

# Worldwide recession looms Russia in crisis

When the normally rational and pragmatic *Financial Times* concludes that "only a miracle" can save Russia from its current financial and economic woes (August 27), then the situation must indeed be grave. Sharp falls in stock markets around the world attest to growing anxieties about a general, systematic financial crisis leading to a possible slump. It is important to analyse the nature and extent of Russia's troubles and to examine their political repercussions.

First, let us do away with the misconception that this crisis represents the failure or death of *capitalism* in Russia. Whatever it is that has collapsed there, it is *not* capitalism in any conventional sense of the word. To understand why this is so, we have to look first of all at the peculiar, almost Asiatic relations of power and patronage that have arisen around what amounts to the court of Tsar Boris. The point to grasp is that for a long time, especially since the 1996 presidential election, there have effectively been two parallel, uncoordinated administrations in Russia.

On the one hand, there is the official government, appointed by the president and approved by parliament. For five years up to the spring of 1998, when Yeltsin sacked him, the government was led by Viktor Chernomyrdin. It is, of course, Chernomyrdin whom Yeltsin nominated once again last week. Under Chernomyrdin the Russian government was committed in principle to a programme of 'radical economic reform' - ie, an attempt to introduce full-blooded capitalism. In practice, however, the social costs in terms of unemployment and the associated political risk in terms of popular discontent meant that the introduction of a conventionally capitalist industrial base was constantly stalled and never really took place.

On the other hand, there arose a small but powerful stratum of elite businessmen, many of them former members of the old *nomenklatura*, commonly referred to as the 'oligarchs', who effectively functioned as a parallel financial and economic administration. Their power increased considerably after the June 1996 presidential election. They spent millions of dollars backing Yeltsin's campaign, but also funded another candidate, the popular former general, Aleksander Lebed. His function was to act as a spoiling candidate to draw votes away from Gennadiy Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). The first round of voting was too close to call,

but after Lebed duly opted to support Yeltsin the result was inevitable.

As became clear almost immediately after the election, Yeltsin's physical health and mental stability were precarious, to say the least. Many of his executive functions consequently devolved upon a coterie of court favourites and advisers. Most have close links with the oligarchs. Those wishing to learn more about the Byzantine court of Tsar Boris should read the memoirs of Aleksander Korzhakov, his former KGB bodyguard and crony, who was at one time widely regarded as the second most powerful man in Russia. Much of Korzhakov's testimony needs to be treated with scepticism, but there seems little reason to doubt his general contention that real power in Russia is for the most part exercised by the oligarchs.

Although they are vulgarly portrayed as capitalists, the oligarchs do not really fit the description. Yes, they have had access to billions of dollars in the form of foreign investment capital and IMF aid, but only a tiny fraction of it has been invested in the sinews of the economy - capital investment in industry has fallen by 75% over the last two years and industrial output has shrunk by 40% in the same period. A good deal of this finance capital simply found its way abroad, placed in the private bank accounts of oligarchs and their corrupt political placemen. Some was used to buy up large chunks of state enterprises at bargain prices; or it formed the capital for innumerable banks, whose main function was to launder money for the Russian mafia; or it was invested in speculative instruments on the financial markets. This is *not* capitalism as Marxists understand it. Nor can we speak of authentic capitalist relations in a situation where wage labour hardly exists. Millions of workers receive no pay at all and survive only through barter and the consumption of home-grown produce.

Only in the sense of a very primitive form of capital accumulation can Russia's economic system be called capitalist. George Soros has called it "robber capitalism"; others "wild west capitalism". It is essentially characterised by *plunder*, parasitism and reckless self-enrichment on the part of the oligarchs.

Boris Nemtsov, the recently dismissed, long-term proponent of radical reform, describes the situation thus: "The country is built as a freakish, oligarchic capitalist state. Its characteristics are the concentration of property in the hands of a narrow

group of financiers ... Many of them operate inefficiently, having a parasitic relationship to the industries they control, sucking out capital and keeping it in Moscow or moving it abroad. They don't pay taxes and they don't pay the workers" (*The Observer* August 30).

Leonid Shebarshin, a former senior KGB officer, who now runs a prestigious security service for banks, characterises the situation as follows: "Thousands of banks sprouted up like mushrooms. There was a chaotic stripping of national wealth. No other country has experienced privatisation on such a scale. The atmosphere was one of boundless greed, of a desire to enrich yourself at any price. The people who were in power looked on this power as an instrument of direct and brazen self-enrichment. Over several years we created not just millionaires, but billionaires. I don't think there's a precedent for this, apart from the emergence of the drug barons ... Personal and group interests overwhelmed the interest of the state and the people" (*ibid*).

In a sense, it is their "boundless greed" that has come back to haunt the oligarchs. Their determination not to pay tax on immense capital gains and income from privatisation and other business dealings played a major part in creating the present crisis: Russia's chronic problems with budget deficits have worsened markedly over the last year; rapidly spreading crisis phenomena in Asian asset markets led to fears of a deflationary spiral and a consequent fall in the price of commodities like oil, gas and gold, which form the bulk of Russia's foreign earnings. The absence of tax revenues means that in effect the country simply ran out of money to pay the interest on its mountain of debt.

In this situation, the Kiryenko government, supported by radical reformers like Nemtsov and Anatoli Chubais was preparing drastic action against the oligarchs' myriad business interests, particularly in the banking sector. It was also an acute shortage of revenue that led the Kiryenko government effectively to devalue the rouble and introduce a rescheduling of debt that amounted to a default. Undertaking to pay back \$40 billion of dollar-denominated debt in roubles was a move that caused western bankers and the oligarchs themselves to spit blood. A further \$150 billion of short-term, high-interest bonds are also to be rescheduled, a move that is bound to produce multiple bankruptcies in the Russian banking system, the bulk of which is

owned by the oligarchs themselves.

Against this *economic* and *financial* background, it is clear why the oligarchs opted for a make-or-break *political* solution to their dilemma. As they saw it, the choice was between allowing the Kiryenko government to inflict major, perhaps terminal damage on their banking interests through the seizure assets and the demand for payment of billions of roubles in back taxes; or bringing in a government that would leave their interests intact while printing its way out of trouble. The flawed economic logic of this approach is easy enough to see, but desperate problems call forth desperate remedies. According to some reports, it was the leading oligarch Boris Berezovsky who brokered a deal with Yeltsin's officials. Whether Yeltsin knew what he was doing when he signed the decree sacking the entire Kiryenko administration on August 23 is open to question.

Economically, of course, this move was sheer madness. Its first and definitive political outcome has been to destroy the Yeltsin presidency's dwindling credibility. Politically he is already a stinking corpse, but even as a cadaver he can still do the oligarchs one final favour. Yeltsin must occupy the presidential throne for a little longer, while they desperately try to stitch together a political deal that will shift the centre of gravity of state power away from the presidency and towards the prime minister and government. They have made Yeltsin an offer he cannot refuse, in return for which this arch-traitor to the Soviet 'motherland' and agent of imperialism will get a peaceful retirement in which to enjoy an immense, criminally acquired fortune. As a bonus, there will be a sackful of immunities to protect him from the legal consequences of his political corruption.

The choice of Viktor Chernomyrdin as prime minister designate was entirely predictable. As a former 'red director' and later chief executive of Gazprom, the huge gas monopoly, he managed effortlessly to transform himself from a 'communist' apparatchik to a liberal free marketeer, forming his own party called Our Home is Russia. His personal fortune is considerable and, as a kind of bridge between the old and new regimes, he was (and to a certain extent still is) regarded by western politicians and other foreigners as a safe pair of hands. At home, however, his five-year premiership is seen as a lamentable saga of futile dithering on economic reform, a good many questionable privatisation deals involving old *nomenklatura* buddies, and a

proliferation of criminality in general. Significantly, shares in Gazprom were practically the only equities to rise on the day after Chernomyrdin's nomination. In a telling gesture, speculators assumed that someone as well known for cronyism as he is would use his new position to ensure that Gazprom was given favoured treatment under the new regime.

From our perspective, the imperialists' initial reaction to the Russian crisis has been both instructive and encouraging - mainly because the big powers and global institutions have found it impossible to disguise their impotence and despair in the face of a situation for which they have no answers. Clinton, Blair, various G7 ministers and the IMF have issued a salvo of more or less identical statements: 'If Russia continues on the path of reform', is the message, 'then we will help'. But on no account should Russia contemplate a return to a command economy.

As all these ladies and gentlemen are perfectly aware, what 'reform' has actually amounted to in Russia is nothing more than organised crime. A small army of thieves and swindlers have been 'reforming' the Russian economy for more than *seven* years now, and the net result has been the impoverishment and degradation of every (non-criminal) stratum in Russian society. Well over \$50 billion in IMF funding is unaccounted for and clearly further charity of this kind would amount to throwing good money after bad.

The CPRF's decision to block Chernomyrdin's confirmation as prime minister, effectively leaving Russia without a government, has raised the political stakes and deprived the Clinton-Yeltsin summit in Moscow of any meaningful purpose - "Lame duck meets dead duck", as one of the headline writers put it. On past form, the CPRF will try to extract the maximum tactical advantage before caving in.

Whatever short-term deal is agreed, there is no way out for Russia. The transition to western capitalism under a bourgeois democracy is impossible, while nobody - not even the CPRF - is advocating a return to Soviet-style 'socialism'. The working class has no voice, no political organisation. As the country descends into chaos, a military takeover looks more and more possible.

Russia's crisis has further added to the global instability of capital, with world markets in turmoil. It is no longer a question of if, but when the recession will hit home ●

Viktor Melor

# Party notes

## The Party 'line'

There has been a little flutter of controversy around the question of a supposed change of the Communist Party's 'line' on the nature of the ex-Soviet Union. Comrade Steve Riley from Manchester CP was featured in *Weekly Worker* of July 30 expressing concern that "the ongoing work of one comrade [is changing into] the perceived wisdom of the majority". Anxious to leave no piece of mud unflung, the recent reply from Mary Ward to my July 23 polemic against her and Nick Clarke thus highlights - idiotically - the "recent changes in the organisation's 'line' on the Soviet Union [which] must have left at least some comrades wondering when and where they had voted for a change" (*Reply to Mark Fischer* August 20).

