



# Taaffe culls opposition

**T**he crisis of the Socialist Party in England and Wales has deepened dramatically with the news that the entire regional committee in Liverpool and their supporters have been suspended for their refusal to sign a seven-point 'loyalty' pledge put to them by Peter Taaffe. The overwhelming majority of members in the area have declared their solidarity with their local leaders and one source estimates that there are now up to 50 members suspended locally, leaving a tiny rump of loyalists around Roger Bannister.

This cull genuinely seems to have come as a shock to many, emphasising just what a panicky, damage-limitation move it has been from the London leadership. The fact that Liverpool was once the jewel in the Militant/SP crown, the area where it sank roots into a section of the class, underlines just how seriously Taaffe is taking any challenge to the integrity of his organisation in the aftermath of the Scottish split.

Speaking to some of the dissenters, I was told that despite the formal 'niceties' of the situation, in effect these suspensions are being widely viewed as expulsions. As one of the leading SPers on Merseyside told me, "That word has not been used ... yet".

Disasters seem to be queuing round the corner to descend on the SP. This internal purge comes in the aftermath of the expulsion of the entire Pakistani section of the Committee for a Workers International, the Pakistan Labour Party. We have reported already (*Weekly Worker* October 15) that the Australian Democratic Socialist Party has been eyeing the Pakistani organisation hopefully, given its increasingly critical stance within comrade Taaffe's 'international'.

Of course, the PLP comrades were also the main international backers of the nationalist self-liquidation of Scottish Militant Labour (*Weekly Worker* May 7), although it seems that 'Scotland' has been a banner of convenience for any manifestation of dissent rather than a real alternative for malcontents against Taaffe. The PLP has also shown solidarity - and possibly, an organisational link-up - with the small ultra-economistic group expelled from SP's fraternal organisation

in the United States, Labour Militant (see *Weekly Worker* October 16 1997). Taaffe's organisation seems doomed to disintegration internationally as well as domestically.

It is hard to tell where this blood-letting will end. Taaffe - true to his petty bureaucrat nature - seems to have embarked on a damage-limitation exercise in the form of administrative amputation to solve *political* problems. This is part of a developing pattern and sets a very dangerous precedent for the future. The path of bureaucratic exclusion will solve none of the organisation's problems, which we have repeatedly shown stem from its fundamental *programmatic* weaknesses.

Militant/SP once boasted that - unlike the "sects" - it was cohesive and not prone to splits or expulsions. Over the last period however, these have become par for the course as it fails to adapt to life outside the committee-room politics of Labourism. Comrade Taaffe's "small mass party" faces extinction - Ted Grant must be feeling smug. The resort to administrative fiat and excommunication is characteristic of a leadership incapable of *politically* preventing descent into the abyss.

Where will be next? As we have shown, the forces tearing the organisation apart are *generalised* pressures engendered by the politics of the group as a whole. Taaffe and his leadership team have proved themselves singularly incapable of fighting these problems on the basis of *principle*. Thus, when a huge concession was made to Scottish nationalism with the granting of 'autonomy' to SML because of "the growth of a clear and distinct national consciousness" (*Members Bulletin* No16, March 18 1996), even Taaffe appeared dimly aware that *generalising* such an approach spelt death for his organisation. The SP's internal bulletin underlined that a 'Scottish turn' everywhere would "lead to the dissipation and eventual break-up of what is at the moment a successful democratic centralist organisation [ie, the SP]" (see *Weekly Worker* February 26 1998).

The *Members Bulletin* of April 2 this year featured an example of the problem. Roy Davies from Swansea

presented the result of "discussions in Wales over the past period". The "Scottish Socialist Alliance offers the answer," he starkly told readers (*Weekly Worker* May 7). This should have been a pretty bleak warning to the national SP leadership - assuming it had the gumption to recognise nationalism.

Throughout the developing crisis the key delusion of Taaffe and the leadership has been the idea that the strength of the organisation lies in the fact that it is "based on a clear revolutionary programme, perspectives, strategy and tactics" (P Taaffe 'Short thesis on the revolutionary party' *Members Bulletin* No16). In fact, rather than revolution, Militant/SP has been committed for *decades* to a reformist strategy for winning socialism, largely indistinguishable from Labour leftists and the opportunists of the Communist Party in the 1970s and 80s.

Taaffe - writing in the organisation's only remotely 'programmatic' document in June 1990 (*Militant: What we stand for*) - envisaged what he chose to call 'socialism' arriving "through an enabling bill in parliament". The activity of the masses is a secondary question, as then leading member Rob Sewell made clear when he underlined that "a socialist Britain can be accomplished through parliament *backed* by the mobilised power of the labour movement outside" (my emphasis - *Militant International Review* No33, autumn 1986, p9).

This reformist approach accounts for the Scottish debacle and the subsequent splits and divisions. Despite himself Taaffe has been unable to avoid this truth, even if he has been blissfully unaware of the fact that he is pointing to it. He has written of how the division between reform and revolution had become "blurred in the minds of some comrades". As a political philistine Taaffe may well actually think it a "paradox" that the "flexible approach" of the SP had a "negative effect" in the ranks, "blurring" the distinction between "mass reformist, left reformist or centrist parties and a Marxist Party" (*Members Bulletin* April 2 1998).

As we have consistently pointed out, there is no paradox. SP is a re-

formist organisation that adapts opportunistically to the political milieu it works in - be that Labourism, feminism, black separatism or Scottish/Welsh nationalism.

Without the *programmatic* means to fight, Taaffe has been reduced to equating the question of the 'revolutionary party' with crude organisational norms like 'weekly meetings', 'collecting dues' and 'recruitment'. Thus when alien political pressures appear in the ranks, they actually appear to have the merit of political coherence or vision compared to the sad grey perspectives of the apparatchik Taaffe. He has displayed the spontaneous reflex of a hack - to defend the *machine*, disregarding what that structure is actually for, whether it is actually fighting for revolution or not.

In Liverpool it appears that we have another example of the "blurring" of the lines the SP leadership has hopelessly attempted to draw around itself as a 'revolutionary' organisation. The politics of the dissidents have been described to me as a modern version of the eclectic, reformist amalgam that was the 'Beyond the Fragments' grouping in the 1970s.

Political lines are yet to crystallise, but the Liverpool grouping appears to be essentially a rightist one. It seems to be questioning the need - or at least, the 'appropriateness' - of party organisation 'during this period'. Instead, the comrades believe that the need is for "broad networks" of activists and thus have been accused of "liquidating the party project" by the leadership. They are even described as "questioning Trotskyism", although this may be another way of saying they have fallen out with Taaffe, of course.

Given the apparent rightist trajectory of the Liverpool comrades, some may be tempted to offer 'critical support' to Taaffe. This would be a mistake. It is precisely the method of this man - learnt from his theoretical mentor, Grant - that has created the crisis. Without a radical break from this method - despite its formal espousal of the need for a 'revolutionary party' against attacks from the right - there can be no positive resolution.

Warning of this Liverpool turn was given months ago. Significantly, the

whole issue of the "Scottish turn, part two" was "injected into a debate on finance by Mike Morris from Merseyside". He did this "in order to reinforce his argument that the financial proposals put forward by the EC" to counteract the organisation's looming crisis "were going too far towards 'a highly centralised structure'" (*Members Bulletin* April 2 1998).

As we commented at the time, "only one" of the centrifugal forces pulling the organisation apart was exerted in the direction of Scotland (*Weekly Worker* May 7). In fact, everything you see in the SP underlines the potential for more splits or expulsions - all going in a myriad of different directions. We predicted that "it can only be a matter of time before the 'Scottish disease' mutates and infects other component parts of the SP" (*Weekly Worker* February 26). It gives us no pleasure to be proved right so quickly.

We certainly support the call of the Liverpool comrades for open discussion and debate of the questions raised by their defiance of the leadership. Remarkably, despite the huge problems that have beset the organisation this year, its dishonest method of polemic-by-inference continues in the CWI International Secretariat's draft resolution on 'World relations' for its conference in November.

In this both the Scottish and Pakistanis are argued with indirectly. First, against SML, the document states it is "unlikely" that Britain will see "a major defection of the left from the Labour Party, either in Scotland or in the rest of Britain in the next period" (*Members Bulletin* 'Seventh world congress' Document 1, October 1998, p13). Then - in an obscure jab at the PLP (and perhaps, also the Liverpool comrades?) - it underlines that "we cannot fill the vacuum which exists at the present time" (p14).

The crisis that is now tearing its way through the SP is - whatever Taaffe suggests - one involving issues of political principle of profound importance to the entire movement. The movement as a whole should therefore have the chance to debate, clarify and learn lessons from the struggle ●

Mark Fischer

# Party notes

## Two schools

Over the weekend of November 7-8, Communist Party comrades and others will come together for an important school to commemorate the 81st anniversary of the October Revolution. The thematic title of this school is 'Against economism', a theoretical and programmatic struggle that presents our organisation with important tasks over the coming years.

Essentially, we believe that the dominant opportunist method of much of the British left consists of this fatal distortion of Marxism. In effect, economism - as espoused by groups such as the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party - represents the codification of 'working class politics' as the politics of a *slave class under capitalism*, not the universal class representing the hegemon of the struggle for democracy in the contemporary world.

We believe that this *Bolshevik* understanding of the tasks of communists is almost entirely absent from the rest of the left. Yet - as the experience of Russia showed - it is an essential prerequisite of any successful revolutionary challenge for power.

This is an important school, therefore. Comrades should have put some effort into preparation and go into it with the understanding that it takes place at the beginning of our critical study of this question, not the end.

Readers will know that our organisation takes the collective education of our comrades seriously. We are critical of our efforts, but believe that they contrast favourably with the philistine approach of others. Instructive in this context is the comparison between our school and the Socialist Party's event the following weekend - Socialism '98.

The dominant ethos in all schools organised by the Communist Party is the struggle to take the debate to the highest level we can, not to limit the tempo and style of exchanges to accommodate the rawest comrade in the room. In order to facilitate this, we invite organisations defending opposing schools of thought to our educational events and facilitate their speaking at and even leading sessions. This allows our comrades to listen, engage with and learn from coherent and (relatively) theoretically sophisticated critiques of the main ideas of our own organisation.

What a contrast to the dull schools in orthodoxy run by the

Socialist Party and the majority of the left.

