

# Socialist Labour elects Royston Bull End of the road?

In ditching his old allies in favour of an alliance of ultra-Stalinites and homophobes, Arthur Scargill has driven another nail into the SLP's coffin

Last weekend's special congress of the Socialist Labour Party at the Mechanics' Institute, Manchester marked a new stage in degeneration. Having already driven out just about every left and democratic opponent, Arthur Scargill has now succeeded in marginalising every element with even a trace of critical independence. He has turned on his former courtiers of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus (Fisc), replacing them with a pot pourri of sycophants, misfits and sociopaths.

In an amazing development, sitting Fiscite vice-president Pat Sikorski was ousted by Royston Bull, editor of the rabid homophobic rag, the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*. The *EPSR* is a cut-and-paste photocopied A4 sheet, and its supporters are one of the remaining (and wackiest) fragments of the Healyite Workers Revolutionary Party, which shattered in the 1980s. The *EPSR* was previously known as the International Leninist Workers Party, which eventually dropped its previous ultra-dogmatic Trotskyism in favour of a peculiar form of extreme Stalinism. Bull received 541 votes, as opposed to 348 for Sikorski, a result which almost led to fisticuffs outside the hall after the congress.

Bull's total was boosted by the block votes of at least one of the new trade union affiliates (of which there are now four with, it is claimed, 3,775 members), but the largest of these, the phantom North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association, controlled directly by Scargill through Paul Hardman, pointedly abstained, despite having nominated comrade Sikorski. Its 3,000 votes is almost three times the total of the remaining union affiliated branches and all the individual members' votes put together.

However, the constituency section results for the national executive elections showed that Bull would almost certainly have won without the affiliates' block votes. Two successful *EPSR* candidates, Dave Roberts and Sohan Singh, won 230 and 224 votes respectively. This was more than twice as many (111) as the best placed Fiscite, Brian Heron, the London regional president, received from constituency delegates.

These figures give an indication of the true state of the SLP membership. Around 100 delegates (one per func-

tioning constituency branch) cast votes representing around 400-450 paid-up members. In his opening remarks, president Frank Cave claimed the party had 2,265 members "in 345 constituencies" in August 1998 - up from 2,188 in 1997. But, he added significantly, "Our problem is getting the members to pay their contributions." In an internal letter to comrade Sikorski, Scargill put the paid-up figure at just over 900. Clearly even this is greatly exaggerated, as the attendance at Manchester demonstrated.

But in public Scargill insists on counting all those who have ever applied to join as current members, irrespective of whether they have paid a penny in dues or attended a single party event. He justified this blatant falsification in the Sikorski letter by claiming it was "common practice" among all political parties. Assuming that comrade Cave's figures are not totally fabricated, we can see that 77 people applied for membership in the year up to August. But we know that at least several hundred left the party. Only a few bothered to formally resign - most simply walked away.

It is in these conditions of catastrophic membership loss that Scargill's break with Fisc has occurred. Whereas at first he looked to Brian Heron, Pat Sikorski and Carolyn Sikorski to provide him with at least a modicum of theoretical cover, over the recent period he has increasingly turned to the likes of Bull and Harpal Brar. Brar is editor of the Indian Workers Association's bi-monthly paper, *Lalkar*, and a leading light in the Stalin Society and the Communist Workers Association. He received the second highest total of votes (272) in the constituency section of the NEC elections. Carolyn Sikorski is the only remaining Fiscite on the NEC - she was returned unopposed by the women's section.

The final break was provoked by the strong disagreement over the cancellation of the party's 3rd Congress. Scargill, distracted by the court action against him in his capacity as trustee of two miners' charities, neglected to circulate the membership in sufficient time for motions and amendments to be agreed and published according to the constitution. This meant that a full congress could not be held as intended on November 14-15.

At the September 12 NEC meeting several options were debated. Scargill, who clearly believes that manifestations of membership democracy should be kept to the absolute minimum, proposed that the constitution be amended in order to reduce the frequency of congresses to once every three years. This was comfortably defeated. Carolyn Sikorski then moved that a full congress be held as soon as practicable. After all manner of technical reasons were put forward in opposition to such a basic democratic proposal, it too was defeated. The deeply divided NEC was then left with no option but to "unanimously" agree to a special one-day congress, where no membership motions would be discussed, in order to elect a new executive. (In view of Scargill's increasing inability to secure an automatic majority on every issue, it became imperative for him to allow this particular aspect of membership democracy to proceed.)

Pat Sikorski issued a set of proposals designed to clip king Arthur's wings. In parallel Fisc and its allies attempted a minor, if scrupulously constitutional, rebellion. Terry Dunn, Caroline Sikorski, Brian Heron and Helen Drummond circulated a letter among their own close contacts calling for a two-day, fully democratic special congress - a provision which requires 25% membership support. But Fisc did not have access to the names and addresses of sufficient Constituency SLP secretaries. In an unbelievably naive move, it therefore sent its 'initial appeal', signed by 53 comrades, including former Scargill allies Tony and Anne Goss, and Pat Sikorski's contacts on the RMT national executive, Bobby Law and Mick Atherton, to the general secretary himself, requesting he either circulate the appeal or provide them with the names and addresses.

Scargill reacted predictably. He wrote to each and every one of the 53 signatories, informing them that their action was factional, undemocratic and against the constitution. In his usual intimidatory style, he demanded an explanation and an undertaking not to engage in further 'factional' activity.

His own factional response was ruthless. He ensured that Pat Sikorski would be defeated by stitching up the election for vice-president with the

aid of the Sheffield Ucatt union block vote. The fact that it was Roy Bull who would be the beneficiary was a secondary question. But the constituency section was not quite as simple. Scargill had been forced to accept that the union affiliates could not be employed to elect constituency representatives by the furore that erupted at the December 1997 2nd Congress when he suddenly produced the NWCCMA 3,000 block vote.

In order to be certain of ousting Fisc he would need to mobilise not only his personal followers, ex-NUM members and supporters of Harpal Brar; he would also need to bring more firmly under his wing the sycophants from the *EPSR*, from whom he had previously kept a certain distance. And so the 'Campaign to support Scargill and the national leadership of the Socialist Labour Party' suddenly materialised at the congress. Whereas in 1997 Scargill ensured there was an NEC 'recommended' list - backed up by the NWCCMA sledgehammer - this year the NEC majority recommendations would almost certainly not be to his liking.

So in 1998 we had Scargill's own personal 'recommended' list: Bridget Bell, Brian Gibson, Darren Hickory and Jim McDaid - as well as Harpal Brar and the two *EPSR*ers. Evidently the stitch-up was only finalised at the last moment, as three other *EPSR* supporters - Giles Barralet-Shorter, Adrian Greenman and Bull himself - did not even withdraw their names as candidates to the NEC. Clearly Bull was completely confident of winning the vice-presidency, as he allowed two of his comrades to be listed on the pro-Scargill slate instead of himself.

The 'Campaign to support Scargill' issued the following statement:

"Our party has grown significantly since it was launched in 1996, and now has an individual and affiliated membership of over 6,000, with eight regions and 334 Constituency SLPs.

"Despite our success, the party's growing influence in the trade union movement and in single-issue campaigns, there are some - including members of the NEC - who constantly criticise the SLP leadership, in particular Arthur Scargill, a man who has done more than anyone to build our party.

"If you support Scargill and the national leadership of Socialist Labour, we urge you to vote for seven candidates standing for the CSLP section on the NEC. We believe these seven candidates represent a geographical and political balance and above all are comrades who will in the main support the policies of our party, Scargill and the SLP leadership,

particularly in the important political campaigns which lie ahead."

But what of the 'opposition'? Sadly Fisc and its allies - primarily Terry Dunn and Imran Khan - issued no statement of their own. Their idea of a campaign is to secretly agree a course of action and refuse to tell the membership even what the issues are. Their call for a two-day special congress must be one of the best-kept secrets ever - even though it needed 25% membership support. They even excluded people not to their factional liking from the planning meetings for their 'campaign'.

You would have thought that last Saturday's congress provided an ideal occasion to involve the most active elements in the party in calling for membership democracy. But when comrade Cave put the proposal for the 'postponement' of the 1998 full congress until November 1999 to a card vote, not one delegate demanded to speak. The three independent Socialist Democracy NEC candidates also remained firmly in their seats. The proposal was carried with a 98% vote.

The rebellion has been crushed. Scargill is in full control everywhere except London, where Fisc and its allies are still at the helm. Yet surely the incorporation of the *EPSR* onto the leadership will mean the beginning of the end for Scargill's project. Brian Heron and Pat Sikorski provided him with a 'common sense' front. Even Harpal Brar is a politician who at least knows how to operate. But a gang of ranting homophobes?

What will happen if, for example, the London Underground disputes take off in a big way? The *Evening Standard* is already engaging in low-level red-baiting in view of the fact that SLP comrades like Sikorski, Bob Crow, Bobby Law and Mick Atherton are in the forefront of the RMT union. Such a campaign in the press could have played into Scargill's hands, attracting a new layer of militants into his party. But if the *Standard* should make known the contents of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, and the prominence of its supporters in the SLP, that would surely more than wipe out in the minds of left activists any positive image portrayed of a fighting, intransigent, Scargillite organisation. Certainly Sikorski, Crow, Law and Atherton will not want their RMT campaigns damaged by being associated with such a tarnished image.

Far from being able to recruit, the SLP looks set to lose another big layer of members. A whole swathe of delegates were talking of resigning last Saturday evening in Manchester ●

Alan Fox

Simon Harvey's view - p3

## Scandalous

Richard Newton of Bexley and Greenwich Socialist Party is to be congratulated on a pugnacious defence of his organisation and willingness to see a more informed, open debate on the key political issues raised by its crisis (see Letters). His open defence the executive committee of the SP in England and Wales helps us understand a little more of the questions involved and usefully provides yet another insight into the bureaucratic mindset of the SPEW leadership.

Comrade Newton's attitude certainly contrasts favourably with the besieged SPEW apparatus in Hepscott Road. On the occasions that I have rung this HQ looking for corroboration of various questions - even as mundane as whether they had published a report of recent developments in Scotland or not - my messages have either been unanswered or I have had the phone slammed down on me. Thus, there is a very simple answer to the comrade's challenge as to why we did not publish the SPEW EC statement alongside that of the dissident Merseysiders in last week's paper. Richard, your leadership would not give it to us.

The comrades in Hepscott Road were faxed prior to the appearance of last week's paper, informing them that we would be carrying the statement of the Merseyside dissidents and offering them the opportunity to put their case. Characteristically, they maintained their hurt silence and hoped we would go away. However, now that we finally have their document, we are more than pleased to publish it (see p6).

I will save more detailed comment on what the SPEW EC statement reveals, but comrade Newton's welcome intervention raises once again a key principle that the CPGB has fought for and has made synonymous with its name on the left in Britain. That is, *revolutionary openness*.