We will soon be reproducing comrade Ward's document in full along with a reply, but I know all CPGB members will agree with me that we can afford to wave away such mischievous comments from such bruised individuals with contempt. The majority opinion of this organisation is indeed changing on the USSR. But the idea that this process will be punctuated by votes on theory, or indeed that the last 'line' - or rather, majority viewpoint - of Party member's was decided by a show of hands is either profoundly ignorant or simply dishonest.

Indeed, our approach to 'Party lines' is organically linked to our understanding of the 'non-confessional' nature of the revolutionary Party of the working class. The term 'line' is much misused on the left, but if it is to mean anything at all its basic premise must be *action*. In a specific political context, faced with concrete *political* tasks, the Party will adopt a line of march, a practical approach on what to *do* next. In united action decided on by the Party - be it a picket line, a demonstration or the insurrection itself - not one word of discord or criticism can be permitted. A dissenting minority must strictly subordinate itself to the Party majority and fulfil all tasks in a disciplined way.

The idea that this approach has anything in common with having a 'line' on questions such as the nature of the USSR, the Kronstadt rebellion or - as in the case of the Socialist Workers Party - the precise character of the transition from ape to human, is indicative of hopeless sectarianism.

Take Workers Power's recently changed 'line' on the USSR. We commented on its method, prompting an exchange in the pages of this paper (see *Weekly Worker* February 26, March 5 and April 2). Essentially, after a clandestine "five-year debate" inside WP and its international co-thinkers, readers of the organisation's *Trotskyist International* had a new world view *announced* to them in the January-June issue. This revelatory article informed us that "under the impact of events in eastern Europe" from 1989 onwards, "some members of the former majority joined the old minority" after the debate "broke out anew in 1993". Fascinating.

But what of the *content* of the debate - by what process of logical development did the minority become a majority, exactly how and why did people change their minds? All of this is a matter of *conspiracy*. What has become the minority view gently subsides into the depths, only to publicly exist now in fond memory. Workers Power has a new *binding* 'line' on the nature of the eastern European states after World War II. The minority viewpoint has no opportunity - trussed up as they are by ideological 'discipline' - to criticise the views of the majority *openly*, to learn from and critically engage with other advanced ideas in the movement. Unless, of course, the 50 or so individuals fortuitously thrown together in today's WP have an absolute and total *monopoly* of all advanced thinking on the USSR. And if this is indeed the case, WP comrades should perhaps inform us from what far-off star system they have come and what fate they have in mind for the human race when they take over our world.

This approach to theory bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the Stalinist practice of imposing Party 'lines' in other fields of scientific thought. Normally it is justified by pointing to the obvious - that today's groups are more like factions of a Party rather than Party formations. Therefore, the argument goes, they must be cohered by a much higher degree of theoretical and political homogeneity. Yet where is the link between today's internecine practice of the revolutionary left and the future united Party? Is their current work imbued with a spirit of Partyism? Or is it what it looks like - narrow manoeuvring on a political and theoretical level to further the interests of particular sects organised around this or that ideological shibboleth to justify their separate existence?

Without exhaustively scouring the material from all Party conferences and aggregates, I think I am correct in saying that the only membership vote we have ever taken on the USSR was to *study* it. Whatever conditional and partial categories the Party majority coheres around during the course of this important work will not be a Party 'line' or anything like it. We are not in business to build just another sect. We take the fight for scientific ideas rather more seriously. ●

**Mark Fischer**  
national organiser

## Genuine article

In terms of trying to have one's cake and eat it, the article by Don Preston ('Criticism of the past' *Weekly Worker* August 20) really goes to ridiculous lengths.

As part of the debate on the former Soviet bloc that has recently begun in the *Weekly Worker*, comrade Preston polemicalises against the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's allegedly "pseudo-third camp" position which "championed the cause of Polish Solidarnosc, Thatcher and Reagan's favourite 'trade union'", and sagely concludes: "We have seen where Solidarnosc's *real* nationalism led an independent Poland - to capitalism and Nato." Making his views on this clear, comrade Preston states that Arthur Scargill was "undoubtedly correct" to label Polish Solidarnosc as being "anti-socialist".

Yet earlier, comrade Preston attacks "dogma-encrusted Trotskyists who refuse to entertain the notion, as a matter of faith, that the USSR was an exploitative formation - on the block-headed grounds that to admit such a self-evident truth immediately catapults you into the arms of the blackest counterrevolution", and of course cites myself as a prime example.

If this is 'block-headedness', then I plead guilty. However, it is not at all. For if Arthur Scargill was "undoubtedly correct" to label Solidarnosc as "anti-socialist" - in other words as counterrevolutionary - then the question immediately arises: counterrevolutionary in relation to what? Counterrevolution, in general, is the opposite of revolution, and there must be something in some way progressive for it to overthrow.

If the eastern bloc states were exploitative class societies, that were in no sense an advance on capitalism, then it is *utterly irrelevant* that the Polish workers' movement was influenced by Polish nationalism and in some cases anti-semitism, in deciding whether or not to support them against the state of their "exploitative" ruling class or not.

The British workers' movement is strongly influenced by 'left' forms of British nationalism and there are elements of it who are to varying degrees influenced by racism. However, in the event of a frontal confrontation of the British workers' movement with the forces of the bourgeois state, it would be obligatory for communists to use every avenue to secure the victory of the working class, despite its reactionary leadership. If Poland (and the rest of the Warsaw Pact bloc) were exploitative class societies, then there could be no different criteria applied to such organisations as Polish Solidarnosc.

Comrade Preston still thinks that Polish Solidarnosc was counterrevolutionary, but at the same time he thinks that the former Soviet bloc was equally as bad as capitalism. This is a ridiculous, contradictory position, that is untenable and will only bring ridicule, not only from the likes of myself, but also from the likes of comrades Osborne, Matgama, etc. They are not "pseudo-third campist" at all. They are the genuine article. If comrade Preston does not like their embrace of reactionary anti-Soviet forces, he should stop trying to appropriate their theories. Conversely, if he wants to appropriate their theories, he will have to put up with their reactionary bedfellows.

**Ian Donovan**

*Revolution and Truth*

## No contradiction

I read with great interest Steve Riley's recent short article on the former USSR (*Weekly Worker* July 30). He writes: "The Soviet Union on the world stage intervened to suppress uprisings yet inspired the world communist movement for half a century."

Actually there is no contradiction in this dichotomy. The Soviet bureaucracy considered that the uprisings in western Europe over this period were not so pregnant with revolution after all - certainly not worth risking military attack by England and France and later nuclear attack from the

USA. On the other hand, Stalin indeed signed an agreement with Churchill sacrificing Greece to capitalism, but gained instead Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Albania and East Germany for the 'socialist camp'.

Later, outside Europe, the bureaucracy, when it came to the crunch against the risk of nuclear attack, *did* agree to a communist takeover of China, North Korea and Laos. Cambodia, of course, was bombed 'into the stone age' by the USA.

The main area of controversy depends on whether or not there were potential or actual pre-revolutionary situations in western Europe throughout this period. In retrospect, it now seems politically naive to postulate any situation in western Europe after 1933 as 'pre-revolutionary' after the main German working class movement had been annihilated by fascism. Later from 1939 to 1945, the German army occupied the whole of Europe and annihilated the west European working class movements. Then, from 1945 to 1990, came the final blow. West European working class insurrections could unleash nuclear bomb attacks on themselves and on the USSR.

There are many topics to discuss and little time to reach a well balanced, dialectical consensus. Otherwise, this problem will continue to bedevil the future cooperation of former Stalinists, Trotskyists, Schachtmanites and others in Socialist Alliances and other campaigns.

**Alf Packter**

Harrow

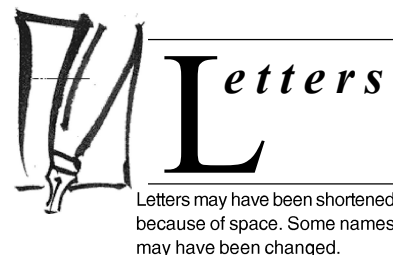
## Peverse

Bob Paul's letter ('Setting our own agenda' *Weekly Worker* August 27) defending the CPGB policy of calling for the abolition of the age of consent is entirely unconvincing. He fails to explain why the demand for adults to have the right to have sex with children without state interference is in the interests of the working class and part of the process of the self-formation of the working class into a ruling class. Indeed, when the essence of the matter is so expressed, the anti-human, stupid and ridiculous nature of the demand becomes apparent. If MI5 had the ability to insert a demand into the communist programme in order to discredit us in front of the working class, the demand to abolish the age of consent would be high on its list.

Is the demand to abolish the age of consent being advanced or supported by young people who are being denied a sexual life by the capitalist state? I think not. There is a case for the age of consent to be lowered to remove state interference with sexual activity between young people. The precise details of such a change are open to discussion, but the guiding aim should be to allow young people to control and develop their own sexual life while providing them with protection against sexual exploitation by adults. But is there any evidence to suggest that the state is actively intervening to stop 14-year olds having sex with each other? Again I think not.

Of course it is obvious to any communist and even any consistent democrat that the age of consent should be equal for homosexuals and heterosexuals, and the present difference is a form of gay oppression which we must combat.

