

Omagh bomb boosts Sinn Féin Turning point

Last Saturday's Real IRA bomb, despite outward appearances, marked a definitive break with the republican strategy of armed resistance to the British imperialist occupation of the Six Counties

At first sight the Omagh bomb attack seems similar to many conducted by the IRA over the last three decades. Certainly there was a blast designed to cause maximum disruption, preceded by a telephoned warning. The bomb was planted by an organisation committed to the ideal of a united Ireland.

But there the similarity ends. In contrast to today's dissident republicans, the IRA waged its heroic armed struggle firmly believing it could drive out the occupying forces - or oblige them to negotiate a withdrawal. It enjoyed the support of a mass movement. It is true that in the final years before the 1997 ceasefire, as the republican movement began to face up to the harsh reality of the New World Order, its attacks had the more modest aim of pushing the British to compromise (we called the February 1996 Canary Wharf attack a "peace bomb").

However, the Omagh blast cannot be viewed either as part of an anti-imperialist offensive or even as a claim to a negotiating place. It amounts to nothing more than an announcement from those responsible that 'we are here'. Even in this it was hardly successful, as it took the Real IRA three days to admit planting the bomb, and then issued no political statement of intent.

Unlike the IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army in the 70s and 80s, republicans opposed to the British Irish Agreement of 1998 and committed to continuing the armed struggle are now almost totally isolated. This was clearly demonstrated by the May 22 referendum results - 71% in Northern Ireland, including an estimated 95% of nationalists, voted 'yes', while in Ireland as a whole the figure was 85.5%. Even then republican 'no' votes were by no means synonymous with support for continuing military resistance at this time. Rightly or wrongly, most nationalists have either embraced the Good Friday agreement as a step towards a united Ireland or else reluctantly accepted that a more equal status under partition is all that can be achieved.

Of course the fact that republican dissidents now constitute a tiny minority does not mean they have no

right to struggle for their views. Revolutionaries - particularly communists - are used to swimming against the stream. But in such times acts of individual terror - ie, armed actions which are divorced from any mass support - can only be condemned as foolhardy adventurism. More than that, they are objectively reactionary. Human liberation can only be achieved by the masses' own actions.

It is for that reason that communists must condemn the Omagh bomb. The deaths and injuries, horrific though they were, are not in themselves cause for condemnation. Innocent casualties are almost inevitable in any war, including a just war against imperialism. In this case it is highly unlikely that casualties were intended, despite media hyperbole and the claims of the Royal Ulster Constabulary's Ronnie Flanagan that false warnings were deliberately given in order to lure shoppers to their deaths. Similar claims were often made when IRA bombs resulted in civilian deaths, even when it was clear that incompetence, sometimes on the part of the authorities, was a factor.

No, we support the right of the oppressed to use violence against their oppressors, and accept that civilian casualties may result. The blame for this lies squarely with the oppressors. But we do not support acts of individual terror. The main task for Irish anti-imperialists, now more than ever, lies in mounting a *political* struggle against the imperialist-sponsored peace process and for self-determination. But such a struggle is almost entirely absent. Republican opponents of the Good Friday deal did not even bother contesting the June 25 elections. Tony Blair was correct when he said that the bombers have "no political organisation, no vote, no political voice".

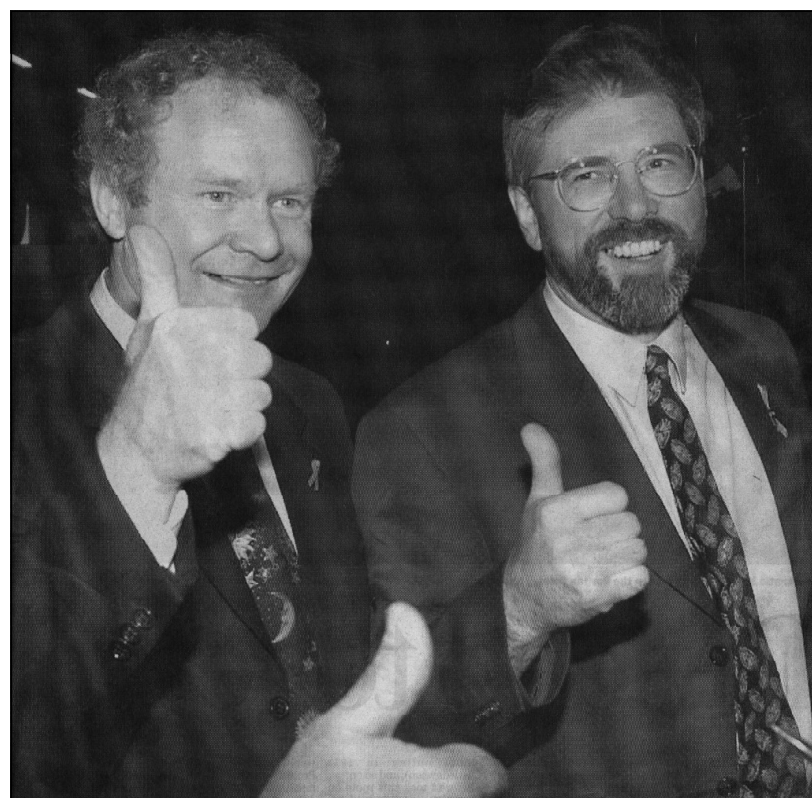
It is of course easy to point to Blair's stinking hypocrisy. The existence of Sinn Féin, the IRA's very real political wing, with its elected MPs and councillors, never prevented him or his predecessors condemning that organisation's military actions. In fact imperialist propaganda, contrary to all the evidence, continually referred to the IRA as isolated thugs without support in their communities.

But today Sinn Féin is an essential part of the imperialist peace process - a "key player", as *The Guardian* put it (August 18). The IRA has permanently ended its armed resistance to the British occupation and has succeeded in carrying almost all its support behind this turn. It is precisely because it is so influential, both within the nationalist community and in its capacity as the political wing of the IRA, that SF's role is pivotal. Its process of transformation into a respectable political force in the bourgeois mainstream must be encouraged by British imperialism at all costs.

The establishment was highly satisfied with SF's reaction to the Omagh bombing. "I am totally horrified by this action," said Gerry Adams. "I condemn it without any equivocation." It was the first time the SF president had used such words about a republican attack. He really would be "horrified" if a mass movement stood a chance of wrecking the peace process - and with it his own political ambitions. But today's republican dissidents are so isolated, last weekend's carnage so bloody and the condemnation so universal, that the blast could well deliver the last rites to all armed republican resistance. Significantly, the Irish Republican Socialist Party has called upon its military wing, the Irish National Liberation Army, to declare a ceasefire in the aftermath of Omagh.

In a further indication of the bombers' isolation, the 32 County Sovereignty Movement, committed to continued opposition to the British occupation and repeatedly linked to the bombers, said: "The killings of innocent people cannot be justified in any circumstances. We reject categorically suggestions that our movement was responsible in any way." Not surprisingly the Real IRA succumbed to the pressure within days, announcing a "suspension" of military actions.

The marginalisation of these subjective anti-imperialists has left them at risk. According to Mitchel McLaughlin, SF's chair, the police "know who's responsible", although his organisation vehemently denies tipping off the police on previous



McGuinness and Adams: ready and waiting

occasions, leading to the arrest of Real IRA activists. The organisation's vice-president, Martin McGuinness, predicted "a massive backlash within the republican nationalist community in the course of the next coming days and weeks". Some read this as a threat to 'take out' the dissident paramilitaries, but such an outcome, while by no means impossible, is unlikely. Any IRA move against their opponents could, it is true, be dismissed conveniently by imperialism as a 'republican feud', but it would have its drawbacks. While an irritant would have been removed, unionists would point the finger at SF and take the opportunity to insist on its exclusion from the Stormont government.

In fact the Omagh bomb has played into SF's hands. It has allowed Adams to press even more forcefully for the full inclusion of all parties - including of course SF - at the very highest level as the only way to end the crisis and achieve a stable settlement. McGuinness's talk of a "massive backlash within the republican nationalist community" should be read as a promise to ensure that the Real IRA and other dissidents such as the Continuity Army Council receive no support whatsoever from Catholics. It serves to underline the indispensability of SF to the peace

process - even to unionists. In that sense the Omagh blast, far from wrecking the Good Friday deal, as the Real IRA hoped, has boosted its chances.

While SF is likely to offer some form of cooperation - if only implicitly - with the British security forces, more important for the state will be the adoption of new legal measures. The marginalisation of the minority has cleared the way for yet more draconian powers. The reintroduction of internment has not been ruled out, particularly in the Republic. But changes in the law regarding membership of illegal organisations seem more likely. It has been suggested that the word of a senior police officer ought to be enough to establish membership in a court of law - neatly bypassing the little matter of proof.

Greater cooperation between British and Irish police and intelligence will also result from the Omagh bomb. Ironically, that is one north-south link that ultra-unionists will not object to.

Anti-imperialists need to start the long process of building a real political alternative to sterile nationalism. An alternative capable of establishing working class hegemony over the struggle for genuine self-determination and democracy ●

Jim Blackstock

Party notes

Communist University '98

This year's Communist University was a real political success for our organisation. Over 60 comrades attended this important annual Communist Party school. Limited space stops me from going into detail, but let me take the opportunity to thank all those who took part in the event, in particular the speakers from outside our organisation who enlivened the proceedings immeasurably.

Continually, we returned to the pivotal question of the USSR. Readers will know that before the school Steve Riley from Manchester CPGB - articulating the fears of other comrades - had taken up the cudgels against what could be broadly identified as the view of the Party majority. The comrade suggested that "in a rush to wash our hands of inconvenient associations" most comrades - with Jack Conrad at the head of the pack - were engaged in the "debunking and rejection of all the progressive character of the Soviet Union from 1928 onwards" (*Weekly Worker* July 30).

Communist University began the exploration of this difference, with the Manchester comrades leaving the school at the end of the week determined to deepen their theoretical understanding of this question - a task posed to all of us, of course. This may lead them - as individuals or as a group - to a convergence with the present Party majority; it may take them further away. However, in contrast to the characteristic fears expressed by a comrade from a guest Trotskyist group, this process does *not* signify some 'pre-split' scenario. The debate on this thorny question - sharp and discourteous as it was on occasion - has helped to bond our ranks. Whatever side comrades took, they are aware that there is only one organisation on the British left that could conduct such a fundamental discussion openly, in front of friend and opponent alike.

In other words, the open expression of this important difference was a living manifestation of the spirit of *Partyism*, a word and associated concept liable to bring some on the sect-strewn left out in a rash. No comrade left the school with the view that our organisation should be cleaved apart along theoretical lines.