His comments about "incorrect points" and "lies" reflect the same problem in reverse, in that sense. Certainly, this organisation has no interest in exacerbating the SPEW turmoil as it *currently* manifests itself in the vain hope that some dispirited elements eventually flop into our ranks - anyone who has followed our coverage in detail would find it hard to make such a claim. We have consistently agitated for the SPEW crisis to be resolved *positively*, through addressing its root cause - that of the failure of *programme*. In the absence of this, we have warned of the profoundly "negative" feature of such crises, that they push "potentially good cadre" to "drop out of working class politics altogether, or start to peddle rightist answers" (*Weekly Worker* November 12).

The first place for SPEW comrades to fight is in the ranks of their own organisation. We are not interested in petty membership raids on SPEW or anyone else. We believe that the political impasse facing our class is a rather more serious affair than that. This is why we have sought to open up the concealed struggle.

The real tragedy is that we have had to uncover this *political* struggle in SPEW and the vital *programmatic* issues it throws up for our entire class in the manner of *investigative journalists* digging out 'scandals' that people are ashamed of. Indeed, you will still - incredibly - meet comrades in SPEW who talk of our paper as a "scandal sheet". As if the question of the nationalist split in Scotland, the liquidationist breakaway in Merseyside or the challenge of broader left unity were the equivalents of the type of salacious trivia published by the *News of the World*!

Thus, inaccuracies can no doubt creep into our reporting, given that we are trying to uncover something that is being treated as a conspiracy - that is, *politics*. This says nothing about us, comrade Newton. It says everything about the nature

of the leadership of your organisation and - more importantly - about the type of 'socialism' it envisages bringing to the benighted workers.

Lenin replied defiantly to those who gloated over the splits that tore apart his Party in 1903 that "... there can be no mass party, no party of a class, without full clarity of essential shadings, without an open struggle between various tendencies, without informing the *masses* as to which leaders and which organisations of the Party are pursuing this or that line" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 13, p159). Such a struggle is "both necessary and useful", he said at a later date, not in order to turn the Party press into a 'scandal sheet', but because "it *trains in the masses* independence and ability to carry out their epoch-making revolutionary mission" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 23, p160).

Thus, the attitude of Richard and his comrades to the "mission" of the working class is - like others on the left - organically linked to their vision of 'socialism'. Will working class liberation be delivered to our class from above, or will socialism actually be the *self-liberating* act of a politically sophisticated class with answers to the crisis affecting the whole of humanity? Will socialism be the moment of the elevation of this class (not the Party, still less a parliamentary majority) to the leadership of the whole of contemporary society, or will it be delivered to it via a vote in parliament? Will the working class be the ruler or the ruled under socialism, in other words?

The open discussion of politics for SPEW and its co-thinkers only "confuses the workers", as one leading participant in the organisation's recent Socialism '98 school opined. Because of this, apparently, he suggested no one wants to read the *Weekly Worker* (although comparative circulation figures for our paper and *The Socialist* would tend to belie this, comrade). Projecting this attitude forward a little to what we will face under socialism itself, it is not too hard to hear in your mind's ear such comrades telling us that the open discussion of questions of war or peace, the economy and planning, or the complex social problems that will no doubt face us would also "confuse" the masses.

In other words, these comrades do not believe in socialism as the *self-liberation* of the working class at all.

It is only now, after the *persistent* intervention of the *Weekly Worker*, that other socialists and advanced workers are even beginning to learn of the "essential shadings" of SPEW's "various tendencies" and "which leaders and which organisations of the Party are pursuing this or that line" (Lenin). It is only now, after the journalistic efforts of the writers on *this* paper, that "the masses" are being at long last 'informed' what important Merseyside leaders like Dave Cotterill, Lesley Mahmood, Cathy Wilson or Roger Bannister *actually* think. If they had to rely on the pap served up to them by *The Socialist*, what would they know? That life is hard and Blair is not the workers' friend?

Forgive us, but we believe that the working class is aware of that much already. Our job is to raise it to the level of a political class, the ruling class. Different visions of 'socialism' lead to treating the 'proles' in different ways, of course. Either as adults, or as multi-millioned dolts who should not be confused by us political 'grown-ups'.

Which approach do you advocate, comrade Newton? And what do you think of the vision of 'socialism' implicitly held by your own leadership, judging from its view of the struggle around such important political principles as an *intrigue* behind the backs of our class? ●

**Mark Fischer**  
national organiser



## Sensational lies

The other day my hard-working, underpaid postman delivered your paper through my door.

By some underhanded way you seem to have my address and decided to subject me to your views. "Extinction looms," screamed the headline; maybe this is an article on capitalism? No, it is a misinformed, badly written article on the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

"The Socialist Party in England and Wales is in crisis - official" was how you opened up your article, gutter press style, and then went on to say that the Merseyside comrades were "ejected" from the SP with no right of appeal. Well, that is 100% wrong. The comrades have, at this stage, been suspended by the October 1998 national committee of the Socialist Party and, as with any suspended comrades, they have the right to appeal against the NC's decision. The NC's resolution also made it clear that they would be only too happy to lift the suspensions on any of the comrades who would give an undertaking that they would accept the basic obligations of party membership: carrying out NC decisions and making financial contributions to the national organisation.

I guess that you just couldn't be bothered with the facts and that your main objectives are to publish scare stories in the hope that members of the Socialist Party will join your sect. There are of course a number more points from your article that are incorrect, but I think the best way to answer them is by referring you to the statement from the NC, which I guess you forgot to print alongside the Merseyside statement.

Just for information's sake, I'm not on the EC, or the NC of the SP, and I have written this e-mail from work with no contact with comrades from the national centre, so we are allowed to think for ourselves in the SP.

**Richard Newton**

Bexley and Greenwich Socialist Party

## No witch hunt

Toby Abse's crazy and slanderous letter (*Weekly Worker* November 12) advocating 'no platform' for the supposedly pro-Le Pen, child-molesting 'bourgeois libertarians' of the CPGB is a textbook example of lies for political ends.

Not being a supporter of the CPGB, and indeed being someone who has frequently criticised their often mistaken tactics and wrong positions, I must nevertheless set the record straight as to Toby Abse's own motivation. He claims to speak for "the Independent Labour Network, the Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook and the Socialist Workers Party", and warns the CPGB that "it might be wiser not to campaign in any part of London with large numbers of jews, blacks or Asians". The implication being that his view of the CPGB as a bunch of pro-Nazi child molesters is about to gain wide currency, and therefore the CPGB are in physical danger. In reality it is comrade Abse who is displaying his contempt for the racially oppressed by his fantasies of enlisting them as physical auxiliaries to his own political vendettas - even the minuscule minority of the oppressed

communities who are likely to have the faintest idea what brother Abse is raving on about probably have more sense than to follow him when he maliciously shouts 'fire'.

What is comrade Abse's call for a 'Mancunian' solution (a purge of the CPGB) really about? It is about his *political* hostility to openly communist and revolutionary groupings being involved in the Socialist Alliances. Comrade Abse claims the support of the SWP, the SP, Socialist Outlook and other leftists for his projected Scargill-style purge, but in reality he is using them for his own reformist, anti-revolutionary political aims. Brother Abse is stalking far larger political game than the SP or SWP, and his attack on the CPGB is in reality the thin end of the wedge. On October 5, at a meeting of the Independent Labour Network, comrade Abse put his political cards on the table, in arguing that:

"The left slate [in the upcoming elections] should not have too leftwing a programme. It should not call for the nationalisation of the banks, etc. It should have a *social-democratic* programme, that can appeal to ordinary Labour Party members. We want something that could even appeal to the likes of Roy Hattersley, and if we come out with a programme that is too far left, that will not be possible."

I was the only person at that meeting to openly disagree with this opportunist and dangerous political perspective, criticising it as "sacrificing the long-term interests of the labour movement for short-term opportunist gain". But it is not surprising, if comrade Abse is trying to appeal to the likes of Hattersley, he should find himself initiating an anti-left witch hunt in the Socialist Alliance. After all, Hattersley, for all his supposed 'born-again socialism' is still utterly unrepentant about the hounding of Militant supporters out of the Labour Party in the 80s and early 90s when he was Kinnock's deputy.

That is the *political* reason for comrade Abse's call for the purging of the CPGB. His characterisations of the CPGB's supposedly pro-Le Pen article, and their alleged 'paedophile' views, are not honest critiques of their positions. The CPGB's article on Le Pen was simply a commentary on the pitfalls of calling for the *bourgeois state* to censor political views, even those of the far right. In no sense was it a 'defence' of Le Pen. This is slanderous rubbish, an excuse for a witch hunt.

His call for 'no-platforming' the CPGB is an outrage, an incitement to reactionary violence worthy of the worst thug elements in the SLP. It should be realised that comrade Abse's incitement on this is a threat to the bloc partners he claims to have in his pocket, as well as the CPGB, and to independent revolutionary socialists like myself.

I agree with the position that there should be no blanket age-of-consent law, but that lack of effective consent should have to be proved in individual cases. Both the SWP and Socialist Outlook have in the past argued in favour of the same view. Does that make all of us pro-paedophiles who should be 'no-platformed'? Is that position, which is widely held among a range of 'far-left' groups, to be *verboten* in the Socialist Alli-

ances? Do people who hold this position deserve to be subjected to violence and treated like fascists, as comrade Abse's letter implies? Or is comrade Abse hypocritical in his bigotry, in being prepared to overlook the fact that some of his claimed bloc partners also hold this position, in pursuit of his opportunist desire to purge the CPGB?

They should wonder if comrade Abse will later turn on them, for the simple reason that he is stalking far bigger game than even the SWP - like unrepentant rightwing witch hunters such as Lord Hattersley.

Any witch hunt in the Socialist Alliances will *kill* it as a movement for progressive social change, just as surely as it killed the SLP.

Hattersley's 'old Labour' witch-hunts laid the basis for New Labour!

**Ian Donovan**

Editor, *Revolution and Truth*

## International call

Blood has been shed in Jakarta. Fighters for democracy have been killed. Habibie and Wiranto must be made accountable.

In Indonesia today a wave of people's struggle, spearheaded by students, has unfolded, aiming to win justice and popular sovereignty. We, the Indonesian people, have rejected the special session of the Peoples Consultative Assembly. It is full of people who are the product of the May 1997 rigged elections.

We, the people of Indonesia, demand the end of the dual function of the armed forces [the armed forces' role in politics] and the repeal of the 1985 political laws. These are the two greatest obstacles to the establishment of democracy in Indonesia.

We the people of Indonesia reject the leadership of Habibie because it has been proved that Habibie is just an agent to continue the dirty politics of the dictator Suharto. We demand the formation of an Indonesian Peoples Council as a transitional government.

We now hear that five university students and one high school student have died and hundreds have been wounded. Blood has been shed. But we will not retreat until our ideals of social justice have been reached.

We call upon all those in the international community who support democracy and oppose oppression to:

1. Carry out protest actions outside Indonesian consulates and embassies around the world.
2. Condemn the acts of violence by the Habibie regime which has used the armed forces as its killing machine.
3. Bring Suharto, Habibie and Wiranto before an international court to face charges against the Indonesian people in particular, and humanity in general.
4. Send aid in the form of money, food and medicine to the people of Indonesia who are struggling for democracy.

**Henry Kuok**

Peoples Democratic Party, Jakarta

Simon Harvey of the SLP

# Scargill's victory

As I took my seat alongside the other observers in the Mechanics' Institute last Saturday, I wondered how the split on the leadership would first show itself.