Bob Paul does not seem to want to face up to the reality that there exists a group of people, commonly designated paedophiles, who obsessively desire to have sex with pre-pubescent children. Is our answer to this problem, however much its prevalence is exaggerated by the bourgeoisie media, simply to state that the state has no role to play in protecting children from such abuse, indeed even campaign (through "protest meetings, strikes and councils of action", it would seem) for the state to keep its nose out, as it should "not be allowed to set a political agenda which determines who should sleep with whom"? Maybe we should also oppose intervention by the state to protect children who are physically abused by adults



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

on the grounds that we should not allow it to set a political agenda which determines who assaults whom? Comrade, what is the weather like on your planet? The call for the abolition of the age of consent is in reality libertarian, anti-working class, anti-communist rubbish.

To pose the question concretely, if a known paedophile moves into an area, do we say there should be no legal impediment to his perverse activities or do we demand that the state provide resources to help him overcome his problem while ensuring the children of the area are safe from his attention?

**Sandy Johnstone**

Glasgow

## Quite correct

In response to Ann Murphy's article ('The fantasy world of Dave Craig' *Weekly Worker* August 27) the Revolutionary Democratic Group wants to make its position very clear. The RDG fully supports the open letter (July 14) from the Campaign for a Federal Republic to the Socialist Party executive committee. (The Campaign is one of the affiliated organisations of the Scottish Socialist Alliance.)

The importance of the demand for a federal republic as against the nationalist call for Scottish independence is not about the numbers game. It is about politics. In terms of numbers, size and strength, Scottish Militant Labour with its call for Scottish independence is vastly more important than the tiny Campaign. In terms of fighting for a federal republic, the Campaign is more important.

The Campaign is correct to publicly oppose the move towards a Scottish Socialist Party and warn that this move is a fundamental mistake which can do long-term damage to the working class. The Campaign is quite correct to state that they might not join the new party if it is formed.

The Campaign is quite correct to call on the SSA to pursue an alternative course of action - namely, to discuss with all-British or all-UK organisations how to form, merge or join an all-British (UK) organisation or party. This discussion should obviously include the Socialist Party, Socialist Labour Party and SWP. No doubt this is not intended to be an exclusive list. For obvious reasons, the Socialist Party is the first door that the Campaign should knock on.

The Campaign is quite correct to write directly to the SP executive and raise these matters. The SP executive is the most important political factor in how this whole disaster is played out. The Campaign is quite right to ask the Socialist Party to publish its letter and a longer explanation of its views on the national question and also to publish the views of other affiliated organisations. It is important that the rank and file of the Socialist Party should be as fully informed of the different positions as possible.

To point to the correct and politically necessary course of action is not the same as pointing to what is likely. The SP executive committee did discuss the letter and decided to do nothing at present. This is hardly a surprise to members of the Campaign or the RDG. It is hardly a surprise to the readers of *Weekly Worker*. It was not a surprise to Ann Murphy either. But at least we should thank her for telling us what we already know.

We call on the *Weekly Worker* to give full support to the open letter, by publishing it as soon as possible. Of course we welcome constructive criticism. But we would urge you not to let your obvious anger and frustration with your ex-members cloud your judgement. Support or critically support the letter. To do otherwise is to give aid and comfort to the forces of petty bourgeois left national socialism.

**Revolutionary Democratic Group**  
**Organising Committee**

From **The Call**, paper of the  
British Socialist Party,  
September 5 1918

## The outrage in Moscow

The dastardly attempt on the life of Lenin is really worthy of the Herostrates who have undertaken to pull down the magnificent rising structure of the first socialist commonwealth.

They are not reactionary monarchists or Cadet fanatics concerned about the landlords' property or the financiers' capital. Oh dear, no! They are 'Socialist Revolutionaries', both socialists and revolutionaries, to whom the patient and slow organising work of the Marxist social democrats was in the past something like anathema maranatha.

Now they are impatient to destroy the very foundation of the growing socialist temple. Eight weeks ago they assassinated the German ambassador in order that the Germans might come and establish a Skoropadsky regime in Russia. As no such development ensued from this heroic deed, and the accompanying revolt ended in complete fiasco, the hand of a new Charlotte Corday rose to strike down the head of the socialist commonwealth, our great revolutionary leader, greater than Marat, greater than all the revolutionaries of the past, Lenin, the man for whom even the bitterest bourgeois enemy has the greatest respect.

The name of the perpetrator of this outrage will go down in the history of all future ages as that of the greatest and blackest traitress to the cause of the people on record. But just as the individual assassination of the tsars and their myrmidons in the past proved futile as a means of bringing about the collapse of the tsarist system, so will the present act of terror fail in its intentions. Systems are social products independent of individuals, as Marxists always used to argue with the Socialist Revolutionaries (so-called), and the soviet system has come to stay, whatever happens to individuals, however great.

This is a truth which not only the Socialist Revolutionaries, but also the Germans and the Austrians, will learn to their cost, and our indignation is prompted not by fears for the ultimate fate of the socialist commonwealth of Russia, but by our love for, and admiration of, the great revolutionary genius whom we have nearly lost in the midst of his fruitful work.

We send our heartfelt sympathy to Lenin and his wife, and to the labouring people of Russia in general ●

# 1918

Russian Revolution  
this week 80 years ago

# New attack on democracy

Taking advantage of the universal revulsion at the Omagh bomb, Tony Blair has proposed yet more wide-ranging and authoritarian laws. The word of a "senior police officer" will be sufficient to convict a person of membership of a proscribed organisation. Refusal to answer questions or disclose "relevant information" can now be taken as proof of guilt. All this amounts to internment by another name.

Most seriously of all for the international struggle against imperialism, refugees from oppressive dictatorships will no longer be able to carry on political struggle from within the UK without the risk of being accused of terrorist conspiracies. Marx would have been arrested in London under such a law. The distinction between dissent and so-called terrorism is being blurred. Hundreds of MI5 officers made technically redundant by the outbreak of peace in Ireland will find new work targeting émigré groups.

In the 1970s mass opposition to British rule in the Six Counties made draconian legislation counterproductive, boosting support for and recruitment to the IRA. The government was compelled to abandon internment. This is an important lesson for revolutionaries - only mass working class resistance can protect our vital interests, not abstract appeals to justice and bourgeois law. As Marx pointed out, bourgeois right is purely formal. Such political and civil rights that the capitalist state has been forced or has seen fit to grant us for its own purposes, it will not hesitate to take back when conditions change - unless the working class organises itself to fight back.

In contrast to 1971, Blair calculates that in the current post-revolutionary situation in Ireland repressive measures against 'terrorists' will be widely accepted. His statement last week that he would *not* send in the SAS against the Real IRA shows that he still wants to be seen to act within the bounds of bourgeois legality. That is why parliament has been recalled during the summer recess to rubber-stamp the



Omagh - excuse  
for draconian laws

new laws. Once in place, they are ready for use not only against Irish republicans, but if needs be the working class.

In the days since Blair's statement announcing the new legislation, tentative voices have been raised questioning the wisdom of rushing through such laws. First the bourgeois press, then the Sinn Féin leadership, and now a motley collection of Labour backbenchers and liberal peers have expressed doubts, fearing that such measures may discredit the peace process. Inevitably there will be embarrassing miscarriages of justice.

The nature and extent of the protests made by Adams and McGuinness is dictated by their need to balance two conflicting aims. They want to stay in line with moderate opinion and avoid damaging their own political ambitions for power within the new Stormont government. On the other hand they want to avoid

strengthening any opposition to the peace process within and around their own ranks. Blair can afford to ignore their misgivings. As to his opponents in parliament, in a gesture of appeasement Blair has now made a few token concessions which change nothing in the substance of his new police powers. For example, they must be renewed annually in parliament - easily achieved using a three-line whip on ambitious Labourites. The new laws will, according to Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam, be "compatible" with the European Convention on Human Rights - which British governments have had no compunction about ignoring in the past.

During the cold war we were constantly told that we lived in the 'free world', where, in contrast to the USSR, human rights, seen as natural and universal, were honoured. The need to demonise socialism is no longer such an imperative. The emphasis on

'freedom' is less essential. Indeed the ruling class whips up fear of crime and terrorism to make the British people more than willing to discard the freedoms they were once taught to hold so dear. Shopping centres and railway stations are full of surveillance cameras watching our every movement. Phone numbers are provided to enable neighbours to denounce benefit 'cheats' to the authorities. Trade union rights, destroyed by the Tories, are not restored by New Labour. The unemployed must obey ever more stringent conditions to qualify for the derisory 'job seekers' allowance. We are slowly being conditioned to accept universal ID cards.

Blair's new laws seem to imply that a fair trial is a luxury the state can no longer afford. In this connection, the home office is now viewing with approval suggestions from the judiciary that a defendant's criminal convictions should be made known to the jury in the course of criminal trials.

During the long boom, and during the current period of working class passivity and demoralisation, capitalism in Britain has been secure enough not to resort to the censorship of the press and bans on public meetings that less firmly entrenched capitalist regimes, such as the one Marx laboured under in Germany, required. The liberalism of modern capitalism has been a sign of its strength. It knows that its ideas are the ruling ideas and are spontaneously generated in the minds of the working class.

Even in periods of social peace, bourgeois political rights exist mainly for the benefit of the capitalists themselves, serving to safeguard according to Marx their "need and private interest, the conservation of their property and egoistic person". Nevertheless we fight to defend and extend these rights, insisting on the social and economic rights we need to live a fully human life ●

Mary Godwin

## action

### ■ CPGB seminars

**London - September 6** - 'The SUCR episode', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* as a study guide.  
For more details call 0181-459 7146.

**Manchester: September 14** - 'The process of exchange, money, the circulation of commodities' in the series on Karl Marx's *Capital*  
For details, phone 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.

### ■ Hillingdon hospital workers fight on

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.

### ■ 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.

### ■ Southwark Socialist Alliance

Public meeting on 'The fight against poverty pay in the NHS'.  
Horseshoe pub, Melior Place, Snowfields (at the back of Guy's Hospital, Bermondsey. 7-30pm, September 8.  
Speakers: Ian Driver (former Southwark socialist councillor), Glenn Kelly (national secretary, Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Union).

