

# TUC on its knees

Blair may have sent a batch of his ministers to last week's TUC. But his plans for the realignment of British politics include the complete marginalisation of the unions

Last week's Trades Union Congress clearly demonstrated that the TUC has for the moment transformed itself into a useless talking shop.

The bureaucrats listened politely not only to Eddie George, governor of the Bank of England, and George Bain, head of the government's Low Pay Commission, but also to a whole array of New Labour ministers. Peter Mandelson, the trade and industry secretary, patronisingly conceded that the unions were "a force for good" and welcomed their "huge efforts to modernise". But, in an attempt to reassure the establishment that this recognition of the TUC's 'positive' development did not mean a return to the previous close relationship, he emphasised that the Labour government would "never be a soft touch". Nevertheless Mandelson dangled the carrot of increased TUC input - a "voice of direct workplace experience" in public policy-making - if the unions continued to toe the line. The choice before them, wheedled Mandelson, was "opposition or legitimate influence".

The determining factor, as far as Mandelson was concerned, was the necessity for the unions to "actively work for and welcome profits". By way of contrast, they should show "moderation in wage demands and flexibility in pay levels". Here he was expressing his desire that the militancy of the 70s and 80s would remain a thing of the past, and that a tamed union movement would in effect become first and foremost an arm of capital.

That might have appeared a forlorn hope in view of John Edmonds' much reported "greedy bastards" comments. But Mandelson was not taken in by the GMB leader's populist remarks. He knows that complaints of pay disparity are intended for union members' consumption and are most unlikely to be backed up by action.

This was well illustrated by the bureaucrats' muted criticisms of the pathetically low level of Labour's minimum wage. As *The Guardian* reported, "A succession of union leaders and delegates admitted they were torn between delight and dismay at the initial £3.60 hourly rate" (September 16). Bill Morris of the Transport and General Workers Union exemplified this with his remark, "Thank you for the principle; shame about the rate." And the 'leftwing' leader of Unison, Rodney Bickerstaffe, con-

fessed to being "cock-a-hoop" that the state was to set a legal minimum, but whinged that the rate was "not enough" and "cannot be fair". TUC general secretary John Monks merely rebuked Labour for being "over-cautious".

These misleaders seem totally unable to grasp that a "principle" that leaves millions mired in poverty is worse than useless. The only principled demand is one which lays down a minimum based on *what workers need*. The fact that it is claimed that two million workers will have their poverty slightly alleviated by Blair's legislation, as George Bain shamefacedly admitted to the congress, is hardly a cause for celebration. The Communist Party has calculated that workers need a minimum of £285 a week in order to reproduce themselves physically and culturally in 1998 Britain. That translates into an hourly rate of £8.14, based on a 35-hour working week. The TUC's 'reasonable' call for £4.61, backed up by most of the left, is in fact equivalent to a declaration that their members are not entitled to any sort of a decent standard of life.

No wonder the TUC won praise from bourgeois liberals. Writing in *The Guardian*, Hugo Young was fulsome in his admiration: "... they have acquired their own modernity. This has been a sober, polite and passionately serious gathering. In fact, as political partners for Labour, the unions in their present state must seem, to anyone with an open mind, to have a few things to be said for them that business cannot match" (September 17).

Monks' talk of "partnership" and "new unionism" certainly marks the unions' transformation, and with it a distinct shift in the attitude of large sections of the bourgeoisie. Over the last two decades the change has been dramatic. In the 70s even the most rightwing of union leaders, whatever their talk of cooperation with business, were obliged to speak out for workers' pay, conditions and workplace rights in the context of interests separate and distinct from those of the employers. Today any expression of working class independence - even in the form of totally unpolitical workplace antagonisms - has been smothered by the most blatant class collaborationism.

What has caused this change? Undoubtedly the Thatcherite offensive, culminating with the breaking of the



Prescott and Monks at the TUC: no need to look left

miners' Great Strike of 1984-5. This was a strategic defeat for our class. The shift in the balance of power was enshrined by the battery of anti-union legislation that all but outlawed effective trade unionism. It resulted over time in a belief amongst individual workers that their interests were not being advanced through trade union organisation.

Membership began to drop from its peak of around 12 million (50% of the workforce) in 1980 to below seven million (about 30%) today. Despite rising employment over recent years, this decline has not been reversed. It has resulted not so much from mass resignations as from a failure to recruit. Only 18% of workers under the age of 30 belong to a union, and the newest sectors of industry are the ones where union membership is most sparse. Militancy is almost exclusively limited to long, defensive actions by tiny groups. Working days lost through strike action have dropped from their peak of around 30 million a year in the late 70s to a stage where they hardly register at all.

The effects of this historic defeat were not restricted to the workplace, but were also reflected in a shift to the right in the Labour Party and in the whole of society. Over the last decade this rightward shift has been accentuated following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The apparent elimination of any kind of ideological alternative to capitalism has ushered

in a period of reaction, where the notion of working class independence - in the sphere of trade unionism, let alone in the political field - has been totally discredited.

In 1998 the only 'campaigns' the union tops can contemplate are those such as the demand to cut interest rates. Even this is conducted almost by proxy. The TUC delegation to Downing Street before congress called on the Bank of England committee which determines the rate to be broadened, to include "representatives of industry" - ie, of industrial capital. Gone are the days when the union bureaucrats aimed to influence the state directly; now they hope that big business will do the job for them.

What is unspoken in the TUC's criticisms of Labour's policy on interest rates is any acknowledgement of Blair's anti-working class reasoning on the question. The government's priority of vanquishing inflation carries with it the underlying assumption that unemployment is 'too low'. Fewer people at work means lower demand, the achievement of which can also be aided by holding down workers' pay. If prices are lower as a result, the competitiveness of British capital will be enhanced. A spate of bankruptcies, along with higher unemployment, is a small price to pay - or so the argument goes. Nevertheless Monks, Morris and co cling to 'their' party.

The stoicism of the union bureau-

crats has clearly impressed Hugo Young. Having witnessed "the sobriety and long-termism of the unions" in TUC week, he has changed his mind on what he previously considered to be the "high priority of progressive politics" - the necessity of ending Labour's links with the trade unions. He contrasts the TUC with "the gimcrack opportunism and fly-by-night donations of corporate sponsors who think they know a good thing while it briefly stares them in the face" (*The Guardian* September 17).

This misses the point. Blair is well aware that governing in the interest of capital as a whole often requires taking action in direct opposition to the short-term approach of individual capitalist concerns. His proposal for the state funding of political parties envisages the freedom to act, independent not only of residual union influence, but of the whims of "corporate sponsors" too.

Sure, it would be useful to retain the loyalty of the TUC leaders, just as Clinton's Democrats still have the main US unions in tow. But Blair is looking at the bigger picture. The introduction of proportional representation will change the face of British politics. Last June's joint declaration on constitutional matters by the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats opened the way for a future realignment, where the support of the unions will be a marginal concern ●

Jim Blackstock

## Euro-election fund

The Communist Party is launching a £65,000 election fund to ensure that our revolutionary politics are presented to masses of ordinary people in next year's European elections.

At the very least, this total would enable us to stand a full slate of 10 CPGB candidates in London - if agreement is not reached within the London Socialist Alliance to form a common list - and to produce propaganda to be distributed to up to three million electors. Given the regulations of the new proportional representation electoral system, the deposit for London will be £5,000, whether we stand one candidate or the full 10. Any political organisation that takes itself seriously will surely aim for ten candidates to maximise its impact.

This would be the largest electoral intervention of our Party for many years, a difficult but exciting challenge for our organisation. We have identified communist work in bourgeois elections as critical for the development of a viable proletarian alternative under the conditions of today's class struggle. As Jack Conrad wrote in the book *In the enemy camp*, "In the conditions which pertain today the 'election question' delineates the main divisions within the working class movement in our country" (p7).

When this was written, we faced relatively few left rivals in the field, the majority of other organisations being tied to auto-Labourism. Blair has changed all of that. The evolution of the Labour Party away from even a nominal relationship to the working class has at last precipitated some movement. The arena of electoral challenge to Labour is starting to look quite crowded. The Socialist Workers Party has timidly intimated that it will start to stand in some elections; the Socialist Party will contest (for as long as it survives or remains able to do so - see below); in Scotland the new Scottish Socialist Party will be throwing its national socialist hat into the ring; Scargill's Socialist Labour Party will certainly contest and, hopefully, the Socialist Alliances will present a challenge.

In London, the Communist Party is suggesting to our allies in the LSA that we present a united left slate, with candidates selected on a proportional basis from the constituent parts of the Alliance to ensure a true reflection of forces involved. We are also urging our LSA comrades to run as ambitious a campaign as possible, to take advantage of the provisions of bourgeois electoral legislation to get our material into the hands of every potential voter. There could be tremendous political rewards for forces with courage enough to rise to the challenge.

If CPGB comrades stand as part of an LSA slate across the capital, the money from our electoral fund will be used both to pay our fair share of the expenses of the joint slate and - crucially - to promote our politics alongside this bloc, to fight for a maximum vote for it through critical communist propaganda. If the LSA fails to grasp this opportunity, or turns its back on proportional representation within the slate for participating groups, the CPGB will stand alone. Given problems of logistics or finance, we consider it *obligatory* for serious working class forces to stand in elections. We will utilise *every* avenue to propagate the ideas of communism to masses of people.

Comrades can contribute to our fund confident that their money will be used to get communist ideas to *millions*. It is an ambitious target because as a political organisation we are ambitious. Some of our bloc partners in the Socialist Alliances appear a tad less confident about the future, however.

*The Socialist* of September 11 announces the launch of an "emergency fund appeal" because of the "economic crisis buffeting the world and now hitting Britain". And what prompts the launch of this crisis fund? What bold initiatives are our comrades planning? Well, it seems the Socialist Party in England and Wales is attempting to inspire its readers to dig deep because "producing leaflets and posters is expensive".

In other words, the financial crisis engulfing world capitalism has its counterpart in the financial hole the Socialist Party is in. Just as with the loss of its whole Scottish organisation to left nationalism, SPEW seems organically incapable of telling its readers - or even itself - the truth. The dramatic membership contraction of the organisation since decamping from the Labour Party has placed huge strains on the SPEW apparatus, built up in the halcyon days of 8,000 Militant members.

With ominous separatist noises coming from Wales - probably the organisation's most successful fundraisers - SPEW has to launch 'emergency funds' simply to ensure the continued production of run-of-the-mill campaign material like "leaflets and posters". Similarly, the following issue talks of the "the resources to produce our material" and the need to "urgently rebuild our war chest" (September 18). Not very inspiring stuff.