Party democracy had been flagrantly flouted with the cancellation of the full, two-day 3rd Congress and its replacement with a rally-cum-talking shop with no decision-making power. How long would it be before one of the Fiscites or Socialist Democrats rose to challenge the trampling of membership rights?

The congress began with comrade Scargill himself giving the conference arrangements report. This, he said, was because the committee had not been able to meet until the previous evening. Laying down the law, he explained that congress's first duty was to amend the constitution so as to allow members who had joined the party up to 13 weeks before (as opposed to December 31 of the previous year, the present rule) to be included in voting entitlements. Reasonable enough, you would think, but essential from the general secretary's point of view: over recent months a batch of new Indian Workers Association comrades had suddenly joined in order to boost the chances of comrade Harpal Brar and other Scargill sycophants in the NEC elections.

Scargill then asked for doorkeepers to be elected - to ensure that no one "from the Conservative Party enters without due consideration from the delegates". Nothing to do with the *Weekly Worker* supporters outside of course - although they had been refused entry without any "consideration" by delegates.

Frank Cave, giving his presidential address, stated that congress must decide whether to back the NEC's "unanimous" recommendation to proceed to a special congress or attempt to hold a full congress, which, he assured the delegates, could be done, although it would cause problems. He stated blandly: "It does not require me to explain" why a special congress was necessary, as Arthur had already given the reasons in a branch circular.

Surely this would be the moment for the 'opposition' to strike? Not a bit of it. Comrade Cave immediately put the question to a card vote without any intervention from the floor. The NEC recommendation was carried with a 98% vote, as were the constitutional amendments.

No doubt boosted by the incredible ease of his victory, comrade Scargill pushed on with his secretarial report - gushingly optimistic in its wishful fabrication even by his standards. *Paid up* membership, he said, had increased by 79% since 1996. Where does he pluck his figures from? Turning to next year's elections, he announced that the (30-strong) Welsh SLP would contest "at least" two out of the five constituencies for the Welsh assembly. Scotland was "talking about contesting in six regions" for the parliament - although this appeared to be the first the Scottish delegates had heard of it. The SLP would stand in four regions in the European elections: London, the North West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and Humberside.

Comrade Scargill held up the possibility of 100,000 marchers for the May 1 1999 Reclaim Our Rights demonstration. He told us of the prominent new recruits still flocking into

the party, but the only examples given were an (unnamed) full-time Ucat organiser and councillor Jimmy Routledge from Liverpool.

Praising the breadth of the internal SLP regime, he mocked the *Weekly Worker* comrades - sellers of "so-called newspapers" outside the hall - who, according to Arthur, had told him: 'What we need is revolutionary politics.' But, he said, "We are in favour of extra-parliamentary action." The SLP was "Marxist", he added, but, what is more, "we are transparent". The amazing thing is, of course, most of the delegates believed him. According to comrade Scargill, the only members to complain were "those who have since left, only to reappear writing in other papers".

The first speaker from the floor was Roy Bull, who praised the SLP as "the historic break from the Labour Party at a time of capitalist crisis". He was absolutely behind every detail of Arthur's perspectives. He was followed by Chris Herriot, an NEC candidate whose name was not on the 'support Scargill' slate. He told us that before he joined the SLP, he was a pessimist; now he was an optimist.

Next came the showpiece defector from New Labour. But councillor Jimmy Routledge rather spoiled our general secretary's claims of a "Marxist" party: "We are not a fringe group," he said, "but what the Labour Party should be."

At last a leading 'oppositionist' came to the microphone - none other than comrade Brian Heron, principal author of the 'appeal for a special conference' in defence of members' rights. But Brian did not want to be the one to spoil the party. He too saw a rosy future - although, I must say, he has an unusual strategy for building up working class political support among the electorate: "If you're with them on a wet and windy evening, discussing how to get water in their house, they'll be with you next May."

Comrade Harpal Brar described himself as "not merely a member of an ethnic minority, but a proud member of the British proletariat" - an impressive start to his speech. 'Harpal', he said, would be viewed as just another 'British' name in 100 years time. But, smoothly slipping into sycophantic mode, he described how comrade Scargill had been ridiculed for predicting that the miners' Great Strike would last a year. "If those who lead the working class have such vision..."

After comrade Brar's "complete agreement" with Arthur's plans, it was the turn of two more signatories of the 'rebel' Heron document. Comrade Alec McFaddon seemed poised just for a moment to offer some criticism, but contented himself with the vaguest of hints about "problems of organisation". Carolyn Sikorski stuck firmly to safe 'women's questions', disclosing the latest plans for Fisc's Women's Tribunal.

After the lunch break when balloting for the NEC and vice-presidency had closed, Fisc ally Imran Khan earned an enthusiastic ovation for his speech describing his role in the Stephen Lawrence enquiry. He is clearly highly respected throughout the party - widely viewed as one of Socialist Labour's assets. But if you speak against Arthur, such respect is no guarantee of electoral success. Comrade Khan was just 20 votes short in the NEC elections. Surely, had he spoken earlier, he would have won the extra votes needed from just a handful of delegates.

Another NEC candidate was also called too late - not that he had any chance, given the delegates' mood. Nathan Parkin, standing on a Socialist Democracy slate, gave a low-key speech: "Some of us don't like the situation where initiative is crushed by people high up in the party - whether deliberately or not." He thought that cancelling the 3rd Congress was "a

mistake", and added vaguely: "Party democracy is about finding the way forward so we can win." No problem for Scargill there.

Fisc and their allies may have been keeping their heads down, but that only served to increase the confidence of the loyalists. The *EPSR*'s Adrian Greenman ended his usual speech on capitalism's crisis with the solution - "politics, politics, politics", adding: "We're not getting too much of that in London [controlled by Fisc] - there haven't been any meetings."

As the afternoon wore on, real "politics" started to make a tentative appearance. John Milligan - another 'appeal' signatory - wondered whether it was always "appropriate" to stand against other left groups in elections. Surely, he said, the sight of rival left candidates on the ballot paper would "confuse the electorate". The next speaker, Peter Pierce, pressed this point in a more forthright manner: "We need to contest as widely as possible everywhere," he said, and certainly not even consider stepping down in favour of Labour 'lefts' such as Livingstone, who stood in the general election on a Blairite programme. But, he went on, what about those, such as the Independent Labour Network of Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr, who have already broken with New Labour? "Shouldn't we be encouraging this break?" he asked.

To jeers from the Bullites and a disbelieving shake of the head from comrade Scargill, comrade Pierce went on to ask the Coventry comrades: "Do you want to stand against Dave Nellist?" "Yes," roared the Bullites. Comrade Pierce also pointed out that the SWP ought to be helped along its path away from voting Labour. He called for the SLP to cooperate with the Socialist Alliances and actively work for joint lists in the European elections. "We need the widest possible unity of the left," he concluded. Not a popular contribution.

This speech brought an immediate response from the *EPSR*'s Dave Roberts. "Ken Coates," he said, "has class collaborationist, reactionary politics". The ex-Labour MEP did not mention 'socialism' once in a recent speech in Coventry. They had experienced "a similar problem with the Reclaim Our Rights comrades", who had wanted to make the campaign "too broad". Rather than cooperate with any left group, the revolutionary communist SLP that exists in comrade Roberts' head should "sort out the best forces and deal with the enemy within". He ended by stating how necessary it was "to expose the class treachery of people asking us into bed with all sorts of dubious alliances".

The next speaker, Ranjeet Brar, Stalinite NEC youth section representative, followed in similar vein: "The key enemies are people like the SWP," he explained. "They are not communists. They are social democrats." There are apparently no social democrats whatsoever in the SLP.

Comrade Pat Sikorski thought that the debate had at last become interesting. In response to Dave Roberts' remarks about Ken Coates, he believed that the main thing to consider when entering into alliances was not what you say at meetings, but "what you do in action against the class enemy". He thought it was "perfectly reasonable" to discuss electoral alliances while the SLP was still small.

After the speeches the election re-

sults were announced. The news that Royston Bull had ousted Sikorski was received in total silence. I could not work out whether delegates simply did not believe it, or whether they thought it was a mistake. But after a few moments, just as Scargill was getting to his feet to make his closing speech, the silence was broken by the rasping tones of Tony Goss: "Electing a homophobe to the vice-presidency - that's what this party's about. Scumbag!"

Our general secretary made an oblique reference to this in his speech: "We oppose the homophobic comments that have appeared in some journals," he said to a roar of approval. Did this reaction mean that the same delegates that had just voted for the *EPSR* gang were aware of their homophobic views? It remains to be seen whether comrade Bull will submit to self-censorship - just look at his November 3 issue on Ron Davies.

Dealing with the question of left cooperation, comrade Scargill stated: "I do not want to be part of alliances." That seemed to settle the matter. As to the left, "We offered them an alliance as part of this party, but they turned away. They wanted a special place rather than putting the working class first." Sometimes you can only marvel at Arthur's effrontery. His sectarian hypocrisy is almost artistic.

But this was his congress. Fisc was routed. The majority of delegates gave the Great Leader a standing ovation, as he ended his speech with a rousing "For socialism! For Marxism! For internationalism!" His former allies remained in their seats, clapping half-heartedly. For them it was the end of a dream ●

## action

### ■ CPGB seminars

**London:** Sunday November 22, 5pm - 'Bonapartism and the "progressive despot"', 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.

### ■ European elections

The Network of Socialist Alliances in the Midlands has arranged a meeting to consider the advisability of standing socialist candidates in the 1999 European elections. Saturday November 28, 10am. Union Club, Pershore Road, Birmingham. For further information e-mail: office@soc-alliances.demon.co.uk.

## Socialist Labour officers, 1998

### President

Frank Cave - unopposed

### General secretary

Arthur Scargill - unopposed

### Vice-president

Royston Bull (*EPSR*) elected - 541  
Pat Sikorski (*Fisc*) 348

### NEC - constituency section

Bridget Bell (loyalist) elected - 277  
Harpal Brar (Stalin Society) elected - 272  
Darran Hickery (loyalist) elected - 270  
Jim McDaid (loyalist) elected - 238  
Dave Roberts (*EPSR*) elected - 230  
Sohan Singh (*EPSR*) elected - 224  
Brian Gibson (loyalist) elected - 202  
Imran Khan (*Fisc* ally) 183  
Terry Dunn (*Fisc* ally) 143  
Brian Heron (*Fisc*) 111  
Rachel Newton (*Fisc*) 95  
Trevor Wongsam (*Fisc*) 78

Geoff Southern (*Fisc* ally) 74  
Nusret Sen (*Soc Dem*) 64  
Nathan Parkin (*Soc Dem*) 47  
Giles Barralet-Shorter (*EPSR*) 46  
Royston Bull (*EPSR*) 46  
Peter Morton (*Soc Dem*) 42  
Jim Hackett (ind) 33  
Chris Herriot (ind) 17  
Adrian Greenman (*EPSR*) 13

### NEC - trade union section

Bob Crow (ind), Paul Hardman (loyalist), John Hendy (ind), Paul Liversuch (loyalist), Joe Marino (ind), Linda Muir (loyalist), Nell Myers (loyalist) - all unopposed

### NEC - women's section

Liz Screen (ind), Carolyn Sikorski (*Fisc*) - both unopposed

### NEC - youth

Ranjeet Brar (Stalin Society) - unopposed



# Reformasi total!

## The next phase of the Indonesian revolution has begun

Six months after the toppling of Suharto, Indonesian society has again been thrown into open turmoil, bordering on civil war, after 11 democracy demonstrators were killed in violent clashes with the military in Jakarta.

