

Oppose Serb repression and imperialist strikes Independence for Kosova

Once again Nato is preparing for unofficial war against a much weaker pariah state - this time the government of Serbia. It has been warned that if it does not obey the demands of the 'international community' then air strikes will follow.

One thing we must do before we can start to grasp the post-Soviet world is be clear about the 'international community'. It is an ideological construct used to justify the actions of the US in its self-appointed role as global policeman. In other words it is jargon for the interests of imperialism. The US imperialists, enthusiastically backed as always by the British government, demand an immediate ceasefire in the conflict in Kosova, the withdrawal of Serbian troops and special forces from the area, and the start of an imperialist-sponsored dialogue about the status of the rebel republic. As part of the military preparations, TV in both Britain and Serbia is showing war propaganda of the usual simplistic crudity. Slaughtered Kosovar babies are shown on our screens, and in Serbia there are strident calls to national resolve and defiance in the face of the threatened Nato aggression.

The Balkan region has been the scene of interminable wars since the decay and fall of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. This was a historic phenomenon - not some inherent violent predilection dating back to the 7th century invasion of the Balkans by the Slavic tribes. Rival petty states became the cat's paw of the big powers and their imperialist ambitions - Russia, Austria, Germany and Britain. The south Slavs were unable to form a strong, unified nation state - they existed as objects, not subjects of history. After World War II the south Slavs were bureaucratically united in a self-proclaimed socialist republic led by the Yugoslav Communist Party which, having led an anti-German, anti-monarchist, peasant-based revolution, followed a line independent from the Soviet Union, and for 45 years managed to keep people together, partly by efficient policing, partly through bureaucratically balancing one republic against another, but mainly through the rule of

one man. The bourgeoisie and big landowners were expropriated, factories were nationalised and nominally run by workers' councils, a culture was inculcated in the masses of allegiance to Yugoslavia and the idea of Tito socialism was presented as overriding regional or religious identity.

This attempt to put into practice the goal of Yugoslav unity against the internecine divisions and hatreds of history was laudable to the extent that it was democratic. Communists are firm advocates of the greatest possible voluntary unity of peoples. We want to create conditions in which nationalism, nations, nationality and the nation state all wither away. But such conditions have to develop organically: it is in the last analysis futile to try to impose unity artificially through the suppression - however benign - of national aspirations. Yugoslavia is a spectacular example of this. As soon as the powerful and charismatic life president, Josip Broz Tito, died in 1980, ethnic and historically shaped divisions were reasserted, rearticulated by a medley of bourgeois restorationist, reactionary, petty nationalist and bureaucratic strongmen, leading to bloody civil wars and the disintegration of the federation into its component and sub-component states, and thus the crude attempt to crush Kosova.

Under Tito, Kosova was an autonomous republic. In the south of Serbia, adjoining Albania, 90% of the population are ethnic Albanians. For 10 years its people have been pressing for a return to autonomy, at first mostly peacefully but since March this year that has become a demand for separation pursued by means of armed struggle led by the Kosova Liberation Army. In the summer the KLA won significant military victories against occupying Serb forces. In recent weeks Serb president Slobodan Milosevic has overseen a vicious counterattack that has caused untold suffering.

Villages suspected of harbouring KLA fighters have been bombarded with rockets or burnt out by special forces, and not only the separatist guerrillas but also their families have been massacred by Serb forces moti-

vated mainly by a nationalist hatred of Albanians. At least 280,000 Kosovars have fled from their homes since the Yugoslav authorities launched the latest assault on the KLA, and many are still living rough in the hills, too frightened to return home.

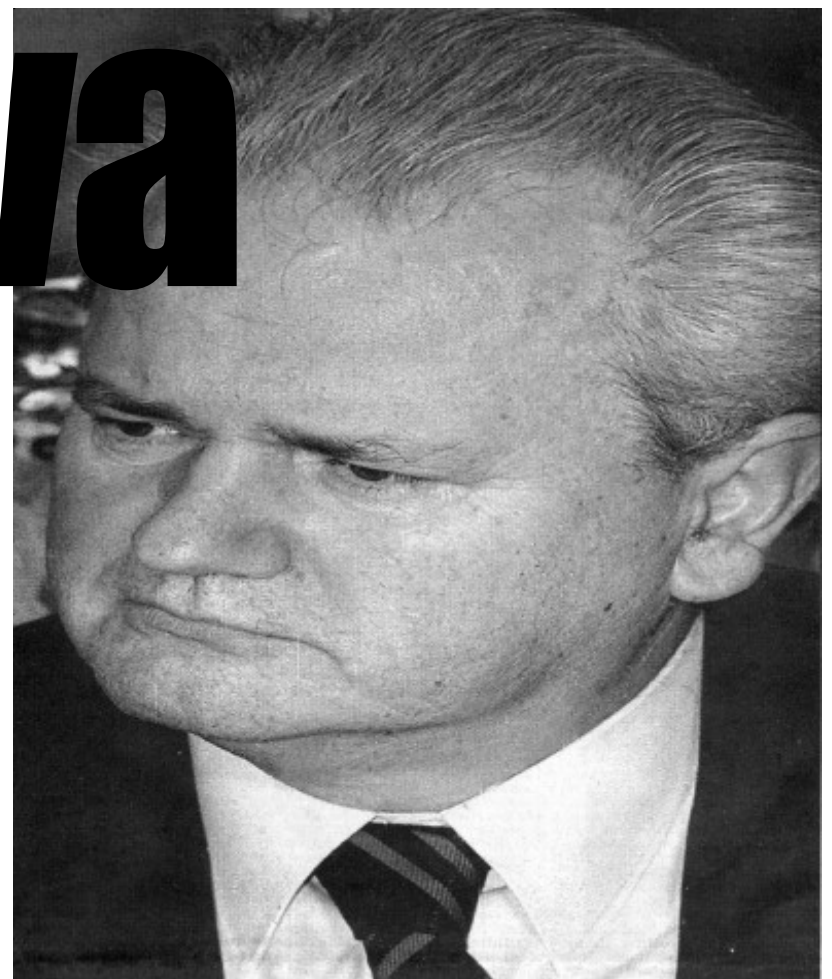
Reports of Serbian atrocities have appeared in British newspapers in recent days, and bourgeois commentators lead calls for Nato to punish Serbia in an attempt to persuade Milosevic to withdraw his forces. Milosevic has become the embodiment of evil, taking over from Colonel Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, and most recently Osama bin Laden.

The KLA, especially now that it is retreating, is appealing to Nato and the UN for military assistance. Nato air strikes against Serbia are still possible, and the US, via its envoy in Serbia, Richard Holbrooke, continues to threaten Milosevic, although the use of Nato ground troops has been ruled out for the moment.

Obviously we communists condemn Serbian repression in Kosova, just as we condemned the use of British force against the IRA and its supporters in Ireland. We share the almost universal revulsion against the use of military force against unarmed civilians, and quite apart from that we regard the struggle for independence being conducted by the KLA as a just war. We support the right of nations to self-determination up to and including forming an independent state.

In the case of Kosova, following the bloody suppression of national rights, the only option is independence. We condemn the cruise missile diplomacy of Nato. We never support the military actions of imperialism. Its aim in Kosova is to defeat Serbia on its own terms: to impose an imperialist stability that would actually deny the Kosovars genuine self-determination. The US and Britain call for Milosevic to negotiate with Kosovar leaders with a view to merely granting 'greater autonomy'. (International law recognises the right of states, not nations, to self-determination.)

We can be sure that imperialist leaders do not act out of sympathy for the



Slobodan Milosevic - the new Saddam Hussein

suffering Kosovars, but for their own selfish ends. The ultimate motivation of all bourgeois politicians is to protect and increase their own position and power. Like all US presidents, Clinton is not above boosting his popularity at home at the cost of a hundreds of lives in distant parts of the world. As with the Tomahawk attacks on Afghanistan and Sudan in August, in addition to serving imperialist aims in the Balkans, military action against Serbia could enable Clinton to depict impeachment moves against him as an irrelevant distraction at least, and ideally as unpatriotic Republican plotting to weaken the nation when it needs to rally its strength.

In Britain Tony Blair and Robin Cook spoke last week in favour of quickly moving against Serbia. This bellicosity won support at the Labour Party conference and in the tabloids. Not to be outdone, shadow foreign secretary Michael Howard attempted in a letter to *The Independent* to score party political points against Cook, lambasting him for not pressing Nato to take military action sooner.

In fact it is likely that military action taken under UN auspices will be

vetoed. Of the five members of the security council, two - Russia and China - are opposed. Nato may therefore attack without UN approval, as the US did against Afghanistan and Sudan. The Russian defence minister, Igor Sergeev, claimed rather pathetically that this would trigger the return to the Cold War.

Whatever the result of these diplomatic shenanigans, the Kosovars remain a historically constituted people who share a common culture, language and territory - they must have the right freely to determine their own future. This is not a Bosnia (a non-nation). Workers across the world, and especially in Serbia as the oppressor nation, must support the right of Kosovars to freely form their own independent state, or even unite with Albania.

Communists are internationalists, and advocate at all times the maximum unity. But as democrats we are for separation as opposed to the coercive or violent maintenance of state unity. Where this is attempted, as in Kosova, it is an undeniable reflection of the existence of oppressor and oppressed nations in the state ●

Mary Godwin.

Confusion

The formation of the Scottish Socialist Party on September 20 was a setback for the entire workers' movement. The founding principles of this new group cannot be 'accepted' by communists, socialists or revolutionaries as the basis for joining. What has been created is a right centrist *nationalist* organisation, a new opportunist party born through a process of *splitting* existing all-Britain workers' organisations - the Socialist Alliances and the crisis-riven Socialist Party in England and Wales - of Peter Taaffe. (He 'fought' the formation of the SSP purely on the basis of technicalities - he has not a principled bone in his political body). Generalised to the entire workers' movement, this process would spell utter disaster for our class.

This is the *defining characteristic* of the SSP, not its militant rhetoric or its spurious 'internationalism'. It does not seek to organise workers on the basis of their class interests against the state that rules over them. Instead, it aims to split our class in this country along lines of nationality or geography. There can be no compromise with these politics - they are a foul poison and genuine partisans of our class can have no truck with them. This organisation pledges itself to intransigently fight such weakening of our movement by petty nationalism and to dissuade those who would accommodate to it.

A good place to start is with the two articles in last week's paper from comrades Tom Delargy and Dave Craig. Faced with this important change, this duo present us with perfect examples of tactics *not* to employ.

