



For inclusive democracy in Socialist Alliances

Plotters exposed

London Socialist Alliance held a general meeting on July 5. Two main motions were debated - the first put forward by the Communist Party of Great Britain, the second by an 'amalgamated' bloc of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, Socialist Outlook and the Socialist Democracy Group. (Thanks to this bloc other motions were not discussed - there was a vote at the start to cut the time available by over a half).

Our motion stood firmly for the continuation of the LSA's inclusive democracy. The aim was to formalise the structures of LSA in the manner of the flexible, combative and inclusive democracy practised by the soviets - or workers' councils - during and immediately after the Russian Revolution of 1917. John Reed, the celebrated US communist, rightly described the soviets as "the most perfect organs of working class representation". There might be no revolutionary situation in Britain. Nevertheless the system of elected delegates and recallability can serve the Socialist Alliances admirably.

Speaking for the CPGB, Peter Manson explained that every affiliated organisation should have the *right* to send one *instantly recallable* delegate - that would include borough alliances, political organisations, trade unions and progressive campaigns (we are, as the comrade stated, open to negotiation on additional delegates in order to account for numbers and/or political weight).

Crucially the CPGB's plan allows for the speedy and full reflection of growth, priorities and changed political complexion. Representation comes with affiliation, not a vote by the whole. There would be no fixed terms. Hence a new affiliate would not wait in purgatory before finding whether or not this or that majority permits it to take a seat on our committee. Cooption is no option, but something to be avoided at all cost. As a system for the Socialist Alliances it is prone to terrible abuse by a determined clique (a majority of one can be built into something totally unassailable using such a device).

Organisations, not individuals, must be central. For example, if a comrade was assigned to another task by their trade union, they can be substituted, without fuss or bother, by that organisation at a moment's notice. In other words, no need for annual Socialist Alliance elections or the generosity of an existing majority.

The CPGB plan applies the same flexible practice to officers. Treasurers, editors, chairs, coordinators, trade union organisers, etc, should be elected when and where needed, not

according to some snapshot popularity poll by an atomised membership. The mayoral or presidential system has no legitimate place in our tradition. It breeds arrogance. We do not need another labour dictator like Arthur Scargill. Officers should be strictly accountable to their peers. They should be elected and replaceable by those whom they work alongside. If a comrade drops out because of illness, disillusionment or family pressures, another can easily be elected. By the same measure those officers who fail or who become isolated from an emerging political majority can be replaced without humiliation or a full-blown general meeting.

Our plan roots the LSA in the actual politics of its base. What happens below is almost instantly reproduced at the top. If there is a shift to the right in our affiliated membership, that will see a shift to the right above. The same applies if there is a shift to the left. So the CPGB stands for the right of the minority to become a majority and the right of the majority to take the leading positions ... but not through exclusion.

Those supporting the 'amalgamated' motion were represented by comrade Nick Long of Lewisham SA and the SDG. In his opening he confidently announced that he was speaking on behalf of the majority. This 'amalgamated' bloc had no hidden agenda. Or so he claimed. They want a broad alliance built from the bottom, with an emphasis on local environmental issues, pay and other bread and butter matters. A woefully inadequate schema in the run-up to the nationally important London Assembly and mayoral, and European elections. Surely the LSA should be concentrating, centralising and upping the tempo of our small forces, not scattering them downwards in every direction. As to articles in the *Weekly Worker* to the effect that the 'amalgamated' bloc wants to witch hunt communists and practically drive out the CPGB from the Alliance, as happened in Manchester - they were, said comrade Long, the result of "paranoia".

Such hypocrisy was easily exposed. Not only was comrade Long an anti-communist witch hunter during his brief stint in Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. He remains one. Our comrades circulated an internal SDG document that has recently come into our hands. The effect was electric. The author is a certain Duncan Chapple. His language is highly pretentious and deliberately delphic. Nevertheless the target is crystal clear. In the name of "trust and mutual respect" and creating a "pluralistic" and "matrix-type

organisation" the SDG has been busily plotting to purge the CPGB. Why?

It is not that this "contributor" - ie the CPGB - has hindered the work of the LSA. Nor have we attempted to dominate. As an organisation the CPGB has always been a minority and remains one. No positions have been seized by manoeuvre or underhand deals. Anne Murphy, LSA coordinator, is a member of the CPGB. However LSA chair Ian Driver is from the SDG. It is no secret that the administrative burden has been mainly carried by comrade Murphy. Surely that is why she was elected unopposed (twice) by the LSA ad-hoc committee to represent London on the Network of Socialist Alliances Liaison Group. In the borough alliances our comrades have also played an active and honourable role - the biggest slate of SA candidates for the May 7 council elections in London were fielded by the CPGB.

No, what is so damned offensive about the CPGB is that it exists as "the embryo of the future movement". This "absolutist" notion, which certainly could be applied to Peter Taaffe's 'small mass party', is "destructive". How to deal with the "absolutist" CPGB? Comrade Chapple favours creating "the position" whereby the CPGB finds itself outside the "atmosphere of trust and transparency" the SDG piously wishes for. In plain English he is for an anti-communist witch hunt.

Others from the 'amalgamated' bloc spoke in support of this hidden agenda. David Lyons of the SDG denounced the CPGB and Anne Murphy for advocating a *principled* split in the Scottish Socialist Party. Ironic, given that effectively the SSP is a nationalist split from SPEW and the Socialist Alliances. Doubly ironic given that comrade Lyons himself initiated and took part in an *unprincipled* split from SPEW last year. Not surprisingly the comrade now displays a deep prejudice against those who seek to strengthen the Socialist Alliances through principle as opposed to expediency and *realpolitik*. Creating a third irony, comrade Lyons champions localism (he takes no part in any borough alliance or local campaigning work).

Dave Packer of Socialist Outlook also jabbered about the virtues of localism, as did Toby Abse. This comrade is the 'amalgamated' bloc's uncrowned alternative to Anne Murphy as LSA coordinator. Masterfully displaying his 'non-partisan' credentials, this member of the Independent Labour Network rounded on the CPGB in general and its rep on the LSA ad-hoc committee in particular. The concern for minorities expressed by the

CPGB was "crap" (he did not elaborate). As for the CPGB's rep, he did not attend the same local meetings and pickets as comrade Abse. A heinous crime deserving of the severest punishment.

Suffice to say, when it came to voting on the two motions there could be no doubt about what was at stake. Inclusive democracy or conspiracy, exclusion and an orientation to faddism and localist fragmentation. On motion one the votes for and against were exactly even: 18 on each side. So, although the motion fell, the 'amalgamated' bloc has conclusively been shown to be no majority. It is the intolerant, undemocratic, anti-communist right wing of the LSA. It is also the past, not the future. The 'amalgamated' bloc by its very nature is unprincipled and therefore unstable. Those supporting it are a motley crew, not only including SPEW, Socialist Outlook and the SDG, but the flotsam and jetsam of the burnt out left, along with members of the Green Party (so much for the pompous claim by the greens to be the epitome of democracy).

The fact that SPEW places itself at the core of this rotten bloc goes to prove just how deeply in crisis it is as a political entity. The comrades appear to be suffering from collective amnesia. They have forgotten that not so long ago Militant Tendency was on the receiving end of a sustained and brutal witch hunt. Neil Kinnock used democracy to undemocratically hound them out of Labour's broad church. However, having just lost his largest region, comrade Taaffe dreads another Scotland. So his comrades in London are desperate to kill off the LSA. But without being seen to do the dirty deed. Amongst other factors, they have to take due account of Dave Nellist riding high in his Coventry power base. Significantly SPEW's only successful candidate in the May 7 council election enthusiastically backs the Socialist Alliances. The comrades therefore operate by stealth and negatively. They steadfastly refuse positions of responsibility. They make only a token contribution. They oppose the circulation of controversial ideas. They pour scorn on theory and full discussion at meetings.

Obviously this reflects more than an organisation riven with pre-split fault lines. The socialism envisaged by SPEW would be bureaucratic and statist: ie, from above. Their socialism has nothing to do with proletarian self-liberation. It will according to their 'revolutionary-reformist' programme be handed down to a largely passive and ignorant working class by a be-

neficient parliamentary majority. Such non-socialism leads to its own dire methods and stultifying political culture.

When it came to voting on motion two, it was Hackney SA which formed the basis of a real majority in the LSA. A series of amendments were submitted. They had the full support of the CPGB and all but one of them were carried. The unsuccessful amendment fell on a tied vote. The amendments had the effect of spiking or undermining the localism, greenism and liquidationism of the 'amalgamated' bloc. The cynical stratagem originating from SPEW to limit the LSA to one meeting every two months was deleted. Relations with greens and other such non-socialist forces are to be based on "principle". The LSA will democratically decide what campaigns to initiate or support.

The next few months will be crucial for the whole Socialist Alliance project. LSA is committed to another general meeting in the autumn. Moreover there is to be a National Network meeting on September 5 in Rugby. After the May democratic coup against democracy in Manchester SA - when the CPGB was to all intents and purposes excluded by the combined votes of SPEW, Socialist Outlook, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty etc - democracy must remain the main question.

Most comrades involved in the National Network's Liaison Group have no intention of operating on the basis of exclusion. Of that we are convinced. That said, the structure outlined by comrade Dave Church of Walsall Democratic Labour Party is not only ambiguous and cumbersome, but could produce the very same results that John Nicholson - National Network coordinator - engineered in Manchester.

There must be the most determined rejection of exclusion. There must be no more Manchesters. Inclusive democracy is no luxury for the Socialist Alliances, but a vital necessity. It needs therefore to be constitutionally enshrined in all Alliances from top to bottom.

The CPGB will submit its own constitutional proposals to Rugby. We will also present a minimum political platform which both provides for the unity of all genuine socialists and at the same time junks the pacifism, greenism and bureaucratic socialism evident in the draft formulations produced by some leading comrades. Win or lose, the CPGB will strive to build the Socialist Alliances into a mass force ●

John Bridge
CPGB representative on London SA
ad-hoc committee

Party notes

Socialist Hypocrisy Group

"This Socialist Democracy Group, then. What's it all about?" muses Dave Osler in *Socialist Democracy* No3 (April-May 1998).

Good question, Dave. What on earth is the SDG all about? Here is an organisation whose promotion blurb is full of honeyed phrases about the need for 'openness', 'inclusion' and 'democracy'. Its founding members split from the Socialist Party denouncing its "gross distortion of the spirit of debate and controversy" which constitutes the essence of democratic centralism (Founding statement *Socialist Democracy* No1, November 1997).