Rallying on November 12 during the stage-managed special session of the Suharto-appointed Peoples' Consultative Assembly (MPR), more than 150,000 students and up to one million other people began to descend upon the parliament - the same building which was occupied by students during the dramatic events in May which toppled the old dictator. The presence of 30,000 troops and thousands of paid thugs on the streets prevented the masses occupying the building once again.

'Reformasi total!' - total reform - is their slogan and it is becoming clearer that the Indonesian masses will be content with nothing less than the sweeping away of the old order. While cautious, given the bloody track record of the Indonesian military, far from being cowed by the events of November 12-14, the Indonesian masses are again learning lessons and gaining confidence in their own power.

This renewed social upheaval is not only limited to Jakarta. The ruling oligarchy's constitutional wranglings to save their skins have provided the masses with an opportunity to put their stamp on events.

The special session of the MPR, which concluded last Friday, was promised by president Habibie when he assumed power after Suharto's resignation. It was always going to be a delaying tactic designed to preserve the regime. While the people

demand freedom and democracy, the regime can only deliver bloodshed and empty promises. Its illegitimacy is displayed before the world.

It is clear to all now that Habibie is no solution. He was always going to be a stop-gap measure so that the oligarchy could gain time, throwing sop after sop to the masses. Far from satisfying their appetites, it has made them even more hungry. The regime's hopes to marshal a safe transfer to a controlled capitalist democracy have been deeply shaken by this week's events.

Splits are emerging above. Under pressure from the uncompromising demands of the masses, the MPR agreed to include Suharto's name in a draft law which laughably says it aims to eradicate corruption, collusion and nepotism. This from the very assembly built through cronyism since Suharto came to power in 1965.

Elements of the ruling party, Golkar, and the military have called for Habibie to resign now. This amounts to little more than a coup threat with the alternatives put forward as armed forces chief general Wiranto or the sultan of Yogyakarta. Some of the MPR legislators are openly discussing a 'compromise' with the military which could include a presidium with general Wiranto, and three moderate reform leaders - muslim leader Abdurrahman Wahid, Amien Rais, Megawati Sukarnoputri (daughter of Indonesia's first president, Sukarno) - and the sultan of Yogyakarta.

For now, Habibie has placated the military with full support for the crack-down and giving general Wiranto *carte blanche* to prevent chaos. But this will only anger the people more. However, within the military forces themselves, it seems as though sides are being taken. There have been reports of the marines defending students against other military and police units.

In contrast, there seems to be growing unity and confidence below. In contrast to the May events, the demonstration organised for the MPR session was coordinated by Akrah, a joint committee formed at the end of October bringing together all the forces demanding complete abolition of the military's role in politics and rejecting the legitimacy of the MPR. The alliance ranges from those around the militants of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PRD) to the most moderate of the student groups. Whereas in May moderate students - the majority in the parliament occupation - voted against mobilising the urban poor and working class, last week the students unanimously voted to involve all sectors of society.

The army had organised thousands of thugs armed with bamboo poles. The so-called Civil Security attacked the students who fought back. A PRD report states: "In the first clashes between these thugs and students, the students fought back. On seeing some of these clashes, the Jakarta urban poor poured out of their neighbourhoods, sometimes armed with air rifles and other weapons, and defended the students."

It was on the evening of November 13 that the killings occurred after around 15,000 students had broken through blockades around the parliament during the previous evening.

According to the PRD, this was when the indiscriminate firing of rubber bullets at crowds of students and urban poor took place in all sectors of the city. In many areas where the military attacked, both the masses and students fought back with rocks and other projectiles including molotov cocktails.

"Part of the new consciousness among the students that was evident [from] November 11, was that they would fight back if attacked or if force was used to try to stop their advance on the parliament building."

Clearly a revolution is developing in Indonesia, but what sort of revolution is it? Many, not least in Indonesia itself, say a bourgeois democratic revolution.

Lenin once said, referring to Russia 1905, that it was an odd sort of bourgeois democratic revolution that was led by the working class in alliance with the peasantry. As we have remarked before, Lenin did not let a bad formulation get in the way of a good revolution. The category of 'bourgeois democratic revolution' was inherited from the Second International and later codified by Stalin.

In their hands the bourgeois democratic revolution was a necessary and predetermined historical stage. Thus, faced with any revolutionary crisis, they expected the bourgeoisie to lead and the working class to follow. True, in 1642, 1776, and 1789 the middling classes took the position of leadership. However, in general since then this class has become thoroughly conservative, not to say counterrevolutionary.

And yet we are left with this fixed category of 'bourgeois democratic revolution' - part of the theoretical baggage which has led us to defeat time and again. The Stalinists rediscovered its Menshevik content of two stages and applied it with murderous results in China in 1927 and beyond, subordinating the proletariat to the mythical 'progressive' bourgeoisie.

In the hands of the Trotskyites, the 'bourgeois democratic revolution' has divided the world in half. In their rigid schema, democratic tasks are to be undertaken primarily by the bourgeoisie. The working class's task is an abstract 'socialism' which is arrived at through transitional demands which for the Trotskyites are *separate and different* from democratic demands. In the advanced countries, by and large, the democratic questions have supposedly been solved by the 'bourgeois revolution'. However, in the backward countries that has not yet occurred. Avoiding the treachery of the Stalinists, the Trotskyites say that the bourgeoisie is incapable of carrying out 'their' democratic tasks in such countries and it is left to the proletariat to clean up the mess.

Both schemas remain hamstrung by the Menshevik theory of the bourgeois democratic revolution, and both must be ditched, if we are to move forward to a 21st century of revolutionary victories. The unfolding revolution in Indonesia can and must assist us in developing a programme which will arm us for such victories.

For the first time in decades, the masses are determining history more and more consciously. Suharto is gone, but Habibie is no solution. Reform must be total. The army is not trusted. But just whose revolution is it? At present, that question has not been answered. The oligarchy around

Habibie-Wiranto is struggling to hold itself together. But it is clear they will fail. So far the student-led revolutionary or 'total reform' movement seems to be pressuring the 'democratic' bourgeois such as Rais and Megawati to take power - some because they believe in them, fewer in order to expose them. Yet it is these forces which represent counterrevolution as much as Wiranto and the hated Kostrad special forces. On one side of the road to revolution is an imperialist sponsored 'democratic' settlement which would then crush its more radical supporters. On the other side is a coup and naked repression.

The most coherent force to emerge from the revolution so far has been the Peoples Democratic Party (PRD). It has been instrumental in uniting the student forces and the urban poor into action on November 12-13. Its slogans - calling for the removal of the military from political life, the trial of Suharto and his cronies, the expropriation of their wealth, and the formation of a transitional government with themselves and all other anti-government forces - have widespread support, forcing the government and the MPR to respond.

Yet it appears that many in the PRD view the Indonesian revolution through a Menshevik-style, two-stages prism. Leading PRD comrades decry Rais and Megawati and other bourgeois for not leading 'their' revolution.

The PRD have close links with the Democratic Socialist Party in Australia. The DSP was once a member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. It is revealing that one of the main reasons for the split from Usec in the early 1980s was due to the DSP's abandonment of permanent revolution and the adoption of some form of two-stage theory of revolution in the backward countries. Concretely, this arose out of the Nicaraguan revolution and the DSP's desire to give uncritical support to the Sandinista regime.

The DSP's current programme seems ambiguous. It states: "The complete and lasting attainment of the goals of national liberation in the Third World can only be carried out by an anti-imperialist movement based on an alliance of the working class and the peasantry that transfers power to a revolutionary-democratic government and destroys the capitalist state apparatus" (*Programme of the DSP* 1995, p21). While this seems close to a Leninist conception of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, the very next paragraph throws some doubt on the comrades' consistency.

It says: "While bourgeois nationalist forces may be part of such a movement, historical experience has shown that the national liberation movement will not succeed if these forces enjoy political hegemony within it, or if the revolutionary-democratic forces subordinate the mobilisation of the worker-peasant masses to the goal of maintaining bourgeois nationalists within the anti-imperialist alliance" (*ibid*).

Slippery stuff. While this formulation argues for the hegemony of the revolutionary-democratic forces, at the same time it allots the bourgeois (note: not petty bourgeois) nationalists an anti-imperialist - ie, progressive - role. This is a capitulation to Menshevism and Stalinism.

The truth is that the national(ist)

bourgeoisie is thoroughly reactionary.

At the level of tactics all manner of temporary alliances are possible. But to ascribe a programmatically progressive role to the national bourgeoisie will lead to disaster. I cannot pronounce fully on the correct tactics *vis-à-vis* the bourgeois 'democratic' forces of Rais and Megawati, but to call for a government of these people is fundamentally wrong. Yet in May that is what the PRD did.

While support for Amien Rais *et al* as part of a coalition which includes the PRD may be intended to expose those sections of the current movement who are conciliatory to the regime, it carries the danger of handing the initiative over to counterrevolutionary forces. The example of the Iranian revolution of 1979-81 and its slaughter by the mullahs cannot be forgotten. Not a transitional government of reactionaries, but a provisional government born of the revolution, committed to the free election of a constituent assembly.

The PRD's tactical approach to the bourgeois forces carries a real danger of liquidating the revolutionary wing of the democratic movement. Indeed, after the events of the past week, the PRD's demands seem to be lagging behind those of the most militant and mobilised worker, urban poor and peasant masses. While the PRD merely call for the abolition of the 'dual role' of the military - that is, its removal from political life - they want rid of the military altogether. They are defending their own demonstrations with sticks, stones, molotov cocktails and air rifles. Four of the armed thugs sent against last week's demonstration paid with their lives. What is needed is the call to form the masses into armed defence corps. This is the key to splitting the military, from bottom to top.

The revolution in Indonesia can succeed only if it is led by the working class in alliance with the peasantry - this is what student radicals should work for. They should coordinate and give priority to revolutionary committees in factories, workplaces, and working class neighbourhoods. Here are the embryonic organs of dual power and the future provisional government. The land question too must be urgently addressed. Indonesia is still an agrarian country. Already, peasants are occupying landlords' estates. A pledge to give land rights to the peasants would win them to the revolution and help split an army with its substantial peasant composition.

The MPR's decrees allow for multi-party elections next year, an 'in principle' agreement to phase out the role of the military in politics and a bogus investigation of corruption under Suharto. This is way below popular demands and expectations. More confrontations between the masses and the state are inevitable. Six months after the ousting of Suharto, the Indonesian masses must have learnt considerable lessons and have started dreaming of things they never thought possible.

With a 'reformasi' movement developing in Malaysia, the material for a regional revolutionary movement is emerging. The lessons for us all, no matter its outcome, will be great indeed.

