

## Network of Socialist Alliances launch

# One step forward, two steps back

Last Saturday's Rugby conference of the Network of Socialist Alliances was intended as a step towards creating a democratic structure. Bad politics and a bad agenda ensured failure

**T**he September 5 conference was faced with a choice between two distinct forms of structure. The Liaison Group proposed a cumbersome system of electing the leading committee, more reminiscent of a bureaucratic *party* than an alliance. In contrast the CPGB put forward an inclusive structure of automatic representation for all affiliated organisations. The meeting agreed to hold a recall conference early next year to finally determine the form in which our forces can most effectively cooperate.

The conference voted by a margin of 51 votes to 36 that the structure proposed by the Liaison Group be adopted in the meantime on an interim basis. However, in effect this meant the status quo continues, since no elections were held along the lines contained in its proposals. The unelected Liaison Group will continue to function as it has up to now.

All this showed only too clearly that the CPGB had been correct to propose at the beginning of the conference that sufficient time be allowed in order that every aspect of the structure could be debated and everyone who wanted to speak would be able to do so. But Liaison Group chair John Nicholson insisted that only the truncated morning session could be spent on the question of organisation, as there were invited speakers due to address the conference - on Europe and low pay - in the afternoon. In the first vote of the day the John Nicholson-Dave Nellist-Pete McLaren-Dave Church leadership was supported by 54 comrades, with 24 backing the CPGB proposal to continue discussion on structure all day if necessary. The final outcome vindicated our approach. The recall conference will be devoted entirely to this one question - but in six months time.

The Socialist Party's Dave Nellist spoke in favour of the Liaison Group proposed structure with its unworkable electoral colleges, exclusion clauses and ethical socialism. His main argument against automatic representation was that the ensuing committee would be too large. Speaking

for the CPGB, Peter Manson pointed out that if needed the committee could elect sub-committees for specific purposes. Under the CPGB proposals the Liaison Committee would consist of elected and recallable delegates - one from each affiliated national organisation and one per 100 members from local, metropolitan or regional Socialist Alliances. This committee would elect its own officers who would in turn be recallable. Similar proposals were also put forward by Martin Wicks and Dave Spencer of the Socialist Perspectives group.

In other words, this structure would reflect admirably a rapidly developing, fluid network of *alliances*, as opposed to a more formally institutionalised organisation, where officers would be elected at an annual conference, and the outcome of the vote, along with all the decisions of the Liaison Committee, could theoretically be determined by a 51% bloc around one group.

Several comrades who were prepared to go along with the Nicholson-Nellist-McLaren-Church Liaison Group nevertheless expressed strong reservations about some aspects. For example comrade Tony Reid wondered how in practice three members elected to the committee by national organisations (as the Liaison Group proposed) would be able to represent numerous and very different political formations grouped under the Network umbrella. Pete Firmin of Socialist Outlook "broadly supported" the leadership structure. He was against the "CPGB idea" that the leading committee should be responsible for "day-to-day running" of the Network - ironically a simplified and shortened version of the Liaison Group formulation. Other comrades also tilted against an invented notion that the CPGB's loose and highly flexible structure was actually a "central committee". It is understandable however why Labour-loyal groups like SO would want to resist the possibility of a united socialist challenge to Blair's party.

Comrade John Pearson of the Cam-

paign for a Democratic SLP made a telling contribution, outlining how he had been excluded from the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance after the GMSA structure had been changed from a system of representative inclusion to one of annual elections dominated by an exclusivist bloc. The Manchester coordinator who oversaw this democratic coup against inclusive democracy was none other than John Nicholson, the chair of the conference, who was now backing just such a scheme for the Network.

Comrade Nicholson, despite opening the conference with a call for "participative and non-confrontational" debate, ran the meeting in a most abrasive and hostile manner. Any procedural motions of which he disapproved were rudely dismissed. He also pointedly refused to allow leading CPGB members to speak - treating some to childish personal abuse.

Apart from the question of structure, two other themes dominated the morning. There was controversy over the proposed name and therefore scope of the organisation. The CPGB proposed the Network of Socialist Alliances in the *United Kingdom*, whereas the rival draft wanted to limit the membership to *England*. CPGB comrades consistently argued for the active unity of all workers against the state. Nobody oppressed by the UK state should be excluded from the fight against the UK state. Our opponents ludicrously claimed that this amounted to 'the English' telling the Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish what to do. Anticipating this debate, comrade Nicholson read out a message from the Scottish Socialist Alliance (shortly to liquidate and become the Scottish Socialist Party) which welcomed the recognition of "the right of socialists in Scotland to organise separately from England". Nobody was questioning that *right*, but the central question here was whether we ought to cooperate practically against our common enemy within one democratic and voluntary framework.

The argument against 'imposing' a structure on comrades outside England was turned on its head by a Socialist Alliance comrade from London who also proclaimed himself a supporter of Dundee-based Campaign for a Federal Republic. He pointed out that not all comrades north of the border welcomed the proposed SSP.

Many were against the SSA's nationalist isolationism. Such comrades should not be excluded from working in an all-Britain framework. The SSP itself should be encouraged to affiliate.

The second recurring theme concerned the composition of the Network. Should it be an alliance of *socialists*, as the CPGB proposed, or should its politics be watered down so as to make it acceptable to "all socialist, green, direct action and other radical groups and individuals", as the Liaison Group argued? Comrade Manson read out extracts from a pamphlet calling for the protection of the environment, elimination of waste and for sustainable activity to protect the earth's natural resources. He asked rhetorically whether the conference thought the authors should affiliate to the Network. He then revealed that the extracts came from a vacuum cleaner manual put out by Electrolux. The CPGB and others stressed that the network should openly welcome *socialist* greens, *socialist* direct action groups and *socialist* individuals.

None of the Liaison Group attempted to defend their formulation, although some comrades did back the call for close red-green cooperation from the floor. To some extent this was countered by a Green Party member, Stephen Platt from Doncaster. He "deplored" the fact that the Green Party had already selected its candidates for next year's Euro-elections without any prior consultation with any groups on the left, including the Network. Comrade Platt thought that the Alliances should go ahead and stand - the Network should "make its presence felt". Despite the Liaison Group's best efforts to dilute its socialist content in an attempt to win what it imagines will be popular support through classless environmentalism, its efforts have carried it towards political irrelevance. An indication of this was the fact that no Green Party representative turned up to address the meeting, even though the Rugby conference date had been changed to avoid a clash with the Green Party conference.

The afternoon session was not without interest - even if it was at the expense of a fuller discussion on the Network's structure. The debate on Europe featured John Palmer from the editorial board of *Red Pepper*, Hugh Kerr MEP of the Independent Labour Network, Michael Hindley MEP, still

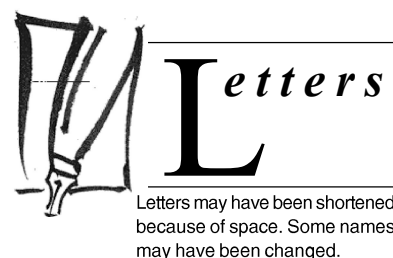
- just - a Labour Party member, and Ron Dorman from the Campaign against Euro-federalism. Opinions ranged from the national socialist 'get out of Europe' of comrade Dorman to the classless internationalism of comrade Palmer. As comrade Marcus Larsen from the CPGB pointed out, an independent working class perspective was totally absent.

The final item was what comrade Nellist described as "one of the most important aspects of why we're here" - an anodyne and poorly attended discussion on low pay introduced by Jean Thorpe of Unison. The Socialist Party in England and Wales is of course engaged in an economic campaign around the issue, and no doubt comrade Nellist believes that highlighting the question at the conference - along with his proposal to collect one million signatures on the question - would strengthen his hand in the internal SP dispute around the value of the Socialist Alliances. Be-leaguered general secretary Peter Taaffe is known to want to downplay the SAs in favour of building his "small mass party", while comrade Nellist is one of a small minority who is active within them. Apart from comrade Nellist and some local SP comrades selling *The Socialist*, there was only a handful of SP members present - none of whom made, or even tried to make, a contribution to the discussion.

Although the Liaison Group won the votes, it was a Pyrrhic victory. The CPGB won the argument. Unable to force through its unworkable structure, the Liaison Group was compelled by the presence of a large 40% minority to defer a final decision to allow for further consideration of this essential question. The CPGB has subsequently written suggesting the setting up of a constitution working party, on which a representative from the CPGB and the Independent Labour Network, as well as comrades Nellist, Nicholson, Church, McLaren and Martin Wicks, should sit. That will allow clarity on where we disagree and where we agree.

Our enemies spend an inordinate time in thrashing out laws, institutions and treaties which ensure and facilitate their cooperation. Partisans of socialism ought to spare no effort in negotiating and fine-tuning a common structure, which can contribute towards winning a better world ●

Alan Fox



# Party notes

## United Kingdom communists

At the launch meeting of the Network of Socialist Alliances in Rugby last Saturday (see report on front page), the Communist Party supported amendments to the Liaison Group's draft constitution which would have deleted its restriction of membership to "anyone living in England". Our comrades attempted to explain why we call for socialist organisation throughout the United Kingdom. Given the crass restrictions on the debate by the scrupulously unfair chairperson John Nicholson, they did not do a bad job. The fact that they faced either incomprehension or ridicule from certain quarters had little to do with the coherence of their arguments: far more to do with the nature of the times we are living through. Defending the proposal of the Liaison Group to restrict membership to England, one delegate even surreally speculated: "I'm not sure we should even be talking about Great Britain anymore".

In periods of profound world defeat such as this one, it is not simply the organisational strength and coherence of the workers' movement that takes a battering. The theoretical and political positions that have been conquered in previous periods are often lost to the reactionary tide and have to be actively fought for and reconquered. The existing culture of most left organisations is *marinated* in philistinism.

The most obvious example of this poverty is on the Party question of course, including foolish jibes on the name we fight under.

First, let's reassure the pig ignorant. We do not call ourselves the Communist Party of *Great Britain* because we concur with our rulers that Britain is *fab*, a cool place to hang out. For example, the latest issue of *New Interventions* (summer 1998) features Roger Cottrell sideswiping the hapless Socialist Party of Great Britain - "Still less can I take serious a party that refers to 'Great Britain' in its title ...", he tells them. In the past, I have had Spartacist League members sniffily asking me, 'What's so great about Britain, then?' Well, its *bigger* than lesser Britain - ie, Brittany ... *berk*.