These comrades pointed to the real fact that "almost all" revolutionary organisations attempt to "drive out oppositions". Which means that "radical and new ideas" are silenced. This is "abnormal" at any time, but now it has become "impossible in a period when many aspects of the socialist programme have to be rethought". Contemporary society - overshadowed by the dramatic collapse of Stalinism - has produced an "increased sensibility toward democratic functioning". Thus, "much broader and inclusive formations are needed" (my emphasis).

Clearly, those elements of the SDG who joined believing this stuff will now have difficulty squaring these "libertarian" statements with the rather squalid practice of the organisation. In fact, there is no little irony that leading SDG supporters have been the moving spirit behind the sordid intriguing in the London Socialist Alliance. In truth, despite the verbal commitments to "openness" and "inclusion" mouthed by this group since its inception, it has pursued a narrow sectarian project, it was formed in an exclusivist sectarian manner and thus - unsurprisingly - it works in an underhand sectarian way.

First, on its formation. The SDG's core comrades constituted a short-lived faction in the Socialist Party. However, far from a principled struggle to win this important organisation to their point of view, the comrades split casually, in the light-minded and prissy manner that they seem to believe marks their sect out as 'fresh', 'young' (?) and 'interesting'.

As I commented on their exit at the time, "It should be axiomatic that to split a serious working class organisation is a grave matter, something to be entered into only after protracted, tenacious and indefatigable struggle" ('Party Notes' *Weekly Worker* October 30 1997). The frivolous manner of the exit from the SP underlined that this was essentially a petty, personal project of the disparate individuals involved, not a venture in the interests of the class. This estimation was confirmed in the editorial of the very first issue of *SD*, where there was no honest settling of accounts, no balance sheet of the (minimal) struggle in the SP. Readers were simply presented with yet another immaculately conceived micro-sect of the British left, organised around a particular theoretical shibboleth that justified its separate existence.

Thus, while the founding conference of the SDG on January 31 officially advertised itself as "open to anyone who agrees with the need for the construction of a broad, pluralistic socialist party" (my emphasis *SD* No 2, January-February 1998, p9), the truth was rather different. The SDG is committed to excluding the CPGB from the LSA ... after the communists what other "absolutist" comrades will be next?

It is at the level of its theory, however, that we have to explain the SDG's hostility to communist revolutionaries.

Socialist Democracy No2 (January-February 1998) writes of "ultra-left or-

ganisations like the CPGB, Workers Power, Workers Action, etc". These very different organisations apparently all "fill their journals with irrelevant sectarianism".

This aversion to honest political debate flows from one of the few political perspectives that binds SDG comrades together. This seems to be their agreement that the task of the day is "the fight for political representation at national and international level of the working class". The nature of this political representation is determined already. It is a "fantasy to imagine that even a section of the popular masses" will go to revolutionary groups. There is an inescapable "stage" that it is impossible to "jump over" of "much broader and inclusive (!) formations" (SDG *What next for socialists in Britain?* - cited in *Weekly Worker* October 30 1997). But inclusive of whom exactly, comrades?

In the formulations of the group, the nature of the organisation it envisages is left deliberately vague. Yet it is clear that the SDG - as a 'revolutionary' organisation - is actually agitating for a social democratic grouping, with themselves as a tolerated Marxist minority - a "stage" of going "through the complex process of refounding the socialist left and its Marxist wing" (cited in *Weekly Worker* November 20 1997).

The wellspring of the SDG's opposition to communists in the Socialist Alliances is thus revealed. Its mechanical perspective of the inevitable 'recomposition' of left social democracy is rejected by the CPGB. Thus, in the true spirit of this type of politics, elements in the SDG's ranks wish to exclude the communists from the preconceived opportunist framework it is attempting to impose on reality. The logic of this rotten perspective spontaneously produces the type of insidious, deceitful methods the comrades have displayed in the London Socialist Alliance. Not surprisingly SDG and the anti-communist witch hunters in the Fourth International Supporters Caucus are closely related. Indeed they could be called twins. They not only share the same origins and international affiliations, but the same method. In fact several SDG comrades were only a short time ago members of Fisc.

Opportunist politics shrivel up quick in the light of day. It is this that explains the delicious irony that Duncan Chapple can blithely write in one paragraph (see p6) that the LSA needs "clear, free, open and participatory discussion to clarify the alliances goals" and in another suggest that it "must ... select and control those who are within the alliance on the basis of what they bring to it" - communists need not apply, we presume.

The SDG and its close chum - *History* (with a capital 'H', of course) - have already decided what the "goals of the alliance" are to be. Those who think otherwise and have a coherent alternative vision are to be excluded.

Honest SDGers who find this objectionable and who are actually committed to the revolutionary openness ostensibly espoused by their group should approach the Communist Party. Our organisation is the most consistent champion of democracy in the workers' movement. Comrades who join our genuinely inclusive project will never be faced with the suppression of their views or with the demand that they change their perspectives - on 'recomposition' or anything else.

We insist only that they break with the rotten hypocritical practice of the SDG - that they fight for their politics openly, honestly and with revolutionary candour ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Inaccurate

I have been a subscriber to your journal for a couple of years now and find it a useful source of information on who is doing what to whom in the revolutionary left, and I generally enjoy the robust polemical tone of Mark Fischer's column.

However, if I might offer a little friendly criticism, Mark's tendency (and he is not alone in this) to embroider his articles with quotes from Lenin's *Collected Works* adds nothing to their persuasiveness, especially when, as in the case of Mark's article, 'Craig agonises' (*Weekly Worker* July 2 1998), his gloss on the reference (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 19, p173) is both inaccurate and inappropriate.

In discussing whether recently ex-CPGB comrades should have their views aired in the columns of the *Weekly Worker*, Mark opposes the notion, calling in aid Lenin and a small episode in his dispute with Bogdanov from the year 1913. Mark sets the references out thus: "A few years after having Bogdanov expelled from the Bolshevik faction he attacked the *Vpered* group to which the man belonged in the Bolshevik paper *Pravda*. Bogdanov sent a reply, which was published. Outraged, Lenin wrote to the editors telling them that their decision was 'so scandalous that, to tell the truth, one does not know whether it is possible after this to remain a contributor'. Lenin saw no 'right' for Bogdanov - the leader of a trend that proposed the dissolution of the Party - to be accorded space in the pages of the Bolshevik press to propagate these views, even if responding to a polemical attack. Right or wrong, he assessed it politically, in other words."

It is difficult to imagine a less convincing example, or one with more errors. Bogdanov was not a member of the *Vpered* group. In Lenin's words (from the same article Mark calls in aid): "The *Vpered* group is disintegrating completely. Mr Bogdanov left them a long time ago." Nor did Bogdanov or the *Vpered* have a dissolutionist policy. That was a Menshevik heresy of Potresov, Martov, etc. Bogdanov and *Vpered* were Otvosts, dedicated to the cessation of work in the Duma and trade unions and other legal working class organisations in favour of an underground party. Lenin's complaint was that Bogdanov's article denied *Vpered*'s line was connected to boycotting the Duma, etc. Lenin says: "Mr Bogdanov expounded the *Vpered* platform incorrectly and gave the facts incorrectly ... I cannot continue to contribute articles in face of Mr Bogdanov's despicable lying."

None of this is particular heinous, but it is the sort of mess that comrades get themselves into when they bolster a sagging argument by reference to infallible writ. The similarity between the Dundee comrades and Bogdanov and *Vpered* is as remote as the Russia of 1913 is to Britain in 1998. Have the Dundee comrades imported the anti-Marxist philosophy of Mach and Avernarius into the CPGB as Lunacharsky and Bogdanov did to the Bolsheviks? Did they set up a rival party school to the Communist University as Bogdanov, Lunacharsky and Gorky did? Did they lead physical attacks against party public meetings as Alexinsky and a group of *Vperedists* did? I will bet the answer to these questions is no. Indeed, in terms of boycotting I would have thought that Jack Conrad and Mark Fischer would be closer to Bogdanov than Dave Craig or Dundee.

In any case, comrades, take heart. At the end of it all, Bogdanov, Lunacharsky and Gorky all returned to the fold. So why not save a lot of space and allay all suspicions and print the comrades letters?

Jim Higgins
Norfolk

Not even-handed

The Communist Party of Great Britain is as accurate as ever. In West Belfast the Socialist Party got 128 votes, not 28. More importantly however is the allegation of "evenhandedness in their equal condemnation of both loyalist death squads and republican anti-imperialists" (*Weekly Worker* July 2). The Socialist Party has never described these trends as being one and the same, or even opposite sides of the same coin. The reasons for republican armed struggle and loyalist reaction necessitate a more detailed analysis than the CPGB provide.

Such a lazy description could only be provided by a group devoid of support and analysis from those on the ground in Ireland.

Phil Bryant
Belfast

The life of John

I had to blink a few times when I read the letters page in the latest issue of *Socialist Review* (July). In it there is a wonderfully non-sectarian, hands-across-the-water-type letter. Thus we read the following:

"Once we could have argued for a 'one party, one

election' approach; now we need something more flexible. For example, the Network of Socialist Alliances brings together local groups of socialists who are taking up struggles across the country. The Independent Labour Network is enlisting support of those disaffected with Labour following the move of Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr, Euro MPs. The Green Left Network seeks to mobilise those who combine demands for environmental sustainability with social justice, and there are Green councillors willing to work with socialists. These three networks are linked and are developing the possibilities of cooperation and coordinated electoral intervention, where appropriate, effective and possible. At the same time, there are at least three socialist parties with electoral aims and experiences: the Socialist Party has elected representatives; the Socialist Labour Party has fought elections widely; the Socialist Workers Party is considering putting its resources towards an electoral platform.

"All these forces are worthy of recognition."

The author of this letter concludes: "We could also demonstrate by working together that (nearly) 2,000 years later we are not all reliving the experience of the splitters who were so prominent in *The life of Brian*."

Who wrote the above words? John Nicholson, convenor of Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance and the Network of Socialist Alliances. A comrade who used the most despicable bureaucratic practices to exclude and drive out communists from the GMSA.

It appears from the above letter that comrade Nicholson is prepared to work with just about anyone except communists - and in particular the CPGB.

Worst of all, Nicholson tries to enlist Monty Python's *The life of Brian* on his side! I recommended that comrade Nicholson watches it again. He may find that the joke is on him.

John Dart
Bristol

What did I say?

Gone are the heady days of a week at Blackpool or Scarborough debating a full schedule of political, industrial and world events - which marked the NUM out not simply as a trade union, but as a social and political organisation with campaigns and views affecting all areas of work and life.