Victory to the democratic revolution in Indonesia! Victory to the working class and peasant alliance! ●

Marcus Larsen

## Fighting fund

## Stronger

The missing £3 billion from the EU's 1997 budget cannot explain the regular appearance and growing circulation of the *Weekly Worker*. Our finances are dependent on truth, not fraud. Revolutionary consciousness and workers' organisation forged through the open clash of ideas generates its own support, including finances. Our readers know the importance of the £400-a-month fighting fund to sustain the left's vehicle of openness. Thanks to comrades TD, ES, and HP for £65 received this week, taking us to £304 ●

Ian Farrell

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

# Unenlightened myth

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

Support grows for nationalism in Scotland, a nationalism which threatens to split and greatly weaken the working class movement. Communists and all genuine socialists are obliged to combat this contagion. The more virulent nationalism, the more pronounced must be our internationalism and calls for workers' unity. Evidently not all who describe themselves as communists or socialists have done their duty. On the contrary. Scottish Militant Labour has broken with the Socialist Party in England and Wales along national lines. The Scottish Socialist Party - at the head of which stands SML - demands an independent class state in Scotland. The Communist Tendency in the SSP writes disparagingly about the 'Brit' left and takes as its starting point the principle of nationality, not class. Indeed the rather hysterical passage reproduced above, taken from the Communist Tendency's polemic against the CPGB (*Weekly Worker* November 5), is fairly representative of left separatist thinking in Scotland. Hence a reply will not only allow us to elaborate our views, but draw a sharp line of demarcation between international communism and national socialism.

The CPGB “does not recognise Scotland as a nation and claims that Scots are merely a minority nationality (ethnic group) within a British nation.” To begin then, it is necessary to ask ourselves what a nation is and distinguish this category from the categories ‘nationality’ and ‘state community’. So what is a nation? I have no problem in starting out with the basic argument presented by Stalin in his famous pamphlet *Marxism and the national question* (see *JV Stalin Works* Vol 2, Moscow 1953). Incidentally, for the sake of incorrigible Stalinophobes, Lenin had the highest opinion of this work. He gave it “prime place” in the “Marxist literature” on the subject. No doubt that is why he backed Stalin's appointment as commissar for nationalities in the first Soviet government.

A nation is a “definite community of people”, insisted Stalin, often formed through the merger of the most diverse tribes, nationalities and ethnic groups, brought about in the first place by the dynamic of capitalism (Karl Kautsky had a similar objective approach). Stalin cites “the British, the Germans” as a “historically constituted community of people” (*ibid* p303).

## A reply to the Communist Tendency in the Scottish Socialist Party

Nations must not be confused with loose empires such as that of Alexander the Great or state communities such as Belgium, Spain or the former Soviet Union which have a common territory but no common language. A nation also must have, “strictly speaking”, a “common economic life” and “economic cohesion” (*ibid* pp305, 306). Stalin suggests that his native Georgia was not a nation till the late 19th century. The development of the means of communication (not least print) and the rise of capitalism shattered the economic isolation of the old, warring principalities, and overcame the isolation and indifference of the peasants by drawing them together into a single whole. Such conditions create a “common culture” (*ibid* p307).

Stalin stresses that nations have a history, hence a beginning and an end. Nations come into existence and will certainly go out of existence. In other words they are not fixed categories with their origins in the mist of time but are fluid and transient. So to understand this or that contemporary nation we must seek out non-selves, not project what is back into history.

How do things stand in relationship to the British Isles? Traditionally academic historiography has been taught within an invented ‘national’ paradigm. This went hand in hand with the ideology of nascent imperialism. From the late 19th century onwards ‘England’, ‘Scotland’, ‘Wales’ and ‘Ireland’ were taught by elementary and secondary school teachers as something ancient, each ‘unit’ having its own distinct people, character and destiny (at its crudest Anglo-Saxon and Celt). Far from being a source of disunity, such a ‘national’ history served to forge a common identity under the crown against ‘inferior’ or ‘enemy’ peoples (as can be seen in libraries and bookshops, ‘national’ history has become axiomatic).

A Britannic approach which accounts for the existence of many overlapping cultures is far more accurate and rewarding. With such an approach it can easily be recognised that our present-day arrangements of ‘England’, ‘Scotland’, ‘Wales’ and ‘Ireland’ are accidental results of feudal marriage bed deals, the fortunes of war and the continuation of the monarchical system. There is no distinct ‘English’, ‘Scottish’, ‘Welsh’ or ‘Irish’ people or culture with its own unique and separate history.

Withdrawal of the Roman legions in the fifth century left a vacuum filled by several Celtic cultures (including the Romano-British) which competed with each other and several incoming Germanic cultures. In broad terms there was a common experience across the British Isles. The ‘English’ kingdom of Northumbria stretched from the Forth to the Humber. The Strathclyde British kingdom in ‘Scotland’ (‘Scot’, of course, being ‘Irish’ in origin) fought a bitter struggle against the Picts of Caledonia. The same commonality was witnessed in the ninth to 11th centuries. Whole swathes of the British Isles fell under the sway of invaders and colonisers from Norway and Denmark. Both the islands of Ireland and Great Britain formed part of the Scandinavian cultural world (‘Great’ Britain as opposed to ‘Little’ Britain or Brittany).

The Normans in turn did not merely conquer England. Their kings and

marcher knights established domination over Wales, Scotland and in turn the best parts of Ireland, during what Marc Bloch called the “second feudal age” (*M Bloch Feudal society* Vol 1, London 1962, p69). By the 12th century there was a Norman empire of the British Isles (not forgetting their ambitions and domains in France). Scotland, like Wales and Ireland, was then little more than a “geographical expression” (H Kearney *The British Isles* Cambridge 1995, p97). Norman domination was left incomplete in Scotland by survival of earlier political entities. Norway still controlled Shetland, Orkney, the isles of Lewis and Skye and the Isle of Man. Galloway was ruled by Hiberno-Scandinavians.

The popular belief that William Wallace, and following him Robert Bruce, led some sort of “war of independence” against the English is a combination of 19th century myth and Hollywood hokum. The celebrated ‘Declaration of Arbroath’ acquired its “status of a surrogate Scottish constitution” only in modern times (M Lynch *Scotland* London 1992, p111). In essence the conflict between ‘England’ and ‘Scotland’ after 1294 was no different from the Wars of the Roses: ie, an internal struggle between rival feudal interests whose ideology was based on past notions of fief and vassalage, not future notions of nation and nationality. The castellan Norman lords in Scotland were ‘traditionalists’ defending their exclusive right to exploit their serfs. Edward I was the ‘revolutionary’ centraliser.

What of the servile orders? By the beginning of the 14th century most appear to have been speaking a dialect of English (Lothian). Thus within what had become the kingdom of Scotland there existed four distinct cultural entities. The arrogant Norman elite who still paraded their French. In the south and east the peasantry used English (ie, Lallans or Scots). Gaelic was standard for most classes in the north west. In Shetland and Orkney they continued to speak Scandinavian (see R McCrum, W Cran, R MacNeil *The story of English* London 1992, p146).

The ascent of James VI of Scotland to the English throne in 1603 and the 1707 Act of Union have wrongly been portrayed as endangering the Scottish nation. They were certainly more than a dynastic and parliamentary merger. Britain had become the site of a protestant ascendancy. Reformation and counterreformation were the common experience across the whole of the British Isles. The Cromwellian republic, the Stewart restoration, the 1688 Glorious Revolution affected every part. None of them were purely English affairs. Moreover, behind the absolutist state and the religious wars mercantile capitalism was creating a home market from which industrial capitalism could take off. Having a common language - English - was a

material advantage. England took “easily a half of Scottish exports by 1700” (L Colley *Britons* London 1992, p12). The Highland Gaelic culture found itself in headlong retreat in the face of an evolving English-speaking British nation and an invented British anti-catholic nationalism “superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties” (*ibid* p5).

The 1715 and 1745 Jacobite rebellions attempted to exploit Scottish resentments against the Act of Union (there was an equal and opposite resentment in England). But the intention of the old and the young pretender alike was to capture London, not liberate Scotland. Both claimants to the throne of the United Kingdom received logistical aid from the great catholic enemy, France. Their rebellions had the character as much of an internal north-south civil war in Scotland as a religio-dynastic struggle between Stewarts and Hanoverians. The 1745 rebellion found little support outside a minority of the highland clans. In the south only a thin layer of the episcopalian gentry came over to the side of Charles Edward Stewart. Likewise in northern England “hardly any civilians who were not Roman catholic joined” his cause (*ibid* p77).

The industrial revolution and the fruits of a worldwide British commercial and military empire cemented a merger of the main peoples in Britain. The huge industrial cities of the north sucked in the surplus rural population and created a class of proletarians. Catholic labourers flooded in from Ireland too. Hence in Scotland there came into being three overlapping cultures: the dynamic English-speaking south and east divided between indigenous protestants and incoming Irish catholics, and the declining Gaelic north (not forgetting the residual Scandinavian culture in Shetland and Orkney). Competition between protestant and catholic workers, the non-integration of southern Ireland into the system of real capitalism and successive uprisings in Ireland gave renewed life to the ideology of anti-catholicism. Opposition to Irish home rule allowed the Tories to establish a mass base. Reaction was particularly marked in Scotland. As in Ulster and Liverpool the notorious Orange Order sunk deep roots. ‘No popery’ and protestant sectarianism remain a potent, though dormant, force.

It has only been with the visible decline of British imperialism that Scottish nationalism has seriously emerged. The closure of the old steel, shipbuilding, engineering and mining industries, the discovery of North Sea oil and the election of four successive Tory governments created genuine nationalist sentiments amongst the Scots, and not only those who vote SNP.

Inevitably nationalist ideology imagines its would-be Scotland back into the distant past. ‘Be a nation once again’ is the perennial slogan. The kilt, various feudal or dynastic battles,

Gaelic folk tunes - all are re-interpreted and used as evidence of a distinctive Scottish culture, that the Scots were a ‘people’ and thus ought to have their own state. Such nationalist symbolism raises hostility *vis-à-vis* the English and simultaneously maintains that lowlands and highlands, worker and bourgeois, protestant and catholic, belong to the same national culture and thus share common interests. Yet, as we have shown, neither Scotland, nor England, nor Wales were ever nations in the sense of having a unique common language, economic life and culture. They were as much divided internally as Britain as a whole. Nevertheless within the common territory of Britain there did evolve a spreading common English language and with the development of capitalism that allowed a - by no means uniform - common economic life and culture.

Being members of the nationalist SSP, our critics understandably but stupidly brand such elementary facts as “racist” - the idea of a British identity is obviously profoundly offensive to them. How our theory “gives succour to the most reactionary wing of Scottish nationalism” we can safely leave to their fetid logic. Suffice to say, in the face of a rising tide of nationalism in Scotland, the task of communists in the rest of Britain is not simply to expose the blatant lies of nationalism but to come forth as the foremost champions of self-determination - a right we wish to see exercised in favour of unity inside a federal republic. That explains why, unlike SML and its Communist Tendency allies, the CPGB rejected Blair's sop of a monarchist semi-parliament. We called for an active boycott of the September 11 1997 referendum. Scotland, as a territory, with all its diverse peoples, including recent migrants, must be constitutionally free to determine its own future. (A similar attitude would be adopted if there was a nationalist movement in Orkney, Shetland, etc.) The Edinburgh parliament does not provide that freedom.