At these, the 'line' on issues as diverse as 'capitalism crisis' and the evolutionary leap between ape and human is given by an authoritative speaker in some blandly digestible form. A few corroborating interventions are taken from the floor, a couple of questions, then it is time for a summing up. Controversy, argument and sharp divisions are actively *discouraged* - even bureaucratically excluded.

Thus, the advertising blurb for the SP's Socialism '98 consciously dampens expectations that its debate will attempt to stretch people, to get them thinking about new, uncomfortable and challenging ideas. "It is not," we are assured, "aimed at the 'experts' or professional academics. It is an opportunity for anyone who is angry at the poverty and inequality in society, for anyone who is fighting for better pay or free education, to come together to debate socialist ideas" (*The Socialist* October 30).

On one level, how can we disagree? - we certainly do not organise our schools for professional academics to pick fleas out of each other's intellectual egos, with the rest as passive spectators. Yet in fact what is being outlined is an approach to education which tends to hold up a mirror to the *existing consciousness* of militants, misnaming this 'socialist politics' or even 'Marxism'. A good example, in other words, of an *economistic* approach.

On another level, of course, this is all just wishful thinking anyway. In *The rise of Militant*, the old warhorse Peter Taaffe wistfully writes of his approach to cadre development - "It is not possible to take a horse, particularly a young one, out over the Grand National course first time out" (p446).

The idea that during this period the majority of participants in SP schools will be bouncy young foals is simply nonsense. This is a profoundly patronising approach both to any new comrades that do attend and - more importantly - to the majority of the long-time membership of the organisation who have sustained it through thick and thin and who deserve to be treated rather more seriously as political cadre.

We welcome comrades looking to be treated as political adults to our 'Against economism' school and to all other educational events of the Communist Party ●

**Mark Fischer**  
national organiser

## No credit

While respecting Don Preston's right (nay, duty to his writing vocation) to say just about anything provided it is conditional to his assessment of "these specific conditions" - which I presume to be a reference to the current stage of the resolution of the capital-labour contradiction. Nonetheless, his piece 'Saying the unsayable' (*Weekly Worker* October 22) brought no credit to the *Weekly Worker's* 'Around the left' column - rather an image of a 'weakened worker' around the bend was created.

Institutionalised racism does exist in the UK police forces. Even Manchester's police chief acknowledges what UK minorities have been complaining about for years is a problem. Only a middle class, and probably white plonker who likes to flash his Latin ("*reductio ad absurdum*") - I bet *Workers Hammer* are really pissed off to be accused of that by Preston's piece) could be so confused about the important issues covered in 'Saying the unsayable'.

For instance, the mainstream press does coalesce with the left press on issues other than the Stephen Lawrence case. Why else did the relaunch of *Marxism Today* (which the *Morning Star* characterised as the group that took the Marx out of Marxism and put the 'rev' in revisionism) get so much coverage in the mainstream media? If there is an opportunity to dilute communist certainty then the mainstream media apply the maxim that Preston rightly attached to police who "use all and any means".

Naturally, one is suspicious of the *Daily Mail*, but no doubt they get behind other popular issues such as nurses' pay and conditions, and the *Mail* putting their legal budget up against racist thugs is to be welcomed surely as some indicator of perceived common decency amongst its target market. The *Weekly Worker* seeking to be the only left paper posing an argument counter to the Lawrence family point of view cannot in anyway be commendable.

Preston has difficulty accepting that institutionalised racism could be possible, probably because he has not developed a sufficient understanding of racism's true nature - in particular, the part racism plays in the unconscious formation of all national identities. For instance, Preston is reassured by the implausibility of the existence of a "racist cabal" comprising such diverse constituents as the "boys and girls in blue" (Preston's words), judges and the British National Party. It is well known that judges and cops have worked and do work together to pervert the course of justice, and if Preston cannot accept this then it is time for him to devote his writing vocation exclusively to explicit fiction.

However, it is Preston's fantasy that somehow the BNP have to be part of the racist cabal which demonstrates the limitations of his argument. Preston is right in one sense - the only thing one could imagine a judge and a BNP bonehead could possibly have in common is perhaps use of the same prostitute's service. Nazis are not known for their intelligence. Indeed a quick review of their culture - hate, alcohol abuse, mythology, the occult, violence, frenzied white power music, drug abuse and internequine murder - reveals the UK far right as composed of easily led morons who are clearly being tactically manipulated by more powerful agencies.

Preston's concept that the "official ideology of the state" (as apparently received by the readership of *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail*) is anti-racist, and that because of this communists should treat issues around anti-racism with some circumspection, is totally laughable. Such an idea seems to play upon the media creation that is instinctively antipathetic towards political correctness. Why else should one take an anti-anti-racist position unless one is actually a racist oneself - and therefore not a communist. There is little evidence

of political correctness running rampant in police forces, who typically have themselves unrepresentative racial mixes which disadvantages access to well paid public service jobs for minorities inclined to pursue a career in the police.

The idea that "the left as a whole - as a matter of theoretical and political urgency" needs to grasp the "truth" that "racism, like anti-semitism and anti-catholicism, no longer serves the interests of the state" - or that rather than institutionalised racism "the greater danger comes from institutionalised anti-racism" - could only come from someone who looks to the capitalist media for succour.

Consequently, Preston is "missing the point spectacularly".

**Julian Hawthorne**  
Manchester

## New twists

The monthly paper of the Workers Power group now has a new look. It says that this reflects merely a change in style. As we have claimed before, just as New Labour used to be a reformist bourgeois workers' party, so Keith Harvey's New League for a Revolutionary Communist International/WP has been transformed from a healthy revolutionary organisation into an erratic, centrist and closed sect. In a way, this new *Workers Power* expresses WP's deep deformation.

WP introduced its new-look paper with the following promise: "We will make space for contributions from those in the labour movement and on the left who do not agree with us." However, in that issue and the following one there is not a single paragraph given to any critical leftwinger.

In the pages of the *Weekly Worker* there have been numerous exchanges about WP's U-turns. Are WP going to allow such critiques to also appear in *Workers Power*? They have never mentioned the existence of these polemics in their press.

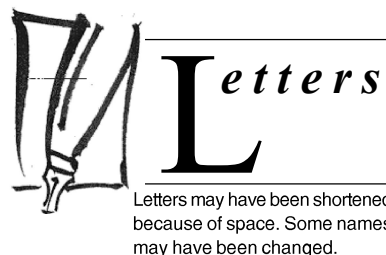
WP members used to go to many meetings in order to criticise the positions of other left groups. Now it is the other way round. They do not go anywhere and no time is allocated for critical speeches in the few public meetings they hold.

*Workers Power* does not even have a letters page. They simply are not interesting in inviting their readers to comment and criticise. They are meant to be passive spectators who have to be told the party line - a line elaborated behind closed doors by a handful of 'revolutionaries'. The paper claims that "WP is the number one leftwing publication for serious analysis and debate, as well as the only really revolutionary paper in Britain".

If they are genuinely serious about analysis they need to answer many things which we and many others have been asking them for years. Why does WP always vote for the Blairites against the left? Why did it do entryist work in the SLP while refusing to support it electorally? Why did it initially support an all-UK perspective and reject demands for Scottish autonomy, and then later - when most Scottish workers wanted devolution - vote 'yes' in the referendum? Why, at the same time, was it against any degree of autonomy for Wales? How on earth can it say that in the last decade the world is simultaneously entering a 'revolutionary period' and a 'counter-revolutionary situation'? Why does WP now say that the creation of (the workers') states in eastern Europe and Asia actually meant the reinforcement of the bourgeois state, even though it described most of eastern Europe and the ex-USSR, as moribund *workers'* states?

WP will never answer. It thinks that a group of 50 people who have never led any mass strike or demonstration is the only revolutionary force in Britain. The WP leadership do not want to listen to other groups' arguments or engage in serious united front activity. It only want fronts it can control. It does not even allow tendencies inside its own ranks.

Tragically, the organisation that was



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

co-founded by Dave Hughes and the South American Poder Obrero is now becoming an irrelevant and arrogant cult.

**John Stone**  
LCMRCI

## Sectarian murder

The callous sectarian murder by loyalists of Stephen Service in the Alliance area of North Belfast is purely sectarian and is to be deplored by all right-thinking people. The murder of yet another nationalist will come as no surprise to the nationalist community in the north of the city, whose homes have been coming under persistent attack in recent months.

The Irish Republican Socialist Party are calling on the RUC to release the forensic history of the weapon used in the murder. It is important that the wider community are told if those who killed Stephen Service at night are masquerading as peacemakers during the day at Stormont. The speculation that the killers are a splinter loyalist group will not wash with nationalists. The history of violent loyalism shows that mainstream loyalism has a pattern of using cover names.

**IRSP**  
Belfast

## A statement from Death Row

Once again, Pennsylvania's highest court has shown us the best justice that money can buy. Ignoring right, reason, their own precedent, and fundamental justice, they have returned to the stranglehold of death. In their echoes of the tortured logic of Judge Albert Sabo, they have reflected a striking fidelity to the DA's office. If it is fair to have a tribunal who are in part admittedly paid by the FOP-and at least one justice who can double as DA one day and a judge the next in the same case—then fairness is just as empty a word as "justice." To paraphrase Judge Sabo, it is "just an emotional feeling."

In recent months the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has upheld death sentences in cases where an impartial reading of transcripts or pleadings would make an honest affirmation all but impossible. They have ignored all evidence of innocence, overlooked clear instances of jury taint, and cast a dead eye on defence attorneys' ineffectiveness. What they have done in my case is par for the course. This is a political decision, paid for by the FOP on the eve of the election. It is a Mischief Night gift from a court that has a talent for the macabre.

I am sorry that this court did not rule on the right side of history. But I am not surprised. Every time our nation has come to a fork in the road with regard to race, it has chosen to take the path of compromise and betrayal. On October 29 1998, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court committed a collective crime: it damned due process, strangled the fair trial, and raped justice.

Even after this legal *legerdemain* I remain innocent. A court cannot make an innocent man guilty. Any ruling founded on injustice is not justice. The righteous fight for life, liberty, and for justice can only continue.

**Mumia Abu-Jamal**  
Pennsylvania, USA

Note: The Pennsylvania state supreme court, after taking 13 months to deliberate, has just handed down a 71-page decision, denying Mumia's appeal for a new trial. The governor of Pennsylvania, Tom Ridge, has said that once his appeal was completed, he would sign a death warrant immediately. Clearly his life is now in immediate danger.