In general, the standard of interventions from comrades was high, the debates interesting. All comrades contributed and learned. More than that however, the school presented our organisation with its real theoretical and programmatic task for the coming years. This is a struggle that must be joined and won if workers are to rise above the politics of a slave class, to become a potential ruling class worthy of humanity.

In a variety of different forms, comrades were faced throughout the school with the struggle against *economism*. This is the near universal method of the British revolutionary left, a degenerate form of 'working class politics' that transforms the proletariat into a mere appendage of bourgeois democracy.

In this century - dominated as it has been by working class defeats - the magnesium flash of 1917 illuminated everything, both behind and ahead of it. It showed in practice the dead end of the mechanical politics of the Kautskyite Second International; they were a product of the compromise with the labour bureaucracy, a caste with interests inimical to those of the broad mass of workers. Later, judged in the harsh light of counterrevolution, we can see that the 'official communism' of the Soviet bureaucracy represented a *dialectical negation* of Marxism, the opposite of 1917.

The degeneration of the revolution, and the decline into ideological obfuscation this engendered in the 'official' world communist movement, has had a *material effect* on the working class. The degradation of the politics of our class from its 1917-23 apex, when it won the position of *democratic hegemon* of contemporary world society, down to today's sorry nadir is the story of the 20th century. Politically, our class has ceased to exist.

Inevitably, this ruinous process produced its dissenters and opponents. The most prominent of these - Trotskyism and its various critical children - had (for the most part) an honourable tradition. Yet in the aftermath of the implosions of 1991, it has become increasingly clear much of the source of its vigour sprang from its *oppositional* character. It was against Stalinism. But left to its own devices in the aftermath of the collapse of eastern Europe, the USSR and the world political movement it spawned, its manifest inadequacies are being ruthlessly exposed. Prominent amongst these is *economism*.

Thus, apart from the lessons of the USSR, I believe the other dominant theme of our school this year was the confrontation between our Leninist politics and those of the overwhelming majority of the left. These unconsciously separate the struggle of the working class to become a class for itself from the revolutionary fight for democracy. Thus, it is clear that during the course of exploring the relationship between democracy and the fight for workers' power, we will not simply draw lessons about, for example, self-determination for Scotland, or where the demand for the abolition of the monarchy should appear in our programme. This most fundamental question will also inform our understanding of USSR and the nature of its degeneration.

In the view of the leadership of our Party, this problem has been sharply delineated over the past few years or so, although it has been implicitly present in our critique of the left since the origins of our group. To begin this task in earnest, to start to give it more conscious, *programmatic* expression, we have decided to organise a weekend school under the banner of 'Against economism' in November of this year to coincide with our celebrations of the Russian Revolution. Details are still provisional, but the event is likely to be in London over the weekend of November 7-8. Contact Party centre for more details.

Once again, let me extend thanks to all participants in this year's CU for making it one of the most politically successful we have organised ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Pardon me

Let me first of all congratulate the *Weekly Worker* on getting round to publishing the letters of Nick Clarke and Mary Ward. But I'm writing to comment upon some points raised by Steve Riley's article ('One-sided analysis' *Weekly Worker* July 30).

The CPGB has made much of the failure of other groups to see the counterrevolutions of 1989-91 for what they were. Yet more recently 'analysis' by Jack Conrad of the USSR and other states, defunct or still existing, has tossed around phrases like "dystopias" and "freak societies". What is particularly galling about this is that no political accounting has been rendered. Jack Conrad has not repudiated what *The Leninist*/CPGB wrote in the past. It is as though the CPGB has gone from 'Down with Solidarnosc' to 'Down with the Soviet Union' while still pretending that it has not changed its line.

Of course, it is still maintained that the CPGB does not have a 'line' on the USSR or other states. Well, as far as I can make out, the *Weekly Worker* does, and if I am not wrong the *Weekly Worker* is the official publication of the CPGB. Proof of a line existing is an episode that occurred at the start of 1995. I had just returned from Cuba, where I had taken part in a Cuba Solidarity Campaign brigade that went there. For the *Weekly Worker*, I wrote an article about Cuba and my stay, critical of this or that aspect of what I saw in the country but still broadly supportive of it.

My article was published, but interestingly, a 'personal viewpoint' rubric was placed over it. The only reason I can see for this is that what I wrote did not reflect the 'official viewpoint' of the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB, a viewpoint which supposedly does not exist ...

I agree with Steve Riley that "Comrade Conrad's drive to distance the CPGB from anything not identifiable as the 'pure thing' - advanced socialism arising out of the highest achievements of capitalism - has brought the CPGB to the point of opportunism." When I was in the CPGB, I noticed the lack of concrete support for countries like Cuba, but I put this down to a small organisation's need to concentrate its efforts on working to affect British politics. In hindsight it is clear that the CPGB does no work to support Cuba because it does not support Cuba, not even against US imperialism.

It looks to me as though Jack Conrad has been gradually refashioning *The Leninist*/CPGB ideology to make it more appealing to Trotskyists, state capitalists and bureaucratic collectivists. In doing so, all balance is being lost. I think the word "opportunism" used by Steve Riley is appropriate. Doubtless you don't win many friends in late 20th century Britain by defending the Soviet Union, and if the CPGB keeps losing members at the rate it is it will soon need all the Trotskyists, state capitalists, bureaucratic collectivists and anti-Sovietniks it can get.

If you wanted to draw up an indictment of the USSR and similar societies, most of the material for this was available as far back as 1981, when *The Leninist* current was founded. Why is Jack Conrad only talking about dystopias now? But in reality these societies contained both negative and positive aspects. The positive tends to be highlighted by what has been going on since they collapsed. The collapse of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact has had profound effects. The CPGB (especially Jack Conrad and Mark Fischer) has to explain all manner of negative phenomena as resulting from the "period of reaction" following the collapse, yet

it wants the societies that collapsed to be written off as "dystopias". Pardon me, but if they were really so bad, wouldn't their removal be a step forward?

During the Vietnam War, North Vietnamese troops, especially anti-aircraft crews, wore steel helmets sent by Warsaw Pact countries like Poland and East Germany.

In July 1996 in Turkey, I saw Turkish military personnel brutalising leftwing demonstrators. There was something vaguely familiar about the helmets. This year, a leftwing German newspaper, *Junge Welt*, reported that reunited Germany had sold or given former East German army equipment to Turkey - including steel helmets. When East Germany existed, its equipment helped a weaker nation fend off imperialism. Now that it is gone, its equipment aids the oppressors. I think this adequately indicates what damage has been done by the disappearance of the "freak societies".

I support Steve Riley's short article and I wish him all success in combating the CPGB's right opportunist trend. And I hope this letter goes some way to addressing the one-sidedness of the current CPGB line.

Andrew Mackay
Brussels

CPGB in crisis

The CPGB still appears to be smarting for having its clumsy entryist work in the SLP revealed. Peter Manson ('Political fightback' *Weekly Worker* July 30) argues against establishing a supportive, collaborative SA forum in south London to help mutually assist neighbouring fledgling alliances. Working from the bottom up to build representative SA structures is the way forward, not seeking to impose from above a central committee.

Peter's hostility to the idea of a south London network demonstrates again that the CPGB is not about allowing the SA to develop organically arising from campaigning and local activity, but imposing from above a preconceived blueprint and working to an agenda of control. Far from the idea of a south London body being rejected, a number of SA activists in south London have welcomed it. Peter, it would seem, has more in common with the Stalinists in the SLP leadership who sought to close down joint SLP branch structures and discussion forums. The CPGB's view of politics is anchored in the past and has all the birthmarks of your political antecedents.

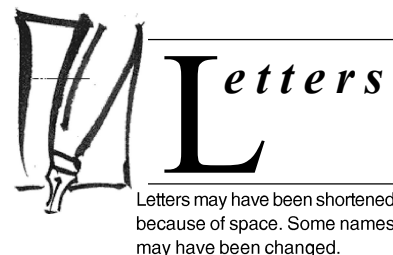
Importantly, Peter fails to report that a leading activist from the SLP involved in the campaign to fend off moves to privatise homes attended our meeting and reported on a recent conference held in Tower Hamlets. One of the lessons the CPGB seems to have failed to have learnt from its work in its current SLP host is the need for socialists to work cooperatively, sharing experiences, valuing others' contribution and learning from each other. Peter's article seems to reflect his disappointment at turning up to a meeting and being unable to have a 'pop' and hector other socialists.

No wonder the CPGB is in crisis with dwindling numbers, resignations, calls for liquidation and stalled unity.

Nick Long
Lewisham SA convenor

Hindsight

I would like to respond to Bob Paul's letter in *Weekly Worker* July 30 in which he claims an orthodox Trotskyite pedigree for the Party's attitude to the Soviet Union. Do we use the phrase 'bureaucratic socialism' simply to avoid the overtly Trotskyite 'degenerated workers state' tag or do we have a different understanding of the USSR phenomenon?



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

Comrade Paul points to our 'Trotskyite' understanding of the degeneration of the revolution and the Bolsheviks and the emergence of a "new bureaucratic stratum". He then goes on the quote Trotsky: "[the bureaucracy] was forced to preserve the new, *historically progressive* property relations"; "the new bureaucracy had ... to defend ... a social and economic base theoretically *superior to capitalism*" (my emphasis).

Surely, comrade Paul, this was Trotsky's error and not one we intend to repeat. What was "historically progressive" about Soviet property forms? Was bureaucratic socialism really "superior to capitalism"?

Under capitalism economic and political power are - formally at least - separated. In the Soviet Union they were united. Those who controlled economic life also controlled political life. Was this in and of itself progressive? Barring the current, capitalist, epoch, political and economic power have always been united. We must ask, 'Who wields the power?' Did workers wield power in the Soviet Union? Was the bureaucracy their servant - or their master?

Trotsky's technocratic outlook led him to equate socialism with the statification of property. Some 60% of apartheid South Africa's economy was state-owned. Did black South Africans rebel against "historically progressive property relations"? Is Myanmar/Burma socialist?

Trotsky provided some brilliant insights into the birth of the Soviet bureaucracy and its historically contradictory position. However, his work also contains some profound flaws. We have the benefit of hindsight, comrade Paul: let's make use of it.

Andy Hannah
London

Protect young

As a new comrade I find the politics of the CPGB radical and informative. However, I have to disagree with comrade Eddie Ford regarding the age of consent ('Abolish the House of Lords' *Weekly Worker* July 30).

