

Socialist Party in England and Wales: Extinction looms

The Socialist Party in England and Wales is in crisis - official. The statement reproduced below from dissident Merseysiders summarily ejected from the SP with no right of appeal is a damning indictment of the regime of Peter Taaffe and his national committee majority. Comrades in the movement should treat with some contempt any subsequent SP leadership professions of 'democratic unity' (its pseudonym for its version of 'democratic centralism' ie, bureaucratic centralism) or claims to have always practised "full freedom of discussion, genuine, comradely and fraternal debate" in its ranks (*Members Bulletin* No16, March 1996).

So now, after Merseyside, where next? Taaffe and his faction seem set on a damage limitation exercise in the aftermath of the disastrous *de facto* Scottish split. For instance, it is not hard to predict that Llanelli SP branch will be next for the axe (see p3). Although Llanelli is not a major SP centre in Wales, its loss would represent another big blow to the morale of an organisation already reeling from the loss of Scotland and the 'city that dared to fight'. It would leave an active SP presence in just two areas of Wales - Swansea and Cardiff, with attendance at Cardiff

meetings in particular described as 'skeletal'.

Even more potentially dramatic, the seventh world congress of the SP's 'international' - the Committee for a Workers International - meets at the end of this month. The appeal of the Pakistani section, the Pakistani Labour Party, against its recent expulsion, will almost certainly be rejected. This could set in train a very unfortunate sequence of events which would effectively wreck the CWI, with rumours of a French section walkout already rife and the possible declaration of total Scottish separation from the Taaffe-led project, internationally as well as domestically.

Sources tell us that there has already been at least one meeting of some CWI international secretariat members with the dissident PLP and others to discuss the crisis. The talk was of pressuring Taaffe - not in the best of health - to retire on honourable medical grounds, although no particular enthusiasm was on display for his most obvious successor, Lynn Walsh. Thus, if the Pakistani appeal is rejected, Taaffe could be in for more trouble.

Inside the SP itself, no hard oppositional faction has yet cohered. But the Merseysiders and others still in the organisation are in contact

informally: as one comrade put it, "quiet links are being made". The problem for them remains a lack of clear political orientation. There is talk of work in the Socialist Alliances, of producing a magazine - but fighting for what programme? Certainly, the comrades could move to a loose network of SP dissenters (if Taaffe holds back from a full bloodletting) and external activists from the same broad tradition. They obviously have the resources to put something together. Merseyside has its own printshop, office, relatively substantial money reserves and 50 or so stalwarts with a well established political record. They also have the potential to take others out of comrade Taaffe's organisation nationally - up to 100 cadre have expressed deep dissatisfaction, according to what we are told. If they go, it really would be the end of Taaffe's "small mass party" pretensions.

Clearly, the Liverpool comrades did not expect to be excluded. Thus, it is perhaps not that surprising that they lack a perspective. The politics of the SP/CWI dissenters in general appear to be a pretty mixed bag, with the central unifying theme being distaste for the SP organisational regime. In the case of Merseyside in particular, this seems to have produced a reac-

tion against the idea of 'party' altogether. This is clearly wrong. The logic of this sort of method leads down a slippery slope to dumping the idea of 'socialism' itself because of the negative experiences of Labourism in the west and 'official communism' in the USSR and eastern Europe.

Taaffe's survival strategy appears to be to sit tight, cull dissenters when they pop up, hold onto the Hepscott Road headquarters and wait for better times. Taaffe's real problem, however, is *politics*. He has so far refused to address the central *programmatic* weakness tearing his organisation asunder. Until he or a new leadership does that, surely what remains will not become as politically disorientated, demoralised and resentful of the regime as SP/SML members have in Scotland or Liverpool.

Amid the dull routinism of its former Labourite environment Taaffeism could flourish - his entryist rivals in the shape of Tony Cliff and Gerry Healy having departed by the 1970s. But the harsh world outside Labour Party committee rooms is not conducive to those who are not genuinely revolutionary. Being neither 'fish nor fowl' comrade Taaffe's revolutionary-reformism is ill-adapted to the environment. It is now *facing extinction* ●

Mark Fischer

Together with London, Liverpool has the longest record of Trotskyist organisation in England, spanning some 60 plus years. More importantly throughout that history Liverpool has always been involved in struggles.

Unfortunately, throughout its history Trotskyism has been bedevilled by splits and conflicts over leadership, leading to the creation of a multitude of 'parties', leagues and tendencies. Much of this has come about because the 'leaders' have been isolated and removed from the actual mass activities. In the late 1940s the Revolutionary Communist Party imploded after the expulsion of a series of leading figures. Now in a surreal rerun, history has come full circle.

On October 18 1998 the national committee of the Socialist Party (formerly Militant) suspended with no right to appeal the entire membership of the Merseyside regional committee. This effectively amounts to expulsion. The reasons lie in the political and organisational challenge mounted by Merseyside against a national leadership which regards political and organisational differences as a heresy.

The political differences centre around perspectives for capitalism worldwide, trade union issues, the possibilities of building a new workers' party, together with severe criticisms of the financial and organisational running of the party. As differences have unfolded the

Destroying themselves

Statement by expelled Merseyside Socialist Party comrades, October 1998

true nature of the organisation has been revealed. Whilst professing to promote political debate and democratic methods, the national leadership of the Socialist Party has chosen in action to use completely contrary methods.

This has not happened in isolation. In the last two years comrades in the USA, Pakistan and Germany have been expelled. In Scotland, Militant Labour is for all intents and purposes regarded by the London-based leadership as being outside the orbit of 'their' organisation. Further divisions, splits and expulsions have opened up in France, Australia and in Britain.

The response to the expulsion of Merseyside will be to further widen this crisis. Throughout England and Wales there is opposition: in Manchester, Tyneside, London, South West, Wales, Yorkshire and the Eastern Region. Support for the national leadership is largely confined to London. The NC is split down the middle. Voting figures at the national

committee demonstrate this and signal the depth of the crisis within the party. Out of a national committee of 80 plus only 50 participated in the vote for expulsion and out of the 36 who voted for expulsion, 20 plus were from London.

On Merseyside itself only a handful of people support the national leadership. Prominent amongst these are two comrades expelled by Kinnock, in the 1980s, from the Liverpool District Labour Party, as part of a group of nine. The nine had 141 years membership of the Labour Party. The regional committee members, expelled in October 1998, have 214 years of membership in the Militant/SP. Perhaps even more damning is the fact that one of the comrades supporting the national line is currently leading a campaign for democracy in Unison - yet supported the expulsions, without any procedures or recourse to the laws of natural justice.

Given the whole history of expulsion, surcharges, press assassination

and organisational actions taken against Merseyside, it is not surprising that these actions have led to anger, revulsion and a massive show of support from active trade unionists and socialists for the Merseyside regional committee.

Significantly not one individual who played a prominent role in the Liverpool council battles of the 1980s, the expulsions from the Labour Party, the poll tax fight, the events around the Walton by-election, the defence of Terry Fields MP in Broadgreen or the marathon dispute of the dockers has come out in support of the national Socialist Party leadership; in fact the very contrary is the case. The dock shop stewards stand in total solidarity with the comrades on Merseyside. Without exception those who stood shoulder to shoulder during these events, who adopted a principled and collective stance, have supported the Merseyside regional committee, because of their recognition of the contribution made. No amount of organisational or financial smears will ever detract from this.

As history proves, those who resort to organisational measures to solve political differences inevitably destroy themselves. The irony of the national Socialist Party leadership ex-

pellling those who were expelled by Kinnock's Labour Party and using the same methods that they vehemently complained about will not be missed. What applied to the Labour Party in the 1980s will now apply to the Socialist Party - those who voted for expulsion will only ever be remembered for this act; those who were expelled will always be remembered for their independence and integrity.

What, therefore, will happen on Merseyside? Firstly we are proud to continue to uphold the traditions which began 60 years ago. However, we also recognise that the labels of yesterday do nothing to represent the reality of today. In other words we are prepared to discuss with and learn from all political tendencies that stand on the basis of fighting for a democratic socialist society. Secondly there is no intention of repeating past history and declaring a new 'party'. Thirdly we do not ask that anyone take our word for what has gone on in the party. In the next couple of months a full account of the political differences and debates will be published, electronically and in printed form. Individuals, parties and history can then make a judgement.

Instead Merseyside socialists will continue the work of the last 20-30 years: stand by workers in struggle, promote revolutionary socialist ideas locally, regionally and internationally and work with other socialists to create a new mass workers' party. Nothing on Merseyside, in this sense, has changed ●

Left in crisis

The revolutionary left in Britain does not present a particularly pretty picture. We are faced with the deep crisis of the Socialist Party, the miserable decline of the Socialist Labour Party, the sectarian sterility of the Socialist Workers Party and the practical irrelevance of the score or so of little left sects that constitute our movement. For us, this pretty parlous state of affairs is far from bleak or hopeless. But what it does underline is the need for a Party orientation, a recognition of the fact that the time for sects is coming to an end.

This paper and the organisation that sustains it have consistently fought for the Party principle. We believe that it is now self-evident that the tasks of 21st century demand that all genuine partisans of our class be united into a single revolutionary organisation. Under a regime of genuine democratic centralism, it is quite clear that many of the differences of theory that currently keep revolutionaries apart will prove to be secondary: episodic at best, sectarianism at worst.

Clearly, as the reports from various parts of the workers' movement featured in this issue of our paper underline, we are in a period of tremendous fluidity and change. Predictably, this cycle of flux has opened with a process of dissolution and disintegration of many established organisations. While this has meant comrades are at last starting to break down the foolish proscriptions on working with others so long characteristic of the left, the overwhelming feature of this period is *negative*. We are seeing groups shed potentially good cadre who subsequently drop out of working class politics altogether, or start to peddle *rightist* answers to the crisis of the left.

Essentially, this takes the form of a retreat for the fight for a working class *Party*. The ex-Socialist Party comrades from Liverpool are only the latest in a long line who seem to have denounced this struggle as 'premature', 'inappropriate' or even 'outmoded'. In contrast, our organisation understands that the fight for Party is the *vital political question* facing revolutionaries.

Out of the current confusion on the left, we call on others to work with us to crystallise a Partyst pole of attraction. What would this mean in practice?