This sad scene underlines how dubious the rallying call in the fund launch article actually is. Given everything we know about the desperate situation in SPEW, the idea that "a donation to the Socialist Party is your best investment for the future" is hard to read without a wry smile. On the contrary, many of the readers of *The Socialist* will probably conclude that now is the time to bale out, cut losses and stop throwing good money after bad.

Until SPEW confronts the *political* crisis that threatens to drag the organisation under, its downward spiral is likely to continue. This decline is a product of the period of profound world reaction we are living through and should not be viewed in a sanguine manner. Until there is a viable pole of communist attraction, the disintegration of organisations like SPEW will produce little positive for our class.

The Communist Party's election fund looks a far better "investment" to plough your money into. The *Weekly Worker* will carry updates of the fund over the coming months. I urge all our readers, supporters and sympathisers to give it their maximum support ●

**Mark Fischer**  
national organiser

## What next?

It would seem that Frank Worth (Letters, September 10) is incapable of engaging in a serious exchange of views on the CPGB policy of abolishing the age of consent. For him either you support abolition or you are a sad vigilante brandishing a brick and a rope.

It would appear that his vitriolic response to my assertion, that - while there is a case for reducing the age of consent - its abolition would remove a useful protection for children from sexual exploitation by adults, springs in part from his anger at my use of the word 'perverse' to describe the obsessive desire among some adults to have sex with pre-pubescent children. Is it not perverse for an adult to have sex with, for example, a six-year old? How can a child meaningfully consent to such a 'relationship'?

Adults are naturally in a position of authority in their relationship with children. The child trusts the adult. For the adult to utilise this position in order to gratify their own sexual desire is a gross breach of trust which can have serious consequences for the abused individual's future development. Indeed that is one reason why such a relationship is perverse. For instance is it acceptable for teachers, social workers, nursery nurses, childminders, etc to form sexual relationships with their charges? To abolish the age of consent would remove legal sanction from such behaviour. Surely the organised sexual abuse which took place in children's homes throughout the UK in the 70s and 80s should counsel against providing adult abusers with the legal defence that the child has consented to the sexual activity. Of course other forms of abuse were rampant in such places, but the sexual abuse added another dimension to the pain suffered by the children 'cared' for by such institutions.

It is interesting to note that supporters of the Taleban believe that girls of six years of age are old enough to marry and have sexual intercourse with their adult partners. Does it not seem rather incongruous to Frank that the Taleban, who are not renowned for progressive policies on social questions, promote such a policy which, *prima facie*, allows six-year old girls to choose to express their 'sexuality' with an adult partner. Or is the matter rather to do with power, abuse and female oppression?

As with all child abuse, the sexual abuse of children is anti-communist in that it hinders and distorts the abused individual's ability to freely and fully develop their potential. We should remember that communists stand for a society where the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. We aim for a society and a working class movement in which individuals are confident, courageous and in control. Not wrecked, haunted, atomised emotional cripples.

There is no doubt that the anti-paedophile movement encouraged by the bourgeois media is reactionary. But it is also a response to real concerns (however exaggerated by the media) in certain communities that individuals with a record of serious child sex abuse are simply being dumped in certain areas with no resources provided to aid their rehabilitation. Is our answer simply that there is no legitimate grounds for concern?

Is there any form of sexual activity which Frank would consider perverse? Possibly the CPGB should campaign against the legal restriction imposed by the bourgeois state on those individuals who express their love for their pet or livestock in a more full-bodied way than popular prejudice and the law permits. These individuals, stigmatised and designated in popular parlance by the derogatory and pejorative term 'sheep-shaggers', are evidently oppressed by the present legislation out-

lawing bestiality which the British left have refused to challenge due to their economic focus on purely bread and butter issues. Admittedly including such a demand in our action programme for the European elections is unlikely to win many votes in most of the areas of the UK, but it can be argued that such a demand is crucial to the process of the self-formation of the working class. However, count me out for the canvassing.

The CPGB should reconsider its position of calling for the age of consent to be scrapped. With the death of Stalinism and the demise of social democracy the potential exists for genuine communists to reach out to the new generation, coming of age in a period where capitalism has nothing to offer humanity but social and cultural decline, and build a mass Communist Party. To include in our programme the demand to abolish the age of consent opens us up to justifiable ridicule. What next? Abolish the prohibition on incest?

**Sandy Johnstone**  
Glasgow

## Baggage

New Labour's rightward stampede and the ongoing marginalisation of the left inside and outside of it has opened up a political vacuum. No one organisation has the ability to fill this. Also, there are many people outside the normal scope of left politics taking direct action often of a very militant type - ie, the Animal Liberation Front. This makes alliances both desirable and necessary. The transition to socialism cannot be the work of a minority, an elite of professional revolutionaries. It has to be the effort of the vast majority. At present, it is by means of alliances that we can secure and begin to mobilise that majority.

Long years of Labour hegemony over the workers' movement plus the dead weight of ideological baggage has led to fragmentation and marginalisation of the left. The reduction of everything to a crisis of leadership has resulted in leader centralism and absurd personality cults. Science has been replaced by pseudo-theology and democracy by the bureaucratic tyranny of the party apparat. The gap between leaders and led, thinkers and doers, within the parties has widened, as has the gap between the parties and the class.

At the same time, there have arisen groups outside and often in opposition to the left's traditional structures and methods which challenge various aspects of capitalist oppression - if not its totality. Today young people tend to be involved in such groups rather than left groups. Yet if the left is to advance it has to influence and win them over.

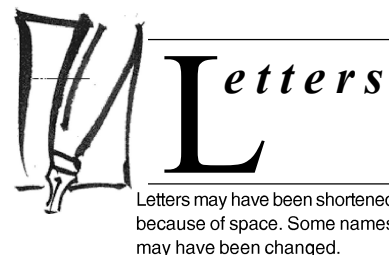
We cannot go on as we have done before. We urgently need a new politics and a new movement.

**Terry Liddle**  
South London

## Mish-mash

In the letter that you published in the *Weekly Worker* (September 17) the main idea which I originally wrote was not very clearly expressed. I wanted to stress the fact that any group which secretly conducts a five-year internal struggle, completely avoiding all public debate (like Workers Power and the League for a Revolutionary Communist International did in relation to a key programmatic issue: the state question), is not only bad for the class but also bad for that organisation. The fact that a minority could finally win is not, as WP claims, evidence of internal democracy; it could show exactly the opposite.

The LRCI's new theory on the state is one of the worst mish-mashes ever



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

produced by the international left. According to WP's new conception, the Stalinist states were bourgeois states without a bourgeois economy, which they call 'workers' states'; these workers' states were created without smashing the capitalist state and even worse, by reforming and reinforcing it.

WP makes no major distinction between a bourgeois and a workers' state. Apparently until August 1997 all the states east of Germany were workers' states and one month later they decided that eight of them ceased to be that. No explanation was given. However, even Yugoslavia, which WP continuously described as the only "degenerated workers' state" in Europe, could not be defended against internal reaction or imperialist intervention. WP called for US/UK/Nato forces to assist their Balkan puppets against the Serbs.

The debate in WP was extremely long and confused. Finally the minority won through using a variety of administrative and repressive measures. The leader of the minority never created a tendency in order to fight for his position. He just happened to be the person in charge of making, editing and changing the minutes and every adopted resolution, the international treasurer, the editor of the international journal, the leader of many commissions, the head of every commission of investigation against his internal opponents, etc.

These manoeuvres, combined with a debate behind closed doors involving only a few dozen individuals, prevented any genuine democratic discussion. The opponents of Harvey's new revision quite often had to defend themselves against moral charges and disciplinary measures.

**Dave Jones**  
London

## Late post

In your last edition a comrade from Coventry complained because you decided to put only part of your paper on the Internet. You replied that the best guarantee to receive your paper was through a £5 subscription. This could be a good solution for people inside the UK, but is not the best outcome for people like us who are in different continents and who constantly suffer police interference with their normal mail.

As a way of illustrating our point, until last year we used to have branches of Poder Obrero (LCMRCI) in only three cities in Bolivia and Peru. We used to receive from time to time some of your papers. However, now we are doubling our branches. In Bolivia we are leading a national union with branches all over the country and in Peru we have a recognised presence or participation in the three main cities. If your paper managed to arrive, it would come late and would be difficult to distribute to many cities. Despite the differences that we have with some of your positions, we have to recognise that yours is one of the few British papers that promotes a healthy debate between different currents.

I would like to suggest that you *improve* your website, creating a browse where it could be possible to find articles concerning a particular subject and where you could organise articles not only by dates, but also by sections.

**Fernando Rodriguez**  
Poder Obrero  
Lima, Peru

*Editor's note: our policy is to post on our website certain articles from the current paper, along with a fuller selection from back issues of the Weekly Worker*



From **The Call**, paper of the  
British Socialist Party,  
September 26 1918

## "Miserable hacks of the ruling class"

If anything were needed to justify the utter contempt in which all genuine socialists must hold the patriotic 'leaders' of Allied socialism and labour who assembled in London last week, from His Excellency Emile Vandervelde, ex-president of the International Socialist Bureau, downwards, it was surely provided by their callous indifference to the brutalities perpetrated upon those socialists who refuse to applaud the universal self-massacre of the working class.

In America WD Haywood and 114 other members of the IWW are serving terms of imprisonment ranging from 20 years downwards; in Britain John Maclean and in Italy comrades Lazzari, Serrati, Vella and others are paying in prison the penalty of adherence to the solemn declarations of the International Socialist Congress; in France arrest and imprisonment, often without charge or trial, is the lot of those who dare oppose the shameful 'sacred truce'.

Whilst our patriotic 'leaders' gibbered their meaningless phrases about war for "democracy against autocracy", American capitalist 'justice' was condemning Eugene Debs, one of the oldest and most venerated figures in the Socialist International, to 10 years' imprisonment for declaring the war a capitalist war and extolling Bolshevism in Russia.

But never a word of protest from these knights errant in the cause of 'democracy' ... How true is Karl Liebknecht's characterisation of their type - "miserable hacks of the ruling class" •

# 1918

Russian Revolution  
this week 80 years ago

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# End state abuse

**S**arah Hubert, a 25-year old woman who fell for a 14-year old youth, was found guilty last week of indecent assault. The love between these people was deep, mutual and lasting. It enriched their lives and harmed no one. But because the state does not allow adults to have sex with 'minors', she may well be sent to prison for six months or more when sentenced next month.