### Weekend school

Central London, November 7-8: 'Against economism'.  
Saturday November 7, morning: 'Iskra and economism'; afternoon: 'Lenin versus imperialist economism'.  
Sunday November 8, morning: '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.

Comrade John Nicholson, joint convenor of the Network of Socialist Alliances, is the latest to polemicise against an organisation whose name he cannot bring himself to utter - the CPGB.

Writing in the October edition of *Socialist Outlook*, comrade Nicholson reports on the September 5 launch conference of the Network. Discussing the morning session, when there was heated debate around the proposed constitution, he agonises over the difficulties his “liberal ‘work with anyone’ approach” cause him and his co-thinkers. The problem is, you see, this approach “forces us to allow the inclusion of those who don’t actually want to work with anyone else!”

Comrade Nicholson makes clear who these awkward, uncooperative types are in his next paragraph. He continues: “Communists genuinely want a mass working class party with a central committee. Some want it based on the ‘UK state’, and do not recognise parallel developments in Scotland or Wales (never mind the situation in the Six Counties of the north of Ireland).

“Socialists working with campaigners from different backgrounds think that a looser federal structure, based on networking and mutual respect, is a more likely and more desirable future. Language varies from the Leninist and its historical truth to the broader demand for dropping words like ‘socialist’ and ‘green’ altogether, focusing instead on ‘social justice and ecological sustainability’.

“This question of orientation is the major fault line running through the debates. And it’s *political*, not organisational (even if it is true that one form of organisation would favour some groups more than the other). So it has to be tackled politically.

“Subordinate to it are questions of affiliation. Should any structure be individual only, should it guarantee places for every affiliated group, or for every local alliance? Who defines what constitutes a ‘group’ or an ‘alliance’? Should it just be simpler in any case?

“And there’s the question of approach. Is it acceptable to be able to join something simply for the purpose of exposing it as not the something you want? If you want a ‘central committee’ about which you can complain for its failure to ‘lead’, why not join an organisation which gives you this, rather than seeking to promote discord amongst comrades who

Socialist Alliances

# For inclusive democracy

.....

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.....

clearly don’t want to be in that sort of organisation?”

First of all, let me point out the utter dishonesty of refusing to name your opponent. Presumably, comrade Nicholson believes that by not specifying the CPGB he is excused from any duty to accurately represent our views. That is not so. Everyone knows who he means and the ‘anonymity’ of the accused does not make such unfounded allegations any less outrageous. Who, for example, are “the splitters in our own ranks” he refers to later in the article?

For an organisation that actually took the initiative in setting up the London Socialist Alliance to be accused of joining “simply for the purpose of exposing it” and to “promote discord” is bizarre, to say the least. It hardly seems worth the effort of replying to such inanity. Nevertheless, let me explain the CPGB’s attitude to working class political organisation in general and the Socialist Alliances in particular.

It is true that we “genuinely want a mass working class party with a central committee”. We would be very strange communists if we did not aim to achieve a Communist Party - although I suspect comrade Nicholson would be surprised by how we understand the democratic centralist organisation upon which it would be based. It should be open to *all* revolutionary socialists who for the moment remain scattered in numerous sects. But such a formation cannot be plucked out of thin air. It certainly cannot be imposed. Its advocates at present constitute a tiny minority in the working class movement.

Far from being on the verge of launching a mass Communist Party, the working class does not even see itself as an independent political force. Therefore we must do everything we can to promote its independence - in particular the new, tentative moves that first see light of day as a break from Labour. That is why we actively supported the formation of the Socialist Labour Party, and we are just as enthusiastic about building the Socialist Alliances. Here in London,

for example, our comrades are continuing to cooperate with others in the setting up of new SAs. But, just as we did in the SLP, we fight within the Alliances for *inclusive democracy*, with space for every tendency - including ourselves - to express their views.

In this regard, comrade Nicholson writes: “Allowing someone to speak, on the grounds of inclusiveness, cannot mean allowing every member of one tendency to take cynical advantage of this and bore everyone else to death. This simply excludes everyone else.”

Here he is attempting to justify his own behaviour, as chair of the September 5 Rugby conference, in quite deliberately refusing to let *leading* CPGB comrades, including myself, speak to our proposals. Of course, had the meeting agreed to extend the debate on structure to allow *every* comrade who wanted to speak to take part in the discussion, as we proposed, then no such problem would have arisen. But comrade Nicholson and others opposed allowing as much time as necessary for the most important item on the conference agenda.

The Network cannot be a Communist Party, nor are we attempting to make it one. Repeating *ad nauseam* that we want it to be led by a “central committee” does not make it true. Rather than caricaturing what we stand for, it might even be worthwhile actually looking at the structure we proposed at the Rugby conference and comparing it with the proposals put forward by the unelected Liaison Group.

Whereas the Liaison Group, of which comrade Nicholson is a member, wanted a leadership to be elected at an annual conference, we called for a system of automatic representation on the Liaison Committee for affiliated political organisations and local Alliances. The Welsh Socialist Alliance, whose first annual conference takes place this weekend, is proposing a similar structure. Each affiliate would retain full autonomy and the leading committee would be controlled *from below*. Every delegate

on the Liaison Committee would represent a particular constituency, would be accountable to it and could be replaced immediately. It would be a structure that reflected the nature of the Network as an *alliance*. By contrast proposals for a directly elected committee and officials are more suited to an established *party*. Officials who owe their position to an annual plebiscite can claim to speak for the whole, but in reality are not accountable to any constituency. Ironically it was the Liaison Group’s proposals, supported by comrade Nicholson, which would land the Network with a leading body resembling a “central committee”.

What of the accusation that, in our enthusiasm for organising socialists across the UK state, we “do not recognise parallel developments” in Scotland, Wales and the Six Counties? We “recognise” only too well that the Scottish Socialist Alliance/ Scottish Socialist Party has now completed its embrace of nationalism, thus splitting the working class movement *against* the UK state. Thankfully the Welsh Socialist Alliance has not adopted such an overtly nationalist course, but what is wrong with all comrades coming together in one all-Britain network, while retaining their national, regional and local autonomy? There is no Welsh or Scottish state to be overthrown. Why *exclude* comrades from the *united* fight against the UK state? However much we support the right to self-determination in Scotland and Wales, we only advocate separatism in the most exceptional circumstances (such as Ireland). We must organise against the *existing* state.

It is clear from the tone of comrade Nicholson’s article that, in the name of “mutual respect” and “inclusiveness”, he actually wants to *exclude* the CPGB. He has already seen to it that the CPGB is in effect excluded from the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance, where he is the convenor. This attitude does not augur well for the future of the Network ●

Anne Murphy  
Convenor, London Socialist Alliance

## action

### ■ CPGB seminars

London: Weekend school - no seminar this week

Manchester: 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.

### ■ Welsh Socialist Alliance

First annual conference: Saturday November 7, 10am - 5pm, Central Hotel, St Mary’s Street, Cardiff.

### ■ 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 further 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.

### ■ London Marxist Discussion Forum

Public meeting: ‘Building a rank and file movement’. Sunday November 8, 2-5pm. Calthorpe Arms, Grays Inn Road, near Kings Cross. Speakers: Steve Hedley (Sacked RMT rep at Euston); Mark Sandell (Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, CWU Broad Left). All welcome - plenty of time for discussion.

### ■ Support Tameside careworkers

Support Group meets every Monday, 7pm, at the Station pub, Warrington Street, Ashton under Lyne. Donations and solidarity to Tameside Unison, 29 Booth Street, Ashton under Lyne.

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## Fighting fund

## Upbeat

Trade and industry secretary Peter Mandelson wants us to believe the burgeoning financial crisis is a figment in the minds of the media. They are suggesting “the end of the world is nigh”, he complained, when in fact business is relatively upbeat. Well, pessimism is something *Weekly Worker* readers will have none of, as we fight to prepare our class to ‘do business’, using the opportunities that Gordon Brown’s real difficulties throw up.

Thanks to comrade MN for a brilliant £100 donation to mark the 81st anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and to MZ and MM for new bankers orders. The November fund stands at £185 towards a £400 target. Another excellent start! ●  
Ian Farrell

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



I don't know how much longer it will take before Mark Fischer finishes off his weekly column with a few verses from *Rule Britannia*, but before his ingrained British Marxism takes him to further depths, perhaps your readers would like to be better informed of the political situation in Scotland. For although the *Weekly Worker* borders on the indulgent when it comes to printing articles by individual Trotskyists (but please continue, nevertheless) when it comes to organised tendencies in Scotland (other than SML) the CPGB-Provisional Central Committee goes out of its way to keep its readership in England uninformed and ignores or suppresses political challenges to its politics.

Mark has a problem when he attacks the new Scottish Socialist Party as a "centrist-reformist-nationalist bloc" without any evidence of "a communist pole of the contradiction ... expressed in the party's formation, its structure or founding principles". If this description applies to the new SSP, it applies even more so to the Scargill Labour Party, which the CPGB-PCC so enthusiastically embraced, and continued to encourage people to remain members of, even after the most flagrant violation of elementary democratic norms at its last congress.

Now Mark is aware of this contradiction. However, his attempt to resolve it is extremely lame. We can agree that the declaration of the SSP is a step backwards for revolutionary politics, but it certainly has not reached the depths of political degeneration shown in the SLP so well chronicled each week by Simon Harvey. Mark resorts to a sleight-of-hand technique, in trying to paint the SLP in the best possible colours - but even so he fails. He points out that the SLP "was a break to the left from Labour by a small layer of militant workers led by one of the most important trade union leaders of this century ... There is no comparison with the formation of the SSP." Well, if we are going back to the time of the declaration of the SLP, the comparison should be with the formation of the Scottish Socialist Alliance, not the SSP. Mark is quite right to say there is no comparison, but it is the Scargill Labour Party which is found wanting in comparison.

During the 1984-5 miners strike, Scargill shone out in comparison with any other union general secretary (and most other union officials). However, by the time of the SLP's declaration, Scargill's politics had very much degenerated. We can therefore rejig Mark's political characterisation of the SSP to fit the SLP more accurately - 'reformist, centrist and nationalist'. The reformists are represented by Scargill and a coterie of broad left trade union officials. The centrist minority - and decidedly right-moving centrists at that - are represented by the 'secret' Trotskyist and Stalinist factions. All this is tied together by a very British nationalism with a common acceptance of the 'British road to socialism' and some fairly blatant chauvinist political positions, including support for immigration laws.

