



# *Isreal-Palestine peace accord* **Imperialism calls the tune**

**As Arafat is forced to step up repression,  
there are signs of a split in Fatah**

**L**ast week's Wye Plantation agreement between Israel and Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority once again demonstrates imperialism's ability to impose its New World Order.

Begun in 1993 with the Oslo accord, the Middle East peace process continues at a snail's pace. Israeli prime minister Benyamin Netanyahu agreed to cede a further 13.1% of the occupied West Bank to the Palestinian Authority, in exchange for Yasser Arafat's agreement to impose even more repressive measures on those who wish to continue the liberation struggle. As a result of the complete marginalisation of all elements within the Palestine Liberation Organisation claiming adherence to some kind of anti-imperialist ideology, militant rejectionism is now led by the reactionary clerics in Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Arafat also agreed to convene the 750-strong Palestine National Convention within three months in order to remove from the Palestinian Covenant all mention of the commitment to the "elimination of Zionism". Netanyahu claimed that the agreement will not only ensure that Arafat jails even more 'terrorists', but also will "stop vitriolic incitement" - ie, will bring the wrath of the Palestinian administration on the heads of all those who continue to demand self-determination. Netanyahu had made a great show of pretending to stage a last-minute walk-out from the Maryland talks to force through extra concessions. He easily defeated an ultra-nationalist no-confidence motion in the Knesset, after declaring how much "it hurts ... to give away one centimetre" of the West Bank to the Palestinians. "But I have to tell

you," he continued, "we fought like lions to reduce as much as possible the amount of land to be handed over."

Soon after the vote Netanyahu announced he would not implement the Israeli withdrawal until he received Arafat's detailed plans for suppressing 'terrorism'.

For his part Arafat proclaimed that there would be "no return to confrontation and violence". Even while he was in Wye, his security forces were making further arrests on the West Bank. But it is not only Hamas and Islamic Jihad that Arafat is targeting. Over the weekend there were clashes in Ramallah between Palestinian police and supporters of his party, Fatah, after its premises were raided and illegal arms seized. In the process a young Fatah supporter was shot dead. Immediately a general strike was called in Ramallah, and 2,000 Fatah supporters staged a march. They chanted slogans against the military investigation chief, Moussa Arafat, who just happens to be the autocratic leader's nephew. Moussa was dubbed a "CIA agent" by the protesters - apparently for carrying out his uncle's orders.

Soon however, there will be no shortage of the genuine article. An undisclosed number of CIA agents are to oversee the Israeli withdrawal and general questions of 'security' - ie, the Palestinian clampdown on 'terrorists'. They will mediate between the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority in the event of disputes as to which administration has the right to deal with such dissidents. Former CIA director Robert Gates stated that both sides "trust the CIA more than they trust each other".

This latest move is highly sym-

bolic. Arafat's transformation from liberation fighter to New World Order dupe is complete. He not only looks to the USA to broker deals in order to wring piecemeal concessions from Tel Aviv, but actually welcomes direct imperialist intervention to police them. Clearly he has no faith in his own ability to permanently keep the lid on internal opposition, and of course does not even contemplate challenging Israeli military might himself. Yet he still has enough support to carry most of the Palestinian population behind him - for the moment: the events in Ramallah offer a portent of what the future could hold. However, while his reputation as an intransigent patriot lasts, he can be confident of retaining US support.

This latest stage in the process triggered by the 1993 Oslo agreement was also widely welcomed by imperialism as a whole. Unlike similar accords in South Africa and Northern Ireland, where liberation movements also turned to imperialism after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Oslo did not envisage a relatively speedy settlement. May 1999 was the projected date for the final establishment of the state of Palestine in the Gaza strip and West Bank - although the exact borders were not precisely determined. Since then of course the previous Israeli Labour administration was replaced by Netanyahu's far-right Likud, and the painfully slow progress was for a time halted altogether.

Arafat, in a typical piece of impotent bluster, announced that he would declare Palestinian statehood according to the Oslo schedule next May - apparently forgetting that he had already done that in November 1988 in Algiers. It would have had just as little effect on the real world this time

around. Nevertheless, Netanyahu seized the opportunity to declare that such a unilateral move would pre-empt negotiations and allow him to withdraw from any commitment to Oslo. The Wye agreement has finally set the tortuous process back in motion.

Each time Arafat takes a tiny step forward to his goal in the shape of winning a little more land for his administration to control, he compromises the eventual outcome to the Palestinians' detriment. He has agreed that the territory gained will effectively be cut into strips by Israeli-controlled areas allowing access to Jewish settlements. The USA is to finance the construction of by-pass roads connecting them to Israel at a cost of around \$500 million.

A viable Palestinian state will never be built on the basis of disconnected pockets of territory. But from the point of view of basic democratic rights of the *people*, such deals are outrageous. Restrictions on Palestinians' rights to travel, to be part of a community, to live as a nation, will not only be retained, but enshrined *de facto*.

No wonder opposition to Arafat has started to spread from the religious right to Fatah itself. The Palestinian Authority, already renowned for its dictatorial brutality, including killings and torture to match the worst that Israel has produced, is set to step up its repression. Under the guise of fighting 'terrorism' it will be pressed by Israel and the US to arrest even more opponents - real and potential - and if necessary to employ the 'final solution' of executing them. No doubt Arafat's European backers - 60% of his administration's budget is provided by EU governments and other European organisations - will continue to turn a blind eye.

Arafat hopes that the sight of the Israelis withdrawing and the raising of the Palestinian flag in newly reclaimed pockets of territory might at the very least buy him some time. In truth the partial withdrawal was the least the Israelis had to do to prevent

the situation getting out of control. *The Daily Telegraph* foresaw "a renewed Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip" (October 24), had this deal not been struck: "At worst, Israel could have faced internal insurrection and war on two fronts, with Egypt and Syria. Mr Arafat could have been swept from power by the extremists of Hamas and Islamic Jihad." It was not so long ago that the *Telegraph* was condemning "Mr Arafat" as the worst of the "extremists" threatening imperialist interests.

As well as wanting to ensure some sort of stability in the region, Clinton had another reason for pushing the Wye deal as hard as he could. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, his aim was "coming up with an agreement - any kind of agreement - that would allow the president to call the meeting a success" (October 23). Not only would that further weaken the chances of a successful impeachment, but hopefully it would boost the Democratic candidates in next week's mid-term elections. On the basis of such matters are Palestinian rights negotiated away.

Imperialism continues to resolve the world's 'hot spots' - on its own terms. It has succeeded in defusing many revolutionary situations negatively. However, in order to achieve the stability it craves, it needs to impose settlements around which a majority consensus of all sides can be built. In South Africa that was done, and Northern Ireland is still on track to do the same.

However, the Palestine question has not been settled at all. Israel has a government which depends on the votes of ultra-nationalists, who believe that giving up an inch of the 'promised land' is a sacrilege. The Palestinian Authority is ruled by an autocrat whose main concern is his own survival. Any statelet which emerges will be without economic viability, infrastructure or even communal feasibility ●

**Jim Blackstock**



# Party notes

## Fighting isolation

October's aggregate of Communist Party members began discussion of our perspectives for next year. Much of the discussion had to remain tentative at this stage, given other factors. For example, the precise form of our intervention in next year's important round of elections is hard to specify here and now. This largely depends on the attitude of others to the unity call we have issued (see *Weekly Worker* October 22). Our attitude remains flexible. We will continue to agitate for principled united left slates, with our Party name included. However, we will not forgo any opportunity to make mass propaganda for the 'honour' of acting as mere foot soldiers for left social democrats.

Similarly, it is hard to anticipate now the precise state of the British and world economies a year hence and what political fall-outs this may have.

This lack of certainty found expression in the working title of the document prepared as notes towards our *Perspectives 99* document - '1999 - a year of change?' A great deal is happening in the field of bourgeois politics. There is a space crying out to be filled by the forces of the working class. Yet a feature of the left remains decline and disintegration.

The evolution of Labour away from even a nominal relationship to the interests of the working class has precipitated movement from some sections. Thus, while the Socialist Workers Party's slip into the electoral field is a welcome one, we have no illusions. This has been a step taken reluctantly and will pose problems for it. We have consistently pointed to the programmatic weaknesses that have mercilessly torn the Socialist Party apart. Is the SWP actually any stronger politically? We have seen plenty of examples from its history of centrifugal forces ripping bits out of Cliff's organisation when it engaged in a broader range of interventions. We should not be surprised to see the same process re-start inside the SWP now they have half-emerged from their sectarian bunker.

Of course, we are not in favour of this decline and disintegration of our opponents on the left *per se*. Without a strong revolutionary pole of attraction, all it will produce is the dispersal of working class cadre to the winds.

Within the trade union movement, there is some change with Labour in power. The tough talking at the 1998 TUC conference was hot air, of course, but it does indicate an evolving relationship between the trade union bureaucracy and the party it gave birth to nearly a century ago. Problems in this relationship explain the tame theatrics at the conference, rather than attempts by the union leaderships to contain anger from below, as has been suggested by some sections of the left. We should therefore not be surprised to see some token protest called by the union tops, but within strictly defined limits. Without a *politically* independent rank and file - and not just 'independent' within the narrow sphere of trade union militancy - the union bureaucracy will not launch a serious challenge to Blair. And in the struggle to construct such a rank and file movement economics are important, but *politics* are central.

This is where communist organisation comes in. The aggregate discussed in some detail where our organisation is at the moment and the problems of cadre development in such a lean period. The meeting opened with a series of reports from cell secretaries on the work and development of their teams. These revealed a number of features of the organisation, including a certain unevenness across the Party in its political levels, tempos and structures of work. However, a common characteristic highlighted was a tendency to *isolation*.

Given the reactionary nature of the period we are fighting through, many of the arenas we have been active in are pretty degenerate and sparsely populated. This affords little opportunity for our comrades to develop as rounded communist politicians: they tend to stay theoretically underdeveloped and passive. This is the *key* problem of Party culture, explaining many of the problems with education and our ongoing casual attitude to recruitment.

All this does is underline the hardness of the political period, however. It does nothing to point the way forward, to answer the question of what we as an organisation do next in the coming 12 months and beyond. It is to our great credit that we have maintained ourselves and built something serious in this period, that we have a relatively impressive theoretical and practical record. Bigger forces than us have succumbed or are in the process of succumbing. Our politics are dynamic and we have proven ability to punch way beyond our weight.

Yet to be sanguine about what we have achieved would be to place it all in jeopardy. The aggregate was clear that isolation was a real problem for our organisation, producing weaknesses at all levels.

The meeting agreed that there were no easy answers to this generally recognised problem - what do our comrades actually *do* that requires them to question old ideas, to reach out and absorb new ones?