This year's NUM national conference (Barnsley, July 4) is reduced to one day only, and as such reflects a very much smaller agenda, as well as a limited ability to launch mass interventions. At the insistence of Arthur Scargill the NEC (reconvened as "a special delegate conference") voted earlier the year to hold only bi-annual conferences, even of the one-day variety, and to reduce by half the number of NECs in a year. All of this in a dire struggle to stay solvent in an ever declining coal industry, coupled with an ever declining loss of membership density. The next time we are due to meet is in the millennium!

The conference itself was vibrant, with dynamic contributions from the floor and a unity of purpose across national and old political divides. The union committed itself to a campaign to win recognition at RJB mines (the main coal-owner in Britain) and a conciliation scheme. Arthur set the ball rolling with a wage target of £50,000 per year for face workers, £40,000 elsewhere underground and £30,000 on the surface; a six-hour day and a four-day week. Our aim of retirement at 50 on a full pension has long been nailed to the masthead.

In Arthur Scargill's words, there was "only one note of discord" in the whole conference, and it seems it came from me, raising a question on the annual report and the accounts. I simply asked if the £20,000 annual affiliation we paid to the International Energy and Miners Organisation could be justified - given the lay-off in staff, the cut-backs in union services and the fact that all we have seen for it was a periodical badly duplicated news sheet. Then we needed an international miners' organisation under the control of the miners, with democratic delegate structures, and to whom it would be accountable.

Well, I suppose I should have known better. Arthur was irate. Never had he been so slighted, and generally did his fishmonger act with barrow-loads of red herrings. He was accountable - anyone could go their conferences - and implied accusations of disloyalty, nationalism, lack of gratitude, etc. No, it's not possible to get back up and restate with bared breasts one's undying commitment to our international comrades. You've had your go and all that is to be done is to sit and be harangued, while doing a McEnroe, 'What did I say? What did I say?' plea to fellow delegates.

Dave Douglass
NUM Hatfield

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

Hands off Russia!

The news from Russia is exceedingly grave. It would appear that the intervention has already begun and a British armed detachment has been landed at Murmansk ...

Organised labour, in spite of the sorry Kerensky episode [the Labour Party allowed the deposed head of the provisional government to address its conference, while refusing Maxim Litvinov, the Russian ambassador, the right of reply], must speak in no uncertain terms and protest against this shameful attempt. For the document which Kerensky has himself published as coming from some of the parties of the defunct constituent assembly itself protests against military intervention in Russian affairs, even though it declares Russia still to be at war with Germany.

Hands off! the Russian Socialist Republic! ●

Russian stroke crushed

The attempted stroke of the Revolutionary Socialists of the Left against the soviet government is the first of its kind in the very heart of the republic. It was crushed without difficulty - one more proof of the strength of the Bolshevik regime, but it is of enormous significance by reason of the fact that the left Socialist Revolutionaries have until recently cooperated with the Bolsheviks and only passed into opposition after the conclusion of peace, as a protest against the Brest-Litovsk treaty.

One would never have expected their opposition to go so far as to foment a rebellion and, as many of their leaders belong to the brightest personalities of the Russian Revolution, the surmise is obvious, and is indeed suggested in the official Russian communiqué: they harboured in their midst a number of spies and *agents provocateurs* of the Azev type, who worked in collusion with certain foreign agents, anxious to embroil the Russian government with the Germans by murdering the German ambassador, and to push Russia back into war by overthrowing the Bolshevik government.

This, we see now, is the meaning of the dark hints recently circulated in this country as to the impending fall of the soviet government. There is more in this business than appears to the readers of the censored daily press ●

Simon Harvey of the SLP Campaign struggles for momentum

Following the release of *Fairness at work*, the lightly sugar-coated, yet draconian white paper on workers' rights, delegates once again assembled under the auspices of the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws. Meeting for the second time since the successful launch of the Socialist Labour Party-initiated Reclaim Our Rights conference on March 28, around 60 delegates gathered from a variety of unions and union campaigns at the South Camden Community School in north London. This was half the number assembled at the first recall meeting on April 18.

Billed to confirm the allegedly 'interim' structure set up at the first recall conference, this meeting did not change the overall orientation of the campaign, which is aimed at shifting the trade union bureaucracy to the left. In the words of the Reclaim Our Rights pamphlet by the United Campaign's chair, Bob Crow, and one of the two joint secretaries, John Hendy, the "campaign can only succeed if led by the TUC".

So far, the campaign has had all the hallmarks of a stitch-up of the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy. The active leftwing bodies in the unions, such as the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU), were excluded from direct affiliation. Underlining the bureaucratic approach of the UC's committee, John Hendy said that the affiliation of 'broad lefts' to the campaign would act as deterrent to national trade unions. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, endorsing the existing structure, attempted to give this strategy revolutionary respectability.

Despite the potential the turnout for the meeting can only be considered disappointing. Notwithstanding Bob Crow's opening remarks that he has heard "plenty of fighting talk, yet not seen much fighting", this meeting, lasting over three hours, seemed to do plenty of the former. Perhaps the agenda, including an address by Aslef general secretary-elect Dave Rix, was not the most inspiring for comrades to mobilise around.

Even so, signalling its relatively open, non-sectarian nature and the relative importance of the campaign, a small number of Socialist Workers Party members dragged themselves away from the first day of Marxism 98 to make their clumsy interventions. It seems they are not quite sure how to react. So far, their only purpose seems to be to ensure it supports *their own* mobilisation at the Labour Party conference.

Typical of the United Campaign's culture, nobody mentions their political affiliation, yet most people know what the euphemisms mean. UCLH Unison means SWP, Free the Trade Unions Campaign means AWL, Reclaim our Rights usually means SLP, Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions means Communist Party of Britain, and the CFDU means the Socialist Party. Yet mention of party affiliation seems taboo, with the conference on July 4 explicitly excluding the affiliation of political organisations to the campaign.

The agenda, only slightly different to that advertised, included the joint secretaries' reports - on organisation and finance from Lol Duffy (AWL/FTUC), and on activities from John Hendy (SLP); discussion and decision on the constitutional arrangements of the campaign; the address

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 "So far, the campaign has had all the hallmarks of a stitch-up"

by Dave Rix; reports on union activities; and a debate on *Fairness at work*.

The only vaguely contentious item was that on the constitutional arrangements. Frankly, the rest of the agenda was a combination of repeating what we already know: tangential and obscure point-scoring and information-sharing on the white paper and various campaigns.

John Hendy reported on a number of regional meetings that had occurred (in Durham, Manchester and Glasgow) and said that meetings were being organised for the Midlands, Wales, London and two in Yorkshire. These meetings are to establish regional committees. A fringe meeting at the TUC conference has been organised for Monday September 14.

The United Campaign is to go ahead with its plans to organise a mass demonstration against the anti-trade union laws for May 1 1999. It is proposed to do this in association with the Greater London Area Trades Councils. Further, there is a proposal to dub this Union Rights Day and hold further demonstrations on May 1 2000 (a Sunday) and May 1 2001 (a bank holiday).

SLPer Dave Rix gave a fairly polished, strongly left-leaning speech. He pointed out that the careerists and bureaucrats in the movement were the real 'entrysts' and that they used the anti-trade union laws to police members. The comrade referred to the contradictory mood in workplaces. There was an awakening to the truth of Blairism alongside general apathy toward political activity. Yet when asked by SWPer and Islington firefighter Neil Williams about bureaucrats being more concerned with defending union funds than defending members, comrade Rix said that it was important for unions to have funds and that sequestering has destroyed a union's ability to organise in the past.

Discussion on the 'constitution' was fairly limited in range. John Hendy's draft structure was more like guidelines and notes than a document where every dot and comma was debated. Positively, all national unions (or regions in the absence of the higher body affiliating) have automatic representation. Likewise, regional committees of the campaign and of the TUC have automatic representation. An amendment from the Central London Engineering branch of the CWU, which was accepted by comrade Hendy, allows for automatic representation of affiliating county associations of Trades Union Councils.

Point one of the 'notes for the constitution' drew the most disagreement and discussion. It reads: "Supporters/affiliates: only bona fide trade union organisations". A comrade from Workers Fight asked whether the CFDU counted as a "bona fide trade union organisation". This was answered in

the negative from the platform. Lol Duffy from the Alliance from Workers' Liberty and its front, the FTUC, said that there were two or three 'broad lefts' in some unions and argued that we could not have every small group which called itself a 'union campaign' affiliating. Comrade Duffy said that point seven of the 'notes' was one way that allowed such campaigns to 'unofficially' affiliate. It reads: "10 branches or more of a union who are affiliated to the Campaign and are not supported nationally or regionally have one seat" on the committee.

Greg Tucker from the RMT executive and the South East Region TUC pointed out that it was questionable that Mark Sandell from the FTUC was representing a "bona fide trade union organisation" on the United Campaign's committee. Along the lines of argument presented at the meeting, it is indeed questionable whether the FTUC or, for that matter, Reclaim Our Rights and the LCDTU are "bona fide" if the CFDU is not.

Comrade Duffy argued that any campaign in a union that could not organise 10 branches to affiliate were not real campaigns anyway. He said that the United Campaign should have "real affiliations that mean something". This statement is somewhat ironic, given that regional TUCs, which the meeting recognised as being largely inactive, now have automatic representation on the committee. Surely, activists already in rank and file campaigns will be the initial motor firing any successful movement against the anti-union laws? Surely, the CFDU or Socialist Caucus of the PCSU would be "real affiliations that mean something".

It is positive that the United Campaign is open to all trade unionists. This alone is a step forward for the labour movement. However, it is not enough. Disunity in the face of a resolute and united enemy produces its own spontaneous necessity. Yet the method being used is a typically reflex bureaucratic attempt to win over left general secretaries in order to change the policy of the TUC, which remains slavishly loyal to Blairism. The left is in danger of acting as mere foot-soldiers for the bureaucrats.

Yet within the United Campaign are elements active in 'broad lefts' and left minority campaigns within the unions. These forces are part of the potential for building a cross-sectional, militant movement our class needs. Unlike the suffocating bureaucracy of its SLP parent, there is space within the United Campaign to agitate for what is necessary, against the current strategy of relying upon the TUC to "lead the campaign".

With or without the TUC, smash the anti-trade union laws. Build a militant minority movement in the unions against reformism, against economism and against bureaucracy.

London SLP

Information has been brought to my attention which will no doubt be of concern to the SLP leadership, but will come as no surprise to those who have observed the witch hunts, bureaucracy and inertia within our party. The SLP London committee is ruling over a rump of what it once was. In the lead-up to the SLP's second congress last December, the SLP in London had 600 members. That has now plummeted to 120 ●

action

CPGB seminars

London: July 5 - 'The state in practice - methods and forms' in the series on Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution*.

