

Loyalist split

The arson attack on a Ballymoney council house, leading to the deaths of three boys, has driven a wedge between pro- and anti-agreement unionists



The killing of Richard, Mark and Jason Quinn in the early hours of Sunday morning came as a godsend to David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and first minister of Northern Ireland. It has helped to defuse the growing crisis resulting from the Drumcree stand-off that was threatening to derail the British-Irish Agreement.

Conflicting pressures were pulling Trimble in opposite directions. On the one hand, he believes that only the Good Friday deal can provide the basis for a new stability in Northern Ireland, which he hopes can secure its position as an integral part of the United Kingdom. Sinn Féin/IRA, the most intransigent and consistent opponent of the British occupation of the Six Counties for almost 30 years, has permanently ended its armed resistance. It looks set to complete its transformation into respectable bourgeois politics and actively cooperate in the administration of the statelet, in exchange for the release of its prisoners of war and the establishment of cross-border institutions.

On the other hand, Trimble owes his election as UUP leader to his membership of the Orange Order and reputation as a staunch defender of Orange 'rights'. Only two years ago he stood at Drumcree alongside Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, demanding that the Portadown lodge should be allowed to flaunt its supremacist message as it marched along the nationalist Garvaghy Road. Today the Orangemen want to put up two fingers not only to the local catholic residents, but to the entire imperialist-sponsored peace process. The agreement represents a threat to their historic privilege and, in their eyes, their protestant identity. The Orange Order recommended a 'no' vote in May's referen-

dum, while Trimble was the standard bearer for a 'yes' vote in the unionist camp.

The Ballymoney atrocity gave him the opportunity he had been praying for. It allowed him to drop his previous ambivalent position of sympathising with the Orangemen's desire to march along their traditional route, while hiding behind the Parades Commission ban. Here was his chance to pull the ground from under the ultra-loyalists' feet. Using the argument that no march could be worth the lives of three innocent children, he issued a joint statement with the SDLP's Seamus Mallon, his second minister: "We appeal to the Orangemen at Drumcree to immediately end their protest and return to their homes. Nothing can be gained from continuing this stand-off."

Mallon warned of the escalating violence and a return to the 'troubles'. Many Orange leaders, as well as unionist politicians, saw their own positions coming under threat as loyalist protest seemed to be moving beyond their influence. In hundreds of incidents across the Six Counties road blocks were set up, vehicles were hijacked, security forces attacked and catholic property set on fire. Scores of catholic families were forced to flee their homes. In Portadown itself the Garvaghy Road area was entirely cut off for a time by loyalist gangs.

The Armagh county grand chaplain, Rev William Bingham, spoke for a section of the Orange establishment when he said: "I believe the Orange Order needs to back off from its protest because we cannot control it." Later he was heckled by hard-line leaders of the Spirit of Drumcree faction and scuffles broke out at the Orange rally he was addressing. Although the Portadown lodge "unanimously" decided to "maintain a presence" out-

side Drumcree church, significantly it ended the threat of a huge demonstration last Monday on the occasion of the 309th anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne. It stated: "We would encourage our brethren from other areas to remain in their own districts and celebrate there. We thank them for their continuing support and wish them well in their celebrations."

Elsewhere across the Six Counties Orange protesters called off their 'freedom camp' outside the Hillsborough Castle residence of Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam. Republicans abandoned plans to block another Orange parade through a nationalist area along Belfast's Lower Ormeau Road. They contented themselves with a silent protest, holding up banners reading 'Shame on you' and releasing black balloons as the marchers passed. In an attempt to be even-handed the Parades Commission had allowed the Ormeau Road march, having previously ordered the re-routing of the Drumcree event.

The Ballymoney deaths threw the Orangemen off balance. Clearly the unrest had been sparked by their own protest and they knew it. By its very nature loyalism, because it defends a position of privilege, is directed against those deemed to threaten that status - ie, the entire catholic population. Yet here were three 'catholic' boys who were actually being brought up and educated as protestants. Just what sort of 'threat' did their presence on a protestant estate pose? Ian Paisley, who a few days earlier had boasted that the July 13 Drumcree demonstration would be "the decider" in the Orangemen's favour ("I think that these men will be going down the road," he had predicted), condemned the firebombing - and even had the gall to visit the bereaved catholic mother in hospital.

Yet last week Orange leaders were confident of forcing Blair to retreat over Drumcree and in so doing dent the peace process itself. Their strategy has been to stoke up conflict through provoking a republican backlash to their marches. "What's the point of marching if it's only in our own areas?" asked Stephen McAllister, organiser of the Tour of the North parade through the Ormeau Road. David McNarry, a senior Orangeman, warned: "We can, if we wish, put our minds to paralyse this country in a matter of hours." An anonymous colleague pointed to the influence the ultra-loyalists continued to exert at all levels of the Six Counties statelet: "We have sympathisers in the RUC who keep us informed of their movements and let us know when they are at their weakest" (*The Independent* July 8).

There was indeed a danger of a

split within the Royal Ulster Constabulary, as its officers at Drumcree faced not only missiles, but taunts of "SS - RUC". One embittered Orangeman commented: "They wouldn't shoot the IRA, but they're shooting their own now." As the state forces hit back, a woman shouted: "Get the LVF down here. Let's get something done about this" (*The Daily Telegraph* July 11). Members of the Loyalist Volunteer Force murder squads were indeed seen leading the Drumcree Orange violence, including Mark Fulton, who is rumoured to have succeeded Billy Wright as LVF leader.

Others were looking forward to the creation of new Ulster martyrs on a Drumcree battlefield. David Jones, a Portadown lodge official, threatened perversely: "Tony Blair needs to be careful that, with the 12th of July celebrations coming in, Drumcree doesn't turn out to be his Bloody Sunday."

The Quinn killings have for the moment put paid to such thoughts. The Ballymoney firebombing has shaken Orange resolve and split its ranks. This has strengthened the hand of both Trimble and Blair and has given a boost to the pro-agreement forces. It was this that led Paisley and some local Orangemen to imply that the arson attack had not been the work of Orange sympathisers at all. Last week we pointed out that the firebombings of 10 catholic churches had played into the state's hands ("Perhaps they were the work of the MI5" - *Weekly Worker* July 9). But there is a difference between a series of coordinated church attacks and the indiscriminate burning of catholic houses. These occurred all over the Six Counties but did not result in other deaths or even serious injury. The fatal consequences of the Ballymoney incident and the reaction to it could not have been planned.

Whether the church attacks had been carried out by state forces, paramilitaries such as the LVF or religious fanatics, some loyalists were rejoicing. Leaflets were being handed out at Drumcree which carried a photograph of one of the burnt catholic churches. The accompanying wording consisted entirely of biblical quotes, including this one from Deuteronomy: "Thus shall ye deal with them: ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire."

Be that as it may, the pressure on Trimble and, as a result, the state's task has clearly been eased following both the church arson attacks and the Quinn killings.

Sinn Féin's hopes have also been boosted. Last week *An Phoblacht* was calling on its former enemy, the British state, to protect "the besieged,

threatened and frightened nationalist people of the Garvaghy Road" (July 9). "Repeatedly over the years the British have capitulated and opted to trample on the rights of nationalists rather than lance the Orange boil," it complained. The paper reported the words of Brendean Mac Cionnath, former IRA prisoner and now the representative of the Garvaghy Road residents: "This is about upholding the law - the British have to take the high moral ground now."

In the same issue of *An Phoblacht* Gerry Adams sets out SF's position on the Orange parades: "Sinn Féin upholds the right of the loyal orders to march," he writes. "There are over 3,000 marches by the various loyal orders each year. There are only a small number - less than one percent - which nationalists find intolerable."

The SF president continues: "Sinn Féin is for a voluntary accommodation of all contentious parades. This can only be achieved by inclusive and direct dialogue ... it is only through dialogue that the two sides - that is, those of us who want change and those who feel threatened by change - will get to understand each other's positions."

Nevertheless the bottom line for Adams is the necessity for the British state to "uphold the rights of all citizens". He adds: "If it genuinely means to do this then the British government risks alienating substantive elements of unionism, if only on a temporary basis." He clearly believes Blair must take that risk, rejecting the idea that there is any need to "make concessions to Orangeism rather than risk David Trimble's position".

All this is a far cry from the days when SF/IRA aimed to drive out the British lock, stock and barrel. Today it looks upon the British state not as an illicit occupying force, but as the legitimate authority which should, in the final analysis, impose its will on the loyalists. The dream of a united Ireland is to be realised not through a revolutionary struggle to expel British power, but in cooperation with that power.

Communists on the other hand do not view the reactionary Orange bigots as the main enemy. Our enemy is the imperialist state. Unlike nationalists, we do not view the aim of a united Ireland as an end in itself. For us the means - the self-activity of the masses - is all-important.

In so far as SF/IRA opposed imperialism in a revolutionary way, their struggle deserved and received our unconditional support. But we do not support their collusion with imperialism and its peace process - a peace process which aims to sideline the masses in the interests of capitalist stability ●

Jim Blackstock

Party notes

Suspicion

The letter from comrade Jim Higgins in last week's paper is welcome. The comrade is the ex-industrial organiser of the International Socialists - the forerunners of today's Socialist Workers Party. Last year, he published a very readable (although politically selective) book on the origins of the SWP (*More years for the locust* - reviewed in *Weekly Worker* August 21 1997).

However, the political weaknesses that Jim revealed in his book are summed up neatly in his letter. Too many passages of *More years for the locust* read like the tired cynicism of an old and disillusioned revolutionary - "Life goes on ... and we must keep trying," he limply tells us. Trying *what* exactly, the comrade tends to leave a little vague, apart from vacuous references to "new forms, new forces and new ideas that accord with the world in which we live" (p133). For example, democratic centralism is now an "inappropriate Russian organisational form" (p131). In the same spirit, he castigates the method of the "hucksters [who] root about in the *Collected Works* looking for apposite quotes to add class to some sordid manoeuvre" (p128).

Thus last week's letter takes me to task for a 'hucksterish' tendency of mine to "embroider ... articles with quotes [to] bolster a sagging argument by reference to infallible writ". Specifically, the comrade offers me a little "friendly criticism" for an "inaccurate and inappropriate" use of a Lenin quote against Bogdanov and the *Vpered* group. I will concede him a small inaccuracy. Bogdanov had indeed long left the *Vpered* group by the time of Lenin's stern words. But I'm afraid this slip does nothing to weaken my essential argument, and Jim's other remarks perhaps underline that the real difference between us is not over quote-juggling polemics of the past, but the tasks of revolutionaries in the *contemporary* world.

Firstly, it is a shame that comrade Higgins fails to mention the content of the polemic. Should there be an automatic 'right of reply' in the pages of our organisation's press - yes or no?

