there has been no barring of communists or hounding of minority positions. Meetings of the London ad-hoc committee are open to all groups, tendencies and individual members - though it should be stressed that no organisation has used numbers in an attempt to dominate. For example, except for myself, Communist Party members have only attended as representatives of affiliated borough alliances. The Socialist Party has adopted a similar approach.

Obviously the London SA is part of a broader all-Britain project. That is why the London SA ad-hoc committee was delighted by Dave Nellist's suggestion that we send a representative to the Steering Committee of the Network of Socialist Alliances in England - itself a very ad-hoc body. Our coordinator, Anne Murphy, was elected unopposed in March.

That decision was, it would seem, not to the liking of some. John Nicholson - coordinator of Manchester SA and the network steering committee - told comrade Murphy by phone that her election was possibly invalid. Unnamed persons had apparently questioned it. To clear up the matter the election of a London representative was put on the agenda in April. Again unopposed, comrade Murphy was confirmed.

Perhaps comrade Nicholson's objection was entirely innocent. Perhaps garbled information is being circulated. That was my feeling at the April ad-hoc meeting. However, since then I have had cause to reconsider. Recent developments in Manchester and London present an altogether different picture and should be of great concern to all those of us who want to see the socialist alliances develop in a healthy democratic direction.

Let me first deal with the disastrous annual conference of the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance on May 16. Comrade Nicholson ran the meeting in a way that would have shamed even Arthur Scargill. Originally billed as an all-day event it was arbitrarily cut in half by him. Naturally that did not mean reducing the speaking time he allowed himself. Nor that of the 'guest speaker' - Spencer Fitzgibbon of the Green Party. But it did mean 'debates' on motions and amendments were limited to *one minute*. The clock was also used as an excuse to prevent those standing for election from addressing the meeting (for a full report see the *Weekly*

.....

"The Manchester events put comrade Nicholson's strange objection to the London ad-hoc committee's decision to elect Anne Murphy into another, altogether more sinister and unpleasant, light"

.....

Worker May 21). Unfortunately the majority - including comrades from the SP, Socialist Outlook and the AWL connived with this travesty of working class norms - which eschew democratically silencing minorities, but on the contrary give the minority the fullest opportunity to become the majority.

Manchester SA is taking an extremely worrying course - the SLP shows where it leads. There was an unholy Nicholson-SP-AWL-Socialist Outlook alliance on May 16 which was formed *against* the SA contesting elections. Unholy, because the SP wants a free run, while the others actually still believe in voting for Blair's party. The same bloc also allowed comrade Nicholson to get away with a constitutional coup. The structure of the Greater Manchester SA was in one fell swoop transformed.

All affiliated organisations had from the foundation of the GMSA the automatic right to representation on its committee. That is no longer the case. The newly adopted election-by-general-meeting clause was employed to exclude the CPGB and the Campaign for a Democratic SLP. Even worse, an 'anti-sectarian' ban was introduced which will be used against revolutionaries, to begin with the CPGB ... first they came for the communists.

The CPGB has never had a majority on the GMSA committee. Our comrades have from the start been nothing more than a small minority - albeit a vocal and active one. The CPGB accepts the right of majorities to form and take leading positions. But comrade Nicholson refuses to tolerate what he regards as a nuisance. For him there is no right of minorities to become a majority. Like Ramsay MacDonald, Tony Blair and Arthur Scargill he therefore turns democracy against democracy. Organisational methods are used to deal with political differences.

The Manchester events put comrade Nicholson's strange objection to the London ad-hoc committee's decision to elect Anne Murphy into another, altogether more sinister and unpleasant, light. His objection might have stemmed from a misunderstanding. But, as things appear at the moment, the odds are stacked against it.

Of course, comrade Nicholson is part of a definite trend within the SAs. Where the CPGB constitutes the extreme left, Nicholson and co constitutes the far right. Not only does this

trend fear damaging links with Labourites by contesting elections, but it has a deep loathing for open debate and polemic. More than that, it longs to re-invent Labourism by painting it green.

Labourism has utterly and visibly failed. As to the greens, they are a petty bourgeois movement which contains a wide spectrum of politics, ranging from the critical-utopian to the overtly fascist. Its best minds have written savage indictments of capitalism which supply wonderful ammunition for the class struggle. Despite that most green ideas are confused, naive and at the end of the day irrational. There is a neo-Malthusian element which sees human beings as the fundamental problem. There is also a general prejudice against economic growth and technological progress. The solution to the world's ecological problems is often seen in a return to nature - itself, of course, a social construct.

Communists are not productionists - unlike Joseph Stalin, Maynard Keynes and Milton Friedman. We are for living, not dead labour. Socialism is by no means primarily concerned with economic growth - that is a calumny inherited from the experience of social democracy on the one hand and USSR-style bureaucratic socialism on the other. Our main goal is the growth of democracy and the steady reduction of the necessary working day. So like the greens, communists are for the end of production for the sake of production. But means determine ends. Even amongst those greens who describe themselves as socialists a reformist, pacifist and non-class political stance holds sway. Their socialism is not the dynamic, open-ended result of self-liberation by an armed proletariat. It is moreover decidedly localist, not universal. World revolution and the global reorganisation of production has no place in their thinking.