London: July 19 - 'Transitional programme' - speaker from the International Bolshevik Tendency. For more details call 0181-459 7146. Manchester: July 13 - 'Reaction today: revolution tomorrow'. For more details call 0161-798 6417.

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1918

Russian Revolution this week 80 years ago

For or against inclusive

This was a vital meeting. The fate - and future nature - of the LSA lay in the balance. Much of the discussion formally was about organisational structures. But in reality the fierce debate around organisation was saturated with politics - and shaped by the clash between different contending *programmatic* perspectives.

In a touch of high drama, when the vote was eventually taken on the CPGB's motion, it turned out to be a dead tie - 18 for and 18 against. The forces of inclusive democracy and the 'amalgamated' bloc showed themselves to be the left and right wings of the LSA - and, as Dennis Skinner was fond of saying, "You need both wings to fly". So for us the immediate task is to secure the principled unity of the LSA.

Before the substantive discussion began, comrade Julie Donovan from the SP proposed that the meeting be limited to two hours. After all, some comrades had children to look after, Sunday lunch to cook, etc. A majority voted to finish early. (In reality, comrade Donovan was *desperate* to avoid debate, particularly motion three from the CPGB, that "the LSA is committed to building an all-Britain SA" - and she freely admitted this at the end of the meeting.)

Another negative aspect was the foul spirit of Labourite-style political correctness which some comrades wanted to impose on the meeting. Socialist Outlook's resident feminist demanded to know how many women were on the list of comrades waiting to speak. She also spoke about male domination - ironic, given SO's stated intention of ousting LSA coordinator Anne Murphy and installing Toby Abse. This point of order was the comrade's sole 'contribution'.

However, it turned out to be an extremely productive and illuminating meeting, despite the bureaucratically induced time-famine. Unfortunately the LSA chair, Ian Driver of the SDG, failed to show up. This meant that comrade Murphy - LSA coordinator and CPGB member - had to stand in for him.

Comrade Peter Manson proposed CPGB motion one. He emphasised how its plan for inclusive democracy did not preclude "bread and butter issues" or "local campaigning", as many in the anti-CPGB bloc have foolishly - and dishonestly - claimed. "All components of the LSA must have autonomy and full rights," said comrade Manson.

The comrade also pointed to an elementary fact of political life. There are different types and forms of democracy. Therefore we must adopt the form of democracy appropriate - as the bourgeoisie do. They adopt either the first-past-the-post or proportional representation for their elections, depending on whether they want to include or exclude minority groups. The working class must be as flexible as the ruling class.

The LSA is an *alliance*. Therefore affiliates must have an *automatic* place on its steering committee, stressed comrade Manson. To illustrate this he asked the meeting to imagine the scenario if for example the SWP decided to affiliate. If it joined two weeks *after* the LSA's annual conference, it would have to wait nearly a year to get a representative on the steering committee - if we adopted the 'amalgamated' motion proposed by the SP, SO and the SDG, which advocates annual elections. On the other hand, if it joined two weeks *before*, its members could swamp the AGM

Danny Hammill reports on the July 5 London Socialist Alliance general meeting

.....

"The CPGB does have the politics - and the determination to become the majority through showing the power and correctness of those politics"

.....

and secure 100% of any steering committee.

Comrade Manson concluded by explaining that the CPGB was not trying to introduce a democratic centralist structure into the LSA - quite the opposite. But the structures envisaged by SP-SO-SDG would almost guarantee that the LSA ends up in the hands of a self-perpetuating clique. The CPGB is actually for soviet-style democracy - elected and recallable delegates.

Nick Long of Lewisham SA and the SDG proposed the 'amalgamated' motion. At the start of the meeting he handed out a leaflet, co-authored with Terry Liddle of Lewisham SA and Greenwich Green Party, entitled 'For building real and campaigning Socialist Alliances'. Whiter than white, the leaflet protested that "there is no 'hidden agenda' of exclusion". It told the meeting to "break out of the mind-set of small-sect politics" and to "reject centralism and paranoia - support the amalgamated resolution". In reality, Nick Long's leaflet was an anti-CPGB, anti-communist charter. Possibly a witch hunter's charter. Terry Liddle's signature points to the danger of pink-green McCarthyism emerging in the LSA.

Comrade Long repeatedly stressed that we need to build fighting and campaigning *local* organisations - "Take forward what we have already". The focus must be on local communities, said the comrade. Then we can have a "real impact".

Accurately, comrade Long stressed that this was a "watershed meeting". For him even more so. At the previous Wednesday's meeting of Lewisham SA, he had abruptly announced that he would "withdraw" from the alliances if the 'amalgamated' bloc motion was defeated. With so much at stake, comrade Long presented it as a straight choice between either a "telephone box alliance" (of the existing left groups) or a mass-based alliance with "real people". From all this, he concluded that the position of Anne Murphy was "untenable" and that she should be replaced by Toby Abse - who could present a "public face of independence" for the LSA. Both Nick Long and Toby Abse seemed to be under the impression that comrade

Murphy of the CPGB, not comrade Driver of the SDG, is LSA chair.

The portrayal of comrade Abse as an 'independent' is pure hypocrisy of course. He is a member of the Ken Coates/Hugh Kerr-led Independent Labour Network. In other words, Toby Abse's supporters in the pale green SDG think it is perfectly OK for the LSA to present its *rightist* social democratic face, but not its revolutionary one.

Mike Howgate, ex-WRP and a former SLP member, said the SAs were dominated by unaffiliated socialists "pissed off" with all the left groups. The SAs can help bring in a "new milieu" who had not been 'contaminated' by politics or other left groups - so the comrade hoped. He wearily predicted that the left groups would caucus away like mad on the LSA, whatever structure was adopted. "I want to see the groups replaced by a majority of individual socialists," he said.

He critically supported the 'amalgamated' bloc motion to wind down the LSA steering committee. (Comrade Howgate also contributed a novel interpretation of history - during revolutions the masses remain aloof from the parties and factions of the left - perhaps our learned friend might care to take another look at Russia 1917, Germany 1918, Italy 1920, Spain 1936, Portugal 1975, etc.)

Comrade Marcus Larsen of the CPGB mocked comrade Nick Long's reassurances that he had no hidden agenda. From all accounts, the telephone lines became red hot as Nick Long attempted to apply a "three-line whip" on all those in his rotten bloc: the CPGB *must* be defeated and excluded. Comrade Larsen produced an internal letter from comrade Duncan Chapple of the SDG. For all its Aesopian language, its anti-CPGB, exclusivist agenda was clear. It concluded that it would be better to "find ourselves in the position where we ... are in different alliances" rather than work with the CPGB. The SDG's anti-CPGB conspiracy was well and truly blown. Comrade Long did not deny that he was familiar with the contents of the Chapple letter.

Comrade Larsen also pointed out that the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws, which had three quarters of a million adherents, was run on a strictly affiliated basis. All national unions, no matter how small, had automatic representation on its steering committee - a clear example of a "democratic and working class structure."

The lines of demarcation were not clear to some. Comrade Ian Dudley - ex-Spartacist League, ex-IBT, ex-SLP, ex-*Marxist Bulletin* - stated that "in the abstract" both the proposed structures were democratic. He could see no "qualitative distinction" between the two motions. In the debate he detected a "false polarisation" between the CPGB and the amalgamated bloc. Comrade Dudley also thought it a shame that the meeting was discussing structures rather than politics.

The comrade also revealed his greenophobia. He was "forced" to support the CPGB's motion because the rival motion talked about alliances with the greens. These forces are non-socialist. Therefore they should be excluded. Comrade Dudley also commented that socialists should not

draw the conclusion from the Socialist Labour Party that a party is not necessary. A party does not equal bureaucracy.

Comrade Julie Donovan reiterated her complaint that the meeting was being held at 11am on a Sunday. The comrade seemed to feel the timing represented an outrageous communist attack on the institution of the family. She informed us that monthly meetings were "not the way forward" - perhaps the tempo of work would be too much for her comrades. (After all the SP-led Hillingdon SA had not met for 18 months prior to the LSA's launch.) Comrade Donovan also expressed disdain at the thought of sitting in a room and "debating issues". Workers do not do this, apparently. (A common complaint. Comrade David Lyons of the SDG expressed his "disappointment" at the fact that the LSA so far had spent most of its time on "political debates".)

We should stick to the 80% we supposedly all agree on, insisted comrade Donovan. We should discuss only "relevant" issues. This means being with "real people".

At least some comrades in the 'amalgamated' bloc grouping had retained some degree of honesty. Comrade Dave Packer of Socialist Outlook admitted that the meeting was not primarily about *organisational* structures. It is fundamentally about which *direction* the SAs should take. Do we adopt the structure of the CPGB "central committee" or do we go out there and embrace "real forces"?

There is no real organisational opposition to Blair, said comrade Packer of the auto-Labourite SO. A "real party" requires regroupment. The SAs will not just evolve into a party. Therefore, he said we should not be setting up "rigid structures". Like the comrades from the SP, Packer was allergic to "debating societies" - which is what the LSA will apparently become if the CPGB wins the day. Comrade Packer concluded: "The idea that there is a gigantic plot to remove Anne Murphy is ludicrous."

Somewhat in contradiction, the SDG's David Lyons reassured comrade Murphy that the campaign to oust her was not personal, but political. Very comforting. He thought that Toby Abse would be a "good compromise". If we had six "fleshed out" borough alliances, continued comrade Lyons, then perhaps the CPGB's motion would be appropriate. This is unfortunately not the case. Therefore we need "intermediary" structures.

Comrade John Bridge from the CPGB was more convinced than ever that we were witnessing an anti-CPGB stitch-up, for all the protestations to the contrary. The democratic coup against democracy in Manchester, the Chapple letter, the 'amalgamated' bloc all show that the CPGB is not suffering from "paranoia". There is a real conspiracy. He bluntly attacked some of the sillier myths about the CPGB. The CPGB could not bureaucratically dominate the SAs even if it wanted to - the CPGB does not have the numbers for a start. But it does have the politics - and the determination to become the majority through showing the power and correctness of those politics. No one is stopping SP comrades from engaging in local campaign work and building borough alliances. He invited the localists to go out and do it, if they so wished. But the SP and others should not blame the CPGB for their own failure.

The anti-CPGB bloc, declared comrade Bridge, was not only conspiratorial, but anti-political and anti-theory.