We are not - despite the ill-intentioned jibes of some - a clearing house 'discussion journal' for any trend that fancies it in the workers' movement. Comrade Higgins and many others find the *Weekly Worker* a "useful source of information". Yet this is a by-product of the central purpose of the paper. Ours is the publication of a communist collective that has been cohered over decades of work around a *Partyist* project. The use of this word is liable to bring some (Jim included?) out in a rash, but I make no apologies for it. The essential thrust of the 'Party notes' column (July 2) that Jim takes exception to is that everything that appears in the pages of this paper is assessed politically according to how it advances that fundamental work, and it is in this context that the precedent of Lenin is cited.

Jim really digs himself into a hole when he comes to comment directly on this instructive historical incident. He essentially alibies *left* liquidationism when he writes that liquidationism was simply a "Menshevik heresy" and all that Bogdanov and the *Vperedists* wanted to do was cease "work in the Duma and the trade unions and other legal working class organisations in favour of an underground party". In fact, Lenin was conducting a war against "both varieties of *liquidationism* - liquidationism on the right and liquidationism on the left. The liquidators on the right say that no illegal [party] is needed ... [For] the liquidators on the left ... legal avenues of Party work do not exist" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 15, pp432-433).

Thus, in contrast to comrade Higgins' narrow definition, liquidationism can manifest itself in a variety of different political forms. The comrades from Dundee who recently left our organisation manifested a *rightist* and especially petty, low-level variety of the species. We have delayed the publication of their letters because we felt that it would have done them no good as politicians. I believe we were correct to judge these letters not by the criteria of some inviolate 'right to reply', but *politically*. We prepared a substantial reply to the comrades in an attempt to drag them back from the swamp into which they were wading. From recent tetchy exchanges, it appears this sober and mature approach has not succeeded, not least due to the intemperate intervention of some other comrades (who have used the question of non-publication for polemical purposes). The time is right to draw a line under this petty dispute (so things can be taken to a higher, more serious, level). In other words, it is probably correct to publish; it was certainly not two months ago.

Jim's point about the need to "allay all suspicions" surrounding the non-appearance of these letters is worth a quick comment in closing. Dave Craig - another ex-SWP member with vivid memories of that sect's bureaucratic internal regime - is again featured in this issue of the paper as attorney for backwardness. Comrade Craig recently claimed that the delayed publication of the Dundee letters (copies of which have been circulated to all Communist Party members as well as to RDG comrades and others), blows a "big hole in the policy of 'openness'" (*Weekly Worker* May 28). I believe that the strength of such "suspicions" are inversely proportionate to the distance from our organisation - the lower the level of real involvement, the more 'suspicious' a comrade may be. The answer - comrade Craig, Higgins and others - is to draw closer and consciously identify yourself with the *Partyist* project ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Have a vision

While I am not going to quibble with a minimum wage of £285 (anything between £200-300 sounds approximately right as necessary for people to reproduce themselves in this society), I think you are considerably missing the point when you suggest it for a 35-hour week. An individual certainly cannot be fully socially involved if working more than a 20-hour week (I hope you are not suffering from the dual puritanism of the nobility of labour).

An example of the alienated society we live in is when the government - or even yourselves - talk of the need for childcare professionals to be provided for working class families, which of course is necessary when you are working so hard; when the social solution is for crèches to be formed so parents can take turns looking after one another's children. This is an example of the money economy and is an indictment of our society, and the overworked/impoverished existence of the working class.

Likewise with students, who live one of the most alienated existences going. I don't see why there should be this social separation in a progressive society. We should be able to work for our living and also study if we so wish. If people are that interested in fulfilling themselves in the study of things that are not part of the economic operation of society, they should not be doing it on the backs of the proletariat (and it should be quite possible to work 20 hours and study).

If we are going to have peoples' militias to police ourselves and defend ourselves - a must for all communists/anarcho-communists - a 35-hour week is not truly practical.

£300 a week and a 20-hour week is quite possible at the moment, given the level of production in the UK or European Union (whether it is possible within a capitalist system I do not know). We should only demand the possible - otherwise we look like a bunch of Bohemian dreamers. If it is not possible for capital, it proves we need a more efficient way of organising our economics. Have a vision.

James Walsh

Class War paper group (London)

Exaggerated

In his notorious review of Donald Sassoon's *One hundred years of socialism in Red* (summer 1998), Bill Bonnar attempted to enlist Antonio Gramsci as a precedent for his 'neither revolutionary nor reformist' - ie, centrist - strategy.

This is an unforgivable slander against a great revolutionary and Bill should withdraw it unreservedly. Anyone who has actually read Gramsci's writings, rather than the scholastic commentaries on them by those not fit to lick his boots, and is aware of his political struggles, will know that he did more than anyone (apart from Lenin and Trotsky) to develop the strategy and tactics we need to build democratic centralist vanguard parties capable of leading our class to power.

Bill's other heroes of centrism, the Austro-Marxists, are however exceedingly well chosen. Since Alan McCombes has been boasting to Peter Taaffe about how he converted Bill to Trotskyism, let's look at Trotsky's assessment of Bill's heroes. In *Terrorism and communism* (New Park 1975) we find the following, less than flattering, critique:

"While the real teaching of Marx is the theoretical formula of action, of attack, of the development of revolutionary energy, and of the carrying of the class blow to its logical conclusion, the Austrian school was transformed into an academy of passivity and exclusiveness, because of a vulgar historical and conservative school, and reduced its work to explaining and justifying, not guiding and overthrowing. It lowered itself to the position of a handmaid to the current demands of parliamentarianism and opportunism, replaced dialectic by swindling sophistries and, in the end, in spite of its great play

with ritual revolutionary phraseology, became transformed into the most secure buttress of the capitalist state, together with the altar and throne that rose above it ...

"What characterises Austro-Marxists is repulsion and fear in the face of revolutionary action. The Austro-Marxist is capable of displaying a perfect glut of profundity in the explanation of yesterday, and considerable daring in prophesying concerning tomorrow - but for today he never has a great thought or capacity for great action. Today for him always disappears before the wave of little opportunist worries, which later are explained as the most inevitable link between the past and the future.

"The Austro-Marxist is inexhaustible when it is a question of discovering reasons to prevent initiative and render difficult revolutionary action. Austro-Marxism is a learned and boastful theory of passivity and capitulation" (pp183-4).

First Bill praises the Stalinists in the Spanish Civil War (*Red Winter* 1997). Now he praises the Austro-Marxists' theory and practice generally.

All this proves, beyond a shadow of doubt, that the rumours of Bill's reincarnation as a Trotskyist have been greatly exaggerated. Given that Alan McCombes is now oblivious to any fundamental differences between Bill and himself, on questions of strategy and tactics, programme and organisation, is it possible that it is not Bill, but he, who has undergone the conversion?

Tom Delargy

Paisley

Cliff hanger

In last week's paper (*Weekly Worker* July 9), Don Preston gave a reasonable going-over of Tony Cliff's ludicrous defence of his theory of state capitalism. Claiming infallibility and the truth of History, Cliff says that "one cannot be sure of one's own ideas unless the test of events confirms them" (*Socialist Review* July-August) and then goes on to claim that the events around the collapse of the Stalinist regimes confirms his thesis.

While comrade Preston went some way in debunking this nonsense, he left out some important issues. Fundamentally, the events of 1989-91, if anything, disprove Cliff's thesis and fly in the face of his expectations.

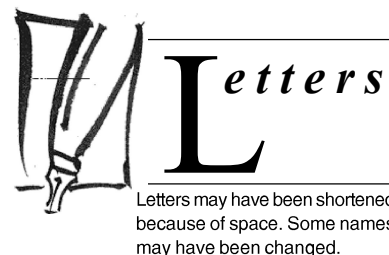
In *State capitalism in Russia* (1988 edition), Cliff argues that 'state capitalism' is "the highest stage which capitalism can ever reach" (p188). And again the fusion of economics and politics in Stalin's Russia "is characteristic of capitalism in its highest stage" (p191).

To further bolster this 'highest stage of capitalism' thesis, Cliff argues that *it is impossible* for private capitalism to ever be restored in Russia without imperialist invasion and occupation. He writes: "Before the experience of World War II, it was an understandable, if incorrect, assumption that private capitalism could be restored in Russia without its occupation by an imperialist power. But the victory of the concentrated, statified Russian economy over the German war machine silenced all talk of such a possibility" (p326). The test of events have clearly proved Cliff wrong in "denying the possibility of the internal forces [of Russia] leading to private capitalism" (p326).

If the USSR was the highest stage of capitalism, why did it collapse so ignominiously in the face of competition with a less evolved capitalism? How does Cliff explain the restoration of private capitalism overwhelmingly due to internal contradictions? All these problems are swept under the carpet.

A hack job trying to prove himself 'right' may massage his ego in the waning years of his life and keep the SWP ranks happy that all is well in the world, but it will not stand up to any rigorous theoretical examination.

What Cliff displays is not unique. Since the collapse of the USSR the left, of all varieties, has remained amazingly and



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

stupidly content with its own 'theories' on the nature of the Soviet Union. Such religious belief, whether of a Trotskyite, Cliffite or Stalinite denomination, is an abomination of the Marxist method.

We, after all, must be the most ruthless and honest critics of our own failings, as Marx and Engels were after the defeat of the Paris Commune.

Martin Blum

South London

All or nothing

Eddie Ford foolishly describes me as "prominent" and "influential" in *Socialist News* and the SLP, but then characterises me as someone who sees no need for a workers' party and political struggle (Letters, July 2). Is this you contradicting yourself or an intended sarcastic joke?

You then give credit to the SLP for its trade union work and its support for single-issue reforms, implying I cannot endorse either because of my view that a drugs legalisation campaign is a reformist diversion.

You muddle different things. Abortion, gay rights, feminism, cannabis reform, etc are all changes in bourgeois society which do not necessarily threaten the capitalist system. To believe that the *best* way to approach capitalism's growing contradictions is to overthrow it by proletarian revolution is not to say that bourgeois society has ceased evolving or developing. That was Stalin's mistake (*Economic problems* 1952).

But to pile energy into such social reforms *is* a diversion. Such reformism will go on anyway, whether people who claim to be 'communist revolutionaries' actively take up these causes or not. I remain *openly* critical of the SLP getting too diverted by single-issue social-reformist campaigning. Barbaric prejudices affecting women, ethnic minorities, gays, the disabled, etc never stop evolving under capitalism, but can never vanish because of the continuously vicious and divisive *nature* of that society all the time that exploitation and private enterprise remain its sole governing morality.

Wages struggles are slightly different, but not much, and it would be "economism", as you allege, if my attitude had not been made clear a thousand times that the *political* programme (for party organisation of the working class to overthrow capitalism) must *always* be the best contribution any support can make behind workers in struggle.

Your 'basic logic' is flawed. To call the legalisation campaign a diversion is *not* remotely the same as endorsing capitalist laws banning drugs. *All* capitalist law is muddled by class bias and prejudiced confusion, and *all* of it must be dumped.