### ■ Greenwich Socialist Alliance

Relaunch meeting - 'Which way for socialists?'  
September 28, 7.30pm, Charlton

House, Charlton Road, London SE7.

### ■ Lambeth Socialist Alliance and Lambeth Trades Council

Public meeting - 'Stop tube privatisation'  
Bob Crow - deputy secretary, RMT; Cynthia Hay - Capital Transport Campaign  
September 22 - 8pm, Bread and Roses pub, 68 Clapham Manor Street, London SW4.

### ■ Scottish Socialist Alliance

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

### ■ 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.

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## Network of Socialist Alliances launch

# Act in haste,

**P**ete McLaren, of the unelected Network of Socialist Alliances Liaison Group, makes the point that the "launch of any new political organisation necessarily involves a period of debating and establishing principles and structures" (*The All Red and Green* autumn 1998). He is quite right. An honest airing of different views on methods and perspectives, along with the most careful consideration of structures, is vital to the success of our common project. If we act in haste we certainly will repent at leisure.

However, the agenda proposed by the John Nicholson-Dave Nellist-Pete McLaren-Dave Church Liaison Group for the launch conference of the Network is, to say the least, unsatisfactory. Between comrade Nicholson's opening at 10am and the close at 4pm there is only the most minimal space allotted for discussion (and even that relies on things starting on time). 'Star' speakers have been given the bulk of time available. Even then co-ordination and coherence is woefully lacking. They will be talking on all manner of unrelated subjects - 'Our future aims, methods and perspectives', 'The importance of the green dimension', 'Our structure', 'Low pay' and 'Europe'. The top dominates. Discussion below, from the actual political forces that make up the Socialist Alliances on the ground, is to be kept to soundbite moments by atomised individuals (as if most comrades are not members of and loyal to this or that group). For example, though the Communist Party of Great Britain has presented an alternative set of draft rules, we have not been approached to provide an authoritative speaker who can explain and answer questions about our proposals.

When it comes to the crucial question of structure, discussion is squeezed into the morning session. And that along with two other items and a coffee break! Including time that must be put aside for voting on amendments, etc, that gives the launch conference of the Network something like 30 minutes to thrash things out and come to a binding agreement (no matter how 'provisional').

New Labour might operate in such an outrageously undemocratic manner. Being a clever politician though, Tony Blair goes to great lengths to give the appearance of consultation. Arthur Scargill would however certainly feel no compunction about openly imposing such farcical limits on his Socialist Labour Party. And this labour king has a 3,000 bloc vote in his back pocket.

But the Socialist Alliances are a new, and hopefully genuinely democratic, political formation. They are moreover made up of very diverse elements and traditions. History has separated us for many decades. The suggestion that left social democrats, socialists, Trotskyites, communists, green socialists, etc can be united under the umbrella of one organisation, after we have been given half an hour between the lot of us to debate and decide, is as ludicrous as it is insulting. The agenda must be changed.

Frankly instead of dumbly listening to Unison's Jean Thorpe on low pay or Pat Byrne on the greens we should have a full, no-holds-barred debate *between our real forces* on methods, perspectives and structure. The fact that the Liaison Group is beginning in such an insensitive, top-down and bureaucratic fashion bodes ill. This is not the way to build trust, overcome division and foster unity in action.

If the Liaison Group's proposed 'Opening statement' and associated draft structure - ie, programme and rules - was soundly based on working class socialism, inclusive democ-

racy and organisational flexibility, there would still be a great deal of work to be done. The devil is in the detail. Regrettably that is not the case however. What the Liaison Group has drawn up is politically flawed, not to say organisationally anarcho-bureaucratic (see p6 of *Weekly Worker*).

Let us begin with politics. Evidently the Liaison Group owes more to Proudhon than Marx, more to the abstract than the concrete, more to the green than the red. Nowhere in the 'Opening statement' do we find a positive reference to the term 'socialism'. All we are told is that Labour has abandoned "whatever aspiration" it had toward 'socialism'. 'Socialism' is also missing from the proposed 'aims'. The sole mention of socialism in the Liaison Group's rules/programme is a meaningless and passing phrase contained in the 'membership' section of the draft structure. "The Network is politically pluralistic and encourages all individuals, organisations and groups to participate fully in our vision of a socialist society and our way of working in an alliance."

What sort of society does the Liaison Group envisage? The 'Opening statement' gushingly promotes fairness, social justice and equality. It declares that society should be "fair and truly sustainable". No society, it ought to be stressed, has proclaimed itself unsustainable or under the protection of injustice. Elsewhere, in the same abstract spirit, we are told that capitalism is to be replaced "with a popular republic, based on democratic ownership and control of the key sectors of the economy, a system based on social justice and ecological sustainability". Later in the 'aims' this society is defined as incorporating "participative and accountable" democracy, the "maximum freedom", the "full return of all wealth generated" for the people, the "promotion of peace, nationally and internationally".

The Liaison Group also wants to guarantee and "where necessary" restore "such biological diversity as is essential to the viability of both global and local ecosystems." Does that require the depopulation of London and allowing the Thames to flood low lying areas in the name of restoring the "local ecosystem" to its supposed pristine glory? Surely people come first for socialists, not some imaginary and reactionary concept of 'nature'.

The Liaison Group is committed to a half-baked ethical or sentimental socialism. There are countless banal platitudes about 'justice', 'fairness', 'freedom' and 'ecological sustainability'. But the class struggle is absent. Indeed both the term and the concept of the working class has been exorcised. And as Karl Marx once observed: "Where the class struggle is pushed to the side as an unpleasant, 'crude' phenomenon, nothing remains as the basis of socialism but 'true love of the people' and empty phrases about 'justice'" (K Marx *MESW*, Moscow 1975, Vol 3, p92). In the realm of reality, of course, socialism without the *rule of the working class* can only exist as its opposite: eg, Stalin's USSR, Attlee's Britain, Pol Pot's Kampuchea, Olaf Palme's Sweden.

In contrast to the Liaison Group, the CPGB's proposals make it absolutely clear that the Network of So-

cialist Alliance is an alliance of *socialists*. Not all greens or direct action people are socialists. Some are liberals. Others are conservative. As a *movement* the greens contain red-green critical-utopians who are sympathetic to socialism, alongside deep-green anti-socialists and even overt fascists: eg, David Icke, the Third Wave, etc. Common to them all however is a neo-Malthusianism that sees human beings as the problem. For example the Green Party is programmatically committed to reducing the population of Britain by something like 20 million. (Would that necessitate immigration controls to keep in check that 'sustainable' level?)

Needless to say, the CPGB is not opposed to the affiliation of green organisations and individuals who declare themselves socialists. Indeed such affiliations are to be positively welcomed. But it does not follow that the CPGB is committed to a red-green alliance. We envisage a united front of socialists. Not, it should be stressed, on some lowest common denominator basis. Nor in order to end polemical exchanges. The CPGB fights for the highest organisational and political unity. That necessarily requires constant political debate, criticism and self-criticism.

The CPGB draft straightforwardly and scientifically defines socialism. It is democratic. It is "conquered by the working class". It is international. However, socialism is not something to be piously preached at rallies, conferences and meetings. It is the result of the class struggle for democracy in the here and now: ie, under capitalism. That is why the Network should be committed not to airy phrases about 'justice' and 'equality', but the "fight for the maximum democracy under existing social conditions". Specifically the abolition of the monarchy, the House of Lords and all constitutional privileges, the unity of Ireland, the right of Scotland and Wales to self-determination within a federal republic.

Where the politics of the Liaison Group are daft, the comrades' proposals for the Network's structure are perverse to the point of being dangerous. There is every possibility that in practice they would fail to achieve the convergence of participating individuals and organisations that is stated as the desired objective. Quite the reverse.

The Liaison Group makes much of its commitment to bringing about a "balance" between "smaller groups and individuals" and "larger organisations". The former should be given "sufficient influence," and the impos-

ing of policy on "local alliances, national organisations and individuals" needs to be avoided. Later, under the title of 'structure', this supposed inclusiveness is elaborated.

The Network "must reflect and encourage concrete liaison between *all* socialist, green, direct action and other radical groups and individuals". The Network "should be a *confederation* of local alliances ... with safeguards to ensure a balance is struck so that smaller groups and individuals have sufficient representation alongside larger organisations, alliances and parties with guaranteed rights for individuals and minorities". Superficially very worthy and laudable. It is strange then that the Liaison Group now objects to "automatic representation on affiliation", all the while citing the necessity for an organisation "which is dispersed and is not hierarchical whilst being representative of the diverse nature of opinion within the Network".

So what is being proposed by the comrades? The Network is not actually to be a "confederation" of political groups, parties, etc, and socialist alliances. It is to be a hybrid party, in essence made up of individuals who might or might not be members of various other organisations or local alliances. Presumably the supreme body of the Network is to be the annual conference. In terms of voting it will consist entirely of individual members. Obviously this will introduce a strong geographical imbalance. Those living near the conference will find it easy to attend. Those living far away will not. That is why a system of elected delegates is far more democratic. The CPGB proposes a heavy bias towards delegates from local socialist alliances, while ensuring that all political groups have a voice.

The Liaison Group's annual or special conference can change the structure of the Network ... "provided such a resolution receives two-thirds of the votes at such a meeting". Why not a simple majority? That is what the CPGB wants. Their conference also elects a 15-strong Liaison Committee. Affiliated organisations and socialist alliances "make nominations" - no more. Five officers are to be directly elected. Like the rest for a one-year fixed term (they are not removable or replaceable). The other 10 are to be elected via a weird and unworkable system of electoral colleges. Here the proposals descend into farce.

