

# London Socialist Labour rebels

## Scargill's former allies of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus attempt bureaucratic blackmail

**T**he London regional committee of the Socialist Labour Party has refused to accept the democratic election of Roy Bull as the party's vice-president. Scargill's deposed former courtiers of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus have embarked upon a typically bureaucratic campaign demanding that the general secretary *increases* his tendency towards personal dictatorship, ignoring the results of the Manchester congress and removes Bull from office by diktat (either that or they will go on strike).

As many foresaw, Arthur Scargill's sponsorship of Bull's successful candidacy at the November 14 special congress has precipitated what could turn out to be the SLP's final crisis.

It was not too difficult to predict that the election of an out-and-out Stalinite homophobe would lead to an immediate flurry of resignations. It was not as if our general secretary had been unaware of the contents of Bull's cut-and-paste weekly, the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*. Numerous comrades, including Scargill loyalists, have privately provided him with many examples of the kind of disgusting remarks that grace the pages of the *EPSR*. The *Weekly Worker*, a newspaper with which comrade Scargill is not unfamiliar, republished several unsavoury examples back in 1997 (see for example January 9, May 15 or July 10 of that year). Bull's views that homosexuality is a "perversion", an "emotional and sexual malfunction", have been well chronicled.

Scargill made it clear in his closing remarks to last week's congress that he knew full well what kind of man had just been elected. He said cryptically: "We oppose the homophobic comments that have appeared in some journals." Perhaps he was responding to the rumblings in the hall about the comments on Ron Davies in the November 3 1998 edition of the *EPSR*. For example, Bull writes: "Tebbitt's comments implying the emergence of secret homosexual mafias in many key institutions, helping each other gain promotion, is almost certainly true."

But for Scargill the election of a homophobic vice-president (not to mention two other *EPSR* supporters to the NEC as part of a 'Campaign to support Scargill' slate) was a second-

ary question. Much more pressing was the need to teach the sitting vice-president, Pat Sikorski, a lesson for having dared to raise veiled criticisms of Scargill's "over-centralised" autocratic regime. He also wanted to ditch Sikorski's fellow Fiscite, Brian Heron, from the NEC, and keep off their allies, Terry Dunn and Imran Khan.

Fisc's bureaucratic fightback was launched at a meeting of the London regional committee, chaired by comrade Roshan Dadoo on Tuesday this week (Heron stepped down from the

chair during the meeting). Around 30 London members were in Conway Hall to witness the passing of the anti-Bull resolution - reproduced below - by six committee votes to two (for: Carolyn Sikorski, Brian Heron, Terry Dunn, Colin Meade, John Mulrenan and Tony Link; against: Mandy Rose and Ranjeet Brar). The LRC handed out an appendix to the resolution, which consisted of a selection of homophobic quotations found in the *EPSR* and collated by Terry Dunn.

The resolution was moved by com-

rade Dunn and backed by Heron and Carolyn Sikorski. Comrade Heron said that the bourgeois press would take up "what the *Weekly Worker* has been banging on about week after week, month after month". Comrade Sikorski agreed, and added that people read papers like *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sun* more than the *Weekly Worker*.

Heron said that for the most part the special congress had had a "positive tenor", with the majority of delegates correctly sticking to the agenda laid down by the NEC. But it was marred by the interventions of "one current", which touted "cranky ideas of Marxist philosophy". The election of Roy Bull - whom he refused to refer to as 'comrade' - was, he said, "a disaster". Another unnamed current at the congress was "more rooted", although it came from an "essentially sectarian" communist tradition which has undergone a "deep, thorough crisis".

One of the latter trend's representatives, NEC member Harpal Brar, spoke from the floor. He was scathing in his condemnation of the tactics of Fisc and their allies, mocking them for "calling on Scargill to use his 'dictatorial powers' to remove Bull". Why have they only now cottoned on to the nature of Bull's publication? - the *Weekly Worker* does not mention the *EPSR*, he said, without prefacing it with the word 'homophobic'.