Your lecture on Leninism misfires. It is *you* who fail to see the importance of "splits and divisions within the ruling class", and the *EPS Review*, which has explained - on Ireland, for example - how the demise of British imperialism has undermined and split the colonial bourgeois society in the Occupied Zone of Ireland, making a colossal triumph possible for the national liberation struggle - an understanding it would be important to convince the SLP of (still trying).

And your grasp of crisis is simply un-Marxist. Subjective (party) input for leading the revolution is crucial. But objective crisis conditions *alone* make the revolution *possible*. Read into your *Communist manifesto* just as far as page 6 about crisis: "Suddenly ... momentary barbarism ... famine ... universal war of devastation ... enforced destruction", etc. You distort my words into a "grim and semi-apocalyptic scenario", but their real flaw is that they pale by comparison to the original.

Royston Bull

Stockport

From **The Call**, paper of the
British Socialist Party,
July 18 1918

The enemy at home

Hard upon the news of the baton offensive of the Glasgow police against the demonstrators demanding the release of John Maclean comes the intimation that the Socialist Labour Press has once more been raided, the printing machinery dismantled and some hundreds of pounds worth of paper confiscated.

The Socialist Labour Party, like the Quakers and the Labour Party, determined to ignore the censorship, but, being a weak organisation, it has been ruthlessly handled for its defiance. The Labour Party is not disturbed in its quiet resolve to take no notice of the Holy Inquisition (new style). The Society of Friends is small and it gets into trouble. The catholic hierarchy in Ireland is powerful and it can oppose conscription with impunity.

We gather that the offence of the SLP has been the publication and wide circulation in cheap pamphlet form of Trotsky's *War or revolution*, and its persistent printing of certain young people's papers, *The Revolution* and *The Young Rebel*, which follows Liebknecht's advice as to the correct course of anti-military propaganda among the youths about to become amenable to the Military Service Acts.

It is but the continuance of the policy of 'the executive committee of the capitalist class' in attacking and endeavouring to suppress all efforts at anti-war or revolutionary propaganda. This organ of the propertied interests, this agency of the imperialists, cannot be expected to tolerate those who challenge its decrees and try to wrest the public authority from its hands. The capitalists, organised through the state, recognise the existence of the class struggle and act accordingly.

The SLP is a Marxist body and, though it does not see eye to eye with the BSP on the implications of our common political philosophy, it will agree with us that the state does not exist to express 'the will of the people', but to protect and further the interests of property. If free speech, free press and free institutions conflict with the very life interests of the exploiting class, as henceforward they must, we can expect nothing else but the iron heel of suppression.

Marxists have the key to these onslaughts on civil liberty. Theirs is the duty to interpret the signs of the times and to point the moral ●

1918

Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

Opportunism knocks

The SLP's Simon Harvey last week gave a summary of the second delegate recall conference of the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws (*Weekly Worker* July 9). That campaign still has the possibility of mobilising workers, despite its bureaucratic approach and its pessimistic lack of belief in rank and file workers (it will only succeed if led by the TUC, according to its chair, Bob Crow, and one of its joint secretaries, John Hendy). A movement, around its limited, legalistic demands, may yet arise. This is not least due to its initial sponsorship by Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (comrades Crow and Hendy are both SLP members).

Yet such a campaign in and of itself will not lead to the birth of a truly self-liberatory workers' movement. It will not build the type of fighting unions that our class needs. However, the intervention of communists and revolutionaries in such a campaign - in concrete and active support of its demands, yet in criticism of its orientation to the labour bureaucracy - could begin to lay the foundations for the type of movement we need.

So far, the main role of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty in the United Campaign has been to give the bureaucratic strategy of comrades Crow and Hendy revolutionary respectability. The United Campaign is attempting to 'unite' the existing trade union bureaucracy into mobilising around its important, yet limited, demands. Political organisations and rank and file bodies are specifically barred from affiliating. Only 'bona fide' trade union organisations, as determined by the committee, are acceptable. How the AWL's Free Trade Union Campaign and the SLP's Reclaim Our Rights qualify, where the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unionism does not, remains unanswered.

The AWL's complete capitulation

to this edict makes the words of Mark Sandell ring hollow. Comrade Sandell is an FTUC (ie, AWL) representative on the United Campaign committee. Writing in the *Weekly Worker* (Letters, May 21) in response to earlier criticism from Simon Harvey of the deal between the AWL and the SLP, comrade Sandell states that the campaign's first delegate recall conference on April 18 "was only to set up an interim committee to get things moving and to prepare for the delegate recall conference in July that will have the authority and the breadth to elect an executive, decide on policy and adopt a democratic constitution". He continues: "It was in that context that I supported the temporary structure designed to aid unity and organise action until July."

It was clear then as it is concrete now that the structure and strategy established at the April 18 meeting were not so interim. The AWL has championed an orientation to the bureaucracy. It kept mum on what sort of trade union movement our class actually needs, and has accommodated to what *seems* immediately acceptable and achievable for the bureaucracy.

Comrade Sandell's eagerness to achieve quick results is questionable, as is his no doubt heartfelt wish that any reborn labour movement be not merely a lash-up of sects and the usual old lefties, but a real movement, "representing tens, hundreds of thousands and millions", as he said at the United Campaign conference on July 4. In a period such as now, when the "struggle against capitalism and for socialism is narrowed down to ... small group[s] of socialists preparing for the future", the "desire to achieve *'something'* becomes seductive and warps and replaces the fresh, clean, young sense of what is necessary and worth striving to achieve, whatever the cost and however long

the struggle. The long view and the overview give way to shorter, discrete, unintegrated views. Impatience breeds opportunism and induces indifference to the seemingly less immediate concerns. The business of achieving a little bit now displaces the old goal, or pushes it beyond the horizon" (Sean Matgamna *Workers' Liberty* June 1998).

Unfortunately, comrade Sandell seems to have been seduced by the seemingly easier task of "achieving a little bit now". Opportunism has replaced principle. Central to the problem is the AWL's Labourism. Without breaking from a position where 'the party' means the bosses' workers' party - the Labour Party - to a position for political independence for our class and a fight for its own revolutionary party *against* Labour, AWL will always be susceptible to falling in behind the labour bureaucracy.

Whether or not the opportunist approach to trade union work of comrade Sandell is also criticised by the AWL's principled minority on the Irish referendum (see 'Around the left', p7) I do not know. But for sure opportunism cannot be restricted to one issue. Nor did it come out of thin air. The majority's rightism on the May 22 vote and its capitulation to the trade union bureaucracy in the United Campaign is an outcome of a method fostered by comrade Matgamna himself.

Nevertheless the AWL is a current in the workers' movement with an admirable respect for open debate before the class. It eschews the traditional Trotskyist method of treating differences between communists as something to be ashamed of, as private matters to be hidden from the workers, who just 'won't understand our arguments'. Revolutionaries are an important and all too rare commodity nowadays - as are their debates ●

Marcus Larsen

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: July 19 - 'The transitional programme' - speaker from the International Bolshevik Tendency.
London: July 26 - 'Anarchism: Proudhonist model', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* as a study guide.
For more details call 0181-459 7146.
Manchester: July 27 - 'The fight for a mass party'.
For more details call 0161-798 6417.

■ Party wills

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

■ London Socialist Alliance

To get involved, contact BCM Box 22, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS, or ring Anne Murphy on 0973-231 620.

■ Lambeth Socialist Alliance

Next meeting - July 21, 8pm. Bread and Roses pub, 68 Clapham Manor Street, London SW4.

■ Scottish Socialist Alliance

To get involved, contact PO Box 980, Glasgow G14 9QQ.

■ Hillingdon hospital workers fight on

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

■ Irish political prisoners campaign

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Summer Offensive '98

The struggle continues

It was appropriate that the trophy for most money raised in the CPGB's 15th Summer Offensive fundraising drive was awarded, at the celebration meal on July 11, to comrade PK of the Party's printshop.

He put in untold hours of voluntary, unpaid communist work at a time when the quantity of commercial business was successfully stepped up. During the Offensive, some of the money raised was used to purchase a new film processor, and our A2 sheet-fed print machine is currently being upgraded with some new parts.

Comrade IF, also mostly through printshop work, took second prize - a bottle of Andong Soju, a potent Korean "folk liquor" donated by a comrade from Seoul who was with us at the beginning of the year. Third prize was taken by comrade TB for an outstanding performance in her first Summer Offensive, having more than doubled her initial minimum pledge.

A substantial donation by Party sympathiser and single mother KK (showing that she is more than just a sympathiser) was recognised by the award of a purpose-made framed embroidery with the words "Communist Party of Great Britain: workers of the world, unite!"

The CPGB is under the same pressure as other left organisations struggling against the tide of reaction sweeping across the world today, and has lost nearly half of our numerical strength during the past year. In these circumstances our target of £20,000 in two months proved to be every bit as tough as expected. In fact we got off to a slow start, and although the money was coming in much quicker at the end, approximately half of those who made pledges had not actually completed them by the time of the celebration

meal, even after 10 weeks of campaigning. With £14,300 actually received, another £2,000 pledged is expected in the very near future, so we can legitimately count the total achieved as £16,300, or 81.5% of target.

The general raising of initial pledges which I called for shortly after the start of the campaign never materialised - with a couple of honourable exceptions - reflecting, I believe, a reluctance to fully accept personal responsibility for financing our own politics. It should not surprise us, in the present political climate, that - again, with a couple of honourable exceptions which prove the rule - no mass of Party sympathisers appeared over the horizon to fulfil our target for us.

Building communist organisation, reorganising the Party, cannot be done merely by thinking, no matter how perceptive, or by writing, no matter how eloquent or persuasive. The most advanced theory must be accompanied by the most advanced *practice*. It is the example of communist practice, through an organisation which *does* what is necessary, which will be capable of winning the allegiance of the most advanced and militant workers.

In the coming period, it is vital that all comrades are involved in a level of fundraising work, week in and week out, which can ensure that our paper and our political work is sustainable. Not a question of cutting our work to match the available cash, but of mustering the funds necessary for the tasks of the day. Just as the completion of every individual pledge in this Offensive must be ensured, so the monitoring of adequate fundraising must be on the agenda of every Party organisation throughout the coming year. Bankers order forms are available on request ●

Stan Kelsey

London Socialist Alliance

For a new party

"A totally open and public document for discussion amongst members and sympathisers of the London Socialist Alliance and all the London borough Socialist Alliances", written by **Toby Abse** of Lewisham SA

Much of the discussion at the Sunday July 5 general meeting of the London Socialist Alliance got bogged down in administrative details about the LSA's structure, leading many comrades unfamiliar with the entire prior history of our minuscule organisation to wonder whether there were any significant political differences at stake or whether we were just enjoying arguing over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. It is not my intention here to suggest an agreed structure is not required, nor to suggest that any type of structure selected at random would do, but to argue that the essence of what divides us is our totally divergent political projects, not essentially contingent organisational questions which can be sorted out at the autumn conference.

