

Spending spree veils new attack

After two years of continuing the Tories' squeeze on health and education New Labour is now playing the bountiful benefactor for all it is worth. Workers should not be fooled

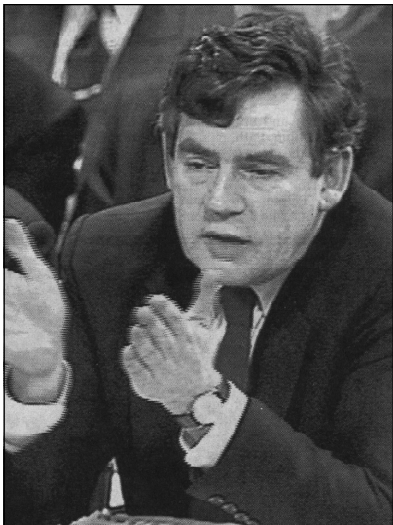
In last week's comprehensive spending review - the CSR - Gordon Brown announced large increases in government money for the NHS and schools for the three years commencing April 1999 - at the expense of public sector workers. The extra cash - a total of £21 billion for health and £19 billion for education - is not to be found by taxing the rich, but by continuing to clamp down on the pay of nurses and teachers.

Although NHS spending is projected to rise by an average of 4.7% per year in real terms (after allowing for inflation) from next April, the overall annual increase, taking into account the previous two years' cutbacks, will average 3.7% a year over Labour's five-year term of office. This compares to an average annual increase of around 3% during the Tories' 19-year period of government. During the last years of the Major administration the real annual rise in health spending was down to 2.5%, but during the early 80s it had exceeded 5%.

Nevertheless such increases in public spending were more often than not made with shamefaced reluctance by the Conservatives. In contrast Brown's heady speech surely underlined that Labour - New or Old - remains a different creature, with a positive belief in the desirability of state intervention.

The announcement of extra funding was greeted with near euphoria within the NHS and education. Stephen Thornton, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, declared that the increases were "beyond our wildest dreams". The Royal College of Nursing spoke of "one of the most exciting opportunities to revolutionise quality in the history of the NHS". Education workers and union leaders also expressed surprise and delight.

The truth is, however, that there is nothing very remarkable at all about Labour's projections. For example, education will account for 5% of the gross domestic product under Labour, compared with 4.9% under the Tories. And the RCN's hopes that Brown's plans will "revolutionise quality" were soon put into perspective, when health secretary Frank Dobson revealed that the NHS expected to have



Conceding just so much

to treat three million extra patients over the three-year period of the spending review. He intended to recruit 7,000 extra doctors and 15,000 extra nurses to try to meet this additional demand.

Despite the continuous rise in health spending over the past two decades the service, as every user knows, has deteriorated. It is not only the ageing population, combined with the artificially high cost of new treatments, that has caused this, but the monopolistic profiteering of drugs and equipment suppliers. The provision of healthcare according to need would be no problem in a democratically planned workers' state, given the present level of productive forces in the advanced capitalist countries. It is precisely the contradictions within the capitalist mode of production that makes such rational delivery almost impossible. The Conservatives tried to resolve the effects of market capitalism through introducing more of the same - the so-called 'internal market'. They failed and deterioration continued. Dobson will be lucky if quality is maintained, let alone radically improved.

The extra spending appears generous only in contrast to the squeeze of recent years. Increases which, in all likelihood, will fail to keep up with demand are made to appear huge by comparison. For all the talk of a "crisis of expectations" peddled by the left - most notably the Socialist Work-

ers Party - workers had very few illusions in Tony Blair on May 1 1997. Their expectations were dismally low. So Dobson's undertaking not to impose new health fees and to raise prescriptions charges only in line with inflation was greeted as though a real improvement was in the pipeline. In fact the prescription 'tax on health' will soon have reached £6 an item.

Taken as a whole, the rise in state spending is very modest indeed - especially considering the freeze of New Labour's first two years. Brown made it clear that his projections are "subject to the overall financial discipline" of last month's economic and fiscal strategy report. The EFSR foresees annual increases of 2.75% in real terms - but the announcement of this moderate easing of restrictions did not receive the kind of acclaim accorded to the chancellor last week. In fact Brown is making cuts in other spheres in order to balance the books - particularly in defence. Imperialism's interests no longer demand such a concentration of resources, following the defeat of 'communism'.

Labour has been able to plan for these small increases because of the outwardly strong appearance of the British economy, with comparatively low unemployment and inflation and steady growth. This has allowed the government to pay off debt, reducing the burden of interest payments. It also plans to continue selling off state assets - even if there are no more major privatisation bonanzas to be had. All this leads Brown to project a current account surplus - with revenue from taxation exceeding spending requirements - by 2002.

His schemes could so easily collapse. While the switch to a more long-term approach heralded by the three-year comprehensive spending review is portrayed as an example of prudent far-sightedness, the words 'long-term' and 'capitalism' do not sit easily together. The CSR may seem "reminiscent of the early Soviet five-year plans" to *The Independent* (July 15), but conscious regulation of economic activity is just as difficult (indeed it is impossible) under capitalism as it was under the Soviet bureaucratic regime. Capitalism depends on the spontaneous, autonomous activity of thousands of enterprises and many

millions of individuals. The forces they generate cannot be accurately directed or consistently controlled.

As a result the system is subject to constant cyclical booms and slumps. Unfortunately for Labour there are warnings of a recession just around the corner. Only this week Adair Turner, director general of the Confederation of British Industry, was predicting new difficulties: "Our overall judgement is that the economy is now beginning to slow at a quite rapid pace," he said. "Manufacturing and exports are in really quite a severe situation now." The Ernst and Young Item Club forecast a rise in unemployment of 500,000 and called for interest rates to be hiked up by 1.25 points to 8.75%.

In view of this perhaps there is more than meets the eye to Labour's categorical failure under the CSR to meet its clear commitment to cut welfare spending. Although Brown initially managed to keep the focus on his health and education promises, it was finally dragged out of Whitehall that, far from the social services budget being slashed, New Labour envisages increases (£27 billion over three years) that dwarf those for schools and hospitals.

"It is difficult to see why social security spending should rise at all during a period of economic boom," commented Anne Segal in *The Daily Telegraph*. The fact of the matter is that it is not so much a question of Blair's inability to push through welfare 'reforms' that is preventing the promised cuts. Rather he foresees a net increase despite individual savings, as unemployment soars. In other words a greater number of jobless workers will face intensified harassment and cuts in benefit.

Even allowing for this contingency, Brown could come completely unstuck. In a recession, not only does unemployment rise, but there is a consequent drop in state revenue from taxes. If spending is to be maintained, tax rates must be pushed up or government borrowing increased. Thus, even if we examine the British economy in isolation (hardly useful in view of capitalism's global nature), Labour's schemes look extremely fragile. There is some truth in the jibe of Francis Maude, the shadow chancellor, that the government is "spending its way into a recession". But it does not take a great deal of imagination to picture a world crash resulting from the continuing Asian currency crisis and a Japanese slump. In such an eventuality all Brown's plans would come unstuck.

In addition to the implicit onslaught

on workers through likely redundancies combined with fewer benefit rights, there is a second, more explicit, attack. There are to be "tough new rules on public pay", as the government assumes even greater control over the 'independent' review committees. These will now have to "bear in mind" Brown's 2.5% inflation target, as well as taking into account the relevant department's budget. While inflation is running at 3.7%, public sector pay - after several years of capping - increased by only 2.8% over the last year. In contrast average income rose by 6.2% in the private sector over the last 12 months.

If the two were to be equalised, the extra pay in health and education alone would eat up just about the entire projected spending increase. At present both the NHS and state education have severe recruitment problems as a result of these differentials. Yet Dobson wants to attract an additional 15,000 nurses. Christine Hancock, RCN general secretary, asked: "Where are these nurses going to come from if we don't tackle pay? There are currently 8,000 nursing vacancies."

This concern was also reflected among some sections of the bourgeoisie. *The Independent's* editorial led with the headline, "Money is welcome, but what about the teachers and nurses?" That was music to the ears of a variety of union tops, from Rodney Bickerstaffe to Doug McAvoy. But these Labour-loyal misleaders will not want to do anything to put at risk the government's 'generous' spending plans.

At present working class combativity is at an all-time low. Yet hundreds of thousands who work in what they view as valued service industries feel bitter at their own undervaluation. When even some elements of the ruling class are calling for their pay to be boosted, it is possible that their frustration may produce militancy - despite the union leaders.

The increases for health and education are not being conceded out of the goodness of Blair's heart. Leaving aside electoral considerations, he knows that the system needs a healthy, well educated working class. Like his programme for constitutional change, perceived improvements are to be handed down from above.

Our class needs its own programme - one that fights not only for the healthcare, education, pay and benefits that we actually need, but one which challenges Blair's plans to consolidate capital's rule ●

Alan Fox

Party notes

250th issue

The first issue of the *Weekly Worker* came out on May 22 1993, under the slogan, 'Unite the struggles - towards a *Daily Worker*'. In fact for a short period in 1992 and periodically into the next spring we published the *Daily Worker* alongside *The Leninist*, our journal founded in November 1981.

As the slogan 'Unite the struggles' suggests, the early *Weekly Worker*, like its daily predecessor, was a campaigning paper, whose task was to give a voice to the actions and huge mood of anger sparked by the miners' campaign to save their jobs in the face of the vicious closure programme launched by Michael Heseltine and the Tory government in October 1992. More than that though, we sought to cohere the struggles, and the surge of solidarity, not only into one coordinated fight, but one that had an independent *political* stance, distinct from the Labour and Tory camps of our class enemy. We have never had any truck with those who opt for the *bourgeois* Labour Party as the lesser evil.

Again and again we strove to hammer home the message - our main enemy is not 'the bosses' (individually or collectively), but the state itself. At that time the *Weekly Worker* was a mere single sheet, but even so, it was already starting to fulfil its prime role - however ineffectively and inconsistently - as organiser for reforging the working class *Party*.

However, we knew that that task required a bigger and better publication and, a year later, on April 7 1994, we were able to expand to a four-page format, thanks to our printshop at last acquiring its larger press. Not only could we continue our organisational and agitational work, but we were now able to carry limited theoretical and polemical articles - for which *The Leninist* had built up a solid reputation.