● **Critical unity.** Partyism does not mean a blind, 'my Party, right or wrong' attitude. The Party project demands a *critical* attachment. This is why our paper is the most openly self-critical and polemical on the British left, why our comrades have the right to organise factions with freedom to publish their views openly. If we are to build a genuine *Party of the class* (and not simply another monoida sectlet), the proletarian leaders who will constitute its ranks will *inevitably* have disagreements, sometimes of the sharpest variety. They must have the chance to openly fight for these ideas, to have them attacked and modified in front of the class itself. We are in business to raise workers to the level of the ruling class of this society. The truly pathetic argument that the open expression of political differences in the same organisation "confuse workers" is an insult to our class and is an implicit warning of the type of top-down 'socialism' envisaged by people who think this way.

● **For Party patriotism.** It is a common misconception on the British revolutionary left that 'Lenin split with the Mensheviks'. In fact, before the *fundamental* schism in the international workers' movement of August 1914, we see Lenin - the incorrigible 'splitter' in the collective mind's eye of our sectarian comrades - fighting again and again for *Party unity* with the Mensheviks. Examples of this are legion. Thus, in addition to being a product of the profound theoretical/programmatic crisis afflicting our movement, the frivolous splits that litter the British revolutionary left underline the seeming determination of the revolutionary movement to remain as amateur and ineffectual as possible.

● **For the right of the minority to become a majority.** Within any Party regime, we expect genuinely scientific, Leninist ideas to *start in a minority*. Relatively simple causal-consequential relations and surface connections present themselves as 'common sense' in politics as in other spheres of life. The job of science - in its particular political form, as in the natural sciences - is the attempt to formulate more profound and fundamental laws of social being and thinking. Our insistence on Party openness is therefore a commitment to the best conditions attainable to facilitate the fight for the revolutionary working class programme and to forging effective Party unity around it.

Thus, if joined by other substantial forces in the struggle to reforge the Communist Party, we Leninists *expect* and - given our commitment to the Party project - are *prepared* to be a minority as long as we can fight openly for our politics.

At present, we do not find a ready audience for explicitly revolutionary ideas, either on the left or in wider society. This is why we must fight for the rights of minorities in our organisation even when we are today in a *majority*.

Despite the formal adherence of many groups to some sort of 'revolutionary politics', the evolution of Blair's Labour simply seems to have presented them with the opportunity to ... reinvent Labourism. Few would argue that they would *not* have been members of the Communist Party when it was founded - 1920 is a long time ago, after all. But the marked reluctance of these comrades to commit themselves to a broad, democratic and *revolutionary* Party project in the here and now underlines the dualism of their politics: revolutionary in 1920; reformist in 1998.

Once again, we urge comrades to break from ceremonial adherence to Bolshevism and join the real fight for Party today ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser



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

Ban CPGB

The CPGB's disgusting stance on Le Pen ('Good enough for us' *Weekly Worker* October 29), defending the murderous French fascist - the renowned torturer of Algerians and convicted assailant of his Socialist electoral opponent - as having an inalienable right to express his opinions on the Holocaust, coupled with its enthusiastic publication of an endless stream of letters from the paedophile, Frank Worth, will deepen the "isolation" you claim to be fighting in 'Party notes'.

The arenas you are active in are indeed "pretty degenerate", to use your own words. At this rate the only organisation that might possibly be interested in discussing unity with you will be *LM/Revolutionary Communist Party*, which shares your predilection for both fascists and paedophiles.

Those of us currently involved in unity talks in London have no truck with your thoroughly bourgeois libertarianism. We uphold the socialist principle of 'no platform for fascists', placing the lives and physical safety of the black, Asian and Jewish communities far above the armchair posturing of drawing room liberals - dead or alive. Similarly we place the welfare of children above the rights of the child abuser - a position which, as the Trotter sandal demonstrated, enjoys rather more popularity amongst the Hackney working class than your own. We await news of your unity slate with Frank Furedi with extraordinary interest.

Don't expect any friendly phone calls from the Independent Labour Network, the Socialist Democracy Group, the Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook or the Socialist Workers Party responding to *your* unity appeal. On November 22 [the conference of the London Socialist Alliance - ed] I will be advocating a Mancunian solution: no platform for fascists or their apologists. Finally, it might be wiser not to campaign in any part of London with large numbers of Jews, blacks or Asians - unless you have your Irish National Liberation Army bodyguards in tow.

Toby Abse
South London

No agreement

The report from the Socialist Workers Party's pre-conference *Bulletin* No2 on negotiations for a unity slate with the Scottish Socialist Party makes interesting reading (*Weekly Worker* October 29). The SWP comrades who authored it are inaccurate in their description of events in Wales, however.

They write that - in contrast to Scotland - "in Wales we have reached agreement for a common list with the Socialist Party and Cymru Goch". In fact, the situation is far more tentative than that.

The Welsh Socialist Alliances have agreed to meet the SWP and one 'pre-meeting' get-together has happened. There is no agreement yet on a common list, or on a potential name for it. Given their stance on the national question, the SWP are unlikely to want to stand on any slate that describes itself as 'Welsh' (this question also provoked some controversy at the WSA conference on November 7).

We wait to learn their attitude here in Wales. Hugh Kerr MEP actually informed the WSA conference that the SWP were rebuffed in Scotland because of their demand for 'parity' with the SSP. If this is true, it is a silly sectarian attitude on the SWP's behalf that does not take political realities into consideration.

The SWP also plan to approach the Communist Party of Britain independently, although it is hard to see any common ground emerging there. The Socialist Labour Party - typically - have refused to negotiate with any other socialist organisation and seem set on standing in at least two out of the five Welsh constituencies, whatever anyone else does.

Ceri Rhys
Swansea

Pinochet demo

On Saturday November 7 a big demonstration against Pinochet's release occupied a large part of Trafalgar Square. Several MPs and international figures and contingents were present.

The Tories, the archbishop of Canterbury and many British legal institutions want Pinochet freed. We strongly condemn genocide. Workers all over the world should mobilise with the aim of bringing other butchers to justice - like General Hugo Bánzer, who is now again in power in Bolivia; Fujimori, the Colombian paramilitary financed by BP, etc.

Bolivian Union Solidarity Committee
London

Basic point

For whatever reason, comrade Julian Hawthorne *wants* to believe that all the institutions of bourgeois society are - secretly - racist (*Letters Weekly Worker* November 5). Quite exactly why the comrade is so eager to see racism in every nook and cranny of bourgeois society is beyond me. But unfortunately I am not a psychiatrist trained in the psycho-analytical school of thought, so I will probably remain in the dark for ever.

Our comrade insists that the police force is guilty of "institutionalised racism". Palpably untrue. Yes, I am absolutely certain that racism - not to mention sexism, homophobia and all manner of other prejudices - is *widespread* in the police force. Yet this in no way means it is institutionalised - ie, officially promoted from above. Whatever may be happening below, it is the height of absurdity to imagine that Sir Paul Condon is doing anything other than propounding the state's official anti-racism.

Like virtually everyone else on the left comrade Hawthorne cannot grasp this very basic point. The bourgeoisie wants to incorporate everyone under its hegemony using divisive bureaucratic methods. Which do you think is the *best* way of achieving this aim: by stoking up the fires of racism (always a risky option) or by preaching the marvels of *anti-racism* and equal opportunities under the state? You decide, comrade Hawthorne.

Comrade Hawthorne informs us - talk about teaching your grandmother to suck eggs - that "it is well known that judges and cops have worked together to pervert the course of justice". Gee, I never thought of that before. There I was thinking the police and the judiciary were friends of the working class. Comrade Hawthorne's astounding revelation in no way proves though that the judges and the police are working to some official *racist* agenda. Just that they are defenders of bourgeois order. And bastards to boot.

When is the left - and comrade Hawthorne seems a perfect embodiment of the spirit of left doctrinarism - going to wake up to the obvious and self-evident fact that anti-racism/sexism can be an excellent weapon to *divide* the working class. Which makes it - section vs section - look to the civilised bourgeois state for salvation, as opposed to the 'jobs' on the council estates - where racism can easily be found.

Finally, I apologise to comrade Hawthorne for using incredibly 'obscure' expressions like *reductio ad absurdum*. However, if our comrade would care to look at his English dictionary and you will find it in there as a perfectly standard expression. The comrade may be horrified to discover that English is littered with 'loan words' like 'pork' (Old French/Latin) or 'khaki' (Urdu). Language, like anti-racism and everything else, is in a process of constant change.

Don Preston
Middlesex

Free Zoorah Shah

We urgently need your support at this time as we prepare to make representa-

tions to the home secretary to reduce Zoorah Shah's excessive tariff of 20 years. She is in prison for killing a man who sexually and physically abused her for 12 years.

The court of appeal dismissed Zoorah Shah's case. On April 30 1998, Zoorah Shah lost her appeal to overturn her conviction for the murder of Mohammed Azam on the grounds of diminished responsibility.

Zoorah's testimony was dismissed as being "not capable of belief", mainly because she had originally lied to the police. In effect, she is now serving a life sentence for lying rather than for her culpability for murder.

The court ignored substantial independent evidence from her GPs, showing that she was depressed. It rejected the testimony of an expert in transcultural psychiatry, who explained that Zoorah's inability to tell the truth at her original trial stemmed from her fear of shame and other cultural constraints.

The court denied Zoorah the right to put forward her defence - a defence not available at her trial because she feared for the future well-being of her daughters. The judgement has far-reaching consequences for all vulnerable people who are unable to tell their story because of mental illness or trauma.

The judgement is littered with ill-conceived and prejudicial misconceptions. It rides on sweeping assumptions about the codes of shame and dishonour - key constraining mechanisms which bind many Asian women into silence and submission. No attempt is made to recognise how these complex notions affect all Asian women, particularly those who are 'discarded' by their husbands and communities. It was her status as a divorced, isolated and poverty-stricken Asian woman which made her vulnerable to exploitation by predatory men.

In essence, the court system has discriminated against Zoorah because she does not fit the category of the 'fragrant housewife'. The courts have been rather more willing to accept cultural and religious factors when used by Asian men to excuse the killings of wives and daughters, on the basis that 'their' wife's/daughter's behaviour transgresses cultural norms.

Witness the recent case of Shahir Hussain - an Asian man from Bradford - whose murder conviction for deliberately killing his sister-in-law was quashed by the court of appeal. Subsequently, at his retrial on July 27 1998, a plea of guilty to manslaughter on the grounds of provocation was accepted by the prosecution. He argued at his retrial that his sister-in-law had brought shame on the family by having an affair outside of marriage. Compare the sentence of six and a half years which he received to the 20 years imposed upon Zoorah Shah. The bottom line is that Zoorah, and women like her, should not be punished twice - first by their oppressors and then by the law.