An orientation to trade union work was raised as a possibility. Of course, it is a self-evident truth that the unions currently operate at a very low level and that the left's fetishism of 'trade unionism' reflects its much deeper political problems. Yet, despite losses, the unions remain mass organisations of the class. In the longer term, it is unlikely that anything serious can ultimately be achieved without communists winning their leadership.

In the short term, there remains the possibility of movement in them, but it was underlined that any move towards this type of work would not be made in order to transform our comrades into 'trade union secretaries', the archetypal 'working class leader' fixed in the mind's eye of much of the left.

We would be in the unions to fight *politically*. These mass organs of the class can be important points of application of our fight for a communist programme, against economism, to transform our comrades into *tribunes of the oppressed*.

All cells should discuss the material submitted so far to the debate around *Perspectives 99* and ensure that materials written as contributions reach centre swiftly for distribution ●

Mark Fischer  
national organiser

## Age of innocence?

One wonders if there is really any point commenting further. Sandy Johnstone and John Walsh (Letters *Weekly Worker* October 15 and October 22) are now in a cosy, consensual, judgmental, moralistic huddle, having worked out just who can and cannot have sex. When all the verbiage is taken away, they are agreed.

John Walsh, while stating that he is in favour of the CPGB's position for *abolition* of the age of consent, actually tells us any 13-year-old who is interested in sex with a mature man *must* be socially disturbed. What is this based upon? Wild bigotry and prejudice, nothing more. He tells us a mature man who fancies a 13-year-old is likewise socially disturbed *and* whether any sex between them is abuse or not will be decided by a jury. The bloke must have broken some law, if he is to be charged and taken to court and go before a jury.

So how is any of this different from Johnstone's position? Between the two of them they suggest sex laws and legislation far less progressive than those that exist in some European bourgeois states currently. Walsh actually proposes marriage laws more restrictive than those already operating in England, and far more restrictive than those currently in law in Scotland. One wonders what gives him the audacity to propose that two people of 16, for example, should *not* be able to marry - even if the parents agree!

Walsh says I quote Islamic practice to justify my positions. Did he miss the last correspondence? It was Johnstone who brought in the question of Islamic countries, citing reactionary barbarous regimes with low age-of-consent laws to demonstrate how this proves them to be abusive, not liberating. Walsh will think this prurient again, but you really cannot talk about ages of consent and abuse without talking about sexual behaviour - sorry that it insults your sensitivities. The whole point of ritual mutilation of young females in these countries is to prevent them enjoying sex. Female circumcision of the clitoris is done precisely for reasons of suppressing female sexuality. So the age of consent, no matter how low in these countries, is never meant to be sexually liberating for anyone, let alone the hapless girls.

Just to be consistent, and while God is still whispering in his ear as to what is just and sound and what is suitable for the psychiatrist and medical attention, Walsh adds that the age of criminal responsibility should be *raised* to 14. Well, you cannot very well argue that a 13-year-old is incapable of true consent to have sex with an older man, if you likewise argue that a 13-year-old girl or girls are capable of fully consenting to murder, or robbery with violence, for example. The truth is - and I will make this my final point on the issue - 11 to 13-year-olds are fully capable of consenting to sex with anyone they want to, without being in need of treatment or being destined for the mad house. Sadly, they are also quite capable of fully consenting to capital crimes, including murder, at least as clearly as any other section of the community.

Whatever Johnstone and Walsh say, sex will continue to take place across the age gap from time to time. Sometimes a full, ongoing, long-lasting relationship will also, rarely but genuinely, occur. You can spit self-righteous rubbish all day long, and try and elongate some kind of age of sexual innocence where Bambi-like creatures pass into early adolescence, blissfully unaware of what their sex organs are for, or operating a strict

no-touch rule on anyone not of their own age, but that will never be the reality. It just means people like you remain part of the repressive, bigoted problem, not part of a liberating solution.

Frank Worth  
Leeds

## Dover, Alabama

They are "parasites" who milk the welfare system, shoplift, pick-pocket, hang around insulting women and run brothels. No, these are not crude lies about Jews from the pages of Adolf Hitler's *Der Stürmer* in the 1930s; they are crude lies about Roma and Kosovan asylum-seekers from recent issues of the *Dover Express*.

Ever since last year, when the first Roma refugees arrived in Dover fleeing persecution, there has been a nasty undercurrent of racism in the town. Local resentment against the asylum-seekers was encouraged by the government when it labelled them "bogus" and dragged its heels over providing extra funding for the area.

When the neo-Nazis of the National Front tried to exploit the situation with marches in November 1997 and February 1998, anti-fascists mobilised to stop them.

In the last few weeks, however, the bigots have gone back on the offensive, following the arrival of refugees fleeing Kosovo. At the beginning of October the *Dover Express* bracketed asylum-seekers together with bootleggers and drug-traffickers as "human sewage".

On Monday October 19 members of Dover Residents Against Racism (DRAR) met to discuss the rising level of hostility towards asylum-seekers. As one member of DRAR put it, "It's starting to feel like Montgomery, Alabama down here".

Asylum-seekers have had their windows smashed. In the last such attack, the attackers left a sign painted with the words, "We will burn you out". One of the addresses attacked had been printed in full by the *Daily Mail* (October 6).

DRAR is convinced that the *Dover Express* bears a large share of responsibility for what is happening. The latest editorial (October 22) says that the majority of local people are not racist, but there is resentment against asylum-seekers which cannot be ignored. The paper says that Dover could become like Marseilles, a stronghold of the Front National. And the paper reports that Paul James (a local builder whose racist statements were previously given great prominence in the *Express*) aims to be a local candidate for the British National Party. James also says that he will refuse to do building work for anyone who supports the asylum seekers.

DRAR is urgently trying to arrange a meeting with the editors of the *Dover Express* and the *East Kent Mercury*, along with representatives of the Migrant Helpline and Refugee Link. Also Kent Anti-Fascist Action has sent a letter to the *Express* answering the racists point for point.

DRAR has been out leafleting in the Westbury Road area of Dover. This brought one letter offering help and a lot of hate-mail. Much of the latter argued that DRAR was an 'outside organisation' because the PO box used on the leaflet (belonging to Refugee Link) is in Folkestone - the next town down the coast!

DRAR will continue to meet on a monthly basis. If matters continue as they are now, someone may even be killed. The fascists are weak and poorly organised. Nevertheless, they could well have an influence out of all proportion to their size.

A Folkestone contact reports that one of her workmates has got involved with a Dover woman who is holding

meetings to "organise a march to London" against asylum-seekers. She was apparently thrown out by her husband and had to go to the council to get rehoused; she is now blaming the asylum-seekers for all her problems. The anti-asylum-seeker stories which this woman is coming out with are drawn word for word from the pages of the *Dover Express*.

Local anti-racists are organising to confront head-on the Nazis and bigots; they are the real "human sewage".

**Dover Residents Against Racism**

c/o Refugee Link, PO Box 417, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 4GT

## Demand justice

Since October 16, when Pinochet was arrested, there has been a daily and noisy non-stop picket at the London Clinic. Thousands have come to picket - from Latin America, Belgium, France, Spain, Switzerland and other European countries.

Our committee is actively supporting that picket. We want the most severe punishment not just for Pinochet, but also for all his collaborators - especially the top level ones in the UK, Latin America, Europe and US. The bloody 1973 coup was carried out with Nato assistance. British-made planes bombed Allende's government palace. More than 400 US 'advisers' prepared the way for the overthrow of the elected Allende government and later helped the dictatorship to capture, torture and 'disappear' tens of thousands. Now, Thatcher has revealed just how close she is to Pinochet.

Workers and progressives want Pinochet put to justice. Many also want to see the same happen to the Peruvian generals who are responsible for the 'dirty war' which killed more than 30,000; to the Argentinean, Brazilian and Uruguayan juntas; to General Bánzer of Bolivia. And so on.

However, we do not have any trust in the Spanish and British courts. While attacking a far-right autocrat, they are preparing the ground to also condemn leftwing fighters accused of killing other European citizens. In this New World Order the imperialist powers want to violate the national sovereignty of the oppressed nations under a 'democratic' cover.

The Chilean government, president Menem, the archbishop of Canterbury and the Tories are demanding Pinochet's freedom. The *Daily Telegraph* is even expressing its sympathies for this mass murderer, saying that his economic miracle would not have been possible without "breaking legs".

The Chilean left is mainly divided between those supporters of the coalition government who are also demanding that Pinochet should be released on the grounds of his 'diplomatic immunity' and those who are expressing support for the Spanish courts. The problem is they are allowing the right and Pinochet to become a martyr of the 'fatherland' against imperialism.

We are against Pinochet's release and we should fight against Blair's attempt to find a negotiated compromise. We should have no faith in the imperialist 'justice' which imposed Suharto, Mobutu, Somoza and other criminals in order to smash the left - and who would accept a British Pinochet if necessary in order to crush a revolutionary movement.