First, Tom presses us to make an "orientation on the Scottish Socialist Party". He presents what he calls a "radical alternative" to this paper's demand for a "principled split" (all quotes from *Weekly Worker* October 1). Tom unfortunately misunderstands badly the reasons we have put forward for this call. He suggests that we make the "inaccurate assumption" that "all supporters of the slogan of an independent socialist Scotland are indifferent to the class struggle throughout the rest of the United Kingdom, Europe and beyond". He also seems to have the idea that we have a grump with the fact that the SSP has no facility for "automatic representation of political groups" at the leadership level, a 'principle' that is apparently "very important to the CPGB".

Tom is simply wrong. We have never claimed that people in the SSP would be automatically "indifferent" to the class struggle in other parts of the world. Individuals can sincerely (or hypocritically) back this or that struggle. But the foundations and perspectives of the new party are explicitly *left nationalist*. The very act of its formation has split existing united working class organisations along the lines of nationality. The mouthings about 'international solidarity' by Alan McCombes and co are therefore worthless. The founders of the SSP have put nationality before class. There is a long record of this sort of betrayal in our movement.

Comrade Delargy should thus stop alibying his essential *personal* decision to join the SSP with foolish ideas such as "this new party is the only credible organisation anywhere in the UK today that stands any chance of *uniting* the anti-capitalist challenge to New Labour" (my emphasis). By definition, the founding of the SSP is about *splitting* or *dividing*, not *uniting* the proletarian response to Blair's all-UK project for recasting official politics.

Second, the notion that we have a 'principle' about the organisational structure of the SSP is also nonsense. Our call for the automatic representation of political groups is a demand *specific* to the stage of development of the Socialist Alliances. This is not some generalised measuring stick against which we 'morally' evaluate each and every new organisation. The democratic structures of the Socialist Labour Party were hardly exemplary, for example.

Ah, but Tom thinks he has us when it comes to the SLP. He cites the appalling internal regime of witch hunt and bureaucratic heavy-handedness, yet points to the supposed irony that "far from proposing a split in that organi-

sation, the CPGB has pilloried those that abandoned ship as 'I Ran Aways'".

This misses the point spectacularly. We *must* have a fundamentally different political approach to the formation of the SLP than to the SSP. The SLP was a break to the left from Labour by a small layer of militant workers led by one of the most important trade union leaders of this century. It gave an important opportunity for communists to win a hearing for their politics among sections of the class lurching in what could have been a fundamentally healthy direction, even if they were dragging large items of social democratic political baggage along with them. There is no comparison with the formation of the SSP.

Here we have a small political organisation (Scottish Militant Labour), despicably splitting along national lines, in order to tail and positively *promote* the petty nationalist sentiments in Scotland. It thus leads advanced elements in the direction of the outright bourgeois nationalism of the Scottish National Party. Who has suffered the setback with the formation of the SSP? Not the forces of capital, but the forces of labour. Tom's main preoccupation appears to be with embroiling the Socialist Workers Party with the new formation, to ensure the electoral collaboration without which both organisations "will be condemned" to see "our vote melt away and channelled to the Blairites". In fact - given other considerations - the SWP might well deserve the support of socialists *against* the SSP.

Whatever its centrist and sectarian limitations, the SWP remains a revolutionary group committed in theory and practice to all-British working class unity. It should be axiomatic that this socialist organisation moving at long last onto the field of electoral contest against Blair's Labour would deserve critical support *against* the left nationalists of the SSP - which is hardly a movement of the class itself. Certainly it is extremely difficult to envisage how a principled call for an SSP vote could be made.

The articles of Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group have on occasion been noteworthy for their abstract formalism. His tactical prescriptions have an air of other-worldliness. On one side, comrade Craig tells us that "we must fight tooth and nail" against nationalism. Concretely, this means "[opposing] separate workers' parties for England, Scotland and Wales" - with obvious implications for the formation of the SSP, you might think.

Yet a few short paragraphs earlier he had been telling us that the SSP was "yet another communist-Labour formation" such as Scargill's SLP. He suggests that "as revolutionary democratic communists, we are not opposed to this type of formation in the current circumstances of the class struggle". So are we against the setting up of the SSP, or in favour of it as "a communist-Labour formation" like the SLP, something demanded by the contemporary "interests of the working class"? Should we accept the 'inevitability' of formations such as this in the same way that we would not rail against a "donkey because we want it to be a racehorse"?

The idea that the SSP constitutes a "communist-Labour" formation is clearly wildly optimistic. Where is the communist pole of the contradiction, and how has it been expressed in the party's formation, its structure or founding principles? Clearly, what we actually have in front of us is a centrist-reformist-nationalist bloc. This is what characterises its *essence* and its *dynamic* and this is what demands that communists pursue hard, confrontational tactics towards it designed to cleave any healthy elements *away* (if there are any). The most pressing need in contemporary working class politics in Scotland is to bring to the fore the contradiction between tartan nationalism and proletarian internationalism. Comrade Craig's 'communist-Labour' definition acts to *obscure* this necessity.

The only correct position remains the call for principled opposition ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser



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

Rights and duties

With reference to Ian Mahoney's article, 'Party aggregate' (*Weekly Worker* September 24) and Dave Craig's letter in response (October 1), perhaps Ian Mahoney is just a rather simple man. How can you 'punish' someone by voting against a motion they have already disclaimed? The comrades in Manchester opposed the original resolutions, proposed by the RDG's Dave Craig at the September aggregate, on the grounds that non-members of the organisation should not be allowed to place motions before Party bodies. They certainly have no 'democratic right'. While I accept that the Party can accept any such formulation, it would be wrong to do so.

Firstly this would give out the wrong signals to organisations engaged in the rapprochement process. They would have rights and not duties. In the case of the RDG this yet again lets them off the hook. Their organisation has dragged its heels time and again. Dave Craig represents the most advanced section. But, if push comes to shove, the RDG will lose members in joining the CPGB. Those who join will gain far more.

The concept of non-members having restrictions placed upon them is correct. Further I would suggest that candidate membership status be introduced while comrades are fully integrated into Party life in *all* its aspects.

The amendments to the resolutions watered them down to such a level that any meaning they contained was lost. That was the method of punishment Ian Mahoney *et al* wanted to inflict on comrade Craig.

Comrades in Manchester want the RDG as members. But the time has come to stop pussyfooting around, and get on with the job in hand - to build a mass Communist Party.

James Frazer
Manchester

Child abuser?

Well, it is interesting that Sandy Johnstone (Letters, September 24) draws the conclusion that a person who has sexual relations with a six-year-old is like a person who "shags sheep", not insofar as he deems them both pervers, but that he equates the consensual level of a six-year-old with that of a sheep. In other words, a six-year-old no more understands what is going on than a sheep.

This actually is the crux of the matter. Sandy and a large part of the population have led themselves to believe six-year-olds have no sexuality, can't possibly enjoy sex or want quite voluntarily to engage in it; that sometimes the degree of sexuality is such it takes them into areas not usually discovered at that age, like engaging in sex with a grown-up at one level or another. If you happen to believe that then clearly a six-year-old *can't* consent to sex, because they don't know what it is.

Well, it's possible, I suppose, but that image doesn't conform to any six-year-old I ever met. Of course their experience of sexual options is limited and confined probably to nudity and touching. I've never had sexual relations with a six-year-old myself, but I understand that people who have generally confine themselves to the sexual level of the child, not introducing them to more adult forms of sex. But even where they've gone on to oral sex or something of that kind, it's hardly beyond the realms of possibility that a child could enjoy mutual oral sex - a six-year-old's clitoris for example is perfectly able to enjoy stimulation and orgasm.

As I understand it, because of the physical differences, adults who actually attempt to have sexual intercourse with a child as young as six are virtually non-existent or fit into a category I'll come onto. I am of course talking about an adult person who likes, loves, or deeply feels for the child as well as being sexually attracted to her/him. Of course there is another, quite different set of adults who for one twisted reason or another *do not* like children, are cruel to them, hurt them, and sometimes part of that hurting involves rape (I mean *actual* physical rape, of the forced sex with brutality variety, not the statutory technicality) or degrading sexual treatment.

I am *not* talking about such people: they are *not* having sexual relations with children, they

are committing violence against children. That is another story entirely, but it is one which Sandy and co refuse to separate out from the former case and, while ever they refuse to see the difference - between love and hate; caring, kindness and cruelty - they will persistently condemn adults who care for children and would never ever hurt them as 'abusers'. Deliberately confusing the rapist, the child-killer, the child-hater with their direct opposites.

In our case, we didn't start having sex until my girlfriend was about 11 and a half. It was me who held back from going too far too quickly, as I didn't want to take her to places she didn't understand. But she set the pace: first to oral sex, then to full intercourse by the time she was 13. We *did* actually know each other and like each other when she was six, but sex didn't seem on the agenda for either of us at that time. Child-adult relationships in general are different: people come to things at different ages. Far from Sandy's conclusion, this is hardly an unnatural process and, stripped of the moral outrage and hysteria, it is quite normal and natural *for some adults and some children* - by no means all. Which brings me to another of Sandy's myths - that "such people" prey on children, children *per se*. Any child. All children. Not true - how could it be? It is clearly obvious not all children - perhaps not even most children - would find the sexual attentions of an adult welcome, let alone go along with them and encourage them. Such relationships are *specific* to particular children in relation to a particular adult.

Needless to say this form of sexuality is open to abuse, bribery, power relations, force, etc, in the same way that all sexual relations can be - those are *not* consensual relations. While it is true the moslem faith has a more intelligent attitude to ages of sexual consent, the *whole* of human relationships - men-men, men-women, women-women and children - is distorted by an imposed and restrictive moral straitjacket, superimposed by religious freaks on the basic work of the koran and teaching of Allah. Islam did not invent this more enlightened view of ages of consent. It was the one which was prevalent in that part of the world and islam absorbed it.

It is noteworthy that Sandy did not take up my point about 12 as the age in consent in most of Europe and some parts of North America. How come adults and 12-year-olds in those lands aren't branded pervers and jailed and burnt at the stake? Could it be that a British person of 12 isn't sexually aware, doesn't know what their sex organs are for, and couldn't understand what a sexual relationship was? I wonder *who* Sandy mixes with, or is he walking about with blinkers on?

Finally, Sandy, I am quite prepared to engage in a nice serious exchange of views. The trouble is *your* view is that I am a pervert, a child-molester, an abuser, who exploits children, and has condemned my partner to being a "wrecked, haunted, atomised, emotional cripple" who needs treatment, isolation from the community and a course of rehabilitation. Now why ever would my response be "vitriolic" to such a rational and well reasoned viewpoint?

I say again: I love my partner and care for her more than my life. She is the most special person in my life and has been since she was 11 and is now six years on. I refuse to let people like Sandy condemn and distort our relationship to the level where he compares it to bestiality. He then stands in surprised reaction that I do not think his bigotry and prejudice, to say the least, is anything other than polite after-dinner debate.