In order to liberate themselves workers *have* to grasp culture. Socialism cannot be delivered from above - either by great leaders or a 'socialist' parliamentary majority.

Comrade Bridge concluded by savaging the "farical misrepresentation" of the CPGB's motion - which aims to preserve and enshrine inclusiveness and protect minority rights. The CPGB *demand*s inclusiveness. The CPGB *demand*s democracy. Comrade Bridge damned the hypocrisy of those who talk about democracy but practice anti-democracy.

Not everyone enjoyed the lively nature of the meeting. Terry Liddle, ex-Stalinite, ex-Labour Party, and now a Green Party member, complained that the meeting was becoming too "adversary and belligerent". He announced that the next meeting of the London Federation of Green Parties was going to discuss its future electoral relationship with the LSA. He was worried that in next year's elections green and socialist candidates might end up standing against each other - even though we probably have 80% programmatic agreement, according to him.

A comrade from Hackney SA was shocked by the Chapple letter and the rampant anti-CPGBism on display. We need the LSA so we can plan in "an organised and targeted way", she argued. It would be disastrous if we split into a myriad of separate local alliances.

Steve Nally of the SP and Lambeth SA could not see the point of setting up "grand structures" (ie, the CPGB's very spare, minimalist and completely flexible plan) when there is "nothing" on the ground. (He ignored the 'amalgamated' bloc's alternative "grand structure".) We need a "practical way" to build socialism, as opposed to sitting in a room discussing theory ... and politics. Looking around him at the forces gathered, comrade Nally exclaimed that this meeting was "the dead talking to the dead". Comrade Nally might include himself among the "dead": it should be remembered that he appeared on television after the police riot in Trafalgar Square promising to 'shop' the anti-poll tax protestors to the authorities.

George Thompson of SO, with commendable logic, said borough alliances were "problematic", in that they did not necessarily reflect real communities. Should we not have smaller and even more local structures then (street or household alliances?). Perhaps the first step should be to recruit your partner.

Lee Rock of Socialist Perspectives, a self-confessed "avid reader" of the *Weekly Worker*, commented that before the meeting he had been 60-40 in favour of the CPGB motion. Now after watching the amalgamated bloc in action he shifted even more to the CPGB's position. He had no fear of the CPGB - despite being compared in the *Weekly Worker* on one occasion to Stalin's secret police chief, Yagoda. As long as the work gets done, comrade Rock is prepared to work with anyone - even the CPGB.

Jim Smith of the Movement for Socialism - the rump of the unlamented Workers Revolutionary Party - also urged "critical" support for the CPGB's motion. The comrade thought it vital to defend the right to automatic representation. (In a leaked letter, displayed at the meeting, Nick Long had listed all those who belonged to his anti-CPGB alliance - the MFS was one of them). Gerry Downing from Workers Fight also urged support for the CPGB's motion - "We need to set out

democracy

how it is possible to include different tendencies" in the Alliance. It is wrong to "de-prioritise" the LSA steering committee. Comrade Downing detected a hidden agenda to remove comrade Anne Murphy. He thought it was wrong to polarise the two motions in such a sharp fashion.

The 'amalgamated' bloc's motion was "too narrow and too detailed", in the opinion of comrade Mark Fischer from Hackney SA and the CPGB. The CPGB supports the notion that borough alliances should have a wide degree of autonomy. Believe it or not, the CPGB was not opposed to Lewisham SA holding meetings on the

Millennium Dome, as implied by Nick Long. As for the greens, there was "no question" of excluding greens who say they are socialists. But there should be no "band-wagon chasing of greens". He urged the meeting to take the CPGB motion the way it was intended - ie, "in the spirit of inclusion, not exclusion."

Comrade Stan Kelsey of Brent SA and the CPGB said there was no contradiction between building top-down and bottom-up - "The more you have underneath, the more you need on top". He strongly objected to the false dichotomy between socialists and "ordinary people" - and between ac-

tion and discussion. The more action that occurs, the more discussion you need. So-called "ordinary people" become socialists and leaders - given leadership and the right ideas. Does the SP propose to stop talking to "ordinary people" when they become socialists and Marxists? Apparently.

Anti-CPGBers push the fallacy that if you have shorter and shorter meetings ... you will get more and more people coming in. This is make-believe politics, said comrade Kelsey. Instructively, when the comrade said that a meeting can and should last for a month if necessary, he was met with instant guffaws of philistine laughter.

Alliances enter new phase

The general meeting of the London Socialist Alliance was an important turning point. It brought into the open a number of issues which have been simmering under the surface for the last few months and allowed a debate to begin.

Despite the fact that there were, and still are, some comrades intent on stifling the project, the opportunities for unity now look more positive than had previously appeared to be the case. Members of the CPGB, as well as Workers Fight, SLP, and various non-aligned leftwingers fought back successfully against the attempt by the 'amalgamated' bloc of the Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook and the Socialist Democracy Group to democratically oust the CPGB. The CPGB motion - calling for inclusive democracy and automatic representation on the steering committee for all affiliates - fell. Nevertheless it was a Pyrrhic victory for the 'amalgamated' bloc (18 for; 18 against). All of Hackney SA's amendments to the 'amalgamated' bloc motion were carried apart from one which fell - again due to a tied vote. Although the question of presidential-style elections versus automatic representation has still not been definitively resolved, the forces for democracy and inclusivity should feel confident.

The questions raised on the day are central to whole future of the alliances nationally. The right of representation of all affiliated organisations, the need for principled links to socialist greens, rather than submerging socialism into the green project, the question of openness and tolerance rather than back-room manoeuvre: all these go right to the heart of the future for the alliance movement which we are in the process of building.

Those that believe that differences can be glossed over, because at the moment workers are 'not interested', are in effect writing off the working class. Working class self-emancipation begins in the here and now. It must be intrinsic in how we debate and develop. Contrary to what the SP continually implies, revolutionaries are not unimportant. We are not, as Steve Nally said, the "dead". Such pessimism is designed to prevent or belittle theoretical and political debate. It stems from a bureaucratic culture where the members and cadre alike are told what to think - it therefore debases every working class man or woman who becomes a socialist. It is an attitude the Alliance movement should reject - it is an attack on the culture needed if the working class is to master society. The SP and those like them who mock gatherings of the left and urge us to go home to Sun-

day lunch rather than talk to each other must be criticised for objectively anti-working class attitudes.

We are now in the period leading up to the national conference of Socialist Alliances on September 5. That day affiliates and supporters will debate the future aims and structure of the alliance. Proposals have already been put forward by the National Liaison Group. It talks about setting up a federation of national, regional and local organisations with the goal of establishing a society based on "as far as may be practicable, the equality of all people", "a full return of all wealth" and "to maintain such defence and security arrangements, which, together with the promotion of peace and freedom, delivers people from tyranny, prejudice and the abuse of power". Hardly scientific socialism; indeed they are far more akin to clause four socialism than working class self-emancipation.

On the question of the interim organisation which would "allow individual socialists and autonomous socialist, environmentalist, and direct action organisations, to work towards agreed common perspectives", the Liaison Group document proposes a mixture of directly elected personalities and political blocs. The AGM as a whole is to elect six national officers, while each "national federated organisation" may appoint one representative to the National Liaison Committee. In addition delegates from local SAs will elect two representatives to the committee, as will delegates from "other federated organisations" and individual members. "National Federated organisations" are defined as "having more than 500 individual members" (significantly the Independent Labour Network has just announced it has 500 members). Here we have all the worst features of the Labour Party.

There is no automatic representation for all affiliated organisations. Election of officers and representatives of smaller groups will be won on the basis of backroom deals. The majority will reproduce itself. The minority can be excluded.

Direct election for posts at an AGM is not a useful or democratic way for a working class alliance to form its leadership. Instead of the affiliated political organisations and groupings of local alliances deciding themselves who should go forward on their behalf, the decision lies in the pocket of the dominant political bloc.

In reality those below know who is best suited to act on their behalf, and they should have the right to withdraw them at any time. They should not have to wait a year if their repre-

sentative fails to come up to expectation or there is a shift in political opinion from right to left, or from left to right.

Although it is clear that a tiered system would be necessary, there can be no doubt that a soviet-style democracy would provide a far more responsive and inclusive structure for the national committee than one which is directly elected by the dominant political bloc at an AGM.

Those who argue that discussion of organisation evades political questions could not be further from the truth. Political programme presupposes certain forms of organisation. One need only think back to the historic split between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks to see this. I would hope therefore that the Liaison Group will respond to such points so that we can better determine our attitude to the proposals they have put forward. There would be nothing worse in September than to vote through a fudge.

Finally, it is good to see that the motions passed by Hackney and Brent SAs in support of London's right to choose its own rep, and noting the recent Manchester anti-CPGB purge, have had an impact nationally. Thankfully Pete McLaren replied to the Brent motion on behalf of the Liaison Group. He said, in a letter dated July 1: "I would strongly support the right of [an] Alliance to select its own representative." He also stated: "At present there has never been a problem with other supporters attending Liaison Group meetings." He remembers after the Coventry meeting when "Anne Murphy was amongst those informed of this fact".

Of course, as he says, the Liaison Group at the present time, is unelected, informal and therefore not yet open to automatic representation. Nevertheless his views stand in sharp contrast to those of National Network convenor John Nicholson. He has a big problem with any comrade from London that is not his liking. He queried the *validity within London* of the election of myself. This attitude, and the consequent blocking of any participation and involvement from London in the National Network, does not bode well for those who might otherwise be persuaded to put their trust in Nicholson's leadership qualities.

If we are not careful there is a real danger that the Alliances will get the same odious undemocratic reputation that Arthur Scargill's SLP currently enjoys. Comrades committed to openness and the rights of minorities must make their voices heard ●

Anne Murphy

Our so-called Bolsheviks forget their claimed history. The idea that workers could ever sit in a discussion for more than two hours was obviously preposterous to the localists of the SP-SO-SDG. This speaks volumes about the 'socialism' of those so opposed to the CPGB. A socialism that excludes the workers - except as a loyal slave class eager to do the bidding of their liberators from above.

Up to and even during a revolutionary situation revolutionaries are in a minority - though, counted in millions, they strive to lead the majority. By supporting the CPGB, said comrade Kelsey, you were defending *your* minority rights to become the majority. The comrade also raised the question of the Scottish Socialist Alliance. It has been cretinously suggested by comrade Lyons *et al* that the CPGB are splitters because they oppose the liquidation of the SSA into the reformist-nationalist Scottish Socialist Party. The opposite is the truth. The SSA are the splitters. They have split Scottish workers from English and Welsh workers.