Now exactly where was the expression of communism in the "party's formation, its structure or founding principles" of the SLP? Despite Scargill having his 'interim' constitution drawn up by a QC, neither the self-declared communists nor 'revolutionary' democrats forced an open challenge to this obviously anti-democratic imposition at the SLP's founding meeting. Compared even with the old Labour Party, the SLP's democratic procedures were found wanting.

However, if Mark can summon up the political honesty to recognise all this, he will still be left with one fallback position of defence. The SLP may well be an anti-communist, but

# Some Scottish enlightenment

The Communist Tendency replies to Mark Fischer

reaucratic sham of a party led by a would-be labour dictator - but, by god, it's British!

So how does this compare with the foundation of the Scottish Socialist Alliance? The real impetus for the SSA undoubtedly had its roots in the massive wave of class struggle shown in the anti-poll tax revolt. The first anti-poll tax group was initiated in Edinburgh by an alliance of Scottish socialists, republicans and anarchists. The 'Brit left' initially held back. However, Militant found those of its working class supporters not tied up in the Labour Party and trade union machine champing at the bit.

So right-centrist Militant was being pushed left, on the back of a great working class victory, round about the time when left reformist Scargill was moving right in the face of defeats. The flushing of SML out of Labour also saw the beginnings of a considerable change in Militant practice from their previous dogmatic sectarianism to a more open, less sectarian willingness to engage in debate and united actions with others outside Labour. This was the spirit they brought to the founding conference of the SSA, where tendency rights were recognised at all levels.

We can take this comparative examination of the course of class struggle further to help explain the relative strength of the SSA in Scotland, compared to the SLP in 'Britain'. The SSA took the lead in the very successful 'Save Our Schools' campaign in Glasgow, marked by militant tactics such as school and council chamber occupations. It also played a prominent part in the Glacier workers' victory, which was also won by an occupation.

In contrast, despite (or, more accurately, because of) the elevated status awarded to left trade union officials in the SLP, their utterly tokenistic 'opposition' has produced no real action in the one union they claim strength in - the RMT; their leading members in the important Liverpool dockers' strike (initiated from below by rank and file dockers) tended to represent the more conservative, trade union routinist and left Labour nostalgic wing of the dispute's leadership. SLP members in Scotland did not join the vibrant support committees in Edinburgh and Glasgow and, despite being a 'British' organisation, it was left to others, including SML, to organise regular tours of dockers and Women on the Waterfront to Scotland. And if we look to Scargill's NUM itself, what have we seen so far? Well, nothing much really - apart from the phantom votes of the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners' Association!

However, when SML initiated Militant's break from Labour, there was another major political factor which had to be confronted. In Scotland, the anti-poll tax revolt had also brought back the issue of the national question with a vengeance.

The destruction of a central plank of government policy; the enforced resignation of a prime minister and the return of the national question (at the same time as a growing republi-

can challenge in the 'Six Counties' after the failure of the Anglo-Irish Agreement) led to a dramatically changed political situation in Scotland. It was precisely the impact of the democratic issue of Scottish self-determination which placed Scottish politics in advance of those in England and Wales, and marked out Glasgow as the cockpit of class struggle in 'Britain'. This higher level of politics also informed the later economic and social struggles in the city too, which led to victories, when virtually everywhere else our class was going down to defeat after long drawn out struggles.

It was left to a very recent convert, Tony Blair, to devise a wider policy of constitutional reform - devolution all round and a reformed monarchy - capable of meeting ruling class needs in the very much changed political situation since Thatcher originally came to office. He was no less determined for all that. Like that late convert, the Liberal prime minister Gladstone in the 19th century, Blair became an advocate of constitutional reform of the union, to create a new framework for the benefit of British capital.

Along with the majority of the 'Brit left', Militant's Marxism was deeply economist. They could rise to, respond to and offer organisational help to a working class pushing forward on economic and social issues, including, when pushed hard enough, breaking with Labour and by-passing the trade union bureaucracy. But faced with the need since 1988 to provide a courageous political leadership over the political and democratic issue of Scottish self-determination, SML was still trapped by its past.

When confronted with this new political challenge, Militant remembered its half-forgotten devolutionist past from the 1970s. Its underlying economist politics filled some members with doubts. They would prefer continued concentration on 'real class' and 'bread and butter' issues. But Militant had always supplemented its trade unionism with a political support for Labour. So openly tail-ending the ruling class's liberal political alternative of devolution was easier for them than, say, for the SWP, which puts an even more economic emphasis on trade unionism and 'real class' issues.

The timing of the founding of the SSA was also significant. Although there were still victorious economic and social struggles, Dewar's political strategy already had had considerable success in rolling back the embryonic republicanism displayed at the height of the anti-poll tax struggle. For communists and revolutionary democrats, quite clearly, the main political task throughout this period, and particularly in the period of Blair's plebiscite, was to make this republicanism politically visible again. However, trying to persuade SML members of such a strategy became more difficult, despite them being more open to debate, now that old certainties no longer held. With the political movement in retreat, it was easier for SML leaders to persuade

economically trained members that the only option was that offered by the liberal wing of the ruling class or the SNP.

As a result of SML's capitulation to New Labour it was left to the two much smaller organised tendencies inside the SSA - the then CPGB-PCC, and the RWT and Edinburgh Republicans - to organise. However, the CPGB-PCC introduced other fatal British Marxist characteristics to their campaign. First was the decision to set up their 'Campaign for Genuine Self-Determination' as a 'Party' front, not a united front. When the Edinburgh Republicans asked Anne Murphy (sent to Scotland as organiser/'minder') for a founding meeting to discuss aims and tactics, we were told these had been predetermined by the CPGB-PCC and were not open to change (Scargill is not alone in insisting on proprietorial rights in his organisation).

Secondly, there appeared to be an opportunist tinge to the proposed campaign. Edinburgh Republicans also thought that the republican nature of the campaign should be highlighted in its name. The CPGB-PCC's subheading was 'For a parliament with full powers'. This was originally SML's slogan and has pushed them in a more SNP constitutional direction. Perhaps it is not surprising then that *The Times* mistook the CPGB-PCC's campaign for an ultra-nationalist one!

In the face of CPGB-PCC sectarianism, the Edinburgh Republicans formed the Campaign for a Scottish Republic, which democratically debated its platform, name and tactics. We were able to win the Edinburgh branch of the SSA to republican politics for the majority of the campaigning period, so official Edinburgh SSA republican leaflets were produced and distributed. Independent campaign material was produced too, including stickers for use on the ballot papers. A united campaign would have had more impact, but that door was closed by the CPGB-PCC. We produced a sober political assessment afterwards, in contrast with the histrionics and hype that characterised the *Weekly Worker*. As a result we were later able to form the Red Republicans and extend our membership to Glasgow and Dundee.

However, there was an even more fatal flaw in the CPGB-PCC's politics. It does not recognise Scotland as a nation and claims that Scots are merely a minority nationality (ethnic group) within a British nation. This theoretical position is so racist, it gives succour to the most reactionary wing of Scottish nationalism, which has expressed itself in Scottish/Settler Watch and the Scottish Separatist Group (SSG). They also define the people of Scotland in ethnic/cultural terms. The SSG arrived at an identical political recommendation to the CPGB-PCC on the day of the Blair's plebiscite - stay at home! Following the logic of their theoretical position, the CPGB-PCC should have been arguing that Scots living anywhere in the UK (or 'Britain') had the right to vote but not the non-Scots living in

Scotland! (The insistence that Scotland is not a nation is even more bizarre, when the *Weekly Worker* (October 8) awards nation status to Kosova. It is doubtful whether anyone living in Kosova considers themselves part of a Kosovan nation - most think they are Albanian.)

Unfortunately, the balance sheet of CPGB-PCC intervention in Scotland has proven to be negative. This is underlined by the collapse of your political presence here, which cannot be attributed to the personal failings of two comrades. Therefore, when Mark devotes another column designed to further weaken communist and republican politics in Scotland (and hence the rest of the UK) he needs to be brought to task.

Mark and the CPGB-PCC really must take a more critical look at that rusty old weapon which they think will smite all opposition - 'One state, one party'. We have already offered a critique of this in our reply to Jack Conrad - 'Fight for the right to Party', submitted as part of the contribution to communist rapprochement. Significantly it was not printed, nor has it been quoted in the *Weekly Worker* or other CPGB-PCC publications. Maybe an organisation which believes that our class's future history will just be a rerun of the Bolshevik experience in 1917 can ignore the lessons of the rest of this century. That the 'One party, one state' formulation has so readily been extended in official and Trotskyist 'communist' hands to 'One party, one state, one leader' must give others pause for thought, especially when it is identical to the political principle of the fascists. Those who so loosely bandy the term 'national socialist' should perhaps look closer to home.

Now, undoubtedly the majority decision to change the SSA to the SSP makes the job of organising revolutionary politics harder. The declaration of a party was strenuously opposed by both Red Republicans and the Campaign for a Federal Republic. However, the republicans inside the SSA and now the SSP have been far more successful in defending democratic rights than the CPGB-PCC in the SLP. The SSP still remains better positioned to influence class struggle positively, although the same difficult struggle against economism and nationalism remains - but it does so in 'Brit left' organisations too, to an even greater extent.

Worker republicans do not run away from struggle because of setbacks - especially when there is still official provision for a fightback. Therefore the Red Republicans urge all members to stay inside the SSP. We also urge others to join to further build worker republican politics. Mark's prescription for communists and democratic republicans in the SSP to leave would merely further disorganise revolutionaries in Scotland. It is a calculated wrecking move - a move he did not seem able to contemplate when faced with a much worse regime and poorer prospects in the SLP.

Mark's Union Jack 'underpants' are revealed for all to see ●

# Universal strategy

**Dave Craig** of the Revolutionary Democratic Group poses the politics of revolutionary democracy in opposition to economism

Over the last two weeks there have been exchanges in the *Weekly Worker* over the fact that the component parts of the Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency (RDCT) - the CPGB and RDG - have no common programme, perspective or organisation. What we do have is a common approach to politics expressed in the RDCT platform and the joint theses on rapprochement and factions.