This case demonstrates clearly the injustice of present laws controlling personal relations in British society. The youth's father, who denounced Hubert to the police, described the affair between his son and Hubert as "sordid and immoral". No doubt he, and the lawyers who prosecuted Hubert, would claim that the laws which criminalise sex with under-16s exist to protect youngsters like this boy from 'harm'. This is of course nonsense: the real harm lies in the forcible separation of the two, the humiliation of having their private relationship exposed in the popular press through state interference, and the stress caused by the threat of imprisonment.

The state denies young people the right to enter into consensual relationships, under the guise of protecting them from abuse. In this case the youth was abused not by Sarah Hubert, but by his father, who felt he had the right to steal his son's property - the love letters from which he found out about the relationship, bully him and forbid him from meeting her.

Hubert was a leader of a scout troop to which the youth belonged. It will no doubt be argued that, as she was in a position of trust, it was wrong of her to allow a sexual relationship to start between them. This is ludicrous. People meet in all sorts of circumstances - through work, a shared interest or by chance - and a sexual liaison may result. But a private relationship is no concern of the voluntary organisation or employer - still less the state.



Under surveillance: the state seeks to control sexual expression

Although Hubert was actually charged with indecent assault, there is no doubt that but for the boy's age there would have been no case against her. No one pretends she really assaulted him or forced him into sex. Only his age is at issue. To quote the CPGB's draft programme, we "recognise the right of individuals to enter into the sexual relations they choose provided this does not conflict with the rights of others". Hubert and her young boyfriend freely chose to have sex after a period of courtship, and no one's rights were violated. Of course, had the boy been several years younger, or had the ages of the two been reversed, the question of consent might have been less clear-cut. Our demand to keep the state out of the bedroom does not mean that we wish to give free rein to paedophiles or anyone else who seeks to

exploit children in any way. Our draft programme is clear in its call for "alternative legislation to protect children from abuse": ie, from violence, physical or mental cruelty and non-consensual sexual interference. What matters is protecting children, not setting arbitrary age limits to sexual activity. The 'correct' age to indulge in any sexual activity will be different for each individual.

Although we condemn paedophiles - if the term is used to define those who act in the way described above - we also criticise the hysterical lynch-mob mentality against known or suspected paedophile whipped up by the tabloids. These lead campaigns for men who have completed sentences for sex offences to be returned to prison indefinitely, or worse; and the Blair government seems happy to acquiesce in such demands. This is a

very dangerous development, which could easily be extended, allowing the state to subject whole categories of offenders to indefinite detention on the word of a government minister.

By contrast we call for the treatment of sexual offenders. This must include supervised accommodation, counselling and other measures, aiming for the maximum voluntary cooperation.

Since over 90% of sexual abuse takes place within the family unit, our call for alternative accommodation to be made available for young people is particularly relevant. The CPGB, as one of the immediate demands for youth in its draft programme, insists that the state should provide for young people "housing/hostels for youth to enter of their own choice for longer or shorter periods when they lose their parents or choose to leave them". Our demands for youth, like those relating to every other section of the working class, form an integrated whole designed to empower young people and enable them to play an active role in society and develop as full human beings.

The main function of the law in sexual matters should be to guarantee people the right to conduct their relationships as they wish, free from interference from others and from the state.

Although there has been some progress in this field in recent decades, most notably in the gradual movement towards homosexual equality and the reduction in moral disapproval of single parenthood, elements of anti-human christian morality are still all too prevalent. This is because sex is bound up with the family, whose 'sanctity' is stressed by christian and other religions. More importantly, the family is the basic economic unit of capitalist society.

There is still a long way to go until sexual expression is totally free from state interference, as Sarah Hubert and her young partner have found to their cost •

Mary Godwin

## action

### ■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday September 27 - 'Reactionary anti-capitalism', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* as a study guide.

Manchester: Monday September 28 - 'The process of exchange, money, the circulation of commodities' in the series on Karl Marx's *Capital*. For details, phone 0161-798 6417. E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.

### ■ CPGB weekend school

November 7-8 - Lessons of the October Revolution  
For more details call 0181-459 7146.

### ■ 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.

### ■ Hackney Socialist Alliance

Public meeting - Defend asylum-seekers.  
Prince of Wales pub, Kynaston Road,

London N16, Friday October 9, 7.30pm.

Invited speakers: Diane Abbott MP, Turkish and Kurdish community organisations, Jimmy Nolan, Hackney Community Law Centre.

### ■ Greenwich Socialist Alliance

Relaunch meeting - 'Which way for socialists?'

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

### ■ Hillingdon hospital workers fight on

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

### ■ Support Tameside careworkers

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 (Holborn tube) 7.30pm.

Saturday October 3: Benefit gig with Bad Manners - Walthamstow Assembly Hall, Forest Road, London E17 (Walthamstow Central tube), 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 (Dalston Kingsland British Rail), 2pm. £5/£3 concessions.

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

### ■ Reinstate Steve Hedley

Sacked by GEC Tarmac Railway Maintenance, Steve Hedley faces trumped up charges of criminal damage following a picket line incident.

Public meeting: Friday September 25, 7pm, St Aloysius Social Club, 20 Phoenix Road, NW1 (off Eversholt Street, Euston). Speakers: Bob Crow (RMT), Jeremy Corbyn MP.

Demonstration: Picket Clerkenwell magistrates court when Steve's case is heard - Tuesday October 13, 9.30am.

## Fighting fund

## Regular money

Sales of the *Weekly Worker*, though important, are not sufficient to finance our paper. Nor does our survival depend on the backing of wealthy advertisers. On the contrary, our finances are based on the contributions of dedicated supporters. Communist money finances communist politics. That is why we can say what we want, when we want. To keep the paper fighting fit, we are again asking partisans of the paper to contribute regular money to the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund with a monthly target of £400, starting with October. Ask for a bankers order form, and/or send cheques payable to CPGB •

Ian Farrell

# One more time

**Mark Osborn of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty replies to recent articles by Don Preston**

I have been putting off writing this reply. I find the whole 'discussion' a bit pointless. It does not seem possible to get far beyond the issue of *how to argue*. How are we supposed to take the following seriously?

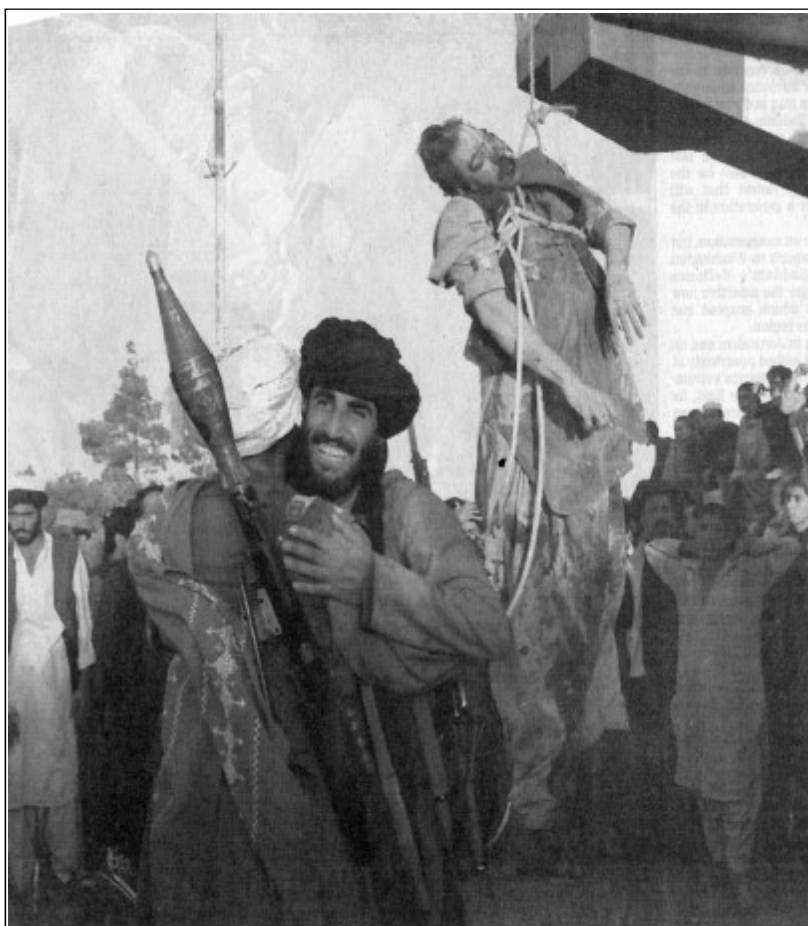
You accuse the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (*Weekly Worker*, July 16) of supporting the Afghan mujahedeen. We reply (*Weekly Worker* July 30) that we supported the Afghan people's rights to self-determination and demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops from Afghanistan; we did not give political support to the mujahedeen. We challenged you to quote something from our press to back your claim that we did; we say such a quote cannot be found.

Then, in *Weekly Worker* August 20, you - casually, in passing - repeat the claim that our tendency backed the mujahedeen. Again without any evidence to back your point up - after you had been explicitly invited to do so. What am I supposed to make of this? Is this some sort of joke? Your aim is - partly - to influence our members. But let me tell you: we're all baffled. As one comrade said when he read it: "They expect something to become true just by repeating it over and over again?" (Perhaps your writer does not even understand the distinction we are making between support for the right of a people to fight for their self-determination, and political support for the leaders of that movement. Let me give a simple example: we supported Vietnam against the USA; we did not thereby assume political responsibility for those who were leading the fight against the USA - the Vietnamese Stalinists.)

We complain (*Weekly Worker* July 30) that you printed a series of slanders and lies about the politics of the AWL in your initial piece, 'Principled minority'. In reply I said that some of your remarks are false, wide of the mark and so unpleasant that they should make you "feel dirty". Your reply? "This from a comrade who told workers to vote for Blair's party on May 1 1997 ... who ought to 'feel dirty'?"

Let us think about what you have done here. To reply to the point, 'You're lying about us', by responding, 'the AWL called for a Labour vote', is one of the most absurd things I have ever read. You are either straightforward dimwits who cannot see the need to string two thoughts together in logical sequence, or you are saying: the CPGB is licensed to lie about anyone who calls for a Labour vote. So which is it? You should either withdraw the allegation you made - specifically you alleged: the AWL's politics are "virtually indistinguishable from mainstream bourgeois anti-Stalinism", making us "MI5 socialists" - or attempt to justify the point itself (rather than demagogically declaim about some other matter entirely).

Your very best effort is this: Don Preston writes in *Weekly Worker* August 20: "How could I claim that *Socialist Organiser's* 'anti-Stalinism' was virtually indistinguishable from mainstream bourgeois anti-Stalinism? For quite straightforward reasons ... [because] *Socialist Organiser* was organically tied to Labourism."