He also criticised comrade Heron for his "dishonest lip service" to Scargill. Members have a right to disagree with the leadership, said comrade Brar, but they should express their differences openly. In fact Heron was much more openly critical at the London committee meeting than he had been in Manchester. There he behaved in what he imagined to be a 'disciplined' fashion in refusing to say a word against the optimistic fantasies about the SLP advancing on all fronts so stridently projected by Scargill.

Comrade Heron told the regional committee meeting that congress had been "significantly less representative" than the December 1997 congress. The delegates were speaking for around 450 members at the maximum. He criticised Scargill's unrealistic assessment of the SLP's perspectives and made it clear that he stood by Pat Sikorski's plans to clip the general secretary's wings. Scargill should stick to doing what he does best - rallying the membership and addressing public meetings - while the party should exert its autonomy.

Comrade Heron still appears to believe that the SLP alone offers a future to the British working class - rejecting alliances with other left groups - even if *he* is not a part of Arthur's party (the Fiscites are well aware that Scargill could act to bureaucratically exclude them, just as he previously voided communists and democrats - with their active connivance).

But they have no viable strategy to fight back. They do not even see the link between Scargill's previous actions directed against the left and, for example, his intimidatory letter to the 53 initial signatories of their 'Appeal for a special congress', following the cancellation of the full, two-day 3rd Congress. Fisc and their allies are correctly calling for a fully democratic congress, as opposed to the Manchester rally, where no membership motions were permitted. But why on earth didn't they use the special congress to try to win over the membership, instead of giving Scargill, Brar and Bull a clear run?

Their hopeless tactics have no chance of inspiring a demoralised membership to stay and fight. Three members of the LRC - Ann Goss, Tony Goss and Guy Smallman - have already resigned their party membership, and several others look certain to follow them. At the Conway Hall meeting committee member Colin Meade talked of the "hypocrisy that leaps out of Barnsley", while John Mulrenan explained how he had been barely hanging on since the 1997 congress.

Meanwhile the *EPSR*'s Rod George was aggressively unrepentant, dismissing the "unbelievably stupid accusations of homophobia about Roy Bull's paper". The only London committee member with a modicum of principle on the question of how to beat Bull was comrade Mandy Rose, who voted against Terry Dunn's resolution. While she opposed what he stood for, she was strongly against calling on Scargill to overturn the election results. He had to be *voted* out, she said.

The truth is that Fisc is every bit as bankrupt as Scargill, who could soon be presiding over nothing more than a rump of Stalinites, cranks and losers. But resignation and dropping out is no answer. Members should fight within the party to break with the sectarianism of both Scargill and Fisc. They should look to forging links with the left beyond the narrow confines of the SLP - primarily with the Socialist Alliances ●

Simon Harvey

## London Regional Committee resolution

The London regional committee of November 24 1998 resolves as follows:

(1) In light of clause IV, section 15, of the objects of the party in the SLP's constitution,

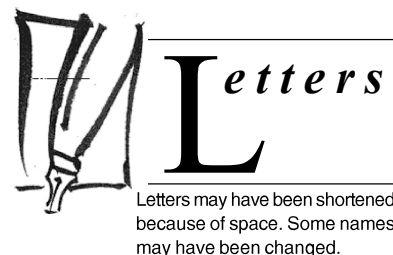
"To establish that no person shall suffer discrimination socially, economically or politically because of their sexual orientation/preference";

and clause II, section 4, on membership in the SLP's constitution, "Individuals and organisations ... which have their own propaganda, or which are engaged in the promotion of policies in opposition to those of the party shall be ineligible for affiliation to the party"; Royston Bull should be immediately removed from his position as vice-president by the NEC.

(2) London region further resolves that Royston Bull's "own propaganda", the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, which has consistently promoted social, economic and political discrimination against homosexuals, thereby attacking our constitution, should be closed immediately and permanently.

(3) London region further resolves that the potentially fatal damage to our public image which would result from Bull remaining as a national officer of our party makes it completely impossible to consider any further electoral challenge on behalf of the party in London unless and until Bull is removed.