Zoorah Shah urgently needs your help to end the injustice she has faced at the hands of her family, the community and now the law. Southall Black Sisters is currently working with Zoorah's lawyers to explore avenues to secure justice for Zoorah Shah.

You can help in the following ways. Make a donation. Some of the campaign funds are also used to enable Zoorah Shah's children to visit her in prison. Write to the home secretary urging him to reduce her tariff and secure her release. Sign the petition which we hope to present to the home secretary in November (please return all petitions to SBS by the end of November). Affiliate to the campaign to free Zoorah. Raise the issue with your MP.

Southall Black Sisters
London

Welsh Socialist Alliances

One step forward

Over 50 people including guests and visitors came to Cardiff for the first annual conference of the Welsh Socialist Alliances on Saturday November 7. Predictably, the meeting was dominated numerically by Socialist Party Wales supporters, with around 10 comrades from the left nationalist Cymru Goch and five from the loose network that comprises Socialist Perspectives.

Observers also attended from Socialist Outlook and the Socialist Workers Party - though both organisations have currently refused to join. Hugh Kerr MEP, a smattering of Socialist Labour Party members and the ubiquitous Nick Long made up the numbers.

The Socialist Alliances in Wales sensibly adopted the type of inclusive structure championed by the Communist Party for the SAs in England. Centrally, this means that all WSA "affiliates are entitled [ie, have an automatic right - IM] to delegates to the national council" on a proportional basis according to their numerical strength (WSA constitution, section 2 'Membership', subsection 2.2).

Foolishly, John Nicholson (joint convenor of the Network of Socialist Alliances), Socialist Outlook and others of this ilk have denounced this as an attempt to impose a "central committee" (as if central committees reflect affiliate structures!) on the Alliances in England. We would be interested to hear of their thoughts on developments in Wales.

Such an inclusive approach has generated what seems to be a healthy atmosphere in the movement. There were clear differences of opinion, sharply expressed. But the general feel of the conference was, as one delegate put it, "businesslike, focused and comradely". What a contrast to England.

Politically, the meeting revealed two important features. First, the decline of the Socialist Party. Second, and by no means unconnected, a certain growth of petty nationalism.

The Socialist Party Wales claims around 90 members and was - apparently - estimating that 40 of its comrades would attend. In the event, just 25 were present and these were the more long-term, experienced cadre. This reflects the fact that - as we have consistently predicted - the 'Scottish contagion' has mutated and adopted new variants, this time in Wales.

In this context, it is perhaps instructive that comrade Roy Davies from Swansea has recently left SPW. Comrades will recall that this is the comrade who wrote those ominous words in the organisation's *Members Bulletin* of April 2 1998: the conclusion reached by some comrades arising from "discussions in Wales over the past period" was that the "Scottish Socialist Alliance offers the answer" (*Weekly Worker* May 7). He even added that these views of his were not something that "have arisen from a clear blue sky" - with the strong implication that he was not simply reflecting *personal* opinions.

Could the resignation of this prominent comrade reflect a bigger haemorrhaging of the Socialist Party Wales waiting to happen over the national question? This notion is given weight when the behaviour of the Llanelli SPw branch comrades is considered.

Essentially, these comrades are in open rebellion, selling *Scottish Socialist Voice* - paper of the left-nationalist Scottish Socialist Party - at the conference and voting as a group against the main SP bloc on important issues.

Thus, when a motion on education from the Cardiff Socialist Alliance was debated, it provoked the closest vote of the day. An amendment from So-

cialist Perspectives (whose comrades provided the most visible and energetic opposition on the day) proposed that an attempt by SP to single out its Save Free Education Campaign for support "in particular" be deleted.

This was supported by others, including the Llanelli dissidents, and was only defeated by a very small margin - 16 votes for the amendment, 20 against.

An ideal chance to assess the Llanelli comrades' real orientation - and thus perhaps that of others in the SP in Wales - would have been the Cymru Goch-motivated motion for a "Welsh workers' republic". Unfortunately, the comrades had left the meeting by this stage. The motion was easily defeated, with the main SPW contingent and Socialist Perspectives uniting to vote it down.

Nationalism clearly does not have the same mobilising force in Wales as it does in Scotland. Hugh Kerr MEP found this to his cost when he delivered his solidarity speech to conference and provoked a chorus of groans as he beat his breast about sharing the experience of oppression by "English nationalism". (The comrade also took the opportunity to attack the CPGB and the *Weekly Worker*, complaining of distortions. He is welcome to write any corrective letters or articles he feels are needed, of course.)

This opposition to nationalism is something positive. But are comrades programmatically equipped to fight its evident growth both in their own ranks and in wider society? Llanelli may be an ominous portent of future developments.

The conference resolved to debate and produce a 'Charter for socialist change' before mid-February of 1999, in time for a socialist intervention in the Euro-elections in Wales ●

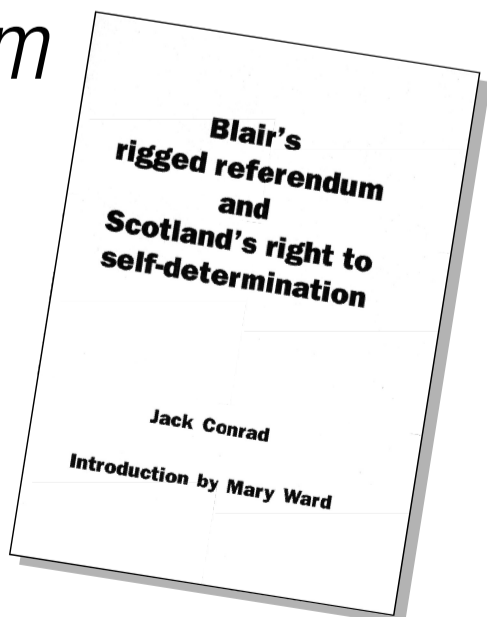
Ian Mahoney

Blair's rigged referendum and Scotland's right to self-determination

Jack Conrad offers a serious critique of the Scottish Socialist Alliance's decision to support the call for a double 'yes' vote in the September 11 1997 referendum.

He also makes clear why the Alliance's leadership, in the form of Scottish Militant Labour - now the leading force in the Scottish Socialist Party - is unable to take up the challenge to lead the working class away from nationalism and reformism towards revolutionary politics around the national question in Britain. Programme is vital.

£1.50 inc - from the CPGB address



action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday November 15, 5pm - 'Marx and Lassalle', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* as a study guide.

Manchester: Monday November 23, 7.30pm - 'The rate and mass of surplus value; the concept of relative surplus value' in the series on Karl Marx's *Capital*. For details, phone 0161-798 6417. E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.

■ Party wills

The CPGB has forms available for you to include the Party and the struggle for communism in your will. Write for details.

■ London Socialist Alliance

Conference - Sunday November 22, 11am-4pm, Conway Hall. Nearest tube - Holborn. To get involved, contact Box 22, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS, or ring Anne Murphy on 0973-231 620.

■ European elections

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

ion 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.

■ 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.

■ Communities of resistance

'Tal' presents the British premiere of 'War and peace in Ireland'. Introduced by internationally acclaimed Irish-American director, Athur McCaig ('Patriot games' and 'Irish ways'). Saturday December 12 at 2.15pm, Rio Cinema, 103 Kingsland High Road, Dalston, Hackney E8 (near Dalston Kingsland BR). £5 admission (£3.50 cons).

Fighting fund

Improving

The Bank of England downgrades its growth estimates in the face of the global economic crisis. Official figures show a rise in unemployment. Yet New Labour employment minister Andrew Smith sums up the situation this way: "The labour market is clearly improving."

With friends like these, the working class needs its own Party, a Communist Party, capable of fighting for a society fit for human beings to live in. The relentless struggle to reforge such a Party is the business of the *Weekly Worker*, which relies on a £400 a month fight-

ing fund from its supporters. Special thanks to comrades BT, KA, TD and TR for their contributions to this week's total of £55, bringing the November fund to £240.

Are you pulling your weight? ● Ian Farrell

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

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Comrades, when I was invited to speak, I was slightly taken aback, and I spoke with your national organiser, comrade Fischer, and said: "Look, I regard Stalin as a great continuer of the Leninist tradition, and your views are just the opposite. It's unlikely I'll change your mind, and you won't change mine, and where conviction is so deep, what's the point of having a debate?" He assured me there were comrades floating between the line of the *Weekly Worker* and our line. So I hope there will be some floating comrades able to listen to what I say, make up your own minds, and of course come over to the viewpoint I uphold.

I have been asked to speak on the legacy of Stalin. It's a very large topic - one cannot do justice to it in an hour. 'Stalinism' is not a term which either Stalin or any of his supporters invented. It's a term invented by Trotskyism, and it's a term invented by the bourgeoisie, and as a result of a great deal of collaboration between the two sides, Trotskyism and the ordinary bourgeois. I regard Stalin as a great Leninist. I do not regard him as having done something very original, except that he had a genius for putting into effect the precepts of Marxism-Leninism. I think that's where his great achievement lies. He never pretended, like a lot of Bolsheviks who shall remain unnamed, to have something new to say. He constantly referred to Lenin, and said, 'This is what comrade Lenin said: that's what we are going to do. It makes sense to me, and I don't wish to disagree with other people just for the sake of disagreeing. We've got a job to do and that's what we are going to get on with.'

I want to summarise in the beginning, and then substantiate, exactly what Stalin's contribution was. I think the most significant contribution was first of all to hold the Party together by routing all the fractious elements. No doubt you'll call it Bonapartist purges and all the rest of it. But actually to have maintained the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union in those times could not be done except on the basis of the strictest iron discipline, for which not Stalin, but Lenin was responsible through the resolution that he personally wrote for the 10th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The second thing Stalin did was lead the Party not only to defeat the opposition - he had to do this before anything positive could be done - but also convince the Party in the fashion of Lenin that it was perfectly possible that socialism could be built in the Soviet Union. Although it would have been lovely if revolution had come in Germany, Britain, France, the United States of America and the leading capitalist countries, it hadn't come - that was the fact. And there's no point in saying that Stalin betrayed the revolution. People who say so have a soft spot for social democracy. If anybody betrayed the revolution in western Europe, it was social democracy, and not Stalin. Social democracy had betrayed the revolution during the time of Lenin, and it was to do so again in the period leading to World War II and subsequently. Stalin led the fight for the building of socialism, and constructed socialism. Should someone question whether socialism was constructed, I shall give them quotations from none other than Leon Davidovich Trotsky.