The CPGB is to be congratulated for its heroic stance against repression and the age of consent. By the way, this doesn't imply that there *isn't* an age of consent. There is: it is the age at which each person consents to have sex, at a level they understand and actually want. But the person themselves decide when that is, not the state or its moral cheerleaders like Sandy Johnstone.

Frank Worth
Leeds

From **The Call**, paper of the
British Socialist Party,
October 10 1918

Imperialist Germany's hour of fate

Brest-Litovsk is avenging itself, and what was to be imperialist Germany's supreme security has become her supreme 'hour of fate' ...

In the fifth year of the war, at the moment of almost complete triumph, when another blow, it seemed, would have been sufficient to place Paris and the Channel ports in Germany's hands, the wheel of fortune suddenly made a complete turn round, and the proud edifice of the German army collapsed at one blow.

This is something more than a mechanical catastrophe ... It is a psychological catastrophe due to the collapse of the *morale* of the German people and of the army ... It was at Brest that that morale was killed, and it was general Hoffman, as representing the military-imperialist party, who did it when, impatient at Trotsky's thrusts, he brought his fist down on the table and shouted out: "We are the victors!"

By that gesture and that exclamation he showed the German people ... that imperialist Germany was fighting not for defence, but for conquests. The gigantic strike involving one million workers was the first reply of the German people, and since then in spite of - or perhaps just because of - the great victories of the first six months of the present year ... the mortal wound inflicted upon the German morale at Brest continued to bleed and to suppurate, undermining the nation's and the army's power of and will to resistance, until at the first serious test the whole constitution broke down. Trotsky was a thousand times right when he said at Brest: "The war map is nothing; the mind of the people is everything."

... It is very unlikely that Prince Max's cabinet in general and the Scheidemann socialists in particular will display that unreserved 'will' to peace and reform which alone can reassure the people and reunite it in resisting foreign aggression ... Is it not more likely that the new government will in due course suffer shipwreck in its attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable claims of kaiserdom and democracy, and that it will either provoke a revolutionary rising of the people or prepare the way for a military dictatorship ... which in the end however must also lead to revolution?

It seems to us that Germany has now entered upon the road which has been traversed by Russia since 1915. It is bound to be shorter, but it will lead to the same goal: the social revolution. The appointment of the present 'national' government, whatever the motives behind it, marks the beginning of the end of imperial and imperialist Germany ●

Lawrence enquiry

Left's aim misdirected

Metropolitan police commissioner Sir Paul Condon last week apologised to the Lawrence family. Speaking at the London enquiry into the killing of Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent police investigation, he added his voice to that of his number three, Ian Johnston, who had uttered similar words last June.

Condon said: "I deeply regret that we have not brought Stephen's racist murderers to justice." He also apologised for having previously accepted the police review of the investigation, which denied any failure or wrongdoing. But Condon was continuously barracked from the public gallery as he repeatedly denied that the problem was one of police "institutionalised racism", or that there was a "culture of racism" within the Met.

The Guardian reported his evidence in this way: "He was prepared to go so far. There was racism, both unconscious and deliberate, in the force; there was discrimination and stereotyping of black people; officers on the street did overreach their discretionary powers of stop and search and arrest. He even reluctantly accepted that such practices were widespread. But he would not acknowledge institutionalised racism" (October 2).

The Guardian disapproved of his attitude, as it made clear with its front page headline, "When sorry is not enough". Its editorial of the same day commented: "The great failing of the Scarman enquiry into the Brixton riots 17 years ago was its failure to recognise the institutional dimension. It is crucial the Lawrence enquiry does not fall into the same trap."

That appears highly unlikely. Having already dubbed the police internal review a "whitewash", the government-appointed team now looks set to go along the "institutionalised racism" road. Enquiry members pressed Condon over and over again to "just say yes" - ie, to admit the "institutional dimension" and that police racism played a part in the failure to jail Stephen's killers. The chairman, Sir William Macpherson, was happy to allow constant interruptions and heckling from the public gallery. It was as though the establishment was deliberately encouraging the venting of frustration in its effort to win over the alienated black community.

The term 'institutionalised racism' has finally passed into the liberal mainstream. For most of the revolutionary left, of course, it has long been used to describe the state and all of its bodies. It is a matter of faith for these comrades that racism and capitalism go hand in hand. Each bourgeois state must, to a greater or lesser degree, rely on racism in order to divide the working class. The state - or so we are told - cannot achieve the same end through different, opposing, means.

For example, before Condon's appearance at the enquiry *The Socialist* was already writing: "The refusal of the police to acknowledge institutional racism at work in the Lawrence case ... shows there is little will within the police to change things" (September 25). This is es-

entially the same line as that of *The Guardian*. Which is strange, since you would have thought that the bourgeois mass media would want to use every opportunity to press home the racist message in their own right. Surely the media cannot be exempt from institutionalisation? If most bourgeois elements declare in favour of anti-racism and a sizeable section is joining in the condemnatory chorus, either they are erecting a most elaborate smokescreen or there is something seriously wrong with the left's analysis.

Of course the liberal bourgeoisie is using the term in a slightly different way from the left. It does not for a moment accept that racism is part and parcel of capitalism. In fact *Guardian* leader writers would be appalled at accusations that *they* were racist - as would the entire liberal establishment. In fact, despite the brouhaha, the difference between them and Condon is one of nuance. They share the increasingly consolidated consensus around the desirability of cohering acceptance of a common *chauvinist* identity of Britishness among all sections of the population - black and white. The official ideology of the state is *anti-racism*. It is a means to divide workers sectionally yet unite them as rival supplicants before the bourgeois state. Racism, like anti-semitism and anti-catholicism, no longer serves the interests of the state.

The Guardian's sister paper, *The Observer*, reacted to Condon's refusal to acquiesce in the growing accommodation of the establishment and the left on the question by publishing an article by Winston Silcott, the black community activist framed by the police for the killing of a police officer in Broadwater Farm during the riots a decade ago. His conviction was overturned in 1991, but he was then kept in jail for another murder. Interestingly, *The Observer* ran his article, phoned through to a campaigner from prison, under the heading, "Another *victim* responds to Sir Paul Condon's apology" (my emphasis, October 4).

Like *The Socialist* and *The Guardian* Silcott is also convinced that racism within the police is institutionalised. If that was not the case, he says, "racist murders would be cleared up and investigated like any other killing. There would be fewer black deaths in custody." But for Condon of course the failings in the Lawrence case do not constitute evidence of racism: "If you examined every murder investigation, successful or unsuccessful, you would find a catalogue of errors, where things could and should have been done better," he told *The Observer* (October 4).

It is undoubtedly true that senior police officers will always tend to cover up unsavoury behaviour and practices - it reflects badly on their own authority. There is certainly a culture of closing ranks behind colleagues, and it is likely that there is a higher proportion of racists within the police than within the population at large. Such people might well be attracted to the force in the hope of being able to act out their unpleasant and vicious prejudices.

But to say that racism within the

police is "widespread", as Condon admits, is not the same thing as saying it is "institutionalised". Institutionalisation - if words have any meaning - implies that it is deliberately cultivated from the top. In other words, racial discrimination would perhaps be inculcated on training courses for new recruits. Or senior police officers would instruct the lower ranks to pick on blacks or beat up Asians purely on the basis of their race - or at least encourage racist freelancers to do their own thing. Apartheid South Africa was a good example of institutionalised racism.

The Metropolitan Police, however, is rather different. Condon bemoans the fact that his 'race awareness' courses have had such little effect and commits himself to rooting out the racists.

It is important to disprove the claims of the left not because we believe the police are gentle, fair and impartial. Far from it. They are employed in a quite partial and often vicious way against the working class, anti-imperialists and - yes - black community activists.

Winston Silcott hit on a truth in his *Observer* article. He said: "Once you stand up for your rights the police feel threatened. They hate to be challenged by black people. On Broadwater Farm, where everybody was looking after their community, the police felt threatened, so they called people agitators to get rid of them. People are not supposed to be persecuted for standing up for their communities, as I did. That was my real crime."

The truth is that the state, through its police, will take action to crush *any* section or group that causes it to feel threatened. That is why the left's focussing in on racism as the main question is completely misdirected. While communists say, 'Not a penny, not a person to the state's police!', *The Socialist* calls for "policies to make the police accountable" (September 25). It adds: "We campaign for the banning of CS gas and long-handled batons." Presumably short-handled batons are OK.

The police can never be reformed into a body capable of acting in the interests of our class. No number of race awareness courses, of measures to make them "accountable", will change their nature. They exist, in the last analysis, to defend the capitalist state.

We need our own bodies to protect our communities and defend our interests. That is why, in opposition to the bourgeois forces of order, we call for "the armed people". We are clear in our aim of "the working class developing its own militia" (*CPGB Draft programme* 1995).

We make these calls not in some abstract schema for the indeterminate future, but as part of our immediate demands. The extent to which we are able to make them a reality will obviously depend on the level of class struggle. At present it is extremely low. But we do not wait for the tempo to rise before we put forward what is necessary. If workers are ever to liberate themselves, the preparation - both theoretical and physical - must start now ●

Alan Fox

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday October 11 - 'From Weydemeyer to Vogt; the many dictatorships of Moses Hess', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* as a study guide.

Manchester: Monday October 12 - 'The transformation of money into capital' in the series on Karl Marx's *Capital*. For details, phone 0161-798 6417. E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.

■ CPGB weekend school

Central London, November 7-8: 'Against economism'. Saturday November 7, morning: 'Iskra and economism'; afternoon: 'Lenin versus imperialist economism'. Sunday November 8, morning: 'Modern Trotskyism's tendency to economism'; afternoon: 'Lenin and the permanent 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 E8 2NS, Friday October 9, 7.30pm. Invited speakers: Diane Abbott MP, Turkish and Kurdish community organisations, Jimmy Nolan, Hackney Community Law Centre.

■ 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.

■ Reinstate Steve Hedley

Sacked by GEC Tarmac Railway Maintenance, Steve Hedley faces trumped up charges of criminal damage following a picket line incident. Demonstrate outside Clerkenwell magistrates court when Steve's case is heard - Tuesday October 13, 9.30am.

1918

Russian Revolution
this week 80 years ago

Labour Party conference

Millbank in control

Mephistopheles would have loved New Labour - they sell their souls so cheaply. At the 1998 Blackpool conference £200 bought you a quick handshake with the prime minister prior to a gala dinner; £7,000 hired you three square metres of floor space to market your wares; and for a mere £25,000 you got the chance to transform every delegate into a walking advertisement by sponsoring their ID cards, suspended on a plastic necklace emblazoned with your company's logo.

The Somerfield chain of supermarkets understandably grabbed this opportunity with both hands. In the light of the Draper affair such a stunt was politically inept, to say the least. But is there *nobody* at Millbank Tower who knows enough about the history of the Labour movement to realise that it was also an *obscurity*? Evidently not - and even if there were, it is doubtful whether they would care (or dare). To give some small credit where it is due, the GMB union and the Co-op provided delegates with alternative neckwear - thus instigating the 'war of the dog-tags'.