We take the same “bizarre” approach to Kosova. There is no greater Albanian *nation* comprising Albania, western Macedonia and Kosova. There is a six-million-strong Albanian nationality. If they want to unite into one state, so be it. That ought to be their democratic right. It should be pointed out however that the Kosova Liberation Army demands independence, not pan-Albanian unity ... and no one, even if they live in Edinburgh, should be able to decide otherwise. The people of Kosova - including the Serbs - should be masters of their common territory.

There are Albanians and Albanians. Just as there are British and British. Identity is invariably complex and multiple. The Albanians evolved from the Pelesgians/Illyrians sometime between the fourth and sixth centuries AD. Needless to say, there are numerous Albanian dialects. Indeed over the last thousand years the main groups - Gheg in the south, and Tosk in the north - have diverged. Except at their extremes they are mutually unintelligible. Danish, Swedish and Norwegian are far closer (to say nothing of the English spoken in the British Isles). Moreover neither the Albanians of Kosova nor the Albanians of Macedonia share a common economy with the Albanians of Albania (there is also the historic division between christian and muslim). Either way the CPGB says ‘yes’ to self-determination - which, given the best outcome, would mean a Balkans federation ●

Jack Conrad

### 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

A 'Statement on the expulsion of Merseyside Socialist Party' has recently been circulated to some comrades in the CWI. The statement is unsigned, but has apparently been produced by ex-members of the Merseyside regional committee who were suspended by the October 1998 national committee of the Socialist Party and by Dave Cotterill, a former NC member who resigned from the SP in July.

This statement gives a completely false picture of the background against which members of the Merseyside regional committee were suspended by the Socialist Party's NC. The statement claims that RC members were suspended because of "the political and organisational challenge mounted by Merseyside against a national leadership which regards political and organisational differences as a heresy". The real position, however, is completely different.

Merseyside RC members, like all other SP members, had the right to raise differences and criticisms and took the opportunity to do so on many occasions. Recent extended debates in the SP - for instance on the name change and strategy for Scotland, which involved questions of perspectives, programme and strategy - show that there is plenty of scope within the party for debate and discussion. All important political, organisational and financial issues are fully debated at every level of the organisation, with ample documentation, before decisions are taken.

It has been a different situation with the Merseyside RC. They raised fundamental differences on perspectives, which they had the right to do, but they did not openly and honestly state their views in a way which would have made it possible for the SP to debate the issues and democratically arrive at conclusions on the key issues concerned. At the same time, the Merseyside RC unilaterally organised local work on the basis of their differences and refused to carry out key NC decisions on policy, campaigning, organisation and finance.

It is striking that although the statement refers to the suspensions of Merseyside members being due to their political differences, there is no attempt to explain their position. Let us help them. The executive committee statement on the Merseyside region presented to the October NC summarised their differences:

"Merseyside RC members have raised fundamental and escalating differences in the last few years on perspectives, strategy and organisation. This has put them in increasing opposition to the EC, the NC and the overwhelming majority of the party. Dave Cotterill, when he was regional secretary, over a number of years vehemently opposed the perspectives put forward by the EC that the likely outcome of the 1997 general election would be the election of a Labour Government. Dave, together with Michael Morris and the regional committee, opposed our economic perspectives for world capitalism: that a new recession or slump loomed. They argued that the economic cycle would continue for another two or three years.

"Their arguments reflected within our party the pressure of the overwhelming majority of bourgeois economists and commentators who have been similarly bemused and confronted by the unfolding of the present worldwide economic crisis of capitalism. The leadership of the party and of the CWI, virtually alone, predicted the economic turmoil of world capitalism. This has prepared members and cadres of the party for the present and future situation. The present Merseyside RC have had a completely one-sided attitude towards globalisation. There has been no comment by members of the RC on the world situation in the light of recent developments.

"During the name change debate [in the Socialist Party in Britain], the regional committee held a neutral position right up to the end of the debate. The executive committee of the party had to argue forcefully against this."

Dave Cotterill and Michael Morris have argued, and continue to argue, a funda-

# Liquidationism

**SPEW's executive committee responds to its suspended Merseyside members (for their statement see *Weekly Worker* November 12)**

mentally false position on the trade unions. We have tried, not over weeks and months, but over a number of years, to convince them that their position is mistaken. Just one example will indicate the implications of their ideas for the party if they were followed. One of the regional committee members, Richard Knights, who is now a teacher, played a role in building Militant and our party in Merseyside in the past. However, in a debate at a Merseyside regional aggregate he discounted the success of our party in having three comrades elected to the national executive committee of the National Union of Teachers. Richard would never have put forward such a position in the past, but has been affected by the vicious role of the right wing of the Transport and General Workers Union in the dockers' dispute and has drawn false conclusions from this experience.

A more fundamental difference has arisen with these comrades on the old issue of the relationship of Marxists and their own organisation to the organisations of the working class and the need to build a new mass workers' party. It was not the Merseyside regional committee but the present EC of the Socialist Party that was ahead of the rest of the membership, including Merseyside comrades, on the issue of the Labour Party becoming a bourgeois party. It was the leadership who raised the idea of preparing the basis for a new workers' party. However, this was never conceived by us as a substitute for building our revolutionary party. We advanced the idea of a dual task: the struggle to rehabilitate the ideas of socialism, linked to the idea of a new mass workers' party, and, at the same time, building the revolutionary party.

The success of our work in Liverpool in the past did not arise from building 'broad formations' alone. Our starting point was to build the revolutionary party which was very organised and very disciplined. This was the precondition for us to then intervene in the broad labour movement and to build organisations, such as the Liverpool 'Broad Left'. Every stripe of opponent complained and opposed us because we were too 'organised'.

It is not the executive committee of the Socialist Party which has moved away from these methods but the present Merseyside regional committee. It is quite clear that they have abandoned the idea of a clear, distinct revolutionary party, based on the ideas of democratic unity. There is no need to take our word for it: read what the comrades themselves wrote in 1998. In a leaflet advertising a series of SP discussion groups entitled 'Resistance is the secret of joy', they wrote the following: "What will these movements achieve? Will they be successful or, under the impact of globalisation are they doomed to failure, as we are all now at the mercy of the market as even 'Labour' governments search for further privatisation? Where can these answers be found? We don't know, but we do know where to start." They then went on to say:

"We are launching a series of discussions over the summer months aimed at debating all of the major issues of the day and seeing how Marxism applies (if it does at all) to the world situation we live in today." Well, the Socialist Party and the CWI has many questions, but we also have given answers to these problems confronting the working class, which seem to bemuse the Merseyside regional committee.

One problem in any debate with the



regional committee is that the comrades have never written down in a worked out form their positions on any question. Despite this, and despite the differences that exist, we believed that it would still be possible to accommodate the comrades within the framework of our party. No restrictions have been placed on the comrades arguing for their point of view within the party. In fact, they have done this verbally on many issues both during pre-congress discussions and at the national congress itself, for instance, in the name change debate. The ideas they raised were debated and discussed but were rejected by the congress.

The actions that the Socialist Party national committee took had nothing to do with any political differences that the Merseyside regional committee held. The rather pathetic attempt to link the actions of the Socialist Party executive committee with those of Neil Kinnock and Labour's right wing in carrying through expulsions in Merseyside holds no water at all. The Labour Party expelled us for our ideas. We have acted in relation to the Merseyside regional committee members not because of their ideas, which they have argued for, but because the comrades refused to accept the basic minimum requirements for membership of the party.

We have not taken precipitous action. We have tried over a number of years to arrive at agreement with the Merseyside regional committee. The choice we had was between taking the action we did or face the prospect of the disintegration of our party as a cohesive national organisation. The Merseyside statement incorrectly states that they were "suspended with no right to appeal". The NC's resolution made it clear that we would be only too happy to lift the suspensions on any of the comrades who would give an undertaking that they would accept the basic obligations of party membership: carrying out NC decisions and making financial contributions to the national organisation. As with any suspended comrades, they have the right to appeal against the NC's decision.

Absolutely no mention is made in their statement of the fact that they have refused to carry out the agreed democratic decisions of the Socialist Party nationally on the issue of finance. They have refused to pay subs for a period of five months. They have refused to implement the Week's Income Campaign which was agreed by the national committee. They have refused to seek a road to the youth through the very successful Save Free Education campaign, which is attempting to organise mass non-payment of tuition fees. Moreover, the Merseyside regional committee have accumulated debts of £60,000, which is the result of loans taken out without any consultation or agreement with the national leadership of the party. The consequence is that some comrades may be liable personally for these debts, which could entail them losing their houses if they are not paid off. This situation arose because of gross financial mismanagement by

leading RC members, and particularly by Dave Cotterill.

Dave Cotterill was not one of the regional committee members suspended by the October NC. This was because he had previously resigned in July 1998. This came in response to a request from the Socialist Party EC for Dave, who was an NC member, to provide information about various funded projects which we had heard he was involved in. We also asked for information about the aims and finances of 'Club Resistance'. Dave wrote back blankly refusing to provide any information and, without any further explanation, stating that he was immediately resigning from the Socialist Party.

The Merseyside statement attempts to give the impression of big opposition to the measures in relation to Merseyside taken by the national committee. There are, it is true, a handful of comrades outside of Merseyside who have expressed major disquiet over the actions taken by the national committee. The majority, however, consider that the Merseyside regional committee have flagrantly violated the basic requirements for membership of the party. The Merseyside statement states, somewhat ambiguously, that "Out of a national committee of 80-plus only 50 participated in the vote for expulsion". In fact 50 comrades participated in the NC meeting because a number of comrades had to send apologies to the NC because of important meetings, illness, etc. There is no doubt, however, that the majority of the absent NC members would have voted in favour of the action taken by the national committee.

The contention that "on Merseyside itself only a handful of people support the national leadership" is being disproved daily. More and more comrades, as the true picture is revealed, are cancelling payment to the regional committee and are switching to the national party. The statement's claim that the trade union comrades in the area all support the regional committee is untrue. Leading Merseyside comrades in Unison, NUT, PCS support the national party. A similarly false claim is made that "significantly, not one individual" who played a prominent role in the Liverpool council battles of the 1980s, the poll tax fight, and so on, has come out in support of the Socialist Party leadership. This is contradicted by the fact that Roger Banister, a long-standing Merseyside comrade who is on the executive committee of Unison, supports the national leadership. Tony Aitman, who was expelled from the Labour Party with him in the 1980s, also supports the NC. Tony Mulhearn, who on a daily basis was largely responsible, together with Peter Taaffe, for the major tactical decisions in the Liverpool council struggle does not support the Merseyside regional committee.

The statement also claims that "the dock shop stewards stand in total solidarity" with the Merseyside regional committee. A number of shop stewards, but by no means all, have indicated they are in "solidarity" with members of the Merseyside regional committee because "they stood by us and we are standing by them". Unfortunately, it seems that they have taken the stand, on an internal Socialist Party issue, without hearing both sides and purely on the basis of industrial solidarity.