(4) London region further resolves to circulate this resolution, and its appendix, to every constituency of the London regional party and ask for constituency parties to endorse the position of the London region ●



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

# Party notes

## Foot balls

Socialists and revolutionaries are grateful to the Socialist Workers Party for kindly letting us know - through the pages of *The Guardian* - that should Ken Livingstone not stand, Paul Foot is to be our "socialist candidate for the mayor of London" in the 2000 elections (November 24).

Comrades in other organisations such as the Socialist Party in England and Wales have expressed dissatisfaction that this SWP decision has been foisted on the London left without debate or consultation. This jars even more, given that important sections of the left in the capital - SWP, CPGB, SPEW, Independent Labour Network, etc - are actually in the process of negotiating a united socialist slate for next year's European elections, presuming they take place with PR. Now the SWP unilaterally turns around and simply informs others that comrade Paul Foot will be standing for mayor and urges support for him as *the* "socialist candidate"!

Of course, it should be borne in mind that the London left have probably had about as much 'consultation' as members of the SWP themselves. The Cliff faction runs a notoriously tight ship as far as inner-party 'democracy' is concerned. At the very least, socialists in London should be allowed to interrogate Foot on his platform before deciding whether he should be our unity candidate, or whether perhaps someone else should be selected. A principled approach would be:

- To begin an exchange with other organisations about the general attitude to be taken to the mayoral elections. It seems from discussions with individual SWPers that it is taken as read that a Livingstone election campaign should automatically pick up the support of the left, even if he is standing as Blair's man. "I am 100% behind Ken, *but if he is not selected* ... then there should be a socialist candidate", Paul Foot tells us (my emphasis - *The Guardian* November 24). The notion that, if selected by the official Labour Party apparatus, Livingstone's candidature will have anything remotely in common with 'socialism' is incredible. As Charlie Kimber correctly notes, Livingstone "has consistently tried to deny that he is really a threat" to Blair's political project (*Socialist Worker* November 21). In contrast to Foot's softness on the man's 'socialist' credentials, comrade Kimber therefore emphasises that "the opposition needs different politics to Ken Livingstone". Quite right.

- A candidate that expects to receive the united support of the left must be prepared to stand on a minimum platform agreed by that left. This should be subject of democratic debate, clarification and amendment.

- This candidate should be adopted by democratic vote at an open meeting of the entire left in London. Of course, given the relative numerical strength of the SWP, some comrades may criticise this as a foregone conclusion. Yet without such an approach the SWP is in effect handing the rest of the left ultimatums, thus helping to perpetuate division and mistrust.

Apart from the fact that the SWP acts in a sectarian manner - which is hardly a scoop - there are a few other points to note. All serious working class politicians welcome the move of the Socialist Workers Party to oppose Blair's New Labour at the ballot

box. Small though it is, the SWP is for the moment the largest revolutionary organisation in this country. Despite its inflated membership figures, it has thousands of revolutionary young people in its ranks, a stable and authoritative team of leaders and considerable resources to deploy in the fight for the loyalty of the class.

The SWP's move into the field of elections will precipitate important changes. It is coming out of its self-deluding little world and will therefore be forced to negotiate, debate and conclude agreements with others on the revolutionary left. The range of influences to which this new electoral move will open up the SWP are very varied and - potentially - very disorientating. Without the anchorage of a principled programme, what is there to stop exactly the same contagion that currently threatens the SPEW with extinction infecting the SWP?

It is imbedded in SWP culture that having a programme is a thoroughly bad idea. The last time the organisation debated this question with any degree of seriousness (about the last time it debated anything, in fact) was in the early 1990s.

A telling comment was made by Maureen Watson (subsequently expelled) at the session on 'Centrism and ultra-leftism' at the SWP's annual 'Marxism' school in 1990. She confidently told her audience that "Lenin would be turning in his grave, at the thought of being bound hand and foot by a programme" (cited in *Republican Marxist* July 1990).

The philistine notion that the mere existence of a programme somehow trusses the party up and prevents it from being 'principled' in practice is barely worth commenting on. If this were so, one wonders why the most astute, flexible and principled working class politician of the 20th century underlined again and again the "tremendous importance of a programme for the consolidation and consistent activity of a political party" (my emphasis, VI Lenin *CW* Moscow 1977, vol 4, p229). However, comrade Watson's foolish throwaway remark does reveal a truth about the SWP. In fact, it was not Lenin and the Bolsheviks who were traumatised by the idea of being "bound hand and foot" by some programmatic document. No, this is a phobia transferred onto the SWP from the SWP leadership itself.