**No political responsibility?: mujahedeen fighters by the body of pro-Soviet Afghan leader, Mohammed Najibullah**

Ha! And there's more! "... Every issue of *Socialist Organiser* had an application form to join the Labour Party ... Attlee's government has been described as a 'workers' government' ..."

So, let me get this perfectly straight. Your argument is this: despite the vast quantities of material we have published, and political campaigning we have done in solidarity with the workers' movements of the eastern bloc, despite the work we have accomplished and funds we have raised for the anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalist genuine socialists of the eastern bloc, we are "indistinguishable from mainstream anti-Stalinism", because we are "organically [no less] tied to *Labourism*".

What does 'organic' mean here? We have an independent revolutionary organisation. We are not tied to Labour (banned by Labour!) or Labourism politically, methodologically, by habit, discipline, rhythm or routine. We are not passive propagandists. We have organised the left to fight the bureaucracy in the Labour Party - consistently, over the last 25 years. That is why we recruited people to Labour: to help that fight. So. You avoid justifying your claim that our anti-Stalinism is bourgeois by changing the subject. You claim that the AWL is tied to Labourism, which itself remains unjustified and downright nonsensical.

You just drop previous claims without explanation. For example your article in *Weekly Worker* July 16 claimed we "crawled" in front of the Labour bureaucrats when our organisation was being proscribed in 1990. You said that, under pressure from the Labour right, we pretended we were not Leninists and disavowed Leninism. We replied by quoting extensively

from our paper, *Socialist Organiser* (see *Weekly Worker* July 30), to show that we explicitly said we stood in the real, unadulterated tradition of Lenin and the October Revolution. Again: we provided *facts* to refute you. In substance you are left with the fact that we differentiated ourselves from certain toy-town Bolsheviks and kitsch Trots.

Who do you think we were talking to, and for? The ordinary Labour Party and trade union members whose often justified contempt for these groups the Labour leaders tried to use against us. Should we have quietly accepted that, when we were ourselves long-time critics of these groups? This may be hard for abstract propagandists to grasp, comrades, but we were engaged in a fight with the Labour leaders and trade union bureaucrats, trying to muster support against them. Your response to my refutation? You drop the matter without comment (*Weekly Worker* August 20). Do you, or do you not, accept that your claim of crawling was false? If not, why not? Facts/evidence, please.

To conclude. I think that a lot of your argument 'techniques' were learnt in the same school as your continual use of the word 'Trotskyite'.

To try to get matters on a better footing. I think there are two things Don Preston is doing that it would be worth your tendency mulling over:

Your knee-jerk reactions and prejudices on the question of Stalinism, and your historically held positions on matters such as Solidarnosc, have not been re-examined in the light of your changed position on the question of the class nature of Stalinism. Your past positions need such a re-examination. At the moment the two pieces does not square up.

Secondly, I think Don Preston has

just repeated some of the standard abuse about our tendency, without giving it much consideration (we are "pro-imperialist", Zionist, Labourite, buried in the Labour Party, etc). A lot of this slander was picked up from the kitsch Trotskyist left 10 or 15 years ago. I think it's about time you grew up.

Finally, about our campaigning work on eastern Europe. I concentrate on this because of the issue of Stalinism itself, but also because I think the way the AWL has worked illustrates another important difference between our tendencies - and that is the issue of how revolutionary socialists relate to mass movements.

The Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc (CSWEB) was set up at a conference on November 7 1987 - deliberately to mark the 70th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. CSWEB's Honorary Presidents were the late Eric Heffer MP, the Russian socialist Boris Kagarlitsky and the Polish leftwinger Jozef Pinior.

Over the next four years CSWEB raised money for small anti-Stalinist, anti-capitalist socialist organisations in the eastern bloc. We raised hundreds of pounds, we took duplicators over to Poland, we organised many speaking tours and meetings in Britain, we organised pickets, petition drives and protests in their defence.

But we did more than that. We aimed to influence the British labour movement as a whole. We aimed to make solidarity not only with the real socialists of the eastern bloc, but with their emerging labour movements too. In Britain many unions - led by both right and 'left' - were linked to the official, so-called 'unions' of the eastern bloc.

These state-organised 'unions' were the opposite of unions. They were mechanisms for the 'socialist' police states to control the workers. We worked for the British labour movement, at every level, to break with these 'unions' and make solidarity with the independent workers' organisations and the oppressed nationalities of the eastern bloc.

Although CSWEB was our initiative we got sponsorship from Labour rightwingers like Austin Mitchell. Robin Cook opened the first conference. The problem in Britain was complicated because the left in the unions - people like Arthur Scargill - were often the worst pro-Stalinists. Scargill went on his free trips to the conferences of the Soviet miners' 'union'. And by doing so he scabbed on the Russian workers. And because of that Scargill helped to discredit the NUM, the British left and the cause of real socialism.

When the Russian miners struck in 1989 they were ignored by Scargill, but they received messages of support from the scab British miners' 'union', the UDM. Everything was turned on its head. Everything was screwed up by years of Stalinist propaganda which said that the jailers of the workers in eastern Europe were socialists, and by the Stalinists and semi-Stalinists of the west who backed them up. The mess was made worse by the hypocritical verbal support of Thatcher and Reagan for all types of dissidents in the eastern bloc.

It is hardly a surprise, then, that some of the emerging workers' movements in the eastern bloc, at the end

of the 80s, were in a very general sense pro-west and 'anti-socialist' (their oppressors called themselves 'socialists').

So what should socialists say? 'We're not helping you until you accept our programme'? Our tendency said this would be absurd. The British left must champion the independent organisations of the workers in the eastern bloc and by doing so earn the right to a hearing. CSWEB aimed to counter the effect of people like Scargill. We had - for example - campaigned for the independent miners' leader Vladimir Klebanov who had been imprisoned and tortured in a Soviet psychiatric hospital for campaigning for workers' rights in the USSR. We wanted to show, to whatever extent we could, that the real socialists in the west backed the independent workers' organisations, that we stood for workers' liberty, east and west. If the British left had been less Stalinist, more united and less sectarian, we would have done better.

You mention Yuri Butchenko in *Weekly Worker* August 20 - a (not particularly leftwing) representative of the workers' organisations which organised mass strikes in Russia at the end of the 80s. He hated Scargill - whom he rightly saw as a good friend of his ruling class. Who could blame him? He thought the UDM were better than Scargill - well, they'd sent support ...

We organised a speaker tour for Butchenko (together with Workers Power, who had joined CSWEB late, in 1990, after a big conference we organised in January 1990 in solidarity with the eastern European revolutions of late 1989). When the Stalinists in the British labour movement kicked up a fuss about Butchenko's visit, Workers' Power panicked, retiring early to change their Y-fronts (an endearing and entertaining feature of this particular group is their tough talk, followed by a quick exit at the first sign of trouble, shouting slogans like 'Set up soviets' and 'Fight the police' at the rest of us - as they dash off to replace their underwear).

You will find statements - the detailed truth - about this matter in *Socialist Organiser* nos 452/3, June 1990.

The CPGB's idea that the left should not work with such people as Butchenko has two sides:

1. a false appraisal of Stalinism which has led you to defend so-called 'socialism' - in fact, police-state tyranny - against the action of the working class itself;
2. a propagandist, sect-like existence which means that you are only prepared to work with workers who are already socialists.

To end with Solidarnosc. Even if it is true (and it is radically false of the organisation of 1980-81) that Solidarnosc is what you and the kitsch Trotskyists say - rightwing, catholic, pro-capitalist - still, even then, we would defend and champion this movement - emerging from the underground, 10 million-strong, occupying the factories - against the bureaucrats of the police state. We would defend even rightwing unions - for example in America - against the use of troops to occupy their headquarters, the use of the police to beat their members, the use of the courts and prisons to jail their activists, the use of the legal system to ban their organisation and seize their funds.

So why not in Poland? ●

# Uncontrollable forces

**Michael Malkin** discusses the crisis of global financial markets

When George Soros speaks, capital listens. So we should note his warning that there is “an urgent need to rethink, and reform the global capitalist system”; and that world financial markets are dangerously unstable, having been acting “like a wrecking ball, knocking over one economy after another”. These extraordinary remarks were made against a background of increasing alarm about a worldwide financial crisis and the possibility of a “credit crunch” leading to a global recession.

Of course, Soros is hardly an objective observer. He and the ‘hedge funds’ under his control must accept a share of responsibility for the current mess. Every day they move billions in and out of different markets looking for speculative gains. The sheer weight of capital at their command means that they help shape these markets, and this in turn gives their words tremendous power. Readers will remember that Soros’s call for a devaluation of the rouble proved to be a catalyst in the meltdown of the Russian financial system, a debacle which ironically cost Soros’s funds some \$2 billion in losses.

There could be a number of motives behind Soros’s comments (made during a speech to the banking committee of the House of Representatives urging them to accept Clinton’s request for an extra \$18 billion of emergency funding for the IMF), but the same message can be heard from many other quarters. An international - potentially global - financial crisis does exist, and it is having an increasingly adverse impact on the real economy of many countries. What is at issue is the scale, severity and likely duration of the crisis and its impact in terms of the deflationary pressures that could lead to a wide-scale recession or even a slump.

Needless to say, the current market turbulence has induced a well known conditioned reflex among the Trotskyite left (see *Weekly Worker* September 3). Betraying a facile mechanistic inevitabilism, they declare yet again that the collapse of the capitalist system is imminent, and that a socialist revolution will follow. Like the man with the billboard declaring that ‘the end of the world is nigh’, one day they *may* be right, but in the meantime they only make fools of themselves and, much worse, provide ammunition to those who would ridicule Marxian theory about capitalist crises.

I want to examine the specific nature of the current crisis; to look at its probable effects and to note what methods governments are adopting in dealing with it. First, since this is a *financial* crisis, we need briefly to look at conventional theory about the pricing of financial assets.

All markets ‘discount the future’: ie, they rest on an ever-changing consensus about what is likely to happen. According to the conventional paradigm, the prices of *financial* assets such as shares, bonds, etc are determined (in a loose sense) by assumptions about the future level of certain key *economic* variables, such as interest rates, inflation and GDP growth. Hence, putting it crudely, it is in the real economy - ie, the sphere of *production* - where changes in the prices of financial as-

.....  
**“No government or financial institution, however powerful, can get this genie back into the bottle”**  
 .....

sets are supposedly determined. Of course, this is only a schema, with limited explanatory efficacy. As everyone knows, the relationship between the spheres of production and finance is complex - they interpenetrate one another dialectically at every level. Moreover, the whole system is subject to extraneous, often irrational, influences from a range of superstructural factors - eg, ‘market sentiment’: the perennial struggle between greed and fear.