Geography lessons apart, there is a serious point here. The organisation of any party should correspond to the conditions and *purpose* of its activity. Of course, these conditions of struggle constantly change and communists have never claimed an unchanging blueprint for their organisational norms. Yet always implicit in the structural form we adopt is an attitude to the existing *state*.

The main task of those that purport to be fighting for socialism is to overthrow *this* state - not one that exists in their imaginations. This state is the United Kingdom, originally formed by the Act of Union in 1707 (although the term Great Britain had been in use earlier). Later unions created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (1801) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (1922), the state form we face today. This state is the executive committee of the capitalist class, dominated in Britain by the imperialist bourgeoisie - our main enemy.

In such a struggle, the forces of the proletariat need to win the maximum degree of unity, overcoming internal sectional divisions to fight as one against this powerful foe. The divisions that exist between Scottish, Welsh, Irish and English workers, chauvinism against women or gays - these and other problems are obstacles to presenting a serious challenge to the capitalist class.

Clearly, the attempt by elements in the Socialist Alliances to introduce national exclusion into the organisation of the workers - demarcations which do not correspond to the contours of the state that confronts us - is an opportunist adaptation to the poisonous nationalism that infects our movement in Scotland and is starting to grow in Wales. More than that, for all the Liaison Group's talk of 'inclusion', in attempting to define the Network as open only to "anyone living in England", this bars others. What of the socialists in Scotland and Wales who do not want to organise separately from their class brothers and sisters in England? Are we to *insist* that they constitute themselves as nationalists?

The pursuit of the narrow interests or transient prejudices of a section of the working class - whether it is defined by occupation, nationality, sex or whatever - is the defining feature of opportunism. In its particular rightist manifestation by the Liaison Group, this approach underlines that these comrades are *reformists*, that their orientation is towards adaptation to and tinkering with the capitalist state. Bearing this in mind, it is rather amusing to be called "imperialists" by them because of our principled position on the organisation of the working class ●

Mark Fischer  
national organiser

## Obstruction

In line with national policy (insofar as it exists) and the definite view of the London Socialist Alliance, another comrade and I recently set out to establish the Haringey Socialist Alliance, inviting all and sundry left organisations (insofar as they exist) in the London borough of Haringey to an inaugural meeting.

Sacked RMT activist Steve Hedley kicked off a discussion on privatisation and its effects at the meeting on September 1. Unfortunately, as the meeting wore on, it became clear that other comrades who attended were not interested in founding a local Socialist Alliance at all and had come with the intention of preventing it; they wanted everyone instead to work within a loose, nameless, non-socialist body that had held a couple of meetings in Tottenham, in the east of the borough, around solidarity with the RMT struggles.

These anti-HSA comrades, including David Lyons and another comrade from the Socialist Democracy Group and one comrade from Socialist Outlook, pretended only to be against setting up the Haringey Socialist Alliance *now*. But in actual fact, as became clear from what these comrades said, their obstructive and destructive aim was to curry favour with and avoid anything that might upset their current work with local activists who are anarchists, greens or just plain anti-socialists, assuming that they might not work with them in a *Socialist Alliance*. Of course, no one was suggesting that these comrades stop their cooperation with local activists who do not join Haringey SA, especially since it, too, seeks cooperation with these activists. Ironically and contradictorily, almost all of those present who were opposing formation of the Haringey SA are currently members of the London SA.

When loyal London SA members act as we did in Haringey last week, to start to build a "fleshed out" borough alliance from the grassroots in order to organise and co-ordinate local activity and involve local activists ... comrade Lyons comes along with his cohort and tries to prevent it. However, comrade Lyons and those around him should realise that we are determined Haringey Socialist Alliance shall exist, it shall work, and it shall be built into a worthwhile body, despite those who would like to kill it off. No person or organisation is forced to be part of a Socialist Alliance, but neither shall anyone be allowed to obstruct what those of us committed to the Socialist Alliance project want to achieve ... in Haringey or anywhere else. The time to build Socialist Alliances is now.

Jim Gilbert  
Coordinator  
Haringey Socialist Alliance

## Armed struggle

It is good that the *Weekly Worker* (August 27) published in full the statements of both the Irish National Liberation Army, announcing their "complete ceasefire", and the Irish Republican Socialist Party, welcoming this new position - I have not seen this in any other paper.

These full statements give the grounds for a considered political analysis of the reasons put forward by the IRSP and Inla for their revised political positions, and it must be clearly said that they are wrong. The Inla statement includes: "We recognise that the political situation has changed since the formation of the Inla. We recognise that armed struggle can never be the only option for revolutionaries. In the new conditions prevailing it is only right to respond to the new conditions. Those conditions demand a ceasefire."

The IRSP has always since its formation attempted to be a Marxist party, so the Inla sentence about armed struggle never being the *only* option is a complete red herring. Neither Inla nor the IRSP have ever held this un-Marxist view. Why then the red herring? It is clearly seen in the next two sentences of the Inla statement, that in the new political conditions the right re-

sponse is a ceasefire - ie, total abandonment of military struggle and relying totally on political struggle. The truth is that the correct form of struggle, applied for many years by both the IRA and Sinn Féin, and Inla and the IRSP, is the tactical combination of both - the 'ballot box and armalite'.

Both the Inla and the IRSP statements correctly state that they oppose the Good Friday agreement, and "it was not worth the sacrifices of the last 30 years", but the ceasefire is claimed to be justified by the large majority vote in support of the agreement. It can never be the case that a majority public vote in favour - or against - any proposition automatically makes such a majority correct. And when you look at the completely unprincipled hype which was loaded onto the public in the days before the vote - anyone who *dared* to question it, not to mention oppose it, was an 'enemy of peace', etc - the result is not surprising.

In the same way that it was right for some political organisations in Germany to tell the German people they were wrong to have voted for Hitler, it is correct for Marxists to say to the people of Ireland, 'You have been conned and fooled by the most experienced political liars and tricksters - British politicians.'

Every day brings proof that this is true. Tactically and sensibly used against *correct* targets, the armed struggle is justified, and the political - yes, the *principal* - form of struggle at the moment, and, as far as one can tell, into the foreseeable future, must be to take the issue to the international level. The case against British forcible retention of the Six Counties is clear, and would gain genuine international support - as distinct from being conned by US imperialism.

Pat King  
Southampton

## Perverts?

OK, Sandy Johnstone (Letters, September 3), so if we're in the business of playing god and deciding who is a pervert and who isn't, and how we should judge them; and if a pervert is someone who fancies someone younger than the people *you* happen to fancy, who do we call a child and therefore a victim, and who is OK by your measure?

In the USA many states hold the age of consent at 21 - before that you are a minor - and incidentally you cannot have various forms of sexual relations, whatever your age or marital status, as it is deemed 'abuse'. Is that OK? In other states you can have sex and get married at 12, and some do. Are these all sicko perverts then, who should be subject to the good old British justice, dragged into the street, have their house burnt down and given a good kicking, if not hung? No, obviously not everyone of 12 marries another 12-year old. In fact that is a gross exception - most partners are at least 10 years older. And incidentally these tend to be the marriages that last.

But we British are above such perversions. Anyone who is British could not possibly fancy a 12-year old without being sick and depraved. Why is a 12-year old abroad able to make a rational, sound choice of his or her partner, but a British 12-year old needs the protection of Sandy Johnstone vetting their options?

He asks where is the evidence that young people object to this law. Have you asked in the right places? As a matter of fact 80% of all prosecutions against (mainly) men having sex with under-age partners come about after outside interference by people like Sandy, and not as a result of complaints by the young person. In *most* cases the young person refuses to cooperate with the state, or give evidence, and in many cases they themselves end up in care or under some form of enforced supervision. So thanks a million, pal.

If this letter sounds angry, rest assured - it is. My current girlfriend is the one I have had for the last six years or so. She is now 17, so work it out. My feelings towards her have never been predatory or based solely on her age, which of course changes as

time goes on. I feel no different emotionally and sexually now than when I first met her, minus the pubic hair and breasts. Her feelings towards me have matured as she has grown, and obviously she still retains friends of her own age, and does all the things they do with 'normal' age relationships. Why is that Sandy's business? Why should our love for each other cause me to wake up sweating that someone like Sandy and his sad vigilantes might be deciding our fate on our behalf with a building brick and a rope or a pot of paint to daub our house?

In a word, Sandy, if you are part of the progressive working class movement and can dig this, *get off our backs*, and, not to put too fine a point on it, mind your own business. Living one's own life according to a set of sound and principled values is hard enough without thinking you can impose your twisted sense of right and wrong on others, *me and my girlfriend* in particular.

Frank Worth  
Leeds

## Own goal

The CPGB, having acted in haste, will certainly repent at leisure (*Weekly Worker* September 3). The Rugby conference was a disaster for anybody seriously interested in genuinely inclusive nationwide Socialist Alliance lists for the June 1999 Euro-elections. The CPGB comrades are presumably aware that their sectarian behaviour ensured that no decision was ever taken on standing candidates and that such a decision will now be delayed until the recall conference in late March, far too late for an embryonic formation without a substantial public profile or much in the way of financial resources to generate the publicity, recruit the election organisers and raise the money to mount a nationwide challenge.

As a result, the Independent Labour Network will make its own decisions without waiting for the Alliances. This, whilst understandable, is deeply regrettable, since many tendencies present in the Socialist Alliances are not present in the ILN. Some of us involved in both will seek to persuade the ILN leadership to be as inclusive as possible, especially in relation to the Socialist Party which has displayed such a positive and friendly attitude to comrades Coates and Kerr since their expulsion from the Labour Party. But it should be noted that Hugh Kerr and Ken Coates, who were always dubious about CPGB involvement, have now decided in the light of the unwarranted and systematic heckling of comrade Coates by the CPGB and RDG that any relationship with the CPGB or its close allies is now out of the question.

Maybe the CPGB always intended to fight every seat in every region on its own full programme (including no age of consent and fusion with the Inla) but if this was not the intention - and membership outside London makes it hard to believe it was - you have certainly scored an own goal.

Toby Abse  
London

**Editor's note:** Neither the CPGB nor the RDG heckled Ken Coates at the Rugby conference. He was interrupted once by Chris Weller of Kent SA, who is a member of neither organisation.

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From **The Call**, paper of the  
British Socialist Party,  
September 12 1918

## Maxim Gorky and the Bolsheviks

The following summary of some of Gorky's views on the Revolution ... will prove interesting to our readers as coming from the pen of one of Russia's greatest living writers ... from one who from the very beginning of the Revolution has criticised the Bolsheviks unceasingly.