The majority of us on both sides of the debate are thinking, whatever the divergences of the time scale, in terms of building a party (whilst there may be important pragmatic reasons for delaying this until after the Euro elections, I think only a minority would accept the Peter McLaren objection to a party as such). The fundamental question is what sort of party do we want to build. The CPGB are seeking to reforge the Communist Party: in other words they are seeking to build a democratic centralist Leninist revolutionary vanguard party which would have no room for left reformists or social democrats (as an historian I would question whether the actually existing CPGB of 1920-1991 ever bore much resemblance to this model, but this is irrelevant to the matter at hand). Whilst certain formulations beloved of the CPGB (such as 'national socialism' when referring to the Scottish Socialist Party) are eerily reminiscent of third period Stalinism, they ostensibly seek a united front. However, tactical protestations of willingness to work with left reformists in articles addressed to LSA members are always contradicted by more theoretical polemics envisaging a *purely* revolutionary regroupment printed side by side.

The CPGB may be publicly critical of Stalin, embrace the notion of world revolution (rather than socialism in one country), albeit in an extreme form - it has to break out on the same day in every country, and have some sort of bureaucratic collectivist analysis of the old USSR and the surviving self-styled communist countries (if I am decoding the more abstruse theoretical articles in the *Weekly Worker* correctly) and on this basis may perhaps fuse with certain fragments (such as the Movement for Socialism and the *Marxist Bulletin*) drawn from the stranger, more cult-like (Healeyite or Spartacist) variants of British Trotskyism. But the exact degree (or sincerity) of their evolution away from classical Stalinism, while perhaps the subject of intense ideological debate amongst their 'critical supporters' in the tiny groups listed above, is irrelevant to those of us pursuing an entirely different project.

Supporters of motion two want to create a new workers' party, but on an

entirely different basis, as a *mass* party, not a tiny 'vanguard' sect. (Whilst what follows seems to me a reasonably accurate reflection of the thinking of the Socialist Democracy Group and Socialist Outlook, it is possible that the Socialist Party is moving toward, rather than totally in agreement with, the arguments I am advancing, which are perhaps closer to SML. Obviously in the last analysis I only speak for myself and would be genuinely grateful for any clarification from any supporters of motion two who feel I have unintentionally misrepresented their position.)

Our position is that there has been a qualitative change amounting to a genetic mutation in the nature of the Labour Party, turning it from a social democratic reformist workers' party linked to the trade unions and committed in principle to the welfare state, some measure of redistributive taxation and some measure of nationalisation, into an overtly pro-business, neo-liberal party akin to Clinton's Democratic Party.

We recognise that there is a sizeable social democratic minority within the Blairite LP (perhaps around 50 within the PLP, if one aggregates the 1997-98 votes on single mothers, Iraq and tuition fees, but greater at the grass roots, as the vote for Livingstone against Mandelson for the NEC showed. I note there are also tiny groups of self-styled 'revolutionaries' like Workers' Liberty and Socialist Action embedded in the LP, but they have no influence and are as amenable to dialogue as the Healeyite and Spartacist sects) and our aim is to win as many of these people as possible for a new workers' party. Whilst we are thinking in the first instance of those in the Campaign Group like Jeremy Corbyn and Alan Simpson, we would not seek to exclude even the Roy Hattersleys, should they want to join us. (Comrades should note Hattersley's revealing comment in *The Guardian*, July 6 1998, that "one of the reasons I have softened my attitude towards PR is the prospect it provides of a party that speaks for the poor".) It appears to us that *Tribune* is signalling the increasingly desperate position of left social democrats within the Blairite LP and may in time prove a forum for dialogue with layers of left Labour activists. The utterly intransigent Labour loyalism of *Labour Left Briefing* seems heavily overdetermined - Bash seems to be trying to seal the ears of his crew to what he views as the siren call of Coates and Kerr.

The slow process of purging candidates lists at the Scottish, Welsh, local and European levels will culminate in some deselections of sitting Westminster MPs and we should not reject any left Labour MPs, however belatedly they turn to us. Similarly, it is absolutely essential to work closely with the Independent Labour Network (it may have only about 500 supporters but it is an invaluable bridge to far wider layers of left social democracy). It goes without saying that any joint list with the ILN for the Euros is not compatible with 'the pure revolutionary programme' of Hackney SA - com-

rades can't have their cake and eat it!

Given the Blair government's extraordinarily intransigent stance on both trade union legislation and the minimum wage, coupled with its growing reliance on funding from big business and its attraction to state funding of political parties, we believe that in the medium term a break between the trade unions and the LP is now inevitable, but that it may be very slow and uneven, and the task of winning trade unionists to a new formation may not be an easy one.

We believe that there is a place for revolutionary currents within such a new workers' party and would be totally opposed to bans and prescriptions of the type that the CPGB suggest we favour (which *don't* work anyway, as the SLP experience demonstrated to those, who *unlike* myself, were not put off by its constitution). Everybody should have the right to produce their own papers and pamphlets and express their views freely, but nobody should expect tokenist reserved seats on any party executive and nobody should oppose party policy *during* an election campaign (the latter point is just common sense in electoral politics), although they have every right to get it changed subsequently.

However, we think all such revolutionary currents would be a relatively (perhaps even absolutely) small minority within the new formation - given that anybody with the slightest hold on British reality must recognise we are not in a revolutionary situation in Britain, nor are we likely to be in the

foreseeable future, and that even the economic class struggle measured by the annual number of strike days is at its lowest ebb for decades.

Therefore we believe that it is absolutely essential to support *all* workers in struggle over pay and conditions and to oppose *all* privatisations (the London Underground, the post office, council housing, education action zones) and *all* attacks on the welfare state (single mothers, the disabled, pensioners, hospital closures). Only by a resolute defence of the working class and the poor and the oppressed in general in both workplaces and communities can we rebuild people's belief that there is a viable alternative to Thatcherism/Blairism. Any partial victory will have incalculable consequences for the rest of the class struggle, hence the enormous importance of the tube dispute.

Proportional representation would assist the growth of such a new workers' party by undermining the traditional 'wasted vote' and 'Labour is the lesser evil' arguments. It might perhaps in certain circumstances enable it to gain some bargaining power *vis-à-vis* New Labour of a type possessed by Rifondazione Comunista in Italy and the PCF in France, but we suspect that the Blairites have gone further to the right than D'Alema's PDS or Jospin's PS and, faced with competition to their left, might be more inclined to a grand coalition (with Liberal Democrats and moderate Tories) against us - particularly if the German elections result in Schroeder doing something similar.

There is probably a difference of emphasis amongst motion two supporters on the exact role of greens in such a party of recomposition. My position (shared, I think, by all or most

of the Socialist Democracy Group) is that the environmental struggle and the anti-capitalist struggle are inseparable (eg, Monsanto and the GM soya bean and maize) and that the majority of greens could be won over to socialist politics if approached in an intelligent manner (*not* a dogmatic or sectarian one). Others (Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook) are inclined to assume that only a minority in the Green Party could be won over to socialist politics. I would argue that the best tactic is to enter into serious discussions about joint campaigns (first and foremost about London Underground) and/or electoral pacts but in good faith and with some measure of flexibility - not with the predetermined objective of exposing all greens as treacherous vermin and enemies of the workers' movement, which is what I suspect some advocates of the 'principled links' amendment to motion two had in mind.

Whilst we do not seek to exclude the CPGB and other supporters of motion one from our projected party of recomposition, we assume that, given the repeated condemnations such a project has received in advance from John Bridge at public meetings (eg, the *Critique* conference on social democracy earlier this year) and in the columns of the *Weekly Worker*, the CPGB and their allies might reflect upon the merits of a 'principled split' from what in their eyes would be an opportunist and counterrevolutionary body akin to the Scottish Socialist Party, one that doubtless threatens the otherwise imminent arrival of Soviets in Brent and Hackney, spearheaded by the armed popular militia on the Kilburn High Road (one trusts John Bridge is not training them on Hampstead Heath, lest he be accused of Parxism) ●

A reply to comrade Abse

Toby Abse has felt the need to produce an article that is both polemical and open. Excellent news. Comrade Abse is not only a confirmed social democrat and a member of the Independent Labour Network; he is the chosen leader of the amalgamated bloc of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, Socialist Outlook and the Socialist Democracy Group that has malevolently formed itself in the London Socialist Alliance. So although "in the last analysis" he only speaks for himself, what the comrade has to say is a "reasonably accurate reflection of the thinking" of the amalgamated bloc.

Let me deal with comrade Abse's article point by point. This will allow the correction of elementary mistakes and honest misunderstandings. It will also highlight the genuine areas of difference and show that despite them, with good will on both sides,

principled unity is not only possible but desirable. Without its two wings, the left and the right, the LSA will never fly.

1. The CPGB is "seeking to build a democratic centralist Leninist revolutionary party which would have no room for left reformists and social democrats". True. Comrade Abse is right. He is moreover spot on when he argues that the actual corporeal reality of the CPGB from 1920 to 1991 had only an equivocal relationship to that "model". When it was formed - out of the fusion of various interdigitated but schismatic revolutionary groups - the CPGB was to all intents and purposes a left centrist party. Despite its impressive roots in the working class it possessed very shallow theoretical roots in Marxism. By the mid-1920s bureaucratic centralism replaced democratic centralism in practice. From 1935 onwards illusions

were freely sown in 'progressive' imperialism and parliamentary democracy by the Harry Pollitt leadership. With the helping hand of Stalin in 1950 that bore poison fruit when the 'official' CPGB adopted a reformist programme (SPEW is committed to a similar *British road to socialism*). The liquidation of the Euro-wing in 1991 was thus a case of the dead burying the dead.

2. Our Leninist wing of the CPGB never fondly looked back over its shoulder to some golden age. Nor did we evolve from "classical Stalinism". We certainly have nothing to do with "third period Stalinism", as comrade Abse either mischievously or ignorantly alleges (our opposition to 'national socialism' is a critique of Stalin's USSR and those who would repeat that sorry episode of history - the term and its critical meaning is, of course, taken directly from Marx,

Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, who employed the same or a similar oxymoron).

3. Reforging the CPGB is about what is necessary if the working class is to liberate itself and make itself the ruling class. Without a Communist Party the working class cannot really constitute itself as a class. Without a Communist Party the workers are incapable of decisive offensive action against capital and its state. Without a Communist Party the working class cannot hold state power. Can the same be said of comrade Abse's Labour Party mark II?