Perhaps there is a case to lower the age of consent to 14 for people of any sexual orientation - but no age of consent? Young people need protecting, to find the orientation that suits them, emotionally, with no pressure from people who are more advanced than they are in their sexuality - just as much as people need protecting from economic exploitation. Power does not just exist economically, but sexually and intellectually as well. I think even in a socialist utopia there would be a need for protection of younger comrades who are learning who they are, and what they want.

Martin Jennings
Wolverhampton

New journal

I am writing to you to ask for your assistance in helping a publication that I have founded called *Young left journal*. We plan for it to appear quarterly and the first issue is out in September.

The columns are to be open to all and for this first issue I would particularly appreciate any articles on Cuba, China, Vietnam and Albania.

The cost of the journal is 65p per issue, £2.55 for a year's subscription from *YLJ*, 26 Chisenhale, Orton Waterville, Peterborough, Cambs PE2 5FP.

Matthew Willgress
Peterborough

Open letter not published

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group looks into the different positions within the Scottish Socialist Alliance

The Campaign for a Federal Republic has recently written to the Socialist Party executive committee expressing its concerns about the decision of Scottish Militant Labour to launch a Scottish Socialist Party.

The Campaign, along with the Red Republicans and SML, are currently the three main affiliated component organisations of the Scottish Socialist Alliance. The Campaign asked that its open letter of July 14 be printed in *The Socialist* (paper of the Socialist Party) and asked that a fuller article on the Campaign's view of the national question also be considered for publication. One possible implication of the open letter is that there are divisions amongst the affiliated organisations within the SSA about the wisdom of setting up a Scottish Socialist Party. This could mean the beginning of a split within the SSA.

It is therefore important that the Socialist Party prints the open letter so that its own members in England and Wales can get a clearer picture of what is happening in Scotland. As far as we can tell, the Socialist Party has discussed the situation inside the SSA without ever referring specifically to the affiliates. Perhaps in a sectarian view of the SSA, there is only SML and 'the rest'. The latter are presented, not as definite tendencies with particular policies, but a grey, amorphous blob.

The apparent refusal of the Socialist Party to print the letter is therefore to be condemned. The whole issue of the proposed Scottish Socialist Party needs to be opened up before the widest possible audience. We have to ask ourselves whether the Socialist

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Party's refusal to publish the letter is a result of old-style Militant Tendency news management or because a possible split in the SSA might threaten its cosy, behind-the-scenes deal with SML. The Socialist Party seems quite prepared to tolerate Scottish nationalism if only it can cling onto SML.

Whilst the *Weekly Worker* has not obtained a copy of the open letter the Socialist Party is refusing to print, we have obtained a copy of a letter from the Campaign asking the Socialist Party leadership to reconsider the original decision not to publish. We will try to obtain the original letter and publish it ourselves ●

Great urgency

To: Mike Waddington and Socialist Party Executive

July 26 1998

Dear Comrades,

This is to confirm your phone conversation on Thursday July 23 1998 with our representative. You explained that the Socialist Party executive had considered our letter and had decided to do nothing about it at the present time.

We feel that this is regrettable, because the question of a Scottish Socialist Party is a matter of great importance and urgency for our movement. We are left with no choice but to seek other means of making our case public.

Before taking that step we would urge you to reconsider, because we feel that it is in the interests of the Socialist Party and the working class movement that you publish our case, to open up a wider debate. We would ask again that you to print our letter of July 14 1998 in *The Socialist*.

We intend in any case to submit to The Socialist an article explaining our view of the national question and critical of the position taken by Scottish Militant Labour. We hope that you will seriously consider printing this article.

In comradeship
Campaign for a Federal Republic

Simon Harvey of the SLP Congress farce

As politics return to normal after the summer silly season, we see that August has been business as usual for the Socialist Labour Party. If the last congress was a tragic waste of the possibilities that the SLP had opened for the British left, then congress 1998 is gearing up to be a complete farce.

If you have just returned from your holidays hoping to put forward a motion on whatever your SLP hobby-horse happens to be, you are already too late. The closing date for motions to congress was August 8. Most Constituency SLPs received notification of this from general secretary Arthur Scargill on August 4.

For my money, this is no Machiavellian attempt to prevent the left of the SLP attempting a coup at the party's November 14 third congress. Most have walked out or been purged. No, this is more the hallmark of a ham-fisted bureaucracy. It treats the entire membership of the party - loyalist or dissident - with complete contempt. And anyway why should Scargill worry about the CSLPs mounting any challenge? - he still has 3,000 votes from the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association. Readers will recall that he sprung the NWCCMA block vote on the 1997 congress.

In 1998 it seems there will be very little to vote on, as the overwhelming majority of CSLPs will have missed the deadline for submitting motions. Unless of course cliques within the party had forewarning, or late submissions are put through on Arthur's nod.

Can Terry Dunn move support for victimised RMT activist Steve Hedley? Will Fisc be able to pursue its attempt to reinstate black sections? Will Harpal Brar have his motion praising Indian nuclear weapons? And what about poor old Roy Bull and some didactic motion on capitalist crisis?

Knives out for EPSR

Speaking of Roy Bull, news reaches my ears that the Fourth International Supporters Caucus in Manchester, ably organised by 'clever' Trevor Wongsam, has contacted the *Weekly Worker* through an intermediary in search of back issues of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*.

Why would enlightened 'new realists' such as Fisc be seeking the words of wisdom of rampaging Roy? Have they been won to his position on homosexuality as a bourgeois "perversion"? Or does this move to collect the froth and venom of comrade Bull have more to do with what Brian Heron has been overheard describing as a 'clean-out' of the *EPSR*?

Having purged just about all the 'ultra-lefts' in the SLP, the witch hunters now seem to be falling out among themselves. How long will it before Fisc starts looking for back issues of the Stalinite *Lalkar*, edited by NEC member Harpal Brar?

Brar supports nukes

I heard comrade Brar speak at the CPGB's Communist University. A most thorough defence of Stalin he gave. I bought a copy of *Lalkar*, the publication of his 'other' organisation, the Indian Workers Association (GB). It seems that the IWA has got itself in a bit of a pickle over the recent nuclear tests conducted by the Indian and Pakistani governments.

The IWA executive, and Harpal Brar, hailed the tests as having "punched a gaping hole in the imperialists' attempts to monopolise these weapons of mass destruction" (*Lalkar* July-August 1998). Embarrassingly for the IWA, however, its president released a contradictory statement opposing "the nuclear adventurism started by the BJP government in India". He added the general secretary's name to this statement, without his permission and contrary to his views and the agreed position. To make matters worse, the *Morning Star* "in its characteristic quest for truth", as Harpal Brar aptly puts it, published only the unofficial condemnation, and not the original official release or the general secretary's subsequent disowner.

It seems that factionalism is causing the IWA some problems. This is not the first time that an agreed IWA position has been overturned after the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has intervened. Comrade Brar reveals that the CPI(M) directed its supporters in Britain to reverse their decision to back IWA entry into the SLP. That would have upset the CPI(M)'s diplomatic relations with New Labour.

On this occasion CPI(M) supporters have had their arms twisted to condemn the tests. Apparently the CPI(M) could support the previous Congress government's nuclear programme, but not the Hindu-nationalist BJP's logical next step.

I will not go into comrade Brar's reactionary support for the rightwing 'anti-imperialist' Indian bourgeoisie. It boils down to whether you think their possession of nuclear weapons is progressive or not. Harpal Brar thinks it is.

In that case, I wonder how comrade Brar's speech went down outside Aldermaston atomic research centre on August 9, at a demonstration held to commemorate Nagasaki Day. The comrade was scheduled to share a platform with Greenham Common activist and SLP member Katrina Howse. How will comrade Howse react to the knowledge that a leader of her party - actively promoted by Arthur Scargill - supports the Indian ruling class's nuclear policy?

Scargill split

I see that our dear comrade leader's marriage has ended. Arthur and Anne are both on the NEC of the party - against the wishes of the general secretary. Comrades may remember that Anne Scargill's name did not appear on the NEC recommended list at the 1996 congress. She was however elected, apparently because many delegates thought that anyone called Scargill must be worth voting for. In 1997 she was re-elected, topping the constituency section poll.

I wish them both well with their new lives and hope that their separation will not see Anne pushed out of politics.

London aggregate

There will be a London SLP delegates meeting on September 15 at 7pm, in Conway Hall ●

action

- **CPGB seminars**
London - August 16 - 'The state and democratic forms', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* as a study guide. For more details call 0181-459 7146.
- Manchester: August 17* - Report back from Communist University '98. 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.
- **Lewisham Socialist Alliance**
Next meeting - August 24, 7.30pm. Ackroyd Community Centre, Ackroyd Road, Forest Hill, SE23
- **Scottish Socialist Alliance**
To get involved, contact PO Box 980, Glasgow G14 9QQ.
- **Hillingdon hospital workers**
The Hillingdon strikers in west London still need your support. Send donations urgently, payable to Hillingdon Strikers Support Campaign, c/o 27 Townsend Way, Northwood, Middlesex UB8 1JD.
- **Tameside resists**
Three hundred careworkers, sacked for going on strike, call for solidarity. Messages of support and donations to: Tameside Unison, 29 Booth Street, Ashton under Lyne
- **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.
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Socialist Alliance Rugby conference

Two constitutions

Submitted by Network Liaison Committee

Preamble

The following represents interim arrangements to allow individual socialists and autonomous socialist, environmentalist and direct action organisations to work together towards agreed common objectives. It is recognised that whilst differences between the participating individuals and organisations may exist, there remains a greater element of political agreement upon which it is proposed to base common policy and a programme of activity. Where appropriate, it is recognised that this would involve the adoption of appropriate agreed electoral arrangements. It is the hope, intention and expectation that by adopting and campaigning on this common programme, the individuals and groups involved will in the future move towards a closer and more permanent organisational structure.

Clause 1 - Name

Network of Socialist Alliances in England (hereinafter called the Network).

Clause 2 - Objectives

1. To bring together in federation national, regional, and local political organisations and individuals, for the purpose of working towards the establishment of a society based in general on a socialist system, and in particular:

to establish an open participative democracy and, as far as may be practicable, the equality of all people in a just society;

to secure for the people a full return of all wealth generated by the industries and services of society, by means of common ownership and democratic control;

to protect and enhance an environment where development is sustainable recognising finite natural resources;

to maintain such defence and security arrangements, which, together with the promotion of peace and freedom, delivers people from tyranny, prejudice and the abuse of power;

to protect the rights of individuals, recognising that these rights have corresponding responsibilities.