Building socialism wasn't something minor. It meant pulling the Soviet Union out of its feudal and medieval integument into the modern world, and building modern socialist industry and collectivised agriculture. I come from a peasant country, where the peasantry live in miserable conditions. I believe in collectivisation - socialist collectivisation. Stalin's was a tremendous achievement.

In praise of

Harpal Brar, member of the national executive of the Socialist Labour Party, spoke at the CPGB's Communist University, on Sunday August 2 1998

And the third achievement was to have built the Red Army, which was to have the glorious role of almost single-handedly smashing the fascists from Germany and their allies. And at the end of his life to have waged a struggle against people in the Party who were trying to bring in the ideas of market socialism, and to have rehabilitated Soviet production within three years of the end of the war to pre-war levels, and within three years after that to have doubled it.

These are Stalin's significant achievements, and these are his legacy to the communist movement. I don't care that as I speak people snigger and say, 'These are the typical sayings of Stalinists.' To me they are axioms. They are achievements of working class power, of which working people everywhere can be proud. If you go around the world, working people are indeed proud of the Soviet achievement, and so, notwithstanding the reversals that have taken place since the days of Krushchevite revisionism, notwithstanding what has happened in eastern Europe, it doesn't prove anything wrong about the pursuits of Stalin, and what he was trying to achieve. On the contrary, it shows how important it is to have revolutionary leadership, how important it is to fight revisionism and Trotskyism. The 21st century will never be what the 19th century was, such as has been the effect of the October Revolution, and I must say Stalin had some part to play, no matter how modest that part may be. It was certainly far greater than we collectively have ever played or are likely to play.

On the question of holding the Party together. Time and again, it has been asserted that what Stalin was trying to do was cleverly manoeuvre to eliminate every opposition - all those brilliant Bolshevik leaders - so that he could become the sole man in charge. There is absolutely no truth in this. Stalin always believed that after the death of Lenin there was not a single leader in the Party able to step into Lenin's shoes. It was therefore very important to have a collective leadership. Stalin worked as hard as possible with all the leaders - with Kamenev, Zinoviev, and he wanted to work with Trotsky. This was at a time when Kamenev and Zinoviev refused to speak to Trotsky. They wanted Trotsky's expulsion from the Party. Stalin said to them: 'You can't do that. If you start doing that you lop off one arm today, the other tomorrow, and a leg the day after that, and what would be left of the Party?' It wasn't until much later on, over the question of whether socialism could be built in the Soviet Union or not by the year 1925, that they united together in hostility to the Party. Although they were known as brilliant Marxists and great theoreticians, they hadn't a clue how to function. Stalin wanted to work with them. And when they forced the debate in the Party on whether socialism should or should not be constructed, or could or could not be constructed, there was a full debate - and let no one tell me the 'Stalinist bureaucracy'

stopped the debate taking place. Debate raged in the Party, in the factory units, on the farms, all over the country. And when the vote took place, the Trotskyists and the new opposition, as it was called, along with Kamenev and Zinoviev, got 4,000 votes, as opposed to something like 700,000 that the Party got. That was their strength. There was nothing bureaucratic about this straightforward defeat.

I ask you, comrades: a revolution has taken place in Britain. Your theory says socialism cannot be built in a single country, unless revolution comes in a number of other countries. For reasons that are beyond your control - you haven't betrayed the revolution: you obviously want it everywhere - it doesn't come. What exactly do you do? It's a practical question. There are two things. Our theory says socialism cannot be built. So that's it. Lets shut up shop and go home. It was a one-day wonder. The proletariat simply lived to go to the barricades, win, and then be slaughtered. The other thing is - no, it hasn't come, but we're going to make a go of it. I can provide textual evidence - Lenin, all over the place - on the question of whether revolution is possible in several countries, let alone all over the world. And he said it's a rarity. It is not a Stalinist invention that this is so: it is what Lenin said, as early as 1916, in the United States of Europe article - this question has caused some controversy in the SLP.

Read Lenin's article on the military programme of the proletarian dictatorship. Read his article on cooperatives. And what does he say? Socialism can be built. It can be built, because things have changed since Marx's day. Things have changed because old free-competition capitalism has become monopoly capitalism. When monopoly capitalism comes on the stage, the question of revolution can no longer be looked at in the old way. It's not a question of whether in a given country the proletariat is in the majority or not. The question is that under conditions of imperialism the whole world is ripe for revolution. Where will the chain of imperialism break? Nobody can say for certain, but it is likely to break down at its weakest link, and in February, and in October/November 1917, Russia proved to be the weakest link.

The Trotskyists and the opposition suffered defeat, and a lot of people called it Stalin's manoeuvring. The reason the Trotskyist opposition failed was because it was trying to depart from Marxism-Leninism on the question of building socialism. Stalin raised this question: he said, 'How are we to explain the fact that, notwithstanding his oratorical skills, his will to lead and his abilities, Trotsky was thrown out of the leadership of the CPSU(B)?' And Stalin goes on to answer, 'The reason is that the opposition intended to replace, to "improve" Leninism with Trotskyism.' But the Party wanted to remain true to Leninism. That's the root cause why the Party which made three revolutions found it necessary to turn its

back on Trotsky and on the opposition as a whole.

Stalin raised the same question at the 15th Congress, when he said, 'How could it happen that the Party as a whole, and after it the working class as a whole, so thoroughly isolated the opposition?' After all the opposition was headed by well known people, with well known names, people who know how to advertise themselves - people who were not afflicted with modesty, and were able to blow their own trumpet. It happened because the leading group of the opposition turned out to be a group of petty bourgeois intellectuals, divorced from life, divorced from the revolution and divorced from the working class. And that's why it was defeated.

Stalin goes on to say that the opposition thinks its defeat can be explained by the personal factor, by Stalin's rudeness. That is too cheap - an incantation, not an explanation. Trotsky had been fighting Leninism since 1904. From 1904 until the February Revolution of 1917, he hung around the Mensheviks, desperately fighting Lenin's Party all the time. During that period Trotsky suffered a number of defeats at the hands of Lenin's Party. Why? Perhaps Stalin's rudeness was to blame. But Stalin was not yet general secretary of the central committee of the time. He was not abroad, but in Russia, fighting tsarism underground. Whereas the struggle between Trotsky and Lenin raged abroad. So what has Stalin's rudeness got to do with it?

During the period from the October Revolution to 1923, Trotsky, already a member of the Bolshevik Party, made two grand sorties against Lenin and his Party. In 1918 on the question of the Brest peace, and in 1921 on the trade union question. But these sorties ended in Trotsky being defeated. Why? At that time Stalin was not yet general secretary of the central committee. The secretariat was then occupied by notorious Trotskyists. So what has Stalin's rudeness got to do with that? Later, Trotsky made a number of fresh sorties against the Party, in 1923, 24, 26 and 27. And each sortie ended in Trotsky's defeat. Is it not obvious that Trotsky's fight against the Party had deep historical roots? Is it not obvious that the struggle that the Party was waging against Trotskyism was a continuation of the struggle that the Party headed by Lenin waged from 1904 onwards? Is it not obvious that the attempts of Trotskyists to replace Leninism by Trotskyism were the chief cause of the failure of the entire line of the opposition?

So, the whole idea that as soon as Lenin died, the struggle took place because Trotsky was fighting against Stalinist bureaucracy is nonsensical. As Stalin rightly described, Trotsky was the chief patriarch of bureaucrats. You could not find a more bureaucratic person than Trotsky, whose solution to every problem was militarisation. Militarisation of the trade unions, militarisation of every-

body. This could not be done. Working class power could not be held in place if everybody was simply ordered. So you come to a position where you have socialist construction taking place. And Trotsky himself had to admit what exactly the achievements of socialism were.

Revolution Betrayed is a Trotskyist bible. If anyone is a Trotskyist, that's one book that they are likely to have read. I'd actually like them to have read all of Trotsky. The best way to refute Trotskyism is to read Trotsky. He trips himself up each paragraph and contradicts the previous paragraph. Each book contradicts the previous book, and so on. I can see what the attraction of Trotsky is for the average petty bourgeois, and especially the intelligentsia. He has a terrific turn of phrase, but it doesn't enlighten anybody. I also read Trotsky and find at times that he's quite good. For example here, in *Revolution Betrayed*, he says: "Gigantic achievements in industry, enormously promising beginnings in agriculture, an extraordinary growth of old industrial cities, and the building of new ones. A rapid increase in the number of workers, a rise in cultural level and cultural demands. Such are the indubitable results of the October Revolution." People are 'betraying' it, but the October Revolution is somehow working these wonderful achievements.

"Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory". And that's written by the gentleman who says that it's not possible, it's not capable of being built in a single country, and there's got to be a world revolution. "Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not in the pages of *Capital*, but in an industrial arena comprising one sixth of the world's land surface. Not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity. A backward country has achieved in less than 10 years successes unexampled in history. That is so. This also ends the quarrel with the reformists in the workers' movement. Can we compare for one moment their mouse-like fussing with the titanic work accomplished by this people aroused to a new life by this revolution." Now that's Trotsky. I hope you like it.

Then, Stalinism is supposed to be herding everybody, like cattle. Stalin raises his finger, and everyone from Khrushchev down to the factory operator dances to his tune. Not so, if we believe Trotsky. I wasn't there, but Trotsky should know something about Russia. "To be sure," he says, "the youth are very active in the sphere of economics. In the Soviet Union there are now 1.2 million communist youth in the collective farms. Hundreds of thousands of members of the communist youth have been mobilised in recent years for construction work, timber work, coal mining, gold production, for work in the Arctic, Sakhalin or in a mood where the new town of Komsomolsk is in the process of production. The new generation is putting out shock brigades, champion works, Stakhanovites, foremen, under-administrators. The youth has studied, and is studying assiduously ..." Of course Stalin said 'study' and they studied.

"They are as active, if not more so, in the sphere of athletics, including its most warlike forms, such as parachute jumping and marksmanship. The enterprising and audacious are

Stalin

going on all kinds of dangerous expeditions. The better part of our youth, said recently the well known polar explorer Schmidt, are eager to work where difficulties await them. This is undoubtedly true. It would be crude slander against the youth to portray them as controlled exclusively or even predominantly by personal interests. No, in the general mass, they're magnanimous, responsive, enterprising. In their ranks are various unformulated tendencies grounded in heroism, and still only awaiting application. It is upon these moves in particular that the newest kind of Soviet patriotism is nurturing itself. It is undoubtedly sincere and dynamic."