Why? Simply because like too many others on the revolutionary left in Britain, the SWP has been in the business of sect building, not a party project. A programme in these circumstances can be not simply a nuisance, but an actual obstacle to the manoeuvres of the leadership.

As a centrist formation, the SWP must keep itself free to adapt to prevailing moods and prejudices. The last thing the leadership needs is a revolutionary standard, a reference point against which today's particular opportunist or sectarian twist can be judged. Yet without a democratically agreed revolutionary foundation, all manner of sectional politics - feminism, petty nationalism, narrow economism - will undermine the whole edifice.

Programme is therefore not an optional extra: it is the key. For its formulation, inner-party democracy is required. Either way, whether it is aware of it or not, the SWP has some big problems looming ●

**Mark Fischer**  
national organiser

## Fascist CPGB

The SLP congress in Manchester definitely marked a "new stage", as you put it last week (*Weekly Worker* November 19) - but in the ending of political "degeneration", not its start. The political disruption and sabotage by Trotskyism and other anti-communist infiltration has been recognised for what it is, and rightly sidelined.

Just how damaging and unscrupulous such infiltration is, and its real destructive motivation, was immediately apparent from the near-fascist provocations and threatened violence against SLP members (some just elected to the NEC) as they left the hall. The whole incident was stimulated and egged on by *Weekly Worker* paper-sellers lining the exit and jeering at the more confused delegates. The lack of interest in real political clarity and incitement to anti-communist hostility is equally clear from your sly and dishonest reporting of the same incident in your paper.

There was no "result which almost led to fisticuffs", as you put it, which implies some impartial objective forces had been at work, or that the election of Roy Bull as vice-president somehow was 'responsible' for the incident. There was simply the sour and undemocratic reaction of those who have already been exposed as Trotskyist infiltrators and saboteurs, who want to see the historic post-war working class movement against capitalism, which the SLP has every chance to revive, drowned in the old confusions and 57-variety squabbles of the Trotskyist swamp.

The sourness created a provocation outside the hall which pushed and prodded the bitterness of those blinded by single-issue politics into abuse, insults and threats against delegates who stand firmly for the development of the SLP and Scargill's leadership. Some like Terry Dunn were pushed to standing outside and shouting bad language and "homophobe" accusations at delegates, with a clear physically violent intimidatory purpose - while your people, and the Fiscites like Brian Heron stood menacingly close in a ring. This short-cut, simplistic, PC attempt to drown discussion is both unscientific and wrong. You could see why if you read this week's *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*.

None of what happened is other than fascist in tone and anti-communist in intent, and illustrates the *total* bankruptcy of your politics and philosophy, which is quite unable to stand up to scientific argument, and indeed, despite its supposed openness to discussion and debate, is not interested in communist and working class opinion. Just the opposite - it is deeply anti-communist. This leads to book-burning, oppression of discussion and physical attack, which have all been seen before: it is called fascism, capitalism's answer to slump.

**Adrian Greenman**  
South London

## Dishonesty

I was disappointed to read Danny Hammill's misquotation of my views in his report of the otherwise useful and enjoyable CPGB weekend school, 'Against economism' (*Weekly Worker* November 12). Comrade Hammill does not seem to be too good at writing reports on events; however, there is no excuse for misquoting me when my words were recorded on tape.

Danny quotes me in saying that the demand for the arming of the proletariat "only applied to the USA,

where it is more of a 'cultural question'; and goes on to claim that I said: "Since Britain is not in a revolutionary situation, to demand the arming of the workers is foolish and dangerously ultra-leftist". This is a complete misquote.