2. To promote the formation of locally based Socialist Alliances.

3. To assist, enjoin or affiliate with any local, national or international organisations, and in particular with the Scottish Socialist Alliance and the Welsh Socialist Alliance, in pursuit of these objectives.

Clause 3 - Membership and membership conditions

1. Membership of the Network shall consist of:

federated national organisations having more than 500 individual members;

other federated organisations;

local Socialist Alliances;

individual members where there is no appropriate locally based Socialist Alliance.

2. Application for membership by an individual or organisation shall be made on a prescribed form which shall indicate acceptance of the objectives and rules of the Network. Subject to the completion of the application form and the payment of the required mem-

bership subscriptions, membership shall be approved by the National Liaison Committee.

3. A federated organisation or individual member may terminate membership at any time by giving notice in writing to the National Liaison Committee.

Clause 4 - Membership subscriptions

1. Annual membership subscriptions shall be as follows:

national federated organisation: 10p per member

other federated organisation or Socialist Alliance: £20

individual member: £10 (standard); £5 (concessionary)

Annual membership shall be defined as the calendar year. Subscriptions in the year of joining shall be paid on the basis of each quarter of the calendar year (or part thereof) remaining.

2. Where individual members form a locally based Socialist Alliance, subscriptions paid by those individual members shall be applied to offset the subscription of that Alliance.

3. Where an organisation or individual member is six months or more in arrears with membership subscriptions, any representative of that organisation or the individual member shall cease to have a right to vote or participate in any meeting of the Network.

Clause 5 - Organisation

1. An annual general meeting of the Network shall be held in the month of September or October. Ordinary meetings of the Network shall be called as determined by resolution of the Network, National Liaison Committee, or by the National Liaison Committee upon the written request of five federated organisations.

The annual general meeting and ordinary meetings shall be open to individual members and individual members of federated organisations, but voting delegates shall be on the following basis:

a) national federated organisation: one for each 500 members or part thereof;

b) other federated organisation: one for each 100 members or part thereof;

c) local Socialist Alliance: one for each 100 members or part thereof.

The annual general meeting shall elect the following officers of the Network:

a) chair;

b) vice-chair;

c) general secretary;

d) treasurer;

e) membership officer;

f) press and public relations officer.

Casual vacancies for these officers may be filled at any ordinary meeting of the Network, a specific item having been included on the notified agenda of such meeting.

4. The annual general meeting or any ordinary meeting of the Network may appoint such other functional officers deemed appropriate.

5. The annual general meeting shall appoint a National Liaison Committee comprising:

officers determined in 3. above;

one representative of each national federated organisation;

two representatives elected by delegates from other federated organisations;

two representatives elected by delegates from local Socialist Alliances;

two representatives elected by individual members.

Casual vacancies for the National Liaison Committee may be filled at any ordinary meeting of the Network, a specific item having been included on the notified agenda of such meeting.

Functional officers appointed at 4. above may attend meetings of the National Liaison Committee, without voting power.

6. The National Liaison Committee shall be responsible for the administration of the Network, with full powers to act on behalf of the Network, subject to resolution of the annual general meeting or ordinary meeting. In particular the National Liaison Committee may, in the name of the Network:

purchase any freehold or leasehold building, lease or rent of any premises, and make any necessary arrangements for the fitting up and maintenance thereof;

employ any person or persons, on the basis of terms and conditions of employment it may determine;

appoint trustees, form any organisation, society, company or companies in accordance with the provision of the Friendly Societies Acts or the Companies Acts and define the powers of such trustees, organisation, society, company or companies and the manner in which such powers shall be exercised.

7. The annual general meeting of the Network shall appoint two persons to act as auditors. Auditors shall not be officers or be elected as members of the executive committee in any other capacity.

8. Standing orders, for the purpose of calling and conducting the annual general meeting, ordinary meetings and National Liaison Committee meetings, may be adopted by resolution of the annual general meeting. Such standing orders may be amended at an ordinary meeting, a specific item having been included on the notified agenda of such meeting

Clause 6 - Finance

1. In addition to membership subscriptions, the Network may receive donations from federated organisations, individual members and other individuals or bodies, provided such donations are made for the purposes of furthering the objectives of the Network and confer no other advantage to the person or body making the donation. Donations in excess of £1,000 shall be separately identified in the accounts of the Network.

2. The National Liaison Committee shall organise and maintain such fund or funds as may be thought necessary for any or all of the objectives for which the Network exists. In particular the National Liaison Committee may, in the name of the Network:

a) open such bank or building society account(s) as necessary;

secure advances from time to time, or to raise loans either by mortgage or otherwise and on such terms as it may deem expedient;

employ, as appropriate and subject to resolution, all or any part of the funds at its disposal.

3. The National Liaison Committee, through the treasurer, shall maintain records of all financial transactions of the Network.

4. The financial year of the Network shall be from April 1 to March 31. The treasurer shall present for the approval of the annual general meeting audited accounts for the preceding financial year.

Clause 7 - Electoral arrangements

Subject to resolution of the annual general meeting or ordinary meeting, the National Liaison Committee shall determine the advisability of contest-

Brief commentary of the drafts submitted by the CPGB and the Liaison Committee

Preamble

The CPGB draft is explicit that the Network is an alliance of *socialists*. It does not rule out joint work with other forces such as "environmentalist and direct action organisations", but it does not assume that they are all socialists. Nor does our draft belittle the differences that exist between socialists. Nevertheless, even if we use a '80% disagree, 20% agree' mathematical formulation, united action is still perfectly principled and desirable.

Clause 1 - Name

There exists a United Kingdom state. The ruling class organises and oppresses the working class throughout the UK of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. To limit our organisation to England is to weaken our forces and divide the working class. The closest unity with socialists throughout the UK is needed if we are to challenge and overthrow our main enemy - the constitutional monarchist state.

Clause 2 - Objectives

The Liaison Committee draft is woefully inadequate. It talks of "the establishment of a society based *in general* on a socialist system". What is "based in general", if not an evasion? Why not simply say "a socialist society"? The rest is if anything worse. The "equality of all people" is a nonsense. People are unequal. They have different abilities and different needs. That must be recognised. The idea of securing "for the people a full return of wealth" ignores the necessity of a social surplus. Then there is the claim that natural resources are "finite". Matter can neither be created or destroyed - that needs to be said while recognising the necessity for a global approach to the environment. We should not fall for the neo-Malthusianism peddled by the greens. As to maintaining "defence and security arrangements" - is this a reference to Nato? Our draft is altogether far superior. It defines socialism as democratic, international and something that can only be won by the working class itself. There is also a link between our struggles today and the goal of socialism: ie, the fight for "the maximum democracy under existing social conditions" - which is concretised in the demand for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales.

Clause 3 - Membership and membership conditions

We see no need to classify a national organisation with 499 members and one with 501 differently. The principle should be inclusion. The CPGB wants to give the below-500-membership Socialist Party in England and Wales the same status as the over-500-membership Independent Labour Network. We all know that high quality and active commitment is a factor that makes some comparatively small organisations far greater in importance than those with big paper memberships. The Network needs to include and coordinate all national organisations of socialists. Joining the Network should also be made simple.

Clause 4 - Subscriptions

Should be collected annually, all at once, not quarterly. Again the aim should be simplicity and ease of administration.

Clause 5 - Organisation

The Liaison Committee draft is incredibly complex. Its annual general meeting would elect a fixed list of officers on the basis of some sort of electoral college. The membership hurdle is far too high. It does not reflect the reality of the socialist alliances on the ground. Few have a membership over 100. The CPGB puts power squarely in the hands of those below - the local socialist alliances (which can be organised on a regional or city-wide basis in order to gain direct representation). Our proposed system of indirect elections, of elected and recallable delegates, allows for political change and organisational growth below to be fully and quickly reflected above. It is flexible and infinitely more democratic than the cumbersome system proposed by the Liaison Committee.

Clauses 6-9

The Liaison Committee is too concerned with details: eg, bank accounts, the financial year and disclosure of donations. However, the proposals for electoral agreements are frankly sinister. The Liaison Committee is to be allowed to "determine the advisability of contesting any local, national or European election". That would give it a veto on local by-elections. Such extreme centralism should have no place in what is an alliance of many different organisations. Where appropriate, all decision-making should be taken below. Local Socialist Alliances should be free to decide whether or not to contest local or parliamentary elections. The job of the Network is to coordinate and encourage its affiliates, not dictate to them. As to a change of rules, our draft dispenses with two-thirds majorities and gives the annual conference the power to change things on the basis of a simple majority ●

ing any local, national or European election. This shall include entering into agreement with, or arbitrating between, local Socialist Alliances, affiliated organisations or other political parties, where this is deemed to be in pursuance of the objectives of the Network.

Clause 8 - Dissolution of the Network

1. The Network may be dissolved by resolution of a special meeting of the Network, called for this purpose by the National Liaison Committee.

2. Any assets of the Network at the time of dissolution, shall, by way of the resolution dissolving the Network, be disbursed to any organisation or organisations having aims consistent with the objectives of the Network

Clause 9 - Change of rules

These rules may be altered or amended by resolution of the annual meeting, or by resolution receiving two-thirds of the votes at a special meeting called by the National Liaison Committee ●

Submitted by the CPGB

Preamble

The following represents arrangements to allow socialists and socialist organisations to work together in agreed common actions. It is recognised that differences will exist. This should not be a barrier to electoral arrangements, campaigning or open and frank exchange of views. The Network will encourage and facilitate debate and the process of clarification. Our principle is inclusion, not exclusion. Through joint work and no-holds-barred discussions it is hoped that the individuals and groups involved will move closer and towards a higher organisational structure.

Clause 1 - Name

Network of Socialist Alliances in the United Kingdom (hereinafter called the Network).

Clause 2 - Objectives

1. To bring together through affiliation national, regional and local political organisations and individuals for the purpose of establishing a socialist society. The Network considers:

- Socialism and democracy are inseparable.
- Socialism is conquered by the working class. It cannot be delivered from on high.
- Socialism is international or it is nothing.

2. The Network will fight for the maximum democracy under existing social conditions: ie, capitalism. In particular:

- Abolition of the monarchy, the House of Lords and all constitutional hereditary privileges.
- For a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales. For the unity of Ireland. For the right of Scotland, Wales and Ireland to self-determination.

- For the closest political and organisational unity of the working class.

3. To work with other national or international organisations in pursuit of these objectives.

Clause 3 - Membership and membership conditions

1. Membership of the Network shall consist of:

- Affiliated national organisations.
- Affiliated local and regional organisations.
- Local or regional Socialist Alliances.