During this period we stepped up consistent campaigning for the coming together of communists into a single revolutionary party, and the *Weekly Worker* became synonymous with the call for rapprochement. Soon its pages saw discussion and debate around this theme with contributions from a variety of left groups. The campaign bore fruit with the short-lived 'representational entry' into the CPGB of members of the Open Polemic group, whose factional column was carried in every issue, despite its hypercritical and often unconstructive nature.

In November 1995 Arthur Scargill made his call for a Socialist Labour Party. We recognised the opportunity this gave us to argue for the type of party the class needs, and at the same time test the 'revolutionary' pretensions of Scargillism. Of course work around the proto-SLP in no way contradicted rapprochement - the two were mutually complementary. But these twin tasks exposed the inadequacy of our four-pager all the more.

We set ourselves the goal of ensuring the *Weekly Worker* could bring out into the open all the arguments, bureaucratic tricks, anti-democratic manoeuvrings and political factions and shades associated with the SLP project. Everything had to be made available to the working class movement. Without knowledge the workers can never transform themselves from "mere machines" employed by capitalists into "free, thinking leaders" (Rosa Luxemburg).

But to attain that goal the further expansion of our paper became essential - achieved with the launch of the eight-page *Weekly Worker* on February 8 1996.

Not only did it become essential reading for a whole swathe of SLP activists; it continued to build up its reputation as virtually the only source of information about developments across the whole left. To understand the tensions within the Socialist Workers Party, the auto-Labourism of Workers Power, the crisis trajectory of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the nationalist liquidationism of Scottish Militant Labour - there was and is only one place to look. If you want to know about the forces at play within the Socialist Alliances, you only have to open your *Weekly Worker*.

We have been condemned as the "Millwall Tendency", the "CPGB Provos", the "Genghis Khan communists" ... but strangely they all want to read what we have to say. Our polemical style is aggressive and probing, but it is open and honest. Most of all though it serves the single central purpose for which this paper was established - organising the advanced part of the working class into a reformed Communist Party of Great Britain.

Week after week our pages are opened up to friends, rivals and opponents. We neither ask for nor give quarter when it comes to expounding our differences. The search for truth comes first.

But our task is only in its very initial stages. We need a bigger, much more influential paper. Above all we need an expanded CPGB membership, fighting for the single revolutionary party that alone can lead the working class in its drive for self-liberation.

Issue 250 of the *Weekly Worker* carries the same message in our 'What we fight for' column (see p7) as issue No1: "We urge all who accept these principles to join us!"

Jim Blackstock
editor

Striking absence

Although I have circulated a public document outlining the position of motion two to supporters at the July 5 general meeting of the London Socialist Alliance, I do not intend to engage in a point-by-point response to the innumerable allegations made by various articles in the *Weekly Worker*. Having over the last 25 years been labelled a Trotskyist, a Stalinist, a Pabloite, a reformist and a centrist by a variety of political opponents, I have no particular concern about how the CPGB chooses to describe me.

I do however have one bone to pick with comrade Bridge. Comrade Bridge seeks to deliberately mislead your readers about the location of the "local meetings and pickets", his absence from which I referred to in my intervention on July 5. Contrary to the impression implicitly conveyed by comrade Bridge, the meetings and pickets from which he was absent took place neither in Lewisham, where I work, nor in Earls Court, where I live, but in the borough of Camden, where comrade Bridge lives.

To be exact, they were in connection with the Camden libraries strike of February-May 1998, to which the ad-hoc committee of the LSA had given verbal and financial support at a meeting at which comrade Bridge was present. This heroic 11-week strike by 150 library workers, the overwhelming majority of whom had no previous experience of industrial action, against a New Labour council intent on draconian cuts in jobs and services, had widespread popular support in comrade Bridge's own borough (9,000 residents signed a petition in support of the strikers) and, if it had been successful, would have had the potential to serve as an inspiring example to other local government workers threatened by the wage cuts and redundancies contemplated by New Labour councils throughout the London area; undoubtedly the substantive defeat in Camden paved the way for the subsequent Blairite offensive against the Islington housing workers in the neighbouring borough.

Moreover, the strike had political implications of another kind, because the hostility to Bickerstaffe and the Unison bureaucracy, who failed, like comrade Bridge, to appear on the picket line, underlined the lessons of the Hillingdon dispute of the need for a rank and file movement within the union. I believe that the failure of the LSA, as a collective, to intervene in this dispute was a serious mistake, of far greater significance than some comrades' *penchant* for Sunday lunch or eating ice cream in the park.

As comrade Bridge is doubtless aware, there was no socialist challenge to New Labour in Camden at the May 1998 local election - if comrade Bridge had stood in his own ward in Hampstead on a platform centred on the library dispute, we might have built a Socialist Alliance in Camden by now.

Finally, I wish the *Weekly Worker* had given the same extensive coverage to the Camden library strike as it did the relatively small LSA meeting. Had it done so, its stated beliefs in socialism from below and the primacy of the self-activity of the workers themselves would have a lot more credibility.

Toby Abse
London

Offered a lift

As usual comrades from the CPGB don't let the facts get in the way of a story. A few corrections are necessary to help clarify your hyperbole and calm comrade Mark Fischer's rantings ('Party notes' *Weekly Worker* July 16).

Comrade Duncan Chapple's private letter that you circulated and published, which I still have difficulty understanding, is not an 'internal document' of the SDG - we are not a Leninist organisation - simply the individual thoughts of a comrade, and has not even been discussed by the SDG.

The CPGB seems to relish publishing private letters from other socialists. It is a pity that this is not extended to publishing resignations letters from your own comrades.

The theoretical [sic] flourishing of papers and letters seems to be becoming a 'trade mark' of the CPGB, and will serve as a timely reminder, if one were needed, that the CPGB, far from wanting to work with comrades in a fraternal and cooperative fashion to help build an alliance of socialists, sees its work as splitting groups and a party-building exercise for the CPGB. No wonder after two years of these antics comrades in Manchester had a bellyful!

The notion of 'conspiracy, plots and intrigue' all directed at excluding the CPGB is silly. Some of the comrades I have been encouraging to attend the meeting voted with the CPGB. I even offered a lift to Danny Hammill to the meeting, despite him spending half the time during our recent SA meeting phoning through his 'copy' to his editor.

Far from wanting to exclude CPGB members from the Alliance, I have been more than willing to change the day of our SA meetings in Lewisham to allow CPGB members to attend. Seeing the CPGB operate is the best demonstration of how not to take the Alliance forward. Rugby and our autumn conference are likely to be equally educational.

Nick Long
Lewisham SA convenor

Sect petulance

I have been following the recent debate about whether or not to publish the resignation letters of the Scottish comrades.

When I left the CPGB (to join another, also very demanding, organisation, not retire into private life or treat mental health problems), my letter was published in the *Weekly Worker*, for all that I was apparently consigned to the "living dead". What intrigues me is why the same right is not being extended to Mary Ward and Nick Clarke.

I have read Mark Fischer's reasons for this. They are not convincing to me, although anyone at a CPGB seminar who refused to call the Soviet Union a hell on earth would probably not convince anyone else either. Mind you, these seminars are scarcely mass forums of the class, so even one person would not be an infinitesimally small part of the attendance.

The CPGB seems to have lost ground recently. I hope the rather striking denial of democratic rights to ex-members is not the petulance of a sect under siege.

Andrew MacKay
Brussels

CPGB cesspit

Regarding Mark Fischer's notes on Trotsky, 'Frozen in dogma' (*Weekly Worker* July 16). In paragraph one, Fischer writes that the "calumny heaped onto the head of this revolutionary should be rejected with contempt by all partisans of the working class".

However, in paragraph 2 Fischer tells us that Trotsky ("this great intellect of the 20th century") made no meaningful contribution to the development of Marxism and goes on, in paragraph three, to say that Trotsky was tactically inept and a mechanical thinker. More, he was a technocrat which made his followers prone to capitulation to Stalinism.

In paragraph four, Trotsky was, according to Fischer, superficial. Paragraph five, he is contradictory and weak-willed and offers only an immature analysis of events. From paragraph six on, Trotsky is held personally responsible for spawning sterile sectarianism, biblical sects and capitulators to social democracy.

That Fischer thinks it sufficient to simply spew out an endless stream of insults about one of the most heroic and brilliant revolutionaries of the 20th century without any evidence and that this character assassination will have any effect other than to expose Fischer himself as just another in a long line of Stalinist hatchet men, then he is very much mistaken.

Why doesn't Fischer stick to politics? Because he cannot honestly demonstrate where Trotsky was wrong on anything except of course where Trotsky himself has done the leg-work for him. Character as-



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

assassination based on wishful thinking always will be the method of Stalinism and its heirs in the CPGB, who believe that rebuilding a political cesspit is a worthy activity for working class militants.

If Fischer thinks Trotsky was wrong on any issue or in any part of his analysis let's see a serious attempt to grapple with it. Show us where Trotsky broke from the scientific method of Marxism, where his analysis degenerated into rationalism and reflected a bourgeois idealist approach. Then tell us how he was able to be wrong on a Monday, right on a Tuesday and wrong again on a Wednesday, as all you hit-and-run eclectics seem to pray is the case.

Fischer, with these silly notes, has attempted to heap calumny onto the reputation of Trotsky and I can only agree that he deserves the contempt of "all partisans of the working class".

YM Evans
Cardiff

By a thread

I would like to add to the recent contributions from Martin Blum and Don Preston following Tony Cliff's turgid defence of his state capitalist thesis in *Socialist Review*. Critiquing Cliff is akin to shooting fish in a barrel. However, I believe both comrades Blum and Preston failed to make some relevant points.

Cliff is more or less correct to state that workers were "completely passive" during the collapse of 1989-1991. The August coup and its subsequent suppression by Yeltsin did not witness workers mobilising for one side or the other. That internecine struggle within the bureaucracy was solved militarily and with relatively little fuss. The failure of that half-hearted, poorly executed and politically confused coup marked the end of even token opposition within the bureaucracy to capitalist restoration.