Toby Abse of Lewisham SA, a keen advocate of localism and pink-green alliances, put his cards squarely on the table. For this he should be congratulated. The 'amalgamated' bloc motion was about defeating the CPGB, comrade Abse bluntly told the meeting. The workers - and Toby knows this for a certain fact - are not interested in discussing abstract theory. Socialism, Marxism, world communism, etc are ludicrous distractions. Ordinary people will not come to meetings where such politics are discussed. Only the 'fanatical' CPGB could fail to see this. If the CPGB got its way, the LSA would be "continually discussing theory every five minutes". Comrade Abse eventually came to his central point. The SAs need to link up with the London Federation of Green Parties. Being red, the CPGB, by its very nature, poses a serious threat to this pink-green project in the mind of comrade Abse.

As for the CPGB's commitment to minority rights - that was "crap". In a typical "bureaucratic manoeuvre", the 'CPGB' was charging a membership fee of £2 for all who turned up on the day (ie, LSA allowed people to join on the day of the meeting). Even worse, comrade Abse had been in-

formed of the time and venue only at the "last minute". Late post ... blame the CPGB wreckers. (Leaving aside problems with Royal Mail, the meeting has been openly advertised for the past two weeks in the *Weekly Worker*, a paper which we know comrade Abse examines with almost obsessive attention.)

A member of the SLP thought that comrade Abse's speech provided an "excellent summation" of the case being put forward by the SP-SO-SDG-green bloc - ie, are you for or against the CPGB? The "hidden agenda" could not be more clear. The elaborate plots and conspiracies of Nick Long and Duncan Chapple had been exposed. Anti-communism could "destroy" the LSA, he thought. It has not done the SLP any good, that is for sure. The structure outlined by the CPGB was evidently federalist, not centralist or Leninist. There should be automatic representation for affiliated organisations - not least so we know what they think.

The meeting demonstrated the unhealthy and essentially *anti-communist* politics of the SP-SO-SDG-green bloc. But we are glad to report that it did not win the day. Although the CPGB motion one fell on a tied vote, all but one of Hackney SA's five amendments (supported by the CPGB) were accepted.

Amendment one called for the Alliance to be "based on inclusive, not exclusive principles", the "toleration of minority views" and the opportunity for minorities to become majorities. It fell on a tied vote, 18 to 18.

Amendment two, calling for "principled" links with other organisations, including the greens, was passed with 28 for and two against (both Socialist Party - the other two SP comrades abstained).

Amendment three included the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Labour Party as organisations the LSA should seek links with. It was carried unanimously.

Amendment four deleted the demand for less frequent - ie, two-monthly - LSA committee meetings. There were 19 votes for, 16 against.

Amendment five dealt with "initiating action". There was only one vote against - an SDG member.

Motion two was therefore carried with its worst elements deleted ●

No shibboleths

Comrades who attended the opening rally of the Socialist Workers Party annual 'Marxism' school on Friday July 3 report an interesting phenomenon. The willingness of SWPers to take copies of our leaflets and speak to our comrades appeared to be inversely proportionate to their length of membership. 'Greener' recruits were friendly, more open and interested in ideas; longer-term cadre were characteristically sullen and taciturn, when not aggressively hostile.

The culture of this organisation - still the largest on the revolution-

ary left - remains unfortunately narrowly insular and sectarian. Clearly, the SWP stages schools in order to confirm its preconceived theories and prejudices, not to have them challenged - even by an A4 leaflet.

Communism 98 is in marked contrast. The wide range of invites to our school reflects an openness to challenge and progress in the field of ideas. This is indispensable to the development of Marxism, but not to the defence of the sterile nostrums of the past that unfortunately characterises so much of the left ●

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London Socialist Alliance

Hypocrisy - the proof

Comrades from the Socialist Democracy Group, Socialist Outlook, and the Socialist Party had been adamant in the run-up to Sunday's meeting that they had no policy of excluding 'undesirable' elements - namely, the CPGB - from the right to representation on the LSA's steering committee. These denials were completely exposed when CPGB comrades distributed two documents during the course of the debate (reproduced alongside).

'Work in the Socialist Alliances' is an internal SDG document authored by Duncan Chapple. After spelling out "the irreplaceable roles of trust and mutual respect in the future alliances" and extolling the virtues of "an atmosphere of trust and transparency", comrade Chapple eventually makes it clear that these desirable features are not to be extended to all alliance participants.

In his opinion one "contributor" to the LSA "subscribes to the absolutist view" and does not fit in with his schema. He outlines three alternative ways of sidelining the CPGB: "do nothing"; remain in an alliance with this contributor while excluding them from the real work"; or "find ourselves in the position where we and this other contributor are in different alliances".

Despite our insistence that we are for *inclusive democracy* within the socialist alliances, and despite our clear and repeatedly proven commitment to openness, he believes that his "pluralistic party movement" conflicts with our "absolutist view". Presumably he means by this our determination to reforge a Leninist-type party based on democratic centralism. Or that in his opin-

ion we believe that our organisation is "the already created template for the new movement".

In reality comrade Chapple's "pluralistic" alliance is to be an exclusivist one, established on the basis of his own narrowly defined subjective criteria.

'Open and closed' is a hand-written note he angrily passed to a CPGB comrade during the meeting. Comrade Chapple expresses outrage that we dared to inform the meeting of the plan to exclude us from the LSA. This document was "a private note", "a stolen letter", he whinges. In fact from comrade Chapple this is nothing but moralistic liberalism (it is also untrue to say it was "stolen"). Apparently by disclosing the contents of an internal document we - the intended victims of his anti-communist witch hunt, were infringing comrade Chapple's "right to have really 'open' thought and experimentation in the development of ... ideas".

'Exclusivist bloc' is a letter from comrade Nick Long of Lewisham Socialist Alliance and the SDG in reply to Hackney Socialist Alliance. He lets it be known that at least some comrades intended to stand a bloc of candidates for the LSA steering committee which would include representatives from almost every imaginable organisation - apart from the CPGB.

Before the contents of this letter were read out at the meeting, comrade Long claimed that there was no "hidden agenda" nor any plot to remove the CPGB's right to representation on the steering committee. Amazingly he accused us of "paranoia" ●

Alan Fox

Localist dead end

A theme which ran through many of the contributions at last weekend's LSA general meeting was the view that local work was paramount. Many comrades expressed the opinion that the alliances, if they are to be real, can only be built "from the bottom up".

This contention posed several problems which were not resolved at the meeting (not least due to time). Firstly, even if the comrades believed in the primacy of "building roots", why did that lead them to oppose the CPGB's proposals for an inclusive, democratic structure? For example, David Lyons of the SDG stated that the CPGB believed that structure was "the answer", in opposition to "grassroots work". Clearly the two cannot be posed as opposites in this way.

Dave Packer of Socialist Outlook also condemned the CPGB. In contradiction to what Communist Party speakers actually said, and against all the evidence and experience of the LSA steering committee's method of work, he stated that the CPGB wanted it to become "like a central committee". He too opposed inclusive democracy for the LSA because "we need to build real forces, not a committee of sects".

Julie Donovan of the Socialist Party thought that the alliances should "spend our time convincing people of the necessity of socialism. Then we can make the LSA real." And George Thompson, also of Socialist Outlook, thought the CPGB's stress on central structure was all wrong: "We must build the local alliances first," he said.

Again, it needs to be asked, why does this perceived necessity *preclude* democratic coordination? What is stopping any of these comrades from throwing all their energies into local action? Or are they saying that there is no need *at all* for a London-wide body?

Their localism - at the expense of any centralisation, apparently - is completely one-sided. In fact there is a dialectical relationship between spontaneous local ac-

tivity and the need for centralised organisation. The two develop and grow together, gaining strength off each other. CPGB comrades pointed out that the formation of the LSA, far from inhibiting local work, had itself acted as a stimulus for the setting up of borough alliances.

Comrade Lyons believed the LSA had "failed" precisely because it had not organised or coordinated local activity: "The vast majority of activists have never heard of us," he complained. But the borough alliances are hardly household names themselves, are they?

The problem that we face is that for the moment the working class is by and large not combative. There is no mass movement. Local campaigns - no matter how much stress is placed on them - will not win the left scores of new recruits; far less convince people of "the necessity of socialism".

The reason why "the majority of activists have never heard of us" is that our forces are abysmally weak. They are already disorganised - in dozens of different organisations, in scores of campaigns - that they can make almost no impact at all. Yet our opponents in the LSA want to dilute them further.

The CPGB does not wish to impair the autonomy of the LSA's affiliates. Each borough alliance is free to launch new campaigns or participate in existing ones, as it sees fit. But surely our energies could be used to greater effect by concentrating our tiny resources? Yes, we can intervene unitedly in industrial disputes or mass campaigns - if they occur. However, we can make our small forces felt by acting *politically* - on the big national and international issues.

That is why we ought to begin work now for an effective intervention in next year's elections for mayor, the London assembly and the EU. If we prepare well, we can reach hundreds of thousands of workers in a united campaign ●

Peter Manson

Internal Socialist Democracy Group document signed by
Duncan Chapple

Work in the Socialist Alliances

The key development for the next few years will be the development of new forms of organisation on the left which work in a range of ways to help produce the new party and the new political culture needed. Drawing together these alliances involves old forces and new. In this private letter, I spell out the irreplaceable roles of trust and mutual respect in the future alliances.

1. Assimilation or alliance?

In the process towards a new party movement, three waves will come forward. The forces which share our notion of a new party will come first, the organised forces which have other ideas currently may follow, and the best of the new generation will be attracted by the centre of gravity we build.

The whole culture of the old movement is factional, dishonest and lacks real strategic thinking. In particular the basic idea that each organisation is the embryo of the future movement is destructive. It suggests that each organisation is the already created template for the new movement: that the work of setting the general foundation has already been done and that other notions are opposed to it and, ultimately, must be defeated by it. This view is, at bottom, absolutist. This notion, that there is one already existing correct method, means that those who hold this view aim to assimilate those who hold other views. Given the difficult experience of the movement in the past, it cannot be excluded that forces will be drawn towards the new movement in order to bury it, not to praise it.

In contrast, the new party movement we seek to build should be consciously and alliance [sic]: tolerant and pluralistic. There has to be a foundation of agreement about the role and task of the new party movement. In particular, each current, group and individual has unique experiences and strengths. These qualities allow the new party movement to contain the broad range of skills and aptitudes that no one current can or does have. Such a matrix-type organisation can be strengthened by admitting wisdom and deeper knowledge of other organisations and seeking to learn from that the wisdom. In this way, a real organisation can be built on the background of mutual trust and respect, without anyone pre-

maturely giving up their best developed qualities.