**Bolivian Union Solidarity Committee**  
London



## Le Pen and censorship

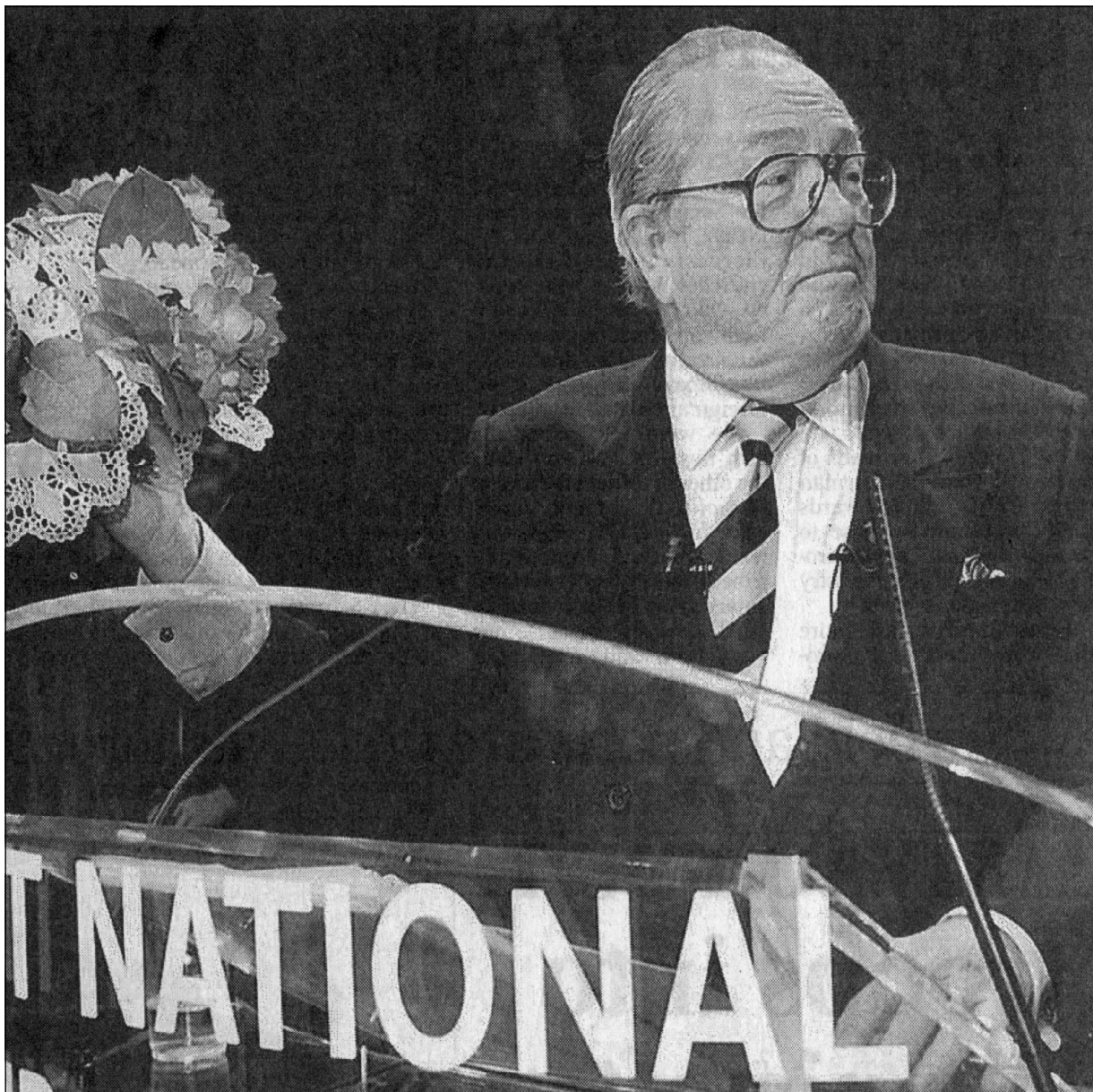
## Good enough for us

The most famous of all intellectual Frenchmen was Voltaire who in rough translation said: "Though I may disagree with everything you said, I shall fight for your right to say it."

Some three weeks ago European parliamentary immunity was removed from a most notorious and unintellectual Frenchman by the name of Le Pen. A man often accused of racism and being a neo-fascist - charges that have more than an element of truth in them. The reason for removing this immunity was a statement he made in Germany. When asked about the extermination of the Jews under the Nazi regime, he replied that the matter was merely a detail of World War II. If he had made such a statement in France or Britain, there would have been no question of prosecution, irrespective of parliamentary immunity. However, the Federal Republic of Germany has passed a law forbidding any comments that tend to diminish or dismiss the Holocaust or can be interpreted in a light favourable to the Third Reich.

It is, of course, true that there can be no absolute right to say what one wills. On the most obvious level crying "fire" in a crowded theatre is an action that would rightly be punished. Nevertheless the suppression of an individual's right to express an opinion on any matter - particularly a historical one - could only be justified, certainly by a workers' state, in exceptional circumstances.

Communists are the most vigorous champions of democracy. Frederick Engels in 1889 denounced the French government for annulling an election in which an extreme rightwing candidate, Georges Boulanger, won the first round. Though Engels had been super-critical of Boulanger on the grounds that he was a potential military dictator, nevertheless people had voted for him and no communist could agree with violation of the democratic process. Marx for his part persistently denounced censorship as a general evil against society and knowledge: it is usually working peo-



Six million dead: a mere "detail"?

ple who are deprived as a result.

The most famous case in recent history in Britain was *Lady Chatterley's lover* where the prosecuting counsel actually asked the jury whether they would allow their servants to read such a book. In addition to the censorship of literary work, political, religious or scientific works can also be judged 'unsuitable'. Simon Rushdie's book *Satanic verses* had censorship imposed upon it by Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa*, and in this country it is still possible to commit blasphemy against the Church of England. There are moves to include other religions than the Church of England in the blasphemy laws. As far as political censorship is concerned, the Official Secrets Act is frequently used, not so much to protect state secrets, but to stop people letting the cat out of the bag with regard to the shenanigans of politicians. Clearly information regarding the supply of arms to an unsavoury regime is not viewed as suitable for public consumption.

Under the guise of protecting private individuals, there are guidelines restricting the reporting of the lives of public personages. In fact, the establishment is primarily concerned with suppressing information which would be a *political* embarrassment. The relationship of Tampax, the Prince of Wales and Mrs Camilla Parker-Bowles was the kind of item which calls into question not only Charles's credibility, but the existence of the monarchy itself.

Let us remind ourselves that the major employers of censorship and suppression of ideas in this century have been those claiming to act in the

name of communism. This did us much more harm than all the censorship and book burnings of the Nazis. Apart from besmirching the idea of genuine socialism, such measures within the Soviet Union helped to deprive it of any rationality, damaging the economy and preventing the bureaucracy even from thinking *itself*. Science also suffered under the blows of censorship: the rejection of the germ theory of inheritance by Lysenko and the Soviet establishment held up all sorts of biological and agricultural developments, as well as causing no end of problems for western communists.

To turn to the original question of Le Pen, the first thing to note is that it is seldom possible to destroy an argument by suppressing it. Only when it is brought into the light of day through mass discussion can the argument be shown to be fallacious. More importantly, because there must be at least a grain of truth within an idea for it to gain credibility, then that grain frequently assumes an exaggerated dimension instead of being viewed as just a small part of a contradictory picture.

This is most obvious in the remark regarding the destruction of the Jews as a "detail" of World War II. In one sense the mass murder of six million Jews is a "detail" of the carnage which cost the lives of 50 million people. Although the death camps were obviously of major significance, World War II was not fought over the Nazi's policy of exterminating the Jews. It was primarily fought over the relative position of Germany in a world imperialist struggle. It is also true that there

were plenty of other people besides Jews that were killed by the Nazis: Serbs, gypsies, homosexuals and - dare I mention it? - they even killed one or two communists, some of whom were themselves Jews. The concept of the Holocaust has been used by, on the one hand, the state of Israel to suppress Arabs and, on the other hand, western governments (including Germany) who find naming Hitler and his anti-semitism as the sole cause of the World War II not only helps cover up the massacres of minorities throughout Europe, but also obscures its main feature - the outcome of global capitalism's general crisis. None of this is to say we agree with Le Pen.

Unfortunately the same knee-jerk reaction to censorship is expressed by many on the left. There was a recent campaign to ban the sale of *Mein Kampf* in WH Smith. One of our comrades was actually told by an SWP member that only "bona fide students" should be allowed to see the book. It was pointed out that *Mein Kampf* was published in French and English by the respective communist parties in the first place. This had the obvious purpose of showing what was being advocated. The SWP comrade seemed unaware that he was actually parroting the attitude of the ruling class. The establishment also believes that only 'properly accredited' people should have access to certain material, while the rest of us should be shielded.

The fact remains that *all* censorship is inimitable to the emergence of truth. What is good enough for them is good enough for us ●

John Bayliss

## action

## ■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday November 1, 5pm - 'The second period of the dictatorship of the proletariat/Marx and the Blanquists after the Commune', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* as a study guide.

Manchester: Sunday November 1, 4 pm - *special seminar*: celebration of the 81st anniversary of the October Revolution.

Monday November 9, 7.30pm - 'Constant capital and variable capital; the rate of surplus value', in the series on Karl Marx's *Capital*. For details, phone 0161-798 6417. E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.

## ■ 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

Conference - Sunday November 22, 11am-4pm, Conway Hall. Nearest tube - Holborn.

To get involved, contact Box 22, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS, or ring Anne Murphy on 0973-231 620.

## ■ European elections

The Network of Socialist Alliances in the Midlands has arranged a meeting to consider the advisability of standing socialist candidates in the 1999 European elections. Saturday November 28, 10am. Union Club, Pershore Road, Birmingham.

For information e-mail office@soc-alliances.demon.co.uk.

## ■ Glasgow Marxist Forum

Wednesday November 18 - debate - 'Should socialists support the demand for Scottish independence?' With Alan McCombes, SSP; and an SWP speaker. 7.30pm, Partick Burgh Hall. All welcome.

## ■ Support Tameside careworkers

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

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

## ■ CPGB weekend school to mark 81st anniversary of October Revolution

Central London, November 7-8: 'Against economism'.

Saturday November 7, morning: 'Iskra and economism'; afternoon: 'Lenin versus imperialist economism'.

Sunday November 8, morning: 'Lenin and the permanent revolution'.

afternoon: 'Modern Trotskyism's tendency to economism'. Caxton House, St Johns Way, London N19, 10.30am-5pm each day. Nearest tube - Archway. £3 per session; £10 for the full weekend.

For more details call 0181-459 7146.

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# Trotskyist critique

Edited version of the analysis by  
**Ian Donovan** of the *Draft Programme*  
of the CPGB

**T**he grouping known as the Communist Party of Great Britain, despite its small size, is one of the most subjectively revolutionary currents on the left today. It was founded at the beginning of the 1980s by a small collective of leftist militants from the Stalinist tradition. The *Weekly Worker* has played quite an influential role in promoting political debate on the British left. However, while the CPGB has been opening up to political debate with those claiming the tradition of Trotskyism, at the same time there are disturbing signs that it also is beginning to move in a rightward direction. The apparent adoption by the majority of the CPGB of an essentially 'third-campist' view of the former Soviet bloc states, denying that these states in any way represented gains for the working class, is a step away from revolutionary Marxism.

However, the CPGB tendency is very different from Eurocommunism, and in fact represented a *subjectively revolutionary* split away from the most anti-revolutionary aspects of Stalinism. Rather, it is the case that, despite their subjective revolutionism, there are concepts deeply embedded in the political consciousness and understanding of the CPGB cadres that are in an immediate sense derived from Stalinism. Because of their Stalinist training, 'socialism'/'democracy'-related questions are an Achilles heel that can despite the best of intentions act as a draw to the right.

The CPGB has many times spoken of the need for a revolutionary programme, but in practice its politics have been so riven by contradictions and flux that it has been unable to elaborate a document on which it can unambiguously stand. However, that is not to say that it has not made a serious attempt to do so. In 1995 it published a quite lengthy document titled *Draft Programme*, which according to the introduction was prepared by "40 seminars covering virtually every aspect of the revolutionary programme. Beginning on January 6 1991, the series was concluded just under 12 months later on December 8 1991. In all 20 comrades gave submissions."

Such efforts to elaborate a revolutionary programme should be taken seriously, especially since the document it produced contains much that is healthy in intention, despite a great deal of confusion.

In the preamble the authors give the following outline:

"The first section outlines the main features of the epoch, the epoch of the transition from capitalism to communism. Then comes the nature of capitalism in Britain and the consequences of its development. Following on from here are the immediate economic and political measures which are required if the peoples of Britain are to live a full and decent life in the here and now. Such a *minimum programme* is, admittedly, technically feasible within the confines of present-day advanced capitalism. In actual fact, though, it can only be genuinely realised by way of insurrection."