Nevertheless greens - individuals and organisations - who declare themselves socialists should be made welcome in the SAs. There we can work together and crucially discuss, argue and clarify. That does not necessitate the reds becoming green. Rather it implies greens aligning themselves with and really becoming reds. Watering down our principles in the name of a 'red-green' alliance will not and cannot achieve that. Quite the reverse. As argued above, we must renew and creatively develop our socialist theory and programme.

Comrade Nicholson and his intolerant version of 'red-green' politics now appears to have found itself a champion in London. At the ad-hoc committee meeting of May 19 David Lyons - a member of the heterogeneous Socialist Democracy Group - presented a motion which perfectly dovetails with comrade Nicholson's aims and methods.

In the name of the SDG he told us that there were basic underlying divisions in the London SA and that officers had to reflect the political position of the majority - whatever that may be. Interesting enough, the only political positions adopted thus far by the London SA have been the decision to stand in the May 7 elections, the call to boycott Blair's referendum and the May 23 picket of the Indonesian embassy - actions formally supported by the SDG. But what comrade Lyons has in mind is not the past, but the future. He dreams of splitting what he calls "our natural allies", the greens, and presumably the price for that is doing a

Manchester and ousting members of the CPGB - not least the coordinator, Anne Murphy (Coventry 'recall conference' report, March 21 1998). I imagine that is why he proposed a general meeting of the London SA and elections *from it* of a "representative committee" and "representative officers".

The CPGB has no objection to nor problem with a general meeting of the London SA. After the May 7 election and referendum a frank discussion of the way forward is an excellent idea. However, we and a big majority opposed comrade Lyons' insistence that the meeting take place within three weeks. That would allow no time for affiliated organisations to produce and circulate position papers, certainly no time for others to reflect upon them. The coup attempt was defeated. There was to be a fair timetable. Also defeated, on a tied vote, was the election of officers. Many non-CPGB comrades said they were more concerned with politics than positions. So the only discussion of positions will be on a London representative on the national steering committee. No bad thing.

The CPGB will be proposing a motion that confirms the right of the London ad-hoc committee to freely choose its own representative. We will also present a motion that aims to formalise the essential principles and structures of the London SA. The CPGB wants to emphasise that socialism is not an abstract notion, but a class movement. In terms of structure our proposal is to adopt the sort of flexible and combative democracy practised by the soviets - or workers' councils - during the Russian Revolution in 1917.

Every affiliated organisation should have the right to send one *instantly recallable* delegate - that would include borough alliances, political organisations, trade unions and progressive campaigning organisations. In other words if a comrade leaves or is assigned to another role by their organisation they can be replaced without fuss or bother at a moment's notice.

The same practice should be applied to officers. They should be elected not according to some popularity poll by an atomised membership. They should be held accountable to their peers. Hard workers and selfless fighters, not mercurial stars and lazy publicity seekers, are needed. The SAs should reject the mayoral or presidential system. Officers ought to be elected and if necessary replaced by those whom they regularly and routinely work alongside. Our proposals allow political changes at the base of the structure to be immediately reflected at the top. Furthermore those who fail to carry out agreed tasks can be speedily replaced without the need for cumbersome general meetings. Such meetings should only be called with proper notice and normally used for purposes of broad discussion, debates and decisions on matters of principle, not day-to-day organisational questions such as who sends out the minutes or who opens a bank account.

Clearly the SAs are at a crossroads. The politics of the secret caucus, the politics of bureaucratic deals and witch hunts pose a threat. But we are sure the politics of openness, honesty and working class democracy will triumph. There must be no more Manchesters ●

John Bridge
CPGB representative
London SA ad-hoc committee

Simon Harvey of the SLP

Which way for Reclaim Our Rights?

Since the release of the white paper on trade union rights, *Fairness at work*, a variety of reactions have come from the labour bureaucracy. Bill Morris of the TGWU has said he will not take the proposals on recognition lying down. Monks has declared his qualified support overall while expressing reservations about the workability of the 40% threshold.

As I reported last week, since our SLP candidate, Dave Rix, was elected Aslef general secretary, Lew Adams, who remains in post until January, has cried foul and is seeking a legal reversal of comrade Rix's victory. Adams has begun to talk very left. He has attacked the white paper in no uncertain terms.

Union bosses are clearly rattled. They recognise that a space is opening up for a militant trade unionism and are trying to fill it with hot air or close it with bureaucratic manoeuvre. In this context it is essential for the left, for militants and revolutionaries to adopt an independent *political* position distinct to that of the trade union bureaucracy. We should be with them *organisationally* to the extent they are really prepared to fight. That is why I welcomed the Reclaim Our Rights initiative from the SLP.