The Merseyside regional committee members, however, were not the only ones to stand shoulder to shoulder with the dockers. Many members of the Socialist Party (who oppose the regional committee and support the national party) or-

ganised solidarity tours, accommodated dockers in their homes, organised solidarity action in their workplaces, union branches, and raised money for the dockers.

Internationally organisations of the Committee for a Workers International played an important supportive role in organising solidarity tours, and in helping to organise solidarity action by dockers in many different overseas ports. Socialist Party and CWI comrades will be surprised and disappointed if Liverpool docks stewards are supporting the former Merseyside regional committee comrades without hearing both sides of the argument.

The statement claims: "We are proud to continue to uphold the traditions which began 60 years ago [on Merseyside]." The comrades who pioneered the building of revolutionary Marxism on Merseyside over many decades, however, remain committed to our national organisation and to the CWI. In reality, these comrades are claiming legitimacy from a tradition which they have abandoned.

The Merseyside statement, however, gives the game away. After claiming that they stand on the traditions of 60 years ago, they then declare: "We also recognise that the labels of yesterday do nothing to represent the reality of today." What these comrades refer to as "labels" - Trotskyism, Stalinism, reformism, centrism - are the historical summing-up of different political trends and ideas. 'Trotskyism' is not a "label" but the most modern expression of the ideas of Marxism. In recent discussions in the Merseyside region, Dave Cotterill declared that with the collapse of Stalinism, Trotskyism "was in danger" of becoming irrelevant unless it found new ways to intervene. What this means in practice is the liquidation of the idea of a revolutionary party and its replacement by 'networking'. They say: "In other words, we are prepared to discuss with and learn from all political tendencies which stand on the basis of fighting for a democratic socialist society", but it is clear that for them it will be on the basis of abandoning the task of building a politically coherent, well organised revolutionary party.

The statement also tries to justify the suspended comrades' abandonment of the CWI by conjuring up a false picture of the disintegration of our international organisation. They refer, for instance, to comrades being expelled in Germany. In fact, a small group left the Berlin organisation of our German section. In some other sections, small groups have, like the suspended Merseyside comrades, abandoned Marxist perspectives and the task of building a revolutionary organisation. They have either left our ranks or come out in open opposition to our organisation, obliging us to take action to defend the political integrity of the international. Far from being in a state of disintegration, the ranks of the CWI are overwhelmingly opposed to the kind of liquidationist trend represented by the suspended Merseyside comrades.

These comrades have stepped outside the Socialist Party because of their political evolution, which they are now admitting, bit by bit. They were not forced out, as they allege, by organisational heavy-handedness on the part of the leadership. The devoted core of Merseyside comrades who have remained loyal to the Socialist Party will become the nucleus of the rebuilding of a powerful Marxist force on Merseyside. It is hoped that some of the comrades who have mistakenly followed the lead of Michael Morris and Dave Cotterill will reconsider and rejoin the ranks of the only party which, as in the past, can politically arm the working class on Merseyside for the battles to come. ●



# New Labour plays happy families

The launch of ‘Supporting families’, Labour’s consultation paper, was an uncharacteristically subdued affair. Mindful of the Tories’ disastrous experience with their ‘Back to basics’ campaign to restore ‘moral values’, Labour’s first priority was to deny any suggestion that they were seeking to set an ethical agenda for the conduct of family life. Modesty, perhaps even a little humility, was the order of the day.

Hence Jack Straw’s confessional references to his own divorce and his upbringing in a one-parent family. Hence also his assertion that the document “is not about telling people how to live their lives” and that it is “not about values”, but “about practical support for families ... nor do we moralise or issue edicts on personal relationships. We are not interested in lecturing. It is not the business of government to pressurise people into one type of relationship.”

In other words, Straw would have us believe that ‘Supporting families’, in effect an extended sermon to the nation, actually has no socially or morally *normative* content whatever, but is merely the crystallisation of objective conclusions derived from sociological data garnered by a regiment of experts. Ostensibly the paper represents a purely pragmatic approach to solving certain well known social problems that are, we are told, causally related to the break-up of the family.

The core thesis of the document, however, makes this position unsustainable. Nobody can assert that “the evidence is that children are best brought up where you have two natural parents and it is more likely to be a stable family if they are married”, and still claim to be eschewing normative pronouncements. What we have here is not pragmatism but ideology with profound ethical implications - nowhere more so than in the notion that “marriage is best”. Four out of 10 marriages in Britain end in divorce; a quarter of families are headed by a single parent; a third of births take place outside wedlock. What are those people to think, whose lives, for a wide variety of reasons and not necessarily because of their own ‘fault’, do not correspond with the ideal set out by the home secretary? They must inevitably feel themselves stigmatised as in some sense inferior, as having ‘failed’ to achieve what is “best” for themselves and for their children. The effect, no doubt intended, is to marginalise large numbers of people, to place them firmly outside the socially desired norm.

Labour is in the process of completing its transformation from a bourgeois party of the working class into a bourgeois party of the bourgeoisie. An important part of this process involves a more explicit endorsement of the ethical presuppositions of bourgeois ideology derived from orthodox Judeo-Christian morality, with its emphasis on the traditional patriarchal family and the sanctity of marriage. Small wonder that ‘Supporting families’ was warmly welcomed by the archbishop of Canterbury. Taking time off from urging us to ‘forgive and forget’ the crimes of General Pinochet, George Carey praised the document for showing that “ministers share a very high priority that the church places on the stability and integrity

## Michael Malkin discusses Labour’s green paper

of the family. I particularly welcome the explicit recognition that marriage provides the surest foundation for raising children, and the undertaking to strengthen the institution of marriage” (*The Guardian* November 5). Given that there has been a tenfold increase in cohabitation during the last 25 years and that annual marriage rates have reached an all-time low, one can understand why the archbishop should take succour from Labour’s commitment to marriage.

Finding himself and his party in the warm embrace of the church evidently causes Straw no embarrassment. In this connection, it is interesting to note that one of the advisers employed in helping to frame Labour’s consultation paper was the influential catholic psychiatrist-theologian and all-round expert on marriage, Jack Dominian. Straw’s own christian convictions led him to voice his personal opposition (doubtless shared by god’s representative in Downing Street) to delicate issues such as gay adoptions and lesbian IVF mothers. Straw is entitled to believe what he wishes, and perhaps he thought there were some votes to be harvested from appealing to homophobic prejudice. But to use the launch of a policy document as a forum for promoting his religious beliefs was injudicious, to say the least, especially since it casts grave doubt on the claim that Labour’s policy on the family is inclusive, ethically neutral and merely concerned with giving practical help.

The specific measures intended to furnish this ‘practical help’ have been widely publicised and need not detain us long. Suffice it to say that this time the Millbank mountain has brought forth a mouse. Using the now familiar blunderbuss approach to policy formation, ‘Supporting families’ fires off a salvo of heterogeneous initiatives at its target. Among the more risible suggestions is that registrars should become secular parsons - if couples cannot be lured to the altar and the font, then registrars will be on hand to offer them premarital counselling and baby-naming ceremonies. The already hard-pressed health visitor service is to be given a much wider remit, supervising every aspect of child-rearing, from the moment of conception to the time a child leaves school. “Advising on weaning, toddler training, helping with behavioural problems, and offering advice on issues such as sibling rivalry” are just a few of the tasks envisaged (*The Guardian* November 5). To top it all, a National Family and Parenting Institute is to be set up as a source of wisdom on ‘best practice’.

With its facile sermonising and incoherent practical solutions to the real problems faced by families in contemporary Britain, ‘Supporting families’ is an easy target for criticism. But how do we, as Marxists, view the question? What is our theoretical position on the family? As always, we proceed from a *materialist* standpoint. Whereas bourgeois ideology, rooted in philosophical idealism, grasps the abstract concept of ‘family’ and tries to use it for its own purposes by superimposing it on social reality, we begin by taking the family as a con-

crete, historically, socially and culturally determined phenomenon. Our aim in so doing is to dispel the mist created by the illusions constitutive of class society under capitalism. We endeavour to separate facts from values, to see the family as it *is*, rather than as it *ought to be*.

With Engels, we maintain that “the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life ... on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the human species (F Engels *The origin of the family, private property and the state* London 1972, p71). Historically, the propagation of the species has taken place under many forms of social organisation. The patriarchal form of family organisation regarded as paradigmatic in bourgeois ideology dates back to Roman times. As Engels reminds us, “The original meaning of the word ‘family’ (*familia*) is not that compound of sentimentality and domestic strife which forms the ideal of the present-day philistine; among the Romans it did not at first even refer to the married pair and their children but only to the slaves. *Famulus* means domestic slave and *familia* is the total number of slaves belonging to one man ... the term was invented by the Romans to denote a new social organism whose head ruled over wife and children and a number of slaves, and was invested under Roman paternal power with rights of life and death over them all” (*ibid* p121). In the epoch of capitalism, the family became a mirror of the relations of power and property prevalent in society as a whole, containing, as Marx observed, “in miniature all the contradictions which extend throughout society and its state” (*ibid* p122).

Rooted as it is in bourgeois ideology and pledged to the maintenance of capitalism, the Labour Party cannot and will not acknowledge the fact that the problems which afflict the family and all institutions in capitalist society are not primarily the result of individual failings and weaknesses, but are inherent in the capitalist system itself. Social relations like marriage and the family are not the result of human design or calculation, not something that can be superimposed on society, but the product of society itself. At the most fundamental level, these social relations reflect the way in which human beings satisfy their needs and exercise their powers through collective labour.

Under capitalism, human beings are alienated from the product of their labour, from the act of labour itself and from one another. This dehumanisation is the outcome of a form of social organisation in which relations between human *beings* are metamorphosed into relations between *things* - it is *having* rather than *being* that forms the essence of life under the capitalist system, and which cripples and distorts all social relations, including the family and marriage.

Does this mean that we reject the family and marriage as they exist in

our society as so much “bourgeois clap-trap”? Some vulgar Marxists and infantile leftists would have it so. They base their view on a misreading of a well known passage in the *Communist Manifesto*: “Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the communists ... The bourgeois clap-trap about the family ... about the hallowed co-relation between parent and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of modern industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour” (K Marx, F Engels *CW* vol 6, p502).

What the ‘abolitionists’ fail to notice is that Marx is referring to the abolition of the *bourgeois* family, rather than the family as such: “On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians and in public prostitution. The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital” (*ibid* p501). For Marx, the “abolition” of the family signifies not the disappearance of the family *per se*, but the replacement of an alienated social institution under capitalism with an emancipated one under socialism.

This is the key to our position. As communists, we support the struggle for *human* institutions, the family included. In our own society the practice of couples pairing off and setting up families (with or without marriage) is the socially and culturally determined way in which the propagation of the species is ensured. This situation is unlikely to change, even after the victory of socialism. What will change is that from being microcosmic reflections of the crippled and alienated relations inherent in capitalist society, families will form the nucleus of a liberated and fully human social organism.

Although the family is not included in the draft programme of the CPGB as such, many of our immediate demands concerning wage workers, youth, the elderly and so on have a direct bearing on the well-being of workers’ families. We support the family for the simple reason that it is the fundamental economic unit of capitalist society, the unit in which the overwhelming majority of the working class live out their daily lives and struggles, a soul in a soulless world. If we were to reject the family as an institution simply on the grounds that the bourgeoisie try to endow it with mystificatory moral significance, we would be making a serious mistake and would be failing in our duty to fight now and fight hard for the interests of the working class.