Some readers may think we make too much of a small matter, but in politics it is often the symbolism of seemingly minor details that tells us most. By turning not just the conference's *physical location* but even its *human* participants into the components of a disgusting corporate bazaar, Labour is saying something about how it sees itself and (god help us) about how it wishes to be seen. For us, as Marxists, it has always been axiomatic that the Labour Party is, to use Lenin's phrase, a *bourgeois party of the working class*, but Blackpool confirmed that Labour is well on the way to transforming itself into a *bourgeois party of the bourgeoisie*. Given the split at Bournemouth - the Heseltine-Clarke wing versus the Hague-Thatcherite wing; given the civil war over Europe, and the demise of the Tories as a viable pro-big business alternative, we might say that, for the foreseeable future, Blair looks likely to succeed in his aim of making Labour the preferred party of the bourgeoisie.

There are really only two questions about Blackpool: what did it say about the present political complexion of the Labour Party, and what clues did it give us about the Party's future direction?

.....
"Blackpool confirmed that Labour is well on the way to transforming itself into a bourgeois party of the bourgeoisie"

In the first place, let us dispose of the notion that the constituency-based part of the NEC elections represented any kind of breakthrough for what is laughably referred to in the bourgeois press as the "hard left". The election of four Grassroots Alliance candidates stimulated a familiar conditioned reflex in the media, with hysterical headlines about the resurgence of the left. But back on planet earth things look rather different: to call the successful candidates leftwing, let alone Marxists, is simply fatuous. Scratch Liz Davies or Mark Seddon and what do you find? A Bennite. Scratch Tony Benn and you find a thoroughbred liberal radical, who after all these years still believes that parliamentary democracy can deliver socialism.

The real significance of these results lies in the fact that the left was elected through a procedure which was specifically designed to exclude them. Admittedly, at around 35%, the turnout was pretty small, but in terms of local elections, for example, it was hardly negligible. The main thing is that the constituency results were a product of Blair's 'one person, one vote' policy - a cornerstone of his strategy for destroying Old Labour and transforming it into a force capable of capturing and holding the centre-left terrain for New Labour: first, in terms of practical politics, this was the only way Blair could neutralise the organised opposition of constituency management committees packed with 'dangerous' leftwingers; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, in ideological terms it provided him with os-

tensible democratic legitimisation for his project. Now, however, Blair has had to learn that the stick of 'democratisation' strikes both ways and that it can be turned against him.

Maybe this fact accounted for Blair's strange mixture of defensiveness and aggression in his eve-of-conference 'question time' session. Somehow or other he managed to use the word 'comradeship' without laughing, but as always with Blair - hampered as he is by a middle class background and a Scottish public school education - there was an unmistakable edge of detachment and menace, even to his pathetic attempts at cultivating 'solidarity' with the party masses. It was the first of many pep talks with a common theme: 'Accept the government you've got, because the alternative is a rightwing Tory administration.' Telling your electorate to 'take it or leave it' hardly seems to be good politics, but maybe it reflects the arrogance of a party in power without any credible opposition.

Presentationally, things got off to a poor start on the first day of conference, when the *Evening Standard* published a leaked memorandum from Millbank Tower concerning delegates who should on no account be allowed to speak at conference. Against a list of names there were remarks such as "Trot", "leftwinger", "pro-Livingstone" and so forth. Predictably, this example of New Labour's futile obsession with control was explained away by a spokesman as the work of an overzealous official, who had since been dismissed. If this is true, one must hope that he takes his case to an industrial tribunal. Further embarrassment followed the next day, when Labour's MPs and MEPs voted for their section of the revamped NEC. The ballot papers for this election were apparently numbered, with the result that some participants were apparently too scared to vote for their preferred candidate (Dennis Skinner) and voted for the leadership's slate instead. This sad fact, which led to Skinner's ejection from the NEC after 20 years, speaks volumes about the culture of fear and sycophancy which comprises the inner-party life of New Labour.

As always, the centre piece of conference was the leader's speech, which this year consisted of 50 minutes of monumental vapidity, the oratorical equivalent of lift music. If this was really meant to be an exposition of the much vaunted 'third way' in politics, then the people who do Blair's thinking for him still have a lot of work to do. Proverbially, the third way is about "managing change", and Blair defined it as usual in hortatory terms: "Accept the challenge of the future, but refuse to consider ourselves powerless to overcome it." Is there anybody out there who can tell us what this banality is supposed to mean? The more you listen to Blair, the more you realise that his speeches consist not of reasoned argument, nor even of an 'honest' appeal to raw emotion - they constitute a particularly repulsive form of calculated sermonising in which it is not ideas but so-called 'values' that count for everything.

What exactly are these 'values'? Basically, a few warmed up leftovers of communitarianism served up with a garnish of 'third way' aphorisms: "We manage change *together*, modernise, reform" (my italics). It is the

"togetherness" that gives the communitarian game away, positing as it does a society in which there are no contending classes determined by relations of property and power, but merely 'families' comprising a 'community'. Such a community can be "confident because the challenge [?] is being taken on not by each of us in isolation from each other, but together, one nation, sure of its values and therefore sure of its future."

'Challenge' is this year's New Labour buzzword, intended to stimulate the recognition that the Labour Party's goals have in some mysterious way become the goals of the community at large, and that not to accept 'the challenge' would therefore constitute a kind of treachery. In practice, Blair's rhetoric serves morally to exclude everybody who does not happen to agree with his 'values'. If you cannot say with Blair, "I am a patriot. I want the UK strong", then there is clearly something amiss with you.

There is indubitably something worrying about a supposedly communitarian ethic that expresses itself in terms of *threats*, as Blair's speech did time and again. Woe betide you if you are a teacher or a doctor who supposedly does not come up to scratch. Heaven help you if you are a first-time benefit claimant. At times the speech became almost sinister: "From tomorrow kids can be picked up for truancy; young children alone on the streets can be subject to curfews; parents made responsible for their children's behaviour. From April anti-social neighbours can be taken to court and punished." You half expect Blair to end his peroration with the promise that 'from June anyone guilty of double-parking will be summarily executed.' What we have here is a language so trenchant and systematic that it is not too far-fetched to imagine it constituting an embryonic authoritarianism.

Only once during the whole conference did we see any suggestion of a serious inner-party conflict and this was over the question of proportional representation. Everybody knows that New Labour is split from top to bottom about this issue. In a manner calculated to warm the hearts of Old Labour nostalgics, Ken Jackson of the AEEU engineering and electricians' union was 'persuaded' by the NEC to withdraw his union's motion calling on the Labour Party to commit itself to maintaining the first-past-the-post system. Most observers agree that if the motion had been put it would have been carried overwhelmingly, which would have caused Blair no end of problems. Maintaining the status quo gives him great flexibility in pursuing his strategic plan of creating a new constitutional order. For all their huff and puff about "shabby deals", union leaders like John Edmonds of the GMB know full well that Blair's constitutional bandwagon is unstoppable. His goal - permanent occupation of the centre ground - ie, a permanent New Labour government, involving where necessary a coalition - demands a concordat with the Liberal Democrats over PR.

Curiously, in presentational terms, Labour's handling of the PR issue has been amateurish and counterproductive. The party's membership, still exulting in what seemed at one time an impossible electoral victory, are in no mood for any kind of deal that would bring Paddy Ashdown into the cabi-

net. Furthermore, the rank and file have good reason to see PR as a deeply centralist way of doing business: candidates for next May's Scottish and Welsh elections and for the European election are to be selected not by their local constituencies, but by a central panel: ie, by the bigwigs at Millbank Tower. This is a source of considerable and understandable resentment.

The PR issue aside, the Blackpool conference produced only one other notable *faux pas*. At a *Guardian* fringe debate the AEEU announced plans to spend £1 million educating suitable candidates for parliamentary seats. Peter Mandelson, who has taken to calling himself an "industrial revolutionary" in his role as trade and industry secretary, dropped something of a clanger when he said: "It would be a disaster if we thought we could discover some tidy quota system of blue collar, working class, northern, horny-handed, dirty-overalled people to have in our party..." (*The Guardian* October 1). Mandelson's distaste for the working class is palpable and hardly surprising coming from a true scion of the old Labour aristocracy and a man whose inability to recognise mushy peas will guarantee him immortality of a kind. How eloquently Mandelson's words speak to us about the reality of New Labour. It is to become a party of professional middle class politicians and seconded members of the self-made bourgeoisie. Workers, "horny-handed" or otherwise, will have no place - except as voting fodder.

In their own different ways Blair and Mandelson can be acquitted of the charge of class treachery because they never belonged to the working class in the first place. The same cannot be said for John Prescott. Here we have a man who consciously uses his proletarian origins to dupe the workers into believing that Labour really does represent their interests. He was on fine form at the close of this year's conference, demanding that the surreal Rubik cube backdrop be lit up in pure red, "the party's true colour". As part of his Les Dawson act, Prescott was even licensed to make fun of the notion that Tony Blair was ever a socialist. Everyone clapped wildly and you asked yourself whether they really understood the import of what was being said, even in jest. Prescott did his job well. Everyone, even those with the remnants of a socialist conscience, went home feeling good about themselves.

This complacency is not destined to last. Behind Blair's rhetorical summons to a new austerity lay the need to prepare the country for bad news. Gordon Brown has already admitted that his projections for growth must now be halved. A global recession, perhaps even a depression, is on the way, with all that means in terms of unemployment and suffering for the working class. Russia is in meltdown, the east Asian contagion has spread to Latin America. Neither the US nor the EU can remain oases of stability. Global capitalism means global crisis.

We shall see soon enough that Labour's talk of community and 'values' is just empty verbiage. In a climate of rising social tension and unrest, its response will be a resort to ever more stringent authoritarian measures of control. Life itself will open the eyes of the working class to the falsehoods of New Labour ●

Michael Malkin

Fighting fund

Backbone

The developing world financial crisis is producing record suicide rates in such places as Seoul, among those who lost their faith in life along with their money. We place our faith in the collective power of the workers to overpower the money system. But the gathering storm by no means guarantees victory to our class. Our paper, with its method of bringing differences out into the open, has a crucial role to play in reorganising the Communist Party our class needs. Giving our money to the struggle for human

self-liberation only strengthens our faith in our communist future. Thanks to comrades CA, MC, JM, MJ, AN, MS and JS for giving backbone to the fund with bankers orders totalling £182 monthly, pushing this month's fund to £237. A brilliant week. Keep it coming, comrades ●

Ian Farrell

Ask for a bankers order form, and/or send cheques, payable to CPGB

Simon Harvey of the SLP

Terminal decline

Under the cloak of a supposedly overcrowded political schedule leading up to May 1999, our cowardly national executive committee has rubber-stamped Scargill's regal cancellation of the Socialist Labour Party's third annual congress. The party is now gripped in a crisis where stagnation could give way to terminal decline. Even Fiscite vice president Pat Sikorski now privately confesses that he treats the party as a holding operation while he gets on with his much more important work in RMT.