4. The Communist Party is the highest, most conscious working class organisation. It combines the fullest democracy - enshrined in the right of minorities to form factions and openly debate in the Party press - with the most resolute unity in action (for the information of comrade Abse we apply those rules today). Factions not only have the right to their own autonomous publications but should be proportionately represented on leading committees. There is no exclusion of those who take part in agreed actions and who pay their membership dues. Nor should there be a requirement to toe the line of, or parrot, a particular thinker or doctrine. The Party cannot be reformed by turning away those who disagree with Leon Trotsky's theory of "proletarian property forms" or Tony Cliff's theory of "bureaucratic state capitalism". To do so is merely to erect a narrow ideological sect. Unity in the Communist Party stems from the minimal requirement of *accepting* the revolutionary programme as the basis of common activity - no more and no less. Though by definition that counts out most left reformists it does not bar revolutionaries who have important differences on various, secondary, programmatic matters or principles (eg, the national question, parliamentary activity, Labour Party entryism). We have no interest in, or desire to create "a tiny 'vanguard' sect" or even a big vanguard sect. Our project is a class project. Comrade Abse should sum up the courage to admit it.

5. Reforging the CPGB is not the sole prerogative of any one group. All talents are needed. Every Marxist, every Leninist, every communist worth the name can and must be won to take up their responsibilities so they can play their full part in organising the advanced part of the working class into a *mass* revolutionary party. Such a Communist Party cannot become an actuality from the fusion of the existing groups. Nevertheless it is a task that can be greatly accelerated and qualitatively taken forward through the unity of existing groups (here we would include SPEW, the SWP, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, etc, and not just comrade Abse's "stranger" and "cult-like" grouplets). So our overriding perspective, to which we subordinate everything, is forging a working class weapon that can plan, make and defend the socialist revolution (which must have international scope and a simultaneous or synchronistic time frame, if it is not to fail - comrade Abse may scoff, but again we base ourselves firmly on and within Marxism).

6. Comrade Abse tacitly implies that SPEW, Socialist Outlook and the SDG are united in the struggle for a reformist party. He singles out the CPGB because that is not our objective. One must assume that comrade Abse knows his bloc partners and is privy to what they think. Needless to say, the CPGB is confident that the revolutionary minorities in these organisations will rebel against crypto-social democratisation. Either way, fighting to reforge the CPGB and working for the Socialist Alliances to become a mass force in British politics are not, as comrade Abse insists, mutually exclusive. His logic is woefully flawed. They are in fact comple-

mentary: ie, a unity. Reforging the CPGB as a Leninist vanguard in no way means that we seek to exclude social democrats or left reformists from the Socialist Alliances. Quite the opposite in fact. We are for the *practical* unity of the revolutionary left wing of the Socialist Alliances and the reformist right wing of the Socialist Alliances. Under present circumstances that means opposing Blair and his whole economic, social and constitutional programme. We have no problem therefore in taking sides, as comrade Abse boldly suggests, against Blair's attack on the welfare state, and in defence of London Underground workers and the poor and oppressed in general. It should also be noted that, following the initiative of the CPGB, an overwhelming majority in LSA voted for a boycott of Blair's referendum on his London mayor and assembly.

7. Unity is precisely what the CPGB's motion at the July 5 LSA general meeting was designed to confirm, order and develop. Comrade Abse is correct to argue that at the end of the day we have in the Socialist Alliances "divergent political projects" (the same applies to communists and social democrats within the trade unions). But whether they are "*totally* divergent political projects" - ie, requiring, as comrade Abse infers, an immediate split - is another matter entirely. The CPGB is unequivocally for an inclusive LSA. There should be room in the Socialist Alliances for all shades of working class and socialist opinion. We strive for and would wholeheartedly welcome an influx of social democratic refugees from Labourism. The same applies to green socialists and militant trade unionists. The CPGB has no wish to mould the LSA into a conglomeration of sects, as suggested by comrade Abse's good-for-nothing caricature. Because they can unite the advanced sections of the working class - a layer organised at present mainly in small groups - with those wider forces who have a middling or left reformist level of class consciousness, the Socialist Alliances can help to challenge and break Blairism, and thus open up a new era of working class politics. That is why the CPGB is determined to defend and institutionalise the right of every shade to have its legitimate place.

8. Our motion to the July 5 general meeting stood squarely 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" (*What Next?* No8, 1998). There is no revolutionary situation in Britain. In our view the world is in the midst of a period of reaction. Not surprisingly then, we are not sleeping with our boots on, expecting the "imminent arrival of soviets in Brent and Hackney" as comrade Abse groundlessly, factiously and only half-jokingly claims. Nevertheless the CPGB is convinced that the system of elected delegates and recallability can serve the Socialist Alliances admirably - because it is an alliance of federated organisations.

9. Comrade Abse slyly conflates our present situation with an abstract future. Instead of dealing concretely with the actual organisational needs of the moment and our immediate goals, methods and likely prospects, he conjures into being an entirely imaginary new *party* of recomposition which he knows for certain will contain a huge social democratic majority (and perhaps have 50 MPs). Like a typical utopian he then dictatorially lays down the law about what will and

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"The Socialist Alliances can help to challenge and break Blairism, and thus open up a new era of working class politics. That is why the CPGB is determined to defend and institutionalise the right of every shade to have its legitimate place"

.....

what will not be deemed allowable in his phantom party. Different papers and pamphlets are to be permitted. Parliamentary and council candidates standing on "the pure revolutionary programme" are ruled out of order. He thereby indulges not only in a flight of fancy, but excuses himself from the onerous but vital task of building unity in the here and now. In place of practical structures he substitutes easy platitudes and truisms. Whether or not the Socialist Alliances transform themselves into a party and what sort of party then develops can safely be left to posterity. Nothing with social weight is tabling 'party' at this juncture. What matters today is cultivating the political trust and building the organisational forms whereby the left can practically unite in an *alliance*. That is the burning issue that confronts the LSA (as it does Greater Manchester SA and the National Network).

10. As we have explained on numerous occasions, every affiliated organisation should have the *right* to send one *instantly recallable* delegate to LSA - that would include borough alliances, political organisations, trade unions and progressive campaigns (by that we do not mean every CPGB, SPEW or SWP *branch*, but their central or London committee). This arrangement is applicable to our movement - from the borough all the way to the National Network. It has the great virtue of recognising that at present we are an alliance or a federation and not a centralised party. Comrade Abse mocks our plan. "Nobody should expect tokenised reserved seats on any party executive," he commands. Apart from the simple and undeniable fact that there is no *party*, we presume that comrade Abse and the amalgamated bloc envisage an *alliance* whose leading committees are entirely subject to the whim of this or that majority (either constituted by one faction or via backroom deals). This is no way to build the sort of unity or the trust needed. It certainly runs counter to the detail of Dave Church's plan being presented on behalf of the National Network Liaison Group to the Rugby meeting on September 5 - it gives automatic representation to affiliated organisations with over 500 members (at the moment that would unfortunately exclude everyone apart from the ILN - a crisis-riven SPEW no longer clears that hurdle). Comrade Abse might also like

to bring his much trumpeted academic skills "as an historian" to bear and consider the Labour Party. Constitutionally it remains a federated party. The trade unions, societies and CLPs have their automatic representation - however hollow. Equally to the point, prior to its crystallisation as a bourgeois workers' party, it was agreed that the socialist groups, including the Marxists in the shape of the Social Democratic Federation, would have an automatic five seats on its 12-strong executive. The 54-14 vote by the SDF's August 1901 annual conference to withdraw from the Labour Representation Committee was surely, as Martin Crick says, "a fundamental error" (M Crick *The history of the Social-Democratic Federation* Keel 1994, p97). And not one the CPGB is tempted to make in the Socialist Alliances.

11. Our plan allows for the speedy and full reflection above of growth, new priorities and changed political complexion below. As such it facilitates trust and unity. Organisations, not 'star' individuals, ought to be central to the Socialist Alliances. Representation should not be in the pocket of a majority bloc. It should come with affiliation. There would be no fixed terms. Hence a new affiliate would walk straight in as an equal partner and not have to wait cap in hand at the door (cooption is not something we favour, but should be avoided at all cost, because 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 unsailable using such a device).

12. 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. Another labour dictator like Arthur Scargill would help no one apart from our enemies. 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 trial, humiliation and death at a full blown general meeting.

13. Our plan roots the LSA in the actual politics of its base. What happens below is almost instantly reproduced at the top. If we and comrade Abse are successful and there is a mass influx of social democrats into the Socialist Alliances then this will be fully and speedily reflected above. By the same measure if those social democrats move to the left under the dual impact of events and the CPGB then the political coloration and affiliations of those holding leading positions would likewise change from pink to red. So the CPGB's plan is not *organisationally* inimical to the social democratic politics of comrade Abse and his amalgamated bloc. We merely stand for the right of the majority to take leading positions and the right of the minority to become a majority ... through political struggle, not exclusion.

14. Comrade Abse maintains that his amalgamated bloc "believe that there is a place for revolutionary currents" within their "new workers' party and would be totally opposed to bans and proscriptions". It is good to know that in the realms of abstraction comrade Abse and his friends are not anti-communist witch hunters. His "new workers' party" will tolerate revolutionaries (presumably as long as they are happy to be a "small minority" and do the donkey work for the so-

cial democratic majority). But what about in the real world? Are comrade Abse and his bloc prepared to tolerate the CPGB?

15. On July 5 Nick Long of Lewisham SA and the SDG spoke for the amalgamated bloc. He claimed that it had no hidden agenda. Articles in the *Weekly Worker* to the effect that the amalgamated bloc wants to drive out the CPGB from the Alliance, as happened in Manchester, were the result of "paranoia". His 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. During the July 5 meeting our comrades circulated an internal SDG document authored by a certain Duncan Chapple (a close ally of the SDG). Amazingly, in the name of "trust and mutual respect" and creating a "pluralistic" and "matrix-type organisation", the SDG majority have been busily plotting to purge the CPGB.

16. The reasons put forward in secret by comrade Chapple are remarkably similar to those in comrade Abse's open article. It is not that the CPGB has attempted to dominate, disrupted campaigning work or shirked its responsibilities (in London we have supplied the coordinator, kept the project afloat financially and during the May 7 local elections the biggest slate of SA candidates were fielded by the CPGB). No, what is so objectionable about the CPGB is that it apparently considers itself "the embryo of the future movement". This "absolutist" notion, which certainly could be applied to Peter Taaffe's 'small mass party', is for comrade Chapple "destructive" and for comrade Abse "total divergent". Comrade Chapple delphically favours creating "the position" whereby the CPGB finds itself outside the "atmosphere of trust and transparency" the SDG piously preaches. Comrade Abse is more blunt. He advises us and our supporters in the revolutionary wing of the LSA to "reflect upon the merits of a principled split" along the lines the CPGB calls for in the proposed Scottish Socialist Party. Whatever the nuances, however, they both wish to see the back of the CPGB.

17. That comrade Abse and his amalgamated bloc partners raise no protest whatsoever against the documented anti-communism of the SDG majority speaks volumes about the worth of their democratic protestations. The silence on the Manchester events is also eloquent testimony.