Of course, at one level the current decline in the values of a wide range of assets - not just equities and their derivatives, but also commodities - is just a reflection of the fact that the law of value has a tendency periodically to reassert itself. What is interesting about the present pattern, however, is that it markedly reverses the paradigm I described above. Economic variables that ‘should’ have been shaping asset values are relatively benign, but they are beginning to deteriorate. This deterioration is attributable not to adverse changes in the real economy, but to developments in the financial markets, especially in the credit system, upon which the whole edifice of capitalism ultimately rests.

At the root of this phenomenon is the globalisation of capital. Given the absence of restrictions on the free flow of capital, and with the aid of modern telecommunications, capitalists can move massive amounts of money into and out of any market in the world almost instantaneously. Such a situation obviously promotes not investment, but speculation.

Although ‘speculators’ clearly bear considerable responsibility for the present dire situation in the markets, it would be farcical to ‘blame’ them for it. The historical tendency for the rate of profit to decline means that the developed economies offer a relatively poor, if safe, rate of return on investment. Capital is always driven to seek the highest possible return, even though the risk is much greater. In the last decade or so, investment institutions in general and the hedge funds in particular have ineluctably gravitated to the so-called ‘emerging markets’, such as the ‘tiger’ economies of south-east Asia, the Latin American countries and, most re-

cently, the former Soviet bloc states, where they sought the best opportunities for capital gains, whether as buyer or seller.

On the buy side, if you throw enough money at an asset, the sheer volume of your trade will create a momentum whereby many more buyers are sucked in; you leave quietly with your profit while the party is still in progress. On the sell side, you can ‘sell short’ (ie, you sell an asset you do not own in the expectation that you can buy it later at a lower price and thus meet your commitments). Given sufficient volume, this tactic also creates a momentum of its own and can be very profitable. It obviously encourages speculators to ‘attack’ vulnerable assets, and this is where the current trouble started, in July 1997, when speculators launched an attack on the currency of one emerging market, the Thai baht.

This assault inaugurated the first phase of what developed, to a greater or lesser degree, into a major withdrawal of capital from the financial markets of Thailand, Indonesia, Malaya and South Korea. Futile attempts to defend their currencies from speculative short selling depleted these countries’ foreign exchange reserves and produced serious distortions in their real economies. So long as these states were a source of superior levels of growth (achieved on the back of cheap labour), capital was happy to reap the rewards. Only a matter of a year ago these ‘tiger’ economies were even extolled by our own great prime minister as models worthy of emulation. How he must regret his enthusiasm now. In the aftermath of the speculators’ onslaught, the ‘Asian miracle’ stands exposed as a combination of bent accounting, wholesale corruption and bad loans. Economic dislocation and social unrest were bound to follow. As we write, there is rioting on the streets of Kuala Lumpur.

The ‘Asian crisis’, described rather modestly by the IMF in its annual report as “one of the worst in the post-war period”, produced what the same organisation calls “contagion effects”. The next seat of contagion was, of course, Russia, where the collapse of the rouble led to an effective default on foreign debt payments and a financial meltdown. Subsequently the “contagion” moved on to Brazil and other Latin American states.

Although the ‘emerging markets’ have understandably been the primary focus of attention in recent weeks, the *real* seat of the current crisis is to be found in Japan, the world’s second largest economy, where the situation has been described as “desperate” (*Financial Times* September 18). What happens to Japan has a truly global significance - remember, for example, that the Tokyo region alone accounts for some three percent of the world’s economic output. The picture in Japan is depressing: year-on-year figures for the second quarter of 1998 indicate a contraction of almost four percent in output - numbers consistent with a severe recession. This is the third quarter in succession that Japan has reported negative growth, something that has never happened since World War II, and there is no prospect of recovery in sight.

Again, the root of the problem lies in the financial sector. According to recent estimates, Japanese banks have accumulated around \$1.2 *trillion* in bad debts (*Financial Times* September 20). The precise figure is

unquantifiable for two main reasons: first, the banks’ balance sheets are meaningless, since they include shareholdings as part of their capital adequacy requirement and these holdings are accounted at cost rather than at current market value; secondly, the culture of cross-ownership of shares makes it impossible to assess the overall impact of a market decline that has seen the Nikkei 225 index plumb 12-year lows in recent days.

It is actually possible, as Hamish McRae puts it, that “the whole banking system is bust, in the sense that the loans that will never be repaid are larger than the entire capital and reserves of the system” (*The Independent* September 15). If the massively bureaucratised financial sector is at last to be sorted out, it will require something akin to the Meiji revolution of the 1860s, and so far the omens are poor. After extended negotiations, the Japanese government has reportedly reached an agreement with the opposition Democratic Party about measures to deal with the banking crisis. Under the terms of this agreement, “troubled” - ie, bankrupt - institutions like the Long Term Credit Bank of Japan will first be nationalised and then liquidated.

Central to the new arrangements is the creation of a new Financial Revival Committee (FRC), with supposedly extensive powers to act as judge, jury and executioner in determining which banks are viable and which are not. Whether the FRC will have enough teeth to see off the entrenched interests which dominate Japanese society remains to be seen. The FRC will not begin work until April 1999 at the earliest and, if the present government has its way, much later than that. Unsurprisingly, the market’s reaction has thus far been negative. Once again, the point to note is that adverse developments in the financial sector have determined the current economic stagnation in Japan. In this case, however, the problem has not been created by short-term, speculative intervention, but by long-term structural factors inherent in the bank credit system. While the market was rising, these factors were hidden. Recession has exposed them.

So much for the specific nature of the financial crisis. What about its probable effects on the real economy in Britain? Institutions are already reporting losses related to the Asian and Russian crises. Barclays Bank, for example, has been forced to write off £250 million of losses, mainly in the Russian bond markets. Other financial institutions, especially those with heavy exposure to the Far East and other emerging markets, can be expected to follow suit.

More ominously, in the real economy a wide range of companies are blaming the ‘Asian effect’ for poor results, or warning the market that current profit expectations are not going to be fulfilled. “Contagion” has apparently spread to sectors that were previously regarded as relatively defensive safe havens, such as telecoms, oil and food retailers. Every day brings news of fresh job cuts. Growth forecasts have been slashed across the board and according to some estimates - eg, the latest figures from the Centre for Economics and Business Research - unemployment in the UK will increase by around half a million from the beginning of 1999. The precise numbers are anybody’s guess, but what is clear is that the acute financial problems originating in Asia and Russia are already impact-

ing on businesses in Europe, even those which were regarded as relatively immune from such adverse effects.

The UK manufacturing sector, burdened by the effects of a strong pound on competitiveness, was in recession even before the market turmoil. Anecdotal reports to this effect will soon be confirmed by official statistics that will add to the pervasive gloom. The lesson for all workers is that in globalised markets no company, however ‘defensive’ its market profile, is secure from the effects of the current crisis - nobody’s job can be regarded as safe.

Governmental reaction to the crisis has been confused and contradictory. Initially there was talk of a concerted lowering of interest rates by the G7 countries, and Alan Greenspan, the Federal Reserve chairman, appeared to endorse such a move. Markets bounced in reaction, but fell back soon afterwards when Greenspan reversed his position and dismissed talk of coordinated rate cuts.

Capital loves cheap money, so there is no doubt that interest rate reductions would be welcomed in the short term. To what extent such putative cuts might do any real good, however, is questionable. Japanese rates have been negligible for a long time without any noticeable benefit. In normal conditions there might be a case for stimulation of this kind, such as was applied after the so-called crash of 1987. Present conditions, however, are far from normal. The *economic* preconditions for a recession are absent, and yet a recession is already underway. How can this be so? Basically because *financial* confidence is at breaking point. In such circumstances it would be folly to hazard a prediction, but the most likely outcome would appear to be a deflationary spiral in which asset prices fail to find a floor.

On the political front, reaction to the crisis has been limited to the kind of phrase-mongering typified by Blair’s address to the New York stock exchange on September 21. According to Blair, what we need are “new” financial institutions for the “new” millennium; a “new” IMF and a “new” world bank will be empowered to “deal with” the crises that have been afflicting capital. This may be good politics, but from the economic point of view it is the purest poppycock. The forces unleashed by contemporary finance capitalism are literally uncontrollable - this is what the threatening global financial crisis is all about. No government or financial institution, however powerful, can get this genie back into the bottle without using the kind of extraordinary measures that would amount to the suspension of the free market and all that such a move implies. In any event, everything we know about Blair suggests that when times get hard he will opt for a rightwing, authoritarian approach to class politics.

Whatever uncertainties there may be about the present situation, one thing is crystal clear: the workers, as always, will have to pay the price. Without falling into the dreams and delusions of our Trotskyite comrades about the historical significance of the present moment, we communists stand prepared for a significant intensification of the class struggle. For us, the potential disintegration of the capitalist financial system signifies that the need to reforge a Communist Party has become even more urgent ●

**Michael Malkin**



No one can discredit Marxism more than those who falsely speak in the name of Marxism. That has certainly been the case with our terrible 20th century. Two main illegitimate rival orthodoxies have in their time laid claim to 'Marxism'. On the one side social democracy - the title adopted by Marxists from the late 19th century - and on the other side 'official communism'.

Eduard Bernstein was the father of social democratic revisionism. Schooled in the classical Marxism of his day - Engels named him along with Karl Kautsky as his literary executor - Bernstein claimed to be no more than an honest critic. Capitalism was not collapsing in final crisis and immiserising the masses as Marx "predicted", but steadily growing and improving living standards. State intervention was regulating and socialising production.

However, Bernstein's project had nothing to do with deepening and enriching Marxism; its revolutionary essence was to be surgically removed. He repudiated dialectics and confidently expected that the class struggle was destined to decrease in intensity. Parliamentary reform and routine trade unionism would step by slow step ensure the evolution of the democratic capitalist state into the democratic socialist state. In this 'modernising' spirit in 1899 he famously, not to say notoriously, coined the dictum: "the movement means everything ... the final aim of socialism ... is nothing" (E Bernstein *Evolutionary socialism* New York 1961, pxxix).

Bernstein's revisionism initially caused a storm of protest. His views were solemnly condemned by the German social democracy and the Second International. In point of fact he was doing no more than providing a theoretical justification for, or reflection of, the actual day-to-day practice engaged in by the European social democratic leaders. Theory followed practice. For them the parliamentary fraction and trade union coffers were everything ... "the final aim of socialism" was something for conference speeches and pious resolutions. In other words nothing to do with practical politics.