What I observed was that the arming of the masses in the United States is in no sense a political advance on the situation in Britain; it is a historically-based result of an old *bourgeois* revolution. I also observed that the non-arming of the working class in Britain is also a 'cultural' matter. I pointed out that the fact that American workers sometimes carry guns and use them in strikes does not itself mean that the American working class is *in any way* more revolutionary or class conscious than the 'pacifistic' British working class; that this is a matter of bourgeois 'culture', not the politically advanced nature of American workers.

Perhaps the CPGB disagrees, and thinks that workers carrying guns who clash with the cops, but at the same time vote for Democrats or even in some cases Klansmen, are more class conscious than 'pacifistic' European workers, who at least believe the workers need a political party of their own. This sounds like tailing spontaneity and backwardness to me - a classic feature of the very economism the CPGB spends so much time denouncing!

I stated that I supported raising the demand for picket line defence squads, etc in the miners' strike of 1984-5, albeit with the reservation that it was also necessary to warn against a descent into guerrillaism.

In condemning my views on this as legalistic, and even misquoting me in the blatant manner Danny did in his article, once again the CPGB is tailing spontaneity, and rejecting Bolshevism. The fact is, in July 1917 when the Bolsheviks led the Petrograd proletariat, but not the masses in the country as a whole, the Bolsheviks deliberately led the Petrograd masses *away* from insurrection, because the relation of forces in the country *as a whole* were not ripe at that point. No doubt if Danny Hammill had been around in July 1917 he would have condemned the Bolsheviks for legalism.

I should note that the method of dishonestly quoting people and attributing to them words they never said can only bring discredit upon the CPGB. At bottom, they are contrary to the spirit of Bolshevism that you seek to uphold. CPGB leader Jack Conrad gets upset when his Stalinist pedigree becomes a political issue in any discussion, but it is precisely episodes of petty falsification like this that ensures that pedigree *is* still a political issue.

**Ian Donovan**  
*Revolution and Truth*

## Distinctive view

The report in the *Weekly Worker* by Danny Hammill about the CPGB 'Against economism' school missed out the main focus of theoretical inquiry and tension. This related to the contributions of the Trotskyist Unity Group.

Firstly, at the 'Lenin and *Iskra*' session, I outlined the importance of philosophy for opposing bourgeois ideology, and showed the necessity of philosophy for developing class consciousness. Secondly, at the session on 'imperialist economism' only the Trotskyist Unity Group critically defended the politics of the so-called imperialist economists led by Bukharin.

It was pointed out that Bukharin between 1915-16 contributed immensely to the elaboration of a Marxist understanding of imperialism and

the state. Under pressure from Bukharin, Lenin modified his understanding of the state, and accepted Bukharin's perspective of the need to smash the bourgeois state if proletarian revolution is to be successful.

Thirdly, it was the TUG who challenged most effectively John Bridge's homogenous and unilinear conception of the continuity of Lenin's democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry theory between 1905 and 1917. In systematic detail it was shown how Lenin's theory was drastically modified, and that Lenin continued to revise and alter his perspectives during 1917 in relation to the constantly changing balance of class forces.

John Bridge had no real alternative to the TUG standpoint, but instead of accepting the theoretical superiority of our viewpoint he resorted to a series of diversionary tactics such as trying to dismiss the significance of my quoting Lenin's criticisms of Kamenev.

Fourthly, we agree with the CPGB's call to develop a critical understanding of Trotskyism in relation to programme, and historically materialist objectivism. In this context our distinctive views on the history of the degeneration of the Fourth International were outlined. Thus the TUG contributed substantially to the CPGB school, and represented the exciting challenge of creative, non-orthodox Trotskyism.

The CPGB is comfortable with polemical struggles with orthodox Trotskyism, but can the CPGB accept the formidable task of tackling a more modern and non-dogmatic version of Trotskyism?

**Phil Sharpe**  
Nottingham

## No more trust

I enjoy reading the *Weekly Worker*, though not for the turgid pseudo-theoretical articles.

What I like are the down-to-earth factual accounts of life on the left in London, plus the keen and eager way you seek to drive a wedge in if ever possible.

Your circulation deserves to go up. You are far better than *Private Eye*. If the *Weekly Worker* could be put into the hands of every leftist, a much-needed realignment of the left would soon take place.