Cliff claims that because the "same personnel ... who managed the economy, society and politics ... continued to be at the top ... there was not a qualitative change between the Stalinist regimes and what exists at present in Russia and eastern Europe". He fails to note the contradiction when, later in the article, he discusses form and content, referring approvingly to Marx's attack on Proudhon: "The container and the content are not the same." As a good Marxist, Cliff is surely aware that most 'bourgeois revolutions' in Europe were carried out by existing ruling elites - Prussian junkers, *et al* - while *his own theory* contends that the *ruling* Communist Party under Stalin - surely the "same personnel" - carried out counterrevolution in Russia.

Mechanically - and stupidly - Cliff states that "workers would have defended a workers' state in the same way that workers always defend their unions". They refused to defend the Soviet state in 1991 (unfortunately for Cliff, Russian workers also failed to defend the revolution against Stalin and the rising bureaucracy) - therefore the Soviet Union was not socialist. And if it wasn't socialist it must have been capitalist.

Out of wickedness I will quote a lovely piece of Cliffism: "As at present no one denies that the regime is capitalist, it follows that it was capitalist before." If someone *were* to deny that the current regime was capitalist would Cliff change his theory? If we all denied the world was spherical and claimed it was in fact flat, would that make it true? What happened to critical *analysis*, Marxist or otherwise?

Cliff states that "the pressure of world capitalism forced the Stalinist regime to become more and more similar to that of world capitalism. The laws of motion of the economy were identical to those of world capitalism". "More and more similar" becomes "identical" - how and when? Answers on a postcard, please.

Andy Hannah
London

From **The Call**, paper of the British Socialist Party, July 25 1918

The Russian Revolution must live!

The Russian Socialist Republic of Workers and Peasants is in danger! Let there be no mistake about it. This is not a quarrel between two or more sections of the labour and socialist movement in Russia. If the Soviet is overthrown, a military dictatorship will take its place, gradually evolving into the restoration of the monarchy. The tragedy of the Commune of Paris will be repeated and reaction all over the world will receive a new lease of life ...

After decades of struggle, after untold sacrifices, after all the tortures and deaths suffered willingly and cheerfully for the sake of their ideals, the Russian workers and peasants have at last thrown off the yoke not only of tsardom, but also of capitalism and landlordism. They have assumed control both of the political and economic machinery. They have established a *socialist* republic.

Agriculture is being organised on a cooperative basis by the peasants themselves, and it is significant that the coming harvest is expected to be one of the best for the last 20 years. The railways are managed under the supervision and on behalf of the Republic of the Soviets by commissions of railwaymen themselves, organised through their unions. Similarly, the great works, the mines, the factories are managed by the workers and are gradually being socialised in the interests of the whole community.

If there is still chaos, and there is, it is due to the heritage of the old regime and to the impossibility of international trade and exchange owing to the continuance of the world war and against the hostility of the capitalist countries of both camps ...

And now our rulers, who are supposed to be fighting Prussian militarism, must needs follow Prussia in their Russian policy, as in so many other things. They must needs egg on Japan and do their utmost to encourage the United States to invade Siberia and cut off the food supplies from Russia. They must needs make common cause with the Russian capitalists and landlords to crush the Soviet of the Workers and Peasants ...

Will the British workers permit their brothers in Russia to be stabbed in the back? No, a thousand times no! British labour can and must prevent this shame. But time is pressing and the matter is urgent. Meetings must be organised everywhere. Trades councils, trade union branches and lodges must pass resolutions of protest and send them to the government, to their MPs and to their executives, and insist that the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress take action.

The Russian workers and peasants can save their Revolution if they are only left alone. The least that they have a right to demand from British labour is to prevent the British ruling classes lending aid to the Russian counterrevolution. The duty of British labour is clear.

Long live the Socialist Republic of Russia! ●

1918
.....
Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

Around the left

Scabbing on the struggle

We have consistently exposed the reactionary nature of the imperialist-driven peace process in Northern Ireland. The Good Friday agreement signals Blair's determination to stabilise and 'normalise' the politics of the Six Counties statelet - itself an imperialist creation. We have also consistently sided with those democratic-revolutionary forces opposed to the presence of British imperialism. By the same measure we have sided against the *counterrevolutionary* forces of pro-imperialist loyalism - whether it be in the constitutional shape of the Ulster Unionist Party or the paramilitary-cum-'respectable' shape of the Progressive Unionist Party.

Unfortunately, not everyone on the left has taken such a principled position. Even the most elementary form of Marxist internationalism (ie, anti-chauvinism and support for democratic struggles) has proved to be beyond some left groups. A particular grim example of this malady can be found in the shape of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, formerly known as Militant. No one can deny, of course, that the SP has been consistent. It has consistently *scabbed* on those waging a life-or-death struggle against the forces of British imperialism and its fascist local - though often unruly and wayward - agents in the Six Counties. This scabbing has taken the form of a lofty, liberal even-handedness when dealing with the forces of revolutionary nationalism and counterrevolutionary loyalism. Such 'impartiality' is objective pro-imperialism.

The latest issue of *The Socialist* displays yet again the SP's indifference to the political struggle waging around it. Desperate to be regarded as respectable, quasi-bourgeois 'community' politicians (remember when the Militant Tendency was held up by the bourgeois press as the ultimate in 'loony leftism'?), *The Socialist* heaves a great sigh of social-pacifistic relief at the fact that the stand-off at Drumcree appears to be ebbing away: "The horrific murder of three young boys in Ballymoney appears to have been the shock that pulled Northern Ireland from the brink last weekend. Until the arson attacks ... all sides - especially the British government - seemed to have run out of options to stop an increasingly desperate situation becoming worse. The British government-sponsored proximity talks had been postponed until after ... July 12-13."

Thank heavens, the British-sponsored "proximity talks" were put back on line by the "tragic death of the children" (was it an accident or the work of god?) - the talks "may even end in a compromise at Drumcree" (July 17). The 'Marxist' SP in Ireland wants an imperialist-brokered "compromise" between the forces of triumphalist sectarian ascendancy and the oppressed - to make "all sides feel the pressure of the community and

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.....

step back from confrontation", to use comrade Peter Hadden's weasel words.

Solid and sensible as ever, the Socialist Party stands stoically between these peculiarly 'un-British' communities. If only both sides could see the other point of view. *The Socialist* declares: "This year has shown that the Parades Commission is no answer. In some ways, by appearing to offer an alternative to local dialogue, it makes things worse. Local negotiation and local agreement is the only way to resolve the problem." If you were in any doubt as to the SP's sincerity, *The Socialist* helpfully prints a photograph of a slogan which proclaims: 'Police and troops, no answer! - For agreement on marches.' This is the "SP message", we are told.

Of course, the SP's *entire* approach to the Six Counties is predicated on this anti-revolutionary liberal communitarianism. During the run-up to the Irish referendum, an editorial in *The Socialist* informed us: "The real yardstick for socialists when considering the national question is whether it will strengthen or weaken the working class movement. In our view a 'no' victory would be a *victory for right-wing sectarians, Orange and Green*, and would quite drastically weaken the potential for unity between catholic and protestant workers ... A real solution can only be based on the unity of working people and the integration of the communities, standing together on social issues and on the difficult and currently divisive issues which arise from the national conflict. Such a unity of the working class could then achieve a socialist Ireland as part of a democratic and voluntary Socialist Federation of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland" (my emphasis, May 15). The SP's abstract socialism fails to disguise its essential reactionary position of studied neutrality between imperialism and anti-imperialism.

Disgracefully, the SP *always* equated republican anti-imperialists with loyalist paramilitaries. After attacking the "reactionary loyalist

regroupment" of the DUP, LVF and the intransigent wing of the Orange Order, comrade Hadden goes on to write that the "sell-out" chorus of the loyalists "has its inverted echo on the republican side where the Continuity IRA, Inla and dissident provisionals are carrying on with military attacks clearly to try and undermine the position of the Sinn Féin leadership ... We need a better choice - the choice between having to carry on with the dead end of sectarian politics or of building a new united movement to challenge and overcome sectarianism" (April 3). It is one thing to *criticise* republican groups like Inla, the Continuity IRA, etc, but quite another to mention them in the same breath as the LVF and DUP. The fact that the SP does not realise this says it all really.

Inevitably, given the realities of the Six Counties, such even-handedness can degenerate rapidly into an explicitly anti-republican stance, which puts paid to the SP's ambitions to play the role of impartial community counsellors. Its February 6 report on the January 30 "trade union-led rally against sectarian killings" in Belfast actually *complained bitterly* that republican marchers had turned up with banners denouncing the British army and the loyalist death squads. *The Socialist* stated: "The rally chairman asked for the banners to be taken down as they were 'inappropriate' for a trade union rally". Despite these groups' *one-sided slogans and sectarian undertones*, the rally was peaceful" (my emphasis). The same report noted: "The [LVF's] comment that they will continue to target republicans leaves the door open for further killings of catholics whom they decide to label, rightly or wrongly, as republicans. This position is every bit as unacceptable as [Inla's] *killing of protestants whom they label as loyalists*" (my emphasis).

The SP's hatred of "one-sided slogans" (ie, anti-imperialist, republican) tells a sorry story. Bearing all the above in mind, readers of the *Weekly Worker* may recall the letter (July 9) from comrade Phil Bryant of the SP (Belfast) where he took objection to our "allegation" that the SP is "even-handed in their equal condemnation of both loyalist death squads and republican anti-imperialists" (*Weekly Worker* July 2). The comrade writes: "The SP has never described these trends as being one and the same, or even opposite sides of the same coin. The reasons for republican armed struggle and loyalist reaction necessitates a more detailed analysis than the CPGB provides."

We would very much appreciate it if an independent adjudicator - an impartial, even-handed one of course - could decide who has truth on their side: Phil Bryant/SP or the CPGB. We also look forward immensely to reading *The Socialist's* "more detailed analysis" of the "republican armed struggle and loyalist reaction". But don't hold your breath ●

Don Preston

action

■ **CPGB seminars**
London - July 26 - 'Anarchism: the 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 Box 22, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS, or ring Anne Murphy on 0973-231 620.

■ **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**
Downing Street picket - first Sunday of every month, 12 noon to 1.30pm. Release the prisoners! For more details contact: Fuascailt, PO Box 3923, London NW5 1RA.

■ **Stop the terror**
Saturday July 25 - 3pm to 5pm at Trafalgar Square (opposite the National Gallery). Picket the Iraqi embassy in protest against the islamic *fatwa* in Iraqi Kurdistan. Organised by the Worker Communist Party of Iraq - Britain.