- Individual members where there is no appropriate Socialist Alliance.
2. Membership shall be open to all who agree to the rules and accept the objectives of the Network.

Clause 4 - Subscriptions

1. Annual membership subscription shall be as follows:

- Affiliated national organisation - £50;
- Other affiliated organisations and Socialist Alliances - £20;
- Individual member - £10 (£5 concession).

2. Where an organisation or individual fails to renew their annual subscription their membership shall be deemed to have lapsed after one month.

Clause 5 - Organisation

1. There shall be an annual conference called by the Network Liaison Committee or a special conference at the demand of one-third of affiliated Socialist Alliances.

2. The annual conference of the Network shall be open to individual members and individual members of affiliated organisations, but voting delegates shall be on the following basis:

- Affiliated national organisations: two delegates.
- Affiliated local or regional organisations: one delegate.
- Local Socialist Alliances: one delegate per 10 members.
- Regional or metropolitan Socialist Alliances: one delegate per 100 members.

3. The role of the annual conference shall be to:

- Debate and express a view of political questions;
- Change the rules and objectives of the Network.

4. The Liaison Committee shall be responsible for the administration and day-to-day running and promotion of the Network. The Liaison Committee shall elect and remove officers as it so chooses. The Liaison Committee shall consist of elected and recallable delegates on the following basis:

- Affiliated national organisations: one delegate.
- Regional, metropolitan and local Socialist Alliances: one delegate per 100 members.

5. The Liaison Committee shall present audited accounts to the conference.

6. Standing orders for the purposes of conducting the annual conference and the Liaison Committee may be adopted by resolution of the annual conference.

Clause 6 - Electoral arrangements

The Network shall facilitate and coordinate the electoral work of regional and local Socialist Alliances. It shall encourage the biggest possible socialist challenge in local, regional, national and European elections ●

London Socialist Alliance

The August 11 meeting of the London Socialist Alliance was very positive. At the initiative of LSA coordinator Anne Murphy, a number of comrades were appointed to positions of responsibility. They are: chair - Steve Nally (SPEW); election organiser - Nick Long (Socialist Democracy Group); treasurer - David Lyons (Socialist Democracy Group); press and

publicity - Ian Donovan (*Revolution and Truth*).

The ad-hoc committee also agreed to submit the following resolution to the autumn conference of the LSA: "The LSA resolves to facilitate and coordinate the biggest possible united socialist challenge in the forthcoming European and mayoral and assembly elections" ●

Around the left Criticism of the past

Don Preston rebuffs criticisms from Mark Osborn of Alliance for Workers' Liberty (*Weekly Worker* July 30)

Mark Osborn seems very upset by some of the comments made in my 'Around the left' column (*Weekly Worker* July 16). Our comrade from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty accuses the CPGB of "shitespeak", even "high-octane shite", and of indulging in "blatant lying" about what the AWL believes in. Comrade Osborn also seems to feel that the offending article should make the CPGB "feel dirty", so great were its crimes. This from a comrade who told workers to vote for Blair's party on May 1 1997 and presumably is happy to be a member of New Labour. Who is talking "shitespeak" and who ought to "feel dirty"?

In reality, the column was doing nothing more than pointing to a few home truths about the AWL and its political past - in the shape of its not so wholesome predecessor, *Socialist Organiser*. It should also be apparent that my plain speaking was not motivated by some sectarian - and puerile - desire to notch up quick and easy points. Rather the article contained praise for the AWL's internal regime and support for the Osborn-Matgama 'minority'. In other words the criticism was constructive and comradely.

Having said that, on some issues the AWL is open to polemical devastation. Which brings us immediately to the question of Ireland. When it comes to this issue, if no other, the AWL is up to its neck in imperialist economism. Comrade Osborn may rage with righteous indignation at the statement that the AWL is "pro-imperialist" and thinks that the "civilising influence of British imperialism provides the only hope" for Ireland. Yet the evidence for precisely such a sentiment within the AWL is legion. Look at the pro-May 22 British-Irish Agreement nonsense peddled by the AWL 'majority' - lambasted by none other than comrade Osborn. Just for the record, that does not mean that the CPGB believes that the AWL, and SO before it, were *consciously* plotting with MI5, the RUC or the SAS. It merely means that the SO/AWL's methodology, if *logically* unfolded, leads it into the arms of British imperialism and counterrevolution. The AWL 'majority' in this respect were being perfectly consistent. As was the decision to give pro-imperialist loyalists a platform and space in *Workers' Liberty*.

We can see a softness towards imperialism clearly in the SO's 1990 platform, *We stand for workers' liberty*. Comrade Osborn in his *Weekly Worker* article urges us to read this document. Indeed we have. In it, we are told that SO advocates "some sort of federal Ireland ... British withdrawal without such a settlement would not, we believe, mean a united Ireland, but a protestant-Irish drive to secure their self-determination against the Irish majority, sectarian civil war, and bloody and permanent repartition" (p6). In other words, SO/AWL implicitly ascribes a progressive role to British imperialism - whose sheer presence, it seems, *prevents* a descent into "sectarian civil war" and a general bloodbath.

If truth be told, the comrades from AWL are permanently distressed by the fact that Irish politics are not like good old British politics - ie, primarily, and normally, conducted along trade union or 'bread and butter' lines. Irish politics deviate from the

'healthy' economic paradigm supplied by the Labour Party and the TUC. If only Ireland could be more like Great Britain. At the CPGB's Communist University earlier this month, comrade Sean Matgama of the AWL confessed as much, telling his audience of his hope that "normal class politics" would one day visit the Six Counties.

Naturally, if you aimed for "normal class politics", then all those forces that seemed to impede or hinder its realisation were *the* problem. The defining and counterrevolutionary role of British imperialism, to put it mildly, becomes occluded. The evidence is incriminating. The AWL wishes the IRA "had never existed". It opposes the call for the immediate withdrawal of British troops. If this is not pro-imperialism it is certainly the next best thing.

Comrade Osborn will no doubt be glad to discover that I generally agree with his assertion that the "point surely is to develop what Trotsky called the 'third camp': independent working class politics - in this case independent of Russian imperialism and what you refer to as the M15 camp". If the 'first camp' is defined as capitalism/imperialism and the 'second camp' as bureaucratic socialism (ie, anti-socialism), then I am fully in favour of comrade Osborn's "third camp" - though of course there is no 'third way' between world capitalism and world communism. The 20th century has amply confirmed this.

The attitude of comrade Osborn and the AWL to the USSR in this respect is a welcome contrast to those dogma-encrusted Trotskyists who refuse to entertain the notion, as a matter of *faith*, that the USSR was an exploitative social formation - on the block-headed grounds that to admit to such a self-evident truth immediately catapults you into the arms of blackest counterrevolution. Or as comrade Ian Donovan, editor and chief contributor of *Revolution and Truth*, puts it: "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'?" (*Weekly Worker* July 23).

So how could I scandalously write that "*Socialist Organiser's* 'anti-Stalinism' was virtually indistinguishable from mainstream bourgeois anti-communism"? For quite straightforward reasons. Comrade Osborn appears to be suffering from acute political memory-loss syndrome. *Socialist Organiser* was organically tied to *Labourism*, a form of virulent pro-imperialist anti-communism. Labour was *its* party - every issue of *Socialist Organiser* had an application form to join the Labour Party. In this spirit the 1945 Attlee government has been described as "a workers' government" - a government which helped form Nato, broke communist-led strikes and banned May Day demonstrations.

Unsurprisingly then, SO breathed in the anti-communist oxygen which surrounded - and nourished - it. This led to the situation where SO attacked *The Leninist* (predecessor of

the *Weekly Worker*) for locating the organisational hub of the Stalinist journal *Straight Left* in the 'official' CPGB. We were branded "witch hunters" for telling this truth. Guided by such a method, SO praised the loathsome rightwing Labourite Frank Chapple, leader of the former EETPU and a notorious red baiter, for "having a good line of international questions". Not surprisingly then SO backed the medievalist mujahedeen in Afghanistan - along with Kinnock, Hattersley, etc. The PDPA-led revolution was dismissed and the counterrevolution which was to foresee the darkest reaction enthusiastically supported.

In reality, SO had a *pseudo*-third campist position. Due to organic ties to Labourism it was inexorably drawn to the 'first camp' - over and over again. SO failed to articulate and develop truly independent working class politics. Instead it tailed anti-communism - whether it be the spontaneous anti-communism of the atomised masses in the USSR and eastern Europe or the venal, self-interested, calculated anti-communism of the labour bureaucracy. So, yes, *for genuine communists* the boundary lines between the 'anti-Stalinism' of SO and the anti-communism of the bourgeoisie was very fuzzy.

Take Poland during the 1980s. Resistance to the Soviet-sponsored regime of general Jaruzelski and to martial law was channelled into the 'trade union' Solidarnosc - an organisation whose world view, from top to bottom, was a reactionary mixture of Polish nationalism, catholicism and anti-semitism. Whatever we may think of Arthur Scargill's politics, he was undoubtedly correct when he labelled Solidarnosc "anti-socialist".

SO championed the cause of Solidarnosc, Thatcher's and Reagan's favourite trade union. Comrade Tom Rigby in 1988 analysed the 'Polish experience' in the following terms: "Though many on the left criticise Solidarnosc for being too nationalist, in an important sense they were *not nationalist enough*. The Solidarnosc leadership should have prepared from the very beginning for the inevitable conflict that was to come. They should have clearly stated their commitment to fight for Polish independence" (original emphasis *Reform or revolution in eastern Europe?* SO pamphlet, September 1988). We have seen where Soldarnosc's *real* nationalism led an independent Poland - to capitalism and Nato.

Yet another example of SO's "third camp" politics?

We will spare the AWL too much embarrassment by not lingering upon the 'Yuri Butchenko' scandal of 1990. With its former ideological and organisational bedmate, Workers Power, SO cobbled together the Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc (CSWEB). As part of its duties, CSWEB touted organisations like Fighting Solidarity, as well as rightwing individuals like Yuri Butchenko. Butchenko insisted that his British tour should be organised with George Miller, a British representative of the pro-fascist National Workers Union. In effect, CSWEB quickly became a rolling anti-communist roadshow, and just as quickly disintegrated amongst much acrimony and bitterness (WP somehow managed to blame Scargill for the whole fiasco).

All these antics were impeccably 'anti-Stalinist' - but *third camp* politics? ●

The greening of socialism

Terry Liddle of the Green Party opened a discussion on red-green cooperation at Communist University '98. Here are extracts from his contributions

Green politics are the politics of the 21st century. One of the criticisms that many people in the Green Party would make is that a lot of socialists seem to be living in the 19th century - or at least in the first part of this century.