On May 19, in the *Novaya Zhizn'*, after a description of the unbearable conditions reigning in the Russian army, Gorky says:

I do not write all this to defend the socialists in any way ... The terrible and impartial truth is ... that now history has placed on the socialists the responsibility for the giant's task of healing and renovating Russia.

That we live badly, in fact that our mode of life is a disgrace, need not be repeated, but under the monarchy we lived even worse, even more disgracefully. Then we dreamed of freedom without seeing any signs of its vitalising power. Now the whole nation feels this power. It is true we are still enjoying it in an egoistic, brutal, animal manner, but it is time to appreciate the grandeur of the fact that a people that has so far lived in the most fearful slavery has at last become free from its chains ...

Now however, the whole Russian people are taking part in the making of Russian history - that is the most important fact ... True it is that the people are half starved, tired, exhausted; that they are committing many crimes ... But this unwieldy strength which has not yet been organised by reason is a splendid strength, capable of every kind of development, and contains an inexhaustible fund of wealth. Those who fight against the revolutionary democracy so frantically in order to snatch power from its hands ... forget this simple truth: the greater the number of people who work freely and with conscious aim, the more valuable is the work produced, so much the more quickly are higher and more perfect forms of social life developed ...

We must remember that the Revolution is not only made up of a series of cruelties and crimes, but also far more of a series of heroic deeds of courage, of honour, of self-forgetfulness, of generosity ...

Bolsheviks? Well, just think then - they too are human beings like all of us ... The best of them are remarkable people of whom Russian history will be rightly proud, whilst our children and grandchildren will wonder of their energy.

... I defend the Bolsheviks? No, I fight against them ... I know that they are making a terrible scientific experiment on the body of the Russian people ... They have made many and great mistakes ... But when one so desires one can say some good of the Bolsheviks too.

Without pretending to know what political result their activity will ultimately bring about, I maintain that from a psychological point of view the Bolsheviks have rendered a great service to the Russian people, in that they have called forth in the masses of the Russian people an interest and a desire to take part in present-day events, without which our country would have gone under.

# Anti-imperialists marginalised

As the British and Irish states take on yet more draconian powers, the momentum of the peace process continues to accelerate

The few weeks since the Omagh bomb have seen a rapid advance in imperialism's plans to impose a new stability for the more efficient operation of capital in Ireland.

Not only is there an ever growing consensus in the Six Counties to steam along the course outlined in the British-Irish Agreement, but London and Dublin have managed to acquire new legitimacy for crushing any new vestiges of resistance to the Good Friday deal using anti-democratic methods.

Exploiting the universal condemnation of the August 15 blast to the full, parliaments on both sides of the Irish Sea were recalled to rush through the necessary legislation. Only 17 MPs voted for an amendment to block the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill, but when this was unsuccessful, the second reading was unopposed. There was a great deal of hot air over the failure of the British government to allow sufficient time for the right honourable members to debate the proposals, but that did not stop them from giving the bill their whole-hearted support.

Tony Benn reserved his fiercest comments for the way in which the legislation was being processed. It was the curtailment of parliament's precious powers allowing MPs to vent their pompous opinions and fine-tune the detailed clauses, rather than the measures themselves, which constituted an "attack on civil liberties". It was an "absolute affront" that the legislation was forced through in that way, "whatever the merits of the bill", he complained.

In order that the queen would not have to stay awake into the small hours, she gave her 'royal assent' before the proposals had completed their passage through parliament. Benn also criticised this "total breach of constitutional practice", accusing the government of manipulating the monarchy.

Conviction of membership of a proscribed organisation can now be obtained solely on the basis of the evidence of a senior police officer - whose word has so often been used in the past to help frame victims such as the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four. Failure to mention "material" facts under interrogation can also be interpreted as evidence of guilt. The courts can confiscate the property of those convicted if the judge claims that it may be used "in furtherance of or in connection with the activities of the specified organisation".

The government took advantage of the occasion to add clauses relating to conspiracy to commit offences overseas. People who are alleged to be planning an illegal act abroad can be convicted provided such an act would also be illegal in the UK. This is irrespective of whether any illegal act has actually been committed and applies even if the regime against which the conspiracy is alleged is the most authoritarian of dictatorships.

Many Tories and Ulster unionists complained that the measures did not go far enough. They would have preferred the re-introduction

of internment to match the powers still in place in the Irish Republic.

Sinn Féin's objections to the legislation were relatively mild and short-lived. Technically the powers could be used against the IRA - still of course an illegal organisation, despite its complete backing for and increasing compliance with the terms of the British-Irish Agreement - as well as against those responsible for the Omagh blast, the Real IRA. But SF/IRA knows that use of the legislation against itself is now just about impossible. SF leaders Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness have their sights set on the two Northern Ireland executive places to which their party's 18 seats in the June 25 elections entitle them. The executive will take over the functions of the Northern Ireland office in February 1999.

In other words, in spite of the latest batch of anti-democratic legislation, SF is well on the way to participation in the running of an arm of the British state. As if to hammer home the fact that it is no longer an enemy, but an ally of British imperialism, the IRA has been paying visits to the homes of Real IRA and 32 County Sovereignty Movement supporters, threatening them with the consequences of a failure to end all armed actions and dissolve their organisations. It is likely, however, that the British and Irish states will get in first - arrests of the suspected leaders are expected within days, now that the "extremely draconian" legislation is in place. In a desperate bid to dig itself out of this hole the Real IRA announced earlier this week that its "suspension of military activities" had now been converted into a full-blown "complete ceasefire".

In addition to the new measures, the past week has seen a significant acceleration of the peace momentum, further boosted by the presence of Bill Clinton. Adams made his statement that violence is "a thing of the past" and nominated Martin McGuinness to liaise between the IRA and the International Commission on Decommissioning. McGuinness has already had "highly satisfactory" talks with its chair, John de Chastelain.

The SF moves were widely welcomed. A spokesman for Tony Blair, reacting to Adams' announcement that violence must be "over, done with and gone", said: "It confirms the prime minister in his view that Sinn Féin deserve to be taken seriously in their commitment to exclusively peaceful means." David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, said the statement was "a move in the right direction".

Within days Trimble appeared to be clearing the way for SF's participation in the executive. He said: "I say to those who are crossing the bridge from terror to democracy: every move you make towards peace, I welcome. Every pledge you make to peace, I will hold you to it. As first minister, I will work with anyone who has the interests of peace at heart." By last weekend he had secured the agree-

ment of the UUP leadership to hold face-to-face talks with SF, whose leaders were represented at the first preparatory meeting, which Trimble chaired, for the Stormont government.

Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party seems out-manoeuvred. Despite all the evidence that SF/IRA has permanently ended its armed resistance to the British occupation of the Six Counties, DUP deputy leader Peter Robinson said Adams' statement was just a "word game". He claimed it fell "far short" of a declaration that the war was over. Clearly the ultra-unionists will have to rethink their tactics, which appear to fly in the face of reality.

At present though Trimble still has to move very cautiously for fear of losing ground to the DUP and his own right wing. That is why he announced that he would not be shaking Adams' hand when the two men met. "When he holds forward his hand," Trimble declared, "it's got two tonnes of Semtex, 600 AK47 rifles and god knows what else in it." This does not apparently contradict his earlier statement that Adams is "crossing the bridge" to peace.

In fact Blair has made it clear that he sees decommissioning primarily as a symbol of change, and Trimble is well aware of this. Irish history is littered with republican weaponry that has simply been left to rust. Nevertheless, a gesture to surrender some IRA arms looks increasingly likely, if not imminent. That would pull the carpet from underneath the unionists who still oppose the Good Friday deal.

Rather than pretending that SF/IRA has not changed its spots, a more promising line of attack from the ultra-loyalists' point of view would be a campaign to 'defend their protestant heritage'. Last weekend's violence around the 'right to march' demonstration showed that there is still life in the anti-settlement forces. They still have the potential to mobilise thousands around this issue, claiming that the banning of Orange parades through catholic areas constitutes an attack on 'basic democracy', in the name of forcing through an imminent united Ireland.

Anticipating the release of the first 17 republican prisoners of war this week, Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam ordered that two Scots Guards should be freed less than six years after their life sentences for the murder of a catholic youth in 1992. The idea is to demonstrate that the peace process is 'even-handed'. In that sense the anger of the youth's family and of the nationalist community at the soldiers' release was a useful counterbalance to the expected reaction to the subsequent freeing of IRA fighters.

In the absence of a working class alternative the imperialist peace process looks more and more secure. The ultra-loyalists are wrong-footed and intransigent anti-imperialists marginalised.

But the real loser will be the Irish people's right to genuine self-determination ●

Jim Blackstock

## action

### ■ CPGB seminars

London - September 13 - 'The tendency toward state autonomy', 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.

### ■ 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.

### ■ Lambeth SA

Joint public meeting with Lambeth Trades Council - '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.

### ■ Greenwich SA

Relaunch meeting - 'Which way for socialists?'

September 28, 7.30pm, Charlton House, Charlton Road, London SE7

### ■ Hillingdon hospital workers

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

### ■ Support Tameside

Public meeting September 11, 7pm, Dunkinfield Working Mens Club, Chapel Street, Dunkinfield. Organised by the strikers' support group. March and rally September 12. Assemble 1pm in Astley Road, Stalybridge. March to Henry Square, Ashton under Lyne for rally at 2.30pm.

Support Group meets every Monday, 7pm, at the Station pub, Warrington Street, Ashton under Lyne.

Donations and solidarity to Tameside Unison, 29 Booth Street, Ashton under Lyne.

### ■ Anti-Fascist Action

Third annual weekend to commemorate the Battle of Cable Street Friday October 2: Public meeting: 'Counterrevolution in sight' Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, 7.30pm.

Saturday October 3: Benefit gig with Bad Manners, Walthamstow Assembly Hall, Forest Road, London E17, 8pm. £8 in advance - £10 on the door (sales office 0181 521 7111)

Sunday October 4: Film show - The 43 Group (with an introduction by Morris Beckman), All Power to the People (the story of the Black Panther Party), Rio Cinema, 103 Kingsland High Street, London E8, 2pm. £5/£3 concessions.

For further details telephone Anti-Fascist Action on 0976 406 870.

# 1918

Russian Revolution  
this week 80 years ago



# On the fantasy world of Dave Craig

**W**hen I opened the *Weekly Worker* (August 27) to read Anne Murphy's article entitled 'The fantasy world of Dave Craig' I was a bit shocked. I had been expecting to see the open letter from the Campaign for a Federal Republic to the Socialist Party, which I had been led to believe would be published. Not only was the letter not printed, but in its place was this 'exposé'.