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For or against

Two recent resignations from the CPGB underline the nature of the political period. These letters of personal justification written in April are printed below with a reply from Mark Fischer which draws out some political lessons

Unreasonable demands

Having heard nothing from Mark Fischer, CPGB national organiser since I informed him of the decision of Nick Clarke and myself to leave the CPGB, it was with great interest that I awaited some comment in 'Party notes' (March 26). I was surprised however that he skimmed over the resignations from the organisation of Andy Hannah but more particularly of Lee-Anne Bates. Lee-Anne was a leading comrade, former editor of the *Weekly Worker* and member of the PCC.

This is significant, as it was the treatment of Lee-Anne by the organisation when she raised criticisms of Jack Conrad which was a major contributing factor in our decision to resign. I have made my view on this clear at all Party forums: I believe she was treated appallingly not by an individual, but by the leadership as a whole. I disagreed with many of her formulations and proposals particularly over the *Weekly Worker*, but when at one meeting I said that I could understand the logic of her proposals, I was berated for not being outraged at her suggestion of a fortnightly paper.

Perhaps that was the start of the "rightwing liquidationist" nonsense. I hold my hands up to having being outraged by that accusation. Our crime was to disagree with the Jack Conrad interpretation of the referendum result. Anyone who was in Scotland at the time - and I include those who have now returned to England - knows the impact we had was marginal. Our campaign did not have a mass impact. This did not mean that the campaign was wrong or a failure and we have outlined our views on this elsewhere.

I cite both of these incidents as examples of part of the reason for our resignation. We believe that the culture and method of polemic both within the organisation and within the *Weekly Worker* is wrong and we have raised this within the organisation on numerous occasions. We believe that this method repels people from, rather than attracts people to, the CPGB. I can understand the spin put on events by Mark Fischer, but he too is well aware that all is not well within the organisation at the highest level.

The quotations that Mark repeats in 'Party notes' are not from either Nick Clarke or myself but, I believe, from at least one other comrade who has not resigned but is concerned about the CPGB method.

Mark says that we "evidence a pronounced reluctance to speak to the leaders of our organisation". This is untrue. I have spoken directly to three members of the PCC. I understand other comrades were advised not to contact us. However, any who have, we have been happy to speak to. We are happy to talk with comrades at any time. I was reluctant however to have John Bridge camped out in my living room at this stage, but made it clear that within the next few weeks we would be happy to discuss all our reasons for leaving.

Comrades should be aware that this was not a spur-of-the-moment decision and that for almost a year now I have felt that the demands made on

us by the organisation have been unreasonable, given the state of the working class movement at this time. We have stressed that the reasons were a mixture of both the personal and the political, and acknowledge the pull of bourgeois life on us all. I only wish the leadership would acknowledge mistakes on its part rather than putting all moves away down to the period of reaction.

Another constant refrain from ourselves has been that the leadership do not listen to the membership, particularly those based outside London. This has been the experience of every comrade that I know of who works or has worked away from centre.

Mark's suggestion that only through the CPGB as it exists at the moment can someone fight for the "project of human liberation" is frankly frightening. Thankfully, there are comrades everywhere who have the same ultimate goal.

We have no intention of giving up politics and will continue to fight for communist politics within the SSA or any other formation that may develop as SML move towards dissolution into a Scottish Socialist Party. We intend to argue against the move within the SSA to take up an independence position by putting forward a resolution on the fight for a federal republic.

We do not wish the CPGB ill. We believe in broad terms with the project to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain and accept the organisation's draft programme, but we have clearly lost confidence in the method of the CPGB to bring this about.

We too will do our utmost to maintain relations and hold many within the organisation as comrades and friends and look forward to the day when we will be united in a single mass party of the working class ●

Mary Ward

Intolerant of criticism

While I do not wish to repeat Mary Ward's letter to the *Weekly Worker*, I would like to make the following points in reply to the 'Party notes' column (*Weekly Worker* March 26). Responding to our resignations, Mark Fischer says that "the departees have raised no principled or programmatic differences with the majority of Party members ... disagreement is that of nuance or style." This is Mark's interpretation, not ours. It is true that I believe that there are no programmatic differences and there are disagreements that could be described as ones of nuance and shade. However, there are principled differences.

For example the handling of members' criticism by the leadership and the treatment of those members who do criticise the leadership has left a lot to be desired in recent months. This is particularly true in the case of Lee-Anne Bates. Although I do not share a number of the criticisms she raised, she did make some valid points, which she argued coherently. However any defence of her right to express them and to be taken seriously was met with a barrage of smears and accusations of "rightwing liquidationism" and "pessimism". So the debate over the real content of her argument failed to happen. This

was also my criticism of the *Weekly Worker's* obsessive use of the phrase 'national socialism'. I do not dispute its validity as a political term, but the *Weekly Worker* deliberately overused it to provoke Scottish Militant Labour, not to encourage a comradely debate on the concept of 'a national road to socialism'.

When it comes to principle, it is some leading members of the Party who actually defend as a point of principle the use of invective and

insult against internal or external dissenting comrades, as if it is part of the Leninist tradition. I disagree: yes, we should have sharp and incisive debate, but it should be comradely (see Lenin v Luxemburg in the *Right of nations to self-determination*). On numerous occasions I have raised this criticism only to be dismissed as "soft". Abuse, disguised as Leninist polemic, is no substitute for constructive criticism that genuinely attempts to reach the truth, not bury it.

The leadership seems unable to accept, as valid, any form of criticism of itself by members. This is not healthy. Some comrades express criticisms in private, but there is a reluctance to do so in print or in public because of the

'polemical' mugging that may follow.

Over the last six months I feel that I have conducted some form of political fight over issues such as the analysis of the referendum in Scotland, the style and content of the *Weekly Worker* and the debate around openness. I have raised political differences, including the above points, either at various Party meetings or in print (in the *Weekly Worker* and in internal documents). I am happy to continue discussing these both with the leadership or members of the organisation. I am not retiring from communist politics, as Mark implies. I intend to continue that struggle in the Scottish Socialist Alliance ●

Nick Clarke

Mark Fischer replies

I won't bore readers with a detailed refutation of all the complaints and jibes contained in these short letters from the Dundee comrades. I have produced a 20,000-word internal document for members, supporters and friends of our organisation which of necessity has to reply in painful detail to these two bruised individuals. I will try to concentrate here on the more substantive political issue that is presented by these sorry personal impositions: that of *liquidationism*.

I understand comrades Mary Ward and Nick Clarke are putting together a rejoinder which I look forward to reading. But, more importantly, I think our organisation is justified in demanding that comrades beyond our immediate ranks actually *take a side*. The equivocal role played by comrade Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group has been disappointing. Despite having these dire letters and being fully aware of the sober and mature reasons why our organisation felt it prudent to delay publication, the comrade has foolishly claimed that this episode blew a "big hole in the policy of [Communist Party] 'openness'" (*Weekly Worker* May 28). His latest comments (*Weekly Worker* July 16) are more ambiguous, but they are still studiously *neutral*. While he agrees with me that there is no "absolute" right of reply involved, he tells our readers that "we all need to know whether the Dundee comrades can give us any insights". Dave and the other RDG comrades have had these letters and my reply for some time. Therefore I hardly need to simply 'assure' him that they are politically "without merit". If he had spotted any "insights" in these sad documents, I presume he might have mentioned it already in any one of the numerous articles he had written in our press or the CPGB internal and public forums he has attended.

A serious approach to communist rapprochement is incompatible with 'even-handedness' between forces fighting for the Party and those who have *deserted* it. I am sure comrade Craig would agree that one cannot pursue genuine rapprochement around a Party project by appealing to backwardness. One must be *for* or *against* liquidationism, in other words.

One more comment before I get

into the substance of this reply. The Provisional Central Committee of our Party categorically rejects the suggestion from comrade Ward that Lee-Anne Bates - the ex-editor of this paper - was treated "appallingly" by the "leadership as a whole". Lee-Anne erupted into print with an *opposition platform* without once ever having even hinted at having *any* criticisms in Party forums or the leadership of which she was a part. The first inkling that members of the Party - including her closest comrades - had of her views was when, along with the rest of the left, they read them in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*.

For reasons I examine below, the comrades seem to find the polemical vigour with which Lee-Anne was replied to "appalling". But what leadership worth its salt would not respond to the sudden appearance of a *liquidationist* opposition platform in the pages of its press? Comrade Bates subsequently resigned as editor of the paper, resigned from the PCC (*against* the advice of the majority of that committee) and finally from Party membership. Today, she has retired to private life to "read Marx" and - presumably - wait for better times.

I have chosen to reply to only those issues raised by our ex-members which have general applicability. In this way, the debate can be raised above the petty and real lessons can be drawn which can benefit the whole of the workers' movement. The issues are:

● The overly sharp tone of our polemics. In fact, it is claimed that the Party in general is infected with a spirit of sectarian invective. This is "wrong" - and presumably always has been, as typically Mary and Nick do not point to any qualitative changes that have taken place. Concretely this method "repels people" rather than "attracts people" as evidenced by our "obsessive use" of the term 'national socialist' in the exchange with Scottish Militant Labour, a mysterious quirk which apparently prevented the possibility of any "comradely debate" over its reformist, nationalist road to 'socialism'.

● While it is not made explicit - either in these letters or in verbal exchanges - there is the clear hint that these 'principled' differences are general, not specific. Therefore, the implication is inescapable that the solution is also

a general one: that the entire membership of the Communist Party should also do what these comrades have done - ie, give up the duties and responsibilities CPGB members have to reforge their Party.

● That the demands on members are "unreasonable, given the state of the workers' movement at this time". I examine the politics behind these charges below.

First, on our culture of polemic. Of course, the comrades are not alone in finding our style abrasive. But what are the Leninist traditions of polemical exchange and does our organisation stand in them?

The defining feature of communist polemic should be rigour and openness. We are after truth, an attempt to make *transparent* all political relationships between phenomena, people and their actions. The angularity of our language, its sharpness and search for precision is a product of this.

Martov - judged rather a 'soft' Iskraist, by the way - neatly captured this blunt, no-nonsense expository style when he commented that the editors of this paper "strove to make sure that 'all that is ridiculous' appears in 'a ridiculous form'" and to "expose 'the very embryo of a reactionary idea hidden behind a revolutionary phrase'" (my emphasis - cited in M Liebman *Leninism under Lenin* London 1985, p29).