That was Trotsky, who thought that socialism could not be built, and that the leadership had betrayed the revolution. These achievements are the finest examples of the kind of 'betrayal' that I would like to see everywhere. I wish that we could have a leadership who would actually 'betray' the proletariat so much.

So you have Soviet industry being built, and there is really not a single country in the world where there was such labour heroism, where there was such an unleashing of the initiative of the masses. There was nothing that the Soviet people didn't think that they could do, and they were right. The breathtaking audacity, and the all-encompassing, awe-inspiring achievements really are fantastic as far as the Soviet people are concerned. And it is really only because of that, that it was possible for the Soviet people to go along and defeat Nazi Germany.

But the Soviet Union could not have achieved this, had it not got rid of the fifth column. No doubt, most people sitting here consider that the Moscow trials were staged by Stalin, that Stalin acted as the judge, jury and prosecutor. Far from it. Time will not allow me to present the evidence of the Moscow trials. Any of you who are genuinely interested, rather than raising Aunt Sallies, should read the transcripts of the Moscow trials. They run into about 2,000 pages. The Moscow trials were held in front of over 1,000 foreign journalists. Foreign diplomats attended. Among them was Joseph Davy, no great communist, from the United States of America - he was the ambassador. He sent reports to his government saying, 'These trials are correct and these people are guilty'. There is plenty of evidence. His masters wrote back to him saying, 'This is so, but it's not something we want the people of the world to know. We have to say these trials are rigged.'

Here are these 51 or 52 people who have been in the Bolshevik Party for a long time. They come and admit to all kinds of heinous crimes, from sabotage to treasonable associations with foreign powers, including Germany and Japan. If a common criminal is arrested, the moment he comes to court he says, 'I was beaten and the police extracted this confession out of me.' I invite you, even if you have to force yourselves, to actually read the testimony of the accused in these trials. I invite you to read Bukharin's evidence at his trial - the same Bukharin who was denounced all the time as a rightwing revisionist. But the moment he turned against the building of socialism, he becomes a great communist and a leading member of the opposition, with whom Trotskyists have no difficulty working. Bukharin actually engages

the prosecutor in philosophical discussions, and tries to actually answer the question, why was it possible, how did it come about that, from being Bolshevik revolutionaries, they became traitors to the socialist motherland? He explains the process.

No one, unless they are very crude, would say all these people entered the Bolshevik Party because they were agents of the bourgeoisie. Although that is not impossible in some cases. Was it unknown for infiltrators to get into revolutionary parties? Is any single group free from it? Is your group free from it? Of course not. Lenin was so strict about who should join the Bolshevik Party - but who did he put on the central committee? Comrade Malinovsky. Comes the revolution, and where is Malinovsky? The one time you want to be with your comrades, when you've won, he's missing. The Bolsheviks seize the records of the tsarist police, the okhrana. And what do they find? He was a tsarist agent. It was on his information that so many people were sent to Siberia. So they caught him somewhere in the streets of Moscow.

Was Malinovsky given a trial? No. Lenin quite rightly said that the dictatorship of the proletariat is unrestricted by law. It doesn't first say, this is the article in the criminal code that you violated, and therefore we shall try you. No. Malinovsky said, 'I'm sorry. I tried to be a fake Bolshevik I shall be a real one if you give me a chance.' Lenin said, 'Take this scoundrel out and shoot him', and they did. Stalin did no such thing. He said, 'Our intelligence agencies have this, that and the other evidence against these people: present it in court.'

The fact that these people were eliminated has been put out as the decapitation of the Party, and the decapitation of the Red Army. Funny 'decapitation'. Funny that this 'decapitated' army, which was expected to last no more than six weeks in the face of the German onslaught, is actually the army that raised the red flag over the Reichstag.

You see, before the war started, Trotsky's prediction was that the Soviet Union would lose. The Stalinist bureaucracy was "frightened" of the workers, the workers at home were disgruntled and the war simply could not be waged. And Trotsky said, "Can we however expect that the Soviet Union will come out of the coming great war without defeat?" To this question, frankly posed by Trotsky, we will answer as frankly: "If the war should only remain a war, the defeat of the Soviet Union will be inevitable. In a technical, economic and military sense, imperialism is incomparably more strong, and if it is not paralysed by revolution in the west, then of course imperialism would win."

In 1940, just before another Trotskyist did him to death, Trotsky said: "We always started from the fact that the international policy of the Kremlin was determined by the 'new aristocracy's' incapacity to conduct war. The ruling caste is no longer capable of thinking about tomorrow. Its formula is the same as that of all doomed regimes - after us, the deluge. The war will topple many things, and many individuals. Artifice, trickery, frame-ups, and treasons will prove of no avail in escaping its severe judgements." This is what Trotsky said in his article, 'Stalin, feck-

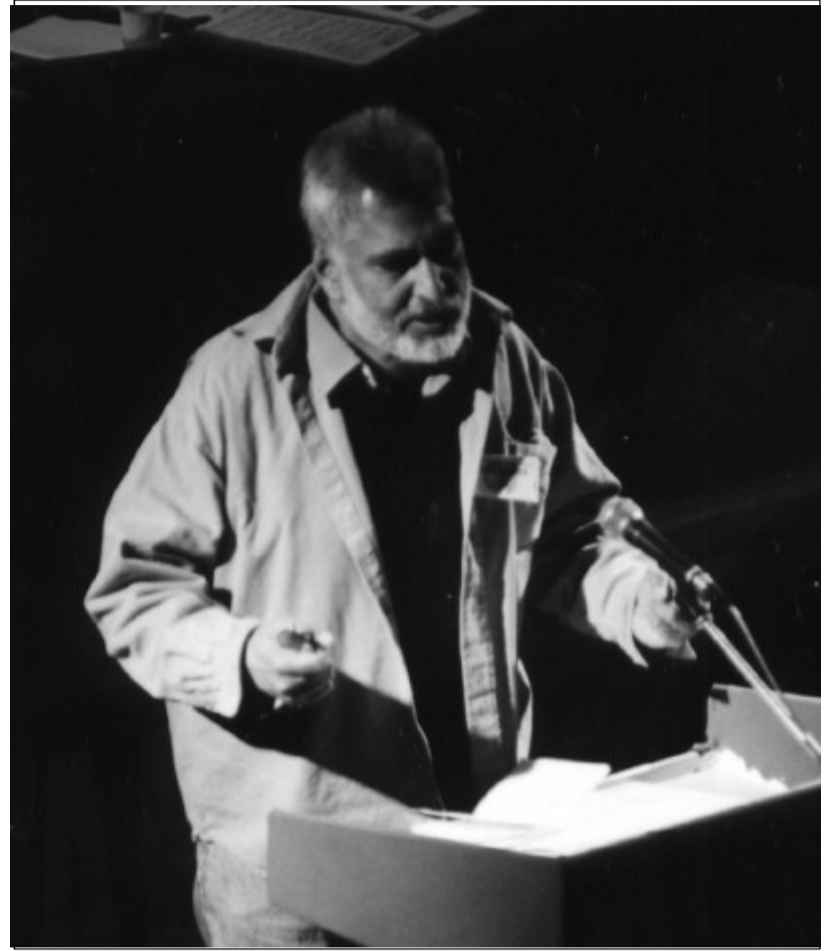
less quartermaster'. Lovely, isn't it?

He then goes on to say, Stalin cannot make a war, with discontented workers and peasants, and with a "decapitated" Red Army. The level of the USSR's productive forces forbids a major war. Involvement of the USSR in a major war before the end of this period will signify a struggle with unequal weapons. The subjective factor, not less important than the material, has changed in the last few years very sharply for the worse. Stalin cannot wage an offensive war with any hope of victory. Should the USSR enter the war with its "innumerable victims" (mainly Trotskyists), the "whole fraud of the official regime, its outrages and violence, will inevitably provoke a profound reaction on the part of the people, who have already carried out three revolutions in this century. The present war can crush the Kremlin bureaucracy, long before revolutionary war breaks out in some capitalist country." That's what Trotsky says.

And how did the average Soviet soldier fight? You see, if a regime is unpopular, decrepit and rotten, the best time to overthrow it is during a war. This is what happened to tsarist autocracy. A rotten regime can last in ordinary, peaceful times. But it cannot survive the kind of feverish changes that took place in the Soviet Union in peaceful times as well as in warlike times. It could only last because it was closely connected with the people. Because the leadership had become a representative spokesperson for the ordinary people. And the average soldier went to his death with one slogan on his lips - 'For the motherland, and for comrade Stalin'. To them, as even a renegade like Gorbachev admits, the major part in the victory of the Soviet Union was Stalin's leadership, and his ability to organise things and wage war in a disciplined manner. And Gorbachev hated Stalin every bit as much as did Trotsky.

I quote from a bourgeois author called Ian Grey, who has written a biography of Stalin. He said the massive setbacks and the immediate threat to Moscow - the initial 12 weeks of the war - would have unnerved most men. "But the impact on Stalin was to strengthen his determination to fight. No single factor was more important than holding the nation from disintegration at this time." He carries on: "It was in a real sense his [that is, Stalin's] victory." Grey cites Isaac Deutscher - "Collectivised farming had been the peasant's preparatory school for mechanised warfare" - and comments: "It was his victory too because he had directed and controlled every branch of Russian operations throughout the war. The range and burden of his responsibilities were extraordinary. But day after day, without a break throughout the war, he exercised direct command of the Russian forces and control of supplies, of war industry and government policy, including foreign policy."

Isaac Deutscher says, how "dreary", "dull", "bureaucratic", etc Stalin was. The very same Stalin as he describes in these wonderful terms: "Many allied visitors who called at the Kremlin during the war were astonished to see how many issues, great and small, military, political or diplomatic, Stalin personally took the final decision in. He was in effect commander in chief, his own minister of defence, his own quarter-



Harpal Brar addresses the 1997 SLP congress

master, his own minister of supply, his own foreign minister, and even his own *chef de protocol*. The Stavka, the Red Army's general headquarters, was in his office in the Kremlin.