The last two sentences provide an introduction to the fundamental confusions in the programme as a whole.

These are, as will be shown in this critique, related to the CPGB's confusions on even more fundamental issues such as the nature of socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The CPGB seems to be unable to make up its mind whether its "minimum programme" really is a minimum programme of reforms under capitalism, or whether it is a *transitional* programme aimed at providing a bridge from 'bread and butter' reforms to the overthrow of capitalism itself. The introduction states:

"From these radical foundations the character of the British revolution and the position of the various classes and strata can be presented. Next, again logically, comes the workers' government in Britain and the worldwide transition to communism. Here is the *maximum* programme of the communists. Finally the inescapable need for all partisans of the working class to unite in the Communist Party itself is dealt with. Our essential organisational principles are stated and show in no uncertain terms why the Communist Party is the most powerful weapon available to the working class."

Despite the obvious subjective revolutionism of these sentences, a similar confusion manifests itself. The workers' government in Britain, which is the culmination of that part of the communist programme which guides the struggle for working class state power against the current capitalist status quo, is placed in the same *maximum* part of the programme as the "worldwide transition to communism". In reality, the latter certainly belongs to that part of the programme (the maximum) which guides communists *after* the establishment of the worldwide dictatorship of the proletariat, whereas the former belongs, again, in the *transitional* programme as its crowning demand. Behind these differences of placement, as will be shown later, lie fundamental misconceptions about the dictatorship of the proletariat and the road to socialism, and indeed what socialism is.

## Section 1 - Our epoch

There is little, if anything wrong with this section of the document dealing with the nature of the world economy, the danger of war under capitalism, the economic contradictions of capitalism, the need for a genuinely international struggle for socialism, and for a struggle against all opportunism and sectionalism in the world working class.

## Section 2 - Capitalism in Britain

Again, this section is pretty much unexceptionable. In fact an accurate sketch of the history of British capitalism and the rise and decline of Britain's imperial power.

## Section 3 - Immediate demands

This section contains the germ of the fundamental confusions that mar this programme. It begins well by outlining the need for communist leadership of the struggles of workers and the oppressed, and states correctly that the working class movement must "consciously oppose every violation of democracy and example of discrimination" and "defend every oppressed minority and elevate itself to a ruling class by winning the battle for democ-

racy". It introduces their programme of immediate demands thus:

"The demands we communists put forward are based on what the masses need if they are to live any sort of a decent life in Britain. They are not based on what the capitalist system says it can afford. Our intention is to provide a plan of action and at the same time make the workers aware of their power to refashion society so that it serves human interests. The formulation of our demands thereby connects today's conditions and consciousness to the aim of revolution and the establishment of socialism."

This, though the authors do not seem to know it, is a pretty accurate description of the purpose of a transitional programme: that is, to provide a bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution, to paraphrase Trotsky. In this, it seems somewhat at odds with the section in the introduction that describes this part as a "minimum" programme, as well as the title of the section itself: ie, "Immediate demands".

## 3.1. Working conditions and wage workers

This section raises a whole list of demands for the reduction of the working week to a tolerable level for all workers, for equal pay for all, for the abolition of compulsory overtime, for a minimum net wage, for six weeks' paid holiday, for proper training, for the proper regulation of child labour, for full trade union rights, etc. All these are unexceptionable as reforms, and there are no transitional demands raised here, which makes it entirely consistent with the description of this section of the programme as a *minimum* programme. Such demands are entirely achievable under a reformed capitalism, though of course, like all such reforms, they would be open to being reversed.

## 3.2. Migrant workers

This section is basically a series of supportable, though at times too minimal, demands for increased democratic rights, including the right to speak and be educated in one's own language. The demand for the right to become citizens with full rights after three months' residence is too minimal: revolutionaries should go further than this and demand full citizenship rights for *all* immigrants and their families from day one.

Other than that, the statement that "Communists are for the free movement of people and against all measures preventing them from entering or leaving countries" is too categorical. A workers' state, for instance, might have good reason for limiting the ability of some types of skilled people, of whatever ethnic group, from leaving.

## 3.3. The Unemployed

Once again, this section contains a list of supportable, if minimal, trade union demands. However, what is glaringly absent from this programme supposedly dealing with unemployment, is any demand(s) raised directly at abolishing unemployment!

For instance, there is no demand for a sliding scale of working hours: that is, for the reduction of the working hours of *employed* workers without loss of pay, so that unemployed workers can be taken on. Such a demand strikes right at the heart of capitalist profitability, and hence points the way towards the need to abolish the capitalist system itself. The absence of this key *transitional* demand is a serious flaw, and appears to imply an *acceptance* of capitalist mass unemployment and a failure to see the potential of this question. For a tendency that con-

tinually attacks other leftists for being allegedly 'economistic', this omission in favour of a mere series of *reforms* is itself a piece of pure economism.

## 3.4. Nationalisation

This section is utterly self-contradictory. It begins:

"From the point of view of world revolution, programmes for wholesale nationalisation are today objectively reactionary. The historic task of the working class is to fully socialise the giant transnational corporations, not break them up into inefficient national units. Our starting point is the most advanced achievements of capitalism. Globalised production needs global social control."

"Communists oppose the illusion that nationalisation equates in some way with socialism. There is nothing inherently progressive or socialistic about nationalised industries."

It is of course true that many states that have considerable degrees of state ownership are in fact still capitalist states, and have nothing whatsoever to do with socialism. But from this it does not follow that the dictatorship of the proletariat is even *possible* without the expropriation of transnational companies. For a workers' state to condemn as "reactionary" the expropriation ("nationalisation") of the property of transnational companies would be to commit economic and political suicide, as their economic power would inevitably be the prime means of subverting the workers' state. Indeed, such a commitment would tend to negate the class character of the workers' state itself. That state would inevitably find itself, in the event of any 'time lag' between the victory of the revolution in a given country and the victory of the world revolution, defending the property of the transnationals against the working class itself.

The CPGB's Stalinist methodology equates 'socialism' (that is, the lower stage of communism) with the dictatorship of the proletariat. But, whether we like it or not, the dictatorship of the proletariat is most unlikely to be achieved simultaneously in all countries, and in an epoch of wars and revolutions the international productive capacities of transnational companies will be used as a weapon against the workers' states.

The remainder of this section contains a transitional element, ironically for something that claims to be a "minimum" programme. It continues: "Under definite circumstances, however, nationalisation serves the interests of the workers. Faced with plans for closure or mass sackings, communists demand that the state - the executive committee of the bourgeoisie - not the workers bear the consequences for failure

"Against closures and mass sackings communists demand:

"1. No redundancies. Nationalise threatened workplaces or industries under workers' control.

"2. Compensation to former owners should be paid only in cases of proven need.

"3. There must be no business secrets hidden from the workers. The books and data banks of every company must be open to the inspection of specialists appointed by and responsible to the workers."

This is broadly correct, and involves an attack on the 'right' of the capitalists to freely dispose of 'their' workers and property. But where is the logic of advocating that the *capitalist* state seize the goods of bankrupt capitalists, while at the same time

attacking the idea that the *working class* in power should seize the property of 'transnational' companies?

## 3.5. Trade unions

This section makes correct points about the ruinous influence of sectionalism in the trade union movement, and the limits of trade union consciousness. Its explanation for the role of the trade union bureaucracy is thus:

"Bargaining is a specialist activity. Consequently the trade unions need a layer of functionaries. However, due to the passivity of most rank and file members and lack of democratic accountability, these functionaries consolidated themselves into a conservative caste.

"The trade union bureaucracy is more concerned with amicable deals and preserving union funds than with the class struggle. Operating as an intermediary between labour and capital, it has a material interest in the continued existence of the wage system."

This is OK as far as it goes, though it leaves out the most fundamental cause of the existence of this caste - the labour aristocracy which obtains special favours from the bosses, and provides a social base for this bureaucracy. Thus the cure that the CPGB advocates is largely technical. Correctly, they demand the independence of the trade unions from the state. They demand the payment to trade union officials of a worker's wage, election and recall of trade union officials, industrial unionism. All supportable demands.

They also call on workers to support trade union officials "only to the extent that they fight for the long-term interest of the class as a whole". It would have been better to explain the criteria whereby communists could give critical support while also explaining that only a fully *communist* programme can defend the "long-term interest of the class as a whole".

Tacked onto this list is the demand for "all-embracing workplace committees". The CPGB make the call to "organise all workers, whatever their trade, whether or not they are in trade unions"; and demand that "workplace committees should fight to exercise control over hiring and firing, production and investment". Here we have one of the stranger features of this "minimum" programme. In reality, these demands, and others that will be dealt with shortly, are not "feasible within the confines" of capitalism at all. They are negations of capitalist power, and their emergence signifies the emergence of *dual power* and a *pre-revolutionary situation*. "Workplace committees" are *organs of class collaboration*, and certainly cannot "exercise control over hiring and firing, production and investment". If they tried, the bosses would move to crush them as soon as possible.

## 3.6. Councils of action

The CPGB write:

"In any decisive clash of class against class, new forms of organisation which are higher, more general, more flexible than trade unions emerge. In Russia they have been called soviets, in Germany raetes, in Britain councils of action.

"Democratically embracing and coordinating all who are in struggle, such organisations of struggle have the potential to become the workers' alternative to the capitalist state. Communists encourage any such development."

Of course, all this is completely correct. But why on earth is this demand

for organs of dual power at the level of the state, which by its very nature can only become feasible in a pre-revolutionary situation, and which poses *point blank* the need for the revolutionary overturn of the existing capitalist state in the immediate period, included in a programme of “immediate demands”? The conception that the prolonged existence of soviets or ‘raete’ is possible under the existing state was one of the worst absurdities of the centrists in Germany in the period after World War I. One hopes this is not what the CPGB means by including *this* demand in a *minimum* programme.

### 3.7. Workers’ militia

Just as much as “councils of action” are out of place in a minimum programme, so is the demand for a workers’ militia! According to the CPGB, these demands are “technically feasible within the confines of present-day capitalism” but can only be *genuinely* realised by means of “insurrection”. But the workers’ militia is the means of insurrection itself! Far from belonging in the “minimum” programme, in reality it belongs in the ‘bridge’: that is, the *transitional* programme. This would, of course, be an utterly pointless and scholastic discussion if the CPGB had not repeatedly expressed its disdain and mockery for the whole concept of a transitional programme, for the reason that there is not a revolutionary situation at present!