What I propose to do is throw out ideas from people who occupy various points on the red-green spectrum and take it from there. The first example comes from an article by John Bridge in the *Weekly Worker* (July 2):

"Finally there is the green question. The greens are a petty bourgeois movement happily containing within themselves a wide spectrum ranging from the critically utopian to the overtly fascist. Its best thinkers have written savage indictments of capitalism which supply wonderful ammunition for the class struggle. Despite that most green ideas are confused, naive and at the end of the day reactionary. There is an underlying neo-Malthusian assumption which sees human beings as the fundamental problem. A general prejudice also exists against economic growth and technological progress. The world's ecological problems could be solved through an impossible return to nature, itself of course a social construct."

That seems to be the attitude of John Bridge - if not of the Communist Party as such - to greens. Hardly a good start, if what we are after is to form some kind of red-green alliance and perhaps beyond that new politics, based at least in part on a fusion of red and green ideas.

That's one side of the problem. The other side is exemplified in a pamphlet called *Red sails in the sunset* by Sandy Irvine. Irvine started off in the Labour Party Young Socialists, then became a member of the Socialist Workers Party and eventually found himself on the far right of the Green Party. He says:

"Socialism, then, brings with it so much anti-ecological baggage that a red-green fusion could lead only to a quick divorce or loss of greenery. There is a yawning chasm between the politics of ecology and that of all major traditions of socialist theory and practice."

If you saw those as the only representatives of socialism and green thought, you would probably say, 'Yes, Irvine is right: there is a great "yawning chasm".' Is even attempting to bridge it any kind of worthwhile project, or is this merely whistling against the wind?

Few would deny that there is an ecological crisis. The nature of this crisis is so profound that it could, unless it is checked, lead to the extinction of our own species and possibly to the extinction of most forms of life on this earth. Already every day, due in no small part to human activity, hundreds of species are becoming extinct, because humans are destroying their natural habitat.

The question is what can be done. How even with the technology available now, are we going to plan an economy which does not screw up the eco-system, but rather guarantees food, water, etc for the whole of our species and at the same time the continuance of life for other species? It is a global problem, which has to be solved globally. But how do you start? We are talking about acting lo-

cally but at the same time thinking globally. The place you start is where you are at.

My argument is that what is needed is a sustainable economy. What this means is that unlimited economic growth of the kind seen in the few hundred years of capitalism is no longer possible. The natural resources upon which this was based are finite. There is in the world only so much in the way of fossil fuels, so much in the way of minerals, so much in the way of wood, so much in the way of water, so much in the way of land upon which it is possible to grow food to sustain human and other forms of life.

The only way you can guarantee a sustainable economy is through socialism. Capitalism looks mainly to the short term. Its attitude is 'take the money and run'. No matter how many 'green' taxes are imposed, this will not alter the fundamental nature of the beast. All capital will do is move its industrial operations to other countries where these laws do not apply.

For sustainability you need socialism. A simple definition of socialism is of course the old one: the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production. I was brought up in a socialist tradition which precluded sustainable growth. Into our household came the *Daily Worker*, glossy magazines like *Soviet Union* and *China Reconstructs*. What they contained were reports of massive new factories, altering the course of rivers with great dams, tilling the virgin lands and planting corn where corn should not grow, and surpassing the Americans in terms of production.

Look at what happened in the Soviet Union, certainly since the five-year plans of 1929 onwards: While it undoubtedly increased the quantity of production, its quality left a lot to be desired. It produced ecological disaster. Lands became barren because the type of agriculture practised on them was not appropriate.

Yet according to that rationality all human problems could be solved

through a technological and scientific fix. The answer was portrayed as ongoing growth and the expansion of production, supposedly to meet human need - but of course in the so-called socialist countries the needs met were mostly those of the bureaucracy, and very often people at the bottom were no better off and in many ways worse off than their counterparts in the bourgeois democracies. But that is the image that socialism has had, both in its Stalinist form and to some extent in its social democratic form, where industries have been nationalised into vast corporations.

If such growth continues, it threatens the future of life on earth. Socialists must take on board these criticisms from the green movement.

I would now like, if I may, to answer some of John's criticisms. I think he has a rather skewed idea of what a lot of greens are about, particularly the Green Party. The Green Party is only a small part of a far wider, very important green movement which takes in all sorts of people: single-issue campaigns, things like Greenpeace, Reclaim the Streets, The Land is Ours, Earth First.

He says: "The greens are a petty bourgeois movement." What does that mean? As I always I understood it, the petty bourgeoisie are small shopkeepers and self-employed artisans. Looking at my own branch of the Green Party, we have teachers, nurses, a park ranger, carers and unemployed people. How can they be described as petty bourgeois?

John describes greens as "happily containing within themselves a wide spectrum ranging from the critically utopian to the overtly fascist". Critical utopians are not a bad thing. One that springs to mind is William Morris and his *News from nowhere*. I find the reference to the "overtly fascist" rather insulting. Maybe you are thinking of David Icke, who got into anti-semitic theories. One could be ungenerous and say that Joseph Stalin also got into anti-semitic conspiracy theories. Unfortunately he was in a position to do more about it

than David Icke, who was booted out of the Green Party.

There was an organisation at one time called Green Wave which was a front for one of the third positionist splits from the National Front. We have made it clear that nobody in the Green Party should have anything to do with this. We have an anti-fascist, anti-racist working group, and our members have been active in the fight against racism and fascism.

John rightly refers to the "savage indictments of capitalism" made by greens. But then he states that "most green ideas are confused, naive and at the end of the day reactionary". I do not think that green ideas are as coherent as they should be, but at least we are trying to work on it. I could add in mitigation that the Green Party is only 25 years old, whereas there has been at least a century of Marxist activity and propaganda in this country. They don't seem to have got it right either. The thing to do if our ideas are not clear is to try and clarify them.

I am not quite sure what he means by "at the end of the day reactionary". "Reactionary" is one of those words which have been overused. What is it we are reacting against? Yes, we are reacting against capitalism, but socialism is a reaction against capitalism too.

Then we come to 'neo-Malthusianism', "which sees human beings as the fundamental problem". Malthus said that human populations rise faster than food production. So the answer is to let surplus human beings starve to death. Nobody in the Green Party advocates that human beings should be left to starve to death.

If you read our *Manifesto for a sustainable society*, you will find this passage: "We believe that every individual in society has an equal right to food, water, warmth and housing. For life to have quality and meaning and to allow individual dignity and respect, the basic requirements must be adequate and must be accessible." Nothing there about starving people to death. We go on to say: "Our central principle is that the necessities of food, energy, material shelter and meaningful and satisfying work should be available to all."

Now we come to population - and this is where socialists and greens disagree. There seems to be an assumption among socialists that population is not a problem. Yet the land available for people to live on and upon which food can be grown is finite. Due to the inappropriate use of agricultural techniques the amount of land available for food is decreasing. The Green Party talks of a reduction in the population of the UK of around 15-20 million.

How are we going to do this? The only way is through an educational programme. People must become acquainted with the consequences of overpopulation. In the advanced capitalist countries this has to some extent happened already. In the third world countries, there is a tendency to have large families as a hedge against old age. Often there is no social welfare provision and people depend on their children. If there was a fully comprehensive welfare system, if the provision of all necessities was guaranteed, then with better education and access to contraception attitudes would change.

It is difficult to estimate the time over which this reduction in population could be achieved. We say, "Draconian legislation is both unpalatable and unrealistic"; and we add: "The Green Party recognises any form of compulsory birth control not only

constitutes a totally unacceptable infringement of human rights which is likely to be morally repugnant, but is also a potentially extremely dangerous tool for social repression." We are not in favour of starving people to death.

We are against economic growth on the grounds that it is not sustainable. John says we are against technological progress. Does that mean that we are in favour of people sitting in caves chipping away with flint tools? We are not against technological progress as such: we are saying that it should be appropriate and should take place within the bounds of sustainability.

"The world's ecological problems could be solved through an impossible return to nature, itself of course a social construct." I do not see that nature is a social construct. You could say that our perception of nature and its relationship to us and each other is a social construct. But the natural world exists. It seems we are being tarred with the brush of the anarcho-primitivists.

The left - whether or not you include the greens - has become very fragmented, very atomised, very isolated, very marginalised. The reality is the majority of people are either totally indifferent to any kind of socialist ideas or actively hostile to them. One way of breaking out of this is for reds and greens to work together for commonly agreed aims and specific projects, interchanging ideas with a long-term view to achieve a red-green party. In the short term we ought to be preparing joint lists of candidates for the London Assembly and other elections - or at least ensure that we do not stand candidates against each other.

Although some people want to rush ahead, my feeling is that any kind of red-green organisational unity is a long way off. I adhere to the idea that we have about 80% agreement, but the 20% disagreement should not be ignored. It is real and covers many fundamental principles, which need to be argued out. Whether this is a viable project of itself or in the context of a framework of Socialist Alliances needs debating. You may even think it is a distraction from your core project, which seems to be reorganising the Communist Party of Great Britain - although perhaps some people might say there is not much point in breathing life into a corpse.

There needs to be a redding of the greens. The Green Party needs to accept that the only way we can have a sustainable society is through socialism. Through getting rid of capitalism and its crazy werewolf lust for profit and having a society based on the common ownership and control of the means of production. I am not a pacifist. I would like to see such a transition without violence. But I do not believe there can be any peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism. If it should prove necessary, then I would not draw the line at shooting capitalists.

There also needs to be a greening of the reds. Socialists must accept that the only way we can guarantee the survival of our species is through a sustainable economy.