My second reaction on reading the article was annoyance with the style of polemic and the political content. My third reaction was to say, 'Well, at least we can analyse some causes of the friction occurring between the RDG and the CPGB'.

In part this goes back to the Scottish referendum campaign. The CPGB was intervening in Scotland through the medium of the *Weekly Worker* and its Scottish committee. The RDG gave critical support to the boycott line. Because of the CPGB policy of openness, our criticisms of the central slogans of the campaign were published and debated in the paper. After the referendum a further debate over the results took place involving myself, Lee-Anne Bates and Jack Conrad. Without the RDG and CPGB being democratically centralised, we functioned as near to that principle as possible for two independent organisations. There was a majority (CPGB) and a minority (RDG). The minority openly criticised the majority. The minority, despite reservations, supported the majority campaign. Afterwards there was a debate over what had been achieved. The only thing we have not done yet is draw some agreed lessons and conclusions.

Within a few months we formed the Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency. So when the Scottish comrades resigned from the CPGB earlier this year, this was a major blow not only to that organisation, but to the new tendency and hence the RDG. Not only did the CPGB lose an important part of its ability to intervene in Scotland, but so did the RDG.

The situation in Scotland is of major importance to the working class in the UK and to any group of socialists seeking to be an advanced part of that class. Hence the resignations confronted the new tendency with two immediate problems to sort out. First, how to intervene in Scotland and conduct the fight for a federal republic and against nationalism. Second, how to draw some political lessons from the setback we had suffered, and do so in a way that is consistent with the policy of openness. These two tasks are separate and must be kept so.

Soon after I contacted the Scottish comrades. They stated that they still intended to be active in the Scottish Socialist Alliance and to campaign for a federal republic. They also said that they still supported the platform of the tendency. This was significant. It meant that among the debris of the crash, there was something to be saved. Should we give the survivors oxygen or should we finish them off with a sledgehammer?

The sledgehammer was not appropriate. The class struggle in Scotland

is so important that this must be our first priority. We must administer oxygen immediately and get on with the political struggle. We cannot continue crying over spilt milk. Neither should we allow spilt milk to sour our intervention. This is my approach, supported by the RDG. Some members of the CPGB were not pleased by this. Their annoyance can be seen in the article by Anne Murphy.

When I persuaded the ex-CPGB comrades that they should remain within our tendency, I did not expect the CPGB would disagree. But they raised procedural objections. In procedural terms they were correct. But politically they were wrong. It is in the political interests of the RDG and the CPGB that these comrades remain within our sphere of influence and allied as closely with us as possible.

It was said that the Scottish comrades could only be in our tendency by remaining in the CPGB or joining the RDG. This is formally correct. Of course I would like these comrades to join the RDG and sooner rather than later. I take this opportunity to call on them to do so. But it was not practical politics to simply recruit them. First they had not left the CPGB in order to join us. Neither had we done any work to recruit them before they left. As I have stated on previous occasions, attempting to poach each other's members would go against the spirit of rapprochement.

In any case these comrades had programmatic differences with us which precluded any immediate recruitment. The only practical option was to try to seek united front work with them and use the new idea of the tendency in a practical way. So after some discussion it was agreed that the RDG and the Scottish comrades would work together.

The second problem was how to investigate the causes of this disaster. Giving oxygen to the survivors and continuing the struggle does not prevent us holding a public inquiry as to the causes of the crash. Whilst I did not think a public inquiry was necessary, once those piloting the plane started giving their version of events in the press, I certainly felt that truth and justice would be best served if the passengers had their right of reply, and sooner rather than later.

We can see the consequences of this in the documents from Mark Fischer and Mary Ward (soon to be published). After seeing the submissions from both sides, it is right and proper that as a third party, with real interests at stake in this, we should give our considered view. The third party is not Dave Craig. It is the RDG. For the RDG to take a view we need to gather in the collective wisdom (or lack of it) from all our comrades.

Demands that the RDG "should take sides" - presumably by not giving the oxygen of publicity to the survivors and issuing some ill-considered soundbites of condemnation - is counterproductive. But comrades can rest assured that the RDG will consider the situation and give our opinions and criticisms of anybody we feel deserves it.

The Tories' view of crime, expressed repeatedly by John Major, is

that we should condemn more and understand less. The working class needs the opposite. Not because the workers are do-gooding liberals. We need to understand more and condemn less in order to draw the correct political conclusions. I would rather have a cool and calm discussion of issues than some mad rush to judgement. If comrades think that means 'siding with the enemy', they are woefully mistaken. The two tasks of intervening in Scotland, and conducting the public inquiry into why the comrades left, must be kept separate. If the Scottish comrades had

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**"Dirty washing, out in the open, cannot fester any more. It has to be washed clean. The soap powder of politics must be applied"**

.....

refused to allow their open letter to be published in the *Weekly Worker* because of their annoyance with the CPGB, then they would be guilty of putting their emotions above what is now necessary in the class struggle. But to attack the open letter and defend the Socialist Party, as Anne Murphy did, was to be guilty of precisely that.

There is one additional factor at work. The whole episode is a living experiment in openness. It is one thing to call on the rest of the left to wash their dirty linen in public. It is something else to do it yourself. First of all, this self-exposure, warts and all, has cheered up all the CPGB's enemies. But that is the short-sightedness that comes from spending too many years under the influence of the Labour Party. Dirty washing, out in the open, cannot fester any more. It has to be washed clean. The soap powder of politics must be applied.

Meanwhile the rest of the left have cupboards full of dirty linen, which never sees the light of day. Every hour the stench grows stronger until the build-up of noxious gases leads to fatal explosions in the style of the Workers Revolutionary Party. Then dazed ex-members wander round confessing about all the crap that went on, which they knew about. Now they are forced to confess to being party to a conspiracy of silence. The theory of openness predicts that the CPGB will be weakened at first, but if proper lessons are drawn, will become much stronger in the end. Current weakness is the source of future strength. It will be interesting to see if this prediction is true.

Now let me turn to the substance

of Anne Murphy's article on 'The fantasy world of Dave Craig'. Let us speculate on the political meaning of the headline. It could be that "Dave Craig" is simply a proxy for revolutionary Marxism. Anne has looked round for a handy weapon to bludgeon the traitors and borrowed the reactionary ideas of the Tories and the Blairites. Revolutionaries are all mad and living in a fantasy world. They are not of the real world. They do not have their feet firmly on the ground. So perhaps Anne is playing to her audience, using nothing more than bourgeois propaganda and popular prejudice against Marxists.

Perhaps not. Maybe this was declaration of war against the RDG and the open letter. My name is again being used as a proxy for the RDG. It is certainly the language of war. Accusing your allies of being on another planet is hardly the best way to enhance comradely relations between us. The RDG responded by immediately publishing a statement in support of the open letter (see Letters *Weekly Worker* September 3). Comrade Murphy says she does not disagree with that statement. We might conclude that she was not attacking the RDG policy or, if she was, it had been a mistake.

We are left with the third alternative. Anne was merely attacking me personally, implying that I was mad, in some fantastic world of my own. The headline is like some government health warning given out to readers. Don't smoke these crazy Dave Craig arguments because they will seriously damage your health! As a method of polemic I find this objectionable, not simply because it is against me.

I began my article by informing readers that the Campaign for a Federal Republic, the Red Republicans and the SML were "the three main affiliated" organisations of the SSA. As a factual statement this is true. There are no others. The word "main" was included only because I was not totally sure there were no other affiliates. Of the two other possibilities mentioned by comrade Murphy, the Scottish Socialist Movement has dissolved and the Communist Party of Scotland is not affiliated.

Anne then suggests that I claim or imply that the Campaign for a Federal Republic is the "third force in the SSA". I made no such claim. I said nothing about "force", nor did I give estimates of relative size, influence or political importance. So Anne places the words "third force" in my mouth. Then she says this is "clearly a fantasy". Later she speculates - "What of comrade Craig's 'second force' in the SSA? - the Red Republicans". All references to second and third "forces" were invented by Anne Murphy and attributed to me. She invents a "fantasy world of Dave Craig" and then criticises me for it.

Next Anne invents the fantasy that I have denied that the SML is the "main driving force" in the SSA. Naturally I made no such denial.

Still that does not stop Anne criticising me for more of the fantasies she has invented. Of course Anne, having thought up all this rubbish, feels the need to bring me down to earth. So she informs me that "any study of reality would leave you in no doubt that the SML is also in the driving seat when it comes to political questions". Apparently I need to "study reality" in order to realise what is known to every serious Marxist and every political simpleton. Even an idiot realises that SML is the main driving force. But not poor old Dave Craig! Next comes the issue of the open letter. Anne does not appear to have acquainted herself with the tactics of open letters or indeed what was actually going on in this instance. Still she is not one to let ignorance get in the way of sneering at the letter.

She says: "Funny that Dave Craig does not consider this trajectory not only a bit of a joke, but something *demanding* criticism" (of the Socialist Party). When an affiliated organisation of the SSA writes to the Socialist Party they have every right to expect a proper response to the political matters raised. The SP executive considered the letter and decided to do nothing about the political points raised. They also decided not to print the letter.

Of course this demands criticism. The CPGB has never hesitated to criticise the Socialist Party in the past. Now all of a sudden Anne Murphy attacks those of us campaigning for a federal republic and defends the Socialist Party which is fighting for Scottish independence. It seems to me that Anne is so blinded by anger, that she has manoeuvred herself into the position of defending the main left party promoting Scottish nationalism.

What is she angry about? The next line reveals all: "Comrade Craig should take sides: against right liquidationism; and for Partyism." Of course I am against these bad things. It is a question of whether we agree what these things are. Just as everybody is 'against sectarianism' without necessarily agreeing what it is or what constitutes examples of it.

The next four paragraphs are a denunciation of the betrayals of comrades Clarke and Ward. This, it seems to me, was the prime purpose of the article. If that means sabotaging any fight in Scotland against the formation of the SSP, so be it. I have no problem if the CPGB want to make comradely criticisms of their former comrades. But once the criticism becomes too personal and too bitter and, worse, is sabotaging the struggle in Scotland, we are descending into sectarianism, otherwise known as left liquidationism.