18. Finally it ought to be explained to comrade Abse that there is a huge difference between the CPGB being a partner in a united front such as the Socialist Alliances (in London or Scotland), where we maintain an independent organisation and can openly - ie, publicly, including during elections - fight for our political programme, and being in a centralised 'party' committed as a founding objective to the nationalist break-up of the United Kingdom and a reformist road to national socialism (ie, non- or anti-socialism). The first is principled. The second is unprincipled ●

John Bridge
CPGB representative on London SA ad-hoc committee

■ **Correction**

In last week's paper our comrade Danny Hammill stated that comrade Duncan Chapple is a member of the Socialist Democracy Group. We have been informed that this is incorrect. Comrade Chapple is a member of Alternatives, a recent split from the Socialist Outlook group that has been engaged in fusion talks with the SDG.

The editor

Revolutionary democrats and a right of reply

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group (faction of the SWP) takes issue with the CPGB's national organiser

Does the *Weekly Worker* have a policy based on a 'right of reply'? I say 'yes' (or at least it should) and Mark Fischer says 'no' (see 'Party notes', July 2). The significance of this exchange is the beginnings of the first real debate within the new proto-tendency between the RDG and the CPGB.

The issues that need to be addressed are: the Scottish referendum campaign; openness and a right of reply; method of polemics; communist organisation.

We have certainly had debates around the first three questions. I could dig out plenty of back copies of the *Weekly Worker* to illustrate past skirmishes. But so far we have not drawn any definite conclusions. These same issues are mentioned by Nick Clarke and Mary Ward in their letters. Consequently Mark deals with openness, methods of polemics and organisation in his document replying to them.

The Dundee comrades did not leave because they had a different programme. Everybody is agreed on that. Depending on who you choose to believe, they left because they lost confidence in the Provisional Central Committee or because they wanted a quiet life. Was something wrong with the PCC or was something wrong with the Dundee comrades? When the issues are posed like that you can see a recipe for much anger and bitterness.

We need to relocate the debate within the new tendency. These are issues which reflect a division of opinion between the RDG and the CPGB: that is, amongst revolutionary democratic communists. Posed in this way we are more likely to concentrate on political issues and not 'who betrayed who?'. The debate is important not to settle old scores, but in order to build - that is, strengthen and unite - the tendency. We want to debate these questions not for something to do, but to draw definite conclusions and lessons and implement them.

It is important to remind ourselves why we want to strengthen the tendency. First there is no genuine (ie, revolutionary democratic) communist party rooted within the advanced section of the working class. The SWP and the Socialist Party are the two main rival tendencies who claim to lay the basis for such a party. They are not. The SP has a revolutionary programme which has adapted to liberal reformism. The SWP programme is totally confused - a ragbag of ideas thrown together. Formally of course the SWP has no programme and adopts an anti-programme position.

If these 'parties' would allow other communists to join and work under their leadership with factional rights, then we would join. The RDG remains formally a "faction of the SWP". This is more of an aim than a reality. It expresses not only our origins as 'state capitalists' who oppose the anarchism and economism of the Cliffites. It also expresses the location of the main ideological battleground if such a party is ever to be built.

The call for a new tendency means

.....

"The working class do not have the rights and duties that come with membership. But they do have a right to demand truth and justice from a party which claims to belong to them"

.....

that we do not intend to wait until the SWP or the SP invite us to join them. We intend to build an alternative now. This is why we are calling on all revolutionary democratic communists to work closely together to establish a new tendency within the Marxist movement. Such a tendency would promote rapprochement and provide an alternative pole of attraction to the SWP and the Socialist Party.

Before such a tendency can become a real factor within the communist movement it must be politically centralised around a draft programme. It must develop a common perspective. The idea that the new tendency can be built by gathering together any individual who calls themselves a communist is nonsense.

At present there is no new tendency. What we have is a proto-tendency based around a revolutionary democratic communist platform. This is supported by the RDG, CPGB, *Marxist Bulletin*, and the Campaign for a Federal Republic which is affiliated to the Scottish Socialist Alliance. Of these four organisations, only the CPGB and RDG are formally part of the proto-tendency.

The purpose of the platform is to identify the allies of Leninism and its opponents. It is not to 'unite' all and sundry in some spurious unity. It is to unite some and separate them from others. It is a litmus test. Some turn red and others, the centrists and ultra-lefts, turn blue.

The most immediate opponents of revolutionary democratic communism seem to be Open Polemic, the Communist Tendency (formally RWT) and Ian Donovan's new publication *Revolution and Truth*. Ian is the only one so far who dares to criticise the platform. In this he exposed a conservative and anti-working class attitude to bourgeois and proletarian democracy which he shares with the centrists and leftists.

I have heard, but it is yet to be confirmed, that the CT are opposed to the platform because of its rejection of 'socialism in one country' and advocacy of "world communism". Of

course we would much rather hear it precisely 'from the horse's mouth'. As for Open Polemic they have adopted a policy of boycotting the platform. Bob Smith of Open Polemic did attend the founding conference and expressed his opposition to the formulation on international socialism. But the *Open Polemic* editorial board have refused to say where they stand. The last issue does provide a critique of the thesis on factions. But that is a secondary question to whether they are in our camp as revolutionary democratic communists or not. We have to assume that their ideological boycott of the platform means that they are lining up with the Socialist Democracy Group and Socialist Perspectives.

The RDG and the CPGB now face each other as two parts of the same revolutionary democratic communist tendency. We stand together, despite our differences, against our common opponents. The CPGB is the majority and the RDG is the minority. Scotland has been one of the questions that have shown up our differences. As is well known to the readers of the *Weekly Worker*, the RDG and CPGB had some quite sharp but comradely exchanges in the *Weekly Worker* over Scotland. After the referendum there was a three-sided debate over the interpretation of the results involving myself, Jack Conrad and Lee-Anne Bates.

Unfortunately this debate took place in the era of post-referendum 'triumphalism' when the general message was 'didn't we do well?' Now we can see that we did not do well. Far from the tendency gaining new members as a result, we lost the ones we already had. Scotland heated up the CPGB to boiling point. Then the boiler suddenly went bang with the publication of an article by Lee-Anne Bates. This led inexorably into an internal debate on the issue of openness and then resignations by the Scottish comrades. Yet nobody has drawn any conclusions that make sense. The question of Scotland has to be debated again in the cold light of day. Triumphalism is deflated and a sober reflection is needed.

So it was that, whilst I was rummaging around in the dustbin of history looking for some clues, the question of a 'right of reply' came onto the agenda. For we all need to know whether the Dundee comrades can give us any insights. Mark assures us that the letters are without merit, yet it has caused him to write a major and serious reply.

A right of reply is one aspect of a policy of ideological openness. My view is that it is a basic democratic principle that should guide the policy of the *Weekly Worker*. Mark suggests that it is not a principle for a communist paper. Mark has a more pragmatic approach and only prints what he believes will help the Party (ie, the CPGB).

To argue that a right of reply is a principle does not convert it into some absolute law. Consider the principle of democratic centralism. We know there are exceptions to every rule. There may be situations in which we advocate federalism. However we know it is a departure from principle and a definite political justification must be given. The fact that we depart from principle does not mean that we now say there is no principle. That would be to slip into opportunism.

The democratic principle of a right

of reply does not mean that we cannot depart from it. But there must be a valid - that is, openly contestable - reason. For example if a fascist replies to some attack in the *Weekly Worker* you would probably refuse to print it. The political reason for departing from our principle might be that to print it would provide a platform for fascism, or that printing it might weaken or divide the anti-fascist movement. Equally it might be correct to print the letter and give an anti-fascist reply. It would be a matter of political judgement to deal with the exception rather than the rule.

Recently we had the example of Lee Rock being compared with Stalin's secret policeman, Yagoda. This was unjust and slanderous because it was not based on the facts of the situation. Lee was urged to exercise his right of reply. Cynics claimed that the CPGB enjoyed slandering people and would not print his letter. His letter was printed and further debate took place in the *Weekly Worker*. At the end of this Lee was satisfied that he had been given a fair opportunity to state his case.

At a recent London Socialist Alliance meeting, Lee Rock made a strong speech in defence of the CPGB. The right of reply had meant that we had politicised rather than embittered relations between Lee and the CPGB. A principled approach to a right of reply enables every working class militant to build greater trust in the *Weekly Worker* and its truthfulness and honesty. A principled right of reply means that mistakes cannot be easily covered up. It raises the standards of truth and honesty by building in an obvious "check and balance".

The letters from Nick Clarke and Mary Ward were replies to Mark's explanation in his 'Party notes' column of why they had resigned from the CPGB. Was the decision not to print these letters a departure from a democratic principle? In which case what was the political reason? Mark explains: "When it comes to the specifics of the particular decision ... I reiterate that none of our recently departed comrades have raised a single issue of substance." This is not true. But in any case it hardly amounts to a serious political reason to depart from principle. So far no such reason has been forthcoming.

Let us examine the arguments put forward by Mark. First is the mode of polemic. It is claimed without any evidence that I am "agonising" and "in pain". This is a pathetic attempt to put a spin on the debate. Hard men don't agonise, but wimps do. I am placed in the category of some whinger who goes on and on about absolutely nothing. If not a whinger then a neurotic, who is worrying himself to death. How tiresome.

I have had reason to complain about this mode of polemic, for example against Lee-Anne Bates. Communist polemic should stick to the political issues and not concern itself about the supposed mental health of its opponents. Perhaps it was Mark's own agony in writing 15,000 words on the subject rather than my "agonising" which has disturbed him?

Mark then throws up a few red herrings. First he claims I contradict myself by saying that "openness does not and cannot mean that any and everything must be printed in the central organ" and then claiming a right

of reply. There is no contradiction. The editors must make political decisions about what articles and letters to publish. But this freedom is proscribed by the political priorities of the CPGB, by the exercise of a right of reply and by the exercise of faction rights by internal factions. It does not mean that "any organisation has an automatic right to use our paper as a bulletin board for their own particular hobby horse." Of course it doesn't, but then I have never suggested this and nor does right of reply imply such a use.

Mark points out that, "If comrades have left our organisation, they can have no rights or claims on it." That is true, except that they have the same rights as other non-members. I cannot see why comrades who leave the CPGB should be any more disadvantaged than the millions of workers who never joined it. The working class do not have the rights and duties that come with membership. But they do have a right to demand truth and justice from a party which claims to belong to them. The democratic right of reply is a recognition of that right.

Finally we need to deal with the fact that Mark wheels out Lenin to oppose a right of reply. I was pleased to see Jim Higgins join the fray and I support what he says. I want to add some further thoughts. Lenin attacked the *Vpered* group in the Bolshevik paper. Bogdanov sent a reply which was published by the editors. Lenin was furious and attacked the editors. According to Mark this proves that Lenin did not support a right of reply (see VI Lenin *CW* vol 19, p173).