The platform of our proto-tendency is based on four slogans: 1. For revolutionary democracy; 2. For workers' power; 3. For international socialism; 4. For world communism.

First, to clear up one misconception. Revolutionary democratic communism means 'the revolutionary democratic road to world communism'. It does not mean democratic communism or democratised communism. Democracy implies a form of state or organisation. A communist society is one in which the state, and hence democracy, has withered away.

Historically Marxism in Russia at the turn of the century divided between the politicians (ie, Bolsheviks), who emphasised the primacy of revolutionary political struggle for democracy and its connection with the economic struggle, and the 'economists', for whom the economic struggle came first and politics followed. The latter strategy was called 'lending the economic struggle itself a political character'.

The revolutionary democratic road is a universal political strategy that can be applied by working class parties in each state according to the specific historical circumstances. It will be applied differently in for example a colonial country, a fascist state, a federal monarchy or a multinational state with a national question.

Naturally and inevitably this is opposed by modern economic communists. They have in their theoretical armoury a stageist theory of democracy. They believe that a revolutionary approach to democracy is only applicable in 'backward countries'. So-called advanced countries have already passed through the 'democratic stage' during which the bourgeoisie 'solved' the democratic question. Only in backward countries does the question of democracy remain a contested question of the class struggle.

Revolutionary democratic communists do not view the question of democracy and the state as an historical stage. It is the terrain on which the continuing political struggle between the classes is fought out. The struggle for democracy can never end until the bourgeoisie has been ousted from power. The bourgeoisie can no more 'solve' the problem of democracy than they can end unemployment and poverty wages. The very idea that the problems of democracy are 'solved' in countries like the USA, the UK or France can only disarm the working class and restrict it to trade unionist politics.

If the revolutionary democratic road is ruled out for 'advanced' countries, then politics is reduced to the variants of syndicalism, anarchism, nationalism and liberal democracy or democratic reformism. These economic roads to communism represent so many false trails, dead ends and roads to nowhere.

We can compare the revolutionary democratic road to communism with the politics of the old CPGB and the SWP in the 1970s and 1980s. The CPGB advocated the *British road to socialism*. This was the most widely known and debated programme within

the Marxist movement until the 1980s. The *British road* was opposed to workers' power (ie, the dictatorship of the proletariat, RDCT point 2). It was in favour of a reformed bourgeois democracy (compare RDCT point 1) which could then introduce 'socialism' in Britain. This was a liberal democratic, not a revolutionary democratic, approach. The *British road* was a parliamentary road to national socialism (compare RDCT point 3) or state capitalism. Neither was there any concept of world communism - except for those dreaming of a Stalinist takeover of the world.

How does the RDCT platform compare to the SWP? The SWP certainly deployed the slogans of 'workers' power and international socialism'. This placed the SWP as a left critic of the *British road*. The SWP did not advocate world communism. Perhaps more significantly it did not have a revolutionary attitude to bourgeois democracy and thus adapted to it. Whilst posing as 'leftists against bourgeois democracy', the SWP could not prevent themselves voting Labour at every election and supporting Scottish and Welsh devolution.

In supporting the revolutionary democratic communist platform, we take a stand against the *British road* and against the SWP's syndicalism and ultra-leftism. However, it is important to emphasise the function and purpose of the platform. We can criticise a bicycle because it is not an aeroplane and cannot fly. But a bicycle is not designed for this. It has no wings nor jet engine. A bicycle can nevertheless serve a very useful function as a limited means of transport. Our platform is not a programme. Neither does it provide a complete or final definition of for example socialism or communism. It is not set in stone or impossible to improve upon.

The platform is a set of parameters, which point the way to communism, and within which different shades of opinion amongst revolutionary democratic communists can come together to begin serious debate and programmatic work. It seeks to provide a bridge which will bring us together from different starting points. It is not a blank sheet of paper whose purpose is not to alienate anybody. We are not trying to reconstruct a communist tower of babble in which a 1,000 different types of communist shout about everything under the sun. Our platform is designed to distinguish the friends and allies of revolutionary democracy from our economic opponents. It aims to separate us from them.

*Marxist Bulletin* comrades have said they do not disagree with the wording of the platform. This is just as valid a starting point as saying, 'we agree'. It is possible to say that the statement on world communism is inadequate. It does not define communism with sufficient precision. But if there is no disagreement with the wording then we should work more closely together. The platform is merely the starting point and not the end.

I would like to see all three organisations, the CPGB, RDG and *Marxist Bulletin*, having serious discussions on programme, perspectives and organisation. We are still waiting to get the exact position of the RWT, now called the Communist Tendency, to

find out if they will come on board. We have some clues in recent comments by the CT's Allan Armstrong.

Allan writes: "Points 3 (international socialism) and 4 (world communism) need to be opposed. They do not form an adequate basis to form a genuine communist tendency. Points 1 (revolutionary democracy) and 2 (workers' power) appear to be adequate." He says: "Revolutionary democracy is perhaps a useful term to describe our attitude towards both politics and organisation when the bourgeoisie is in power." It seems on the face of it that Allan is a revolutionary democratic communist, who disagrees over the platform's definition of socialism and communism. Because the platform has either an inadequate or wrong definition of communism, he thinks "the platform doesn't even reach first base".

I understand in general terms where he is coming from: namely, Marx's *Critique of the Gotha programme*. However I am unable to understand exactly his position because he has not been concrete enough on points 3 and 4. He does not tell us exactly which words or formulations he disagrees with. The worst case scenario is that Allan is simply a nationalist who does not mind the words 'socialism' and 'communism', but does not like the fact that we have attached them to the words 'international' and 'world'. Alternatively it may be that Allan does not object to any of the words, but considers they are inadequate because the issue of the abolition of the law of value is not dealt with. In this case the platform might be inadequate even though he does not disagree with the actual wording.

There would be nothing to exclude the CT from joining with us and organising discussions on the law of value. I would like to see them join with us as an autonomous group. However, from Allan's comments so far, nobody can be sure that the basic problem between us is not so much communism as nationalism.

The debate with Ian Donovan has been taking place in recent issues of *Weekly Worker* involving both myself and Jack Conrad. My concern is limited to the question of revolutionary democracy and economism in relation to the RDCT platform. I am therefore defending the agreed positions of the RDG and the CPGB.

So far I have accused Ian of being a follower of the theories of economism. He gives primacy to the economic struggle. He has a theory of the 'democratic stage' in which the revolutionary struggle for democracy only applies in backward and not economically 'advanced' countries. Consequently Ian either ignores bourgeois democracy and simply counterposes workers' democracy, or at other times, reacting to spontaneous movements, he advocates democratic reforms, not democratic revolution (see *Weekly Worker* August 27). This has been said before. So I want to take the debate on a little further to the question of the constituent assembly.

Lenin explained in 'The nascent trend of imperialist economism' that one of the characteristics of economism was its inconsistent and illogical attitude to democracy. In a follow-up article, Lenin attacks one of the chief imperialist economists, Kievsky. He draws attention to "the

contemptuous attitude of the imperialist economist towards democracy" (the same attitude shared by Ian Donovan).

Lenin exposes the falsity of Kievsky's arguments against democratic demands. He says: "Kievsky is very angry when told that he has given way to fear, to the extent of rejecting democracy in general. He is angry and objects: I am not against democracy, only against one democratic demand, which I consider 'bad'. But though Kievsky is offended, and though he 'assures' us that he is not 'against' democracy, his arguments - or more correctly, the endless errors in his arguments - prove the very opposite" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 23, p23).

Kievsky was only against one democratic demand - the right of nations to self-determination. Ian is only against the democratic demand for a republic. He assures us that he is not against other democratic demands. He assures us he is not an economist. He is only an inconsistent democrat. Therefore he is not against proportional representation or the right of nations to self-determination. But he is absolutely and totally opposed to a democratic republic. Communism might be a spectre haunting Europe, but a democratic republic is the bogeyman that has frightened Ian to death.

Ian is well aware that we are teasing him about British 'democracy'. We are saying he is an ultra-left - in other words a 'softie'. In the face of this teasing he is determined to prove us wrong. Now he never hesitates to tell us he is in favour of abolishing the monarchy immediately. The is just as militant and revolutionary about this as the RDG and CPGB. His only difference is that he opposes the call for a republic. He is anti-monarchy and anti-republican.

What is Ian's strange brew of anti-monarchist-anti-republicanism? Logically it can only mean abolishing the monarchy at the same moment as parliament is abolished. If the monarchy is abolished and parliament or a constituent assembly still exists then we have a republic. But that is what Ian is so hostile to. There can be no call for a constituent assembly to draft a republican constitution, since this would contradict anti-republicanism.

Ian therefore makes the condition for the abolition of the monarchy so restrictive that the queen and the royals can rest easy in their beds. They know that Ian will be fighting tooth and nail against a republic and a constituent assembly. Our position is that we are for the immediate and unconditional but critical abolition of the monarchy. That means a democratic republic which would be a step forward from the current constitutional monarchy. How much of a step forward will very much depend on which class or classes carries out this task and whether they use revolutionary tactics. This does not in any way prevent or delay the transfer of power to soviets when that is possible.

Recently I was given a copy of the platform that Ian put out for the Network of Socialist Alliances conference in Rugby. This contains democratic demands including the abolition of all discrimination and oppression, the abolition of the monarchy and House of Lords and the strict separation of churches from the state. We can all

agree on this list. But he fails to call for the abolition of parliament. In other words by accident he has implicitly called for a democratic republic. He just did not have the guts to be honest and say so. So Ian is a closet republican. His republic is one that dare not speak its name. Equally he fails to mention what he will do with the parliaments in Wales and Scotland. This is inconsistent with his declared position.

Ian then says he wants to "consolidate" this democratic secular republic (the same one he is opposed to) "through the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by a socialist society" on the basis of "democratic administration". Presumably Ian means workers' councils, not parliament. I certainly have no problem with the aim of 'consolidating' the democratic republic by transferring power to workers' councils. But that is not so much 'consolidating' as abolishing parliament and smashing the bourgeois state.

Finally let us turn to the question of the constituent assembly. A constituent assembly is the highest form of parliament because it is elected for the specific purpose of drafting a new constitution. Such assemblies only appear on the scene at times of deep crisis within the system of government. They signal the possible replacement of one system of government by another. Such situations are rare and filled with revolutionary potential.