The rise of the democratic state and the extension of suffrage, tripartite conciliation boards and the institutionalisation of collective bargaining saw many social democratic trade union officials effectively fuse with bourgeois society, albeit as a subaltern caste. Occupying what the Webbs rightly described as "a unique position" between the working class and the "property-owning class", the trade union bureaucracy operated as merchants (S and B Webb *History of trade unionism* London 1919, p467). They expertly haggled with owners of capital over the price of the commodity, labour power, but no longer questioned the fact of its sale. Indeed their privileged existence as a caste relied on the continuation and maintenance of the exploitative labour-capital social relation. 'A fair day's pay for a fair day's work' was their common-sense slogan, not the 'utopian' call to 'abolish the wages system'.

The process of bourgeoisification was completed with the outbreak of World War I. A majority of socialist leaders suddenly discovered that they had a patriotic duty to rally workers in defence of the nation, its institutions ... and by inference their sectional stake in it. Marx was quoted by belligerents on both sides to justify inter-imperialist slaughter. These blood-splattered social chauvinists went on to form a caste of professional politicians whose height of ambition was to loyally staff the capitalist state. Germany, Britain and Austria all had such governments in the 1920s. Of course, by the 1950s social democracy found it expedient to drop any pretence of formal loyalty to

Reply to Ian Donovan of 'Revolution and Truth'

# Behind the mask of Trotskyism

## Part three: self-liberation, democracy and economism

Marxism. Here was the era of Cold War and McCarthyism. European social democracy became Labourised. Their socialism was reduced to little more than state nationalisation of various strategic industries. Today the "final aim" is becoming nothing ideologically. Under the rubric of the 'third way' it is completing the transformation into something to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from bourgeois liberalism.

'Official communism' grew out of the decay of Leninism. From Stalin onwards the idea of socialism was nationalised, bureaucratised and primitivised. A "complete socialist society" could be achieved in a backward country like the Soviet Union, in isolation from the world revolution (JV Stalin *SW* Vol 8, Moscow 1954, p67). Marx's insistence on socialism as a mass, self-liberating break, involving from the start at least several advanced countries, was paradoxically explained away as something applying exclusively to pre-imperialist conditions.

Marxism as a whole was reworked, doctored and reinvented as a rigid and monstrously simplified doctrine. Human liberation and the necessity of active democracy was replaced by a classless worship of the productive forces and a bureaucratic anti-capitalism. Socialism, or the transition to communism, was equated with the famished but living reality of the Soviet Union. Socialism thus became associated with the strong state, nationalised property forms, the absence of capitalism and the rule of the Communist Party. Given the treachery of social democracy and the enormous prestige enjoyed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, a wide layer of advanced workers sought to emulate the Soviet experience. Bureaucratic socialism became the aim. Each 'official' Communist Party invented its own national road to socialism: France, India, Britain, China, USA, Ireland, Korea, etc. Inevitably this was interpreted through the prism of different consciousness. Undoubtedly there were those who knew the Soviet Union for what it was and eagerly looked forward to establishing their own personal dictatorships or furthering parliamentary or trade union careers. But, along with the cynics, the dull reformists and myopic time servers, there were the self-sacrificing, the heroic and the youthful dreamers.

In any contest between reality and utopia, reality must out. Utopia turns into expediency. The state needs of the Soviet Union kept changing and that required a constant change in its 'Marxism'. The alliance with the peasantry gave way to the expropriation of the peasantry, equality to inequality, cooperation with Nazi Germany to cooperation with western capitalism. Soviet or official 'Marxism' steadily lost the power of explanation and descended into mere ritual.

Crucially, the Soviet Union itself was not a viable social formation (that was also true of similar states modelled on the Soviet Union post-1928 and established through bureaucratic revolution). It could with terror, the importation of foreign technology and the burning subjective desire to catch

up with advanced capitalism carry through an enormous leap forward. That entailed turning the Soviet Union into a brutally exploitative social formation. True, in the midst of the world capitalist slump, the first and second five-year plans appeared almost miraculous. But the revolution in the productive forces could not be made permanent. Absolute exploitation was feasible, not relative exploitation. As the surplus population evaporated; so did dynamism. The Soviet Union was thus within itself superior to capitalism and inferior. In the short term the bureaucratic plan could brilliantly substitute for the law of value, but not in the long term. Hence disintegration was inevitable.

So the 20th century witnessed the eclipse of working class political independence, and the failure of social democracy and 'official communism' as alternative routes to liberation. Both proved attractive, but illusory. Both followed a logic that led back to capitalism. Between these two camps revolutionary Marxism was squeezed, persecuted and reduced to sect-like proportions. However, in the shape of Trotskyism it was not simply a matter of size. Isolation from the real movement of the working class led either to social democratisation in the attempt to gain a hearing or pro-Soviet apologetics. Put another way, the wings of Trotskyism merged with social democracy and 'official communism'.

Obviously germs of such a degeneration can be found in Trotsky's writings in the 1930s. On the one hand there was the French turn; on the other the theory that the Soviet Union remained a workers' state because of so-called socialist property forms: ie, nationalisation. Nevertheless there can be no doubt that what was *potentially* opportunist in Trotsky became actual with his epigones. Behind the mask of contemporary Trotskyism we find almost every form of opportunism - the extreme Labour-loyalism once promulgated by Peter Taaffe, petty nationalism à la Alan McCombes and Tommy Sheridan, ridiculous semi-religious sectarianism, narrow economism and sterile apologetics. So Trotskyism as an ideology plays a highly ambiguous role. Without a thorough-going internal revolution it is doomed in the 21st century to farcically repeat the tragedies we have witnessed in the 20th century.

As a good Trotskyite our friend Ian Donovan knows his Trotskyism. However, instead of using it as a means of investigation, a way of approaching the truth and charting a programme towards human freedom, he is forced to deny the scientific method and the vital role of democracy for the proletariat before and after the revolution in order to remain faithful to his version of Trotskyism. We have already shown in parts one and two of this article that he denigrates pre-1917 Leninism by classifying it as a variety of Menshevism because of its stress on democracy; and how, exactly like the Stalinites, he cleaves apart democracy and the conquest of state power by the work-

ing class (the Stalinites do it not in theory, but practice; comrade Donovan at least has the virtue of theoretical honesty). He even maintains that a workers' state can come into being without the working class. Cuba, Vietnam, eastern Europe, North Korea, Cambodia. His twofold criteria for a workers' state are nationalised property forms and anti-capitalism. For Marxism it is working class self-liberation, democratic control over production and society, and an armed population.

In this third, and final, article we want to show that ironically modern Trotskyism owes much to the mechanical 'Marxism' fabricated by the right wing of the Second International in the years before World War I. This we will do under three main headings - one, the Soviet Union, nationalised property forms and exploitation; two, bourgeois revolutions; and three, economism.

Let us begin with the Soviet Union. Rightwing social democracy has traditionally had a statist vision of socialism. We have already cited Bernstein. Lassalle was certainly a precursor. Essentially the idea was to extend state power over the economy so as to overcome the vagaries, crises and inequalities of capitalism. The beneficent state would liberate the lower orders or at least bless them with full employment, a conformist education and adequate housing by mobilising them as state slaves. Whether the state is an existing one or a new one born of revolution is a detail. The principle of self-liberation is absent. That is why Marx and Engels mocked and ruthlessly fought all forms of *staatssozialismus*.

Of course, for comrade Donovan the difference between reforming the existing state and building a new one is key. The overthrow of the capitalist state and the expropriation of capitalist property is not only equated with a 'workers' state' but the end of exploitation. He brands Jack Conrad "anti-Marxist" for even suggesting that Stalin's Soviet Union and other such states were exploitative social formations. They were more akin to bureaucratised trade unions, he says. Bribery and corruption were endemic features of the system. Individual bureaucrats could through such methods secure extra privileges. However, the system itself was a giant exploitative metabolism designed to systematically pump out surplus product from the workers. This relied primarily on political, not economic means.

Comrade Donovan huffs and puffs and does his best to create a thick smokescreen. The above formulation is dismissed as a "remarkable inversion of basic Marxism". He attempts to evade the exploitation of Soviet workers not by proving that it did not take place, but by referring vaguely ("in the last analysis" and "notwithstanding all kinds of complex mediations") to supposed timeless general laws. The result is indeed a "remarkable inversion of basic Marxism".

This is what he writes: "In the last analysis, notwithstanding all kinds of complex mediations, every class so-

ciety rests on an economic base - except it appears this one, where exploitation was through 'political not economic means'." There is no way "Lenin (or Marx, or Engels, or Trotsky) would have argued than an exploiting class could reproduce itself by 'political not economic means'. Jack, like Kautsky and Cliff before him, in the absence of evidence that the driving force of the bureaucracy was 'economic' exploitation, reinvents 'exploitation' in a manner that is divorced from economics, and turns Marxism on its head" (*Weekly Worker* August 27).

Jack Conrad does not think that the Soviet Union had no economy. That would be stupid. Not only has "every class society rest[ed] on an economic base", but so have, and so will, non-class societies. Primitive communism had a hunter-gathering economy. Distribution took place according to need and status. Advanced communism too will engage in economic activity and rest upon the *abundant* production of consumption of products. However, when it comes to class or exploitative societies, we are presented with a qualitative difference between capitalism and all other forms.

Marx explained that capitalism actually creates or establishes economics and politics as distinct and separate categories. Making money is the business of competing capitalists. This labour of Sisyphus takes much time, effort and considerable selfish dedication. Politics is often entrusted or ceded to high grandees or a subaltern caste. In the 19th century the aristocracy specialised in and was synonymous with government. Whig and Tory governments were government by aristocrats. Nowadays middle class careerists form the majority in cabinets, Tory or Labour. Actual *working* capitalists in government are a rarity (apart from those who, having inherited or made their millions, semi-retire in order to perform 'public service'). The ruling class is itself peculiarly ill-adapted to directly taking charge politically. The capitalist state is therefore prone to hypertrophy and relative autonomy. There is no automatic correspondence between the politics of the capitalist state and the economic interests of capital.

Capital is produced and reproduced as a dominant social relation *economically*, primarily through the market and not the appropriation of the labourer. The secret of surplus value is to be found in the everyday "exchange" of money-wages for labour power *at its value* (K Marx *Pre-capitalist economic formations* London 1978, p99). Labour power is sold by the worker for a 'fair day's pay'. There is no need for cheating or robbery. Exploitation occurs *indirectly* because living labour can reproduce itself physically and culturally and yet still leave a surplus when put to work by the owners of capital. Under capitalism exploitation and the extraction of surplus is therefore essentially economic (primitive accumulation is an exception). There can be nothing cruder than to universalise the relations and categories of capitalism. To

do so is to make an elementary error.