To be honest I do not know whether Lenin supported a right of reply or not. As a revolutionary democrat I suspect that he did. I do not go along with the idea that he was bit of a 'Stalinist' and would have been against it. However, I can read the text that Mark gives as an example and it does not support Mark's claim.

Lenin says that it was scandalous to print Bogdanov's letter. The next thing Lenin says is: "In my article there was not a word against Mr Bogdanov (who is not a member of the *Vpered* group); there was not a word of censure in general. As cautiously as possible I stated a fact - that the trend condemned unanimously by the entire party was 'connected with the *Vpered* line'. Not a word more. Nor could Mr Bogdanov quote anything himself."

The implication of this is surely obvious. Lenin is saying he did not attack Bogdanov and therefore the question of a right of reply does not arise. By making this point, Lenin implies a recognition of this right. Indeed at the end of the article Lenin himself says: "I demand categorically that the enclosed article be printed in full ... If you do not print it, pass it on to *Prosveshcheniye*." Lenin is here demanding a right of reply. Otherwise he will get it printed in another paper.

What reason did the editors have for printing Bogdanov's letter? The reason given was "for the sake of impartiality". We need therefore to distinguish between a democratic right of reply, which Lenin seems to accept, and the liberal 'question of balance', which Lenin totally rejects. My preliminary conclusion from reading Mark's quote is that Lenin was a (revolutionary) democrat and not a 'Stalinist' or a liberal ●

Around the left

Principled minority

It is clear that the period of reaction is hitting home. Many left groups are beginning to feel the strain. The Socialist Party (England and Wales) has lost Scotland, its largest region. The Socialist Workers Party has declared its intention of engaging in election work after decades of bitter 'anti-electoralism'. A determined section of the London Socialist Alliance wants to replicate some of the very worst anti-communist practices of the Socialist Labour Party. Many of the smaller left grouplets are looking more unstable with almost each day that passes.

Then we have the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. This is an organisation which has had quite a face change in recent years. As Socialist Organiser it was notorious for its hyper-sectarianism towards the rest of the left. SO's sectarianism - and politics - was of a virulently *rightwing* sort, fuelled by its fanatical pro-Labourism. When Kinnock's anti-Militant witch hunt extended itself to SO, it responded by attacking "Leninist sects" on the grounds that they had no right to be in the Labour Party - and by squealing to the Labour NEC witch hunters that SO was "demonstrably not of that type". Such grovelling did it no good however. After reading an 'incriminating' report from ex-Workers Revolutionary Party member Joyce Gould - Labour's very own Yagoda - SO was declared a banned organisation on July 25 1990.

Alongside this reactionary, kamikaze-like anti-leftism SO developed a set of backward and sometimes weird political positions, such as its objective pro-Zionism. SO steadfastly maintained that the left's anti-Zionism was no more than thinly disguised anti-Semitism. And SO's 'anti-Stalinism' was virtually indistinguishable from *mainstream* bourgeois anti-communism. Thus it enthusiastically supported the 'anti-imperialist' struggle of the *mujahedeen* in Afghanistan. It was not for nothing that *The Leninist*, predecessor to the *Weekly Worker*, classified Socialist Organiser (or the 'Soggie Oggies' as they were not so affectionately known by the rest of the left) as architects of "cold war" or "M15" socialism.

Now things have changed somewhat. Naturally, much of the old Socialist Organiser nonsense remains - it still likes to cast the SWP's anti-Zionism in a sinister light. But, to AWL's credit, it is developing a culture of openness. It encourages debate and polemic with other left groups. It is not afraid to admit that there are differences within the organisation on a whole number of important issues. Its theoretical approach to the Soviet Union is essentially non-ideological. AWL comrades have views ranging from state capitalist, degenerate workers' state to Shachtmanite bureaucratic collectivism (whatever that might be exactly). The open expression of ideas is something we applaud.

The latest issue of *Workers' Liberty* details the sharp disagreements within the AWL over the British-Irish Agreement. The AWL called for a 'yes' vote in the referendum on Blair's peace deal: the majority position within the organisation. A minority called for an abstention - to all intents and purposes a boycott. The fact that these differences - which are fundamental - have appeared openly in the AWL's press is only to be welcomed and we hope other left groups are taking note.

The minority boycottist position was championed by comrades Sean Matgamna and Mark Osborn in the pages of *Workers' Liberty*. Theirs is a principled stance which is similar to the analysis and politics put forward by the *Weekly Worker*. To argue for a 'yes' vote was to support an imperialist peace and sacrifice working class independence. With a few exceptions, such as Workers Power, the left capitulated like jelly in front of Blair and his 'New Britain, New Northern Ireland' project. But at least the AWL had an open and *explicit* 'yes' position, as opposed to the SWP's subliminal 'yes' stance.

It must be pointed out that AWL's general view on Ireland is thoroughly rotten and pro-imperialist - the malign spirit of Socialist Organiser lives on. For the AWL the Six Counties is the site of a "communal" war between Catholics and Protestants. An irrational and ancient struggle between the Orange Order and the Ancient Order of Hibernians. The poor old British imperialist forces are stuck in the middle of these warring tribes. If the British troops withdrew from the Six Counties there would be an instant bloodbath. Workers in the Six Counties must drop their irrational attachment to nationality and religion. 'Bread and butter' trade union politics, allied to the civilising influence of British imperialism, provides the only hope. This economicist, very rightist, anti-republican, anti-IRA (who are "militant chauvinists" in AWL-speak) stance on Ireland shapes and colours the arguments of both the majority and - regrettably - the boycottist minority. Perhaps, hopefully, as the debate unfolds, we will see comrades break from the AWL's traditional pro-imperialist economicism.

The introduction to the debate states: "*Workers' Liberty* advocated a 'yes' vote in the recent referendum on the Good Friday agreement. A minority disagree strongly with this position. In the following pages the issues are thrashed out" (June).

The arguments put forward by the majority are the wearily familiar ones we have come to expect from the left - voting 'yes' gives us an audience, war is nasty, it is a small step forward, etc. Frankly, the views peddled are idiotic. "At best [the agreement] provides a new framework within which the leading communal politicians on each side can manage that conflict ... the simple fact is that more communal polarisation means less workers' unity and a return to war means more polarisation" (Pat Murphy). The referendum is "essentially a vote for or against 'peace'. And the only alternative on offer is a return to the military campaigns of both sides of the communal divide" (Jim Denham). "It is a better option (or lesser evil) than continuing the constitutional status quo" (Dave Ball). "If voting for the agreement is likely to keep the militant communalists marginalised longer than voting against - then fine, we should say that - and advocate a 'yes' vote" (Pete Radcliff). Some of the arguments of the majority are so banal it is frightening.

Counterposed to all this liberal and pacifistic nonsense, we get the *common sense* - in the Marxist sense of staring reality in the face - of the minority. Comrade Matgamna correctly states: "A 'yes' vote is a positive expression of faith in the agreement to really achieve what London and Dublin and the various green and orange political parties say it will. It is to ac-

cept that the political issues and alternatives are as defined by the authors of this agreement ... Many people will vote 'yes' as a vote for 'peace': the question is - is it? And can *Workers' Liberty* treat it as only that?"

Comrade Matgamna goes on to argue: "This agreement institutionalises sectarianism and communalism within an artificial state framework, with a changing population ratio between the communities. That will be a destabilising factor. It is possibly the seed of a future communalist war." In other words, comrade Matgamna does not share the pro-imperialist faith of the majority, who *want* to believe that Blair's deal will bring peace. Yes, it may. But *whose* peace?

Importantly, the comrade challenges the methodology employed by the 'yes' majority: "As Marxists we analyse the reality as it is, try to find our feet in it and ways of getting from here to the socialist goal we work for ... We have our own standpoint and our own politics. We do not accept the gun-to-the-head choice of lesser evils they normally offer: to do that is to forgo politics outside their frame. *The lesser evils are also theirs*. We settle for neither their lesser nor their greater evils.

"Here it is very much a question of our fundamental revolutionary socialist working class postures towards official society and those who shape its destiny. To say 'no' where they say 'yes', and 'yes' where they say 'no', would be to define ourselves as only their negative imprint. But even when we both say 'yes' or 'no', our 'yes' is not theirs. We say 'yes' to peace. But we should not say 'yes' to the idea that this new arrangement is the answer."

The response of comrade Mark Osborn is even sharper. The majority, writes comrade Osborn, "claims we are 'voting yes to working class politics in Ireland'. This is grade A fantasy. Whatever next? - 'Vote Labour for socialism'? 'Vote Tory for workers' rights'? ... the question on the ballot was: do we back the peace agreement cobbled together by British and US imperialism, the Irish ruling class and the more mainstream communalist politicians in the North? Yes or no to *this* question, not the one you've invented."

He continues: "If the referendum

question had been, 'Do we favour working class politics in Ireland?', I would have no problem in voting 'yes'. But the agreement is a document produced by our political enemies. It has nothing to do with 'working class politics'. The working class, as a class, has no imprint on this deal."

Eventually, comrade Osborn widens out the discussion and questions the whole thrust of the AWL's politics. Sounding to all effects and purposes like the founding declaration of an opposition platform, the comrade says: "An argument used in discussions not represented here is this: the workers of Northern Ireland want peace and that's why they're voting 'yes'. We must relate to them. It is 'sectarian' not to vote 'yes', it cuts us off from the workers. Obviously it is pleasanter to be with the big 'winning' side; it is more politically convenient - if reality and our principles allow it - to criticise from within a movement than from without.

"But just travelling with the class - with its imprecise feelings and general moods - would carry us to Bhutto's Peoples' Party in Pakistan in the 1970s, even Peron in Argentina and certainly Mandela and the ANC in South Africa - or, in 1930s USA, to FD Roosevelt. No doubt the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action - the comrades who stood as socialists against the ANC in the South African elections - found themselves 'isolated'. They got a tiny vote. But sometimes it's necessary to lay down a marker, to take a stand for class independence, to rally the left as best we can, to educate a cadre."

We concur with the sentiments of comrade Osborn and all those in the minority grouping. Their differences represent a substantial break from the AWL's whole 'lesser evil' methodology.

We look forward to following the debate. But the fierce battle waging around the Good Friday agreement between the opportunist majority and the principled minority is too important to be confined to *Workers' Liberty*. The pages of the widely read *Weekly Worker* are also open to both the majority and the minority. This way the internal debate convulsing the AWL can be used to "rally" and "educate" the *whole* of the left ●

Don Preston

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Open fight for communism

The July aggregate of members of the Communist Party of Great Britain debated the nature of the Soviet Union, rapprochement and our work in the Socialist Alliances.