### 3.8. The national question

The brief preamble to this subsection is unexceptionable, in its call for the defence of democratic rights and self-determination for all nations and nationalities, though so vague as to be totally abstract. However, there are some situations where the national configurations are intertwined in such a way that they can only be solved by a combination of democratic demands that belong in the ‘minimum’ programme, and some demands that come from the transitional programme, thereby pointing more directly towards proletarian power. This happens when conflicting ‘rights’ of different national or communal groupings create a situation where the application of ‘self-determination’ will create an outcome that itself violates the basic principles of democracy. Such situations exist in Ireland, the Middle East, Bosnia, etc. Unfortunately, the vulgar democratism of the CPGB means that such questions are not addressed in this programme.

#### 3.8.1. England, Scotland and Wales

As a description of the evolution of the national question regarding England, Wales and Scotland, this section is fine. It correctly defends the right of separation of Scotland and Wales, while opposing separatism. Yet it contains the demand for a “federal republic” of England, Scotland and Wales without specifying the class nature of that republic. This is one of the strangest features of this CPGB programme, and underlines its confusion. It does not contain the demand for a *workers’ government* (even a federal one), the achievement of which is the only non-counterrevolutionary outcome of a situation where workplace committees, workers’ militias, etc *have actually appeared*! Presumably, then, the purpose of these is to create by means of “insurrection” a *bourgeois* federal republic which (by definition!!) would *not* expropriate the property of “transnational” companies because that would be “reactionary”. Such a schema could most charitably be characterised as a ‘critical’ left-Stalinist-Menshevik admixture, *reductio ad absurdum*.

#### 3.8.2. Ireland

This is the classic British left position on Ireland and, for a tendency that talks so much about ‘democracy’, takes no account of the hardened and consolidated communal divisions in

the population of Ireland. While it is correct to state that “working class opposition to British imperialism in Ireland is a necessary condition for our own liberation”, in demanding unconditional support for “the right of Ireland to unite” it does not address what will happen if the protestant population in the North, who do not generally see themselves as part of “Ireland”, do not choose to “unite”.

### 3.9. Peace

This section is a little abstract, but there is nothing particularly wrong with it. However, it does state: “Communists are not pacifists. Everywhere we support just wars, above all revolutionary civil wars for socialism.” Since the CPGB have in the past equated backward capitalist states such as Iraq, which come into conflict with imperialism, with the imperialists themselves, and refused to defend these states, some expansion on what this section means would be in order.

### 3.10. Women; 3.11. Youth;

### 3.12. Pensioners; 3.13.

### Homosexuals

All these sections, which deal with social oppression, and raise a whole series of democratic and social demands to deal with these matters, appear to be basically OK.

### 3.14. Freedom of information

This demands an end to all censorship, etc. It may seem to be a little utopian to demand that “the affairs of the bourgeois state are conducted in complete openness on all matters”, but such demands can have an agitational significance, and should not therefore be rejected out of hand.

### 3.15. Crime and prison

This contains a series of demands for prison reforms, and reforms of the judicial system. Again, many of the matters dealt with here have an agitational significance and potentially transitional element to them, but there is an impermissible ambiguity. It calls for “workers’ supervision of prisons”, but does not make it clear as to whether it is talking about a workers’ state or a capitalist state. If it is a capitalist state, there is a very fine line between a negative exercise of veto (this is part of workers’ control in general) and the workers’ movement being sucked into taking responsibility for the bosses’ prison system.

### 3.16. Religion

This section, dealing with the struggle against religion, the separation of religion and the state, and the rights of believers and atheists, is basically OK.

### 3.17. Small businesses and farms

Some of this is valid, such as the demand for “security of tenure” for owner-occupiers and small farmers, but such demands as “guaranteed prompt payment of bills by big business to small business” are really out of place in a communist programme. But of course, if the expropriation of transnational companies by a workers state is deemed “reactionary” in the absence of the world revolution materialising all at once, then all we are left with is trying to ensure that the big boys behave as good boys to the little boys. If one rejects the economic aspect of the dictatorship of the proletariat, then one is left aping the programme of the Liberal Democrats.

### Section 4 - Character of the revolution

This section opens with the bald phrase, “Britain is materially ready for socialism”. This is completely false. No one country is materially ready for socialism. That such a claim can be made shows that, no matter what the accusations of ‘national socialism’ that they make against other currents, the CPGB have not clearly broken themselves from the Stalinist theory of ‘socialism in one country’.

In this section is raised the call for

“the overthrow of the main enemy, the capitalist state”. Yet nowhere in its programme of immediate demands does the CPGB make explicit the connection between demands for dual power institutions and the demand for the seizure of power by the working class. It instead appears to pose an extended period when these dual power institutions exist under capitalism. Indeed, in polemic after polemic, it has attacked the demand for a *workers’* republic as being ‘economistic’.

A lot of this sounds like pure confusion, perhaps genuinely in the minds of the authors, perhaps a deliberate attempt to accommodate its rightist ex-Cliffite co-thinkers in the Revolutionary Democratic Group. The CPGB is trying to find a form of words that will please *both* those of its supporters who think there ought to be a straightforward social overturn of capitalism, and those who believe that there ought to be some sort of ‘democratic’ stage first.

### 4.1. Classes in the revolution

There is much in this section that is correct. The CPGB makes a great show of addressing some of the issues around the ‘non-monopoly’ bourgeoisie: “There can be no revolutionary alliance with the non-monopoly bourgeoisie. Individuals from the bourgeoisie can come over to the side of the working class, but never any section of it.”

This is a rejection of the basis of Stalinist/Eurocommunist popular frontism in Britain, and all to the good.

Regarding the organisations of the middle class “lawyers, doctors, middle management, middle-grade civil servants, the self-employed, well-paid professionals”, it writes: “Workers ought to seek, as opportunities present themselves, alliances with the various organisations and manifestations of this intermediate strata. Indeed, the working class must represent the middle class against capital.”

Again, this seems a reasonable enough perspective.

### 4.2. The socialist constitution

There is much that is correct and positive, again, in this section. It lays out a blueprint, familiar on the left, for a republic run by the workers as a class, derived from the experience of the Paris Commune and the early Soviet state. It also states:

“The principles of our constitution are born out of a scientific understanding of the class struggle. Crucially that in the process of smashing the bourgeois state organs of working class struggle become organs of working class power. Our principles are not gleaming abstractions nor are they a utopian dream. They reflect historic experience and the necessity for the workers to continue the class struggle even when they are the ruling class.”

One wonders, therefore, why they could not make clear in the section on immediate demands that the workers’ militia, the councils of action, etc as “organs of working class struggle” were destined to become “organs of working class state power”. One wonders, again, why the culminating point of the programme of “immediate” demands could not be *explicitly* stated to be “working class power”: ie, a *workers’* republic.

### 4.3. Economic measures

This subsection begins with the following assertion: “The workers’ state would be wrong to nationalise some pre-set number of companies or list of industries. Nationalisation could be used tactically as a political weapon against those who refuse to cooperate or who rebel. But the full socialisation of production in Britain is dependent on and can only proceed in line with the completion of the world revolution.”

Earlier in the programme it was stated that “Britain is materially ready for socialism”. Now it is stated that

“the full socialisation of production in Britain” is “dependent ... on the world revolution”. Obviously then, if the latter is true, the former cannot be also!

In reality, Britain is “materially ready” for the dictatorship of the proletariat, *not* socialism. Socialism cannot be built in one country, and the real socialisation of nationalised property cannot take place until it is *internationalised* by the spread of the world revolution. But to leave industry in private hands for a prolonged period is to allow a ‘fifth column’ to continue to accumulate wealth and influence in a workers’ state. This does not mean, of course, that every single small capitalist enterprise would be on the list for expropriation from day one of the creation of a workers’ state. But it does mean that those industries that are decisive for the well-being of the state would be quickly seized by the victorious proletariat to fortify its position for the battles to come.

What is also missing from the list of “economic measures” is the demand for a state monopoly of foreign trade, which was part of the *Communist Manifesto* and an elementary part of the armoury of the Bolsheviks.

### Section 5 - The transition to communism

In this section the incomplete break of the CPGB with Stalinist concepts of ‘socialism’ becomes most clear. For instance, the preamble subsection begins: “Socialism is not a mode of production. It is the transition from capitalism to communism. Socialism is the communism that emerges from capitalist society. It begins as capitalism with a workers’ state. Socialism therefore bears the moral, economic and intellectual imprint of capitalism; it is the lower stage of communism.”

The CPGB often makes a great deal of its comparatively recent discovery that socialism cannot be built in one country. But if socialism is not a mode of production, then what is so special about it that it cannot be built in one country? It cannot precisely because it *is* a mode of production. Socialism in its lower stage bears many of the birthmarks of capitalism from which it has emerged. Thus the lower stage of communism (socialism) has a residual form of the state, which is not there to regulate *class* antagonisms between the proletariat and the defeated bourgeoisie, but to regulate potential conflict and disputes *within* the same class or with residual classes that do not have fundamentally antagonistic interests. But by this time there is *no question* of the former bourgeoisie regaining power. It has already disappeared as a class.

In this context, the statement, “In general, socialism is defined as the rule of the working class”, is flatly wrong. Under socialism, the proletariat has been superseded by the associated producers, administering the lower stage of a new mode of production. The proletariat has ceased to be a proletariat. Likewise, the statement, “Classes and social strata exist under socialism because of different positions occupied in relation to the means of production, the roles played in society and the way they receive their income”, is also false. There is nothing described in this passage that does not exist in a workers’ state encircled by hostile capitalist powers. It is certainly possible to build a society that fits *that* description in one country. Several have existed this century!

Thus they go on: “The class struggle can, in the last analysis, go in two directions depending on the balance of forces inside and outside [!!!] the country and the class policy being followed. It can go backwards to capitalism or it can advance towards communism.”

Here we have a chemically pure ex-

ample of a Stalinist view. It was made explicit by Mao, in saying that the class struggle continues under socialism. The CPGB say that socialism cannot be built in one country, but here they say that the class struggle under socialism can go in different directions according to events inside or outside the country. Presumably, this is after the victory of the *world* revolution. The meaning of the exclamation marks should not need explaining!

### 5.1. The socialist state

This subsection contains a generally accurate description of the concept of ‘bourgeois right’ and how it persists under socialism until the higher stage of communism. Unfortunately, it is again marred by classic Stalinist conflation of socialism with the dictatorship of the proletariat: “The socialist state (the dictatorship of the proletariat) is needed in the first place against the forces of capitalism.” But the dictatorship of the proletariat *can* exist in one country. Indeed, according to Marx, it existed in one city (Paris in 1871).

### 5.2. Socialism and democracy

Considering it is marred by the shortcomings and confusions mentioned above, this subsection is not that bad. The statement that “socialism and democracy are inseparable” cannot be let through without a few caveats, however. Though, of course, the soviet form of the dictatorship of the proletariat is infinitely more democratic in content than the most advanced bourgeois democracy, it should be noted that all will not most likely be sweetness and light for all under the dictatorship of the proletariat. In particular, the bourgeoisie is deprived of its property. It is also deprived of the means to politically organise to gain the return of its property and, depending on circumstances, that can involve repression to a greater or lesser degree. However, it is true that under socialism even such class-based repression will no longer be necessary, as there will be no enemy left to repress.