Anne finishes by giving me a patronising pat on the head. She says: "Dave Craig has the best of intentions, I am sure. He wants to draw these comrades back from the wilderness. But it will not be done by flattering and elevating two embittered lost souls. It is practice that shows truth, not labels." Since this is the main conclusion of the article, it shows what the intention of the article was all about. What has been exposed to me is not the fantasy world of Dave Craig, but the truth about the polemical style and methods of comrade Anne.

**Dave Craig**  
(RDG faction of the SWP)

# SML prepares UDI

Scottish Militant Labour is on the verge of completing its unilateral declaration of independence from the Socialist Party in England and Wales - the decisive moment will be the September 20 conference of the Scottish Socialist Alliance. Going ahead with the transformation of the SSA into the Scottish Socialist Party relies on SML's willingness to defy Peter Taaffe and the Committee for a Workers International. As the SML internal document we reproduce below shows, it is determined to proceed.

Dated August 26, it pre-empts the SPEW and CWI conferences - a split is imminent. The SPEW executive committee faxed reply that has come into our hands reveals a leadership that is impotent and bankrupt. Lynn Walsh and Peter Taaffe are the chief architects of the crisis - they refused to fight SML's demand for an independent class state in Scotland. They only objected to its organisational consequences when it affected their "small mass party".

## Resolution to SML conference from SML EC

1. The Scottish EC's proposal to launch a new Scottish Socialist Party, that we first debated at the SML conference in March this year, has dominated the agenda of SML over the last six months.

2. An intensive period of debate and discussion has taken place not only in Scotland, but in Britain, and to some extent in the international. Numerous documents have been written by the SML EC, the British EC and the International Secretariat and a whole series of debates putting both sides of the case have been heard, especially in Britain over the last few months.

3. Comrades from the British EC, the IS and representatives of sections of the CWI have visited Scotland on four separate occasions allowing the opposition to our proposals to be heard by the Scottish comrades at first hand.

4. The intensity of the debate has reflected the importance of the issues under discussion which has been an attempt to clarify the best strategy and tactics to pursue and strengthen the forces of socialism and Marxism in Scotland in the coming period.

5. Clearly there are still differences between ourselves and the British EC and IS and many other comrades who have genuine concerns about our proposals. However, while we are still prepared to debate the issues at stake, it is clear we will not reach agreement with the British EC and the IS as to the best way forward.

6. The Scottish Committee agreed overwhelmingly in June that the SML conference in September should come to a decision on the launch of the new SSP. If the conference voted in favour, we agreed at the Scottish Committee to launch the new party in the autumn. We still believe that it is vital that any new party be launched this year to take advantage of the opportunities that already exist for this party and to allow time to fully prepare our intervention in the 1999 elections.

7. This would, of course, mean that the British conference and the world congress both scheduled for later this year have the right to discuss and take a position on our proposals. However, it would also mean that the decision of the Scottish organisation would be implemented prior to these conferences taking place. We realise that it would have been better to have agreement before going ahead, but as clear differences still exist, we feel it is right in these circumstances to allow the Scottish organisation to proceed while recognising doubts and opposition still exist.

8. The SML EC is therefore proposing the following:

- (i) On agreement being reached at the SSA conference on September 20, to launch the SSP in October this year.
- (ii) Launch the SSP with a series of city-wide rallies and press conferences to have the maximum impact prior to Christmas.
- (iii) Set up functioning SSP branches in as many areas as possible that would aim to meet at least fortnightly.

9. International Socialists

- (i) To establish a revolutionary platform/tendency inside the SSP, to be called the International Socialists (IS), which would be the Scottish section of the CWI.

(ii) The IS would be based on the current membership of SML and the role of the IS would be to organise and promote the ideas, analysis and methods of our organisation and international within the SSP.

(iii) IS branches would be formed in Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow and other areas where that is appropriate. IS branches should meet monthly as a minimum, supplemented by other IS meetings where that is necessary.

(iv) IS branches would discuss political ideas ... and monitor the progress of our work inside the SSP, as well as collect subs for the IS and CWI.

(v) The IS will produce a public journal in the form of a magazine called *International Socialist*. We propose to produce this journal quarterly to begin with and moving to a more frequent journal as resources allow.

(vi) Our journal would give an analysis of events in Scotland, Britain and internationally and would be a forum for our ideology within the SSP.

(vii) A regular members' bulletin/newsletter will be produced to carry updates of the work of the IS. The bulletin can also be a forum for the members of the IS to raise issues in a written form.

(viii) The IS will hold an annual conference to discuss policy and programme, and the work of the IS. This conference will elect a national committee and the NC will elect an EC. We will aim to organise NC meetings every three months.

(ix) All IS members who hold public positions in the SSP and elected representatives will be accountable to the IS.

(x) The IS will have the right to have members-only meetings, although as a general rule we would have as many open meetings as possible to attract new members to the IS.

(xi) The IS will elect an organiser, who we propose will be one of the current SML EC members.

(xii) The IS will apply to the International Executive Committee and the world congress to be recognised as an official section of the CWI.

10. Finance

- (i) Because the SSP as a new party will need

time to develop its financial resources, we are proposing that for a six-month interim period, our executive, some of whom will work for the SSP, will continue to be financed by SML/IS. Our current level of subs contribution to the CWI, the cost of the CWI comrade and the production of the IS members' bulletin will also be paid from the SML/IS subs.

(ii) This will mean that comrades should continue to pay subs to SML while joining the SSP as individual members. We would ask comrades to consider paying the SSP minimum sub over and above their current subs to SML. For comrades where this is not practical, an agreement should be reached after discussion.

(iii) After six months, we will discuss a split in our subs, taking into account what we need to run the IS organisation, the rest going to the SSP.

(iv) We are proposing that as a minimum initial financial contribution the SSP pays for the cost of the Glasgow office, but that the IS would have access to the office and would contribute an amount to its running costs.

11. Scottish Socialist Voice

(i) The *SSV*, we propose, would be the paper of the SSP with an elected editorial board. We would expect that two of the current SML executives who are responsible for currently producing the paper, would continue to play a leading role in the production of the *SSV*.

(ii) The *SSV* would continue as a fortnightly paper, with a discussion about increasing the number of pages and the overall funding of the paper being opened up inside the SSP.

12. SML executive (see separate proposals)

(i) It seems likely that the SSP will want to have three area organisers to help develop the party in Scotland. The SSA currently organises in three areas: north Scotland, east Scotland and west Scotland. We should propose to the SSP that three of the current SML EC play these roles. In addition, comrades will play a leading role in the *SSV*, industrial work, as well as the financial development of the SSP.

(ii) We are proposing one comrade is elected as an IS organiser, but other comrades will have varying degrees of responsibilities for the work of the IS in Scotland.

(iii) In effect, a number of the SML EC will be seconded to the SSP until an SSP conference is convened, to ensure that maximum impact of the new party in its initial stages. After that, we can look at the situation in the light of the circumstances at that time. We would expect that a number of the EC would continue to play leading roles in the SSP after that time.

13. CWI affiliation

(i) It would be wrong to impose a time scale or give any guarantees as to the outcome of affiliation to our international by the SSP. We should discuss among the IS members and with the CWI leadership the best approach to take on this question. Whatever the outcome on affiliation, big sections of this new party can be won to the ideas of the CWI if we work in the right way, with a very open and bold approach.

(ii) It is true that these proposals are new and untested. We need to have a sober assessment as to the likely development of the SSP and how quickly it can make an impact. Nevertheless, in our estimation, this new party gives our organisation and international a great opportunity to take the ideas of socialism and Marxism out to a new audience in the politically turbulent situation that is currently unfolding.

14. Proposed role of the SML EC comrades

CF - west of Scotland SSP organiser and *SSV*;  
KK - *SSV*; AMC - *SSV*;  
RV - west of Scotland SSP organiser and west of Scotland workplace organiser;  
KB - SSP/IS finances; PS - north of Scotland SSP organiser and IS magazine;  
FC - IS Scottish organiser

(i) While these are the main responsibilities of the comrades, they do not cover all the areas of work the comrades will be involved in. All comrades will be involved to varying degrees in the work of the IS ●

## Extremely inappropriate

Socialist Party Executive Committee to Scottish Militant Labour Executive Committee

August 27 1998

We received your 'Resolution to SML conference from SML EC' on August 25. We will circulate it to National Committee members before the meeting on September 5-6.

We still consider that these latest organisational proposals are completely inadequate from the point of view of maintaining a revolutionary Marxist organisation and establishing a viable section of the CWI in Scotland. We will produce an EC resolution making our position clear in the next few days.

We feel that we have to write to you straightaway, however, on the course of action you are proposing in the resolution. As you say, there are still "clear differences", which will of course be discussed at the NC, the special conference on October 3-4 and at the CWI world congress in November. You say that you do not believe that we will be able to reach agreement as to the best way forward. The resolution also makes it clear, however, that if your proposed procedure is followed, "it would also mean that the decision of the Scottish organisation would be implemented prior to these conferences [the SP special conference and the world congress] taking place". Such a step would be unprecedented in the history of the CWI and a breach

of the norms and especially the democratic spirit of democratic unity. It is surely an extremely inappropriate way in which to propose the establishment of a new section of our International.

We would appeal to you, even at this stage, to reconsider the timetable and, at the very least, defer any implementation of your proposals until after the SP special conference on October 3-4.

At the moment, the Scottish organisation is still an autonomous unit of the British section, and we do not agree that either the political situation in Scotland or our agreement that the Scottish comrades form a separate section of the CWI makes it right for SML to pre-empt the outcome of the present debate and take unilateral action. We recognise that many SML comrades favour pressing ahead. But we would ask you to recognise that a great many members of SP and other CWI sections (in our estimate a majority), who have the highest regard for the Scottish comrades' achievements and want only to see the further successes of Marxism in Scotland, are strongly opposed to your proposals. They consider that they have a right to participate fully in the debate before a decision is effectively taken.

Yours comradely,

**Lynn Walsh**

For the executive committee

A reply to Ian Donovan of *Revolution and Truth*

# Behind the mask of

## Part one: Lenin and the Russian Revolution

**M**y friend Ian Donovan has a rather excessive opinion of his polemical powers and prowess. Merely because his article 'Fundamentally flawed' (*Weekly Worker* July 23 1998) got a rejoinder - from both this writer and comrade Dave Craig - he triumphantly announces that he "struck a raw nerve". Presumably he imagines his criticism of the Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency platform was so damaging, so damning as to be totally devastating.