"From his office desk, in constant and direct touch with the commands at the fronts, he watched and directed the campaigns in the fields. From his office desk too, he managed another stupendous operation, the evacuation of 1,360 plants and factories from western Russia and the Ukraine to the Volga, the Urals and Siberia, an evacuation that involved not only machines and installations, but millions of workmen and their families. He bargained with Beaverbrook and Harriman over the quantities of aluminium or the calibre of rifles and anti-aircraft guns to be delivered to Russia by the western allies. Or he received leaders of the guerrillas from German-occupied territories, and discussed with them raids to be carried out hundreds of miles behind the enemy's lines. Thus he went on, day after day, throughout the four years of hostilities, a prodigy of patience, tenacity and vigilance, almost omnipresent, almost omniscient." For a dull, dreary, bureaucratic person, I think that's pretty good.

He continues: "There's no doubt that he was their [that is, the Soviet troops'] real commander in chief. His leadership was by no means confined to taking abstract strategic decisions, at which civilian politicians may excel. The avid interest with which he studied the technical aspects of modern warfare, down to the minutest details, show him to have been anything but a dilettante. He viewed the war primarily from the angle of logistics, to secure reserves of manpower and supplies of weapons, in the right quantities and proportions, to allocate them and transport them to the right points at the right time, to amass a decisive strategic reserve, and to have it ready for intervention at decisive moments. These operations made up nine tenths of his task."

And, believe it or not, Deutscher says: "It should not be imagined that the majority of the nation was hostile to the government. If that had been the case, no patriotic appeals, no prodding or coercion would have prevented Russia's political collapse, for which Hitler was confidently hoping. The great transformation that the country had gone through before the war had strengthened the moral fibre of the nation. The majority was im-

bued with a strong sense of its economic and social advance, which it was grimly determined to defend against dangers from without." Which means it was as much a victory for socialism that had been built in the Soviet Union, as it was for mere Russian patriotism.

In a speech to business managers in 1931, Stalin said: 'We're 50 or 100 years behind advanced countries. We must make good this lag in 10 years. Either we do it, or they crush us.' So Stalin had spoken exactly 10 years before Hitler set out to conquer Russia. His words, recalled now, could not but impress people as a prophecy, brilliantly fulfilled, as a most timely call to action. Indeed a few years' delay in the modernisation of Russia might have made all the difference between victory and defeat.

As Jehovah's Witnesses would say, 'My time is up'. I'm going to end with this quotation, comrades, After the victory of the Soviet Army against the fascists, there was a victory parade in Red Square, Moscow. And Deutscher captures the scene as follows: "On June 24 1945, Stalin stood on the top of the Lenin Mausoleum, and reviewed a great military parade of the Red Army, which marked the fourth anniversary of Hitler's attack. By Stalin's side stood Marshal Zhukov, his deputy, the victor of Moscow, Stalingrad and Berlin. The troops that marched past him were led by Marshal Rokassowski. As they marched, rode and galloped across Red Square, regiments of infantry, cavalry and tanks swept the mud off its pavements with innumerable banners and standards of Hitler's army. At the Mausoleum, they threw the banners at Stalin's feet. The allegorical scene was strangely imaginative. The next day Stalin received the tribute of Moscow, for the defence of the city in 1941. The day after, he was acclaimed as hero of the Soviet Union, and given the title of Generalissimo."

"In these days of undreamed of glory," continued Deutscher, "Stalin stood in the full gaze of popular recognition and gratitude. These feelings were spontaneous, genuine - not engineered by official propagandists. Overworked slogans about the achievements of the Stalinist era now conveyed fresh meaning, not only to young people, but to sceptics and malcontents in the older generation."

But not for sceptics in this country ●

Bridging the divide

Danny Hammill reports on the CPGB's weekend school 'Against economism'

At present the revolutionary left is divided into feuding theoretical fiefdoms. All the various left groups are engaged in a ceaseless primordial struggle for supremacy and domination. Ideological gurus conduct vicious internecine warfare - internally and externally - in order to defend their revealed truths, which must of necessity be defended to the bitter end against all other contra-doctrines and beliefs. Fragmentation and eventual disillusionment is the inevitable result.

We need to break out of this profoundly sect-like mentality. The Communist Party of Great Britain's weekend school, 'Against economism', showed that the legacy of mistrust and narrow rivalry can be broken down and transcended. Yes, the old spirit of instinctive dogmatism was not altogether absent. But at the same time we also saw a heartening degree of theoretical movement - albeit of a limited nature - from many of the comrades who attended.

CPGB comrades enjoyed a frank and open exchange of views with supporters of the *Marxist Bulletin* group, the Revolutionary Democratic Group, the Trotskyist Unity Group and Ian Donovan, editor of the Trotskyite journal *Revolution and Truth*. Also present were 'non-aligned' comrades. The school was composed of four sessions: *Iskra* and economism (Mark Fischer); Lenin versus imperialist economism (Steve Riley); Lenin and the permanent revolution (John Bridge); modern Trotskyism's tendency to economism (Marcus Larsen).

The entire British left, both in its Trotskyist and (dwindling) 'official communist' form, is saturated with economism. In a sense, the left does not know how *not* to be economic in its orientation - as the school revealed. Hence it is vital to study this question scientifically. However, as comrade Mark Fischer of the CPGB reminded us, when looking back at the history of economism and the struggle waged against it by Lenin, there are "no predetermined lessons". We need to grasp the historical specifics of economism, said comrade Fischer, and then fill the old labels and categories ('economism', 'imperialist economism', etc) with a *new* content - and hence gain a new insight into the true nature of modern-day economism. In Lenin's day, economism was a by-product of the infant nature of the workers' movement. Contemporary economism, on the other hand, is a manifestation of its *senility* - and, particularly in Britain, of good old fashioned empiricism.

The seminal text of 'anti-economism' is of course VI Lenin's much vilified *What is to be done?* In this fierce polemic Lenin famously argued that consciousness can only be brought to the working class from the 'outside'. Ever since, hordes of philistines and the professionally ignorant - one T Cliff most notably - have damned Lenin for either having an 'elitist' conception of socialism - ie, a socialism without the need for workers' self-activity and workers' power - or alternatively having fundamentally changed his mind in the storm year of 1905.

Nothing could be further from the truth, as comrade John Bridge of the CPGB argued. Lenin did not think that "academics from the ivory tower

would enlighten the ignorant masses" - or, for that matter, that the tanks of the Red Army could deliver socialism from the 'outside'. All that Lenin meant was that socialism - just like the Marxist programme and *scientific truth* in general - does not arise *spontaneously* from the clash between worker and boss. Or, as comrade Fischer put it, socialism comes from "outside of an immediate, particular set of social relations - ie, the worker-boss one".

In reality, Lenin's conception was profoundly *democratic*. It was the task of the communist movement to "re-make the class into the democratic hegemon of society" (John Bridge), which requires the highest level of *political* consciousness possible and the maximum degree of working class independence. This was the essence of *Iskra*-ism.

The economists thought otherwise. Whereas Lenin advocated that communists should become "tribunes of the oppressed", the economists' model was that of a trade union secretary. This debilitating narrowness was expressed in the now notorious and "pompous" (Lenin) formulation by Martynov, that communists aim to "lend the economic struggle *itself* a political character". In practice, this meant that the workers' movement ceded all the democratic-constitutional-political tasks to the bourgeoisie, while the workers got on with the economic or 'bread and butter' tasks.

Surely a brief perusal of today's left press - such as *Socialist Worker* or *The Socialist* - reveals the same dismal 'trade unionist' approach to the workers' movement. Is there anybody who can seriously argue that *Socialist Worker* acts as a "tribune of the oppressed"? For example it remains eerily silent on the right of Scotland and Wales to self-determination and on how that right should be won and exercised. Here, as explained by comrade Steve Riley, we have our modern-day version of imperialist economism. To a larger or lesser degree - normally a larger one - this economism infects the whole of the British left.

It was interesting to note the response of the comrades from the *Marxist Bulletin* group. Indeed, they seemed quite genuinely puzzled that the CPGB placed so much emphasis on economism. Surely the economism outlined by comrades Fischer, Riley and Bridge died out in Russia a long time ago? Sure, comrade Alan Gibson said, we all agree - probably - that the Socialist Party or the SWP are "classic economists" in that they *separate* the economic from the political. But most of the Trotskyist left does not do that - certainly not the *Marxist Bulletin* group! The *MB* comrades appeared to be morally offended by the constant accusation from the CPGB that they are economists.

In order to refute this "odd" (*MB*'s favourite word) charge, comrade Barbara Duke said that the *Marxist Bulletin* group does not believe that the struggle for a five percent pay rise leads by "absolute logic" to socialism. Definitely not. The job of her comrades is to "instill revolutionary consciousness into the struggle for five percent in order to take it further" ... towards socialism no doubt. What is this but a modern-day variant on the old Martynovian struggle to "lend the economic struggle *itself* a political character"? The *Marxist Bulletin*'s innocent denials were made even less convincing by an examination of a supplement (October 1) it eagerly handed out at the school. In this document on the RMT and the Steve Hedley dispute, we are informed that "railworkers need what all workers need - secure jobs, good pay, strong unions, decent free healthcare, good education, and more leisure time". Not a mention, you notice, of what workers *really* need so they can take control of their own lives - *political power* to make revolution. Without posing hegemonic demands, championing the right of all the oppressed against every democratic shortfall - the monarchy, the Lords, British troops in northern Ireland, etc - all directed against the *state*, the left is merely calling for workers to be treated as "better-fed cattle", as one CPGB comrade wryly put it.

Another manifestation of economism, as comrade Bridge stated, is one which imagines that strikes produce political consciousness. Strikes and voting Labour lead to socialism - eventually. Essentially, this is the schema of the British left. The old 'official communist' *British road to socialism* was an example of this rightwing economism. The *Transitional Programme* of Leon Trotsky spawned a more leftwing variant. We need to lead a ruthless struggle against economism in all its multifarious shapes and forms.

However, the *Marxist Bulletin* has started to move. The comrades who put together this journal insist with passion that the CPGB's stress on the importance of the demand for a federal republic is a text-book example of the CPGB's (Stalinist-derived) 'stageism'. They have consistently counterposed their abstract demand for a workers' government to our concrete *transitional* demand for a federal republic - 'Why do we want to swap a bourgeois constitutional monarchy for a bourgeois republic?' What the workers need is "socialism", presumably on the basis that the British bourgeoisie have long since carried out the so-called 'bourgeois democratic revolution' (1640s?) and it is now time to 'move on' - fast.

But as the debate unfolded, comrade Gibson conceded that the federal republic slogan "could be useful". Naturally, the comrade added an immediate caveat - "useful" as part of an overall revolutionary programme. Somehow comrade Gibson has failed to notice that the CPGB's demand for a federal republic is indeed part of its draft programme. But never mind. The real question we need to tease out of comrade Gibson is exactly *when* it would become "useful" - seeing how there is a national question in Scotland and Wales - as well as Ireland - and we live under a monarchy. We look forward to continuing this debate.