Lenin set out the tactics of revolutionary republicanism in 1905. It was to take power at the head of the mass movement and establish a provisional revolutionary and republican government. This government would deal with any attempted counterrevolution and convene a constituent assembly through which the people could decide on a new constitution. This predicted the course of events in 1917, except that the provisional government sought every trick to delay convening a constituent assembly. The Bolsheviks carried out a very successful agitation against the delay.

The Bolsheviks did not counterpose the constituent assembly to soviets until the working class had taken power. Until that point they fought for the most radical bourgeois democratic demands such as the constituent assembly *alongside* the building of soviet power.

The logic of Ian's position is that revolutionary republican tactics are ruled out - not only for the UK, but for any advanced capitalist country. For example in France in 1968 calling for a constituent assembly would be ruled out because France was already 'democratic' under De Gaulle's constitution. According to stageism, the slogan of a constituent assembly is only relevant for backward countries.

In the UK therefore Ian is against the idea of a workers' party using revolutionary republican tactics as the means of abolishing the monarchy. Today the possibility of abolishing either the monarchy or parliament seems a long way off. But it is clear that the workers' movement will have to face up to the future of the British monarchy which is on the political horizon even now. This is what we should prepare for.

Unfortunately if the working class adopted Ian's anti-republican theory it would prevent the class being in the vanguard of democratic advance. It would confine workers to the politics of trade unionism - and democratic reforms within the framework of the constitutional monarchy ●

# Opportunity to fight

**T**he Jenkins report on electoral reform is an important document - not just for the bourgeois parties, but also for us. As communists, we have no illusions about bourgeois democracy. We know it is a sham, an ideological mystification behind which lurks the reality of class rule. Far from *empowering* the people, parliament serves as an instrument to *oppress* them - democratic though it may be in *form*, in *content* it is no more than an elective dictatorship. Nonetheless, the CPGB has stood candidates in parliamentary and other elections and we shall do so again.

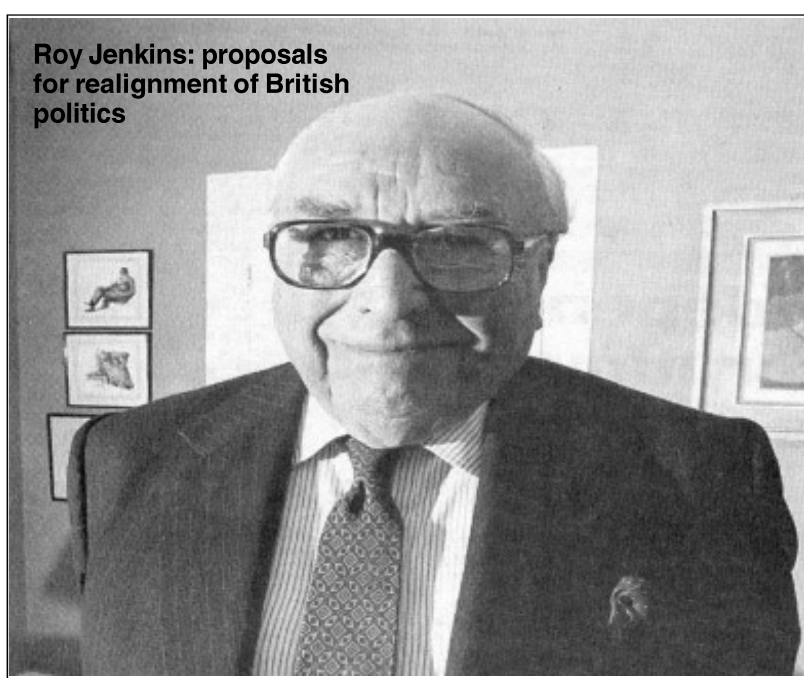
The philistine and immature left sees in this approach a contradiction where there is none. Of course, we treat with contempt all the paraphernalia of parliamentary cretinism, with its pseudo-gladiatorial combat between the establishment parties - all of whom, give or take a few nuances, are in business to promote capitalism. For us, elections and participation in bourgeois parliaments represent a weapon - not only are they valuable instruments of propaganda and agitation, but also a means of getting in touch with the mass of the people and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of our organisation.

It is with these considerations in mind that comrades should study Jenkins and analyse its implications for bourgeois democracy in Britain. In this article we only have space to consider two areas. First, its significance for the major bourgeois parties; second, its likely impact on the disposition of political forces in parliament, if and when it is implemented.

In the first place, Jenkins raises some interesting political dilemmas for all the major parties: Blair needs electoral reform, but *not yet* - his vision of a 'radical' 21st century dominated by the 'centre-left' demands it, but to push for it now, given Labour's invincible majority and excellent prospects for the next election, would mean unnecessarily exposing divisions that run right through the parliamentary party from the cabinet downwards; Ashdown needs it *now* - to sustain his credibility as leader and to give the Liberal Democrats some hope for the next election, but since Blair has all the cards, Ashdown will not get it; the Tories, who perceive themselves as the most likely losers from any change in the *status quo*, are dead set against it, but playing King Canute will also exact a political price.

It is Ashdown for whom the Jenkins report represents not only a long-term opportunity, but also an acute embarrassment. What is an undoubted lifeline for his party may turn into a noose for his own political fortunes. After the 1997 election, his principal argument for persuading his party to get into bed with Labour in an informal coalition was that he could induce Labour to honour its unambiguous manifesto commitment to conduct a referendum on electoral reform *before* the next election. It is pretty clear now that this is not going to happen. The Liberal Democrats must wonder whether the sacrifice of their virtue was worth it after all. More to the point, they will be compelled yet again wearily to march up and down the hill of an inequitable system that has brought them nothing but unfulfilled dreams.

Adept as he is at making the best of a losing position, even Ashdown cannot disguise the poverty and powerlessness of his party's situation. Obligated by reality to shift his stance, he now maintains that "he would not regard postponement as a breach of



**Roy Jenkins: proposals for realignment of British politics**

faith if there were no good reasons" (*Breakfast with Frost* November 1). The "good reasons" are already taking shape, in the form of a face-saving plan hatched by Blair and Ashdown to include measures for further reform of the House of Lords in the planned referendum, measures that would inevitably take up a lot of time in discussion and drafting. Ashdown even has the cheek to tell us that he "is not in the business of closing off options" (*ibid*) - as if he *had* any options to "close off" - except perhaps that of breaking off the engagement with Blair and taking himself and his party into the wilderness.

Blair and Labour are confronted by challenges of a different kind. Their motive for enshrining a commitment to electoral reform in the 1997 election manifesto was prudential: though he had every reason to be confident of victory, Blair needed to ensure Liberal Democrat support in the event of a close contest. In the event, May 1 1997 changed everything. Labour's landslide victory and huge parliamentary majority based on a mere 43% of the national vote - itself another eloquent reflection of the inequities of the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system - meant that he could deal with the Liberal Democrats from a position of overwhelming superiority. Another consequence of 1997 was the Tories' panic-stricken election of a leader so inept that he has managed to open up all their old festering wounds and stoke up what amounts to open civil war in his own party over the question of Europe.

Against this backdrop, it is difficult to conceive of any circumstances in which Blair can lose the next election under FPTP. He will almost certainly find himself with a reduced majority, but the chances of defeat seem so unlikely as to be negligible. Of course, Blair wants and needs the Liberal Democrats in the long term as coalition partners. Hence he will do everything he can - short of implementing Jenkins now - to keep them on board. But he has "good reasons" of his own for procrastination.

Foremost among them is the existence of major divisions in Labour's ranks over the whole question of FPTP versus some form of PR. It is doubtful whether even Blair could muster a majority in his own cabinet in support of reform: Prescott and Straw are against it and others, like Margaret Beckett, are pronounced 'sceptics'. In the parliamentary party some 100 members are supposedly prepared to back Stuart Bell's First Past The Post group, which is already mobilising

support for an attempt to overturn Jenkins at the next party conference. According to one report in *The Daily Telegraph*, Bell has even begun discussions with the Tory chairman, Michael Ancram, in order to coordinate cross-party opposition to reform and has plans to raise a £200,000 war chest for the fight (October 31). As someone with no promotion prospects and a large private fortune, Bell is unlikely to be cowed by the bovine boys of Millbank. He could cause Labour much trouble in the months ahead.

Small wonder, therefore, that Blair's response to Jenkins was not exactly effusive: earlier he was said to be 'unpersuaded' of the case for reform at Westminster (an interesting sidelight on the seriousness of Labour's manifesto commitment); now he says of the Jenkins report: "I welcome it warmly. The report makes a well-argued and powerful case for the system it recommends" (*The Guardian* October 30). Straw's initial assessment, that the well-leaked report was "more complicated than the government had expected", strained credulity, but it served as a suitable pretext for insisting on a protracted debate about the whole issue. Significantly, the government's official spokesperson was obliged to brief the press *against* the cabinet opponents of Jenkins, who were satisfied that the report had been "kicked into the long grass", but his assurances that "we are not kicking it off into the far distance" rang hollow.

The "collective position" or party line promulgated by Downing Street and Millbank is that "there must be a debate, whatever people's different views are ... Nobody is going to shut their mouths, but equally nobody will be raising the banner for one side or the other. This is a united and disciplined government and the cabinet will be united and disciplined behind the line" (*The Guardian* October 30).

The Tories see the implementation of Jenkins as a serious threat, and Hague has pledged that he will wage 'the battle of his life' against what he calls a "dog's breakfast". The gist of the Tory case can be found in their house journal, *The Daily Telegraph*: "The crown of Lord Jenkins' ambition is to make the 21st century ... one in which Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown can share government until decrepitude, rather than anything so vulgar as voters' wishes deprives them of it." The paper goes on to allege that Jenkins, "the grandfather of Blairism", is seeking to "gerrymander the Conservatives into lasting oppo-

sition" (October 30). A similar line is taken by *The Times*: "There must be the suspicion that the real attraction of an 'AV top-up' system for the prime minister is the prospect that the Conservatives could be excluded from power" (October 30).

The Tories and their papers are right, of course. Whether by accident or design, the Jenkins schema is certainly biased against them. Blair's interest in electoral reform stems not from charity to the poor Liberal Democrats, nor from an idealistic commitment to 'fairer' government: it reflects, as we have said, his determination to stay in power as long as possible and realise his own 'radical' vision for the future of Britain - ideally alone, but if need be then in coalition with the Liberal Democrats (and/or the SNP, Plaid Cymru, Sinn Féin, etc). Evidently the Tories believe that their best chance of one day forming a strong one-party administration is to stick with FPTP. They may even believe it possible that an anti-reform campaign prior to a referendum could enable them to pick up some support from a population wary of politicians messing about with their traditional ways of voting.