The Socialist Alliances provide an immediate forum for such a coming together. I do not want anybody put out of the Socialist Alliances. Instead of looking to exclude people, to draw lines between ourselves and others - which unfortunately a lot of people on the left have tended to do in the past, sometimes with really bizarre results - we should be looking at who the hell we can include ●

Serious debate

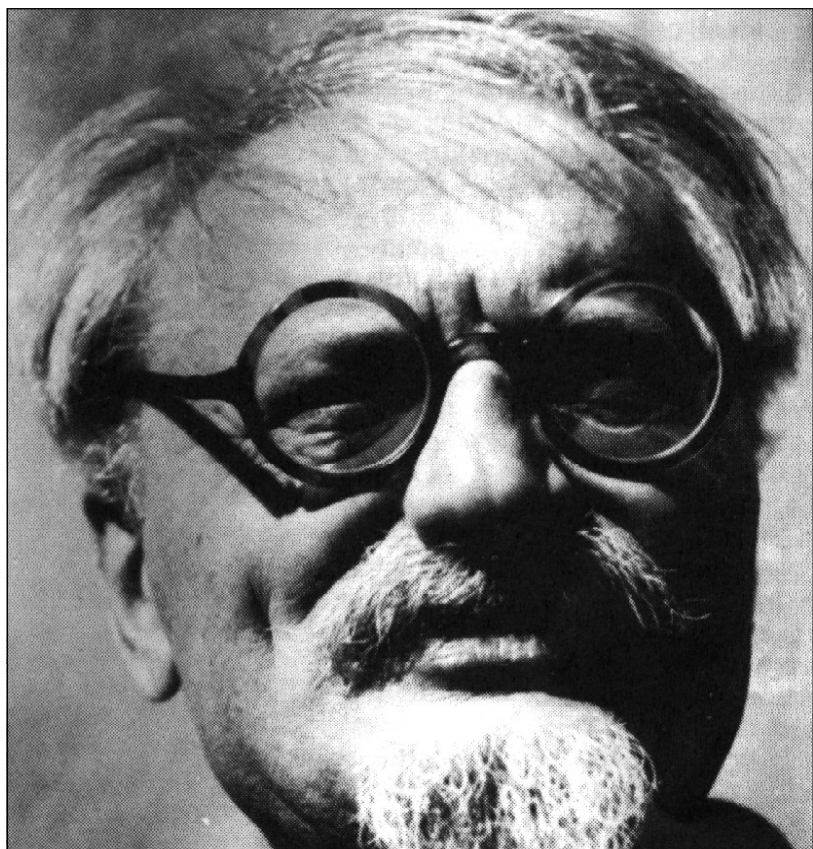
Comrade Liddle replied to the debate on that followed his opening with these words:

"You get far more understanding out of face-to-face discussions like this than out of long-range sniping through the written word. This has been an excellent discussion. It has certainly clarified a lot of my ideas about where you are coming from. Some people seem to think that the CPGB has horns on its head and a tail coming out of its backside. But it is obvious to me that you are very serious people trying to address very serious questions. You are also quite willing to listen to other people."

Because I think that this is a very important discussion I have invited a comrade from the CPGB to put his point of view to my branch of the Green Party next month" ●

Groping towards a theory

Max Shachtman, Hal Draper et al, Sean Matgamna (ed), **The fate of the Russian Revolution Vol 1**, London 1998, pp603, £16.99



Leon Trotsky: retreated from Marx's method

From the beginning the Soviet Union in its unique and contradictory evolution has divided the workers' movement. There were, of course, those who chose their own ruling class rather than side with the workers in revolutionary Russia. These labour traitors thereby proved themselves reactionaries of the worst sort. However, that was not the end of the matter.

Within the revolutionary camp itself different critical interpretations of the Soviet Union phenomenon have caused one schism or purge after another. Nowhere has such sect-like behaviour been more prevalent and damaging than within the Trotskyite tradition. In the last analysis the reason for this is the dichotomy that exists between the strange reality of the Soviet Union and Trotsky's theory: ie, his belief that despite the systemic terrorism of Stalin's monocracy it remained a degenerate workers' state.

Without doubt, having come over to Bolshevism at the 11th hour, Leon Trotsky played an outstanding and invaluable role in the Russian Revolution. (Incidentally the rapprochement between Lenin and Trotsky was not due to the former undergoing a Trotskyite conversion to 'permanent revolution' with his 'April thesis' - that is an unfounded myth which ignores, indeed insults, the history of Bolshevism pre-1917.) The Soviet regime was in its heroic years associated throughout the world with two names - Lenin and Trotsky. True, when he was in power, and incidentally under Lenin's protection, Trotsky showed distinct bureaucratic tendencies. In the early 1920s he proposed the militarisation of labour. Nevertheless from 1924 onwards he took the lead in fighting the bureaucratic degeneration of the isolated workers' state.

Till his assassination Trotsky's brave and unyielding opposition to the Stalin monocracy was from a defencist position. Siding with Stalin's USSR was explained and excused under the rubric of "defending October" - as if there had been no counterrevolutionary break. The So-

viet Union was not only non-capitalist, but, he insisted, a world historic gain. Although workers were deprived of all democratic rights in the 1930s, although they were reduced to the level of an oppressed and formless mass, Trotsky continued to regard the Soviet Union as some sort of workers' state. In the absence of any working class political power Trotsky sustained this fiction by citing so-called 'socialist property forms'. His criticism of bureaucratic socialism consequently focused on the sphere of distribution and consumption rather than that of production. He savaged inequality, but refused to see exploitation. In so doing Trotsky retreated from Marx's method of dialectical investigation - its highest expression being *Capital* - to a neo-Ricardism.

Trotsky's untenable ideas on the Soviet Union came under sustained attack in the late 1930s from within the body of his close supporters. Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, Al Glotzer and other members of the Socialist Workers Party in the USA rightly stressed the centrality of proletarian political power for any genuinely socialist project. Trotsky's notion of 'socialist property forms' was a nonsense. Effectively it equated nationalisation with socialism.

As Trotsky's 'Trotskyite' critics pointed out, the key to understanding the class nature of the post-1928 Soviet Union was not property forms, but property relations: ie, the fact that with the first five-year plan the bureaucracy finally separated itself from any proletarian vestiges, launching a 'second revolution' from above and forced industrialisation. Living standards plummeted. Millions died. The Communist Party was decimated and transformed into an organ which existed to promote the cult of Stalin. Here, in the first five-year plan, was the qualitative counterrevolutionary break. A new social formation had been born out of the failure of the Russian Revolution and the impossibility of building socialism in one country.

Using its - ie, the state's - monopoly

of the means of production, the bureaucracy under Stalin ruthlessly pumped out surplus labour from the direct producers who exercised no positive control over the product, let alone society. The peasants were effectively re-enslaved. The workers re-enslaved. Their trade unions were turned against them. They were denied the most elementary rights. They were atomised by a terroristic regime which ensured that they could not organise themselves into a collectivity. Any hint of political resistance meant imprisonment or death. In other words from 1928 the Soviet Union ceased being ours.

Shachtman, Draper, Glotzer, etc paid a heavy price for daring to question their mentor. With Trotsky's blessing James Cannon hounded the "petty bourgeois deviation" out of the SWP. Trotskyism thus increasingly became a fixed sectarian dogma, not a scientific method open to unexpected challenges and new development. In step with ossification, in theory and practice, Trotskyism turned into its opposite. Trotskyism went from being a searing criticism of Soviet reality to an apologia. Following World War II Trotskyism was plunged into utter incoherence by the export of Soviet-style society to eastern Europe. According to Trotsky's epigones socialism was no longer conquered by the workers themselves. It came not from self-activity, but the Red Army (later other supposed agents of human liberation were discovered - Mao, Tito, Ben Bella, Castro, Saddam Hussein, Tony Benn and Arthur Scargill have all been worshipped by post-Trotsky Trotskyites).

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Sean Matgamna are to be congratulated for the production of volume one of "lost texts of critical Marxism". Let there be many more. These writings of Shachtman and his comrades have been unavailable for too long. They certainly make interesting and inspiring reading. Shachtman's theory - that the Soviet Union was neither capitalist nor socialist, but bureaucratic collectivist - points in the right direction. It is, needless to say, vastly superior to Trotsky's 'socialist property forms' or the notion imposed on the British SWP by Tony Cliff that the Soviet Union was state capitalist. Both these theories owe more to Procrustes than Marx. They either mercilessly stretch Soviet reality or chop off its feet and head in order to fit it into a preconceived abstract schema. The Marxist theory of money, the law of value, the inseparability of socialism from democracy, the role of consciousness are all hopelessly mangled in the process.

The fate of the Russian Revolution will infuriate doctrinaire Trotskyites. Shachtman is their prince of darkness. The fallen angel whose name is for them irredeemably associated with class treachery. Shachtman's 'lesser of two evils' drift into the camp of democratic imperialism - criminally he supported the US-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 - is brandished in order to dismiss everything he said and wrote against Trotsky. As Matgamna tellingly argues, the same technique could equally be applied to Plekhanov or Kautsky. But that would be pure philistinism and a significant intellectual loss. Truth must be our goal. Labelling thinkers all right or all wrong gets us nowhere. People are complex ... and sometimes even mortal enemies are capable of revealing vital aspects of the truth. We close our minds at our own peril. Everything must be questioned. Nothing taken for granted.

Both Shachtman and Matgamna (in his introductory essay) go to great lengths to save Trotsky, the revolutionary, from Trotsky, the theorist of 'socialist property forms', and latter-day Trotskyites. In a couple of his late articles - eg, 'The Comintern and the GPU' - and the unfinished biography *Stalin* the claim is that Trotsky's thought implicitly undermined or went beyond his old theory. If he had lived, he would, it is suggested, have broken from his "provisional" and "tentative" formulations and boldly declared the Soviet Union a society ruled by a class of bureaucratic exploiters that was antithetical to socialism and the working class. Maybe. Maybe not.

Speculation obviously has a legitimate place in Marxist discourse. Many things in history could have been different. Even very different. Nevertheless saving Trotsky from Trotsky smacks of iconisation. It reveals a certain lack of courage, an unwillingness to take criticism the whole way. Trotsky never joined the bourgeoisie. He was no Plekhanov. But if the Soviet Union was a class society which exploited the workers as slaves, then those who have arrived at such a conclusion should be fearless in their criticism of Trotsky - a man who not only possessed all the necessary socio-economic facts about the Soviet Union, but had the proven ability to creatively develop Marxism as a science.

Bureaucratic collectivism is evidently a 'theory' which contains insights of value - it does have the great virtue of leaving behind the wooden normative method of analysis. On the one side, that if the Soviet Union could be shown not to be capitalist, then it had to be socialistic; and on the other side, that if it could be shown to be non-socialism, it had to be capitalist or state capitalism. Life is much richer than the linear sketch drawn by Marx for western Europe in his *Critique of political economy*: ie, primitive communism - slavery - feudalism - capitalism - communism. There have been and can be many other possibilities, including unviable freak societies like the Soviet Union.

Bureaucratic collectivism therefore calls for, demands, a concrete analysis of the Soviet Union phenomenon. Unfortunately neither Shachtman nor any of his successors developed a fully rounded, or general theory, of the USSR. Shachtman, in his defence, never claimed to have arrived at such a necessary level of theorisation. His bureaucratic collectivism is therefore not really a theory - it cannot locate the Soviet Union's actual laws of motion and the essential contradictions which led it to stagnation and ignominious final collapse.