Sorry to disappoint you, comrade Donovan. Speaking for myself, the original article and the subsequent follow-up, 'Economic struggle above democracy' (*Weekly Worker* August 27), was a gift. Comrade Donovan's economic and non-Leninist views are held dear by a wide spectrum on the left which passes itself off as 'Trotskyism'. Every paragraph contains its nuggets of conventional loose thinking and dogmatic *faux pas*. Therefore to polemicise with comrade Donovan is, one way or another, to polemicise not simply with one freelance revolutionary, but a school of thought. It is in this spirit that I reply.

Let us begin by disposing of a couple of issues with which comrade Donovan introduces his article. They speak eloquently about comrade Donovan, but are diversionary. The comrade seeks to portray me as a Stalinist who uses a criminally reinvented Leninism to denigrate the revealed truths of Leon Trotsky and his latter-day disciples.

First diversion: that "infamous Stalinist swearword 'Trotskyite'". Comrade Donovan is, you see, no Trotskyite. He is a Trotskyist. As the comrade explains at length, for him *ist* is a badge of honour. On the other hand *ite* has "overtones of Stalin's *Short course*", the use of which apparently reveals Jack Conrad's "ingrained anti-Trotskyist prejudice". More, it derives from my current "Stalinoid methodology".

Frankly I feel no need whatsoever to rebuff the 'Stalinist' or 'Stalinoid' charges. Such nonsense can be dismissed with the contempt it deserves. However, before giving a brief answer to the use of the term 'Trotskyite', let me put my cards squarely on the table. I am critical of Trotsky on a whole range of significant questions. That should not be taken to mean that I do not admire him as a revolutionary and a Marxist theoretician. On both counts he must be numbered amongst the greats. Hence I do not write 'Trotskyite' as an insult. I deploy it in a somewhat neutral manner. For me it simply describes one who does, or claims to, follow, or defend, the key distinguishing ideas of Trotsky.

Nevertheless, as comrade Donovan should be aware, most 'isms', 'ists', or 'ites' placed after the name of this or that individual first see the light as terms of abuse (whether the original language is Russian, German or English). Certainly that goes for 'Leninism', 'Trotskyism' and 'Stalinism'. Comrade Donovan has a problem here. He can insist for all he is worth that in its derogative usage the term 'Trotskyite' has its origins in Stalin's *History of the CPSU(B) Short course*. Yet anyone with a passing knowledge of Lenin's works will know that such a contention is baseless. Here are three examples (there are many more). In

December 1910 Lenin was attacking Trotsky and his "circle of Trotskyites" for their opposition to rapprochement between the Bolsheviks and Plekhanov's group (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 17, Moscow 1977, p19). In September 1911 Lenin declared "Trotsky and the 'Trotskyites'" more "pernicious" than any "liquidator" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 17, Moscow 1977, p243). In June 1914 the "Trotskyites" were condemned for being "merely a screen to cover up liquidationism" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 20, Moscow 1977, p337).

Needless to say, interchangeably Lenin also brandished the term 'Trotskyist'. Again he did so as an insult. However, what begins as rudely often becomes its opposite with the passage of time. At the end of the day, of course, it depends on the point of view and motives of both communicator and listener (reader). When some muddle-headed anarchist 'insults' me by damning my politics as 'Leninist', I take it as an unintended complement. Comrade Donovan can choose to be offended when called a Trotskyite if he so desires. On the other hand he can take it as praise. But I wish to convey neither message.

Diversion number two. According to comrade Donovan one of the "most insidious aspects of Stalinism was the manufacturing of a cult of Lenin, his elevation to virtual sainthood, the mummification of his body and all." In the field of ideology this is not far off the mark. It needs to be emphasised, however, that in deifying Lenin 'official communism' drained his formulations and perspectives of their liberatory, complex and evolving revolutionary content (the same operation was performed on Marx and Engels). There remained only an outer husk. Words and concepts were thereby mutated into their opposites - 'proletarian internationalism' became a code for domination by the Soviet state, 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' described dictatorship over the proletariat, 'socialism' was equated with nationalised property forms. In this cabalistic way carefully selected quotes plucked from Lenin have been used to justify everything, from Stalin's theory of socialism in one country to Gorbachev's perestroika..

But admit it, comrade Donovan, the 'official communists' are far from alone. Trotskyites have enthusiastically followed suit with Trotsky (and in their own way with Marx, Engels and Lenin too). Gerry Healy famously purchased Trotsky's death mask to bolster his failing Workers Revolutionary Party. Peter Taaffe bizarrely tries to 'prove' that the revolutionary-reformist programme of the Socialist Party in England and Wales is a creative development of Trotsky's transitional method. And as comrade Donovan knows from bitter personal experience, James Robinson legitimises the Spartacist League cult by claiming an unbroken historical continuity with the persona of Trotsky.

From Moscow's Zubovsky Boulevard to London's Hepscoth Road, the scholastic method necessarily involves the continuous reworking of a mythologised 'Marxism'. Opportunism thus overlays opportunism. Therefore what, in common sense, passes for 'Marxism' on much of the left today bears only a vague resemblance to the theory painstakingly developed by Marx and Engels. For any serious

reading of Marx, Engels, Lenin, or for that matter Trotsky, it is necessary to clear away the reactionary accretions that have built up over the years. In other words, meticulous and in-depth study is needed before one can approach the truth of what they 'really thought'. That, of course, does not mean these outstanding thinkers were automatically correct in their pronouncements. Everything and everyone must be questioned. To suggest otherwise would be foolish in the extreme. Suffice to say, that is exactly what comrade Donovan accuses Jack Conrad of doing. Apparently I quote "Lenin's words as holy writ, about matters far removed from the questions at stake in this discussion" (incidentally in my article on economism I quote Lenin once and in brief - on economism). It does not matter. For Jack, "Lenin is a secular god whose words, irrespective of context, are the ultimate trump-card in discussions with 'Trotskyites'".

To illustrate my supposedly religious commitment to Lenin comrade Donovan reproduces the following paragraph from the article 'Trotskyite economism or revolutionary democracy?':

"Indeed, comrade Donovan seems convinced that the democracy in an 'advanced bourgeois democracy that is today's Britain' resulted from what he calls the 'bourgeois-democratic revolution'; ie, a historically necessary and predetermined stage between feudal and capitalist society. No doubt Lenin too took the bourgeois democratic revolution as axiomatic. But he never let a bad theory get in the way of a good revolution. His thought was rich and dialectical, his revolutionary will was unequalled. Fixed categories were an anathema. Hence the 'bourgeois democratic' revolution in Russia would in his programme be carried out against tsarism and the bourgeoisie by an alliance of the proletariat and peasantry" (*Weekly Worker* July 30).

Comrade Donovan is so intent on charging down, polemical club in hand, just about every sentence in the above passage that he fails to notice that in passing Jack Conrad criticises Lenin for having "a bad theory". In other words Lenin was wrong. But mere facts cannot be allowed to get in the way of setting up Jack Conrad as a blind fanatic, can they, comrade Donovan? Anyway he, along with the whole school of economistic Trotskyism, holds to a far worse version of the theory of the bourgeois democratic revolution. But more of this at a later date.

Comrade Donovan dislikes my statement that Lenin's revolutionary will was "unequalled". Such "gushing phraseology is alien to genuine Leninism". Besides, how was Lenin's revolutionary will "greater" than comrade Donovan's hero Trotsky? After all Lenin "had the opportunity to lead the revolution (and did it splendidly) in a period of revolutionary upswing." In contrast Trotsky "struggled against the stream in the face of the greatest defeats in history, which Lenin did not live to see".

With sufficient time I am sure one could find some similarly "gushing" phrase from Trotsky himself testifying to Lenin's outstanding leadership qualities. But that is hardly the point. Lenin and Trotsky were contemporaries. Abstract speculation about how

Lenin might have compared with Trotsky if the former had lived to 1940 is worthless. We can put to use Trotsky's own words in order to juxtapose the two in the actual course of Russian history which embraced periods of defeat and reaction and three revolutions - 1905, February and October 1917. In essence Trotsky took a centrist, "conciliationist" position from 1903 until May 1917, when he returned from the USA and placed himself "at the disposal of the Bolshevik Party". Trotsky later maintained that until then his "revolutionary ideas or proposals amounted to nothing but 'phrases'". Lenin on the other hand carried out "the only truly revolutionary work". That was, a contrite Trotsky argues, "work that helped the party take shape and grow stronger" (L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition: 1923-25*, New York 1980, pp265, 267). Was Trotsky right? Absolutely.

Why is comrade Donovan determined to belittle Lenin? Basically it stems from the comrade's economistic approach to present-day politics. That means democratic questions are, for him, at best secondary, if not ghastly traps to be avoided. Crudely put, the role of revolutionaries in a country like ours is twofold. In the here and now support and give a Trotskyite coloration to bread and butter issues like the minimum wage and trade union rights. That is practical politics which, in spite of the much vaunted 'transitional' claims of the Trotskyites, remain firmly within the narrow horizon of the present constitutional monarchy state. Then in the indefinite future lies the socialist millennium. As there is no revolutionary situation in Britain, that has to be fought over in the realm of propaganda, where the ideologically defined sects engage in a primeval struggle for survival. The minimum or immediate demand for a federal republic advanced by the CPGB has no place in comrade Donovan's world. The only republic he is willing to countenance is the *socialist* republic. Contradictorily the comrade says he too calls for the abolition of the monarchy and self-determination for Scotland and Wales (presumably these demands will have to wait till after the revolution before they can be realised).

Lenin is very inconvenient for this economistic schema. He stressed the necessity for working class hegemony in the struggle for democracy and a republic in Russia; something to be crowned by the revolutionary seizure of power by the workers at the head of the peasant masses (the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry). In contrast because he was anti-Lenin, a caricatured pre-1917 Trotsky serves comrade Donovan's economism admirably. Lenin might have been right and Trotsky wrong about the importance of building the Party. But Trotsky was right and Lenin was wrong about the Russian Revolution. So says our comrade Donovan.

Comrade Donovan insists that in order to lead the October Revolution, Lenin had to "abandon his theory of the 'democratic dictatorship', the aim of which was a provisional revolutionary government of workers and radical peasant parties that would inaugurate the unfettered development of capitalism in Russia. Lenin ad-

vocated a bourgeois-democratic revolution of a special type, in which the role of the revolutionary government of the Jacobin type (clearing the medieval barriers to capitalist development) would be played by the 'democratic dictatorship', while only after a whole stage of capitalist development would socialist revolution become materially possible."