One of the main functions of the school was to attempt to demolish *mythology* - whether it be of the Trotskyist or Stalinist sort. Comrade John Bridge set about this essential task in his opening on 'Lenin and permanent revolution'. For decades, our Trotskyist comrades have insisted that there is a world of difference between the revolutionary plan outlined by Lenin in his *Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution* and that expounded in Leon Trotsky's *Results and prospects*. In *Two tactics*, so the story goes, Lenin was guilty of the heinous crime of 'stageism', which prepared the ground for Stalinism. He only redeemed himself by becoming a 'Trotskyist' in April 1917 when he

wrote what has become known as the *April theses*. In these *theses*, thank heavens, Lenin saw sense at last and embraced Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, eloquently laid out in *Results and prospects*. Apparently, the subsequent events of the October Revolution 'proved' Trotsky to be right and Lenin to be wrong (pre-*April theses*, that is).

Nonsense, replied comrade Bridge. In essence - give or take this or that that nuance or literary formulation - both Lenin's *Two Tactics* and Trotsky's *Results and prospects* share the same outlook. Both agreed that the bourgeoisie was counterrevolutionary. Both agreed that socialism could not be built within the national confines of Russia. Where is the supposed chasm between the two theories?

Yes, Lenin launched vituperative polemics against *Results and prospects*. However, Lenin's ire was in reality directed against Parvus, a collaborator of Trotsky's, for his *leftist* formulation of 'Not a tsar, but a workers' government' - which glaringly ignored the crucial role of the peasantry (ie, the overwhelming majority). Indeed, going by historical evidence, it seems Lenin had not even read Trotsky's book.

Of course, the Stalinite lie-machine exaggerated and amplified the differences. Nothing odd about that. But it is tragic - and unnecessary - that the Trotskyists also echo and give voice to this obvious myth. Somewhat depressingly, the Trotskyist movement has accepted the terms of debate laid down by the Stalinites. What an own goal. Real history shows that the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" (Lenin's supposedly dread expression from *Two tactics*) became a reality in 1917. The monarchy was abolished and the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship" became realised in the soviets - albeit, until October, in the peculiar and novel form of dual power. In other words, we see a clear line of continuity between *Two tactics* and the *April theses*, however much the Trotskyists maintain otherwise.

But a close examination of this myth reveals another source of economism. Using the *name* of Lenin's theory of a revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and peasantry, Stalinite orthodoxy resuscitated the Menshevik theory of bourgeois revolution - *every* country had to go through its 'democratic stage' in alliance with the 'democratic' bourgeoisie - whether that be China 1927, Spain 1936 or France 1968. Hence the communist parties had to divide their activities into two: on the one hand push, pressurise and support the 'democratic' bourgeoisie, and on the other hand struggle around economic or 'bread and butter' issues. A road to disaster. Trotskyite orthodoxy also believes in a (bourgeois) democratic 'stage' - but *its* version of permanent revolution only applies to the *backward* countries. The bourgeoisie has performed its historically allocated 'democratic role' in countries like Britain or the USA. Tragically, in the backward countries the bourgeoisie has let the side down and the proletariat has to tidy up the democratic 'mess'.

Hence the hostility shown by Trotskyists to any talk of a federal republic or constitutional issues in general. Here the 'bourgeois (democratic) revolution' took care of all that stuff. Now it is down to the good old slog between the worker and the boss, combined with the *dream* of the socialist republic. No need for all this

'awkward' political stuff about a federal republic. It only confuses workers.

Somewhat unconvincingly, comrade Donovan argued that the Stalinites exploited the "loophole" in Lenin's algebraic formulation of the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". This "loophole" took concrete shape in China 1927, when the Comintern instructed the Communist Party to subordinate itself to the *bourgeois* Kuomintang. You see, said the comrade, here we saw a concrete 'application' of Lenin's wrong formula. Naturally, no such "loophole" existed in Trotsky's formulations.

More stuff and nonsense, according to comrade Bridge. The Stalinites cynically used Lenin's formulation as a mask behind which they revived the old *Menshevik* schema - ie, to subordinate the workers' movement to the bourgeoisie. Far from being an application of Lenin's slogan, it was its living *opposite*. Using comrade Donovan's logic we might as well dump terms like 'socialism', 'communism', 'proletarian internationalism', 'dictatorship of the proletariat', etc. All full of "loopholes". And turned into their opposites by the Stalinite bureaucracy.

Comrade Marcus Larsen looked at Trotsky's *Transitional programme* - which is peppered with economic "loopholes". The objectivist-catastrophist method behind the *TP* leads - by one route or another - to economism. It was premised on the 1938 belief - not *entirely* naive under those concrete historical conditions - that even the most *minimal* of economic demands put forward by the Trotskyists - organised as sects - would send the capitalist system toppling over. History itself has disproved this spontaneist schema. Trotskyists should rethink and reread the *TP* with a less dogmatic frame of mind.

However, that does not mean there is nothing to be learned from the *TP*. For instance, one of its demands is for "arming the workers" - something modern-day Trotskyists look at aghast. The CPGB has been ridiculed for demanding this as one of its *minimum* demands - and for putting it in election addresses. In that we are just following in the footsteps of the *Second International* and that great revolutionary, Leon Trotsky. Comrade Donovan, rather lamely, argued that this demand of the *TP* essentially only applied to the USA, where it is more of a "cultural question". Since Britain is not in a revolutionary situation, to demand the arming of the workers is foolish and objectively ultra-leftist, he said.

As many comrades retorted, it would be a very funny *communist* minimum programme that did not aim to take us to the point of revolution. Arming the workers *only* in a revolutionary situation says more about the Trotskyites' conservatism and economism than our own supposed ultra-leftism. (The 1926 General Strike saw rudimentary workers' defence corps; the miners organised hit squads in 1984-5; and it was a pity indeed that the 1992 London poll tax demonstration was *not* armed to fend off police attack.)

The CPGB reiterated its offer to the Trotskyist comrades to join the CPGB - with full factional rights. They can do so *tomorrow*. But could a CPGB member join the *Marxist Bulletin*? Nevertheless, we are confident that the ideological icebergs that have traditionally divided the revolutionary left can and will melt away. ●

Simon Harvey of the SLP

Discontent and despair



Laying down the law: Scargill at the 2nd congress

The rumblings of discontent at the top of the Socialist Labour Party have been exposed thanks to the *Weekly Worker*. Pat Sikorski, the SLP's vice-president has penned a secret letter criticising our very own general secretary (see p8). Comrade Sikorski, whose soft-Trotskyite Fourth International Supporters Caucus (Fisc) constitutes one of the most important SLP factions, has a problem. Fisc has theorised the importance of tailing trade union leaders emerging from militant struggles - they are supposedly the key to a new mass organisation of the working class. And of course Arthur Scargill is viewed as such a figure in Britain. As comrade Sikorski writes, "The reputation of AS, as one of the very few labour leaders who have refused to bend the knee in the last decades, has been central to our progress and remains central to our future."

However, the SLP general secretary's single-minded intransigence, even from Sikorski's point of view, has its negative side - to put it mildly. There is no guarantee that this would-be labour dictator will take 'his' party in the direction Sikorski has in mind. At first Scargill looked to Fisc (primarily Pat Sikorski, Carolyn Sikorski and Brian Heron) to provide him with theoretical cover. This was certainly the case in the run-up to and immediately after the SLP's 1996 launch. However, over the recent period he has been just as likely to turn to comrade Harpal Brar (of the Indian Workers Association, Stalin Society and Communist Workers Association). Scargill pulled a 3,000 block vote (wielded by the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association) out of his hat at the December 1997 SLP congress to ensure comrade Brar was elected onto the national executive.

The NUM president's vision of a British national socialism is one where a 'great leader' (no prizes for guessing who will wear the crown) delivers working class emancipation from on high. Fisc still hopes to catch a free ride on Scargill's coat tails. But, unfortunately for Sikorski and co, he trusts nothing, trusts no one he cannot control himself. That rules out just about every initiative - whether it be for internal party organisation or political action. Nothing happens unless Arthur has sanctioned it. And when he gets sidetracked - as occurred recently when he and SLP president Frank Cave were targeted by the charity commissioners for their running of two miners' trusts - everything can grind to a halt. The little matter of Socialist Labour's 3rd Congress slipped the general secretary's mind and he neglected to circulate the relevant documentation to branches in accordance with the constitution. Which is why the full congress was "postponed" for a year and we have instead this weekend's special congress.

No wonder the likes of comrade Sikorski are unhappy. While of course "explaining problems by reference to comrades' weaknesses and faults just creates all the old demoralisation, factionalism and cynicism so familiar on the traditional left", nevertheless the problems must be "recognised and addressed, openly and honestly". And the main problem, to use Sikorski's coded criticism of Scargill's monarchy, is that "the party is both over-centralised and wrongly centralised". He goes on: "Our main public asset, AS, is forced to spend enormous amounts of time and energy on the nitty gritty of internal party work" (my emphasis). Comrade Scargill is "forced" to do no such thing - except by his disdain and mistrust of those around him.

Comrade Sikorski proposes that the day-to-day running of the SLP should be taken over by a secretariat, which would, among other things, "prepare conferences" - ie, make sure they

happen. He writes: "This would prevent virtual paralysis if our leading officers are drawn into the struggles, including legal battles, which their positions in the trade union movement inevitably throw up."

The depth of the crisis facing the SLP is matched only by the poverty of comrade Sikorski's 'solutions'. Apart from establishing a "secretariat", which he hopes would act as a counterbalance to Scargill's megalomania, he makes two other proposals. Firstly, in order to reverse the "serious loss of members, not just in constituencies or concentrated solely in one or two regions, but also in key trade unions", he calls for a reduction in membership subscriptions. Being an SLP member might be a worthless experience for many, but at least it would be cheap. Comrade Sikorski's patronising vision of Socialist Labour as a "mass membership party of the poor" is indeed pitiable.

Surely we need a party which workers would be proud to be in, for which they would willingly make all manner of sacrifices. While such a party would champion the rights of the oppressed, of the dispossessed, its backbone could only be provided by those who select themselves. History has shown that it is class consciousness that decides whether or not people decide to join this or that leftwing organisation, not dues fixed at bargain basement levels. In other words it is the head not the purse that counts.