In the September letter to CSLP secretaries, national sections and affiliated trade unions (sic), which we reproduce below, general secretary Arthur Scargill notes "a number of letters" from party branches complaining about the four days' notice received by CSLPs for submission of motions to congress (as reported in *Weekly Worker* September 17). With Scargillian bureaucratic sleight of hand, the general secretary points out that the NEC had already set the date for congress at its April meeting and that the "timetable for congress is clearly set out in the party's constitution". In other words, we've noted your complaints, but it's all your own fault. Presumably branches should have worked out for themselves the timetable for submitting motions and called CSLP meetings without waiting for NEC instructions. Under the SLP's supposedly sacrosanct constitution, the NEC has no authority to cancel congress - it may only call special congresses. However, in typical bureau-speak, the 'legal' basis of the NEC's anti-democratic act will no doubt be justified retrospectively with the first act of the November 14 special congress postponing the third party congress until November 1999. In other words, the third and fourth congresses of the SLP will be held simultaneously.

Scargill is at pains to point out the unanimity of this decision: "I have been asked to emphasise that the decision to recommend the postponement of the 1998 annual congress in light of the current political situation was taken *unanimously* by all three national officers and by all members of the NEC present at the meeting." It is, of course, nonsense to suggest that the NEC was unanimous in agreeing that the cancellation was necessary "in the light of the current political situation". The handful of executive members at the Blackpool NEC of September 12 were well aware that the situation they were landed with was caused entirely by Scargill's own bungling, and there were heated exchanges. The feeling was that the special congress solution was making the best of a bad job.

Of course, if the SLP were a vibrant, growing class-struggle party about to tackle the tasks of building a mass demonstration on May 1, and eager to contest local authority, Welsh assembly, Scottish parliament and European parliament elections, then the NEC would demand a full, democratic congress to put the party on a war footing "in light of the current political situation".

In fact Scargill's admission that 53 constituency parties have effectively disappeared shows an organisation in rapid decline.

Apart from sanctioning the 'postponement' of the annual conference, the delegates on November 14 will be

expected to vote through two constitutional amendments slightly altering the basis on which membership is counted for the purposes of voting at congress. Why is it felt necessary to make these tinkering changes at a truncated congress? Perhaps Scargill is attempting a coup: the new clause VI, 18 (c) appears to remove voting rights from the Fiscite-dominated women's and Brarite-dominated youth sections.

The NEC agenda seems to suggest that no vote will be allowed on the other items: the elections in Wales, Scotland and for Europe; and the May 1 1999 demonstration.

It is worth noting that Scargill insists on calling the May 1 event to repeal the anti-trade union laws the "Reclaim Our Rights national demonstration". To my knowledge, the organisation for this march and rally is under the rubric of the United Campaign to Repeal The Anti-Trade Union Laws. This campaign, the political baby of NEC members John Hendy and Bob Crow, comprises the SLP-initiated ROR as well as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's Free Trade Unions Campaign. Obviously, the difference in opinion between Scargill on the one hand and Crow (busy with RMT work) and Hendy (currently overseas) on the other is yet to be resolved.

■ NEC nominations

The main reason Scargill decided to hold a special congress was the pretence of membership consultation. This necessitates NEC elections. A look through the nominations and an evaluation of the factions involved shows how bizarre the SLP has become.

Frank Cave, president, and Arthur Scargill, general secretary, are unopposed. And once again frothy Roy Bull of the homophobic - and selectively anti-Trotskyite - *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* is challenging Pat Sikorski of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus for the vice-presidency. Fat chance, Roy: comrade Pat has been nominated by the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners' Association with its automatic-majority block vote of 3,000. While 'trade union affiliates' may not vote for NEC members in the CSLP section, it appears they are perfectly free to dictate who the three officers will be.

In the trade union 'section', there are seven nominees for seven positions. And they are all - surprise, surprise - nominated by the same two affiliates - the NWCCMA and the Crook Ucatt branch. The seven who are already effectively elected are: Bob Crow, Paul Hardman, John Hendy, Paul Liversuch, Joe Marino, Linda Muir and Nell Myers. Former Liverpool dockers' leader Jimmy Nolan has evidently withdrawn from the NEC.

The CSLP section is more interesting from the point of view of in-fighting. For the seven positions there are 22 nominations. In all, only 21 CSLPs made nominations for the NEC and national officer elections. Clearly the party has shrunk dramatically. Nevertheless, from these meagre pickings we can detect clear demarcations.

In effect there are four and a half factions, the largest group being the Scargill loyalists. This is hardly a faction: more a grab-bag of die-hard fans and opportunists clinging to the Dear

Leader's coat tail. This group includes bits and pieces of other factions, showing that the only cement holding the current together is Scargill himself.

Then there is Fisc, the *EPSR* and also those around Harpal Brar of the Indian Workers Association (GB), the Communist Workers Association and the Stalin Society. The 'half faction' comprises those in the party torn between a residual attachment to Scargill and a hankering for a modicum of democracy within Arthur's monocracy. Terry Dunn is the most active in this semi-faction. There are also the faintest glimmerings of what remains of the left, most of which was witch hunted out of the party or ignominiously resigned after the last congress. There is a residual left in Hackney North and Stoke Newington, Lewes, Brighton Kempton and Brighton Pavilion.

Those around Harpal Brar comprise the ultra-Stalinite wing of the party. While comrade Brar is not supporting the weirder-than-thou *EPSR*, they are supporting him, no doubt hoping to join forces to purge the Fiscite Trotskyites out of the party. However, while the Fisc-Scargill alliance is shaky, it is not finished yet. In a show of unity, the Scargill-loyal NWCCMA

has nominated Fiscite Pat Sikorski for vice-president.

Confirming their continuing distance from Scargill, former ultra-loyalists Terry Dunn and Helen Drummond have been nominated by the Fisc-inclined CSLPs of Manchester (Central, Withington and Gorton), Poplar and Canning Town and West Ham. Fisc are also supporting Brian Heron, Imran Khan, Rachel Newton, Geoff Southern and Trevor Wongsam.

The *EPSR*-nominating CSLPs are Denton and Reddish, along with Hazel Grove and Walton. *EPSR* is supporting Harpal Brar, Giles Barralet-Shorter, Roy Bull, Adrian Greenman, Dave Roberts and Sohan Singh.

Harpal Brar is emerging as an opportunist manoeuvrer in the SLP to rival Fisc. Both *court* factions vie for the ear of King Arthur. His CSLP in Ealing Southall limiting its nominations to Brar himself. While drawing the support of the Stalinite *EPSR*, he is seen to be not openly joining in Roy Bull's Trot-baiting in the interests of 'party unity'. Nevertheless, in the national officer elections, Brar's political base did nominate comrades Cave and Scargill without supporting Sikorski. A sign of the next battle

to come, no doubt. While happily sitting alongside Pat Sikorski, Brian Heron, Arthur Scargill and Frank Cave - Brar, it should not be forgotten, believes that social democracy is pro-imperialism and Trotskyism is virtually indistinguishable from fascism.

The only other nominations are sectional, individual or regional. Reflecting the absence of any Scottish representation on the NEC, the two Scottish CSLPs making nominations limit themselves to proposing Scotland-based members.

Bridget Bell is contesting the CSLP section, and is replaced by Liz Screen as the women's section nominee alongside Carolyn Sikorski. Both are unopposed. Harpal Brar's son, Ranjeet, is also unopposed as the SLP youth section's representative on the new NEC.

The SLP is now an odd 'party' indeed. Its only theoretically coherent components are two very small ultra-Stalinite groupings and one very small ultra-opportunist Trotskyite group. They have nothing in common apart from pinning their hopes of riding to power on the discredited and increasingly isolated personality of Arthur Scargill ●

Scargill blames SLP members Congress 'postponed'

September 23 1998

To: Constituency Socialist Labour Party secretaries, National Women's Section, Socialist Labour Youth and affiliated trade unions

Dear Comrade(s):

**SLP Congress 1998
Saturday November 14 1998**

The SLP's national executive committee, meeting in Blackpool on Saturday September 12 1998, noted that there have been a number of major political developments over the past few months, the mass Reclaim Our Rights demonstration on May 1 1999, local authority elections, Welsh assembly and Scottish parliament elections and European parliamentary elections, all of which are to be held on the same day in May 1999.

The NEC has received a number of letters seeking a postponement of the annual congress to a later date (a) because those writing felt they should have been circularised earlier, although it was acknowledged that the timetable for congress is clearly set out in the party's constitution and the NEC did set the date of November 14 at its meeting of April 18 1998; and (b) because the circular *reminding* CSLPs, sections and trade union affiliates of the congress deadlines was not initially circulated to 53 CSLPs because the party's national office did not have at the time any listed secretary or contact for those CSLPs to whom the party could write. As a result, 53 CSLPs could only have motions, amendments and nominations accepted subject to the agreement of

the NEC and congress.

Following discussion, the NEC agreed that the Socialist Labour Party's energies must be fully utilised in campaigning for the Scottish parliament, Welsh assembly and the European elections - all of which are to be held under a list system of proportional representation. In addition, the party must do all it can to ensure that the national Reclaim Our Rights demonstration scheduled for May 1 1999 is a complete success. In order to accomplish this, and in response to the requests to postpone congress, the NEC *unanimously agreed*:

"That a special one-day congress be convened on Saturday November 14 1998, from 11.00am until 4.30pm in Manchester, at the Mechanics' Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1 6DD, and that attendance will be limited to *one delegate* from each CSLP, National Women's Section, Socialist Labour Youth and affiliated trade unions, representation which will provide for over 200 delegates."

The NEC *unanimously agreed* that the agenda for this special congress be limited to:

1. SLP 1998 congress:
2. Constitutional amendments:
- (a) Clause VI - Party congress: (18)(b) *add at end*: "and who are financial members 13 weeks prior to any card vote being taken at a congress, or at a special congress."
- (b) Clause VI - Party congress: *insert new* (18)(c): "Members of constituency parties for the purposes of a card vote

shall also include any members who are financial members 13 weeks prior to any card vote being taken at a congress, or at a special congress."

3. Reclaim Our Rights national demonstration on May 1 1999.

4. Elections for European members of parliament, the Scottish parliament, Welsh assembly, local authority elections and possibly the mayoral election for London.

5. Election of national officers and national executive committee for the year 1998/1999.

I have been asked to emphasise that the decision to recommend the postponement of the 1998 annual congress in light of the current political situation was taken *unanimously* by all three national officers and by all members of the NEC present at the meeting.