However, you are English. Jack Conrad (November 19) comes up with a once typical English view of the national question in Britain. Using wildly distorted history, Jack proves that the nations of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales do not really exist. The British Isles are all the nation of Britain.

Strangely, at referendum time, Jack called for genuine self-determination for Scotland, a place he does not even believe to be a nation. Genuine self-determiners should not vote 'yes', said Jack. They should actively abstain, whatever that means. Citizens of Glasgow! The time is 9pm. You have one hour in which not to vote!

The CPGB's Scottish contingent are far from being nationalists. However, before long, they saw that they had been taken for a ride. The CPGB now no longer has a Scottish contingent.

That's the trouble with the CPGB. Most of the *Weekly Worker* is a jolly good read, even a laugh occasionally.

But nobody trusts you any more.  
**Ivor Kenna**  
Central London

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# Micawber militants

The first sentence of the weak, apolitical statement from the former Merseyside committee of the Socialist Party (see back page) is truly remarkable. Apparently, over “the last few years”, an important section of our movement has been debating “differences” on questions such as the “perspectives for capitalism worldwide, trade union issues and how to build a new workers’/socialist party” and *not one whisper* of any of this has seen the light of day in publications of the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

These are hardly issues that have no interest to the rest of the left. Yet - incredibly - even now that the crap has hit the fan, neither side in the dispute has given us a substantial exposition of the *political* reasons for the parting of the ways. This underlines an important point about the Socialist Party as a whole, not simply the quarrel between the executive committee and Merseyside.

The organisational integrity of SPEW is now extremely fragile. The Merseysiders touch on an important point when they write that “the only thing that has held the party together has been loyalty and the continual demand to raise more and more money on the streets”. I am sure that this view is slightly jaundiced, given the current state of relations between the two sides. Nevertheless it contains an important truth.

Politically, Taaffe’s organisation has been utterly befuddled by the world for quite some time. Ted Grant - the founder of the organisation - had



September 1985: Liverpool Militant members mobilise tens of thousands. Now Taaffe purges them

a dubious definition of Marxism as the “science of prediction”. SPEW leaders’ predictions over the last 15 years or so have more in common with Micawberism than Marxism - “something - *anything* - will turn up”.

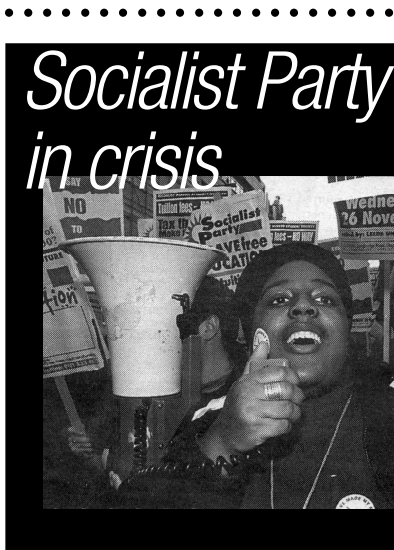
Thus, the Merseyside dissidents’ statement reminds Taaffe that “at the end of the 1980s” - as the bureaucratic regimes in eastern Europe collapsed, ushering in a period of profound ideological reaction worldwide - “we predicted the red 1990s!” Thus, the Liverpool comrades appear to have strained to maintain an apparatus designed to service a much larger organisation during a livelier period, as they were “still expecting things to change in the *near future*” (my emphasis).

The rationale for this impending upturn appears to have been the “continual emphasis on the ensuing collapse of the economy worldwide” (Merseyside statement). The SPEW executive committee actually *boasts* of its prescience in predicting economic trouble for capitalism in their response to Merseyside.

They write that “the leadership of the party ... virtually alone, predicted the economic turmoil of world capitalism. This has prepared members and cadres of the party for the present and future situation” (*Weekly Worker* November 19). Which is basically like saying a stopped clock is bound to be right at least twice a day. A “continual emphasis” on the “ensuing collapse” of world capitalism will eventually receive some sort of corroboration from the global economy. This is simply in the nature of capitalism. Marxism - on the other hand - is a tad more subtle than this.