Five places are for "local Alliances" ('organisation', point 2). Yet we have been told under 'structure' that these

five places are to be "elected by local Alliances" ... remember, this at a conference consisting entirely of individual members of the Network. The same unthought-out mix-up is applied to "national organisations and parties". Their three places on the Liaison Committee are to be "elected by national organisations and parties" ... this when national organisations and parties as such are unrepresented. We now come to the two places "directly for individuals". They will, yes, be "elected by ballot of individual members". How do they differ from other individuals who are also elected by a ballot of individual members? The Liaison Group implies that with these two places the mass of individuals are thereby represented. Such a preposterous notion is an insult to the intelligence. This is the sort of rubbish peddled in the past by anarchists like Bakunin and today by Thatcher, Blair and the free-market right. Apart from the rich, individuals can only be empowered through subordinating themselves to collective organisation. For socialists that should be ABC.

The Liaison Group system is not only a nightmare - it is bureaucratic in the extreme. And far from guaranteeing minority rights and representation for small groups, the opposite is the case. What we have before us is an annual poll whereby any political bloc that can muster or negotiate, through some backroom deal, 51% of the votes of those who turn out or are bussed in for the day can dominate the whole Network. Such a political bloc chooses all five officers. It chooses all five places for local Socialist Alliances, the three for national political organisations and parties and the two other individuals. Hypothetically a 49% minority, consisting of bigger or smaller groups and organisations and individuals is thereby excluded. The 51% majority can then go on to boost itself by coopting five more individuals according to its whim to "ensure effective liaison" with Socialist Alliances in Scotland and Wales, direct action campaigns, the green-left, etc.

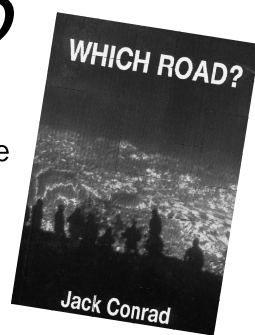
The Liaison Group makes matters worse by inserting a clause which bureaucratically limits the influence of political organisations. No one political organisation "shall have more than 30%" of the Liaison Committee "or of any other elected body *within* the Network". Furthermore it is laid down that "the organisations as a whole shall not have more than 50%" on *any* committee.

A number of questions immediately arise. Is the Liaison Group proposing that affiliated socialist alliances operate according to this system? If so it is a monstrous imposition. Roughly speaking, the London Socialist Alliance steering committee is attended by delegates representing half a dozen political groups and a similar number of local Alliances. Apart from one person I can think of they are all in political parties or groups. Should we turn them away? The logic is that meetings could only proceed with two comrades present ... even that would violate the letter of what is being put forward by the Liaison Group. In a meeting of two 50% would come from one political organisation. The idea is a pure nonsense.

As to the Network itself, the system is totally undemocratic, not to say

## Which road?

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



# repent at leisure

deranged. Voters in any democratic system must be free to elect whomsoever they wish. How would the Liaison Group's dystopia be made to work in practice? Would successful candidates be declared null and void and be turfed out because they took the quota of political organisations above 50%? Who decides? Would the list of nominations be policed by the incumbent Liaison Committee? Is that why under 'membership', clause 5, there is the demand that membership of "groups and organisations, whether affiliates or not" must be declared "on application/renewal of membership of the Network"? The whole approach stinks. Then there is the loss of talent. Surely there is a general tendency for those who are organised to be more politically advanced, dedicated, experienced and - crucially - more representative. Either way, there should be free elections.

Obviously the Nicholson-Nellist McLaren-Church Liaison Group is haunted by the presence and proposals of the CPGB. Our draft rules stand firmly for all-embracing democracy and against exclusion. The aim is to formalise the structures of the Network along the lines of the flexible, combative and inclusive democracy practised by the soviets - or workers' councils - during and immediately after the Russian Revolution of 1917. John Reed, the celebrated US communist, rightly described the soviets as "the most perfect organs of working class representation". There might be no revolutionary situation in Britain. Nevertheless the system of *elected delegates and recallability* can serve the Network of Socialist Alliances admirably.

Every affiliated national political organisation should have the *right* to send one *instantly recallable* delegate. That would admit the proposed Scottish Socialist Party. Automatic representation would thus really reflect our range of affiliations and allow "concrete liaison" between socialist political groups across the whole of the UK state. However, the Network should fundamentally be based on local, city and regional Socialist Alliances. For every 100 members Socialist Alliances should be able to elect one - recallable - delegate. Where local Socialist Alliances fall below this figure they should group into regions (which, as Wales has already done, must be free to form if they so wish). Here in Socialist Alliances individuals can be really represented. Crucially the CPGB's plan allows for the speedy and full reflection of growth, priorities and changed political complexion. Representation comes with affiliation, not a benign vote by the whole. There would be no fixed terms. Hence a new affiliate would not wait in purgatory before finding whether or not this or that majority permits it to take a seat on our Liaison Committee. Cooption is something to be avoided at all cost. As a system for the Network it is prone to terrible abuse by a determined clique (a majority of one can be built into something totally unassailable using such a device).

Organisations, not lone individuals, must be central. Hence, if a comrade representing a political organisation on the Liaison Committee was assigned to another task they can be substituted, without fuss or bother,

by their organisation at a moment's notice. The same goes for a Socialist Alliance. If the political balance swings this or that way it will quickly find its reflection above. Likewise if there is growth. In other words no need for the cumbersome, tortuous and absurd annual Network elections as proposed by the Liaison Group - or the generosity of a 51% majority.

The CPGB plan applies the same flexible practice to officers. Treasurers, editors, chairs, coordinators, trade union organisers, etc should be elected when and where needed, not according to some snapshot popularity poll by an atomised membership. The mayoral or presidential system has no legitimate place in our tradition. It breeds arrogance. We need another Arthur Scargill like a hole in the head. Officers should be strictly accountable to their peers. They should be elected and replaceable by those whom they work alongside. If a comrade drops out because of illness, disillusionment or family pressures, another comrade can be elected. By the same measure those officers who fail or who become isolated from an emerging political majority can be replaced without humiliation or a full-blown special general meeting.

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

That brings me to the numerous clauses contained in the Liaison Group's document which insist as a matter of rule that membership of the Network is confined to those who "agree to join in working together in non-sectarian, cooperative and positive ways". Affiliation "assumes a commitment to an anti-sectarian and cooperative way of working, looking to build unity rather than set out a position to create discord, positively supporting and encouraging the notion of alliances and ensuring that any critical debates are conducted in a positive manner and without personal attack" ('membership', clause 4).

Such clauses are sinister. 'Sectarianism' is in the eye of the beholder. It is one of the most misused words in the lexicon of the workers' movement. It is flung about as an insult by the those on the right against every critic, every thinker, every group on the left. Sectarianism is wrongly equated with principle and lack of mass membership.

Sectarianism is actually putting the interests of the part above the whole. Something encapsulated in right social democracy - from its inception it promoted the interests of the labour bureaucracy above those of the working class. True, small left and revolutionary groups often exist as mere sects: ie, organisations whose sole reason for existence is the promotion of some special philosophical discovery or unique ideological world view. The SWP and the Socialist Party in England and Wales being the most prominent examples. The former in-

sists that members spout Tony Cliff's theory of the USSR as state capitalism. The other "small mass party" too allows no serious public difference: eg, over Scotland. But this sort of 'honest' sectarianism cannot be abolished by decree. It can only be overcome through joint work, open debate and the growth of trust. Ending sectarianism must be seen as a process, not an unconditional demand.

As to critical debate being "conducted in a positive manner and without personal attack", this is surely a euphemistic code which would allow a majority to purge or witch hunt any dissenting minority that is considered a nuisance or a threat. Is this article "positive"? It will, I sincerely trust, "create discord". And the author makes no apology for attacking individuals whose actions or ideas are considered wrong. Though when it comes to invective, compared to outstanding theorists like Marx, Engels and Lenin, we are politeness itself. Marx was famously described by opponents as an insult on legs. His ruthless method of exposing what is ridiculous by making it appear ridiculous is nevertheless the tradition we proudly stand in and seek to emulate. However, it is not a one-way affair. The *Weekly Worker* carries attacks on our political opponents and attacks on our leading writers by political opponents (as is their right, Toby Abse of the Independent Labour Network and Nick Long of the Socialist Democracy Group have recently railed against John Bridge in these pages).

Am I being paranoid with talk of purging and witch hunting? Hardly. Certain forces fear and loathe the CPGB simply because it engages, as a matter of principle, in open polemic. Unfortunately amongst them must be included comrade Nicholson, Liaison Group chair and coordinator of Greater Manchester SA.

Using "non-sectarianism" and the demand for "positive debate", he staged a democratic coup against inclusive democracy earlier this year. With an unholy coalition of Socialist Outlook, SPEW and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty he saw to it that the CPGB and its representative were thrown out of the Greater Manchester SA at the May 16 annual conference. So much for tolerance, uniting on the so-called 80% and guaranteeing the rights of minorities.

Comrade Nicholson ran the meeting in a fashion that is a cause for concern when it comes to September 5 in Rugby. Even Scargill would have blushed with shame. Originally billed as an all-day event, it was arbitrarily cut in half. Naturally the time he allowed himself was not reduced. Nor was that of the 'guest speaker' - Spencer Fitzgibbon of the Green Party. But no doubt, as intended, it did spell disaster for 'debates' on motions and amendments. They were limited to *one minute* per comrade. The clock was also used to prevent those standing for committee elections from addressing the meeting.

We say, never again. The Network must be defended and built as an inclusive project. Leave anti-communist witch hunting to Scargill and the SLP. Our strength is unity ●

**John Bridge**  
CPGB representative  
London Socialist Alliance  
ad-hoc steering committee

## Proposed rules 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 co-ordinate the electoral work of regional and local Socialist Alliances. It shall encourage the biggest possible socialist challenge in local, regional, national and European elections ●

## *An opening statement from the Liaison Group for the Network of Socialist Alliances in England: our future aims, methods, perspectives and structure*

# **A fair society - social justice and ecological sustainability**

**T**he Network of Socialist Alliances in England is working towards a fair and truly sustainable society. The transition to such a society will require fundamental social, political and cultural changes, which will only be possible through the involvement of a clear majority of people. It is essential to pursue change through a variety of avenues - in the community, in the workplace, in elections, through appropriate educational and campaigning efforts - according to the opportunities and expediencies of the time and the place. We therefore aspire to offer organisation, facilitation and encouragement, as appropriate to whatever efforts and developments are contributing to this process of change. We will also provide political support and solidarity to those who are involved in fighting back against environmental destruction and all other injustices of capitalism, here and across the world.