Comrade Donovan ridicules Lenin's demand for the revolutionary democratic dictatorship - ie, rule of the proletariat and peasantry. However, his whole account is garbled. It is half true, half false. He tells us that Lenin had a "theory of stages" - by definition a cardinal sin for any self-respecting Trotskyite. First stage, there would be an anti-tsarist revolution. It could not be led by the bourgeoisie. That class was too cowardly and compromised with the autocracy. The proletariat would have to substitute and, in alliance with the peasant millions, see through the 'bourgeois democratic revolution'. However, though carried out in a "novel way", the revolution would merely bring socialism "nearer" by "laying the basis for capitalist development under 'democratic' conditions". Only after that capitalist stage had been completed could the working class think about putting forward its own class agenda and preparing for the second, socialist, revolution. The 'democratic dictatorship' is therefore, announces comrade Donovan, "synonymous with 'bourgeois freedom and bourgeois progress'" and thus "with a bourgeois-democratic republic".

Actually the real theory of *artificial* stages in Russia was advocated by the Mensheviks. Their analysis flowed from crude historical analogies and was thus very superficial. The peasants were almost entirely absent. The main change needed to the above sketch of Lenin's supposed "stages theory" is that the 'bourgeois revolution' would necessarily be finished by the bourgeoisie. The proletariat had to support the bourgeoisie in carrying out its predetermined historic mission. That bourgeois-proletarian alliance could involve independent militant action from below. However, in the event that a popular revolution proved successful in Russia, the proletariat puts the bourgeoisie in power. Obeying the 'laws of history' it then patiently waits in the wings, as a "party of extreme opposition", until capitalism has been fully developed and the conditions matured for socialism (including the proletarianisation of the peasantry). For Mensheviks then, there would have to be two revolutions in Russia. One bourgeois with a corresponding bourgeois state. The other, coming a long time after, was socialist, with a corresponding socialist state. The two are separated by a definite historical stage and crucially by distinct and antagonistically opposed regimes.

Lenin explicitly rejected this mechanical schema. His theory was based on Marx's permanent revolution and a thorough investigation into Russia's political economy. As comrade Donovan rightly suggests, Lenin considered the Russian bourgeoisie counterrevolutionary. As a class it could not even begin the 'bourgeois revolution'. The workers would have to take the initiative in overthrowing tsarism at the "head of the whole peo-

# Trotskyism

ple, and particularly the peasantry". The main *political* slogans of the Bolsheviks were open-ended: "abolish the monarchy" and "for the democratic republic". If their popular uprising proved successful - and remained under proletarian hegemony - the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry would *not* meekly stand aside for the bourgeoisie. Yes, capitalism would be "strengthened": ie, allowed to develop. But not, as comrade Donovan says, in an "unfettered" manner. There would be strict limitations. Not only a 10-hour day, trade union rights and complete political liberty but an "armed proletariat" in possession of state power. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry would wage a "relentless struggle against all counterrevolutionary attempts", not least from the bourgeoisie.

Such a hybrid regime could not survive in isolation. It would, and must, act to "rouse" the European socialist revolution. The proletariat of advanced Europe would in turn help Russia move to socialism (which requires definite material conditions in terms of the development of the productive forces). Inevitably there would be a differentiation between the proletariat and the richer peasantry. But not necessarily a specifically *socialist* revolution: ie, the violent overthrow of the state in Russia.

Put another way, there would not be a democratic or bourgeois stage and then a socialist stage at the level of regime. Democratic and socialist tasks are distinct and premised on different material, social and political conditions. But particular elements overlap and interlock. The revolution could, given the right internal and external conditions, proceed uninterruptedly from democratic to socialist tasks through the proletariat fighting not only from below but from above - ie from a salient of state power. The revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat thereby peacefully grows over into the dictatorship of the proletariat assuming internal proletarian hegemony and external proletarian aid from a socialist Europe. Here is Lenin's theory elaborated in his pamphlet *Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution* (see VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, pp15-130). It is readily available, easily checked and not too difficult to grasp. So why does comrade Donovan mischievously paint Lenin in the pale colours of Menshevism?

What of Trotsky? Comrade Donovan supplies us with an extensive quote from Trotsky's *Results and prospects* published in 1906. Trotsky outlines his application of the theory of permanent revolution to Russia. Like Lenin he dismissed any revolutionary potential of the bourgeoisie. The working class had to form a revolutionary government "as the leading force". They would do so in "alliance with the peasantry". But given the circumstances of Russia, the fact of proletarian state power would destroy the "borderline between the minimum and maximum programme; that is to say, it places collectivism on the order of the day". One should not interpret such a formulation to mean Trotsky imagined a backward and isolated Russia as ripe for socialism. No communist then believed any such thing. Trotsky, to his credit, remained hostile to "national socialism", albeit contradictorily, till his assassination in 1940 (L Trotsky *The permanent revolution* New York

1978, p159). On the contrary Trotsky understood that the revolution would have to be permanent, or uninterrupted, if the working class in Russia was not to be "crushed". European revolution was vital. Suffice to say, the differences with Lenin's theory are those of nuance.

True in *Results and prospects* and in Lenin's so-called replies there was a very unrewarding polemic between the two men. Factional interests produced more heat than light in both cases. Trotsky dismissed out of hand any suggestion of a "special form of the proletarian dictatorship in the bourgeois revolution". He was intent on rubbishing and equating both the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. Lenin in his turn lambasted Trotsky for "underestimating" the importance of the peasantry by raising the slogan 'No tsar, but a workers' government'.

On the basis of such evidence Trotsky is no doubt right when he concludes that Lenin had "never read my basic work". The above slogan was proclaimed not by Trotsky but his friend and collaborator, Parvus. "Never did Lenin anywhere analyse or quote," says Trotsky, "even in passing, *Results and prospects*" (L Trotsky *The permanent revolution* New York 1978, p166). He goes on to cite the "solidarity" that existed between himself and the Bolsheviks during and immediately after the 1905 revolution. And for those who demonise the term 'stage' and belittle Lenin, Trotsky's boast that he "formulated the tasks of the successive stages of the revolution in exactly the same manner as Lenin" should provide food for thought (*ibid* p168). The same can be said for Trotsky's proud affirmation about how "Lenin's formula" closely "approximated" to his own "formula of permanent revolution" (*ibid* p198). Comrade Donovan can carry on claiming that Trotsky's theory was "far superior to Lenin's 'democratic dictatorship.'" But that only shows he has an agenda which owes very little to the actual revolution and nothing to the truth.

What of Lenin being forced to "abandon his theory of the 'democratic dictatorship'" in order to lead the October Revolution, as artlessly claimed by comrade Donovan? Here is a myth in part created, hatched and fostered by Trotsky himself after Lenin's death in 1924. No doubt he was desperate to counter the campaign against 'Trotskyism' launched by the triumvirate of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev. By pretending that Lenin had undergone a Trotskyite conversion in April 1917 he could enhance his own standing and at the same time highlight the secondary or negative role played by his opponents during 1917; Kamenev and Zinoviev famously 'scabbed' against Lenin's call for 'All power to the soviets' and a second revolution.

In February 1917 tsarism collapsed in the midst of a huge popular outburst. A provisional government was formed headed first by prince Lvov and, following his departure from the scene in July, by the Socialist Revolutionary Alexander Kerensky. The provisional government continued Russia's involvement in the imperialist slaughter, refused peasant demands for land redistribution, protected the money-bags and constantly delayed the convening of a constituent assembly. In short the proletariat and peasantry had "placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie". Nevertheless Russia was the fre-

est of the belligerent countries and alongside, and in parallel to, the provisional government stood the soviets - or councils of workers, soldiers and peasants. There was dual power.

What was Lenin's programme during this "first stage of the revolution"? Did he junk his old theory? On return from exile in April 1917 he issued the call for the Party to *amend* "our out-of-date minimum programme" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p24). Obviously the demand to overthrow the tsar had become obsolete. The key now was to combat honest popular illusions in the provisional government and raise sights. The Bolsheviks were a small minority in the soviets. Their task was to become the majority by agitating for the confiscation of the landlords' estates and the nationalisation and redistribution of land, the abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy, and the amalgamation of the banks into a single bank under workers' control. This agitation would prepare the subjective conditions for the "second stage of the revolution" and the transfer of all power into "the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants." The "only possible form of revolutionary government" was a "republic of soviets of workers", agricultural labourers' and peasants' deputies" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p23). Lenin made no claims that the Party's "immediate task" was to "introduce" socialism. Only that production and distribution had to be put under workers' control to prevent the impending meltdown of the economy.

Do these 'stageist' programmatic formulations and the perspective of a workers' and peasants' republic indicate an abandonment or a development of Lenin's theory in light of new and unexpected circumstances? I make no excuse for turning to Lenin himself for an answer. In the article, 'The dual power', he writes the following: "The highly remarkable feature of our revolution is that it has brought about a *dual power*. This fact must be grasped first and foremost: unless it is understood, we cannot advance. We must know how to supplement and amend old 'formulas', for example, those of Bolshevism, for while they have been found to be correct on the whole, their concrete realisation *has turned out to be* different. *Nobody* previously thought, or could have thought, of a dual power" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p38).

Lenin faced stiff opposition from amongst the 'old Bolsheviks'. Their confused and semi-Menshevik position brought about by the unique situation was summed up by Kamenev in *Pravda*: "As for comrade Lenin's general scheme it appears unacceptable, inasmuch as it proceeds from the assumption that the bourgeois democratic revolution is *completed*, and builds on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution."

His criticism was wrong on two accounts. Firstly, though state power had been transferred, the regime this produced did not meet the immediate programmatic aims of the Bolsheviks. Things were very complex. The old Romanov order had been politically overthrown. To that extent, argued Lenin, the programme had been fulfilled. But the 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants' in the form of the soviets had voluntarily ceded power to the

bourgeoisie. Life for the moment was in that sense closer to the complete minimum programme of the Mensheviks. To bring it up to that of the Bolsheviks required carrying through the agrarian revolution - the landlords still held their estates - and splitting the peasants from the bourgeoisie. "That", asserted Lenin, "has not even started" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p44).

Repetition of the slogan 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' *in general* had become a mere abstraction. Events had "clothed it with flesh and bone, concretised it and *thereby* modified it" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p45). The soviets were palpably real. The Bolsheviks, or those whom Lenin was now calling the communists, had to deal with the actual situation where, instead of coming to power, this 'revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' existed side by side with, and subordinate to, a weak government of the bourgeoisie. Lenin energetically fought for the Party to reorientate, to struggle for influence in the soviets. Once the Bolsheviks had a majority, the minimum programme could genuinely be completed, as October was to prove.

The dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry had become entangled with the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The Russian Revolution had gone further than the classical bourgeois revolutions of England 1645 or France 1789 but in Lenin's words "has not yet reached a 'pure' dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p61). There can be dual power, but not a dual power state. One of the dictatorships had to die. Either the revolution was completed under the hegemony of the proletariat, or popular power would be killed by counter-revolution. It was one or the other.

Secondly, there was Kamenev's mistaken, 'old Bolshevik' fear of voluntarism, of going straight to socialism. Lenin swore that there was no such intention. "I might be incurring this danger," explained Lenin, "if I said: 'No tsar, but a *workers'* government'. But I did *not* say that, I said something else" - ie, that power must pass to the workers' and peasants' soviets (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p48). The peasant movement could not be "skipped". The idea of playing at the seizure of power by a workers' government would not be Marxism but Blanquism. Power had to be exercised by the majority.

Far from rejecting his old formulation of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' Lenin quoted his 1905 *Two tactics* pamphlet to back up his concrete application of it in 1917. Like everything else, such a slogan had a "past and a future". Its past is "autocracy, serfdom, monarchy and privilege ... Its future is the struggle against private property, the struggle of the wage worker against the employer, the struggle for socialism" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p52). Kamenev and the 'old Bolsheviks' could only see the past. That is why they sought unity with the Mensheviks. But in 1917 the future had begun, above all around the attitude towards 'defencism' and preventing the economic collapse caused by the imperialist war. Russia and its people could only be saved by the soviets of workers and peasants. That was not socialism. But it would bring socialism nearer ●

Jack Conrad

## What we fight for

- Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.
- The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers' movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.
- Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.
- We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.
- The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single Party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.
- Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs: ie, communism.
- We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.
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# Seven years after

As the Russian financial and political crisis deepens inexorably, parallels with conditions in Weimar Germany become compelling. Seven years after the Yeltsin-led counterrevolution that destroyed the USSR, Russia has a currency that is effectively worthless, a profound split between the duma and a paralysed political executive and a society in the process of rapid disintegration. On September 7, the duma, in which the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) is the biggest faction, rejected Viktor Chernomyrdin as prime minister designate for a second time. A third vote must take place within a week. If the duma rejects him again, parliament will automatically be dissolved. Despite its record for crying wolf, there seems little chance that the CPRF will back away this time, as it did in May over the nomination of Kiryenko. The party recognises that if it did so, it would lose all credibility.

In the run-up to the final vote, two other scenarios are possible. First, Yeltsin could decide to ditch Chernomyrdin and propose a candidate more acceptable to the duma. In this event, the CPRF, and with it the duma, would probably acquiesce, provided the package included a significant shift of power from president to parliament, with places for CPRF ministers in the new government.

The second scenario is that parliament could avoid the constitutional necessity of dissolution by impeaching Yeltsin - a president subject to impeachment cannot dissolve the lower house of parliament. Preparations for impeachment are underway, condemning Yeltsin, among other things, for the major part he played in the 1991 counterrevolution and the disastrous war in Chechnya. Debate in the duma prior to the second vote centered on Chernomyrdin's 'stabilisation plan' for the Russian economy, a curious and contradictory document that has been received with a mixture of incredulity and anger by people ranging from Russian 'official communists' to western bankers and economists.

The so-called 'plan' envisages two stages. In the first stage, the government's printing presses will be working overtime producing around 37 billion roubles of new currency to clear up wages and pension arrears, settle vast inter-enterprise debts and bring back some liquidity to the tottering banking system. The political logic behind this 'controlled monetary emission' (ie, financial debauchery) is difficult to grasp.

Are workers expected to be grateful to get their long-awaited wage arrears in the form of roubles, still damp from the press, that will have practically no purchasing power? Maybe Chernomyrdin hopes that the inevitable tidal wave of hyperinflation created by this policy will render workers so desperate that they will welcome any means, however draconian, of bringing it to an end? The real beneficiaries of the 'stabilisation plan' are

to be the same oligarchs whose obscene greed did most to bring about the current crisis. It was their nominee, deputy prime minister Boris Fyodorov, who co-drafted the plan with Chernomyrdin.

What the plan proposes is that all old tax debts will be 'forgiven' in return for a promise by the debtors that they will pay up promptly in future! Imagine the mirth with which this proposal was greeted by the so-called oligarchs: ie, the turncoats, thieves, swindlers and degenerates who actually run Russia. At a stroke, the trillions of roubles they owe to the state in back taxes will be written off, provided they swear on scouts' honour to be good boys from now on. And for good measure, the banks they have driven into the wall as vehicles for speculation and money laundering will be rescued using some of the freshly minted roubles kindly provided by their buddies Chernomyrdin and Fyodorov.

If the first stage of the plan amounts to a surreal financial binge, the second will be a crash diet. From January 1 1999, an 'economic dictatorship' will be introduced. Russia will surrender its monetary sovereignty by adopting a currency board system, whereby every rouble in circulation has to be backed by a fixed amount of hard currency and precious metal reserves. In order to give some credibility to the scheme - and to get the further \$10-15 billion in foreign loans needed to make the plan work at all - Chernomyrdin proposes that a proportion of these reserves should be held in German banks. The point about a scheme of this kind is that it presupposes the most draconian form of austerity and monetary discipline, with profoundly negative consequences for a country that is already on the verge of social disintegration. Very high interest rates are intrinsic to the system. Unemployment, already at 11% according to (understated) official figures, would rise dramatically. Public spending would be slashed. Tens of thousands of enterprises would be forced into closure.

In this light, it is not surprising that the plan has caused consternation at home and abroad. In the west, there is scepticism about it on two grounds: first, the 'binge' element is seen as critically destabilising. In August the Russian government pumped more than \$2 billion into the banking system. Inflation for the month was 15%, implying annual rates of over 400% - and that is before the presses start rolling. No wonder the rouble, already devalued by more than two thirds, has not even begun to find a floor. Before the crisis it traded at six to the dollar; now it trades as low as 30, with 50 in sight. The hyperinflationary basis of the plan has been condemned by the IMF and there seems no chance of Russia getting the hard money needed to make it work. Secondly, there are doubts as to whether any Russian government would have the guts to carry through the tough measures necessary to make a currency board viable. Finally, with its

reserves held and controlled abroad, the Russian central bank would not be able to act as a lender of last resort in a crisis: ie, it could not bale out ailing banks. This would make a systemic failure of the entire banking system quite probable in the event of the collapse of individual institutions.

Leaving aside these technical considerations, what about the social consequences, the effect of all this on ordinary Russian workers? In the short period since the rouble's effective devaluation prices of staple consumer goods have gone through the roof. Increases in the region of 150% over the last 10 days are common. Hoarding is exacerbating already acute shortages of basic goods, including foodstuffs. Seven years after the Yeltsin counterrevolution agricultural production is down by

hunger, possibly starvation in the worst affected areas, is unavoidable. The International Red Cross is in the process of launching an emergency appeal for £10 million of food aid.

Economic fallout in terms of unemployment has so far been restricted to the foot soldiers of finance capital. Tens of thousands of 'workers' in the financial sector in Moscow have been summarily dismissed: brokers, salesmen, financial advisers, market analysts - all these people have been thrown overboard during the first phase of the crisis. The embryonic "new middle class" in Russia has found itself increasingly insecure and fearful. Petty bourgeois *biznesmen* (and *bizneswomen*) are easy prey for the anti-semites and brown nationalists.

So far as the working class is con-

Significantly, two of the main protagonists in the current struggle, general Aleksander Lebed and Gennadiy Zyuganov, leader of the CPRF, have stated that the situation in Russia is now as bad as or even worse than it was on the eve of the October Revolution. This raises a question of considerable interest and importance for us communists. Does a revolutionary situation really exist in Russia at this time? As a guide to analysing this question, let us remember a few words of Lenin:

"It is not sufficient for revolution that the exploited and oppressed masses understand the impossibility of living in the old way and demand changes; for revolution, it is necessary that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. Only when the 'lower classes' do not want the old and when the 'upper classes' cannot continue in the old way, then only can revolution conquer ... revolution is impossible without a national crisis affecting both the exploited and the exploiters. It follows that for revolution it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking, politically active workers) should fully understand that revolution is necessary and be ready to sacrifice their lives for it; secondly, that the ruling classes be in a state of governmental crisis which draws even the most backward masses into politics ... a symptom of every real revolution is the rapid ... increase in the number of representatives of the oppressed toiling masses - who hitherto have been apathetic - capable of waging the political struggle ..." (VI Lenin *Selected Works* Moscow 1939, Vol 10, p 127).

It is obvious that one of the preconditions for revolution is indeed present in Russia today. There is no doubt that the "exploiters" (ie, the Yeltsin administration and the oligarchs' kleptocracy) "are not able to live and rule in the old way". The other precondition, however, does not exist. At present, we see no evidence of revolutionary unrest among the "lower classes". It is undoubtedly true that they do not "want" the old way, but as yet there is no sign of that mass united action around a common programme and a single party, which is surely a precondition for revolution implicit in Lenin's definition.

It goes without saying that the CPRF bears no resemblance whatever to such a party. Its Great Russian chauvinist rhetoric harks back to the administrative-command economy of the Soviet Union, but today its calls for increased state intervention and an end to profiteering fall far short of a return to the past. And of course its 'socialism' lacks any trace of real working class democracy. If, as seems possible, the CPRF is brought into government, the duty of revolutionary communists will be to unite against it and to organise an independent working class alternative. ●

Michael Malkin



Gennadiy Zyuganov - a new communist government?

more than 50% and Russia now imports almost half of all its food. The collapse of the rouble has had immediate effects on the food supply, because suppliers are not prepared to deliver food, even to the Moscow area, unless it is paid for in dollars. The prospects for the coming winter are dire. There was heavy rain right across Russia throughout August. As a result the grain harvest is late and of poor quality. Worse still, the potato crop has been blighted, with the result that much of it is already ruined. The official forecast is for a "very poor" harvest of this vital component of the Russian diet. Severe

cerned, the rapid depreciation of the currency means that their roubles (when and if they receive them) will buy less and less of what few goods are available. Strikes, demonstrations and other protests are increasingly common. The miners, always on the front line in confrontation with the Russian government, recently staged a demonstration at the White House denouncing Chernomyrdin and calling for the impeachment of Yeltsin. According to one report, opinion polls show that "up to 75% of Russians would vote communist if elections were held today" (*Sunday Business* September 6).