2. An atmosphere of trust and transparency

Having asserted the nature of this matrix-type organisation, what mechanisms can develop and help consolidate such a culture? I suggest:

- The alliance has to have a clear idea of its strategy and what goals are currently beyond its grasp. It has to focus on those activities where the alliance can play a unique role - a better contribution than those outside the alliance.

- There has to be clear, free, open and participatory discussion in order to clarify the alliance goals, to maximise the exchange of knowledge, to wither away hierarchies inside the alliance by giving each participant the same pool of knowledge.
- The alliance has to be fight against being diverted from this goal by its competitors and detractors. This means the new party movement has to be pluralistic but, not being the state of a compulsory organisation, must also select and control those who are within the alliance on the basis of what they bring to it. That means that those with a different goal or strategy belong elsewhere.

3. The over-arching problem of our current alliance

We have, in a way, been drafted into the most obvious alliance in front of us. In our contributory elements we have started to clarify the goal or strategy. In the whole alliance, this is not true. In particular, one contributor subscribes to the absolutist view. This gives three main choices:

1. Do nothing.
2. Remain in an alliance with this contributor while excluding them from the real work, which would increasingly strain the atmosphere of trust and transparency.
3. Find ourselves in the position where we and this other contributor are in different alliances, which would allow us separately to develop the atmosphere of trust and transparency we wish for on the basis of the necessary requirements.

I favour the third option most and the second option least ●

Note passed to a CPGB comrade during the LSA meeting by **Duncan Chapple**. It was written in response to the disclosure of the witch hunting contents of his circular, 'Work in the Socialist Alliances'

Open and closed

I'm disappointed with the way you've used this letter. It's a private note - and clearly labelled as such - and you are quite odd to talk of comradesly relations in one breath, and use a stolen letter in the next. It denied people the right to have really 'open' thought and experimentation in the development of their ideas.

Obviously, from the idiom, the writer anticipated that the CPGB would have the opportunity to steal it. I'm sorry that you have.

I hope you won't compound your breach of trust and comradesly respect by publishing this letter further ●

Excerpt from letter to Hackney Socialist Alliance from **Nick Long** of Lewisham Socialist Alliance and SDG

Exclusivist bloc

Thanks ... for your information confirming Mark Fischer as your secretary and the model CPGB resolution your meeting adopted on June 6. Danny Hammill circulated the resolution at our last meeting and we resolved to discuss our position at our next meeting on July 1 1998.

Likewise I hope to circulate statements shortly

from those candidates that the SP, Socialist Outlook, SDG, MfS [Movement for Socialism, ie the rump WRP] Green Socialist Network and ILN [Independent Labour Network with ex-Labour MEPs Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr at its head] will be supporting at the general meeting on July 5 1998.

In comradeship ●

London Socialist Alliance

Tyranny of the clock

If some of our comrades on the left are to be believed, we should only ever have the briefest of meetings with soundbite contributions, so that 'ordinary workers' are not put off.

This reactionary, almost Blairite, approach was vividly illustrated last Sunday at the London Socialist Alliance general meeting, when a majority supported a procedural motion proposed by Julie Donovan, representing the Socialist Party, limiting proceedings to two hours. Claiming that some comrades at the meeting had to visit contacts (ie, herself) and that some women (!) present needed to get home to look after their families, the comrade insisted that this important LSA general meeting had to be over by lunch.

In Manchester, John Nicholson stage-managed another time-limited exercise in May in order to purge the CPGB. In doing so, he suppressed inclusive democracy, an act which will send the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance into a sectish backwater, destroying its capacity to rally socialists and revolutionaries. A key element of Nicholson's anti-communist shenanigans was to choke off debate, censoring contributions through the use of the clock.

What a different approach from the Scottish Socialist Alliance June meeting in Glasgow (11am-5pm) or the forthcoming National Network (10am-4pm) let alone our revolutionary predecessors. Lenin and the nascent Bolsheviks spent two months discussing the RSDLP's refoundation in 1903, at a time when no more than a few thousand people worldwide would even have known of their ex-

istence (and that includes police spies). Do our LSA friends believe the Bolsheviks succeeded in 'putting off' ordinary workers? Or that their small size should have meant meeting for only half an hour over a pub? A suspicion arises that some comrades in the LSA have such a deep inferiority complex about their lack of theory and the ability of the working class to master existing culture in order to liberate itself that they fear debate, preferring instead to immerse themselves in blind activism. Yet these comrades claim the Bolsheviks' legacy as their own.

In reality their approach is insulting to workers. After all, workers spend upwards of eight hours a day in factory, office, or shop just to earn the means to live. Are we as revolutionaries, then, to be so patronising toward workers that we believe them incapable or permanently unwilling to spend whatever time it takes to prepare for something as momentous as their class's own self-liberation? If that is the case, our cause must be hopeless. Or perhaps, for all their protestations to the contrary, these comrades have a different project - the imposition of 'socialism' administered from above.

During the Russian revolutions of 1917, 'ordinary workers' abandoned 'ordinary' life and participated in rolling, continuous political discussions. The revolutionary situation unleashed pent-up frustrations and gave an outlet for working class expression, producing a multitude of literally endless discussions. There were not enough hours in the day.

In more recent times too, the drive

for self-liberation has gained the upper hand over domestic and workaday cares. Thirty years ago, during the May 1968 events in Paris, students' discussions were in permanent session. The Sorbonne 'soviet' is rightly famous.

And in Britain from the mid-60s a technique imported from the USA - the 'teach-in' - was brought into play against intransigent university authorities and as part of the anti-Vietnam war protest movement. No one bothered much about sleep, let alone Sunday lunch: discussions ranged over the whole gamut of concerns, challenging capitalism from socialist, communist, and anarchist perspectives, without let-up. Taking inspiration from the Paris events, students occupied university administration buildings throughout Britain in early summer 1968. Whether talking about 'local' issues of student representation or examining the meaning and application of 'revolutionary foci', whether supporting the Viet Cong or analysing the means to world revolution, nobody dreamt of curtailing discussions.

In actual fact, of course, many of those who demanded the curtailment of the LSA general meeting had no urgent need to leave, since they were seen continuing post-meeting discussions in groups near the meeting hall well into the afternoon - eating ice-creams in the park or downing pints in the pub. These comrades had the time, but not the inclination to thrash out our differences. And some of them had the gall to guffaw when a CPGB comrade made exactly this point, suggesting with no hyperbole

intended that differences should be tackled, even if it meant spending "weeks" doing so. Clearly some of our LSA comrades need to relearn our movement's own history. Except, of course, Sunday's 'amalgamated' bloc appear to have more in common with state socialism than revolutionary democracy.

The fragmentation and decay of many left groups, not least the SP, carries on apace, and threatens to bring down the Socialist Alliance project with them. Today we live in and endure a period of reaction. The 'red 1990s' existed only in Peter Taaffe's head. Scottish Militant Labour is liquidating itself and the Scottish Socialist Alliance as part of its headlong dive into nationalism. Its Scottish Socialist Party is destined to become the 'radical' rump of the SNP. Communists condemn the wanton destruction of the SSA and the damage this inflicts on the unity of the working class in Britain.

The London Socialist Alliance has the potential to demonstrate how socialists can work together in a united way. But unless comrades realise that differences cannot be brushed under the carpet (nor should they be if we are to behave as revolutionaries), then it will not be a living, breathing, healthy organism. We need time to agree our methods of work, tackling our differences in an unrestrained, but principled manner.

If unity is to be real and not some diplomatic feint, it must come both through joint work and the continuous questioning and re-examination of ideas ●

Tom Ball

Around the left

Dogmatic SWP abstractions

For the SWP the theory of state capitalism is its defining position. In a sense, the SWP is an organisation based around the defence of this particular theory. Take the state capitalist plank away from the SWP's theoretical cannon and the organisation starts to disintegrate, if not die. This is why we label the SWP an ideological sect. In the last analysis, the preservation of the theory replaces critical Marxist science, which has no preconceived analysis.

In the latest issue of *Socialist Review*, Tony Cliff takes up the state capitalist cudgels once again. His argument is less than convincing. As Cliff explains, "In 1947, 51 years ago, I came to the conclusion that the Stalinist regime was state capitalist. I wrote a couple of books to develop the theory. But of course one cannot be sure of one's own ideas unless the test of events confirms them. The collapse of the Stalinist regimes made it possible to confirm or refute the theory" (July).

Continuing in his clumsy fashion, Cliff argues: "The collapse of the Stalinist regimes makes a postmortem possible. If Russia was a socialist country or the Stalinist regime was a workers' state, even though a degenerated or deformed one, the collapse of Stalinism would have meant that a counterrevolution had taken place. In

such circumstances, workers would have defended a workers' state in the same way that workers always defended their unions, however right-wing and bureaucratic they may be, against those who are trying to eliminate the union altogether ... Did the workers in Russia and Eastern Europe defend the regime in 1989-91? Of course not. Workers in the countries were completely passive. There was less violence at the same time than during the miners' strike in Britain in 1984-85. The only country where the regime was defended, and violently, was Romania; but it was not defended by workers, rather by the Securitate, the secret police.

"If there had been a counterrevolution, the people at the top of society would have been removed [Cliff seems to have forgotten that Stalin came to power in 1924 and carried out a counterrevolution in 1928 with the support of a large section of the urban proletariat]. But characteristic to the collapse of the Stalinist regimes was that the same personnel, the *nomenklatura*, who had managed the economy, society and politics under Stalinism, continued to be at the top. For the people at the top the years 1989-91 did not mark a step backward or a step forward, but a step sideways. Therefore, it is clear that there was not a qualitative change between the

Stalinist regimes and what exists at presents in Russia and Eastern Europe. *As at present no one denies that the regime is capitalist, it follows that it was capitalist before*" (my emphasis).

Cliff's false logic is howlingly obvious. There can only be two sorts of societies - socialist or capitalist. Nothing else. If it is not A, it must be B. Simple. JV Stalin's Soviet Union clearly was not socialist. Therefore it must have been capitalist. So "it follows", as Cliff would say, that Khrushchev's Soviet Union was capitalist - as it was under Brezhnev, Chernenko, Andropov, Gorbachev ... and now Yeltsin. Nothing much has changed - if we are to swallow the analysis put forward by comrade Cliff.