Unfortunately so far, there has been a lack of clarity about the nature and direction of the united campaign launched by ROR. Most of the left have seen their role as that of cheerleaders. The limitations and bureaucratic nature of ROR have been swept under the carpet.

Sadly that tailism was all too evident in Mark Sandell's contribution on behalf of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (Letters, May 21). He was responding to my report, 'Reclaim Our Rights delegate recall conference' (*Weekly Worker* April 23). I remarked upon the obvious deal done between the AWL-backed Free Trade Unions Campaign and the SLP-sponsored Reclaim Our Rights vis-a-vis the initial set-up of a united campaign against the anti-trade union laws. Although a positive development in that it genuinely aims to unite existing campaigns under one umbrella, who is holding this umbrella is of vital importance. It is to be Arthur Scargill and other trade union general secretaries and presidents. More than that - because of that - there is no room anywhere for rank and file opposition campaigns. That means excluding militant minorities such as the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Union.

Comrade Sandell, accusing me of

SLP "war weariness", states that the unification of ROR, the FTUC and the Communication Workers Union campaigns "offers an opportunity to build a rank and file movement against the anti-trade union laws". Obviously this is what we should fight for. But I repeat my criticism that it will not come about through the structure railroaded through by Bob Crow at the ROR conference - without opposition and presumably with the agreement of the AWL.

Comrade Sandell implies what exists is not perfect, but that he lent his support in order to get things off the ground. Is this the correct method? He claims: "We now have a united campaign on a principled basis" - interestingly and revealingly he fails to spell out what those 'principles' are.

Comrade Sandell believes that my report "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". However, as I pointed out, "despite its *interim nature*, the political balance will determine the trajectory of the campaign, before a conference in the summer elects a full committee and considers a constitution" (emphasis added *Weekly Worker* April 23). It is

disingenuous to suggest otherwise but true to form. At the ROR conference he urged comrades 'not to worry too much about seats on committees'. Of course the AWL had already done a deal to secure itself at least one.

The comrade is proud of the achievements of the FTUC. Its foundation, given the current period, was "a major rank and file workers' event", he says. What a pity Mark and the AWL are prepared to sell it so cheaply.

Comrade Sandell describes the CWU's campaign as being "an important break from the old policy of hiding behind the TUC's non-campaigns". What a shame then, if it were now to be dragged back to just such a policy. The ROR pamphlet, written by its two leading figures, Bob Crow and John Hendy, states: "The campaign can only succeed if led by the TUC"; and that *the task* of the campaign being set up is "to commit ... the TUC to lead the campaign, as it did in the 1970s".

So, what is the way forward? Comrade Sandell states that the ROR campaign, as it stands, "will not stop the AWL saying exactly what it thinks of the behaviour of the union leaders who support the campaign in the RMT, CWU or anywhere else". But what are the AWL's criticisms? What

are its proposals to stop the drift towards a left bureaucratic lash-up? How do we move to a rank and file body, more akin to the legacy of the Militant Minority Movement?

Having read a bit of Lenin, comrade Sandell throws that favourite morsel of rightists to any criticism from the left. Do I support the ROR-initiated united campaigns like a rope supports a hanged man?

As comrade Sandell knows, the tactic of the 1920s to support the Labour Party as a rope supports a hanged man was because Lenin and the CPGB actually wanted to replace the Labour Party. They saw no possibility of reforming the bourgeois wing of the labour movement (unlike the AWL - which actually wants to repeat history through a Labour Representation Committee). I want to build, not destroy, the campaign against Blair's anti-trade union laws but that means developing rank and file initiative and overthrowing the leadership of all reformists and would-be labour kings.

Precisely because of my experience as an SLP member I know the likes of Scargill and Crow could front a mass movement against not only Blair's anti-trade union laws, but against Blair himself. My worry is the direction in which they will then take it ●

Frank Sinatra (1915-1998)

His way to reaction

Torch singer and noted film actor Frank Sinatra grew up in Hoboken, New Jersey, where his mother was a political activist. From his mid-teens to early 20s Sinatra sang for little or no pay. But in 1939 his career started to take off, first as the Harry James' band's first vocalist and then singing with Tommy Dorsey's band for \$125 a week. Sinatra left the band in 1942, with Dorsey demanding a contractual 43% of Sinatra's earnings for the next 10 years. Sinatra took over as star of the top radio show *The hit parade* in 1943 and signed a contract with musical film studio RKO. He was able to insist that his own nominees write the musical score for the hit film *Anchors aweigh* (1945), in which Sinatra starred with Gene Kelly, after MGM bought up his RKO contract.