Therefore truth for communists - engaged as we are in the class struggle - is not arrived at by some mushy process of "constructive criticism" instead of "abuse", as comrade Clarke puts it. The search for truth is an active affair, involving constant, sometimes harsh *conflict*.

Thus, this ruthless exposure of "the very embryo of a reactionary idea hidden behind a revolutionary phrase" - a "polemical style that was destined to enjoy a brilliant future in the Bolshevik party" (*ibid*) - was damned by *political* competitors: "On all sides, *Iskra's* opponents condemned the polemical methods of this journal, which was accused, to quote Trotsky's testimony at the time, of 'fighting not so much against the autocracy as against the other factions in the revolutionary movement'" (*ibid*).

What distinguishes our political theory is its scientific foundation and

liquidationism

- paradoxically - it is this that often can introduce the sharpness, the conflict into its expression. Science consists in the practice of moving beyond the observation of relatively simple causal-consequential relations and surface connections to the formulation of more profound and fundamental laws of social being and thinking. It is in this context that Marx commented that if the surface appearance of things and their inner essence coincided, then there would be no need for science.

Given that scientific truth is thus hidden behind what is 'accidental' and 'chaotic', how does it come into the world? Always and everywhere as the viewpoint of either *individuals* or *extreme minorities*.

Why were Lenin's hard political formulations almost always in a minority when they began? Because he merely concerned to "insult" and to use "invective"? No - precisely *because* they were characterised by scientific exactitude, by a striving to grasp what was essential to a political phenomenon, not to be diverted by "all that was external, accidental, superficial" and instead "reached to the heart of the matter and grasped the essential methods of action" (L Trotsky *On Lenin* p194).

While ultimately Leninism is verified and made more precise by the practical experience of society itself, because it is a species of *political life*, it cannot expect its victory to simply materialise through the unfolding of the objective laws of history's development. In other words, it is not like waiting for the seasons to change or for a solar eclipse. To be a successful Leninist politician, one must master the *art* of politics, an essential aspect of which is *polemic*.

Thus, given what I have said above, it has to be the ABC of Leninist polemics that they are required to carve out an audience for themselves, to make other, larger, forces pay shocked attention. To do battle against the prevailing flow of political 'common sense', they must be expressed in stark, angular political terms. And if in the course of such a tussle, a word, phrase or idea hits home, then for Christ sake keep *repeating* it, *drive it* into the heart of your opponents. It should be obvious that when a political opponent starts at our use of particular phrase, when, like Tommy Sheridan and Alan Green, they make demands that we 'withdraw' these accusations, the likelihood is that we have touched a soft spot.

Comrade Clarke attempts (not very successfully) to enlist a 'polite' Lenin into his camp of "constructive" debate as opposed to "abuse". It would be too easy for us to present over and over again a 'rude' Lenin. This type of quote-jousting is of little use, apart from to prove that our list would be far, far longer. So how are we to explain this 'nasty' and 'nice' Lenin?

The form of the polemical struggle of the revolutionary party is framed within an understanding of its *political tasks*. The organisation and the proletariat it seeks to represent operate in a world saturated with the ideas of an enemy class. Bourgeois consciousness - and its 'working class' political form of opportunism - is constantly reproduced - a spontaneously generated poison within the ranks of the proletarian movement.

The fight of our Party is for *proletarian independence*. Fundamentally,

this is not an organisational attribute - it is political/theoretical. The struggle for our politics thus takes the form of drawing sharp, unambiguous lines of political demarcation. The tendency to blur such lines, to be coy about political differentiation, to let opportunists off the hook - all of which has been manifest in the Scottish comrades' approach to politics - is an expression of a slide away from Leninism, towards bourgeois politics in the workers' movement.

Thus, Lenin's famous angularity was *not* simply for the sake of upsetting people. His politics were formed thus in order to draw implacable lines of political distinction between proletarian politics and those of our enemy class.

Of course, there is no single mode or tempo of polemical struggle. We employ different tactics in order to affect the real world in some way. The polemical assault conducted by the Communist Party and the *Weekly Worker* on the explicit embrace of nationalism by SML has been designed to shock, outrage and engage comrades in its ranks. We have raised our voice so piercingly because we have seen this organisation about to disappear over the nationalist cliff. As a much smaller group, we have to make our voice heard in the first place. Thus, when a scientifically accurate but shocking phrase draws a response, we keep using it. If the positions were reversed and we were the size of SML, we could perhaps smother its rightism with politeness, if we thought it worthwhile. This is not the case. We want it to be saved as an organisation if possible; if not, it must be split, destroyed and a minority orientated to genuine working class politics.

This sensitivity to the 'style' of the *Weekly Worker* has clearly now revealed not simply "nuance or shade", but the differing programmatic appetites of these two comrades. Far from this 'style' obscuring the message of our organisation, I think its approach is fully in the tradition of the art of Leninist politics. It has been brilliantly effective. Thus we actually come far closer to the truth if we say that comrades Clarke and Ward wanted us to quietly drop the 'national socialist' label for SML precisely because it *had* hit home, because it was continually causing controversy, heated exchanges. Comrade Clarke did not want to "provoke" more.

The current guiding ethos of these two comrades is to recommend to us not that we do what is necessary, but simply the level dictated to us, "given the state of the working class movement at this time". The "demands" we place on comrades - in line with our consistent principle of 'fighting for what is necessary' - are thus "unreasonable" according to comrade Ward.

Fighting for what is necessary always has been the method of this organisation and it continues unchanged. This is the slogan with which we have launched Summer Offensive after Summer Offensive, convinced comrades to give up jobs and become full-time revolutionaries, to move around the country, or even from one continent to another.

The implied arguments of these letters thus flippantly overthrow *the whole history of our organisation from its very inception*. The suggestion is that this organisation - as a Leninist collective - should never

have been founded in the first place.

Let us look at comrade Ward's casual lurch into sub-Menshevism in some detail. First, if the general demands of the Party are "unreasonable due to the state of the working class movement *at this time*" (my emphasis), when exactly *were* they 'reasonable'? In 1920 when the Party was formed? In 1981 when *The Leninist* was launched? And if the level we demand must be mechanically fixed to the level of the general workers' movement, should we be demanding progressively less and less every year, given the period of reaction?

In much the same philistine vein, two comrades of the liquidationist (and now liquidated) International Socialist Group once accused us of having "elevated democratic centralism into a fetish - inappropriately organising [our] cadres as 'professional revolutionaries' on a cell basis - a state of affairs which smacks of nothing less than wish-fulfilling voluntarism" (*Weekly Worker* September 26 1996). The ignominious way this dismal little sect winked out of existence - a demise perhaps 'reasonable', "given the state of the working class movement at this time" - is a more eloquent polemic against these type of politics than anything I could ever write.

Having not "given up politics", are comrades Ward and Clarke now doing what is *necessary*, or just what they believe is *possible*? If it is what is *necessary*, they must believe what they have done in leaving the Party in the manner they have represents *the future*, that all comrades should follow *their* example.

Organisation flows from politics in that it is the form of mediation between theory and practice. Therefore, the opportunist groups we see strewn about the British left are not 'partial solutions' to the crisis afflicting the vanguard of the workers' movement. They are actually *organised forms* of that crisis.

A communist organisation - if it is to have any merit or *purpose* - must be regarded by the people in it as a conscious step towards *overcoming* this crisis, a conscious step in the fight for communism. This is certainly how I view the Communist Party: is this what comrades Clarke and Ward think of the two-strong 'group' they have formed since resigning? If not, why does it exist?

Believing in communism *means* being a communist, taking the conscious steps that lead to it. This may require communists to do many things, to undertake all sorts of irksome tasks, sacrifice time, money and their personal freedom. But then, we communists look at "the pull of bourgeois life" as inherently corrupt and corrupting. The chase for the easy life is a chimera based on the unfreedom of others. As communists we do not therefore search for individual salvation under capitalism but *consciously subordinate ourselves* to the organised collective that will facilitate winning *real* freedom: that is, communism.

Like many others, comrade Ward foolishly writes that she looks forward to the day "when we will all be united in a single mass party of the working class". But, it must be asked, what is the link between *today's* actions and this pretty picture of the future? Does the manner of comrade Ward's departure from our ranks contain, in however abstract and unde-

veloped a form, the goal she and comrade Clarke claim to want to achieve? A genuine Communist Party, as a revolutionary form of consciousness of the proletariat, is *a process by its very nature*. It comes into being as a product of struggle. It is built in the course of battles in the *here and now*. As Lukács puts it, "However little the final goal of the proletariat is able, even in theory, to influence the initial stages of the early part of the process directly, it is a principle, a synthesising factor and so can never be completely absent from any aspect of that process" (G Lukács *History and class consciousness* London 1983, p313).

In other words, if these are the actions of principled communists, why not make the call to liquidate the Communist Party as presently constituted *explicit* (as opposed to just implicit by their actions)? If it is not what is *necessary* for communists, if it is simply the result of the "pull of bourgeois life", how is it possible for anyone who calls themselves a communist to remain neutral?

Communism - Lenin tells us - attempts to "proceed from the top downward, and uphold an extension of the rights and powers of the centre in relation to its parts" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 7, Moscow 1977, p394). Having lost confidence in the leadership, are Nick Clarke and Mary Ward proposing the replacement of *this* Party centre by another, higher centre? Are they proposing that their phantom 'Dundee group' does the job? Or are they - as seems obvious by their actions - actually proposing the *obliteration of any Party centre whatsoever* in the anticipation of some fictitious "single mass party of the working class" in the misty future?

I have no doubt that Mary Ward genuinely feels a sense of 'outrage', of scandalised anger against the "accusation" of rightwing liquidationism. "Nonsense," she firmly tells us. Yet I have illustrated in some detail how this characterisation exactly describes the actions of these two comrades specifically. But let us try to draw some broader historical parallels.

The nature of the period of reaction we are going through has its own unique features, but we can see glaring similarities to previous gloomy times. Particularly instructive have been their corrosive effects on individual revolutionaries. Take Russia as an example after the defeat of the 1905 revolution.