### 5.3. Communism

Unfortunately, again this subsection is marred in the same way. However, discounting that, it is not that bad, and accurately sums up the historic aim of the communist movement - a society of equality and abundance for all.

### Section 6 - The Communist Party

The cell structure advocated here is not necessarily the best method of organisation by any means, and has had a bad history at times, having been used by Zinoviev and Stalin to fragment the membership of mass communist parties and undermine the possibility of political opposition emerging. A party of geographically-based larger branches and fractions for carrying out specific areas of work is at least as effective a method of organisation, and allows for more contact between comrades and hence a better internal life.

However, the following statement of what constitutes communist discipline goes down well with the author of this critique: “Party discipline consists of the duty to voice differences, complete fulfilment of assigned tasks and not withholding financial resources. Communist discipline develops on the basis of positively resolving differences and successfully developing ties with the masses. Mutual respect and the strength of the working class increases the level of communist discipline.”

It is to be hoped that this critique will gain a serious consideration according to the same principle ●

The full version of ‘Trotskyist critique’ can be found in *Revolution and Truth* autumn-winter 1998-9, or online at <http://www.dono.dircon.co.uk/RevTruth>. Draft programme £1 from CPGB address.



**W**ho could have foretold it? Less than a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of 'official communism', Marx is 'back in fashion' - at least if you believe what you read in *The Guardian*. Provocatively asking the question, "Was Marx right after all?", the paper's G2 section superimposes on a picture of Marx the announcement that "He's back" (October 20).

In the minds of those of us who never thought that Marx had 'gone away' in the first place and who have never doubted the truth (and hence the power) of his ideas, this apparent 'rehabilitation' is of great interest. Serious discussion of Marxism is to be welcomed, but when *The Guardian*, the bastion of bourgeois liberalism, sounds so enthusiastic about the idea, deep suspicions are aroused. Sadly, they are fully justified. What we are dealing with here is not a serious engagement with Marx's thought, but a characteristic piece of shallow 1990s marketing hype masquerading as the intellectual heights. Marx, or rather his iconic form, is being used as a trendy designer label to promote and lend credibility to a very inferior product - in this case, the warmed-up leftovers from the last supper of old Labour social democracy.

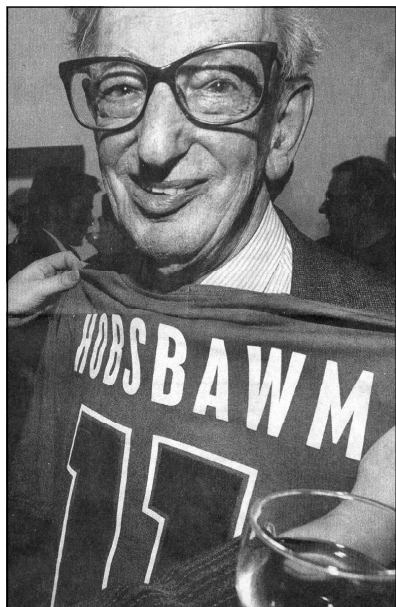
The guilty party responsible for this farrago of nonsense is the late and unlamented journal *Marxism Today*, which last week came back from the grave with a special issue devoted to a sententious critique of "the Blair project". Thanks to a meticulously orchestrated PR campaign, the publication of this one-off issue became something of a media event and, judging by the difficulties experienced by this writer in laying his hands on a copy, the venture must, commercially at least, have been a conspicuous success.

Before we examine this special issue in more detail, let us recall a few facts about the history of *Marxism Today*. Having been for many years a theoretical journal of the 'official' Communist Party of Great Britain, in the 1980s it was effectively taken over by what was then the increasingly powerful and dominant Eurocommunist wing. Throughout this period and until its demise in December 1991, *Marxism Today* was edited by Martin Jacques, who was also the prime mover behind this month's special issue. Along with the likes of the 'official' Party's last and decidedly least general secretary, the long since forgotten Nina Temple, Jacques was a renegade from 'official communism' and a brazen liquidator. He took all the 'official' opportunist crap to its logical conclusions.

Significantly, the 'final' issue of *Marxism Today* was emblazoned with the words "The end" on its cover. However much Jacques may now protest that this merely denoted the fact that "we had done what we could" and that it "was time to move on", the fact is that then his editorship of the journal concluded with the formal repudiation of Marxism and a wholesale capitulation to bourgeois ideology. In short, Jacques openly and unashamedly went over to the class enemy, and it is no coincidence that he has since made a good living out of mediocre political punditry by marketing himself adroitly as a 'leftwing' intellectual.

By the end of its life the title *Marxism Today* was a glaring misnomer - there was nothing remotely Marxist in its philistine and opportunistic promotion of Labourite politics. The same is true for last week's pitifully tame 'critique' of Blair's "Thatcherism in trousers". The whole issue rests on two fundamental propositions: one of them self-evidently true, the other plainly false. The true proposition is that capitalism is currently in the throes of a global financial crisis; the false, that "the age of neo-liberalism is over".

# Social democratic platitudes



**Hobsbawm: playing for which side?**

As regards the first, we cannot but agree: "After hubris comes Nemesis. What price now the facile triumphalism of 1991 - the empty boasting about the victory of capitalism in economics and of bourgeois democracy in politics; the ignorant crowing of bourgeois intellectuals about the end of history? The period of reaction through which we are living has entered a new phase, in which all the comforting 'certainties' that bourgeois ideology derived from the collapse of the USSR are now exposed as mere will-o'-the-wisps" (*Weekly Worker* October 15).

There is common ground here between ourselves and *Marxism Today*. Indeed, we would go further and suggest that the capitalist system is currently pregnant not only with acute contradictions, but with potential devastation. In a characteristically bilious and disingenuous attack, *The Economist* accuses *Marxism Today*, and by implication ourselves, of indulging in "Schadenfreude" (October 24). But as we and the comfortable *Economist* writers know perfectly well, it will not be the capitalists but, as always, the working class who will end up paying the price for the present crisis.

However devastating the crisis may turn out to be, on the basis of present evidence it is theoretically unjustifiable - in fact perversely wrong-headed - to suggest, as does *Marxism Today*, that it marks the end of the road for "neo-liberal, free market fundamentalism". Throughout the developed world and beyond, leaving aside local nuances, "neo-liberal" capitalism remains the dominant ideology, and this situation seems unlikely to change in the immediate future. In the subtext of the whole *Marxism Today* comeback issue one detects an excitement and anticipation curiously reminiscent in some ways of the Trotskyite left - except that, whereas these comrades exhibit an infantile conviction that the collapse of capitalism is imminent and that it will 'inevitably' usher in a proletarian revolution, the contributors to *Marxism Today* naively believe that the Blair government simply must 'see reason' and put things to rights by embracing the social democratic nostrums of yesteryear. Both are equally wrong. Even if confidence in free market economics were not merely

shaken but totally destroyed, capital would seek to renew itself at our expense, as it has done before. Workers too do not spontaneously look to socialist revolution in such circumstances. In the short term we must face the fact that the most likely prospect is neither revolution nor liberal reform, but a retreat to the stringent authoritarianism that is already implicit in Blair's social policy.

Perhaps the best way of coming to grips with the *Marxism Today* special issue is to look at its centrepiece - an article by the venerable historian Eric Hobsbawm, grotesquely described by one of *The Guardian's* benighted sub-editors as "Britain's foremost Marxist thinker".

If that statement were true, then our plight would indeed be serious. Hobsbawm is undoubtedly learned in Marx's thought and knows a great deal about him, but if that is the criterion, then Pope John Paul II must also be regarded as a Marxist.

To be a Marxist in any meaningful sense of the term means not only to be familiar with the *theory* of Marxism, but to embrace Marx's *vision* - to be, like Marx himself, a partisan of the working class and of proletarian revolution. In this, Hobsbawm abysmally fails the test.

For example, to justify his glib assertion that "in 1998 Karl Marx came back", he cites the fact that the 150th anniversary of the *Communist manifesto* "produced ... to everyone's surprise ... an enormous echo in the press". Perhaps it did, but so what?

Neither "the press" nor Hobsbawm himself care to reiterate the central message of the *Communist manifesto*, that only a proletarian revolution can emancipate the working class, and with it humanity as a whole, from the slavery and oppression inherent in capitalism. Instead of stating this fact, as any real Marxist must, Hobsbawm treats us to the trite observation that "what this man wrote 150 years ago about the nature and tendencies of global capitalism rings amazingly true today!" Quite so. Mr Hobsbawm's Marx is the 'prophet of globalisation' and nothing more. He is a mere peg on which to hang a few social democratic platitudes dressed up as theory.

Both in terms of his economics and his social policy, Hobsbawm seems to have remembered everything, but learned nothing at all. Having acknowledged the somewhat obvious fact that "the global economy is indeed here to stay", he proceeds to indulge in what has become a favourite daydream of our present-day bourgeois liberal reformists: namely the notion that the operations of globalised finance capital can be regulated by "non-market institutions", and that "at the very least they require the equivalent of a system of law with sanctions to guarantee the performance of contracts and, more to the point, outside regulation - very notably of financial markets".

Mr Hobsbawm may be 81 - but he really ought to try and get out more. Let him go down to the City and talk to dealers in the equity and currency markets. They will soon convince him that globalised finance capital has produced conditions that are inherently unstable and beyond any effective control, least of all by the "political power and policies" in which, like all

rational liberal intellectuals, he appears to place so much faith.

As Hobsbawm sees it, therefore, on the economic level "the problem" is "how we control and regulate the operations of a capitalist market" - scarcely the way in which a real socialist, let alone a Marxist, would envisage "the problem" raised by the crisis of capitalism. With touching naivety, he believes that "coordinated action by several governments" can do the trick, especially since "most countries of what has become the European Union are under governments of the centre-left, elected by voters sceptical of free market fundamentalism". So there you have it: all we need to solve the crisis of capitalism is for Blair, Jospin, Schröder *et al* to get their heads together and come up with some "policies" with which to "regulate" the markets. Even by the standards of social democratic reformism this really is the most utter banality.

Hobsbawm's approach to social policy is no better. Here the "problem" is "how to distribute the enormous wealth generated and accumulated by our society to its inhabitants". The Blair government should remember that "its major objective is not national wealth, but welfare and social fairness". Here speaks a real liberal - where would they be without the concept of "fairness"? But amazingly, where welfare is concerned, Hobsbawm even lets his liberal mask slip a little and mentions his agreement with the former Labour social security minister, Frank Field, that "we must break with a system that generates welfare dependency among people of working age and ... that it [the welfare system] can no longer be ... purely a system of state transfers". Here Mr Hobsbawm seems to be giving the nod to Blair's oft-stated desire to crack down on benefits claimants and institute a radical "reform" (ie, dismantling) of public sector welfare provision - a strange position for a liberal, let alone a "Marxist" to take - but it is symptomatic of the more deep-rooted confusion that underlies the whole essay.