Secondly, comrade Sikorski calls for an improvement in the SLP's "national communication", which, he says, is "poor and intermittent at best". Quite true. But this is to be rectified by the distribution to branches of "edited versions of the political reports, which the NEC now takes". *Socialist News*, whose name comrade Sikorski cannot bring himself to utter

(Fisc was originally against the idea of any SLP paper) and which he refers to only as "the newspaper", cannot "both fulfil the role of an internal communicator and reach out to new readers at the same time". Why not? Are the pearls of wisdom emanating from the NEC suitable only for experienced party activists? The idea that workers will be able to form a ruling class without needing to grasp the most advanced ideas, without understanding every detail of organisation, strategy and tactics, is bizarre. But, as with Scargill, Sikorski's vision of socialism is not one of working class self-liberation.

Sikorski tries to put an optimistic gloss on the SLP's 'achievements'. Rather than stating accurately that a small layer of militants and union bureaucrats were initially attracted to the SLP, he claims that our party's membership represents "the best fighters of their generation". Rather than giving a sober assessment of Socialist Labour's election returns (with a few exceptions they are no better than those achieved by the left as a whole since the war - less than two percent on average on May 1 1997), he pretends that "we politically represent a small, but significant, part of the British people, a fact which is reflected in our election results". The reality is that the overwhelming majority of the population are not even aware of the existence of the Socialist Labour Party.

According to comrade Sikorski, "The SLP set up the main lines of its fundamental policies in a democratic manner and spirit not seen before in British politics." In fact, where Scargill disagreed with the conclusions of the policy workshops which met in March 1996, he simply ignored or overrode them. Only three general policy areas were discussed at the founding conference, the rest being

determined by the NEC. The constitution was imposed by Scargill decree and were not endorsed until the December 1997 3rd Congress.

But it is the vice-president's disappointment - even despair - which shows through, however much he waxes lyrical about the SLP's "complete break" with the past. The truth is that Scargill's autocratic rule, leading to the hemorrhaging of the membership, has brought the SLP to the brink of disaster. Everyone is against everyone: Arthur is at war with Bob Crow, Harpal Brar is out to get Fisc, Roy Bull hates Pat Sikorski, Pat Sikorski loathes the Stalinites.

Comrade Sikorski cannot see beyond the utopian but vacuous ideal of the "new phenomenon in British politics" - "something which, while it is based on the lessons of the past, is at the same time totally new". The SLP is so "new" and original that its constitution (largely) and structure (almost entirely) are based on those of the Labour Party.

Amazingly the novel achievement of the SLP is its "atmosphere of mutual support, respect for others' opinions and democratic openness". The witch hunt, the bureaucratic exclusion of communists and democrats, the banning of opposition conferences, the political diktats from on high, are all either skimmed over or justified by a single passing phrase - "the abuse of openness by some left groups", which made it "necessary to draw a firm line against 'entry work'" (Fisc, Stalin Society, the Bullites, etc excluded).

The hypocritical phrases about "mutual support", "respect" and "democratic openness" are reminiscent of the hypocrisy of New Labour or the John Nicholson leadership of the Network of Socialist Alliances. These forces, like himself, erect a smokescreen of sweetness and light to mask their intolerance of any real opposition to their views.

When comrade Sikorski stresses "the continuing need for further creative discussion about our political programme, strategy and tactics", he is hardly speaking out for the right of the membership as a whole to democratically determine the direction of the party. After all, he is a member of the national executive that "unanimously" "postponed" the 3rd Congress until November 1999, agreeing instead to stage this weekend's special congress where no motions from the membership have been permitted.

No, what worries him is the continuing erosion of his influence. Certainly, he wants to restrain the worst of Scargill's dictatorial excesses, but only so that wise courtiers like himself can provide their own corrective guidance.

Comrade Sikorski's tinkering proposal will not transform our party into a vehicle for workers' liberation. For that we need genuinely open, democratic discussion before the whole class. We need to end all bans and proscriptions, and strive to achieve the greatest possible cooperation (including electoral) amongst the left, with the aim of forging a higher unity ●

What we fight for

- Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.
- The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers' movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.
- Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.
- We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.
- The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single Party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.
- Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs: ie, communism.
- We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.
- War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world's problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

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

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Fisc out to clip Arthur's wings

Renewing our sense of purpose

1. The SLP is an historic task. In the most difficult of circumstances, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and eastern Europe and 20 years of retreat by the labour movement in Britain, Socialist Labour has already begun to organise the political resistance.

When we founded the SLP, our aim was no less than the creation of a new, mass, socialist party. Already we politically represent a small, but significant, part of the British people, a fact which is reflected in our election results. Our support in what remains of the trade union movement is greater than that of any left party since the 1920s. The reputation of AS, as one of the very few labour leaders who have refused to bend the knee in the last decades, has been central to our progress and remains central to our future.

The dedicated hard work of numerous comrades, up and down the country, working together, despite a massive range of different political experiences and backgrounds, is an illustration of the new spirit we have already begun to build in left politics in this country. The quality of the members we attract - the best fighters of their generation - is a powerful signal of our potential.

2. The SLP set up the main lines of its fundamental policies in a democratic manner and spirit not seen before in British politics. Despite the abuse of our openness by some left groups (which meant it was necessary to draw a firm line against 'entry work') our atmosphere of mutual support, respect for others' opinions and democratic openness was a new phenomenon in British politics. It indicated the founders' intentions to make a complete break with the traditions of all parts of the left up to now. Our overall objective was to replace 'New Labour' among the millions of those who were undermined and attacked by the 'free market' and its political supporters in Britain. At the same time we understood that virtually all organised left politics had failed to provide the key answers to the new problems. We were determined not to repeat others' mistakes, which included the ways they organised.

That spirit has survived, despite



some serious tests. However, the strength of our electoral and trade union support does not compensate for our weakness in party organisation and collective leadership. The latter threatens to cut across a positive atmosphere in the party and undermines goodwill among members and supporters. A culture of blame grows up in the party and begins to replace the much more effective approach of building on people's strengths. Explaining problems by reference to comrades' weaknesses and faults just recreates all the old demoralisation, factionalism and cynicism so familiar on the traditional left.

3. The fact is that there has been a serious loss of members, not just in constituencies or concentrated solely in one or two regions, but also in key trade unions. This is our most serious internal problem today, and it must be addressed.

4. This draining away of members is, in part, connected to our weaknesses in organisation and collective leadership. The circumstances which made the SLP essential have also made building our party very difficult at this time. Some of the weaknesses in our party have arisen through lack of resources. Others come from the continuing need for further creative discussion about our political programme, strategy and tactics. The wealth of ideas and experience in the party have not all yet been tapped. New experiences of the struggle will have to be incorporated. All this contributes to our difficulties.

However, that is not the whole

story. Often our responses to this situation have been ill thought out. Some of our weaknesses in party organisation and collective leadership have been made worse by failing to plan properly. This is no reflection on the many magnificent efforts of individual comrades. Our difficulties are, primarily, collective problems, of bodies of the organisation. These problems can begin to be rectified relatively simply, but first it is essential that they are recognised and addressed, openly and honestly, otherwise they will just get worse and increase the damage to the party as a whole.

The prime responsibility to examine party problems falls on the NEC. It was given that responsibility by conference and it must take the lead. Three obvious, initial steps should be taken now by the leadership and/or recommended to conference.

● The party is both over-centralised and wrongly centralised. Our main public asset, AS, is forced to spend enormous amounts of time and energy on the nitty gritty of internal party work. AS should be freed to motivate and challenge the party with the next major steps forward which it has to take and to play the leading public role at which he excels and which both represents and builds the party in public life. A secretariat should be established, with full-time or voluntary support, to run the day-to-day organisation of the party, prepare conferences, NECs, etc. This would prevent virtual paralysis if our leading officers are drawn into the

struggles, including legal battles, which their positions in the trade union movement inevitably throw up.

● National communication in the organisation is poor and intermittent at best. It is often completely organisational or administrative, which is not good enough for a political party. The newspaper cannot both fulfil the role of an internal communicator and reach out to new readers at the same time. It is a relatively simple matter to prepare edited versions of the political reports, which the NEC now takes, for publication to the regions and branches. This step would provide a political lead to the whole organisation and make the party a more interesting, lively and attractive place to be.

● Some of our most dedicated and self-sacrificing members say we made a mistake hiking up our subscription levels and they are now prohibitive for many potential recruits. We should get a qualified member to do an analysis on our finances and see whether a lower basic membership fee plus a sliding scale of voluntary contributions reflecting members' financial situations would be more fitting to a party which aspires to be a mass membership party of the poor.

5. We all know how difficult it is to create something new, however much it is needed. When we remember that a new, mass socialist party has to both be something new and, at the same time, safeguard all the gains and lessons of generations of bitter struggle by working class people so far, then a measure of the enormity of our task becomes obvious.

It is tempting to compromise. We might imagine we could stop a little way along and our road towards a genuine mass party, at the point of the perfect far-left group of a few thousands which some always wanted, but never saw. Or we might be drawn into thinking we are building a type of Communist Party, one which is really democratic and does not base itself on the future success of New Labour's left wing. The truth is all those organisations, both nationally and internationally, with a tiny handful of honourable exceptions, have already failed. They cannot be recreated in any form. They belong to the past. They are unattractive to people, compromised, past their sell-by date and dying. There is not the faintest possibility of repeating the history or even some souped up version based on our own preferred choices. We cannot escape the necessity of building something which, while it is based on the lessons of the past, is at the same time totally new.

The SLP came into being because all parts of the existing left wing in Britain had failed to prevent what was the mass party of the working class movement, the Labour Party, accelerating its slide towards becoming yet another capitalist party, pure and simple. Our job is to lay the foundations of a new mass party of the working class. We cannot stop halfway. It is the single most important task in British politics for a century. Without it there will be no further social progress and everything the working class movement has gained is in jeopardy. Accordingly our responsibilities are great. But if we keep in front of us that we are driving towards a new mass party, which seeks to win majority support in society, nothing less, then many of our internal problems will fall into their proper place.

6. Let us face any problems honestly and squarely, without traditional left-type recriminations, or the search for 'who to blame'. Instead the strengths of all our comrades should be nurtured and used to develop the party. Mutual respect and support among all comrades; goodwill and self-activity in overcoming difficulties: these are the internal values which are essential to our future success. We need to apply the same open and democratic spirit to our problems today as we used so successfully in the process by which our party's fundamental policies were formed ●

Reply to Sikorski - p7