By 1945, Frank Sinatra had become a household name, so it was hardly economic pressures that influenced his decision to take the singing role in the 10-minute anti-racist film *The house I live in*, shown throughout the USA. The title song, which Sinatra later released as a single, was composed by US communist Earl Robinson; Albert Maltz, one of the blacklisted and hounded Hollywood Ten and Sinatra's good friend, wrote the screenplay.

Sinatra's progressive stance in the 1940s was not superficial, something underlined by another of his friends from those years quoted in Kitty Kelly's *His way: the unauthorized biography of Frank Sinatra*. Jo-Carrol Silvers recalls that, "Both Frank and I were fairly close to the Communist Party line at that time. Neither of us was a card-carrying member, of course, but were both close to people like Albert Maltz who were, and we shared their beliefs for the most part." Although Sinatra did not join the CPUSA, he worked closely with communists in the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences and Professions.

After a visit to Cuba in 1947, where Sinatra was photographed socialising with known mafiosi, Hearst newspaper columnists renamed him with a gangster epithet. A couple of duff films followed, *The kissing bandit* and *The miracle of the bells*, both produced in 1948. But in 1949, Sinatra linked up with Gene Kelly again for *Take me out to the ball game* and *On the town*, temporarily lifting his career. Some fallow years of collapsing popularity were ended when Sinatra took the role of Private Angelo Maggio, for rock-bottom pay, in *From here to eternity* in 1953. After that he never looked back - in more ways than one.



He once sided with the oppressed

Emotion and passion in Sinatra's singing and acting ebbed away in terms of his involvement with any-

thing overtly 'progressive'. Following the McCarthy witch hunt years of the early 1950s, when his marital difficul-

ties took precedence, Sinatra's energies were totally directed away from anything to do with working class politics. He may have taken humanist roles in some of his films, using his intelligent and sympathetically realistic style to good effect, but his political drift rightwards continued without abatement. A former friend of John F Kennedy, his associates were surprised to see Sinatra cosy up to Reagan in later years. Sinatra became happy to bask in establishment adulation, peaking in the glory of his 'Living legend' award at the 1994 Grammys.

Anti-racism was one element that drew Sinatra to the left, associating him with communists, who were at the forefront of anti-racist struggles in the USA at the time. Clearly his relative wealth was no bar, either in his own mind or to leftists who worked with him. Any ideas of human liberation he possessed either became subsumed within his artistic expression or were frittered away and modified piecemeal through the separation of his mode of life from that of most of his audience. Professional setbacks had initially followed resounding successes and probably led Sinatra to separate his social and political concerns from his career, to which he then dedicated himself above all else. Involvement with progressive causes - not easy in the USA of the late 1940s - needed no longer to be his priority, and Sinatra withdrew from any such engagement. Political withdrawal has its own price, of course, since immersion in a sea of bourgeois thought is inevitably corroding, justifying every abandonment of human liberation. Justification for Sinatra ended with him literally singing the praises of his Republican friends ●

Tom Ball

Government issues 'Fairness at work' white paper

Labourism at work

"This white paper is part of the government's programme to replace the notion of conflict between employers and employees with the promotion of partnership. There will be no going back. The days of strikes without ballots, mass picketing, closed shops and secondary action are over. Even after the changes we propose, Britain will have the most tightly regulated labour market of any leading economy in the world. What we set out here are our proposals for an industrial relations settlement for this parliament." Thus spoke prime minister Blair in his foreword to the white paper, *Fairness at work*, which was published last week.

'Settlement' is an apposite term, as the responses of big business and the trade union bureaucracy soon showed. "The Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress both said they were concerned about parts of the white paper, but indicated they could make the proposals work," reported the *Financial Times* employment editor, Robert Taylor (May 22). Only the representatives of inefficient national capital, the Institute of Directors, the Engineering Employers Federation and the London Chambers of Commerce, spoke in condemnatory terms. The EEF talked of "damage to business efficiency", while the LCC complained of "added costs to business" and of "a significant step backwards in labour relations".

As anticipated, the white paper proposes that a minimum of 40% of workers eligible to vote must cast in favour of trade union recognition before a simple majority is considered valid. It also exempts from any recognition requirement firms employing under 20 workers. No less than five million workers are employed by these companies. But criticism on both scores was distinctly muted from those trade union leaders who, only two months ago, were threatening to mobilise huge demonstrations. John Edmonds, general secretary of the GMB, called the white paper a "flawed jewel" and promised a "campaign to change it, before and during its passage into legislation". The TGWU's Bill Morris spoke in similar terms. Only Lew Adams, of the train drivers' union Aslef, who was recently deposed as general secretary by Socialist Labour Party member Dave Rix, called for "an urgent recall of the full TUC Congress to ensure that current policies are unambiguously reaffirmed to the government" (*Trade Union Review* May 1998). Meanwhile, reassurance was forthcoming for media boss Rupert Murdoch, as the GPMU print union stated: "Wapping is not even in our top 100 targets" (*Financial Times* May 22).