At best, Hobsbawm's views can be seen as similar to those which Marx attributed to the democratic petty bourgeoisie: they "strive for a change

in social conditions by means of which existing society will be made as tolerable and comfortable as possible for them ... they hope to bribe the workers by more or less concealed alms and to break their revolutionary potency by making their position tolerable for the moment ... For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property, but only its annihilation; not the smoothing over of class antagonisms, but the abolition of classes; not the improvement of existing society, but the foundation of a new one" (K Marx, 'Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League', March 1850).

Nowhere in Mr Hobsbawm's essay will you find a single reference to the class nature of capitalist society or to the class struggle, let alone a call for the "annihilation" of private property. Heaven forbid. What Mr Hobsbawm, like all Labourite reformists, would like to see is a capitalist market that is better "regulated" and a capitalist society that distributes wealth more "fairly" - and these are the views which *The Guardian* attributes to "Britain's foremost Marxist thinker".

It should be obvious that this *Marxism Today* special was not a serious intellectual enterprise, but little more than a complacent, inward-looking piece of reformist gimmickry dressed up as radicalism: an attempt to create something of a stir in the small world of the liberal intelligentsia and perhaps a trial run at reconstituting a 'leftwing', supposedly "Marxist" alternative to Blairism that could serve as a rallying point for the forces around the old Labour left.

Whatever its purpose, this venture has at least reminded us of one important fact - that the ideologists of reformism in the labour movement are quite capable of exploiting a 'safe', emasculated Marx to give credence and a frisson of excitement to their tired old social democratic platitudes.

Nevertheless, reviving Marx as a safe liberal may not turn out to be so clever after all. The renewed interest provoked by this marketing exercise will no doubt lead some to seek out his real ideas. Communists must make full use of any opportunities the situation provides ●

**Michael Malkin**

## Fighting fund

## Safeguard

In difficult financial times, we all take special steps to safeguard those things we hold dearest. New boss of The Body Shop Patrick Gournay, who replaced Anita Roddick in the top job on July 14, showed us the way with an £87,500 investment in the company's shares. Self-sacrifice? Hardly. *Weekly Worker* readers know they must match such capitalist profit-seeking zeal with financial support for working class values. Reach deep into your pockets and bank

accounts to sustain our paper's struggle for the Communist Party our class needs. £55 received this week from PS, AN and ST takes us over the £400 monthly target in October by £42. Well done! Can we start November with special money to mark the anniversary of the Russian Revolution? ●

**Ian Farrell**

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

Our friend and comrade Dave Craig raises a number of interesting and important issues of theory and practice (*Weekly Worker* October 22 1998). Two questions in particular require an immediate response. First, Scotland and the communist attitude towards the formation of the Scottish Socialist Party. Second, the process of rapprochement between the Communist Party of Great Britain and his Revolutionary Democratic Group.

On the Scottish Socialist Party comrade Craig makes a great deal of the different formulations advanced by himself and the CPGB's national organiser Mark Fischer. In the red corner from comrade Craig we appear to have the SSP as a "communist-Labour formation". In the blue corner comrade Fischer's term "centrist". As comrade Craig admits, in the abstract the two are not mutually exclusive. The SSP can be centrist *and* at the same time a communist-Labour formation. Of course, the real task is not to berate each other with abstract definitions plucked from thin air, or partial truths, but to actually grasp the SSP in terms of origins in its non-self, its present character and contradictions, orientation and logic.

Let us begin with centrism. Centrism is a broad category denoting a political position that exists and oscillates between pro-capitalist reformism and consistent scientific socialism. Centrism should not be assessed or approached simply as a thing in itself. Rather it is political beginnings and direction. If, for example, there was a mass working class split from Labourism, it would be churlish, not to say puerile, to dismiss or belittle such a *movement* on the basis of (inevitable) programmatic shortcomings and illusions. That would be the mark and mentality of a sect.

The task of any communist worthy of the name can be summarised as follows: join, work loyally, attempt to infuse the membership - each stage of struggle raising receptivity - with the ideas of Marxism. It would be ludicrous to lay down maximalist ultimatums, or insist that this or that ideological nostrum be religiously enshrined before communists deign to involve themselves. No serious communist would turn their backs on a real workers' movement because it was not formally revolutionary. Nor would we insist that our membership was impossible without the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', 'proletarian internationalism' or some such phrase being inserted into the programme. Communists must do their utmost to fuse themselves with the workers as they begin to move into political activity and towards class consciousness.

That was the approach of those organised under the banner of, and influenced by, the Provisional Central Committee *vis-à-vis* the Socialist Labour Party. True, prior to Arthur Scargill's monstrous constitution being imposed (and well before it was adopted by a conference) we supported a fully articulated alternative revolutionary programme for the purposes of debate and clarification. But once the SLP's reformist politics fully crystallised and the disastrous Sikorski-Scargill witch hunt was unleashed, the *Weekly Worker* took the lead in championing democracy. Our paper gave "full support" to the SLP's Revolutionary Platform, the Left Network and other such broad campaigns. As comrade Craig says, "The CPGB participated constructively, joined the new party and sought to organise with other revolutionaries". Indeed we did everything to provide ammunition for, cohere, and give direction to all SLP democrats.

The SLP was in its origins a break to the left from Labour. Scargill played a highly ambiguous and paradoxical role. He made the whole thing possible. The SLP would not have hap-

# A common perspective

In reply to Dave Craig, the CPGB's **Jack Conrad** reasserts the need for opposition to the Scottish Socialist Party and the correctness of pursuing communist rapprochement

pened without him. Simultaneously he ensured that the SLP died as a mass workers' movement almost at birth. Neither Tommy Sheridan nor Peter Taaffe, neither the SWP nor the CPGB were wanted. His personality and history attracted a layer of class fighters and socialist activists. Yet his 'little England' politics, authoritarian methods and inclinations drove many of these very people away. Like a magnet he equally pulls and repels. The SLP is today a (dwindling) right centrist rump, a weird and highly unstable Scargillite *sect* under a would-be labour dictator.

Had the communists and democrats been successful, the SLP would have become through *movement*, if you like, a communist-Labour formation (itself *transitory* to something else). In other words a centrist formation in which the left pole of the contradiction, where Marxists are not only tolerated but are gaining hegemony over the pole of Labourism. Not, it should be emphasised, as a result of capturing branches, committees, sections, etc, through organisational methods. On the contrary because their ideas prove to be the most effective, most illuminating, most powerful in the school of practice.

What of the SSP? It was voted into existence by a conference of the Scottish Socialist Alliance. The SSA began as an alternative to the SLP and was part of a (much weaker) all-Britain Socialist Alliance movement. At its core the SSA consisted of Scottish Militant Labour (then an integral part of Taaffe's Socialist Party break from Labourism). This right centrist majority was added to, and given political weight and legitimacy by the adherence of a thin, though not insignificant, layer of organised and unorganised activists and leftwingers.

Whatever the reformist nonsense peddled by the SML majority, however hollow its Marxist claims and Leninist pretensions, it was surely correct for communists to take a full part in the SSA and thus produce a formation containing communists, centrists, left reformists and left nationalists in conflict but unity. Such a balance between unity and conflict had to increasingly give way to a purely conflictive approach when faced with the long signalled goal of transforming the SSA into the SSP. That perspective should have been met head on by an energetic and imaginative fight for a split based on posing and building a realistic alternative.

Why? The SSP represents neither a move to the left nor the right, along the traditional horizontal political spectrum. The SSP is a descent, a collapse into petty nationalism. Indeed fundamentally it is a national-based split - a Scottish split from the SP, a Scottish split from the Socialist Alliances in England and Wales. Comrade Craig is right to argue that the only correct communist position is intransigent opposition to such nationalism.

Those on the left in the SSP, the Red Republicans and Alan Armstrong's Communist Tendency,

cannot be described as communist, if by that we refer to the internationalist theory of Marx, Engels and Lenin, as opposed to the national socialist theory of Otto Bauer, Joseph Pilsudski, JV Stalin and Tom Nairn. Nor should we work for what is a right centrist-left nationalist-Labourite formation to be honoured with, or camouflaged by, any kind of communist prefix or coloration.

The term 'communist-Labour' to describe the SSP, or to characterise our aim, is therefore wrong. This, comrade Craig, has nothing to do with the CPGB having "no members in the SSP". We would recruit, and under certain circumstances, keep comrades in the SSP. However, we do not, and will not, urge anyone in Scotland to join and agree to, or accept, its membership terms and conditions.

Communists do not oppose the formation of the SSP because it carries over the right centrist politics of SML. Here I wholeheartedly agree with comrade Craig. The idea of refusing to join the SSP due to its leadership seeing no advantage in *pretending* to be revolutionary is foolish in the extreme. Communists fight for *real* revolutionary politics and consciousness through the movement of the class and the logic of struggle, not empty gestures. We prefer Tommy Sheridan, Alan McCombes, Hugh Kerr, Allan Green, *et al* to be honest. Neither they nor the SSP are revolutionary. Communists object to the SSP because it is a *nationalist* step backwards, a *nationalist* split by a *declining* SML and its allies left and right.

The *defining* founding principle, the basis of the SSP's agreed electoral, and all other such ongoing work, is not the unity and forward march of the working class. It is the division of an existing British nation state *and* an existing all-Britain working class along the lines of nationality. Objective circumstances demand no such *exceptional* course. Scotland is neither a Kosova, nor an Ireland, nor an East Timor.

The SSP declares for a Scottish class state merely on the basis of the fleeting ups and downs of opinion polls. This is rank opportunism. An attempt to ride to power on a surge of nationalist sentiment. McCombes polemically brandishes, primarily against a politically bankrupt Socialist Party in England and Wales, Mori surveys of young people between the ages of 18 to 25. He uses them as justification for his entire political trajectory. A slim majority opt for independence over devolution. Pathetically SPEW's general secretary Taaffe can raise no objection (he agreed in the first place to the formation of SML on the basis of opinion polls).

The SSP is therefore a leftwing tail or variant of the Scottish National Party. Under such circumstances communists do not dither about whether or not to enter its ranks. Uncertainty empowers and encourages no one apart from enemies and opponents. Therefore the *Weekly Worker* and the CPGB should not, as comrade Craig

demands, "give full support" to those who have yet to "declare their intention" of joining the SSP. We will "give full support" to those, who on the basis of firm principles, refuse to join, and who fight in theory and practice, for a viable alternative based on the interests of working class.