Attached is a full list of all comrades who have been nominated and accepted nomination for election as either national officers or members of the national executive committee.

Would you please notify me *in writing* as quickly as possible of your delegate's name, full address and telephone number in order that credentials can be prepared and dispatched at the earliest date. *Please mark your envelopes: SLP congress 1998*. If comrades acquire [sic] accommodation on the Friday night (November 13), please notify me at the same time, and we will arrange for our Manchester comrades to make the necessary arrangements.

Yours,
Arthur Scargill
general secretary

Strengths and limitations

Phil Sharpe compares the record of Lenin and Trotsky

The debate that has opened up in the pages of the *Weekly Worker* about Trotsky is to be welcomed, but what is still missing is a systematic comparison of Lenin and Trotsky. Carrying out such a comparison will help us to understand their strengths and limitations in relation to the complex task of building a party.

Lenin was the crucial leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Party. This faction played a principled role in the first Russian Revolution of 1905, but in the reactionary period after the defeat of the revolution Lenin was inclined towards unnecessarily splitting the Bolshevik faction.

Lenin used the philosophical controversy between Plekhanov (Menshevik) and Bogdanov as the pretext to facilitate a split with Bogdanov. Lenin made support for orthodox philosophical materialism (which he defended using a crude reflection theory of knowledge) a test of party loyalty. The fact that the dissident grouping disagreed with Lenin about tactics towards the duma was the formal basis for being driven out of the faction; the real reason was their philosophical willingness to challenge Plekhanov - the 'father' of Russian Marxism.

Lenin was concerned that Bogdanov's philosophical polemics with Plekhanov would undermine the possibility of a renewal of party unity between the Menshevik and Bolshevik wings. Thus Lenin was prepared to split the Bolshevik faction if it served the greater 'good' of bringing about party unity. This meant Lenin was still inclined to be opportunist in political and organisational terms: he needed to overcome his deference towards Plekhanov if he was to become a consistent proletarian revolutionary. (He was also deferential towards Kautsky in similar terms.)

Lenin's political actions between 1914 and 1917 did represent the period in which he became an intransigent proletarian revolutionary. Once he was aware of the betrayal of the Second International, which was shown through its effective support for the imperialist war, Lenin made a comprehensive and ruthless analysis of its counterrevolutionary character. This analysis was carried out in political terms, such as indicating the reactionary role of the labour aristocracy, and also developed through the brilliant philosophical critique of Plekhanov in the *Philosophical Notebooks*. Lenin concedes that he was wrong to have supported Plekhanov against Bogdanov, even if he still does not agree with Bogdanov, and he now maintains it is necessary to oppose the mechanical materialism of Plekhanov. This decisive break with Plekhanov and Kautsky, in profound philosophical, historical materialist and political terms, meant that Lenin had qualitatively become the leader of the Bolshevik party of proletarian revolution.

This transformation was connected to his enriched proletarian internationalism and the call for the formation of the Third International. Lenin was no longer primarily concerned to become the leader of the Russian social democrats: he now understood the importance of building a new and principled leadership of the Third International. The theoretical and political gains of the period 1914-1917 enabled Lenin to be the brilliant co-leader of the October Revolution.

Lenin's momentous break with the Second International did not mean there were no ideological and political residues. These limitations were expressed in the famous 1915 article in which the possibility of socialism in one country was conceived in connection to uneven development and breaking imperialism at its weakest link.

The bitter dispute about the Brest-Litovsk treaty brought to the surface the hidden ideological problems in Lenin's conception of world revolution. Lenin wanted to make Soviet Russia a fortress, or base of world revolution, and so he was prepared to sign the treaty and give large amounts of territory to German imperialism. Not to sign the treaty would mean risking the military overthrow of the Soviet regime, and this would seriously undermine the further development of world revolution.

To Rosa Luxemburg, and also in different ways Bukharin and Trotsky, military action by German imperialism would create the political conditions for a mass mobilisation by the German proletariat against their ruling class. This act of solidarity with the soviet Russian regime would also represent the beginning of the German proletarian revolution. Lenin was essentially dismissive of this prospect because he maintained that the balance of forces did not yet favour the possibility of revolutionary developments in Germany. Possibly he was correct in static terms. However, he was not prepared to recognise the need for audacity to change the balance of class forces. This was because he considered his main task to be maintaining the Soviet state, even if this was at the expense of the German proletarian revolution and the development of world revolution.

This pessimism was a result of his proletarian internationalism being undermined by a national-centred conception of world revolution. Only when the Soviet state was politically stable should it support more audacious tactics in order to bring about proletarian revolution in Germany and elsewhere. Lenin's approach did not represent indifference or hostility towards class struggle in Germany and elsewhere: he was still a principled proletarian internationalist, but he also sought to reconcile international struggles with the interests of the Soviet state.

Lenin's advocacy of the ban on factions was a terrible mistake. It ensured the onset of ideological and political conformity and facilitated the growth of a monolithic Party that was based upon the hegemony of a bureaucracy. In subjective terms Lenin's support for the ban was the main starting point for replacing political principle as the criterion of Bolshevik membership with the opportunist aspiration to rise up the hierarchy.

Lenin's mistake was made worse through his support for Stalin becoming general secretary. In the last period of his illness, he tried heroically to overturn his mistake and get Stalin removed. He also attempted between 1921 and 1923 to introduce measures to stop the development of a bureaucratic elite within the Party leadership. He was unsuccessful because the process had already become entrenched, and also because he did not advocate one of the most crucial measures - the removal of the ban on factions.

Lenin did not accept that the role of

the whole Party would be required in order to overcome the bureaucrats. Thus Lenin became a leader increasingly isolated from his comrades and yet unable to appeal to the Party for support against the growing power of the bureaucracy. He did not know how to mobilise against counterrevolution from within a workers' state.

Alongside his brilliant theoretical work of the 1914-1917 period Lenin's other main outstanding contribution was his work on the complexities of socialist transition. His articles on state capitalism, war communism and the New Economic Policy enrich our knowledge of how difficult it is for the dictatorship of the proletariat to arrive at the right policy with regards to the transition to socialism.

Lenin's mistakes between 1918 and 1923 are often more theoretically profound than other people's achievements. Thus Lenin in the 1917-1918 period equated the building of the productive forces with the introduction of the methods of state capitalism. He moved away from supporting workers' control and started to favour technocratic management.

The onset of civil war, and the need to carry out severe measures in order to obtain food from the peasantry, showed how utopian the approach of state capitalism was. A rapid development of the productive forces using state capitalist measures was not possible in the desperate conditions of famine and dire poverty. The ruthless methods of war communism were necessary if food for the cities was to be obtained.

During war communism the illusion developed that the effective end to a money economy showed that it was possible for a transition to developed communism to occur. Lenin, who had been a firm adherent of war communism and justified its ruthless approach, now put forward the need for an NEP. The peasantry had been alienated by war communism, and without the support of the peasantry the dictatorship of the proletariat was doomed. Lenin now called for a proletarian-peasant alliance.

In his last writings Lenin was trying to establish a strategy to maintain proletarian state power and also link it to world revolution. His enriched conception of world revolution was now more principled because he was less concerned to put the survival of the Soviet state before the interests of international revolution. Instead, through ensuring the survival of the Soviet state through the establishment of the proletarian-peasant alliance, it was now possible to accelerate support for world revolution. Hence Lenin's last writings of 1923 express the resolution of previous theoretical and political contradictions and the movement of his ideas onto a new higher level.

With regards to Trotsky, he was for many years a pro-party Menshevik. He had the same deferential attitude towards Axelrod that Lenin had towards Plekhanov. Trotsky was prepared to maintain that Lenin was an elitist Jacobin who was against building a proletarian Party. Thus in his various attempts to unite the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks Trotsky acted to exclude Lenin from the process of Party unity.

Nevertheless despite his anti-Leninism Trotsky played a principled role in 1905, and his theory of permanent revolution was the most explanatory basis for revolutionary theory and practice. This is because the theory showed the counterrevolutionary character of the national bourgeoisie and the necessity for proletarian leadership of the democratic revolution,

and that it was necessary to realise bourgeois democratic tasks as part of the proletarian revolution.

Trotsky started to go towards Bolshevism as a result of the outbreak of the inter-imperialist war of 1914. Even though he was still not prepared to call for a new Third International, he was in overall political agreement with Lenin about the need to build revolutionary parties in opposition to the reformism of the Second International.

Trotsky became the outstanding co-leader of the 1917 October Revolution. From 1917 he was an intransigent exponent and defender of Leninist revolutionary Marxism. However, Trotsky was not a consistent Leninist in relation to the tasks involved in developing international revolution and in the attempt to overcome the degeneration of the Soviet state.

In the 1920s Trotsky never recognised the necessity to overthrow Stalin, who was the personification of the bureaucracy. Instead Trotsky started with a perspective of the self-reform of the bureaucracy, and was prepared to envisage the possibility of a united front with Stalin (the bureaucratic centrist) against Bukharin (the pro-capitalist restorationist) in the period of 1928-29.

Trotsky essentially agreed with Stalin that NEP should be ended. So, whilst not theoretically supporting the exploitation of the peasantry, he did, if reluctantly and critically, support Stalin's bureaucratic measures. In other words Trotsky made errors in connection to relations with the Bukharinists because he supported aspects of bureaucratic socialism: the implementation of collectivisation without the consent of the peasantry.

Bureaucratic socialism - the elitist, utopian and ruthless introduction of measures not based upon the consent of the proletariat and peasantry - is still upheld by Trotsky in the 1930s. This was still present in his work on the class nature of the Soviet Union, and in the conception 'degenerated workers' state'. In *defence of Marxism* justifies the view that the Stalinist bureaucracy can carry out a revolution from above and overthrow capitalism. The Soviet Union is still considered a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which makes it capable of extending the nationalised property relations of the Soviet state through military-bureaucratic means. Trotsky does not sufficiently consider that nationalised property is not inherently progressive, or socialist, and instead can be the basis of exploiting the working class. This adaptation to Stalinism means that Trotskyism is left with the legacy of considering Stalinism to be counterrevolutionary, and yet capable of overthrowing capitalism and establishing a form of workers' state.

The Transitional Programme of 1938 is often held to be one of Trotsky's major theoretical achievements. Trotsky does show in powerful terms that the class struggle has an open-ended character, and socialism or barbarism is the alternative facing the proletariat. However, this programme also contains important theoretical contradictions. The Transitional Programme contains a tendency towards objectivism: the economic crisis represents an irresistible movement towards proletarian revolution. This objectivism justifies the ambiguous formulation that a workers' government could be formed as a result of the spontaneous pressure of the working class, and this government could be led by social democracy or Stalinism. In other words the inexorable power of work-

ing class spontaneity can bring about a workers' government that is a distorted expression (first stage) of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This approach compromises the important principle that proletarian revolution is a conscious process based upon the close unity between a revolutionary party and the proletariat.