Trotsky points out that "the liquidators were in the forefront during the most desolate years", and veteran Bolshevik Mikhail Olminsky later recalled that "they were the cocks of the walk and they crowed about it" (cited in P Le Blanc *Lenin and the revolutionary party*, p172).

An important element in the wide appeal of this current was *demoralised disappointment*. What this produced in elements of the workers' movement should sound very familiar to us. The old Menshevik Nicolaevsky wrote of the post-1905 period as one when the ranks of the professional revolutionaries were decimated not simply by tsarist reaction, but by "revolutionaries ... talking about such things as planning marriage and a family, about getting out of the revolutionary movement - temporarily, they claimed - in order to finish school or find a job" (cited in A and J Rabinowitch *Revolution and*

politics in Russia, pp28-2).

Now, before going on, an important point needs to be made here about the 20/20 vision of hindsight. Of course - in 1998 - everyone is a 'Leninist', including Nick Clarke and Mary Ward, no doubt. It is 'obvious' that Lenin was right and our Dundee comrades and others would consider it a great personal insult - a "smear" or a "polemical mugging" perhaps - if I suggested that the contemporary positions they advocate would have taken them far from the ranks of the Leninists, perhaps out of the revolutionary movement altogether in this corresponding period.

It would be glib of *any* comrade to declare that 'of course' they would have been with Lenin. When you read what the opponents of Lenin wrote at the time, it appears as very seductive.

Thus, why did the Menshevik and other liquidators possess such a degree of influence and strength? Precisely because their prescriptive analysis corresponded to a real truth, an aspect of reality of the Russian workers' movement. After all, what 'party' was there left to defend?

Zinoviev notes that "in retrospect", in the period of reaction following the defeat of 1905, "we can say quite unhesitatingly that in those hard times the party as such did not exist: it had disintegrated into tiny individual circles which differed from the circles of the 1880s and early 1890s in that, following the cruel defeat that had been inflicted on the revolution, their general atmosphere was extremely depressed" (G Zinoviev *History of the Bolshevik party* p165). By 1910, the party as a whole had on paper perhaps 10,000 people. *Perhaps*. Krupskaya actually wrote that "we have no people at all" (Elwood *Russian social democracy in the underground*, p36).

Thus the liquidators were in fact proscribing what was supposedly reasonable, "given the state of the working class movement at this time" - the methodology comrade Ward would have us adopt. What could be more sensible?

In 1910, Potresov responded to Leninist broadsides by pointedly asking, "Can there exist in sober reality, and not merely as the figment of a diseased imagination, a school of thought that advocates liquidating what has *ceased to be an organic whole*?" He compared the activities of his critics to "playing with toy soldiers in the face of tragedy" (Ascher *The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution*, pp76-77).

The patient organic work in legal organisations - work that yielded tangible results for workers - superficially compared well to the collapsing Bolshevik underground. During periods of reaction, the rationale of liquidationism is powerfully attractive because it appears to have the whole weight of contemporary society backing it up. It is only "unreasonable" revolutionaries who do not succumb.

No serious communist can deny that the resignations of these two comrades is justified by them on the basis of particularly trivial, personal complaints. Nevertheless, the issue of substance raised by their implosions is that of the continued existence of communist organisations altogether. This alone dictates that there should be no hint of equivocation, or detached impartiality. Communists must stand with the Party, *against liquidationism* ●

Fundamentally flawed

Ian Donovan, editor of *Revolution and truth*, elaborates his criticisms of the Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency platform

Dave Craig's reply (*Weekly Worker* July 2) to my critique of the 'Revolutionary democratic communism' platform is welcome, but only serves to emphasise his own confusion and misunderstanding, both of the positions of *Revolution and truth* and of more general aspects of Marxism and the road forward for the workers' movement. In fact, comrade Craig's reply is often more notable for those issues raised in my original letter that it does not address, than for those it does.

I cannot, of course, speak for the comrades of the *Marxist Bulletin*, though I find it somewhat difficult to believe that the International Bolshevik Tendency (who are the political mentors of the *Marxist Bulletin*) would subscribe (even 'at arm's length') to the totally inadequate platform of the RDCT. I suspect that the comrades, whose self-designation of themselves as a 'fighting propaganda group' is somewhat belied by their inability to produce effective propaganda, have been caught on the hop due to this deficiency by comrade Craig's repeated demands for a reply. On the other hand, I am grateful for the opportunity to engage in serious political debate with the comrades of the RDG and the CPGB.

Comrade Craig quotes me as saying that "the four points of the platform of the 'Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency' have the quality of 'apple pie and motherhood'" and then somewhat rhetorically responds that: "In other words, they are so obviously good that no one can disagree with them. If this were true our tendency would be massively supported. In fact it is not true."

Dave is missing something important in his reading of my letter (*Weekly Worker* June 4). In fact, what I wrote was that elements of the platform of the RDCT "have the quality of 'apple pie and motherhood' insofar as they are correct". In other words, while the RDCT platform contains correct points, they are not the decisive points in the platform and there are other points in the platform, both explicit and implicit (in terms of its failure to address points that no communist tendency worthy of the name can fail to address) that means, despite the 'apple pie and motherhood' contained within it, in its overall thrust it is fundamentally inadequate. I could say the same thing about the 'Where we stand' column in *Socialist Worker*.

As I said, Dave's reply is remarkable for the questions that it fails to address. Yet later in his reply he makes the following rather revealing remark: "First we want to replace bourgeois democracy with proletarian democracy, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie with the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this we are replacing a lower form of democracy based on parliament with a higher form of democracy based on soviets or workers' councils. We reject any notion that establishing a workers' state can mean swapping one set of bureaucrats for another. A 'bureaucratic workers state' is a contradiction in terms."

I wonder which 'hat' Dave is wearing when he is arguing that "a 'bureaucratic workers state' is a contradiction in terms". Is he speaking as a representative of the RDCT

as a whole, or merely as a representative of the RDG? My understanding is that the RDCT is a bloc of the RDG and the CPGB. Yet the CPGB for many years characterised the Soviet bloc states as representing 'bureaucratic socialism'. Even now, the CPGB, when challenged, will still defend the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. In this regard, when Dave says that "at present Ian is outside our tendency and opposed fundamentally to it, as we are fundamentally opposed to his ideas", he certainly appears to be speaking the truth. But it would be interesting to ask which of my ideas Dave is most "fundamentally" opposed to, and whether his bloc partners in the CPGB would agree with him as to which of them merit the most 'fundamental' opposition.

This is particularly notable, given that in the following week's paper, Don Preston, polemicising with the SWP, argues that in 1929, with the first five-year plan, the USSR became "an exploitative politico-socio-economic formation that was neither capitalist nor socialist" (*Weekly Worker* July 9). This is essentially the thesis of Max Shachtman and his latter-day followers, whose conceptions of 'democracy', mean that for them there is nothing to choose between the former Soviet bloc states and capitalism itself.

Implicitly it involves a repudiation of those positions taken by the *Leninist* tendency that put it generally on the correct side of the barricades in the Cold War of the 1980s. For if the former Soviet states were 'exploitative societies' what is there to stop the CPGB from retrospectively adopting the position of most ostensibly Trotskyist centrists and left reformists in saying that it was correct to support Solidarnosc on the basis that what was involved was workers fighting against an "exploitative politico-socio-economic formation"? As opposed to the reality of workers alienated by decades of the monstrous corruption of Stalinism mistakenly opting for the return of the old exploiters, thereby cutting their own throats in a social sense. It would not be the first time that an ex-Stalinist formation like the CPGB had jumped straight out of the 'socialist camp' into the 'third camp' of Shachtman and Cliff. This certainly gives credence to my observation that the RDCT is a "congruence around a stageist strategy based on vulgar democratism as the basis for convergence".

The quotation from Lenin Dave alleges backs up his case for his interpretation of 'revolutionary democracy' (which in practice means that the *main governmental slogan* of the workers' movement in advanced capitalist Britain in 1998 should be that of a bourgeois 'federal republic'), is not exactly relevant. The article he quotes from is titled, indicatively, *The revolutionary proletariat and the right of nations to self-determination*, and there is no question that Lenin was right against Luxemburgists such as Karl Radek who rejected the demand for the *right* of self-determination of nations such as the Poles in the tsarist empire - ie, to separate if they choose and form their own, separate state. If I had been arguing against the right of Scotland (for example) to separate from the United Kingdom (if

the Scottish people so choose) then Dave would have been justified in using this quotation in order to show that my position was incompatible with that of the historic Marxist movement. But this is not the case.

Dave responded to by criticisms of the RDCT platform's statement that "the working class can become the leading force in society by championing the struggle for democracy" by reminding us of the experience of Russia. "He [ie, myself - ID] seems to have forgotten that the Russian working class did exactly that with Lenin's leadership. It was Lenin who called the working class 'the vanguard fighter for democracy'."

There is a vital difference between pre-1917 Russia under a semi-medieval pre-capitalist absolutist despotism and the advanced bourgeois democracy that is today's Britain. In Russia, you had a bourgeoisie that was too cowardly to carry out the tasks of an essentially bourgeois revolution. The questions of democracy Lenin was speaking about were not about minor tinkering with the format of a parliamentary regime. Fundamentally, they involved the destruction of the absolutist regime and the liberation of the oppressed nationalities from its pre-capitalist tyranny, and the expropriation of a whole *class*, the landlords, with the distribution of their property to the largely landless peasantry.

In Britain, conversely, the main agency of oppression and exploitation is the bourgeoisie itself. The monarchy is essentially a bourgeois institution, despite its medieval form. The British aristocracy today is not a separate class with its own interests distinct from the bourgeoisie. It is rather the remnant of an old ruling class, that has been assimilated by the current ruling class and is now a caste *within* the bourgeoisie. The main significance of the monarchy for Marxists is twofold. It is, of course, a prop of social servility and conservatism. But more important is its potentially Bonapartist role: the crown has the power in a 'national emergency' to override parliament; thus the armed forces swear loyalty, not to parliament, but to the crown.