So much for the dilemmas which the Jenkins report raises for the major parties. What about its content in terms of ideas and its likely impact on the disposition of forces if it is implemented? The commission's terms of reference contained stipulations as to the objectives of electoral reform: broader proportionality, stable government, an extension of voter choice and retention of the link between MPs and geographical constituencies. As Jenkins himself remarked, these requirements were "not entirely compatible".

The outcome of Jenkins' work was bound to be some kind of fix or fudge, but there is nothing ambiguous about the deficiencies and inequities of the FPTP system, which Jenkins was commissioned to replace. The problems with FPTP are familiar to all of us: it is demonstrably unfair to third parties - in 1992, for example, while polling some 18% of the national vote, the Liberal Democrats gained just three percent of parliamentary seats; FPTP is also capable of producing governments that, in the words of *The Economist*, are "formed in ways that are hard to square with democratic principles" (October 31) - in 1951 and 1974, for example, the party that got fewer votes nationally went on to form the government; under FPTP, an astounding 312 out of 659 MPs (some 47% of all members) are sitting in the Commons having received the votes of under half those voting in their constituencies; FPTP also produces the anomalous situation in which whole swathes of the country become no-go areas for one or other of the major parties - in 1997, for example, the whole of Scotland, Wales and nearly every significant provincial centre in England became Tory-free zones; perhaps the most depressing aspect of FPTP, however, is the way in which it condemns millions of electors to a lifetime of wasted votes, or at the very best it involves them in the haphazard process of tactical voting.

Jenkins' blueprint does offer a remedy for these anomalies. Dubbed rather inelegantly 'Alternative Vote with Top-Up', it is essentially a two-tier system, with each elector exercising two votes. At least 80% of MPs would continue to be elected in conventional single-constituency seats, but using the alternative vote system, whereby electors vote for candidates in order of preference. If nobody gets

50% of first-preference votes, then the least popular candidate is eliminated and the second preference of those who voted for him or her are redistributed. The process is repeated until a candidate emerges with 50% or more. The second vote is used to elect a 'top-up' MP based on a county or equivalent-sized metropolitan area. This vote may be exercised in favour of a party or of a named 'top-up' candidate from that party.

The system sounds more cumbersome than it is. Its broad effect would be to do away with the glaring deficiencies of FPTP and go some way towards satisfying the demand for "broad proportionality" and "an extension of voter choice". Projecting the Jenkins schema back on to the outcome of previous elections is a fascinating speculative exercise for psephologists and other anoraks, but, to use a Jenkinsism, it is an "otiose" exercise, thwarted, at least where elections during recent decades are concerned, by the impossibility of disentangling complexities introduced by tactical voting. With a few exceptions, the outcome of recent elections would not have been significantly different, except for the fact that the Liberal Democrats and their forebears would have done consistently better. Contrary to the argument put forward by opponents of electoral reform, AV-Top-Up would not have led to the creation of a succession of weak coalition governments.

What possibilities, if any, does the Jenkins model hold out to the left in British politics? Hilary Wainwright of *Red Pepper* argues in *The Guardian* that it represents the left's big chance. She points to states like Germany, where "with more democratic electoral systems, the radical and green left has achieved independent parties that force social democratic parties to look over their left shoulders ... it has also boosted the left within social democratic parties ... Chancellor Schröder has to treat his left more seriously" (October 30). Perhaps Wainwright's reference to "independent parties" is intended as a hint that the Labour 'left', such as it is, could split and form an independent force? This seems to be indicated by her excited suggestion that "Ken Livingstone could eventually be running the treasury" - a prospect evidently intended to thrill her readers with eager anticipation of a new socialist dawn. Obviously the advent of a new left Labourite party, just like the creation of the SLP, would be an interesting and important development. Although, like the SLP itself, any putative new left party formed in the loins of Labour might end up a vehicle for the kind of reformist social democracy with which we are depressingly familiar, there is nothing inevitable about this outcome. It would offer communists an opportunity for fighting for the kind of organisation that workers could use to achieve a real socialist alternative.

In summary, the recommendations of the Jenkins Commission are to be welcomed insofar as they would bring about some extension of democracy within the bourgeois system. The election of communist MPs could once again become a reality. They are all right *as far as they go*, but that is a pitifully short way. The sow's ear of the bourgeois monarchical system can never be transformed into the silk purse of a radical republican democracy, let alone socialism.

That requires not a Lord Jenkins, but mass self-activity from below ●

**Michael Malkin**



# Bourgeois morality



Ron Davies: guilt-ridden double life revealed

While the establishment has adopted a partial acceptance of homosexuality, there is a long way to go before there is full equality

The discussions stimulated by the assault and robbery suffered by former Welsh secretary Ron Davies after his 'walk' on Clapham Common continue to develop in predictable ways in the bourgeois press.

In the downmarket tabloids, prurient speculation and unreliable accounts by men claiming to have seen Davies at various unofficial gay meeting places sell newspapers. But this has no relevance to the crime against Davies or the question of whether he should have been forced to resign. In the broadsheets, the debate has moved beyond Davies to the problems the Labour Party in Wales will have finding a suitable replacement as future first minister of the new Welsh Assembly; and more importantly the extent to which politicians should be permitted to keep their personal life private, including details of their sexuality. Trade secretary Peter Mandelson was outed as a homosexual (not for the first time) on BBC 2's *Newsnight* programme by a former Tory MP, Matthew Parris. The BBC subsequently issued a much ridiculed edict to its employees ordering them not to allow discussion of Mandelson's sexuality on air.

According to *The Guardian* (October 29), as "Mandelson has never been guilty of hypocrisy in his statements on sexuality or the family", whether he is gay or not "is a matter for him and for no one else ... Without exposing an element of hypocrisy the 'outing' of politicians is simply a gross invasion of privacy." The contrary position, held by Outrage activists such as Peter Tatchell, is that each decision to remain in the closet represents a tacit acceptance of the inferior status of gays and thus

delays the achievement of full equality. In the eyes of Outrage, all closet gays in public life are colluding with oppression and are therefore legitimate targets for outing. In our view, this approach goes too far in sacrificing the rights of the individual to the interests of the 'community'. However, we share the annoyance felt by gay activists at the attitude of conservatives who accept gays so long as they live in monogamous relationships, but condemn those who are promiscuous, or strangely become uncomfortable when gays 'flaunt' their sexuality.

We regard outing as a tactical question. As communists, whose morality and programmatic demands are founded on the achievement of collective liberation, where the maximum opportunity for each person to fully develop their unique social-individuality is recognised, we support all moves to defend and advance homosexual rights. We are for equality. We are opposed to the anti-human prejudice of religious or other bigots, who portray sexually active gays as 'sinful' and 'deviant'. In general we say sexuality should be a personal matter. However, when discrimination against gays is advocated for opportunist reasons by those who are secretly gay themselves, we agree that it is quite justified to expose their hypocrisy.

Reactionary opposition to gay rights is often based on the claim that they undermine the family, the basic economic unit of capitalist society. The Labour government, of which Peter Mandelson is a leading member, has just published a consultation document putting forward suggestions on how to 'strengthen' the family, by which it means the

conventional nuclear family of a married man and women raising children and possibly supporting other dependent relatives, such as elderly parents.

The similarities between New Labour thinking and the reactionary Tory 'back to basics' policy are clear. When the Tories vilify single parents, gays and other 'deviants', they often base their moralising on an appeal to christianity and its ethos. They pretend that the reason they seek to impose a conventional moral code on society is simply that this code is right in accordance with some eternal value system, and any calculation of means and ends is secondary.

New Labour, however, does not obfuscate in such a way. It appeals to the selfishness of the comfortably off minority known as 'middle England'. Rather than attack single parents as morally reprehensible, Blair's spin doctors simply point to the welfare benefits many single parents need to support their children. New Labour advocates stable nuclear families because if working people can be made to bear the highest possible degree of responsibility for caring for their own children and old people, the lower will be the cost to the state. And by producing fewer teenage criminals, according to well publicised theories, these 'conventional' families cost the state less in the long term. For all Labour's fine words about 'support', they are simply reflecting the fact that for capital, the nuclear family is the most cost-efficient way of reproducing labour power.

Tony Blair may have used his image as a family man to sell himself to the Labour Party and to the electorate, but, partly due to the efforts of gay rights activists, it is no longer impossible for an openly gay politician to reach the top of the bourgeois political hierarchy. Chris Smith, the culture secretary, being an example. However, full equality has not been achieved for gays in social life. Many people feel compelled to lead a double life out of fear. They hide their inclinations, marry, have children and opt for guilt-ridden secret liaisons or

prostitutes. When they are found out their whole world comes crashing down.

This is what seems to have happened to Ron Davies, who was leaned on to resign when he was subjected to blackmail threats by a man he had approached who then robbed him. According to the *Daily Mirror*, when Davies was appointed as an opposition whip in 1985 he was subjected to routine vetting by the Special Branch and MI5, which alleged that he was gay (November 2). The then leader of the Labour Party, Neil Kinnock, was warned that Davies was vulnerable to blackmail and thus presented a security risk. If Davies led a double life in which he secretly sought sex in situations in which he was certain to be at risk of attack, he could not benefit from the partial acceptance of gays by the establishment. Neither does that acceptance extend to prostitution.

The full story of Ron Davies's misadventures has yet to be revealed. He has attacked the press for intruding into his private life, saying: "I have never, ever in my life moralised about other people. I have always taken the view that public figures as well as private figures have the right to a private life, provided that doesn't intrude on their public duties." This is a fine sentiment, but unfortunately for Davies commentators were quick to point out that he is himself guilty of hypocrisy in saying it. In 1995 he attacked Tory minister Ron Richards when Richards was accused of adultery, and in 1996 he was forced to apologise after saying that Prince Charles was not fit to be king after his divorce was announced.

The Ron Davies affair has highlighted three particular aspects of bourgeois morality in Britain. First, the increased acceptance and incorporation of open gays. Second, the continued guilt associated with homosexuality and the subsequent dangerous double life forced on many people. Thirdly, the absence of a democratic movement from below to challenge New Labour's conservative moral agenda ●

Mary Godwin

## 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.

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# Blaming the oppressed

**T**he Truth and Reconciliation Committee has at last published its report on the crimes arising from the South African apartheid system.