A controversy over the USSR arose with the publication of a front-page article in the *Weekly Worker* last month. A piece by comrade Jack Conrad on the Scottish Socialist Alliance ('Appeal to members', June 25) contained the following statement: "Stalin's USSR, Mao's China, Hoxha's Albania and Castro's Cuba prove that a national post-capitalism is perfectly feasible. However, they also prove that the consequences in terms of humanity are disastrous. Partial negations do not create something superior, more dynamic and more sustainable than capitalism. Instead of being an 'oasis' attractive to others, they become giant prison camps where workers are subject to a modern state slavery."

The publication of this single paragraph provoked the resignation of one member. Despite being offered the opportunity to explain his disagreement within the pages of our paper, the comrade refused to fight for what he believed, thus rejecting the struggle for an open, non-ideological Party.

The aggregate was unanimous in condemning this unprincipled behaviour. We do not have a 'Party line' on the nature of the Soviet Union. This opinion of comrade Conrad, while broadly shared by the majority, is not a condition of membership. Comrades have not only the right, but the *duty* to state their disagreements and fight for their views in our open press. We unite around *action*, not around a definition of the USSR.

It was also pointed out that the article in question was hardly the first in which comrade Conrad had expounded his views on this subject. Our paper carried three supplements in 1997 where his arguments had been developed in a comprehensive manner.

Comrade Steve Riley, while equally critical of the resignation, had similar criticisms of the article. He launched what amounted to a defence of the position carried in *The Leninist*, precursor of the *Weekly Worker*, for many years. Although the USSR was run by a bureaucracy with separate interests to those of the working class, it was nevertheless a form of socialism - bureaucratic socialism - with many positive features, which our organisation was correct to defend as an advance over capitalism.

It soon became clear that comrade Riley's views carry the support of only a tiny minority. In fact no one else present at the aggregate supported them. Although there were differences of shade, most comrades described the USSR bureaucracy as exploitative, with interests not only separate, but *anti-theoretical* to the working class. There was some debate over the continued use of the term 'bureaucratic socialism'.

One comrade argued that we should not imply that the Soviet regime was socialism of any kind, while others stated that the term could still be applied, but in a different way - similar to Marx's use of 'petty bourgeois socialism' or 'utopian socialism'.

The second discussion, on rapprochement, was introduced by comrade Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group. RDG comrades have a standing invitation to participate in our aggregates. The comrade put forward ideas for the development of the Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency, established by our two organisations. In particular he called for the inclusion in our tendency of the 'Dundee group' - two comrades who resigned from the CPGB in March of this year.

This proposal did not meet with the support of CPGB comrades. It was pointed out that the RDCT was set up with the purpose of facilitating rapprochement between the CPGB and the RDG. Certainly we hoped that the process would attract others. But any 'Dundee group' membership of the tendency would be conditional on their genuine commitment to communist rapprochement.

Several comrades suggested that the best example we could give to other groups, as well as individuals such as the Dundee comrades, would be to push through the speedy merger of our two organisations. Comrade Craig himself should take the lead in this.

Comrade John Bridge opened the debate on our work in the Socialist Alliances. He described the recent general meeting of the London Socialist Alliance as a partial success from our point of view. While the CPGB motion on inclusive democracy had fallen on a tied vote, we had managed to remove the worst aspects of the opposing 'amalgamated' motion through amendments. Nevertheless, the fight for inclusive democracy would continue and would be carried forward into the conference of the national network on September 5.

At that conference the CPGB would be putting forward an alternative structure to that proposed by the Liaison Group. As in London (and earlier in Manchester), the structure being proposed would effectively exclude certain minorities - not least the CPGB - from representation.

The important idea to win in united front alliances such as the SAs was that there must be room for both a right and left wing. Certain rightwing elements want to purge the left, in this way hoping to make the Socialist Alliances appear more welcoming to Labour defectors and non-socialist greens. The CPGB, on the other hand, would not attempt to exclude the right, although this did not mean that we would hold back on the fight for what is necessary - a Communist Party ●

Peter Manson

Supporters of the *Marxist Bulletin* and the International Bolshevik Tendency reply to Mark Fischer's 'Frozen in dogma'

Lenin's heir

We have recently received a document from the CPGB presenting some views on Trotskyism and asking for a response. While we do not think this is a subject that can be adequately covered in a short exchange, we would like to make a few essential points in defence of Trotskyism.

You suggest that, unlike Lenin, "Trotsky's contribution to the revolutionary workers' movement did not constitute a qualitative development of the theoretical categories of Marxism." However, it is not clear what "theoretical categories" of Marxism you mean, and what contributions to their development you ascribe to Lenin. In our view, Lenin's most important political contribution to the Marxist tradition was on the Party question - rejecting the social democratic notion of a party of the whole class in favour of a disciplined, democratic-centralised combat party composed of only the most advanced workers. Some of Lenin's other important contributions are his analysis of the nature of the imperialist epoch, his programme for addressing the national question, his development of the tactics of the united front and his recognition of the importance of the proletarian vanguard championing the interests of the specially oppressed.

Trotsky was Lenin's continuator on all these questions - not merely in the abstract but in politically combating the revisionism of the bureaucratised CPSU led by JV Stalin. In addressing the central political questions that arose in the 1920s and 30s, Trotsky certainly extended and deepened Lenin's programme "according to its own logical laws of development". The Trotskyists upheld the internationalist traditions of Marx and Lenin against the narrow Russian nationalism of 'socialism in one country'. Against the criminal sectarianism of the Stalinised Comintern's denunciations of social democrats and other members of the workers' movement as 'social fascists', the Left Opposition advocated the creation of a united front to smash the Nazis, modelled on the Bolshevik Party's united front with Kerensky to defeat Kornilov in 1917.

In China Trotsky counterposed a policy of working class political independence to the Comintern leadership's disastrous policy of capitulation to the 'anti-imperialist' bourgeoisie. The Trotskyists opposed the Comintern's turn to the popular front (ie, overt class collaboration) in the mid-1930s. The Comintern's popular front policy in Spain succeeded only in beheading the Spanish revolution and directly resulted in Franco's victory. During World War II in the 'democratic' imperialist countries, the cadres of the Fourth International upheld the Leninist position that 'the main enemy is at home', while the Stalinists poisoned the workers with social-patriotism.

Trotsky brilliantly analysed the social roots of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. He located the profound contradiction embedded in the degenerated Soviet workers' state between the proletarian property forms and the political monopoly of the parasitic caste headed by Stalin. Trotsky's prediction - that if the Soviet workers did not rise in a proletarian political revolution to overthrow the Kremlin oligarchy, the Soviet Union would ultimately succumb to capitalist restoration - has (unfor-

tunately) been fully vindicated by history.

The designation 'Trotskyism' is important precisely to distinguish Bolshevism from Stalinism - the ideology of the gravediggers of revolution. But one cannot counterpose Leninism to Trotskyism, any more than one can counterpose Marxism to Leninism. Of course Marx, Lenin, Trotsky (and countless others) addressed different questions and made distinctive contributions, but they are all contributors to the development of humanity's 'positive self-consciousness'.

Trotsky is no more responsible for the multiplicity of 'Trotskyists' who prostrate themselves before Lech Walesa, Ayatollah Khomeini or Tony Blair than Marx or Lenin are for the crimes of 'Marxist-Leninists' like Stalin or Pol Pot. (The history of the Trotskyist movement after Trotsky can only be understood in the context of the struggle against the Pabloist revisionism that destroyed the Fourth International.)

A revolutionary party can only be created by embracing the living tradition of Leninism - and that must mean a decisive rejection of Stalinism. Instead of 'socialism in one country' - world revolution; in

place of the minimum/maximum programme - a revolutionary transitional programme of the sort advocated by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. A "reunification" of the Trotskyist and Stalinist traditions would be just as retrograde as a reconciliation between Leninism and Kautskyism.

On Sunday July 19 we will be speaking on the subject of the transitional programme at a CPGB seminar in London (5pm - all welcome. Ring 0181-459 7146 for details). We will also be presenting the Trotskyist view on the Soviet Union at your 'Communist University' in August. We hope that these discussions can help further clarify the differences between our two organisations. Perhaps a process of discussion and debate can narrow the political distance between us. In any case we think it would be a mistake to paper over these differences in the interest of promoting the appearance of 'revolutionary unity' where there is none. For the question of Trotskyism versus Stalinism is not merely a historical question - it poses issues of methodology and programme that are crucial to building a viable international revolutionary movement today ●

Frozen in dogma

1. Leon Trotsky was a great intellect of the 20th century, one of the two towering figures of the Russian Revolution. The calumny heaped onto the head of this revolutionary should be rejected with contempt by all partisans of the working class.

2. Despite this, Trotsky's contribution to the revolutionary workers' movement did not constitute a qualitative development of the theoretical categories of Marxism, an extension according to its own logical laws of development. In this sense therefore, there is no 'Trotskyism' in the same way there is a 'Leninism'.

3. In the struggle against the rising bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, Trotsky and the left (and later, the united) opposition defended many positions of orthodox revolutionary Marxism, centrally the need for world revolution. However, Trotsky made numerous tactical errors in the inner-party struggle, blunders that contributed to eventual defeat. Crucially, Trotsky failed to correctly estimate the potential strength of the Stalin centre, based on the Party apparatus. In this error, he evidenced a tendency to mechanically collapse political forces into social base. This combined with a certain technocratism contributed to the eventual political fragmentation of the opposition, with many capitulating to Stalin after 1928.

4. Trotsky's analysis of the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party and the social consequences of the USSR's isolation contained many brilliant insights. Yet it must be taken as the product of the provisional working categories of a brilliant Marxist attempting to understand the laws of motion of a totally unprecedented social formation in the very process of its emergence and consolidation.

5. Thus, to the very end of his

life, Trotsky's thought revealed development and dynamic tensions within itself. This is true despite a certain degeneration of his thought conditioned by the intense pressure of Stalinism and his personal isolation. It is entirely possible that - given the developmental logic of his ideas before his assassination - Trotsky would have been able to resolve the contradictions in his analysis positively, to critique and outgrow his conditional category of 'degenerated workers' state'.

6. Trotsky's followers subsequently froze his method and these provisional categories into dogma. This was evident in the immediate aftermath of World War II and was a characteristic of both sides in the 1953 split in Trotskyism. Trotskyism thus emerged - in contrast to the method of Trotsky at his best - as sterile sectarianism.

7. We observe that today Trotskyism in Britain is embodied in general in two degenerate forms. First, there are the tiny, biblical sects engaged in squabbles over the letter of Trotsky's work, not his method and its results in the real world. Second, where Trotskyist groups have attempted to relate to the mass, they have adapted to social democracy and become practically indistinguishable from left social democrats.

8. The place for all revolutionaries and communists is in a single revolutionary party. Trotskyists committed to the creation of a mass revolutionary workers' party should begin immediate discussions with the Provisional Central Committee with a view to the reunification of Trotskyism with the Communist Party of Great Britain ●

Notes by Mark Fischer in consultation with PCC members