The fact that the leadership of SPEW appears to have little else to recommend itself to the membership other than its supposed perceptive prediction of economic troubles is truly pathetic. Apart from anything else, the mechanical assumption that any economic crash will automatically translate into mass political advances for the left is simply inane. The possibilities are far more varied - and dangerous.

As we have reported, the Merseyside comrades appear to have been genuinely shocked at the violent reaction of the SPEW leadership. They cite the fact that many SPEW branches have set up websites. Yet the idea that Liverpool should start



to publish a journal - even one that would be “based on the present programme of our party” - precipitated a shocking reaction from the EC. “What is the difference?” they rather plaintively ask.

Clearly, they are right to say that, as a bureaucratic and beleaguered clique, the leadership of SPEW see “ideas as a threat”. Of course, this sensitivity has been exacerbated by the split with Scotland. It is this disaster for Taaffe and his leadership faction that explains the sudden move against the Liverpool critics. It is Taaffe’s substitute for open theoretical struggle - organisational amputation.

Instructive in this context is the first open statement by the SPEW EC on the Scottish crisis, which appears in *The Socialist* of November 20. While the fact that the organisation’s leadership has at last broken its public silence on such a crucial issue is welcome, readers looking for a break with the mealy-mouthed, technocratic obfuscation that has characterised the internal polemic between Scotland and the SP leaders so far will be disappointed by this piece of diplomatic pap.

The statement reports that an “intense discussion” has been taking place over the proposals of the Scottish comrades - although the only place you could have read it is in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. The EC goes on to characterise the new Scottish Socialist Party as a “hybrid”. It “has not been organised as a broad socialist party, on united front lines.

Nor is it a clearly defined revolutionary Marxist organisation”. Now, one might expect that this is another example of “the kind of liquidationist trend represented by the suspended Merseyside comrades”, an opportunist deviation “overwhelmingly opposed” by the majority of SPers and their co-thinkers internationally (SPEW EC statement *Weekly Worker* November 19).

Yet this November 20 EC statement on Scotland - which they *sickeningly* decide to place on their ‘international news’ page - ends by offering critical *support* to the SSP! “In spite of our opposition to the underlying political strategy, we hope that the SSP will succeed in attracting new socialist forces,” the SPEW leadership wheedles.

The inconsistency of its responses to Scotland and Liverpool underlines the fact that what decides its attitude to any political development is not political *principle*, despite its ‘hard’ posturing against liquidationism in Merseyside. What comes first is the organisational integrity and narrow concerns of SPEW.

Future generations of Marxists will look back on the primeval sectarian swamp the left currently inhabits with some degree of wonder ... and revulsion, we suggest ●

Mark Fischer

## action

### ■ CPGB seminars

**London:** Sunday November 29, 5pm - ‘Marx and the Blanquists after the Commune’, using Hal Draper’s *Karl Marx’s theory of revolution* as a study guide.

**Manchester:** Monday December 7, 7.30pm - ‘Cooperation, the division of labour and manufacture’ in the series on Karl Marx’s *Capital*. For details, phone 0161-798 6417. E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.

### ■ Party wills

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

### ■ London Socialist Alliance

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

### ■ European elections

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

### ■ Glasgow Marxist Forum

Public meeting, Thursday December 3: ‘Is global capital heading for a world slump?’ Speaker - Hillel Ticktin. Partick Burgh Hall, 7.30pm. All welcome.

### ■ Support Tameside careworkers

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

### ■ Communities of resistance

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

## Where to get your Weekly Worker

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## Fighting fund

## Heritage

The hypocrisy of using the queen’s speech against the hereditary principle is lost on *The Guardian’s* political editor, who proclaims the forthcoming “historic battle between the elected Commons and the hereditary peers” (November 26). The *Weekly Worker* upholds the democratic heritage of our class by fighting for abolition of the ‘democratic monarchy’ and its replacement by a federal republic — part of the fight to unite our class across all sectional divisions. Re-

forging the Communist Party is the key to both workers’ unity and democracy.