However, bourgeois republics also have this reserve power, to be used at times of acute class struggle, usually in the form of a clause allowing the head of state to override parliament in circumstances of 'grave national emergency', which of course includes a revolutionary situation. Indeed such powers were widely used by Hindenburg, the president of Weimar Germany, to override the Reichstag in the lead-up to Hitler's assumption of power. Such 'clauses' in whatever form are a necessary part of *all* bourgeois-democratic regimes, monarchical or republican. Marxists oppose *all* of them. But such powers (and the armed bodies of men and women that are able to enforce them) are indispensable to the rule of the bourgeoisie. These kinds of 'emergency clauses' and 'royal prerogatives' are only a juridical form that legitimises the core functions of the bourgeois state. To demand their abolition points directly to the need for the destruction of the bourgeois state itself. Dave's perspective, on the other hand, appears to involve the replace-

ment of one (monarchical) form of this, with a positive advocacy of a (republican) replacement as necessarily a step forward.

In this context, Dave's accusations of economism are plain silly. Economism is the separation of economic struggle from political struggle. What my dispute with Dave is about is not about the necessity or otherwise of political struggle in the fight for socialism, but rather of *what kind* of political struggle. My political record over the last few years has been in propagating the need for a *bridge* from the minimum programme of reforms under capitalism to the need for the destruction of capitalism itself. How this *transitional method* can be termed 'economistic' is utterly mystifying. The essence of 'economism' is that everything beyond the minimum programme is to be left to other forces. In the case of tsarist Russia in Lenin's polemics against the economists, the economists sought to leave these matters to the liberal bourgeoisie. This was further complicated by the fact that in Russia a *revolution*, whose most immediate tasks were similar to those of the classical bourgeois-democratic revolution, was impending, which is certainly not true in Britain today.

Indeed, Lenin wrote: "It is absurd to contrapose the socialist revolution and the revolutionary struggle to a *single* problem of democracy: in this case, the national question. We must *combine* the revolutionary struggle against capitalism with a revolutionary programme and tactics on *all* democratic demands: a republic, a militia, the popular election of officials, equal rights for women, etc. While capitalism exists, these demands - all of them - can only be accomplished as an exception, and even then in an incomplete and distorted form. Basing ourselves on the democracy already achieved, and exposing its incompleteness under capitalism, we demand the overthrow of capitalism, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, as a necessary basis both for the abolition of the poverty of the mass and for the *complete* and *all-round* institution of *all* democratic reforms. Some of these reforms will be started before the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, others *in the course* of that overthrow, and still others after it. The social revolution is not a single battle, but a period covering a series of battles over all sorts of economic and democratic reform, which are consummated only by the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. It is for the sake of this final aim that we must formulate every one of our democratic demands in a consistently revolutionary way. It is quite conceivable that the workers of some particular country will overthrow the bourgeoisie before even a single fundamental democratic reform has been fully achieved. It is, however, quite inconceivable that the proletariat, as a historical class, will be able to defeat the bourgeoisie, unless it is prepared for that by being educated in the spirit of the most consistent and resolutely revolutionary democracy" (*The revolutionary proletariat and the right of nations to self-determination* October 1915).

It is not myself who is guilty of *contraposing* the struggle for the democratic, *on its own* quite 'minimum' demand for the abolition of the monarchy to the struggle to expropriate the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, I was arguing that they should be *linked together*. Indeed, I argued against the SLP Republicans on be-

half of the *Marxist Bulletin* that socialists should "advocate as the goal of the labour movement, and all its demands and struggles, the goal of a workers' republic" (see *Marxist Bulletin* No7, May 1998).

The demand for the abolition of the monarchy in Britain today is part of a minimum programme, and is essentially negative - the demand for the abolition of a particularly reactionary, anti-democratic institution. In and of itself, it does not point beyond capitalism. For revolutionaries, the raising of the demand for the abolition of the monarchy must be *linked* to the demand for a *workers' government* based on mass organisations of the working class, not the bourgeois parliament. That is the only 'positive' context we can give it that has a revolutionary *content*. Indeed, outside of such a context, it is quite conceivable that it could be achieved as part of a programme aimed in a situation of deepening class struggle to *save* capitalism, to stabilise it.

To raise this demand *without* linking it to demands that go beyond capitalism, as the RDG and increasingly the CPGB are systematically doing in arguing in positive terms for a federal republic, is not so much to 'leave politics to the bourgeois liberals' as to adopt the programme of bourgeois republicans for yourselves. While an elected head of state (at least in theory) should represent an advance compared to a non-elected one (which is why the abolition of the monarchy is a democratic demand), the fact is that the so-called democratic bourgeois republics, such as France, the United States, etc are just as oppressive to the working class and other oppressed layers as is monarchical capitalist Britain. To make one's main governmental slogan the positive demand for a *bourgeois* republic reflects illusions in bourgeois democracy, and certainly builds much illusions. It also robs this democratic demand of its potential agitational significance against the capitalist system as a whole. If this democratic demand is to have any anti-capitalist significance, it must mean the demand for a *workers' republic* (or rather a federation of workers' republics).

The slogan of a federal republic as raised by comrade Craig is not connected to the right of self-determination of Scotland or Wales. It is rather advanced as a *bourgeois alternative* to separation. Comrade Craig wants to preserve the unity of the English, Welsh and Scottish working class - by offering the goal of a reformed *bourgeois* British federal state to struggle for. The essence of my argument is that this is fundamentally inadequate in a class sense. Comrade Craig is fond of evoking the revolutionary traditions of Irish republicanism in support of his essentially bourgeois republican perspective. In this regard, I would rather echo the sentiments of James Connolly regarding such questions in an Irish context.

"After Ireland is free, says the patriot who won't touch socialism, we will protect all classes, and if you won't pay your rent you will be evicted same as now. But the evicting party, under the command of the sheriff, will wear green uniforms and the harp without the crown, and the warrant turning you out on the roadside will be stamped with the arms of the Irish Republic." "Now isn't that worth fighting for?" (*Socialism made easy*) ●

The following newsletter of the 'Campaigning Alliances Bulletin' has been circulated by comrade **Nick Long**, convenor of Lewisham SA and a member of the Socialist Democracy Group. It is advertised as "a newsletter of those committed to building real Socialist Alliances"

CPGB paranoia?

London SA ad-hoc committee climbs out of the sect ghetto!

At the London Socialist Alliance meeting held on July 5 1998 it was resolved to hold a founding conference of the London Socialist Alliances in the autumn to democratically elect a steering committee. A motion to give tokenistic automatic representation to tiny crackpot sect and 'front' campaigns on a future official London steering committee fell. Representation will have to be earned by building real and campaigning alliances, supporting workers in struggle and forming alliances with others. Surely this what the SA is about! It is important that

the ad-hoc puts this decision into effect and the 'Campaigning Alliances Bulletin' will be working to build a successful conference, able to tackle the enormous tasks we face next year.

■ Undemocratic move rejected

A move by an amalgam of various tiny vanguard sects to have the meeting drag on all day was decisively defeated. Comrades saw through the tactic of having a prolonged meeting, which the ultra-left would hope to see independents and socialists drift

away after having to endure hours of abusive hectoring by comrade John Bridge. Fortunately Bridge only had to be endured for five minutes, although it seemed longer! One CPGBer, to a chorus of laughter, suggested the meeting should be prepared to go on for weeks if necessary! The comrade from Brent later admitted that the Brent SA had not met for three years! The spooky CPGB seem to think that all comrades are of independent means and don't have childcare or household chores to do at the end of a week's work and political activity!

Paranoia and misinformation

Comrades saw through a smoke-screen of allegations made by the fanatical and paranoid CPGB that the moves to hold a conference in the autumn was all part of a sinister Manchester-London axis plot to exclude them. The reality is that the CPGB fear the SA becoming a mass organisation - hence their opposition to a London founding conference and an orientation to mass organisations of the working class. The tactics of CPGB comrades during the meeting in distributing a private letter confirmed to many that to give this organisation automatic representation would be a mistake. No wonder comrades in Manchester SA had a bellyful after two years!

■ Exclusion of socialist greens rejected

tally independent despite the fact that he works for GTRM.

What is happening here is clear. Management are trying to break effective union organisation by intimidating and trying to sack staff representatives.

Steve Hedley was left in no doubt that he would be sacked after attending the 'investigation' where a further accusation of pushing a strike-breaker was also levelled against him. If this accusation were true, why didn't the man involved inform the police straight-away instead of waiting a week? A likely explanation is that management's attempted stitch-up will not have a chance in hell of standing up in a court of law but will be enough to secure a sacking in a GTRM kangaroo court.

If Steve Hedley is sacked GTRM will find it easier to intimidate other representatives. Bob Crow, assistant general secretary of the RMT, has said that current strikes will not be settled until Steve is reinstated.

In the coming weeks management will use every dirty trick, lies, slander and innuendo against Steve. Do not believe their lies. Do not allow management to sack a loyal RMT activist on trumped-up charges ●

For more details contact the Railworkers Rank and File Campaign, c/o Colin Roach Centre, 56 Clarence Road, London E5 8SW. Tel: 0181-533 7111. Any donations should be made payable to 'John Kennedy', treasurer.

The meeting overwhelmingly endorsed proposals to approach other socialist parties, such as the SWP and Socialist Labour Party, including socialists in the Green Party with a view to involving them in building the alliance. The meeting heard reports that other socialist groups are likely to join the alliance in the future. The meeting further resolved to support underground workers in campaigning against the privatisation of the London Underground.

■ South London committee?

The SA supporters in South London have taken the initiative to explore the possibility of establishing a South London committee to coordinate and support the work of the campaigning SAs established in Southwark, Lambeth and Lewisham. Through supporting local campaigns and struggles SAs will gain weight within working class communities and the wider labour movement

■ An autumn slate?

The London ad-hoc committee remains just that: an interim committee until the autumn. It is essential, now that the political orientation of the alliances has been pointed in the right direction, that we have officers who are able to drive the alliance forward in London. Supporters of the CAB will be seeking to put proposals forward to the autumn conference which ensure that the SA becomes a mass force involved in the struggles of the working class and not a party-building project of the CPGB ●

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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August 1-8, Brunel University, Uxbridge, west London - 10 minutes from Uxbridge tube. Residential (self-catering): £75. Non residential: £30 for the week or £5 per day on the door

Failed revolutions

Representatives from both the 'hard' and 'soft' wings of Trotskyism attended the July 19 meeting in central London. Apart from the IBT, comrades from Workers Fight, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, the Socialist Democracy Group and the Trotskyist Unity Group were present. Bob Pitt of the Socialist Campaign Group and comrades from the Revolutionary Democratic Group (faction of the SWP) and the Socialist Labour Party also attended, as well as some visitors from Japan and the United States.