How do other class and exploitative societies differ from capitalism? It could be argued that feudal lords in medieval England, the pharaohs of ancient Egypt and the caesars of Rome played a vital economic role in their respective societies. Castles were built to defend the land, rivers tamed and roads built. That would be to miss the point however. The surplus necessary for such achievements of yore were obtained primarily by force: ie, to use a concept comrade Donovan rejects, through "politico-legal relations of compulsion" (P Anderson *Passages from antiquity to feudalism* London 1996, p147). Marx, Engels and other authorities could be quoted. But it is all very ABC.

This "extra-economic coercion" took the form of labour services, forced labour, rents in kind or customary dues. Politics and economics formed a unity based on military power - naked or concealed. War was the main business of feudal lords and other such rulers. Politics and economics thus tend to be fused in the same personnel. It was from the political vantage point of possessing a monopoly of force that surplus was extracted. Labour was performed with no pretence of an equal return. Serfs had to do compulsory work for a fixed number of days for their lord and hand over a definite proportion of their product as tithes. Tribute was extracted by armed tax gatherers in the ancient world. Slaves in Rome worked under the overseers' lash.

In the Soviet Union, as a generality labour power was neither bought nor sold (private services were only performed on the margins of the system). Nor was there money or commodity production. So there was no surplus value. Surplus product was exacted however by the *state* - and from 1928 onwards on a huge scale. Here was the counterrevolution in the revolution. The five-year plans increased the available surplus dramatically. Any objective study will prove that this was done at the expense of the workers - their social position and subsistence levels dropped precipitously and disastrously.

Was this 'self-exploitation'? The unequivocal answer must be no. Workers lost all democratic rights with the five-year plans. Trade unions became docile tools of management and an alien state. Internal passports were reintroduced. Leaving work without permission and absenteeism became criminal and in due course capital offences. The workers and peasants were reduced to the position of miserable state slaves. They exercised no positive control over society nor the product of their work. Revenge was exacted in the slow pace of work, sabotage, and the appalling low quality of the product. Nevertheless the means of production and the resulting surplus was the exclusive collective property of a politically defined bureaucracy; it possessed a monopoly over force. That, comrade Donovan, describes not mere "political despotism" but an exploitative social formation and exploitative property *relations* ... needless to say, not of the capitalist sort. Exploitation was not indirect, but direct: it was "extra-economic" coercion that was responsible for the power and reproduction of the *exploitative* bureaucracy.

Comrade Donovan has a mechanical view of history and social development. He appears to follow the primitive communism-slavery-feudalism-capitalism-communism schema Stalin outlined in his *Dialectical and historical materialism*. That no doubt explains why his thinking is fossilised and fragile. Highly complex social phenomena such as the transition from one mode of society to another are for him "really quite simple". There is no need for study or thought. Thus "in a bourgeois democratic revolution, obviously demo-

cratic demands predominate". In the proletarian revolution against a *fully* developed capitalist society democratic demands are "secondary". So-called *class* demands are primary; their "ultimate expression is the demand for the 'economic' expropriation of the bourgeoisie".

One is left wondering why comrade Donovan says that in his "bourgeois democratic revolution" class demands are not primary. After all in his Menshevik-Stalinite theory the "democratic demands" are "aimed at smashing pre-capitalist obstacles to the development of capitalism and thereby to the growth of the proletariat". But surely, if we examine real bourgeois revolutions, such a contention stands revealed as nothing more than crude teleology. No bourgeois revolution aimed at "smashing pre-capitalist obstacles to the development of capitalism and thereby to the growth of the proletariat". Yet for comrade Donovan that is heresy. He wants to hang, draw and quarter Jack Conrad for supposedly writing about the "lack of role of the bourgeoisie in the bourgeois revolutions of the past". Comrade Donovan should try reading and thinking before he rushes to condemn. He quotes me thus:

"There have certainly been bourgeois revolutions - that is, revolutions led by the middling elements. England 1642 and France 1789 are classical examples. However, it would be profoundly mistaken to imagine that what was in both cases a bourgeois class-in-formation was a class of industrial capitalists or that their victory was over feudalism and directly ushered in capitalism.

"Those who led the English revolution were commercial farmers, well off gentlemen and the lesser nobility. In France it was lawyers and office holders. They did not overthrow feudalism. That society was long dead. As a system in western Europe feudalism originated in the collapse of the Roman empire before invading Germanic barbarians and had given way to centralised kingdoms and commercial trade by the 14th century - fief and vassalage characterised a military society where the elite was bound by ties of 'personal' fidelity."

Hence, as can be seen in black and white, Jack Conrad does recognise that revolutions have been led by a bourgeois class-in-formation. But what he does not accept is that this class in England or France was a class of industrial capitalists. Bourgeois and industrial capitalists are not synonymous. Nor did these revolutions aim to smash "pre-capitalist obstacles to the development of capitalism and thereby to the growth of the proletariat". That might have in due course been an unexpected and unintended consequence. Cromwell and Robespierre mobilised the masses with democratic slogans and promises in order to advance in sectional interests middling elements. But these types were not natural democrats. They regarded the masses or the mob with barely concealed contempt and eventually violently turned on them. As to industrial capitalism, that certainly was neither their aim nor immediate legacy. Only those who are blinkered by a linear theory of social development could suppose otherwise.

Not surprisingly then he dismisses Jack Conrad's speculation about the possibility of a 17th century English republic stamped by the Levellers or a 19th century French republic stamped by the *sans culottes*. Such talk is "anti-materialist", he decrees. Their struggles were "anticipations" of the future class of proletarians and "could not have been more at the time". Here is real "anti-materialist" thinking. History for comrade Donovan is a closed system with no other possibilities within it other than what happened. He applies the same dire method to our century ... Mao ushered in a workers' state because that

is what follows capitalism on the ladder of social evolution.

True, with hindsight we can designate popular struggles of the past as 'anticipating' the modern day. But they were more than that. The Levellers and *sans culottes* were real social movements made up of sentient, socially formed human beings who, like Spartacus, Watt Tyler and Jan Huss and their followers made history according to their own beliefs, fears, desires and interests. The Athenians established a peasant-citizen republic; the Hussites fought off the pope's counterrevolutionary crusades for half a century. Neither the Levellers nor the *sans culottes* were doomed to defeat. Their programmes were utopian, but that could have found material expression in an *extensive* democracy under the influence and scrutiny of those below. The extent democracy was expanded downwards and oppression was lessened in the past is a tribute to such as these and their strivings and struggles, not the supposed democracy of our exploiters.

Comrade Donovan goes on to mock Jack Conrad for stating above that the bourgeois-led revolutions of 1642 and 1789 did not overthrow feudalism. Feudalism is not defined by the comrade. Nonetheless he appears to equate it with the aristocracy. He cites the post-Cromwell reaction and even the Dreyfus case in the French third republic. This is plain silly. One can define feudalism very broadly as a mode of production based on agriculture and an aristocracy. But, as comrade Donovan himself rightly points out, the aristocracy had become thoroughly capitalistic from at least early modern times - surplus was obtained economically from rents, investments and real estate. The system of serfdom and a decentralised ruling class based on fief gave way to the centralised absolutisms typified by the Tudors and Bourbons. These dynastic systems might not have been capitalist, but by the same measure they were not feudalistic.

Apparently Jack Conrad's "purpose" in trying to grasp the complex transition between feudalism and capitalism is to "obliterate the qualitative distinction between the bourgeois democratic revolution that made the bourgeoisie into the economically and politically dominant class, and the proletarian revolution whose task is to destroy the *class rule* of the bourgeoisie". I have no such purpose. What Jack Conrad seeks to do is to show that the Second International *theory* of the bourgeois democratic revolution is bogus. That is why I praised Lenin for not letting a bad theory become a barrier to making a good revolution. There are what could be called bourgeois or capitalist limits to a democratic revolution in a backward country. But examples of any sort of bourgeoisie leading or making any sort of revolution are sparse indeed. As a class it is fundamentally cowardly, anti-democratic and anti-revolutionary. Equally germane, because Jack Conrad rejects the linear theory of history he can at least entertain the thought that the destruction of the "class rule of the bourgeoisie" need not automatically be equated with "proletarian revolution". There are other *freak* or *unviable* possibilities. Nothing should be decided *a priori*. We should endeavour to discover the truth through concrete theorisation.

To achieve socialism requires revolution. Not just any revolution though. The revolution will have to be democratic, in the sense that it is an act of self-liberation by the majority and aims to take the democratic state to its limits as a semi-state that is already dying. Democracy and socialism should not be counterposed. The two are inexorably linked. Without socialism democracy always stops short of ending exploitation. Without democracy socialism is only

post-capitalism: it is not *proletarian* socialism.

The task of the working class is to champion democracy, not leave it to the bourgeoisie. Existing democratic forms must be utilised, new forms developed - eg, soviets or workers' councils - and given a definite social or class content. The objective is to extend democracy and control from below both before and after the qualitative break represented by the proletarian revolution.

Comrade Donovan downplays the struggle for democracy. Capitalism has more or less done it all. Instead he wants to concentrate on economic issues. In the here and now that means low pay, trade union rights and supporting and giving a Trotskyite coloration to strikes. Naturally we communists do not ignore or dismiss such matters. Nevertheless, in and of themselves such spontaneous struggles take place entirely within the sphere of bourgeois economics. The workers remain a slave class. There is no *intellectual* bridge between them and socialism. That bridge is and can only be politics. The working class must be trained through political struggle to become a universal class, a class that can master every contradiction, every grievance, every democratic shortcoming, a class that sees its interests in the liberation of the whole of humanity. For that, theory and a Marxist programme are vital.

Naturally comrade Donovan indignantly rebuffs the charge that his outlook is characterised by economism. He does after all "combat any concept that the working class can really achieve its objective without the revolutionary dissolution of the bourgeois state". This is to reduce economism down to archetypical strikism. There are other manifestations. For example, the revival of economism as imperialist economism and now post-Trotsky Trotskyite economism. Thus comrade Donovan would put off the struggle for certain democratic demands until after the revolution and at the same time he plays down the necessity for democracy after the revolution. Democracy as a central question is absent before and after. Whatever comrade Donovan's noble intentions, the working class thereby remains a class of slaves. That is the upshot of post-Trotsky Trotskyite economism.

Faced with a national movement in Scotland, he answers with economic struggles now and in the future. Wages on the one hand, expropriation of the bourgeoisie on the other. He cannot bring himself to demand a federal republic because it does not abolish class exploitation. He might just as well object to divorce or homosexual equality. Every Marxist knows that democracy under capitalism is limited, partial and subverted. Yet democracy and the struggle to extend it brings to the fore the class contradiction between labour and capital. That is the crux of the matter. Far from being a diversion, demanding *immediately* that Scotland and Wales have the constitutionally enshrined right to self-determination within a federal republic is crucial. Without training the workers in such a spirit of democracy the struggle for socialism is impossible.