A number of sops have been thrown to the union chiefs to encourage acquiescence. Firstly, there will be a 'fast track' to recognition, with no ballot being required, where unions can demonstrate to the Central Arbitration Committee that over 50% of a 'bargaining unit' are already union members. The CAC will also be able to rule on disputes over the definition of the appropriate bargaining unit for recognition purposes. And all union members will have the right to be represented by a union official or fellow employee in disciplinary and grievance procedures, even in workplaces where the union is not recognised. Taylor, of the *Financial Times*, suggests that advisers had warned Blair that the TUC's so-called 'new

unionism', with its emphasis on responsible partnerships in industry, could be put at risk if Monks was seen to be humiliated over the recognition issue.

The second major area of change proposed in the white paper is in the law relating to dismissal. Employees will be able to claim unfair dismissal, at an industrial tribunal, if they have at least one year's employment, instead of two as at present. The TUC had obtained a commitment from the former Labour Party leader, John Smith, that rights should apply from day one in a job. This has now been abandoned in line with New Labour's now explicit identification as 'the party of business'. The white paper explains that the government accepts that employers need a year in order to be sure of being able to "correct errors in recruitment without excessive cost". The present ceiling of £11,500 on compensation awards in unfair dismissal cases is to be removed. This will bring Britain into line with the European Union and its attitude towards discriminatory dismissals on the grounds of sex, race or disability.

Under the proposals complaints of unfair dismissal arising from official industrial action may now be considered at an industrial tribunal. Workers sacked during unofficial action will have no such right. Dismissals in the former case will not automatically be unfair, in the way that dismissals for pregnancy, for instance, are. Tribunals decide whether the employer had acted 'fairly' and 'reasonably'. The white paper asks for views on what criteria tribunals should apply in deciding this matter. It also poses the question as to whether a flat-rate compensatory award should apply where dismissals are found to be unfair, rather than the now unlimited awards in other types of unfair dismissal.

On this item, too, previous Labour Party commitments have been very substantially diluted. Whilst campaigning during the Labour leadership contest, Blair himself stated, quite explicitly: "I believe the next Labour government should ... ensure that where industrial action [is] lawful, individual employees *would have the right not to be dismissed for that action*" (emphasis added - letter to secretary, Tameside Union, July 12 1994).

Either way it remains the case that Labour is a different animal to the Tories. Where Thatcher sought to smash trade unionism without compunction, Blair seeks to discourage industrial action through both maintaining the main body of the anti-union laws and incorporating union officialdom. Independent rank and file working class initiatives remain outlawed. Indeed they will be more exposed under New Labour.

The union bureaucracy had complained that, due to the prevalence of victimisation, it was becoming difficult for them to recruit *responsible* shop floor union representatives. The white paper acknowledges this class collaborationist reason for addressing the problem, and outlines legislation to remove those areas in which discrimination on the grounds of union membership (or non-membership) or activities remains lawful: eg, denial of pay rises to union members who refuse to sign 'personal' contracts. Blacklisting of union members will be prohibited, although no explanation is given as to how this will be enforced.

Two 'social chapter' provisions are

incorporated into the proposed legislation - a right to *unpaid* parental leave of up to 12 weeks while a child is under eight years of age, and the extension of statutory maternity leave entitlement from 14 weeks to 18 weeks to bring it into line with maternity pay. These reforms are announced in the name of "building a new relationship between work and family life". They are woefully inadequate in comparison to what is needed: ie, free 24-hour nurseries and community restaurants, and the socialisation of housework.

Tory shadow industry secretary John Redwood described *Fairness at work* as "pay back time for the unions". He was referring to two little publicised provisions tucked away in the document. The requirement for renewed authorisation for the deduction of union dues from pay every three years is to be abolished. Secondly, there is to be a review of the law and code of practice on industrial action ballots with a view to simplification, and the requirement for unions to hand over to employers the names of all employees to be balloted will be deleted.

But the real "pay back" comes with a reminder of the role expected of the unions by capital and its government: "Of the 50 largest UK companies, 44 recognise trade unions. Trade unions can make the task of forging effective partnerships easier for employers and employees. Many trade unions now focus much more strongly on working with management to develop a flexible, skilled and motivated workforce."

The Labour Party is still a bourgeois workers' party. Groups like the Socialist Party are mistaken in seeking to deny this. For the time being, Labour continues to carry out its historic role - tying the workers to capitalism; preventing the workers from becoming a class for itself. The role comes natural and easy.

Just as TUC leader JR Clynes could admit, in 1925: "I am not in fear of the capitalist class. The only class I fear is our own"; today we can still see the fear and loathing of the bureaucracy towards groups of proletarian fighters like the Liverpool dockers. Just as TUC general secretary Walter Citrine could write, in 1927, that the future line of development of the trade union movement should be "in the direction of making workers' organisations an integral part of the economic machinery of society"; today John Monks eulogises 'new unionism' and 'social partnership' and declares unions to be "part of the answer for employers facing the pressures of change and competition".