To 'prove' his argument Tony Cliff has to obscure, if not obliterate, the differences between the capitalist states and the Soviet social formation: "Capital is dominated by the need for capital accumulation. Ford has to invest continually otherwise it will be beaten by General Motors. Competition between the capitalist enterprises forces every one of them to invest more and more, to accumulate more and more capital. Competition between the capitalists also forces every one of them to increase the exploitation of workers. The tyranny of capital over workers is the

other side of the coin to competition between capitals.

"The same applies to the Stalinist tyranny towards the workers and peasants. The harsh exploitation, including the gulag, was the by-product of the competition between Russian capitalism and other capitalist powers, above all Nazi Germany." Elsewhere he makes the extraordinary, not to say incredible, claim: "The laws of motion of the economy and of the Russian army were identical to those of world capitalism" (my emphasis).

All very neat and tidy. But false. The Soviet bureaucracy, under the leadership of Stalin and his vile servants, brought into being with the first five-year plan an exploitative politico-economic formation that was neither capitalist nor socialist. To investigate and understand the true nature of this "freak" society requires painstaking scientific analysis and the development of new categories. We must not cling dogmatically to old abstractions. Life must guide theory.

But this does not mean we become 'post-Marxists' or postmodernists - shrilly announcing that Marxism is too 'limiting' for us. Quite the opposite. It is only by using the critical-scientific method developed by Karl Marx that we have any hope of getting to the bottom of the 'Soviet question' ●

Don Preston

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Loyalists rebel

As Orangemen continue to camp out at Drumcree, insisting they will stay "as long as it takes", their loyalist supporters have attempted to launch a rebellion against the Good Friday deal

Immediately after the elections to the new Northern Ireland Assembly had been completed, the Parades Commission announced that the Orange Order march would not be allowed through the nationalist Garvaghy Road. But Orange Lodge leaders declared that they would not agree to the parade being diverted away from its "traditional route". They refused to recognise the legitimacy either of the commission or of the ban. Troops erected barricades and dug reinforced ditches to emphasise the state's determination to uphold the decision to re-route the march.

Two years ago, after a similar standoff, the British government backed down, eventually permitting the Orangemen to parade in Drumcree. The state judged that nationalist protest could more easily be contained than the loyalist disorder which was already sweeping Northern Ireland. In 1997 too the march was forced through in opposition to the Garvaghy Road residents.

This year however, a retreat by the state is the last thing Blair wants. Having successfully manoeuvred to win considerable consensus around the British-Irish Agreement, and achieve a majority to back it both in the referendum and the assembly elections, he now needs to demonstrate that the agreement means a qualitative break from the past. Whereas the old Six Counties was entirely based on an ideology of protestant supremacy and privilege, a stable settlement, providing for the efficient operation of capital under British/European Union hegemony, can no longer be achieved on that basis.

Orange culture celebrates not the "protestant faith", as its leaders maintain, but the suppression of the rights of catholics (it is akin to the Ku Klux Klan). It celebrates the denial of the right to Irish self-determination. Orange privilege has not only been flaunted in protestant residential areas and town centres, but has been used to rub the noses of catholics in the reality of their own inferior status, as its parades have passed through their estates. Until recently nationalist events, such as commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising, have been confined to catholic ghettos or suppressed altogether.

Under the gerrymandered Stormont regime protestants enjoyed greater access to jobs and promotion, to housing and leisure facilities. The police, judiciary and civil service were almost exclusively protestant. The 40% catholic minority found itself trapped in "a protestant land for a protestant people". This culture perme-

ated the entire Six Counties structure of government. The first prime minister of Northern Ireland, James Craig, once said: "I am an Orangeman first and a politician afterwards."

In order to defuse the revolutionary situation which lasted almost three decades, British imperialism has gradually dismantled all the most blatant institutionalised forms of Orange supremacy. Now Blair hopes to seal this process at the top through the power-sharing government. Yet 18 out of the 28 Ulster Unionist Party elected representatives in the Northern Ireland Assembly are Orange Order members - including the UUP leader and new first minister, David Trimble.

No wonder unionism has been thrown into crisis. The new Northern Ireland Blair wants to secure is seen by loyalists as a threat to the old protestant identity. Denis Watson, the most senior Orange leader in county Armagh, said: "This seems to be the year they decided to break the Orangemen. But if they think that, they are very mistaken." Joel Patton, leader of the Spirit of Drumcree faction, declared that to allow the Drumcree march to be re-routed would be "to surrender a piece of the UK to the enemy".

This was just the situation that Trimble had hoped to avoid. Prior to his confirmation as first minister, he voiced his disapproval of the Drumcree ban: "It is my view that the decision was a mistake and that this mistake is a very serious threat to peace and stability in Northern Ireland." Having won the UUP leadership on the basis of his reputation as a staunch defender of Orange 'rights', Trimble is clearly in a difficult position. The Parades Commission's desperate decision earlier this week to allow an equally controversial march through Belfast's Ormeau Road on July 13 failed to buy off the Orangemen.

Even the reaction to last week's arson attacks on 10 catholic churches was not enough to defuse the Drumcree situation. Whoever carried out the attacks, they played into the hands of Trimble and Blair (perhaps they were the work of the MI5). Condemned by all the political leaders in the Six Counties - even the Democratic Unionist Party's Ian Paisley - the fire-bombings appeared to give added weight to warnings of the dangers of confrontation.

Nevertheless, when the march was halted by state forces last Sunday, loyalists began to mobilise across the Six Counties. There was widespread disorder as rioters set up road blocks and hurled petrol bombs at security

forces. Dozens of vehicles were hijacked and all public transport was for a time withdrawn from service.

The Independent's David McKittrick described the extent of the rebellion: "Even a simple car journey can take on a nightmarish aspect. Those manning the road blocks are not polite men in suits: often they are belligerent teenagers spoiling for a fight. Sometimes they are drunk. At times like these, many of society's normal rules go by the board, as youths with cudgels become temporary rulers of their districts and their roads" (July 7).

The crisis has exposed the pathetic bankruptcy of two elements of British imperialism. On the one hand, the ultra-reactionary conservative wing, exemplified by *The Daily Telegraph*, backed the Orangemen's refusal to talk to the representative of the Garvaghy Road residents, "convicted IRA terrorist" Brendan MacCionnath. The paper called for "a plan to see the march through". It concluded: "What is certain is that urgent talks between local nationalists, minus Mr MacCionnath, and local Orangemen is the best means, and the right means, of both arranging the march and avoiding bloodshed" (July 4). *The Telegraph* harks back to the days when the union - and British imperialism's interests - were considered best defended through protestant privilege.

On the other hand *The Independent* displayed the kind of imperialist arrogance that only liberals can muster: "To anyone who does not live in Northern Ireland," its editorial began, "the annual crisis in Drumcree is baffling. The temptation is to mutter, 'It's only a walk down a road, for goodness' sake' ..."

"The only way to approach this year's marching season is to go to independent arbitration, which is what the government did. The independent Parades Commission decided that the Orange tribe should not march down the Green tribe's road. Now the government must stick to that decision, come what may."

And here is *The Independent's* 'solution': "The Orangemen marched down the Garvaghy Road last year ... they must not march there this year. Next year they should march again, and do so on alternate years until the people of Portadown decide they have better things to do on a Sunday" (July 6).

One of the same paper's regular columnists, a certain Ken Livingstone, did not take such a simple-minded, not to say puerile, view of Drumcree. He correctly pointed out: "Orange parades in nationalist areas are about as

welcome to local residents as the British National Party marching through Brixton" (July 1). Cutting their frequency by half would hardly reduce their offensiveness. But, whereas the *Telegraph* calls on the state to intervene on behalf of the Orangemen, Livingstone takes the opposite stance: "Tony Blair and Mo Mowlam must use whatever force is necessary to restrain the Orange Order, whose real goal is to blow away the peace agreement."

While not-so-red Ken is right about the objectives of ultra-loyalists like the Orange Order, he performs his usual turn, for which his sort can always be relied on - acting as a left apologist for imperialism. In the name of 'democracy' and 'minority rights', reformists like Livingstone are forever calling on the ruling class to take on yet more powers, to use yet more force, in order to achieve its aims.

Sinn Féin too is placing all its hopes on its former enemy. Far from mobilising militant republicans to defend the Garvaghy Road residents, SF president Gerry Adams said that the government's will to enforce the Parades Commission ban was the "acid test".

He went on: "The nationalist sense of confidence that there can be actual change is now resting to some extent on whether the British state upholds the rights of the people of the Garvaghy Road and faces down the minority who want to march into that area."

British imperialism's use for forces like the Orange Order and the loyalist death squads has for the moment almost run its course. It intends to maintain its rule through other means, based on cross-community consensus. But it cannot simply discard those forces as easily as Adams and Livingstone seem to believe. They are not *simply* imperialist tools; they have their own independent *raison d'être*. The marginalisation of extreme loyalism will be a long and complicated task - but one which Blair will need to achieve if he is to renew the constitutional monarchy system.

The working class, however, should look neither to imperialism nor to nationalism for progressive solutions. It should look to the building of a democratic alternative in order to secure its own, proletarian, hegemony ●

Jim Blackstock

Summer Offensive '98

Fast finish

During the last few days before the celebration meal on Saturday July 11 to mark the end of the CPGB's 15th Summer Offensive fundraising drive, money is coming in faster than ever. A late start has become a fast finish. As anticipated, £20,000 is proving to be a tough target, but this kind of money is a necessity, not a luxury, if we are to develop our organisation and its open, independent press. The *Weekly Worker* can only play its invaluable role in fighting to shape a new, unifying culture of openness if the money is found to sustain it. Who pays the piper calls the tune, and our independent communist finance is the guarantee of our freedom to express independent working class politics.

The results so far are very varied. Some comrades have doubled their original pledge, and then exceeded the new one. A number of Party sympathisers have shown their approval of our political work with handsome donations, some for the first time. A few comrades have barely begun, while most are struggling to complete or exceed their pledge by the time of the meal.

If you have made a pledge, the most important question is to complete it, even if personal circumstances dictate that this takes extra time. Completing your pledge should be regarded as a matter of honour - as a duty towards all the other comrades participating in the campaign, but not least as a duty to yourself. Shouldering personal responsibility for financing the Party and its paper is a key factor in making you into a real communist: a communist in practice, not just in words. For those readers who understand the worth of the *Weekly Worker* but have not yet contributed, perhaps it is time to recognise that this understanding carries responsibility with it.

A magnificent £2,551 raised in week nine, the best week so far, brings the total to £13,067 (65%). A few more substantial contributions would push us past our £20,000 target ●

Stan Kelsey

It is not yet too late to book your place for the meal (£20, £50 solidarity price): ring Anne Murphy on 0973-231 620