This is because we believe that there is an alternative to the global, unregulated free market and that the wealth exists in society to meet people's needs. We aim to galvanise mass opposition to the injustice, inequality and environmental damage which the free market causes and to replace it with a popular republic, based on democratic ownership and control of the key sectors of the economy, a system based on social justice and ecological sustainability.

We recognise that the current Labour leadership has dismantled whatever aspiration to socialism the party ever had. It has embraced the free market and removed all methods of reversing this new direction from within the party. In its failure to challenge current conservative free market ideology, Labour encourages a climate where far right and fascist views may fill the vacuum.

Opposition to this must therefore come from developing policies, campaigns and political representation which engages socialists with the environmental, direct action, anti-racist and industrial struggles, working together in genuinely new ways to put forward the alternatives to New Labour and its partnership with multinational business and media tycoons. Our intention is to do this by establishing a broad organisation, through the Network of Socialist Alliances, based on accepted principles and open to all individuals and organisations who support these and who agree to join in working together in non-sectarian, cooperative and positive ways.

### **■ Preamble**

The following represents an interim arrangement to allow individual socialists/greens and autonomous socialists/green/direct action organisations to work together towards agreed common objectives. It is recognised that whilst differences between the participating individuals and organisations exist, genuine trust is developing and there is a greater element of political agreement upon which activity can be based. Where appropriate, it is recognised that this could involve the adoption of appropriate agreed electoral arrangements.

.....  
 "a commitment to an anti-sectarian and cooperative way of working, looking to build unity rather than set out a position to create discord"  
 .....

It is the hope, intention and expectation that by developing unity through practical action, the individuals and groups involved will in the future move towards a closer and more permanent organisational structure. For the present, a balance needs to be struck so that small groups and individuals have sufficient influence alongside larger organisations, parties and alliances: a balance which encourages involvement and activity and at the same time avoids any imposition of policy on local Alliances, national groups or individuals. It is for this reason we are opposed to automatic representation on affiliation: our new way of working needs organisation which is dispersed and is not hierarchical whilst being representative of the diverse nature of opinion within the Network.

Any interim structure needs to be of an on going federal type which can be changed, with representation and affiliation encouraged from local and national groups, while individual membership can be built and individuals can feel part of any structure which is developed. In the longer term, groups and parties might dissolve themselves into one structure.

### **■ Name**

Network of Socialist Alliances in England

### **■ Aims**

Our aim is actively to help create a socially just and ecologically sustainable society. This is one in which social justice is defined as incorporating:

- The political organisation of society in the most open, democratic, participative and accountable manner practicable;
- The maximum freedom of the individual commensurate with the freedom of others;
- The ultimate abolition of all forms of economic exploitation and social oppression, in such ways as to secure for the people the full return of all wealth generated by industries and services of society, by means of common ownership and democratic control;
- The promotion of peace, nationally and internationally, and of a system of justice which gives defence from tyranny, prejudice and the abuse of power; and in which ecological sustainability is defined as incorporating:
- The promotion of only those so-

cial, economic and cultural structures which may be sustained indefinitely without causing any form of irreversible damage to the global ecosystem;

f. The guaranteeing and, where necessary, restoration of such biological diversity as is essential to the viability of both global and local ecosystems.

### **■ Our methods of working**

To achieve our ultimate aim, bearing in mind the prevailing political, economic and social conditions, imperatives and opportunities of any given time and location, we shall from time to time develop strategic and tactical objectives. These will be:

- attainable goals valuable in themselves
- stages towards greater change
- catalysts for the wider propagation and discussion of information, ideas and action commensurate with our aim.

In pursuit of our aim, or of any strategic or tactical objective conducive to this, we may assist, encourage, join or affiliate with any local, national or international organisations.

Our immediate objectives are to promote the formation of locally based radical Socialist/Green Alliances and to encourage constructive dialogue between these and other organisations and individuals, where this may help the pursuit of our aims or objectives.

### **■ Our perspectives**

We have developed as an organisation which recognises the variety of green and socialist views held by many different groups within the Network: indeed, we see this as a strength. We have agreed, as a first step towards a possible common political programme, to unite and campaign around the 80% of policies we can all accept: these are contained within the 80/20 proposals agreed as a draft for Alliances to develop. Such policies will be the matter of continual debate and refinement as the various strands of the Network work closely together in activity.

### **■ Structure**

#### **Principles behind the interim structure**

- Any structure must reflect and encourage concrete liaison between all socialist, green, direct action and other radical groups and individuals who agree on the need to work together in non-sectarian, cooperative and positive ways.
- Central to the work of the Network must be the building and strengthening of local Alliances.
- The Network should be a confederation of local Alliances - a loosely federal structure, interim and adaptive to new circumstances, with safeguards to ensure a balance is struck so that smaller groups and individuals have sufficient representation alongside larger organisations, Alliances and parties with guaranteed rights for individuals and minorities.
- Individual membership will be actively encouraged.
- Groups and parties who agree with our aims should be asked to affiliate,

financially on a proportional basis, and be encouraged to maintain their own identities whenever they so wish.

● The Network should have an elected Liaison Group which acknowledges and represents the diverse nature of opinion between the individuals and groups who are part of it. Functional officers, including joint convenors, treasurer and bulletin editors, should be elected at a conference and join 10 supporters elected by ballot as follows: five (50%) elected by local Alliances; three (30%) elected by national organisations and parties; two (20%) individuals elected by ballot of individual members.

● The role of the Liaison Group would continue to be organisational, and would include recruitment; publicity; the dissemination of information; and the holding of forums, conferences, etc.

#### **Membership**

1. Individual membership is open to anyone living in England.

2. Any individual, organisation or group which broadly agrees with the aims and agrees to abide by this structure and the anti-sectarian, cooperative and positive way of working which are involved in it, may join the Network.

3. The Network is a broad, open, inclusive and flexible organisation, based on voluntary participation. The Network is politically pluralistic and encourages all individuals, organisations and groups to participate in our vision of a socialist society and our way of working as an alliance. Such parties, organisations and groups which affiliate are expected to be able to keep their identity whilst participating fully within the development of the Network.

4. To further this, all organisations, groups and political currents participating in the Network must be affiliates. Affiliation assumes a political and financial commitment. It also assumes a commitment to an anti-sectarian and cooperative way of working, looking to build unity rather than set out a position to create discord, positively supporting and encouraging the notion of alliances and ensuring that any critical debates are conducted in a positive manner and without personal attacks. All affiliates should be paid up to the Network and should also ensure individual paid-up membership from within their respective organisations. All representatives from affiliated organisations must also be paid-up individual members of the Network.

#### **Subscriptions**

- £50 per year per party, national organisation 500 members +
- £20 per year per party, national organisation 0-500 members
- £10 per year per campaign, single issue group
- free per local Socialist Alliance or related local group
- £6 (waged)/£3 (unwaged) per year per individual, to include annual subscription to *The All Red and Green*.

### **Organisation**

1. Policy will be decided democratically by an annual conference, open to all members.

2. The implementation of policy and new activities between conferences, and the organisation of annual and any other conferences, shall be carried out by an elected Liaison Committee. This consists of five officers and 10 other members elected by conference. The officers include a chair, three joint convenors (including bulletin, membership, correspondence) and a treasurer. The members include five places for local Alliances and related groups, three places for national affiliated organisations, parties, single issue groups, and two places directly for individuals. The Committee will also have the ability to invite other organisations or individuals to ensure effective liaison (eg, trade union, Socialist Alliances in Scotland and Wales, green-left, parliamentary, direct action). Such invitations and/or cooptions will not total more than a quarter of Committee membership.

3. Every individual, every Alliance or related group, and every affiliated organisation participating in the Network is entitled to make nominations to the Liaison Committee; with the limit that no one political organisation shall have more than 30% of membership of the Committee or any other elected body within the Network, and that the organisations as a whole shall not have more than 50% of such membership.

4. There shall be political meetings and conferences of the Network, open to all members to attend, as determined by the Committee. If one quarter of the paid-up membership requests it to the Committee, there can be decision-making meetings of the full membership of the Network called in addition to the above and to the annual conferences.

#### **Liaison committee**

The Liaison Committee will be responsible for the running of the organisation and for finance, membership, arrangement of meetings, communications with local groups and individuals, national bulletin production and distribution, liaison with other groups and organisations, and arrangements for seeking and enabling electoral unity; and any other matters delegated to the Committee by the Network as a whole.

#### **Dissolution of the Network**

The Network may be dissolved by a resolution of a special meeting, called for this purpose by the Committee or by one quarter of the membership (as above). Any assets of the Network shall be disbursed to any organisation or organisations having aims consistent with those of the Network, as agreed at such a special meeting.

#### **Changes to this structure**

This structure and its contents may be altered by resolution of the annual conference or by resolution of a special meeting called by the Committee or one quarter of the membership, provided such resolution receives two thirds of the votes at such a meeting. This structure is in any case intended to perform an interim function for the Network and developments are expected as part of its process ●



## Around the left

## Economistic despair

A potential meltdown in Russia. Continuing financial instability in south east Asia and the Far East. Stock exchange turmoil. There is talk of a British recession. The Dow-Jones index suffers its second worst drop ever, falling 6.4%. In general, the world markets are in a state of nervous tension, possibly panic. Time for the left to confidently step into the breach?