From my talks with prominent AWL comrades - Tom Rigby, for example, at Communist University '98 - there appears to be a danger of bureaucratic collectivism being turned into its opposite by present-day adherents. Instead of getting to grips with the Soviet Union in all its complexity through painstaking research and the logical development of new categories, the limited and often intuitive insights of Shachtman and co are cited as gospel *because* they conform with what is imagined as 'Marxist' orthodoxy. Using this fundamentalist approach, comrade Rigby *knows* that the Soviet bureaucracy had to be a fully fledged ruling class.

Hopefully *The fate of the Russian Revolution* will not be used to establish another rigid dogma. On the contrary this book deserves to be used in the service of real theoretical development ●

Jack Conrad

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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Under the censor's knife

Two aspects of the censorship that surrounds us recently came into sharp public focus. First off the blocks was a slight lifting of the lid on video censorship in the UK, courtesy of the annual report of the British Board of Film Classification and the subsequent furore in the media that started 10 days ago.

Despite the liberal label awarded by the press, including *The Independent* and the *Daily Mail*, the BBFC report authored by outgoing director James Ferman merely advocated giving life to the near-defunct 'R18' sex-shop video category so that, for example, real consensual heterosexual sex acts might be depicted in pornography. Ferman, who is retiring in December after 23 years as BBFC supremo, pleaded only for the police not to seize videos containing such depictions, since they do not of themselves 'deprave and corrupt', which is the current vague legal test. Of course, real sex acts are already portrayed in BBFC-certificated videos under the 'sex education' rubric within the freely-available adult category '18'.

Part of the reason for Ferman's outspokenness must be the drubbing he received a few months back at the hands of home secretary Jack Straw, who took him to task for admitting publicly that his board was allowing a little more explicit porn material than hitherto. Straw's unbridled desire to curtail any manifestation of impropriety in the Blairite remaking of Britain, pandering to Mrs Grundyism in the process, leads him to make strange bedfellows. Of course, like much of the 'debate' around censorship, including video censorship, the great and the good have had the field very much left to themselves in deciding what the benighted masses may or may not enjoy. The *Daily Mail*, in particular, has over the last decade and a half taken upon itself the role of public guardian against the tide of 'filth', violence and video 'nasties' for which porn merchants and others it deems moral reprobates have created a market. Ferman has often been cast as the liberal villain in the *Mail's* demonography, a raving radical out to flood Britain with porn.

A shake-up at the BBFC has been on the cards for some time. When Jack Straw's placeman, Andrew Whittam Smith, was put in to replace Elizabeth Windsor's cousin, Lord Harewood, as president, he upgraded the post immediately, sidelining Ferman, who had previously held uncontested sway within the organisation. But everything has its price and the payment being exacted at the moment is threatening the existence of the BBFC as an institution. Deep demoralisation is setting in. Ferman's deputy is unhappy. The BBFC's crusty board of management has been rolled out to stem internal rebellion. Disciplinary action against staff is being mooted to stem public leaking about its arcane workings.

One worrying aspect of the new regime at the BBFC is the report that Whittam Smith has been having regular and frequent meetings with David Alton, whose restrictive amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill (as it then was) would have had the effect of forcing the dumbing down of videos so that only those hacked by cuts to 'PG' level would be available.

Squalid, behind-doors machinations are typical of how our rulers would have things,

of course. Despite Blairite squeakings about transparency and accountability there is no way that anything but window-dressing gestures toward openness in matters of censorship are contemplated. The agenda for discussion decided for us and debated so far publicly has still not progressed beyond the manner in which censorship over what we see and hear is to be *better regulated*. Film which is screened theatrically for what censors see as a different demographic (ie, not so working class an audience as for video) never suffers to the same degree the indignities placed on supposedly more influential video releases, even when they are of the same works as appear on film.

However, over the last decade there have been markers in the road which we can follow to expose the bankruptcy of the censor's patronising view. In the early 90s, *Visions of ecstasy*, which depicted the erotic-religious visions of a saint having sex with Christ on the cross, was banned by the BBFC on the grounds of blasphemy. More recently, Ray Brady's serious and difficult *Boy meets girl* was in 1997 denied a video certificate (ie, banned) by the BBFC on the grounds of its 'excessive' sado-masochistic violence; an appeal under the Video Recordings Act procedure subsequently confirmed the ban. But since Whittam Smith's appointment, reflecting the Blairites' moralistic imperative, the boundaries are now being even more restrictively drawn. This year, soft porn distribution company Sheptonhurst had its *Making whoopee* banned by the BBFC, a decision reversed on appeal; but now, however, Whittam Smith is courting a judicial review, as well as calling into question the legal basis upon which he operates, by announcing that he intends illegitimately to refuse the work a certificate nonetheless. We shall see if his Blairite masters whip him in on this one.

Not to be outdone in the censorship stakes, the boys in blue in Southampton got hot under the collar last week on spotting the window of a left bookshop, October Books. The cause of their anger was a poster advertising Irvine Welsh's newly published book, *Filth*, bearing the image from its front cover of a caricature pig's head wearing a police helmet. Police raided the bookshop, confiscated posters, and were last heard to be contemplating passing the case to the Crown Prosecution Service under provisions in the Criminal Justice Act 1994 against "intentionally causing harassment, alarm, or distress through threatening, abusive or insulting words, behaviour or displays". On conviction the offence carries a maximum penalty of six months in prison and/or a £5,000 fine.

Afterwards, October Books worker Liz Carter commented: "The police said it was the first time they had seen the poster and they found it offensive ... The officers were upset, but although the book can hardly be said to present a positive depiction of the police, the image is supposed to be light-hearted ... If the poster is so offensive why didn't they seize copies of the book as well?"

When even posters advertising challenging books of well known authors can be seized by police, the state's representatives must surely feel that they have some mighty good laws in their back pockets ●

Tom Ball

Anti-working class sham

Once again a British government is locked in a doomed struggle to prevent the media printing information about the murky world of the security and intelligence services. Readers will have seen plenty about this in the bourgeois press and the story seems set to run and run; but the questions we need to ask are what this furore is actually about and what it means for communists.

On one level you can see the Blair government's cack-handed attempt to derail the Shayler-Tomlinson roadshow as a straight repeat of the fiasco involving Peter Wright and his book *Spycatcher* 10 years ago. The ingredients are similar: the deafening clanging of stable doors, a bungled and futile effort at damage limitation that actually makes things much worse, the prospect of an embarrassing court case, and unlimited quantities of bad publicity. Added to all this there is, of course, the bizarre fact that Shayler's revelations are already in the public domain, freely accessible to anyone who has access to a computer, or, for that matter, a copy of the *New York Times*.

So much for the similarities with Wright, but some elements of the Shayler-Tomlinson case are significantly different. First, Wright was an ageing, eccentric former member of a rightwing clique within MI5, a tragi-comic figure hardly suitable for the role of hero or martyr. Shayler and Tomlinson, however, seem able to pose convincingly as wronged heroes, determined to expose the iniquities and inefficiencies of their respective services. Their injured innocence is, needless to say, perfect fodder for the righteous indignation of bleeding heart liberals.

Secondly, whereas Wright's disclosures were not particularly surprising and essentially of merely historic interest - MI5 agents bugging their way around London; speculation about Soviet penetration of MI5; attempts to discredit Harold Wilson by suggesting he was a Soviet agent - both Shayler and Tomlinson appear to have had access to much more sensitive and current operational information, including stuff about the involvement of the secret services in criminal activity.

Perhaps the most interesting revelation to date is Shayler's

description of an alleged plot undertaken by MI6 to assassinate Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. If Shayler's report is true, it would seem that MI6's lawyers and the foreign secretary of the time, Malcolm Rifkind, were quite happy to authorise an MI6 plan which involved the secret service paying £100,000 to a Libyan dissident to murder Gaddafi. The operation failed and a number of innocent people were killed. This tale is, of course, an interesting example of ruling class hypocrisy - those who condemn state-sponsored terrorism in public are busy practicing it in secret - but can anyone really claim to be shocked or surprised about this?

One interesting fact which has emerged as a result of the Shayler affair is that MI6 really can be 'licensed to kill': subject to the foreign secretary's prior approval, the secret service is authorised to commit or to procure the commission of any criminal act whatever, providing it takes place outside the borders of the UK (see *The Guardian* August 6 1998). One is left wondering whether a similar legal provision might be made in respect of actions taking place within the borders of the UK - or does one exist as a secret memorandum of understanding between the relevant departments?

Press coverage of the story so far has been pretty predictable: on the right, the *Daily Telegraph's* contribution was characteristically cerebral: having made a token effort to discredit Shayler's disclosures as "incoherent", this paper opted to insist that "secret services must remain secret" and that Shayler should be horse-whipped. On the pinkish 'left', as represented by *The Guardian*, the emphasis is on the high-minded indignation which has become that paper's stock in trade: what worries *The Guardian* is that the British public pay for the secret services and consequently have a right to know what their money is being spent on and what actions are being carried out in their name. For a more facile, archetypically illiberal approach to the question you would have to look very far indeed. As always, the question of supervision and accountability looms large, the idea being that, were the House of Commons Security and Intelligence Committee given greater operational oversight over the

secret services, then all would be well. This seems to be the line taken by *Tribune*, which calls piously for the "accountability and scrutiny of the security services that Labour demanded when in opposition".

What should communists make of all this? In the first place, we must protest against every act of injustice, every violation of democracy. We do so while recognising that we have before us two embittered careerists whose names we would never have heard of if they had been better treated by their personnel departments. We can be sure that, had their egos been more effectively massaged and their promotions assured, these men would be happily carrying on the fight against the working class in this country and the Blair government's 'enemies' around the world.

A public trial should be unequivocally welcomed. It would present both men with the opportunity to inflict even greater damage on their respective organisations, and could help bring to light further examples of state-sponsored criminality conducted contrary to the letter and the spirit of those recent acts of parliament which farcically purported to place the security services within a legal framework.

We need to draw two main lessons from this episode. Firstly, the cult of secrecy surrounding the security services is no mere whimsical Whitehall fetish, but a very necessary device to cloak the illegal and immoral activities in which successive British governments have been happy to engage when their interests were deemed to be threatened. Secondly, communists should have no truck with the liberal bourgeois notion that all we need to do is call for a better regulated, more accountable secret service. For us, the point should be clear that these services can never function as anything other than the covert armed militia of the ruling class, and that when the political situation demands it (as one day it certainly will), they will be ruthlessly deployed, as they have been before, against communists and other progressive forces in society. That is why we demand a freedom of information act and the opening of all government files ●

Viktor Melor