Trotsky's conception of transitional demands contain important tensions and contradictions. Can these demands be realised under capitalism, or are they only brought about through proletarian revolution? The tendency to argue that the balance of class forces will determine the prospect of realisability means that it is often argued that transitional demands are realistically achievable under capitalism.

Thus they are effectively reformist demands, and support for these demands does not require the development of revolutionary class consciousness: it can be mobilised on the basis of existing trade union (bourgeois) consciousness. Consequently the decline of trade union struggles in the context of protracted economic crisis has led to the stagnation of the many Trotskyist groups based upon the Transitional Programme. They no longer have a viable programme upon which to obtain support within the proletariat, because this programme was based upon developing trade union militancy. The result has been to dilute transitional demands even further - and so this justification of reformism has resulted in an activist contempt towards the proletariat and an effective repudiation of the need to develop a revolutionary relationship between party and class.

Nevertheless despite these important theoretical and political problems of Trotsky's legacy he still represented the continuity of revolutionary Marxism after the death of Lenin. He upheld proletarian internationalism against Stalinist nationalist degeneration. Crucially Trotsky continued to point out the political necessity to establish the political independence of the proletariat from the counterrevolutionary forces of social democracy and Stalinism. Trotsky worked to build the Fourth International as a political alternative to the opportunist Third International.

How then can we compare Lenin and Trotsky? Both had periods of opportunism in their younger days, but both were able to overcome this political problem and thereby developed into consistent revolutionary proletarian internationalists.

Eventually in 1923 Lenin was able to develop his strategic perspective of the proletarian-peasant alliance as the basis of world revolution. This was Lenin's brilliant achievement, but it was not recognised by Trotsky. (Only Bukharin understood what Lenin had done, but in opportunist terms.)

Trotsky had the very difficult task of opposing Stalinism. It is no wonder he made mistakes, and we will never know if Lenin would have made similar mistakes. However, what is most important is that Trotsky carried out a struggle against Stalinism and attempted to theoretically explain that struggle. Thus we have been left with a precious record of what an intransigent proletarian revolutionary tried to do under conditions of the adverse political circumstances of the hegemony of Stalinism. Whatever terrible things happened to his family and comrades, Trotsky never gave up in the struggle to rebuild the revolutionary party, and for that we owe him eternal thanks and gratitude ●

The problematic of negative ideology

Phil Watson calls for a conscious application of the dialectic in analysing the USSR

The paradox is this. Throughout its 70-odd years of existence the USSR remained trapped inside a system whereby social and political hegemony had become alienated from the broad ranks of the proletariat. Yet despite this the CPSU bureaucracy continued to exercise control in the name of Marxism-Leninism. For those mired by decades of mechanical epistemology this contradiction is, at best, of secondary importance, or, at worst, a reactionary diversion. However, the controversy surrounding the role of ideology in the USSR will not disappear whilst the demand for a complete critique of the Soviet Union persists. Partial truths, despite the honest intent which may lie behind them, can never hope to mediate and surmount the social whole. Logic becomes circular and thus reified.

A good example of such a process at work can be seen in Jack Conrad's recent review of *The fate of the Russian Revolution* ('Groping towards a theory' *Weekly Worker* August 20). Conrad argues of the first five-year plan that "the [CPSU] bureaucracy finally separated itself from any proletarian vestiges, launching a 'second revolution' from above and forced industrialisation. Living standards plummeted. Millions died. The Communist Party was decimated and transformed into an organ which existed to promote the cult of Stalin. Here in the first five-year plan, was the qualitative counterrevolutionary break." This all sounds blissfully straightforward. However, anyone studying the impact of the first five-year plan is duty-bound to consider the manner in which such developments were rationalised in the Soviet Union.

Sheila Fitzpatrick has argued that the development of the USSR through collectivisation and the first five-year plan was accompanied by a distinct 'cultural revolution'. This was partly premised on the need for the CPSU to assert itself in the administrative and cultural spheres, with Stalin proving to be adept at utilising anti-bourgeois sentiment within fields such as science and philosophy in order to establish Party control. This revolution was also activated by an "iconoclastic and belligerent youth movement ... [who] were by no means a docile tool of the party leadership". Fitzpatrick describes these revolutionaries as "intensely party-minded, asserting their own right as communists to lead and dictate to others, but at the same time ... instinctively hostile to most existing authorities and institutions ..." (S Fitzpatrick *The Russian Revolution 1917-1932* Oxford 1982, p130). Such groupings provided the focus for a brief ascendancy of utopianism in Soviet society, publicised, funded and encouraged by many official bodies. The negative side of this juncture was the subjective leftism of groups such as the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), a factor that proved grimly prophetic for the ideological development of the USSR.

For Jack Conrad this represents an enigma, or at best an empty formalism. His starting point is the Soviet product and its essentially alienated circuit through society. It seems meth-

odologically acceptable therefore to abstract this social content from its ideological form (ie, a fundamental precondition for its *materialisation* into the Soviet Union). Conrad's dualist beginnings stand exposed as the foundation for a partial, one-sided and *false* approximation of the USSR and its 20th century dynamic.

Let us be clear that ideology in this context is not to be solely premised on its narrow, political, meaning. For sure, we are attempting to account for the ideology of a very specific political grouping (the CPSU). Nevertheless it is not enough to merely identify a collective and its outlook: one also has to comprehend the idea of function and, as a result, process. It is at this juncture that we might wish to turn to Louis Althusser's definition of ideology as "a matter of the *lived* relation between men and their world ... In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence ..." (L Althusser *For Marx* London 1996, p233). Althusser's problematic reveals itself as both broad and compressed. Broad in the sense that ideology becomes truly cultural, "an objective social reality ... an organic part of the class struggle" (*ibid* p12). Compressed, because it remains counterposed to scientific knowledge, the only correct method of accounting for the development of social formations.

In order to escape the reified clutches of Althusser we can usefully turn to the work of Raymond Williams. Under the influence of Lukács and Lucien Goldmann, Williams sought to bypass certain limited readings of the base-superstructure metaphor to a developed position of 'cultural materialism'. Its author sought to emphasise "the centrality of language and communication as formative social forces ..." For Williams this meant "a theory of culture as a (social and material) productive process and of specific practices, of 'arts', as social uses of material means of production ..." (R Williams *Problems in materialism and culture* London 1997, p243). Williams shows how this "materialist (but non-positivist) theory of language, of communication and of consciousness" has been equated with 'idealism', "because, in received Marxist theory, these activities were *known* to be superstructural and dependent - so that any emphasis on their specific primacies (within the complex totality of other primary forms of the material social process, including those forms which had been abstracted as 'labour' or 'production') was known *a priori* to be 'idealist'" (*ibid* pp243-244). This quotation illustrates rather well the nature of Williams's paradigmatic shift. It also offers a coherent, radical solution to Althusser's theorisation of ideology in its broadest cultural sense.

It would be wrong however to subsume Williams's analysis under a specific social ontology. Rather it forms a moment of praxis - in Althusser's words a "*slogan* of rejection ... and thus ... a *practical* signal ... [a] gesture towards a beyond ... which is not

yet truly *realised* ..." (L Althusser *op cit* p245). At this juncture we are groping towards an understanding of our problematic. Marxism-Leninism was the ideology of the state in the Soviet Union and in that sense a distinct material force. Mészáros has argued that "in the post-revolutionary capital-relation labour could not be fragmented and atomised on the model of the capitalist labour process". Part of the reason for this was the ideological apparatus of the Soviet Union: "... the ground of legitimisation of 'building socialism' was the working class, and all talk about the 'proletarian dictatorship' and the 'leading role of the party' in it had to exclude quite explicitly the possibility of capitalist restoration and the subjection of labour to the alienating fetishism of commodity" (I Mészáros *Beyond capital* London 1995, p668).

The CPSU thus proved - ultimately - an unwieldy instrument for the realisation of Marxist-Leninist ideology in the totality of material social processes. In fact, under the rule of the bureaucracy its ideology suffered an endless blocked mediation, becoming ever more atrophied as the USSR neared extinction. The ideological power of Marxism in the Soviet Union was not insubstantial. Its lack of practical realisation was the problem: therefore its power was manifest in the most negative of senses.

It is the issue of mediation between theory and practice that forms our methodological key. Lukács provides us with a useful point of reference for our problematic. He describes how Second International theorists such as Hilferding and Kautsky could insist on the revolutionary nature of the imperialist epoch, whilst declining to organise the concrete mediation of that theoretical insight: the revolutionary party. This of course skewed the struggle against revisionism. "The upshot was that for the proletariat these differences of opinion simply remained differences of opinion *within* workers' movements that were nevertheless revolutionary movements ... Because these views were denied any interaction with practice they were unable to concretise themselves or to develop through the productive self-criticism entailed by the attempt to realise themselves in practice. Even where they came close to the truth they retained a markedly abstract and utopian strain" (G Lukács *History and class consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics* Cambridge, Mass 1975, p302).

In the context of the USSR, this dynamic was partially reversed. Marxist theory bore its practical fruit with the leadership of the Bolsheviks in the 1917 revolution. As the Soviet Union and the CPSU became subject to distinct bureaucratic distortions, this point of mediation became blocked. Marxism-Leninism lived on as an "abstract and utopian strain" within the edifice of Soviet society. Careful readers will have noted that, despite his blistering criticisms, Lukács still argues in the above extract that the opportunist parties of the Second International were "nevertheless revolutionary movements". In a similar vein it can be assessed that the CPSU still represented a *revolutionary* movement and the USSR remained the world's revolutionary *centre* until the bitter end of August 1991.

To formulate this problem a little

more clearly we can usefully engage the typology of 'abstract' and 'concrete' potentiality that Lukács draws for us: "*Potentiality* - seen abstractly or subjectively - is richer than actual life. Innumerable possibilities for man's development are imaginable, only a small percentage of which will be realised [ie, as concrete potentiality]". Herein lies the reification espoused by the modernist as he/she attempts to subjectively substitute "these imagined [abstract] possibilities for [the] actual complexity of life". This insufficient grasp of the need to seek a concrete mediation into real life leads to an oscillation "between melancholy and fascination". Lukács goes on to suggest that "[w]hen the world declines to realise these [abstract] possibilities, this melancholy becomes tinged with contempt" (G Lukács *The meaning of contemporary realism* London 1979, pp21-22). Therefore the status of Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet Union is revealed as that of an 'abstract potentiality' - an essential precondition for the brief ascendancy of Gorbachev.