Comrade Barbara Duke of the IBT - publishers of the *Marxist Bulletin* - gave the opening. She usefully reminded us that Leon Trotsky's 1938 *Transitional programme* (TP) was written primarily for the Socialist Workers Party of the USA and was co-authored with James Cannon. For some this fact alone could indicate a potential weakness with the TP.

Comrade Duke outlined the general approach of the TP. It was rooted, she said, firmly in the approach adopted by the first four congresses of the Third International. The transitional approach, insisted comrade Duke, flows from "day-to-day struggles of the workers". In that sense, the slogans and demands "picked up" by those advocating the TP are "chosen by the workers themselves". We must "start with the existing consciousness of the workers". The programme must apply to "real movements" and it "must reflect society as it is". The TP also takes the "long-term view".

Comrade Duke denied that her approach was economic - it raised economic slogans merely "as a starting point". Trotskyists, she continued, "do not pick up on each and every demand of the workers" - which appeared to contradict her earlier statement. As comrades from the CPGB later pointed out, where is the role of *science* in the 'transitional method' as outlined by our Trotskyist friends? These comrades strongly give the impression that it is the job of Marxists always to place themselves slightly to the left of the *existing consciousness* of the workers, whatever level that might be.

The Stalinised Comintern, argued comrade Duke, represented a *return* to the method of the minimum-maximum programme. She also maintained that Engels, in his 1872 preface to the German edition, dumped the minimum-maximum aspects of the *Communist manifesto* which had become "antiquated" - ie, the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of section two (such as nationalisation of the "means of communication and transport").

The TP stands the test of time, said comrade Duke. It is all very well accusing the TP of being "catastrophist". World War II did represent "a clear choice" between either socialism or barbarism. Sure, continued the

.....
"The 20th century is a history of failures of programme.' This only makes it all the more urgent to provide the advanced section of our class with a guide to action"
.....

comrade, the "future predictions" of the TP never came to materialise. Neither fascist counterrevolution nor proletarian revolution triumphed. (In fact, deviating from the script, the Red Army tanks extended the range of Stalin's bureaucratic socialism - ie, anti-socialism. US imperialism emerged from World War II as an imperialist colossus. There was an unprecedented post-war boom.) However, said comrade Duke, we should be looking for the programmatic *essence* of the TP. After all, she added, the TP was never actually completed in any real sense. Comrade Duke quoted James Cannon to this effect - amongst its other inadequacies, a "theoretical expression of the epoch" is lacking.

For comrade Duke and the IBT - and most Trotskyists - the situation now is basically the same as it was in 1938. The objective conditions are ripe, if not over-ripe. But the *subjective* factor is still the determinate - ie, we continue to witness a crisis of leadership. This was hotly contested. Comrades from the CPGB, and Dave Osler from the Socialist Democracy Group, retorted to the followers of Trotskyist orthodoxy that what we have is more a crisis of class consciousness than leadership.

A programme must take us up to the seizure of power, insisted comrade Duke - hence the vital importance of the "workers' government" slogan. This meant, according to the comrade, that the TP must include "simple demands": the job of revolutionaries is "to fill the gap between the objective and subjective". This surely points to another central weakness of the TP. Based on the supposed epochal "stagnation of the productive forces" and the belief that economic crisis - and revolution - was

imminent, Leon Trotsky thought that even the most minor demands would spark off the world revolution. Debatable even in the 1930s, post-World War II Trotskyism made this an article of faith.

One of the most unconvincing aspects of the general IBT thesis was that their work inside the SLP was a sterling example of the transitional method in action. Specifically, we were referred to the *Marxist Bulletin*'s 'Marxist programme for the SLP'. The IBT went through all the SLP policy documents picking out those it could paint with a left gloss. For instance, the SLP's call for a four-day week without loss of pay can be 're-interpreted' as the TP's demand for a sliding scale of wages. This proved to be "immensely popular with the Scargillite membership", said comrade Duke. The same goes for nationalisation. "There is an audience for transitional demands," she concluded.

This is all counterposed to the CPGB's "minimum" - possibly Erfurtian - approach to the SLP. In the mind of comrade Duke and fellow IBTers, the CPGB abandoned the struggle for politics in the run-up to the SLP's congress last December. Instead, the CPGB concentrated its fire on the single issue of democracy. So much for the CPGB's commitment to the transitional method, said the IBT comrades. The "CPGB's heart was not in the SLP project", to use comrade Duke's asinine words.

Comrade Mark Fischer of the CPGB pointed out that this particular accusation by the IBT was pure hypocrisy - the CPGB adopted the 'democracy tactic' precisely to "give itself a space to fight" for communist politics. The IBT, on the other hand, had openly called upon all the left groups to liquidate themselves and then "creep into" the SLP as individuals. It demanded that the 'outsider' *Weekly Worker* be closed down. In the meantime, the IBT *pretended* to dissolve its 'external' organisation in Britain in a mock display of pro-SLP loyalty. The IBT/*Marxist Bulletin* has now abandoned the SLP!

The transitional method is a weapon against opportunism and sectarianism - this was the message rammed home by the pro-TPers. "The 20th century is a history of failed revolutions," observed comrade Duke. Hopefully the next century will be different, *if* we are armed with the TP.

From this perspective, one that *fetishises* the 1938 TP, the CPGB must indeed look like it "wants to have it both ways" (Alan Gibson - IBT). The CPGB wants the transitional method *and* the minimum-maximum programme. Does the CPGB have a "unique version" of the minimum-maximum programme, one not contaminated by the centrism of the Erfurt programme of German social democracy, the Second International and 'official communism'? Why is the CPGB "so reluctant to embrace

Trotskyism"? (A common chorus these days. A comrade from Workers Fight ventured the Freudian opinion that CPGB members were *de facto* Trotskyists but their "inner psychology" prevented them from admitting it). Comrade Duke implied that the real reason for the CPGB's 'anti-Trotskyism' lies in the fact that it is a bit like the Revolutionary Communist Party. Like the RCP (now LM), the CPGB "thinks it is new and different".

Comrade Marcus Larsen (CPGB) tried to introduce a note of *history*. Engels rejected the minimum-maximum demands ... "of the centrists". Contrary to popular Trotskyist myth, Lenin in his *April theses* did not suddenly embrace the 'Trotskyist' notion of the transitional programme. There is "not necessarily a contradiction between transitional methods *and* the minimum-maximum programme," suggested comrade Larsen. He also posed the following serious question: why is it that virtually all the post-World War II Trotskyist groups collapsed into social democracy and left economism? What happened to the TP safeguard?

The comrade from the RDG developed this theme. You can have "different kinds of transitional programmes" - even a series of them. The Bolsheviks' old minimum programme was transitional. When the tsar was overthrown, Lenin decided that they needed a different programme - ie, different transitional demands. The fatal flaw in the Erfurt programme, stated the RDG comrade, was not its minimum-maximum nature. It lay in the fact that it was not *republican*. This was in sharp contrast to the Bolsheviks' minimum programme, which was republican - and democratic. A revolutionary programme for Britain also needs to be of a republican minimum-maximum nature.

Bob Pitt made some useful criticisms of the TP, even if they were essentially from the right. The period has fundamentally changed since 1938 - this can only mean that the TP is "fundamentally flawed". Trotsky's demands were based on the perspective of imminent economic collapse, general catastrophe, etc. With the power of hindsight, said comrade Pitt, the TP's talk of "the stagnation of productive forces" comes across as nonsense. Transitional demands are purely *propagandist* in this period. In fact they are "irrelevant". We need new minimum-maximum demands - "very minimum" ones. For him the call for a £4.61 an hour minimum wage would help to "unify" the workers.

"Bob Pitt just replicates the mistakes of the Second International right," replied comrade John Bridge of the CPGB. Its approach was devoid of any sort of transitional politics - it is *minimal*. Comrade Bridge detected a "false debate" being set up between transitional methods and the minimum-maximum approach. Virtually all Trotskyists treat the mini-

mum-maximum programme "as the source of all evil". They were brought up by their sects to unthinkingly regurgitate the 'anti-minimum' mantra.

With a *revolutionary* minimum-maximum programme, continued comrade Bridge, "we are talking about what the workers should fight for, in order to make themselves into a class" - about "how the workers are readied politically to seize power". Communists aim to equip the workers with a scientific and hegemonic programme. This means not bowing to spontaneity, unlike the comrades in the IBT who want to lend strikes and other essentially trade unionist politics "a Trotskyist coloration". Comrade Bridge said we need a programme for attacking the state. Communists distinguish themselves by bringing to the fore *political* questions like Ireland and the British constitution. They also propose to fight for democracy - eg, a federal republic, using revolutionary, proletarian methods.

Comrade Bridge concluded by agreeing with one statement of comrade Duke. Yes, "the 20th century is a history of failures of programme". This only makes it all the more urgent to provide the advanced section of our class with a guide to action. Our class needs the truth, needs to question everything. A revolutionary minimum-maximum programme, as the foundation of a non-ideological - ie, a non-confessional - Communist Party, can unite the advanced workers. (Comrade Bridge rebuffed the silly and dishonest accusations of the IBT, and others, that the CPGB has been "coy" about the crimes of Stalin and 'official communism'. Our tendency has offered its opinions openly, in print, since 1981.)

There were other interesting contributions. Comrade Ian Donovan, ex-IBTer, held up the old Spartacist League theory of 'inter-penetrated peoples' as a *good* example of how the transitional method can be applied. "Economic slogans" can break down the "communal divisions" in Northern Ireland, suggested comrade Donovan. He also objected to the idea that workers' militias are a *minimum* demand, as they are presented in Jack Conrad's *Draft programme* for the CPGB.

Mark Osborn of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (minority) talked about the CPGB's "Moss Side disaster". During the local elections in May, the CPGB's election addresses - incredibly - called for the abolition of the age of consent, the legalisation of drugs, etc. Clearly madness. Left groups need to concentrate and organise around "slogans that can penetrate the movement" - such as defending the NHS and free education. These are the sort of slogans that "can unite the left". We can all agree on these bread and butter issues "in the here and now", said comrade Osborn. Presumably we should drop all the 'awkward' political stuff ●