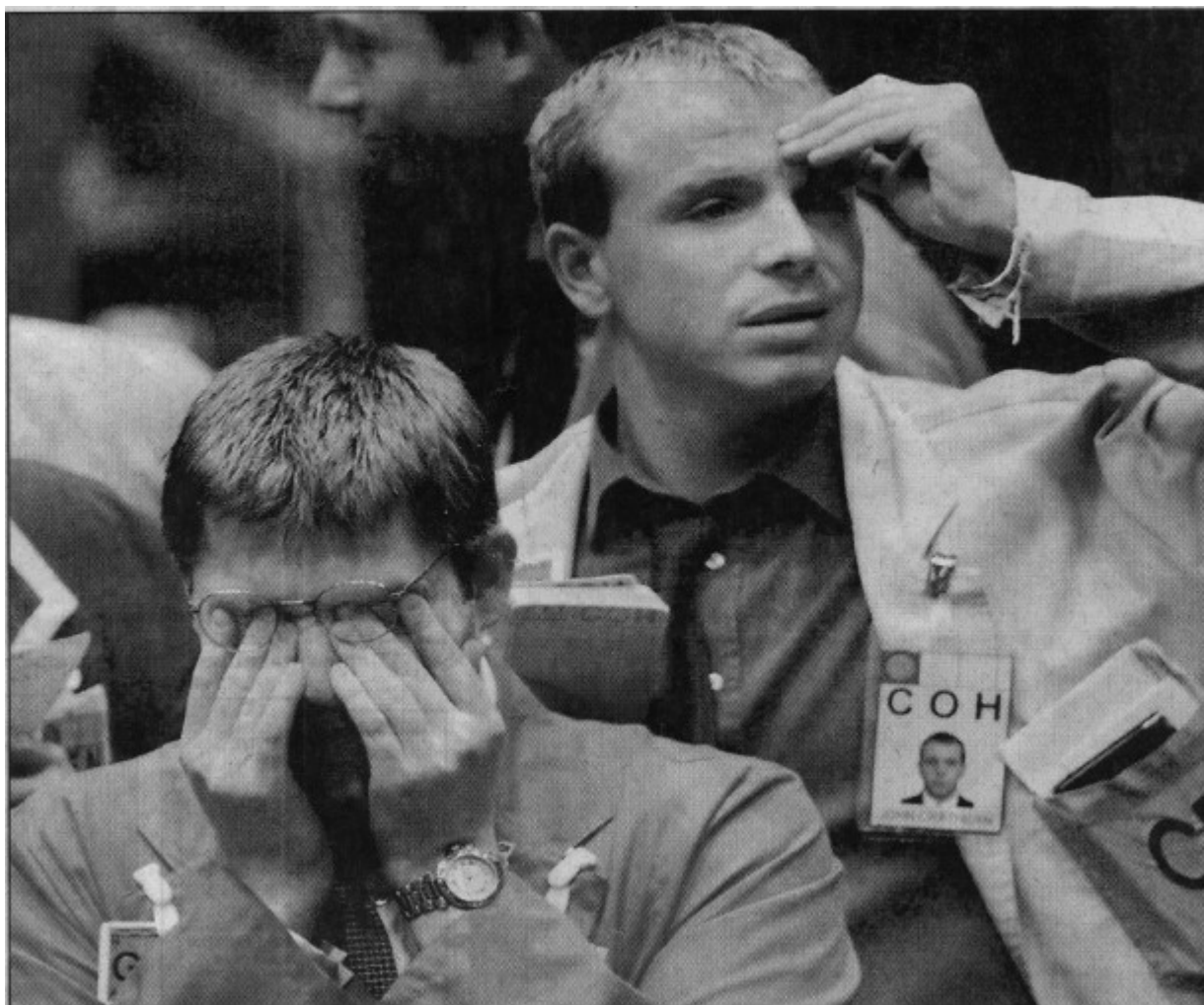
As capitalism throws its latest wobbly, left groups are only too eager to say, 'We told you so' - and then explain at length about the evils of capitalism and the wonders of socialism. The current world situation provides an easy opportunity to trot out the tired old dogmas and platitudes that have so long bedevilled the British left. We are seeing the usual mixture of fatuous - or official - optimism and a blind faith in the historic power of spontaneity. All this stems, as we know, from the left's fatal brand of mechanical inevitablism, which essentially believes that all we have to do is unroll the carpet of history and 'socialism' will spring out, fully-formed and pristine. Not for the first time, nor for the last, we see a complete inability to fully grasp the essential role played by *consciousness* in the struggle for socialism. The 'productive forces' or 'history' cannot act as a substitute for consciousness.

One of the most crude examples of this is the Socialist Party. In the case of Russia, it seems to be labouring under the essentially economistic illusion that the masses will fall into its lap as soon as the words 'Leon Trotsky' are mentioned - and if the crisis is severe enough.

The editorial in *Socialist News* informs us: "The financial-economic meltdown in Russia has exposed the 'virtual' quality of the new Russian capitalism. Far from being a dynamic epicentre of global growth, as many capitalist commentators claimed until very recently, the Russian economy has been reduced by the market to a barbarous jungle dominated by predatory robber barons. In the ruthless struggle to enrich themselves, the capitalist mafia have squandered the enormous human, technological and natural resources built up in the former Soviet Union, despite the distortions of Stalinism" (September).

The reference to the "enormous human, technological and natural resources built up in the former Soviet Union" betrays a belief in the positive nature of the so-called 'proletarian property forms' which Trotskyites seem to admire so much in the former bureaucratic socialist countries, and, presumably, in the still existing bureaucratic socialist countries (like China). However, the outline presented in the editorial is reasonable enough.

Unfortunately, the conclusions drawn by the SP are nothing short of disastrous. We read: "The effects of the Russian collapse, moreover, will not be confined to the economic-financial sphere. It will provoke a far more intense political and social crisis in Russia. Workers who are already suffering from the primitive gangster-capitalism will be forced to fight for survival. *Within Russia and internationally any illusions that capitalism is a progressive system will be destroyed.* Among the politically conscious workers there will be an intense re-examination of history. Why did the distorted Stalinist form of the planned economy collapse? What is the route to a socialist planned economy that can provide the material foundations for a democratic socialist society run by



working people?

"The collapse of Stalinism promoted the illusion that capitalism is a successful system. *The collapse of Russian capitalism will have an important effect in cancelling this out*" (my emphasis).

Here we see the 'first the meltdown - then us' mentality of the SP. With no organised *global* alternative to capitalism, illusions and delusions of all types will inevitably grow - whether they be in capitalism or something else. In Russia, disillusionment with capitalism - and the bitter resentment generated by the unleashing free market mechanism - can become a reaction against *democracy in general*. To some extent we are seeing this already. Some are looking back to the 'good old days' of Leonard Brezhnev, or even JV Stalin. Many are looking towards or flirting with extreme nationalism and fascist ideas and organisations. It is the spectre of 'national Bolshevism' that looks set to haunt Russia, not Marxism and scientific socialism. And definitely not Peter Taaffe and the SP's Committee for a Workers International. A meltdown in Russia, in all probability, will in the short term lead us to barbarism, not socialism.

Workers Power takes a similar line to the SP. A world financial crisis will 'inevitably' turn into a revolutionary crisis, which 'inevitably' will lead to socialism ... if Trotskyites armed with the 1938 *Transitional programme* are there to swoop in at the required moment. In an article based on a resolution of the international secretariat of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International, we are told that "we are entering a new decisive phase of the international class struggle". It goes on to state: "A new world historic revolutionary period opened up with the downfall of Stalinism in 1989-91 and the end of the Cold War. The United States and its allies won that contest. The new order was theirs to make at will, or so it seemed. The LRCI argued that this period would have a profoundly revolutionary character.

The downfall of Stalinism and the rightward shift of the reformist labour movements and union bureaucracy signalled that the new period would start with an opening counterrevolutionary phase, but one that would end in the short term as the capitalists returned and the crisis of capitalist restoration gathered pace ... The serious defeats of workers' struggles in the 1980s, the aborted political revolutions of 1989-91 in eastern Europe, Russia and China and the imperialist victory over Iraq in 1991 all contributed to the ascendancy of bourgeois democratic counterrevolution - but it could not last."

Now are presented with the 'first the bourgeois democratic counterrevolution - then us' viewpoint of WP. Apparently, the revolutionary upturn is well on its way. The 'red millennium' beckons. Staring at the global wreckage of the dying 20th century, the anonymous writer explains: "The most important and most generalised characteristic of the counterrevolutionary phase was the combination of weak class struggles and accumulated defeats. This created a temporary equilibrium favourable to the world bourgeoisie. But the policy of containment only ever involved a partial suspension of the contradictions between nations and classes, between the oppressed and the oppressor, not their resolution. That is why the LRCI insisted that the equilibrium would not be prolonged, let alone be the basis for an entire new historic period. Now it is clear that we were right. The democratic counterrevolutionary phase is at its end and we are entering a new phase of political instability and class struggle. The end of the six-year global recovery is in sight. The way in which it ends will decide the tempo and depths of the class struggles and inter-state rivalries unleashed. US political and military hegemony will, at the very least, be severely tested."

WP almost appears to be rubbing its hands in glee at "the six-year global recovery" coming to the end. And, yes, the installation of a military red-

brown regime in the Kremlin, say, or a break-up of the Russian Federation would certainly "decide the tempo and depths of the class struggles". The bitter reality, however much WP tries to deny it, is that the period of reaction remains - there is no working class fightback. But, somehow, WP even thinks that China "is heading towards a revolutionary crisis". (A crisis - yes, perhaps. But a *revolutionary* crisis?)