If it was not already crystal clear, it must now be so, that the incumbent union leaderships have no thought of achieving the repeal, let alone the smashing, of the 1980s raft of anti-union laws. They have demonstrated, once again, their incapacity and their unwillingness to lead a real fight.

Herein lies Arthur Scargill's opportunity, through the Reclaim Our Rights initiative, and also the source of his open difference with his fellow SLP national executive committee members, Bob Crow and John Hendy, who want to rely on the TUC. Scargill on the other hand sees his chance to build an alternative leadership based on left union bureaucrats gravitating towards 'his' SLP. By deferring the national ROR demonstration until May 1999 he hopes to build up a head of steam and win the allegiance of thousands of discontented union activists.

Revolutionaries, while welcoming the ROR initiative, realise that permanent advance cannot be 'delivered' by labour dictators. We must argue for what is really needed - a revolutionary rank and file organisation, a new Minority National Movement and a reformed CPGB ●

Derek Hunter

Summer Offensive '98

Half time looms

Week three of the CPGB's eight-week fundraising drive saw a North London supporter add to the £100 he had already donated towards our election work, sending cheques for £200 now and £200 postdated, all of which counts towards our collective Summer Offensive target of £20,000 by June 29. Comrade DO from East London has given £50. We also received a number of smaller cheques from Party supporters and sympathisers inspired by our coverage of events in Indonesia.

Comrades in Hackney are tackling the Offensive in a variety of ways. One is collecting goods to be sold in car boot sales. Two others are doing second jobs and extra shifts to bring in that extra few hundred pounds. This, of course, is something non-political people readily do to meet their private needs, but communists put in time in a selfless way, for the needs of

the struggle.

Comrades in Manchester have responded to the Party printshop's offer to augment SO figures with commission on jobs. Competitive quotes can be given for any location in the UK (if not beyond), so a book for a Manchester customer will help the printshop expand and swell our SO total.

A further £91 has been raised by Manchester comrades this week, and £300 by the *Weekly Worker* team, bringing the total for three weeks to £3,469 - 17.3% of the target. We are still looking for new or increased pledges to the tune of £6,170 to reach £20,000. This will only be achieved by each individual Party and *Weekly Worker* supporter personally prioritising fundraising in the face of other pressing matters. Mark the halfway point of the campaign by sending in money and new pledges ●

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. ☐

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

WW subscription £ _____

Donation £ _____

Cheques and postal orders should be in sterling.

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

Special offer to new subscribers: 3 months for £5.00

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TEL _____

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

Tel: 0181-459 7146 Fax: 0181-830 1639.

CPGB1@aol.com

Tories wait in wings

Last Friday's Northern Ireland referendum marked a significant step towards a settlement in the imperialist-sponsored peace process. However, in no way does this mean that from here on Blair will have an easy ride. Indeed we should expect new crises.

The 71% 'yes' vote, combined with the remarkable 81% turnout, would, in any circumstances other than the Six Counties, have signified a conclusive and successful outcome for the whole project. For example, the almost identical 'yes' percentage a fortnight earlier in the referendum for a London mayor and assembly undoubtedly foresees an uncomplicated, virtually uncontested passage for Blair's proposals in that area - despite the turnout of just 34.6%.

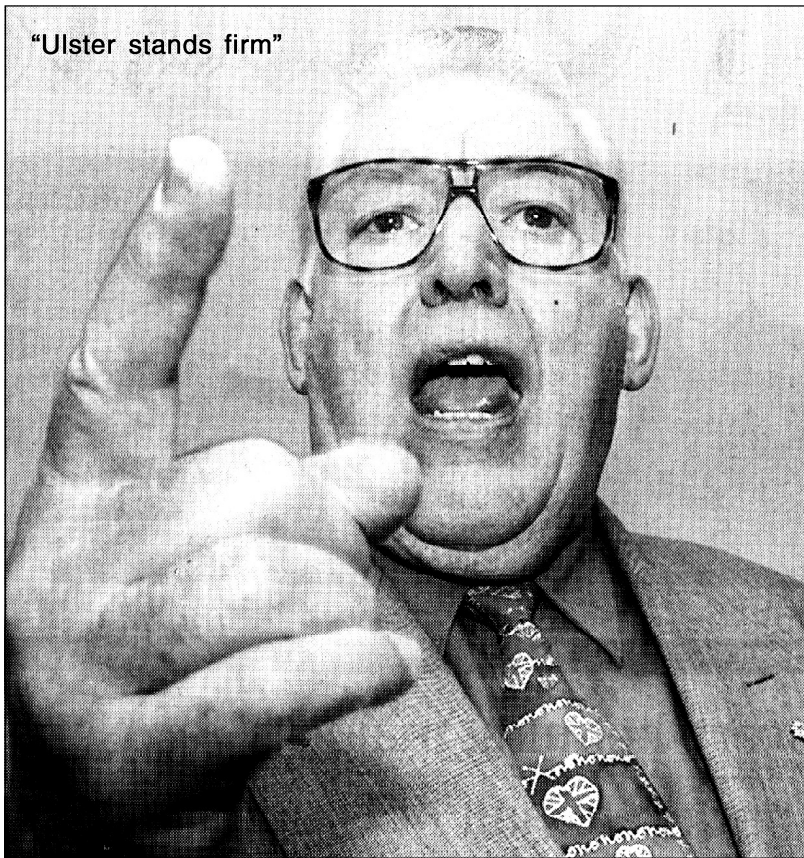
The two referendums were of course closely connected. While the Ireland peace process is hugely more significant than plans for a London assembly, nevertheless both form part of Blair's scheme for far-reaching constitutional change in order to forge a new consensus, allowing for the more efficient operation of capital over the entire British Isles. But the powerful forces at play in the Six Counties retain the capacity not only to wreck the British-Irish Agreement, but also to provoke deep divisions within the British ruling class itself.