I make no apology for finishing this article with a passage taken from Lenin's *Imperialist economism*. Lenin is chiding Kievsky - that is, Pyatakov - for failing to "appreciate the significance of democracy ... For socialism is impossible without democracy," thunders Lenin, "because: 1. the proletariat cannot perform the socialist revolution unless it prepares for it by the struggle for democracy; 2. victorious socialism cannot consolidate its victory and bring humanity to the withering away of the state without implementing full democracy" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 23, Moscow 1977, p74).

Lenin was doubly right. Comrade Donovan is doubly wrong ●

Jack Conrad

# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Party aggregate

The September 13 aggregate of the Communist Party began discussions that will feed into the production of our *Perspectives '99* document. Two items were agendaed - one on forthcoming elections next year and the other on work in the Socialist Alliances. These were uncontroversial and quickly dealt with.

The afternoon session saw more controversy. Three resolutions were submitted by Dave Craig, leading member of the Revolutionary Democratic Group. Strong opposition was voiced by some comrades to this. They angrily suggested that the RDG had "no right" to submit resolutions to a CPGB members' aggregate.

Other comrades agreed that the aggregate was indeed under no obligation to take the resolutions, but that it was positive that the RDG - or individual RDGers, perhaps - were now submitting such items to a Party meeting. This should be looked on as a healthy development in the process of rapprochement. The aggregate had the right to consider anything put to it and in this spirit, it was correct to debate the items. This position won a big majority against a procedural motion to disallow the resolutions.

Strangely, the aggregate not only debated these resolutions against the opposition of a Party minority, but also against the wishes of the RDG proposer. He announced that he intended to withdraw all three resolutions as the discussion

around them would be "premature".

Again, the aggregate disagreed. Material submitted becomes *its* collective property. The fate of these resolutions was now out of the hands of the original drafter in that sense. Thus, while it noted the opposition of the RDG comrade to us engaging in the debate, the majority again decided that a discussion would be fruitful.

Resolution 1 was on the right of reply, proposing elaborate procedures involving Provisional Central Committee statements if replies were not published, then the right of reply to these leadership statements (and so on, presumably).

The meeting was puzzled by the need for this resolution. We regularly print highly critical pieces from members and others. The bureaucratic monstrosity proposed by comrade Craig would do nothing to enhance this. Fear was expressed that this resolution was in fact a part of the comrade's continuing brief for certain ex-members. The resolution was amended to restate the importance we attach to openness, but to reiterate that the contents of this paper are assessed *politically* by the editor and Party leadership and they have the right and *duty* to edit.

The meeting sharply criticised the original Craig drafts for resolutions 2 and 3. It was proposed that amongst other things, the aggregate must 'uphold' and 'defend' the idea that the task of "Marxist science" was to "uncover the economic

and social basis of the Soviet ruling class" (resolution 3) and to 'recognise' that "it was possible and necessary to rebuild the dictatorship of the proletariat" in the USSR towards the end of 1920 (resolution 2).

This organisation is certainly not averse to passing resolutions on historically specific questions, but the USSR is the subject of ongoing debate, controversy and study. Indeed, this particular RDG comrade is fully aware of this, given his full participation in our recent Communist University, which had the USSR as a recurring theme. Thus, his stated reason for tabling the resolutions - to register the 'stage' of the debate - was superfluous.

By a large majority, the meeting agreed to amend these two resolutions to emphasise the open-ended nature of the study we are engaged in and also to underline our commitment to an inclusive Partyism. The resolutions were altered to reaffirm that "there is a place in the Communist Party for revolutionaries who believe" that there was a definite Soviet ruling class or for those who have a particular slant on events in the early 1920s around Kronstadt or the banning of factions in the Bolshevik Party.

The amended resolutions were passed by a big majority, with a minority voting against them, not because of political disagreements, but seemingly out of a lingering sentiment to 'punish' the RDG for putting them forward in the first place ●

Ian Mahoney

## Simon Harvey of the SLP Compromise solution

Last week I reported that Socialist Labour's annual conference had been cancelled after a bureaucratic mix-up by Arthur Scargill. Our general secretary had apparently forgotten to make the preliminary arrangements until it was too late for the timetable regarding motions, amendments, etc to be adhered to in accordance with his own constitution.

Comrade Scargill's attempts to ignore its provisions provoked a great deal of anger and resentment within the party. Branch secretaries were particularly incensed that they were expected to issue a notice to members calling a meeting, agree a motion or amendment to the constitution, and ensure it was in the general secretary's hands - all within *four days* of receiving notice of the congress. Not surprisingly, the September 12 national execu-

tive meeting decided that it had no alternative but to call it off.

But the NEC was in a quandary. If it abandoned any attempt at consultation with the membership, it would be left with a leadership whose term of office had expired. Therefore a compromise solution had to be found. When the NEC reconvenes on October 3 it is expected to give final agreement to arrangements for a delegate conference to be held in Manchester on the date originally reserved for the ill-fated congress, November 11.

No motions will be taken from Constituency SLPs, sections or affiliates. The main purpose of the conference will be to elect a new executive and national officers. There will also be discussion around three or four urgent questions - primarily next year's Euro-elections and the SLP attitude to the cam-

paigns against the anti-union laws: Reclaim Our Rights and the United Campaign. It is not clear whether any amendments to the leadership's proposals on these questions will be taken from the floor, or even whether they will be voted on at all.

The October 3 NEC is expected to confirm that representation at the conference will be on the basis of one delegate for each CSLP, irrespective of size, although each branch will cast its vote for the NEC elections in proportion to its registered membership. After the furore caused by Scargill's outrageous use of the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association's 3,000 block vote at the December 1997 congress, the influence of this phantom will be limited this time to the trade union section in the NEC elections ●

## Prozac elections

Class war on the waterfront, a referendum for a republic, divisions in parliament and on the streets over Aboriginal land rights, the emergence of Pauline Hanson's racist One Nation party ... you might think that the past 12 months would have set the scene for a political debate of the highest quality in the run-up to the Australian federal election on October 3. If so, you would not be further from the truth.

The main issue in this election is, it seems, a goods and services tax (GST) proposed by the incumbent conservative Liberal-National coalition. It dominated last week's television debate between prime minister John Howard and opposition Labor leader Kim Beazley. Breaking the supposedly axiomatic law of bourgeois politics never to go to the electorate proposing new taxes, the linchpin of the government's election campaign has been its 10% across-the-board GST. The Liberal Party is repeating what led it to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory two elections ago. John Hewson lost the 'unlosable' election in 1993 against Labor's deeply unpopular Paul Keating by centring his platform on a similar tax.

In what has been a dull campaign so far, Labor - starting from behind in the polls - has edged ahead for the first time on 43%. Coalition support has slipped to 42% and One Nation is currently at eight percent nationally. It is not clear whether Hanson's ultra-right party will win any seats in the lower house of parliament, as her own rating is only running at around 35% in her constituency. The middle-of-the-road Democrats are at a paltry three percent, their popular leader having defected to Labor in 1997.

With the bourgeois political classes safely confining the question of a republic to their own dull, narrow framework, such a 'divisive' issue is being sidelined by both the government and the Labor opposition. The Liberals wish to avoid being seen as too monarchist by an electorate which is now around 60% republican. Labor too is quite happy to fight an election on grounds it thinks it can win - a scare campaign over tax. The party is still scared of its own shadow after Paul Keating lost the 1996 election. Then it was supposedly removed from ordinary concerns and too focused on 'big picture' issues of a republic, Australian capital in Asia and the information technology revolution.

In April and May this year, everything looked so different. A union-busting attack on the Maritime Union of Australia by Patrick Stevedores, backed by a rightwing government, sent Australia into the throes of a highly political class battle over who controlled the country's economically vital waterfront. The importance of the struggle in a country where union power had been controlled - but not smashed - by Labor in government in the 1980s drew parallels with the British miners' Great Strike of 1984-85. A strategic phase of the class war was being played out.

And the wharflies won. Or so it seemed. Negotiations after the high court victory against the stevedores in favour of union la-

bour on the docks resulted in compromise. The leadership of the MUA was content to negotiate a deal which maintained its monopoly over jobs, at the cost of a further eroding conditions.

At the time, spirits were high in militant working class circles. There was a feeling that the tide was flowing in the right direction, and an urge to take victory all the way. However, the left largely remained cheerleaders of the union bureaucracy. Despite some criticism from sections of the revolutionary left, no alternative leadership was forged out of the struggle. The rank and file were sold out to 'protect the union'.

In the immediate fallout of the waterfront dispute, Kim Beazley's Labor opposition hit the lead in opinion polls for the first time since losing the 1996 election. Further, Labor seemed to have the coalition on the ropes over the government's legislation amending the Native Title Act on Aboriginal land rights over agricultural land on crown leases.

However, the continued pressure on the political mainstream from the petty bourgeois One Nation saw the main parties close ranks. Labor's insistence on not wanting to fight a 'race election' on land rights and the failure of the left to cohere and develop a coherent political alternative has made these the Prozac elections.

With typical Australian jingoism, sport has at times seemed to leave the election in the shade. Eighty gold medals in Kuala Lumpur, Aussies in the US Open tennis, the rugby league and Australian rules grand finals, the Poms on their way for a good thrashing in the Ashes ... Kim Beazley even argued that the prescient John Howard had timed the election so it was swamped by sport - until he was ahead in the polls.

The conservative Liberal-National coalition - while publicly tearing themselves apart in some areas over whether to give voting preferences to One Nation over Labor - are hoping to run a narrow, run-of-the-mill campaign to bore the country into voting for the status quo. When Howard was elected in 1996, he promised the Australian electorate a quiet life. After the debacle over the wharflies, land rights and Liberal preferences to One Nation in the Queensland state election, this time the government is trying to kill off the opposition's tactic of painting Howard as divisive.

Labor, while attempting to widen the scope of the political debate, is also hoping to avoid being seen as 'divisive' - which is supposedly a terribly 'unAustralian' characteristic. Such is the formula for an anodyne campaign.

In opposition to this, the Democratic Socialist Party is standing candidates for the senate in all states and territories. For the first time in many years, the entire electorate will be able to register a vote for a socialist party. Yet the DSP's platform lacks programmatic coherence for current Australian conditions. A semi-reformist, semi-activist wish list, it has no immediate alternative to the undemocratic monarchical federal state ●

Marcus Larsen