Communists do not demand the SSP *becomes* revolutionary - ie, demand a lie, an illusion; under present conditions the SSP does not contain the theoretical raw material nor the class struggle experience to become revolutionary. No, what communists demand is that the SSP *ceases* to be nationalist. That means more than mere words and pious resolutions. Everything must be subordinated to fighting for, and organising, not a Scottish, but an all-Britain alternative. All-Britain not out of any sense of imperialist nostalgia or red, white and blue patriotism or anything like that. The British state is our main enemy. Here is the necessity for working class unity - to overthrow and replace the constitutional monarchy state (in such a democratic struggle the workers can and must use their own methods and pursue their own class and historic agenda).

Comrade Craig ends his article by bemoaning the lack of a "common perspective" between the CPGB and the RDG. He also complains about the "infamous CPGB 'style of polemics'" and not getting the "kind of 'good vibrations' coming from organisations about to fuse". He cites the SSP as the "latest example". Frankly I am amazed. There are differences of nuance between the majority of the CPGB and the RDG. That is for sure.

However, what strikes me as remarkable is the broad areas of programmatic and political agreement between the two organisations - Scotland and the SSP included. We can search for, highlight, or exaggerate differences. That can have its uses. But when it comes to discussion of communist rapprochement, it is similarity and common thinking that ought to be given pride of place.

Comrade Craig says the CPGB has a better organisation than the RDG. A matter of fact witnessed by our *Weekly Worker*, finances, membership, influence, etc. Against that he claims that the RDG has a superior programme. This writer begs to differ. Unless our comrade is suggesting that designating the Soviet Union as state capitalist is an essential precondition for the merger of our two organisations and the self-liberation of the working class, there is nothing fundamental that separates the CPGB's draft programme and the programme of the RDG. The RDG document has a number of formulations which could beneficially be incorporated into the standing CPGB draft. Nevertheless, on balance it is the latter that is the more comprehensive and honed. Either way, differences between RDG and CPGB comrades can be, ought to be, contained within one fused organisation. That would send a powerful and positive message throughout the workers' movement ●

## 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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Simon Harvey of the SLP

## Divisions at the top

Arthur Scargill's shenanigans have led to demoralisation and disillusionment at the top of the Socialist Labour Party. Imran Khan, Louise Christian and Victoria Brittain are rumoured to be on the point of leaving. Pat Sikorski has also exchanged highly critical correspondence with Scargill.

Our party seems to be facing its worst ever crisis. Scargill has succeeded in marginalising the left and riding roughshod over membership democracy, with any remaining rank and file opposition sullen and disjointed. But now he is faced with divisions at the top. 'Star' comrades like Khan, Christian and Brittain are unimpressed by a *Socialist News* packed full of weirdos, ranters, semi-sociopaths and - in total - pathetic political losers. They dislike the sectarian election tactics of Scargill - his refusal to countenance left unity or alliances. Above all they realise that the SLP is now doomed to be no more than a Scargillite rump on the extreme edge of the political universe.

As to his vice-president, Sikorski, his Fourth International Supporters Caucus is still smarting from its setback at the 2nd Congress of December 1997. Fisc was rocked out of its smug complacency when Scargill used his previously unannounced 3,000 block vote - cast by the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association - to force through the abolition of Fisc's cherished black section.

Former Scargill loyalist Terry Dunn was disgusted not only at the abolition of the black section, but by the manner in which Scargill ensured that his personal programme was imposed on congress through the phantom NWCCMA. Comrade Dunn is standing again for the NEC as a dissident at the November 14 special congress, with the backing of Fisc.

Another major source of friction on the NEC occurred over the Reclaim Our Rights campaign against the anti-union laws. Set up on the initiative of NEC members Bob Crow and John Hendy, ROR gathered support and, along with the Alliance for Workers' Liberty-sponsored Free Trade Unions Campaign and the Communication Workers Union, came together to form the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws. But that was not to Scargill's liking. He was not content with merely being the dominant figure, as he would have been in the United Campaign. He wants the fight for union rights to be an adjunct of 'his' SLP.

But the question which really exacerbated tensions at the top was the debacle over Socialist Labour's 3rd Congress, due on November 14. Our bumbling general secretary sent out notice of congress just four days before the closing date for branch motions. After a whole raft of Constituency

SLPs protested when they missed the deadline, Scargill attempted at first to extend it. But that would have left no time for amendments to be proposed by branches. In the end the NEC hit on the 'solution' of 'postponing' congress until November 1999 - ie, cancelling it altogether. A special congress, with no motions from CSLPs, was called for November 14.

### ■ Down the tube

Short of a miraculous transformation, the SLP cannot be a vehicle for socialism. But that does not mean that our party could not yet win the support of a section of the working class. For example, the frustration and anger of thousands of union militants could find expression in ROR. While Scargill has been well and truly exposed as a labour dictator among the left, millions know him only as an intransigent union fighter. In the event of an upsurge in class struggle, many might turn to him.

This has clearly been demonstrated by the attention we get from time to time in the press. Recently the *Evening Standard* has been giving prominence to the SLP in its coverage of the RMT, particularly in relation to the London underground - "Scargill fights to control RMT" was its headline on October 22. The article warned of an 'SLP takeover' in the forthcoming leadership elections. It speculated that sitting assistant general secretary Vernon Hince could be challenged by comrade Sikorski, while president John Cogger might face comrade Mike Atherton. Also in the frame are comrades Bobby Law and Bob Crow himself. Comrade Crow is already the union's number three, but earlier in the year categorically denied that he would be challenging general secretary Jimmy Knapp. He can afford to bide his time and wait for 57-year-old Knapp to stand down.

What worries the *Standard* is the upsurge in militancy that might arise following election victories for SLP members. Comrade Dave Rix's success in Aslef might at last foretell cross-union cooperation in common struggles. Already London underground workers seem prepared to fight. At present RMT members are about to ballot for strike action over three separate disputes, affecting the Northern, Victoria and District lines. Comrade Law, RMT executive member for the underground and an SLP militant, said he expected "overwhelming support" for action.

The *Evening Standard* is ready to resurrect Scargill as revolutionary bogeyman, as it warns of a new "winter of discontent". This would play into his hands. He might become a hate figure for many middle class commuters, but his rating would go up in the eyes of thousands of militants ●

## Report on meeting with Scottish Socialist Alliance/Scottish Socialist Party

This document featured in the Socialist Workers Party pre-conference internal *Bulletin* No2, berating the SSA/SSP for refusing to contemplate a unified socialist list for next year's Scottish parliamentary elections. The CPGB fully supports the idea behind the SWP's 'Open letter for socialist unity', and considers that the same principle applies in all-Britain elections, particularly those for the European parliament in 1999. The left must unite to maximise the challenge to New Labour

On Friday October 9 Chris Bambery, Julie Waterson and Glasgow organiser Ian Mitchell met with Tommy Sheridan and Allan Green of the Scottish Socialist Alliance. This was a follow up meeting to one held at our request in June to discuss a united socialist list in next May's Scottish parliamentary elections.

The meeting began with them urging us to join the Scottish Socialist Party which is to be launched in February. They argued that all socialists in Scotland could unite in the new SSP. We replied that the SSP was consciously being launched not as a revolutionary party, but as one embracing revolutionaries and reformists, that this blurred the key divide in the working class movement, that historically in such hybrids it was the right wing that called the shots and, lastly, that the SSP's interim programme was left reformist.

Underlying the SSP approach is a pessimism about revolutionary change. At their recent conference one of the keynote speakers contrasted the 1980s, when socialists had a big audience, with the 1990s, when the collapse of the USSR has allowed the right to go on the offensive

The dangers of adapting to reformism were demonstrated by Hugh Kerr MEP (he's joined the SSP) in his opening speech to that conference. He argued that the SSP could hold the balance of power in the Scottish parliament and that "there would be a price to be paid" for SSP support for either the SNP or Labour!

The statement on "equal rights" says nothing about immigration controls, abortion rights or opposition to separate catholic and protestant schools in Scotland. It has none of the sharpness of our Action Programme.

The SSP is also clearly a nationalist party in its call for a Scottish socialist republic. Our position is that we are for the right of the Scottish people to self-determination and would shed no tears over

the destruction of the UK state. Clearly if a referendum on separation was seen as a vote of confidence in Blair we would have no problem voting for separation. But the national question is not like that in Ireland. Ireland was a colony of Britain. For Marx, support for Irish independence was a matter of principle. In contrast, Scots played a full and bloody part in the creation of the British Empire.

Socialists have to say to workers that independence will solve nothing if Scotland remains a low wage economy competing for multinational investment within the EU. 'Silicon Glen' faces ruin as the computer industry collapses into a crisis of overproduction. A Scottish parliament would do nothing to halt that. Workers have to fight for a society based on need rather than private profit.

That centres on a direct confrontation with the ruling class and the state that protects its wealth. Scottish workers should follow the lead of Korean workers at Hyundai who occupied against job losses and won. Scottish workers do not have separate interests to English workers, nor are they more disadvantaged. Socialists reject pan-nationalism, arguing that Scotland is one of the most class-divided nations in the world. Class unity between Scottish, English and Welsh workers isn't something abstract. It is a daily necessity.

The key issue in Scotland is the mounting job losses. The Scottish parliament is powerless to deal with economic affairs. The stress on independence does not address the need for a working class fightback. Disillusionment with New Labour is mounting. There is a very concrete battle being fought over what sort of alternative is on offer between socialists and the SNP. The SSP fudge this divide.

Lastly, the SSA is no bigger than the SWP in Scotland. It does not exist in Aberdeen, scarcely so in Greenock or Paisley. We are bigger in Edinburgh, and in Glasgow it is certainly not larger than us -

though as a high profile city councillor Tommy Sheridan has a personal following.

On the question of the Scottish parliamentary elections, we proposed that all socialists (SSA, SLP and SWP) could unite in a single list and that, whatever our differences, could come together on a limited platform. Each party could put out their own publicity within that.

The way the electoral system is being imposed by the Blairites makes unity imperative (see Charlie Kimber's document in pre-conference *Bulletin* No1). For instance in Glasgow, as elsewhere, you get two votes. One is for the election of an MSP for say, Shettleston, and will be on the traditional first-past-the-post system. You then get a vote for a party list whose votes will be counted across Glasgow and on the basis of which extra seats will be allocated. You can only vote for one list.

The SSA stated they would stand as a party list across Scotland and would not enter into unity. What they were prepared to do was to stand down in a few first-past-the-post seats to allow us to stand.

The way they will run the campaign is by a central push to get as many votes for the SSP list as possible. The key result will be the amount of votes each party list gets. The actual contests for the first-past-the-post seats will be secondary.

The SSA/SSP are clear this is a party building decision which is not open for negotiations. It is a sectarian position. In Wales we have reached agreement for a common list with the Socialist Party and Cymru Goch.

We will meet again in November. In the meantime we should get as many signatures on the 'Open letter for socialist unity' in the elections as possible. We need to make clear who is sabotaging this ●

Chris Bambery, Julie Waterson, Ian Mitchell