These tensions were illustrated in an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* the day after the referendum result was announced. Its May 24 editorial stated that the poll had been decisive, bringing "a ray of hope to the dreary stepples of Fermanagh and Tyrone". However, it went on: "There is no doubt ... that the loyalist and IRA ceasefires have been bought at a morally expensive price. In public, Conservative and Labour ministers have vehemently denied that their actions during the peace process have constituted appeasement; in private, they are much more honest, conceding that their strategy was based on the premise that the IRA could not win, but that it could not be defeated. The cost has been the granting of grotesque international credibility to Sinn Féin, the welcoming of Gerry Adams into Downing Street, and the revolting parade of released paramilitary prisoners. In practice more concessions were made to the terrorists than to any other group in the negotiations."

But the editorial continued: "In constitutional terms however, the republican movement has gained little. As Mitchell McLaughlin, the chairman of Sinn Féin, conceded in a recent interview, the deal 'does legitimise the British state in Ireland'. Like the constitutional nationalists, Sinn Féin has signed up to the principle - previously heretical - that the status of Ulster cannot change without the consent of its majority. It has also had to accept the new Belfast assembly."

The *Sunday Telegraph*, up to this year a scathing critic and die-hard opponent of the whole peace process, still expresses strong reservations. However, its analysis

"Ulster stands firm"



concerning the balance of forces, the concessions to SF/IRA and the latter's retreat in constitutional terms is accurate. What causes it to wring its hands is the fact that the IRA's heroic struggle has forced the state to concede in practice that the liberation fighters were not mere 'criminals', but soldiers and prisoners of war. Although "nationalist Ireland has been forced to accept ... the democratic legitimacy of partition", for the *Telegraph* the moral credibility of the UK state - its right to rule - has, paradoxically, simultaneously been weakened by its concessions to the "terrorists".

It is these underlying contradictions, combined with the continuing strength of 'Ulster says no' loyalism, which could yet produce fissures of crisis proportions within the British ruling class. The referendum result, for all its decisiveness, concealed the fact that the protestant population was split down the middle. Of the 29% 'no' vote, only a couple of percentage points at most were accounted for by intransigent republican opponents, which means that in all likelihood there was the narrowest of 'yes' majorities amongst unionists.

An accurate breakdown of catholic/protestant voting returns was intentionally prevented by the authorities through its deliberate mixing of ballot boxes from different localities. This obfuscation allowed Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party and most prominent 'no' campaigner, to claim 56% support amongst loyalists - without fear of authoritative rebuttal. "The Ulster people refused to be bribed and bullied - they stood firm," he fulminated, promising that this alleged protestant majority, once translated into members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, would block key aspects of the deal. Other DUP leaders were less flamboy-

ant in their statements than Paisley. However they too undertook to co-operate in the assembly's working, but announced their intention of preventing "democratically" any moves towards all-Ireland institutions.

But the promise to thwart cross-border institutions is no idle threat, as representatives to the assembly, to be elected on June 25, will be asked to declare themselves unionist, nationalist or "other". Decisions will require a majority of both nationalists and unionists in order to pass.

At present the DUP and its allies are unable to threaten, let alone deliver, an Ulster Workers Council-style rebellion, although such a possibility is not entirely ruled out over the coming months.

The DUP will certainly have a large presence in the assembly, but the single transferable vote electoral system will not be in its favour. Voters will be able to list the parties in order of preference, but already both the Social Democratic and Labour Party and, more significantly, Sinn Féin itself have called on their supporters to consider using their lower preferences in favour of the Ulster Unionist Party, so as to keep out the DUP and Robert McCartney's UK Unionist Party. The DUP and UKUP can expect very few lower preferences from Alliance Party supporters, and even some UUP voters may consider the 'catholic' SDLP preferable to the likes of Paisley.