Finally, it goes without saying that our support for the family does *not* in any sense imply that we elevate it to a status of ‘moral’ superiority over other forms of social life, such as the alternative lifestyles practised by single heterosexuals, gays and lesbians. We struggle on behalf of all oppressed human beings, whether they live inside or outside the family ●

## 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.**

I want to be a **Communist Party Supporter**. Send me details ☐

I wish to subscribe to the **Weekly Worker**. ☐

**WW** subscription £ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation £ \_\_\_\_\_

Cheques and postal orders should be in sterling.

	6 m	1yr	Institutions
<b>Britain &amp; Ireland</b>	£15	£30	£55
<b>Europe</b>	£20	£40	£70
<b>Rest of World</b>	£28	£55	£80

**Special offer to new subscribers: 3 months for £5.00**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

TEL \_\_\_\_\_

**Return to: CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX.  
Tel: 0181-459 7146  
Fax: 0181-830 1639  
Email: CPGB1@aol.com**

# A covert coalition

In politics, as in life, every virtue has its corresponding vice. When a politician seems unable to distinguish between the virtue of leadership and the vice of diktat, between decisiveness on the one hand and mere impatience and impetuosity on the other, judgement and competence are bound to be questioned.

Such has been the deserved fate of Paddy Ashdown in the week since the publication of the Labour-Liberal Democrat joint statement on extending their political cooperation. By a sublime irony, a document that set out to foster a spirit of unity has succeeded only in actualising the latent tensions between and within the two parties. Everything about the statement - not just its content but also the manner of its provenance and presentation - has thrown into sharp relief the contradictions inherent in the protracted courtship between Blair and Ashdown. It is the ambivalent relationship between the two leaders, rather than between their parties, that lies at the heart of the present crisis.

Before we look at the document, let us be clear about the circumstances which gave birth to it: namely, Labour's decidedly unenthusiastic response to the Jenkins report on electoral reform. Whatever Ashdown may aver to the contrary, it seems highly improbable that Blair will hold a referendum on PR before the next election. With a Commons majority of 179 and a cabinet and party divided over the merits of PR, the prime minister would be foolish to pursue the matter at this stage, even if this means failing to honour a manifesto commitment and leaving his Liberal Democrat counterpart in the lurch. In some respects, the joint statement can be seen as a sort of consolation prize, intended to soothe the wounds to Ashdown's *amour propre* caused by his failure to deliver on Jenkins. Widening the remit of the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) and even endowing it with some spurious added authority must have seemed an attractive option.

The first thing to say about their statement itself is that this paeon to the value of consultation was contrived *in secret*. Ashdown's background in special forces and 'the foreign office' evidently taught him the value of the 'need to know' principle. Only the two leaders and a small coterie of trusted advisers appear to have been involved in producing a document with profound political implications. Such is the arrogance and the contempt for democracy and openness evinced by these two paragons of 'inclusive politics'. No wonder that their respective parliamentary parties were angry and resentful at having been confronted by a *fait accompli*. Even John Prescott was not informed and was duly "infuriated" (*The Daily Telegraph* November 17).

With its combination of blandness and opacity, the joint statement shows all the signs of having undergone a large number of redrafts. Leaving aside the usual Blairite flummery of solemn aims and objectives - the verbal equivalent of Father Tony's infuriatingly complacent grin - the core of the statement contains a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand, we read: "Of course we are two sovereign and independent parties working together where we agree and opposing each other where we do not." Of course. Yet in the next breath the document tells us: "Our parties will continue to offer different choices to the British people in the ballot box *whenever the appropriate opportunity arises*" (my italics). The logic of this sentence can surely not have escaped its authors. The suggestion is that there may be circum-



Ashdown: which party card?

stances in which it is *not* appropriate to offer the voters different choices: ie, the possibility of electoral pacts and virtual coalition agreements cannot be excluded. It was this proposition that understandably sounded the tocsin in the ears of many Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs and party activists.

Whatever the ambiguities implicit in this contradiction, at least one thing is made crystal clear: the aim of closer cooperation between the two parties is to exclude the Tories from power for the foreseeable future: their objective is "to ensure the ascendancy of progressive politics in Britain, against a Conservative Party which seems determined to travel further and further to the right". The "ascendancy of progressive politics" is Blair-speak for his vision of a 21st century dominated by what he has the impudence to call the "radical centre-left" but which in reality will bear the stamp of his own distinctly rightwing, authoritarian politics.

The joint statement reflects not so much the interests of two *parties* as the will and ambitions of two *leaders*, whose motives are not difficult to divine: anybody who has read the suggestively titled book *The unfinished revolution* by Philip Gould, a leading ideologist of New Labour, cannot fail to understand that Blair's ultimate aim is not coalition with the Liberal Democrats, but a kind of party political *Anschluss* - the effective absorption of the Liberal Democrats into a unified 'Greater New Labour'. Ashdown's motives are equally apparent: to exercise real power at last, ideally at the head of the Liberal Democrats, but if necessary in Blair's party. As one newspaper put it very well, "Mr Ashdown ... cannot really want to lead his party into a third election and is looking for a proper job where he gets to make decisions which are not immediately voted down by a polytechnic of obstreperous local councillors" (*The Independent* November 16).

Reaction to the joint statement by the Liberal Democrat parliamentary party was swift and hostile, but in part based on a misapprehension. The final draft stepped back from a detailed agenda and in fact limits itself to a review of the JCC's work with a view to extending cooperation. References to specific areas in which the JCC's remit might be broadened, such as health, education, welfare reform and so forth, are at present merely speculative. Nonetheless, the speculation was enough to convince many Liberal Democrat members that they were be-

ing bounced into a situation where their teeth would be drawn in criticising Labour's social policy.

On the same day that the statement was published by the No10 press office, Ashdown was compelled to call a meeting of Liberal Democrat MPs in order to explain himself. Roy Jenkins - the real *eminence grise* behind the whole project - was wrenched away from his claret for long enough to give his personal support to Ashdown's initiative. After more than three hours of heated debate, in which he persisted in maintaining that there was still a real possibility of a referendum on PR before the next election, Ashdown won a vote in favour of the statement by 44 to two. One of the two MPs to vote against was Simon Hughes (Liberal Democrat member for Bermondsey and his party's health spokesman), who looks likely to be a key figure in coordinating continued opposition to closer cooperation with Labour. Hughes's position, understandably enough, is that strong leadership appears more important to Ashdown than democratic participation. He questions "whether the strategy of increasing national agreement is either appropriate or acceptable without both parties, by democratic decision, being signed up to deliver it. My concern is that the party was forced into making a decision that may not have been taken if there had been a proper democratic process" (*The Independent* November 14).

Ashdown successfully negotiated another hurdle on November 16 at a meeting of the party's federal executive, gaining the support of 15 out of 19 members. But this 'victory' had its cost in the form of Ashdown's forced acceptance of a federal executive motion to the effect that the Liberal Democrats remain committed to replacing the Tories as the official party of opposition and eventually to forming a government in their own right. Desperate to avoid a special conference at which the joint statement would be debated at length, Ashdown now accepts that a national ballot of all Liberal Democrat members is "the most decisive, quicker and cheaper option of settling the matter" (*The Guardian* November 17). Arrangements for a ballot could be concluded at the executive's next meeting on December 7 and the whole matter sorted out one way or the other before Christmas. His speech to the federal executive involved some notable back-peddling: a coalition with Labour was dismissed as "inconceivable" and the widening of cooperation with Labour envisaged by the joint statement was characterised as "the last step" in the Liberal Democrats' strategy of "constructive opposition". Such cooperation as there might be would have to be in "tightly defined and carefully controlled" areas of policy (*The Independent* November 17).

Palliatives of this kind seem unlikely to make much impression on Ashdown's opponents in the party. A ginger group calling itself the Campaign for Liberal Democracy, consisting of MPs, peers and local councillors, is in the process of formation as a national channel for Liberal Democrat hostility to the idea of any further rapprochement with Labour. The group's main argument is that Labour is in the business of coopting and then killing off the Liberal Democrats as a viable independent force. Credibility was added to such fears by an embarrassing Millbank letter outlining Labour's plans for a 'dirty tricks' offensive against the Liberal Democrats at local level. The letter had been drafted on the very eve of the joint statement's publication. In reality such duplicity is a normal part

of political warfare, but its revelation at this particular time was unfortunate, to say the least.

Opposition to the joint statement by Labour members has been muted in comparison with their Liberal Democrat counterparts. The mass of the parliamentary party remain like so many rabbits, frozen in timorous immobility by the searchlights of the Millbank Gestapo. What passes for the left wing of the Party in the form of "the usual suspects" from the Campaign Group of left social democrats has produced rumblings that are as ineffectual as they are predictable. They are no doubt waiting for Blair to falter before making a more serious move. In the meantime, the prime minister is unlikely to lose much sleep about threats from his left.

The 'Jenkins problem' continues to bedevil the Blair-Ashdown relationship. In a written answer to a parliamentary question, Blair states that no date for a referendum on electoral reform has yet been set, but that it should be held "at the earliest possible moment it is sensible to do so" (*The Independent* November 12). Little comfort in this meaningless phrasemongering for poor Paddy. Whistling in the dark, he told Radio Four's *The World This Weekend* of his conviction that Blair is "intellectually and emotionally committed" to electoral reform: "The prime minister has moved his position from being unpersuaded and hostile to PR, to warm and presumed to be in favour of it. That is not insignificant."

The big question, of course, is - where are the two parties, or rather their respective leaders, really heading? In this connection it is useful to recall a few words from a Dimpleby lecture given some years ago by Roy Jenkins: "Sometimes coalitions are overt; sometimes they are covert. I do not think the distinction greatly matters. The test is whether those within the coalition are closer to each other, and to the mood of the nation they seek to govern, than they are to those outside their ranks." In the same interview with *The World This Weekend*, Ashdown admitted that a form of coalition on the continental model - in which the Liberal Democrats would presumably play a role similar to that played for a long time by the German FDP - would be an inevitable consequence of a reformed electoral system. Such a coalition, embodying the creation of what Ashdown called "a progressive liberal centre" would become "the dominant governing force of our time". In the interim, it seems abundantly clear that what the two leaders want is a covert coalition, in which the Liberal Democrats, in return for some enhancement of their status at leadership level, give their support to Blair's "radical centre-left" administration for the next century.

What is also beyond doubt is that the correlation of political forces in Britain is in the process of significant change. On the periphery, the accelerated march of the SLP into the political graveyard serves to emphasise the vacuum that needs to be filled on the left. New Labour's abandonment of any pretence of representing the working class, along with the advent of PR and coalition government, will almost certainly lead to a Labour split. The ensuing period of fluidity should not be viewed merely as a rightward realignment of bourgeois political forces. A reaction in opposition to it, looking to the left, will emerge. However marginalised and demoralised the left appears at present, the new political environment that Blair is attempting to create will provide opportunities for communist intervention in order to aid the left's revival ●

Maurice Bernal