In reality, WP has no solutions, or any sort of strategy designed to help usher in the 'red millennium' - just an abstract call for a "programme of socialist revolution". In south-east Asia, for instance, WP advocates the following: "The working class must organise around an emergency programme of action to meet the economic crisis. *All* conglomerates, banks and multinational enterprises must be nationalised *immediately* under workers' control, with no compensation to the bosses" (my emphasis). In a truly global economy the demand for localised socialism is tantamount to lunacy - it could only send society crashing backwards.

Without a minimum programme to guide it, and an understanding of the *real* world balance of forces, WP is destined to remain an impotent sect. It still believes, as a matter of sacred dogma, that "the most burning problem of the present situation is the question of working class leadership". Are we still on the verge of *imminent* revolution then, just as Leon Trotsky thought way back in 1938?

The problem goes deeper than that. We have no leadership, or leaders, because of the crisis that afflicts *the class itself*. A class which has vanished politically. A world dominated by the power and the ideology of capitalism - which pretends that 'Old Labour' and the Soviet-type societies were a form of 'socialism' - and look what happened to them.

Banking everything on a global meltdown, a general crisis just around the corner, is in reality not a sign of confidence, but despair ●

Don Preston

## What we fight for

- Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.
- The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers' movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.
- Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.
- We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.
- The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single Party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.
- Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs: ie, communism.
- We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.
- War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world's problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

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

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Green Party  
activist Terry  
Liddle at CU'98

# Controlling nature

The CPGB was pleased to host speakers from a range of left groups at Communist University '98. Among those addressing this year's event was Terry Liddle, a comrade from the left of the Green Party, extracts from whose speech were published in the *Weekly Worker* (August 20).

A large part of comrade Liddle's address, which was followed by a lively discussion from the floor, was given over to a response to comments made by the CPGB's John Bridge, contained in a previous *Weekly Worker* article.

In that article comrade Bridge wrote the following: "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" (July 2).

Comrade Liddle took issue with just about every phrase that comrade Bridge wrote.

The first criticism he had concerned the use of the adjective "petty bourgeois". Ignoring the fact that this term was used to describe the class location of a *movement*, not the social position or occupation of its members, comrade Liddle protested that most greens could not be described in any way as "small shopkeepers" or "self-employed artisans".

We are well aware that many green supporters are workers - just as all the main bourgeois parties contain thousands of working class adherents. In a bourgeois democracy such as Britain the capitalist parties must of necessity rely on millions of working class votes in order to get elected. The Labour Party has always been overwhelmingly working class as far as its membership and support are concerned. But the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher clearly had at least the tacit support of a large swathe of British workers for a considerable period. Hitler's National Socialists also had an undeniable plebeian mass base.

Nevertheless we describe all these organisations as bourgeois. For us the key to the class location of any movement or party is not its membership, but its ideology and programme. Thus the Labour Party has always been a *bourgeois* party of the working class. Whereas its membership and support came from the proletariat, its programme was - to a greater or lesser degree of ambiguity - based

.....

"By controlling the forces of nature, by breaking through the constraints of capitalism, the whole of humanity could live a full and dignified life, enjoying a cultural level far surpassing the best that can be attained today"

.....

on the requirements of capital. Of course New Labour is in the process of rapidly transforming itself into a bourgeois party pure and simple.

What of the greens? Which class interests do they express? As comrade Liddle correctly states, ecologists are "reacting against capitalism". In that sense green ideology is anti-capitalist. Capital, in its organic drive for profit, consistently and continuously destroys. It destroys existing non-capitalist social relations, traditions and competitors. Above all it destroys our humanity. Left to itself, it despoils and pollutes. True, industry is perfectly capable of putting on a green face. The state may take measures which mitigate against capital's worst excesses. But such measures do not change its essential nature. Thus, while the bourgeoisie may attempt to incorporate the greens - just as it has successfully incorporated working class movements in the form of social democracy - the greens do not in general express the class interests of capital.

But neither do they in and of themselves express positive working class interests. Of course they contain many self-confessed socialists like comrade Liddle - even subjective revolutionary socialists. Nevertheless objective working class interests can only be advanced by the self-organisation of a class *for itself*. A class which defines itself not against one particular aspect or characteristic of capitalism, but in opposition to its

rule. More than that, a genuinely working class movement must at least contain the seeds of a positive alternative to capital.

Failing that, opposition to capital will inevitably relapse into reaction. It will be nothing more than the backward-looking opposition of the old, of the alienated. Of those sections more and more marginalised by the system. There is nothing *inevitably* progressive about opposition to the capitalist system as such, let alone to certain aspects of it. Such opposition is often epitomised by the small entrepreneur - the "small shopkeeper", "self-employed artisan" or peasant - being squeezed by capital's continued expansion. But workers may also look back to an imagined golden age. They too can be prey to petty bourgeois ideology.

That is why the green movement, despite its anti-capitalism, is *at the end of the day* reactionary. Unless it can be won to the understanding that the only positive alternative to the destructiveness of capital lies in a mass movement of working class democracy, it will look to other solutions and thus constitute a barrier to working class advance. Comrade Liddle himself cited an example of reaction in its most extreme form in the shape of Green Wave, a "third positionist split from the National Front". Surely he cannot deny that the green *movement* does contain, as well as the "critically utopian", the "overtly fascist"?

These two phrases express both the potentially positive and the extreme negative components of the greens. The term "critically utopian" is not used as an insult. We too have noted the progressive content of utopian socialists like Robert Owen. But utopian ideology by its very nature would also be a barrier to genuine advance - if it won a substantial following and formed a mass movement it would inevitably stop it halfway. It too is reactionary "at the end of the day".

Comrade Liddle also takes exception to the use of the term "neo-Malthusian" to describe the green movement. Yet the aptness of this expression was admirably demonstrated by his own comments. Comrade Liddle states: "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 ... The Green Party talks about a reduction in the population of the UK of around 15-20 million."

Nobody is suggesting that, like Malthus, the Green Party is "advocating that human beings should be left to starve to death". That is why the term "Malthusian" was modified by use of a prefix. But comrade Liddle's words amply show that he too "sees human beings as the fundamental problem".

It is one thing to note that hundreds of millions of people around

the world suffer from malnutrition and poverty. They are without clean water and shelter. In Britain millions are denied access to the basic requirements of a decent life. This is stating the obvious. But it quite another thing to draw the conclusion that there are therefore too many people. On what basis does the Green Party state that the current UK population cannot grow enough food to feed itself? That there is insufficient rainfall? That the materials and space for building cannot be found to provide shelter for every one of Britain's inhabitants?

On the contrary there is an abundant supply of all of these. In addition there are large areas of sparse population and 'natural' beauty which all could enjoy. The same could be said for the world taken as a whole. If anything, it is underpopulated. However, in order to grasp this objective reality it is necessary to look beyond what capitalism has ever been able or will be able to provide. In a system based on the competition of autonomous enterprises and individuals there will always be winners and losers, just as there are in nature. By controlling the forces of nature, by breaking through the constraints of capitalism, the whole of humanity could live a full and dignified life, enjoying a cultural level far surpassing the best that can be attained today.

But, says comrade Liddle, resources 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 ..." It is certainly true that the quantity of all these can be measured. For example the volume of water contained in the earth's oceans, rivers, lakes and atmosphere can be roughly estimated. It is however impossible to use it up. It is recycled through the action of the sun. The problem with water is not that it is "finite", and certainly not that there is insufficient of it, but that class society has been unable to ensure it can always be directed where it is needed in a usable form.

As for the rest of the earth's raw materials, they are also naturally recycled - but of course over a much longer period. Unlike water, such materials eventually reappear in different forms. Matter can neither be created nor destroyed. And what of heat and light? Ultimately it is derived from the sun - a supply that is likely to last for some considerable time.

If we view the question in this way, we can begin to pose the solution not in terms of the form in which matter appears at any one time or place, but in terms of its control and management. Freed of the restraints of capitalism, humanity's ability to achieve both is not in doubt. Would it not be possible to plant sufficient trees not only to provide enough wood for all our needs, but also to obtain the necessary atmospheric balance? Would we not be able to tap into sources of

energy in new forms? None of this means that there is no place for the *conscious* recycling and conservation of raw materials and energy in forms which are immediately re-usable.

Our vision is of a future humanity 'mastering' nature. But what is nature in a country like Britain? It is indeed largely a social construct. The munificence and beauty of the Scottish Highlands, the Yorkshire Moors and the Lake District have been created in no small part by human activity. Humans are after all an important part of nature. Their behaviour and actions, along with those of all other material phenomena, have shaped the world. Nature does not have a single, fixed form which humanity 'ought' to protect. It has constantly changed and evolved. Our humanity is enhanced by the discovery of nature's complexity, laws and powers. Nature must become a thing-for-humanity, not a thing-in-itself.

So we are not opposed to the forward march of technology. But like the forces of nature it must come under social control, if it is to serve living labour, not dead labour. Through the class struggle, in the final analysis through communism, technology can become one of the means to reduce necessary labour to the minimum - and thus allow the full development of the human personality.

Comrade Liddle describes his own 'official communist' background and has rightly rejected what it had to offer. The Soviet Union was no more able to control and manage the resources of nature than capitalism. It replicated some of capital's worst acts of destruction. Here was an example of a society run from the top by a self-serving bureaucracy, which deformed and wrecked the world communist movement of which the Communist Party of Great Britain was a part. We do not seek to reforge the CPGB of Harry Pollitt or Gordon McLennan, as comrade Liddle seems to believe.

But if we are to achieve a world where humanity can fully control its own product, then the working class will have to create disciplined, fighting organisations capable of leading a revolution - not only in Britain but in every country. Only communist parties are capable of such a task. Such organisations must contain within them all revolutionary socialists. It will include many who today define themselves primarily in regard to the environment.

Clearly most green socialists do not at the moment share this aim. Nevertheless, there is no reason why we cannot cooperate - for example in united fronts where we are agreed on a common action. The CPGB certainly believes that greens who define themselves as socialists should be in the Socialist Alliances as a step towards a higher organisational form. ●

Alan Fox