On the other hand, the remarkable statement of SF spokesperson Pat Doherty, that "those who voted for change" should back David Trimble's UUP, may serve to turn wavering unionists away from Trimble and over to Paisley. The fact that 'republican terrorists' are backing Trimble will in their terms tend to confirm Paisley's claim that the UUP has sold out. Nevertheless, Sinn Féin's call to consider back-

ing the Ulster Unionist Party, the historical oppressor of catholic rights, clearly demonstrates how far Gerry Adams has moved along the path that leads away from revolutionary nationalism and towards 'respectable' bourgeois politics.

SF's stress on ensuring the agreement's success at all costs could logically be carried even further - to the point of advising a vote for those other champions of the peace process, the Progressive Unionist Party and the Ulster Democratic Party, respective political wings of the UVF and UDA anti-catholic murder squads.

It could also be viewed by the British and Irish governments as a signal that dissident paramilitaries can now be 'eliminated' without undue objection from SF, and without risking mass protests capable of destabilising the peace process. Irish taoiseach Bertie Ahern is thought to believe that the overwhelming 85.5% 'yes' over the whole island gives him the go-ahead to crack down on the 'real IRA', the Continuity Army Council and the Irish National Liberation Army. And Tony Blair wrote in the *Belfast Telegraph*: "I can also guarantee that both ourselves and the Irish government will show no mercy to anyone going back to violence. There will be no fudge between democracy and terror" (May 25).

Over the next week or so Trimble will be pulling out all the stops to ensure that as many as possible of the UUP's candidates will be pro-agreement. Already a section of the UUP that had joined the 'no' forces has started to edge back in the wake of the referendum. Jeffrey Donaldson, one of the six anti-agreement UUP MPs, called for the party to reunite, saying: "If the people of Northern Ireland have voted 'yes', we will have to live with the consequences of that." But this did not help him in his bid to be nominated as a candidate for the assembly. The Trimble leadership stepped in to prevent this possibility. Donaldson said he was "disappointed", but would accept the decision.

Nevertheless, even if Trimble is able to build on his referendum success in backing the agreement and manages to beat off the DUP challenge on June 25, it is clear that the assembly unionists, whatever their precise party affiliation, could block the establishment of the North-South Council and the setting up of other all-Ireland bodies - even at the risk of seeing the assembly suspended. That would effectively stymie the whole peace project. They will certainly continue to bay for the disarming of the IRA and shout their opposition to the release of republican prisoners.

Like the unionists, the Tories will also insist that the IRA begins to give up its arms before its POWs are freed. Their Northern Ireland spokesperson, Andrew Mackay, called on SF/IRA to first "embark upon substantial decommissioning". Earlier this week it was announced that the *procedure* for surrendering weapons had been ac-

cepted by all the parties. But that is a far cry from the paramilitaries agreeing to do so in practice. There is no doubt that SF will be expecting and demanding that early releases begin this summer, but a token surrender of outdated weaponry would be unlikely to satisfy either Tories or unionists that "substantial decommissioning" had begun. But moves by Blair and Ahern against dissident republican paramilitary groups could help to deflect some of the pressure on Sinn Féin and allow the release programme to proceed.

Mackay continued: "Members of parties associated with terrorist organisations [must not] be allowed to become ministers within the new assembly unless these and other criteria are met." It is however improbable that Adams will want to see SF ministers at this stage. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that his organisation could constitute the second biggest grouping in the assembly, outstripping the SDLP as the largest nationalist party. That would entitle Adams to the post of 'deputy first minister', but he would almost certainly refuse to take it up, preferring to act as power broker for an UUP-SDLP administration.

How the Tories react will depend very much on events on the ground in the Six Counties. If Paisley is able to conjure up a protestant backlash on the streets, ultra-reactionary sections of the Conservative Party might seize their opportunity to exploit Blair's difficulties and attempt to wreck his whole project of constitutional reform - reform which looks set to marginalise the Tories through the introduction of proportional representation and the ending of their majority in the House of Lords. A Countrywide Alliance-type movement, taking its cue from Blair's difficulties in Ireland, could even produce a 'non-constitutional' opposition.

At present this scenario does not look likely. In fact, according to *The Sunday Telegraph* (May 24), Tories close to Hague are considering whether the Conservative Party's close links with the unionists should be broken. In an article headed 'Tories rethink on unionist ties', the *Telegraph* reports that Hague ally Michael Ancram has drawn up a secret paper recommending that 'unionist' be dropped from the party's name. It "has a faintly musty smell," he remarked. The paper warns that the new assembly will allow Blair to portray Northern Ireland as the equivalent of Scotland and Wales. "Labour may seek to launch a new unionism," writes Ancram. "We should try to get there first."

This does show, however, that even mainstream Tories are looking to exploit any weakness in Blair's project. And Ireland remains his most ambitious, yet most fragile and problematic area. Over Ireland Blair is potentially at his most vulnerable. Difficulties and divisions within the ruling class could yet provide us with our opportunity ●

Jim Blackstock