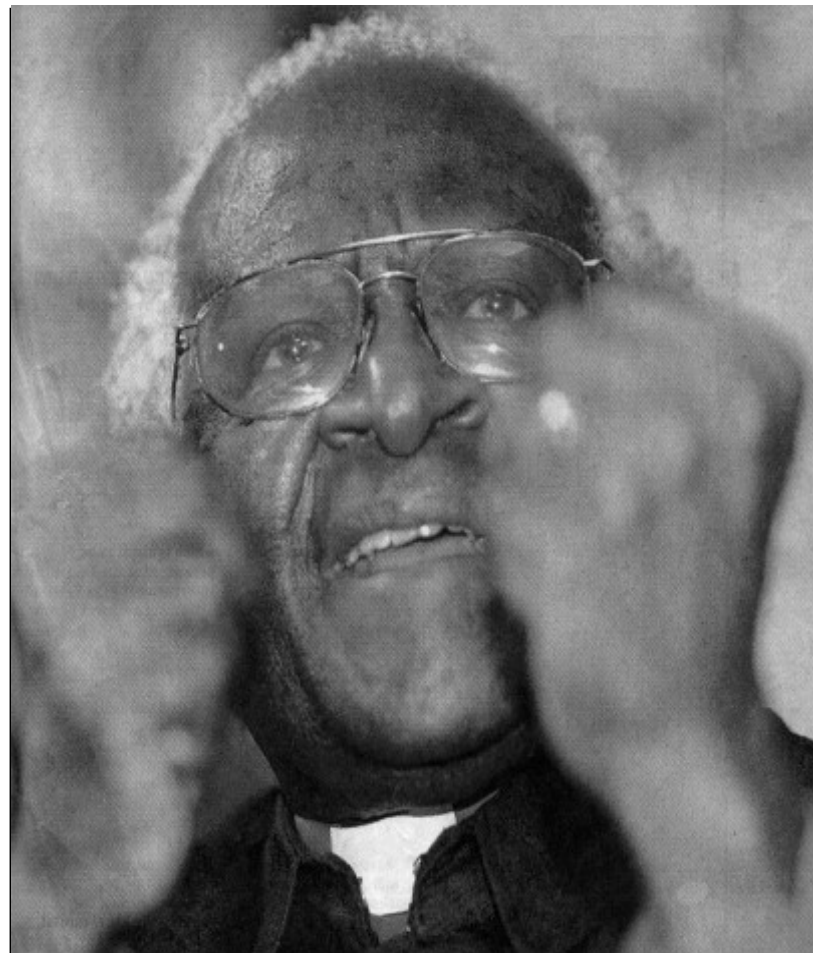
Chaired by archbishop Desmond Tutu, the TRC did not aim simply to uncover all the acts of oppression, brutality and inhumanity perpetrated by the country's former rulers. There was certainly never any intention of using it as a launching pad for a politically useful show trial of key members of the apartheid government, security forces, secret police, etc. Hanging former president PW Botha, his successor FW de Klerk and Inkatha leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, might have sent a positive message. Such an outcome would have been possible only if the liberation forces had carried through the democratic revolution to complete victory, sweeping away not only all formal vestiges of racism, but smashing the state which upheld it and establishing in its place the direct rule of the people, organised in their street, township and other such committees.

Far from resolving the revolutionary situation in such a positive way, the leaders of the movement - the African National Congress, in close alliance with the South African Communist Party - stopped halfway. The main global counterbalance to imperialism was gone - at first gradually weakened, as Gorbachev committed the Soviet Union to full cooperation with the US in order to cool the world's 'hot spots'; and then, with the final collapse of the USSR, suddenly removed altogether. The changed global balance of power found its reflection within individual countries. In South Africa the ANC/SACP gave up all hope of crushing the apartheid regime through a combination of military attacks and mass uprising. At the same time global capitalism became more confident of winning a consensus for an imperialist stability. That too engendered a parallel turn within the South African ruling class.

As a result, the transition from apartheid was conducted in a steady, orderly manner. The institutions of the state - political, military and juridical - were left intact and its personnel either remained in place or were allowed to quietly retire. The promise of a 'new South Africa' was presented as all things to all people. All sections, all classes were to be the winners - those who benefited from apartheid just as much as its victims. The main task of the new order was therefore to unite the former enemies. Not just the political leaders - that was relatively easy, as both the more realist wing of the National Party and the ANC bureaucracy could see new opportunities opening up for themselves as individuals if they agreed to cooperate in the transition.

More importantly, the mass of the population, polarised according to race under apartheid, had to be disabused of the old 'truths'. For middle and working class whites, the majority black population was not after all inferior to themselves and ought not to have been held back. And the mass of blacks in city and country had to be persuaded that changes at the top meant that their liberation had been achieved and there was no further need for militant struggle.

Hardly anyone can now be found



Archbishop Tutu: even-handed

to speak out in favour of the old system. The set of social relations known as apartheid has been reified - it was an evil which carried along everyone - oppressed and oppressor alike. Both were its victims. At least that is the basis of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee's investigations. It is around a new 'truth' that the new-old bourgeoisie seeks its reconciliation.

Tutu described his committee's findings as a "triumph for truth and humanity". That was to be expected. And the South African liberal press was also exuberant in its praise. According to the *Mail and Guardian*, the TRC "has performed an extraordinary service for this country, which the pettiness of the politicians has only thrown into relief" (October 30). The reference to "pettiness" was provoked by the degree of criticism with which most political leaders reacted to the report.

In fact its publication was very nearly prevented by legal action. First, the final apartheid president, de Klerk, succeeded in having removed passages accusing him of being an "ac-

cessory to the fact" in relation to two state-sponsored bombings in the mid-80s. The 1993 Nobel peace prize winner claimed to have no knowledge of, let alone complicity in, any of the old regime's dirty tricks, despite the complete implausibility of such ignorance. Tutu asserted he had been "scrupulously fair to Mr de Klerk" - ie, he had seen to it that the most damaging allegations against him did not see the light of day. The good archbishop claimed to be deeply upset at having to remove the relevant sections.

Jolted into action by de Klerk's success, the ANC made similar legal moves at the 11th hour. The party wanted many of the critical references to itself removed from the report. Allegations (however true) of "gross human rights violations" by its military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, including the torture and murder of its own dissidents, would "criminalise the whole liberation struggle", according to the ANC. In an attempt to expurgate such allegations the party made common cause with its former enemy. If de Klerk and the ANC thought that

publication would not be "in the interest of reconciliation and nation-building", said a presidential spokesperson, they had every right to seek to prevent it.

Tutu reacted furiously in the face of these threats to his entire work. "I have struggled against a tyranny," he said. "I didn't do that in order to substitute it with another." But the ANC move was rejected by the courts, and the official handing-over ceremony went ahead on schedule. President Nelson Mandela announced: "I accept the report as it is."

However, de Klerk and the ANC were not the only ones to speak disparagingly of the TRC. The Pan-Africanist Congress echoed the words of that die-hard defender of apartheid, PW Botha: the commission was a "circus", declared the PAC. The National Party and rightwing Freedom Front boycotted the ceremony, while the Inkatha Freedom Party described the fact that its leader, Buthelezi, stood accused of orchestrating pro-apartheid killings as "preposterous".

Such criticism from just about every quarter was actually very useful in appearing to support Tutu's claim of even-handedness. He completely and shamelessly equated the violence of the oppressed with that of the oppressor. Commenting on the antics of those who wished to discredit his work, he said: "It won't change the fact that they [the apartheid police] killed Stephen Bopape; they [de Klerk's agents] bombed Khotso House; they [Umkhonto we Sizwe] tortured their own people in their camps in Tanzania, in Angola; they [ANC supporters] necklaced people..."

The report was quite specific in this regard: "The fact that the apartheid system was a crime against humanity does not mean that all acts carried out in order to destroy apartheid were legal, moral and acceptable," it said. The commission actually went so far as to condemn the killing of apartheid spies and informers by the revolutionary movement. According to this liberal gang of utopians, those waging war against one of the most brutal and inhuman systems ever known should have allowed the lives of hundreds of heroic fighters to be put at risk rather than acted quickly to eliminate such traitors.

Of course that does not mean we can give leaders of those who fight oppression *carte blanche* to treat the movement as their own property; to accuse comrades of treachery merely because they have dared to question

decisions. We are well aware of the shortcomings of the South African liberation organisations. An alliance of petty bourgeois nationalists and 'official communists', they suffered from all the deformities you would expect of such movements. Nevertheless, they were conducting a revolutionary war against an oppressive state, with the support of the working masses. In no way can their mistakes or crimes be equated, in terms of working class morality, with those of apartheid.

While Botha, Buthelezi and Winnie Madikizela Mandela are the most heavily criticised, it is Buthelezi's position that will cause the government most embarrassment. The current home affairs minister, he is the only figure named in connection with human rights abuses who still holds an official state post. The TRC candidly admitted that it had refrained from subpoenaing him because it feared such a move "would stoke the flames of violence in KwaZulu-Natal". In 1994 Buthelezi unleashed a wave of terror in an attempt to prevent the holding of the first post-apartheid elections. He was only bought off by a promise to let him run the province, and it is widely believed that the results in KZN were officially doctored so as to show the Inkatha Freedom Party as having gained more votes than the ANC.

Rightwing groups have called for a blanket amnesty for all those named, but so far Tutu is resisting this demand. However, a government move to drop proceedings against the IFP chief would certainly be an attractive option for the ANC. Individual amnesty hearings are set to continue until March 1999.

The TRC report recommended that big business should atone for having profited from apartheid by paying 'conscience money' into a fund for the system's victims. Whereas under apartheid capital took full advantage of the pass laws, racial restrictions and union bans - all of which delivered a cowed working class - today it relies simply on market forces to ensure that the 40% unemployment rate allows its super-exploitation to continue. But for the TRC the 'normal' operation of capital is of course perfectly acceptable.

Other recommendations include a proposal for a national summit on reconciliation (it is not difficult to imagine the meaningless platitudes such a talking shop would produce), and a ban on research into methods of interrogation and torture. Talk about closing the stable door ... ●

Peter Manson