The Soviet Union refused to yield to the abstractions of Marxist-Leninist ideology and therefore left the bureaucracy prostrate before an alienated society of its own creation. Such immobility led to the contempt that Lukács details for us above. In this instance, however, worldly contempt no longer had anti-bourgeois angst as its content. The targets this time were October 1917 and the USSR. Hence the steady importation of bourgeois ideology, an ideology of resignation. This dynamic was eventually personified by the rise and fall of Gorbachev. Even at this late stage the self-perception of the CPSU still exhibited a certain negative power. Mészáros pictures the bureaucracy as making "a myth out of their own 'leadership' as a disembodied determination, divorced from its unsavoury ... social metabolic functions" (I Mészáros *op cit* p662). Therefore in the initial stages of perestroika the introduction of market forces into the USSR was hailed as a potential saviour of the socialist assemblage.

In submitting this short piece to external criticism its author is well aware that it functions less as an empirically grounded exploration of the Soviet Union and rather more as a methodological outline for the purposes of future research. Nevertheless it will have fulfilled a certain purpose if it can make a contribution to correcting one-sided (and at times hysterical) denunciations of the USSR and JV Stalin. These worrying formulas are the unambiguous product of tawdry theoretical beginnings whereby dialectical reticence appears as the only unifying feature. It is extremely doubtful whether the majority of CPGB comrades have even understood the question of ideological form as one of *contradiction*, let alone perceiving that contradictory reality as a *unity*. It logically follows that the issue of mediation is absent from the tortured narratives of many Party comrades. What we get instead is a hideous symphony of one-sided truisms, where radical phraseology becomes the substitute for serious revolutionary theory.

It is only through a conscious application of the dialectic that the Communist Party of Great Britain can counter this revisionist ulcer ●

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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Australian left fails challenge

The BBC World Service reported the outcome of the October 3 Australian federal election as a defeat for Pauline Hanson's racist One Nation party. And that was pretty much all they said.

The front page of *The Observer* carried not a picture of the victor, John Howard, but of the vanquished, Pauline Hanson. And while distance can distort the focus of any political situation, it can also bring into stark relief the central issues as opposed to the ephemeral fluff which so often our rulers regard as all that is fit for the consumption of the masses.

And so it has been in these elections. Just a few months ago, it seemed this election could have been dominated by major political issues around trade union rights, racism and immigration policy, the republican debate and the struggle around the Aboriginal land question. Instead, the major parties ran dull scare campaigns around taxation, employment and track records on economic management.

One Nation was not *the* opposition party. But Hanson did attempt to define herself against the dull routine of mainstream politics. Among those parties receiving widespread media attention only Pauline Hanson, in her own reactionary-populist and amateur manner, attempted to run any sort of political campaign. No wonder the international media only concentrated on her rise and subsequent fall. Hanson's prediction of 12 lower house seats was shattered, with Hanson losing her own seat and One Nation only managing one upper house Senate position from Queensland.

Labor under the rightwinger Kim Beazley has successfully reduced the ruling Coalition's parliamentary majority from 27 to six. This slim majority may yet undermine central elements of the Liberal Party's election campaign - the introduction of a goods and services tax and the full privatisation of the national telecommunications company, Telstra. The Liberals' rural-based coalition partner, the National Party, is divided over support for both policy planks and may split in parliament, denying the government its majority.

While Labor failed to reassert its claim to be the natural party of government, it was not too disappointed with the result. While missing out on the required 27 seats for government, it gained a majority of overall preferences in Australia's voting system.

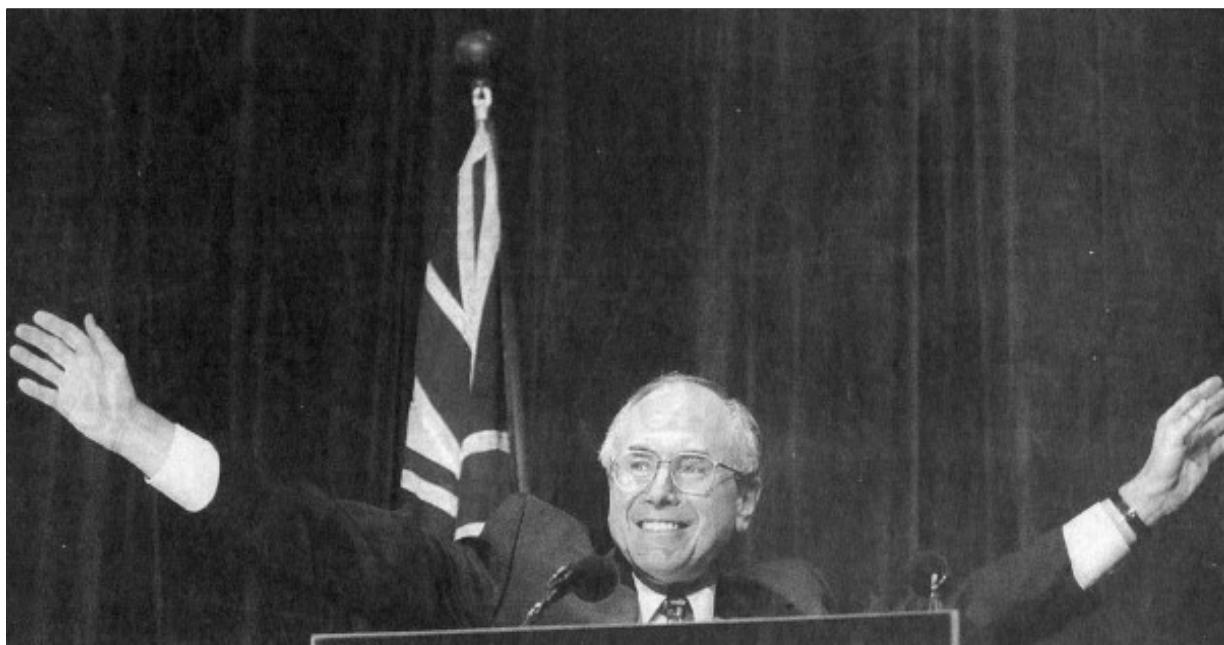
Shying away from a 'divisive' campaign over the republic, the wharfies' struggle, racism and land rights, Labor instead promised a five percent unemployment rate - and that was meant to be a good thing. They also promised to close down the controversial Jabiluka uranium mine, opened by the Liberals on land claimed as sacred by Aborigines. No doubt there were some who remembered the failure of the previous Labor government to carry out a promise to close down all uranium mines after Bob Hawke was elected in 1983.

Unfortunately the elections did not see a breakthrough for the left. While the Democratic Socialist Party may have hoped to have capitalised on the media coverage its youth section, Resistance, received over its anti-racism campaign, only the widely optimistic would have expected this to be translated into big votes. The revolutionary left remains marginal. In all, the five socialist and two left reformist groups standing received a total of 30,836 votes - under one percent. The other socialist groups were: Militant, the rump 'official' Communist Party of Australia, the Northite Socialist Equality Party and the US SWP-aligned Communist League. The left reformists were the Progressive Labor Party and Broad Alliance.

Only the DSP mounted any sort of national campaign from the left, standing in every state for the Senate and in 12 House of Representative seats. However, while gaining 21,129 votes in all, it failed to gain an electoral hegemony on the left. This political space to the left of Labor remains open.

However, the forces from the revolutionary left that stood showed far greater courage than the craven Laborites from Workers Power and the International Socialists who called for a vote for an avowedly pro-capitalist, imperialist, anti-worker Labor Party. Displaying all the political hallmarks of the British sects which spawned them, they put into stark relief the traditional auto-Labourism of the British left, as compared to most of an Australian left which has tended to show more political independence.

Yet it is not immune to one malady which afflicts the British left - sectarianism. The election fell in the midst of the DSP's spat with Militant over the running of the school students' anti-Hanson campaign and the DSP paper, *Green Left Weekly*, failed to mention the fact that Militant was also



John Howard: a victory, but as big as last time

standing.

However, underlining the crisis for the fight for a genuine workers' party is the crisis of programme. While presenting themselves as the genuine fighters against racism and Hanson's One Nation, the left in general failed to come to terms with the political tensions at the heart of the bourgeois state. Both main bourgeois parties managed to sufficiently distance themselves from Hanson to neutralise or capture much of the left's anti-racism.

There was one concrete issue with serious programmatic implications which failed to excite the political campaigners from either the main parties or the left. Coinciding with the election was a referendum in the Northern Territory over its constitutional status. Being a territory, as opposed to a state, it has more limited powers, with direct rule from the federal government. The least populated part of Australia, the Northern Territory is an area around half the size of western Europe populated by under 250,000 people. One quarter of the population are Aboriginal.

The referendum asked: "Now that a constitution for a State of the Northern Territory has been recommended by the Statehood Convention and endorsed by the Northern Territory parliament: do you agree that we should become a state?" There were 47.2% 'yes' votes with 52.8% voting 'no'.

How does such a seemingly innocuous issue open up many of the

questions of political rule in the Australian context? Contained in this result are the central programmatic issues undeveloped by the Australian revolutionary left: a revolutionary minimum programme which forms the basis of a generalised political challenge to the existing bourgeois state. Of necessity this must at least encompass: republicanism; the issue of a democratic/centralised state; a bill of rights, which would centrally include a programme of Aboriginal right to land and comprehensive workers' rights to independent and strong trade unions.

The Northern Territory referendum touched upon the land issue, the federal/state issue and to some extent the republic issue. The overwhelming majority of Aborigines who voted in this ballot said 'no'. Most progressive minded non-Aborigines would have voted similarly. Why?

The politically powerful in the Northern Territory are based around mining, extensive cattle grazing and tourism. All three industries compete for land access with Aboriginal people who suffer greatly from the ongoing process of colonisation and undemocratic assimilation. Through being a territory, the laws to land access are determined by the federal government's Aboriginal Land Rights Act, which is far more democratic than any other state-based land rights legislation. The redneck Country Liberal Party government in Darwin - which has been in power ever

since the Northern Territory was given a parliament - is bitterly opposed to the Land Rights Act and the extremely limited forms of control it gives to Aboriginal communities. In supporting a 'yes' vote for statehood, the Northern Territory government was hoping to gain the powers of a state for its reactionary political aims.

Such a seemingly minor issue is regarded by the economic left as of no concern to the working class. Communists however need to develop a democratic programme which would unite the working class and, under its hegemony, progressive allies in the Aboriginal community against the interests not only of the Hansons - who are merely fly-by-nights - but against the real political power of the state and the reactionary bourgeoisie.

Aborigines must have the right to democratic assimilation with a culture and economy which, while far in advance of their former social base, has dominated them in a most brutal, not to say genocidal, manner. The states and territories must be abolished and the working class must lead the rest of society in the call for a centralised republic on the ashes of the monarchist-federal constitution.

In failing to develop a coherent minimum programme around these central issues of how we are actually ruled, the revolutionary left is in danger of remaining isolated, beholden to eclecticism in programme and economism in politics ●

Marcus Larsen