This week comrades RW, AC, AN and JS backed this struggle with £80 between them, bringing the November total to £384, leaving just three days to complete our £400 target ●

Ian Farrell

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

Over the last few months I have reported that the rapprochement process between the Revolutionary Democratic Group and the Communist Party of Great Britain had stalled. It was in danger of going backwards. There are some real issues that need to be discussed and hopefully over the next few months we will begin to do that. Meanwhile there are signs that we are now beginning to move forward again.

One of the first positive ideological steps was the CPGB educational school on economism. The school showed the need to fight the deadly virus of economism that has virtually destroyed the communist movement in the UK as a revolutionary movement.

For most of the British left, the primacy of the economic struggle is its sacred cow. This does not mean the absence of politics. When the more class conscious members of the SWP approach a picket line, they do so in solidarity with workers in struggle. They come to the picket line bearing gifts - solidarity, money and politics. The politics is introduced in conversations, leaflets or through selling copies of *Socialist Worker*.

But what kind of politics is on offer? Typically the answer is economic politics, the politics of the liberal bourgeoisie. There are two varieties of this poison - right economism and left economism. The first is critical support for Labour and its programme of reforming the constitutional monarchy. The SWP urged its supporters to vote Labour and vote 'yes' for devolution in Scotland and Wales. The Socialist Party and Scottish Militant Labour backed Blair's attempt to patch up this foul and rotten system of corruption. Indeed the stench has become so strong that even the SWP are trying to distance themselves from Labour.

The SWP considers that the 'real' class struggle is only on the picket line. Here the SWP are very militant. They bring an element of syndicalism into the equation. From the picket line, they hope to build up to a general strike and the overthrow of capitalism. But on the level of national politics, the SWP dutifully serves up critical support for the liberal programme of the Labour Party. This is the classic economist formula - the workers are for the economic struggle, but the political struggle should be left to supporting the liberals. This boils down to saying that the SWP is in favour of higher wages, best won by militant action, and democratic reform, best won by voting 'yes' in Blair's referendum or voting Labour in the general election. Militant trade unionists, but not militant democrats.

Left economists have a different approach. They are in favour of militant trade union struggle. But the politics they bring to the picket line is a rejection of national politics completely. They are not simply against voting Labour. The working class must not interfere in the working of bourgeois democracy at all. They want nothing more and nothing less than the abolition of parliament.

It sounds very radical. But it is the equivalent of saying that there is no point in fighting for higher wages; we should simply abolish the wages system. To fight for higher wages on this theory is to legitimise wages. The answer to today's politics is simply to say we want none of it. Abolish the lot and give us a Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Republic. There is a purist and moralistic streak in this kind of politics, whose roots are surely in the temperance movement. The demon drink or demon politics is evil - keep away from it.

The politics advocated by right and left economism have one thing in common. In the realm of high politics - who runs the country and how - they both concede to the hegemony of the liberal bourgeoisie. To the ques-

# Anti-economist tendency

tion - shall we fight in the cesspit of bourgeois politics? - the rightists say 'yes' but only by following or supporting the reformist bourgeoisie. The leftists say: 'No, we refuse to fight. We are leaving it to the reformist bourgeoisie.' Guess who is laughing all the way to the bank?

Unfortunately there is no other terrain for political struggle apart from the cesspit of bourgeois politics. It is here that the bourgeoisie is leading the country, including the working class. It is here the working class is being led by the nose, and is struggling for its survival. Communists have to enter the cesspit and plot an independent course, through it, towards dry land. Then we have something that makes sense and can be supported by the working class.

The right economists do not ignore bourgeois politics, but have no independent course. The left economists say simply that somewhere over the horizon is the dry land of the workers' republic. But as to plotting an independent political course, forget it. When workers are trying to find a way forward, these are the people whose 'help' is to turn out the lights out and steal your compass. In the dark they will be shouting, 'It will be alright if we ever get out of this mess'. And the liberal bourgeoisie will be shouting, 'For the next step forward, follow me'.

The idea that economism equals the absence of politics is an absolute lie. This theory has been invented by the economists themselves to cover up their crimes against the working class. Ian Donovan of *Revolution and Truth* has been peddling this kind of politics. He has set himself up as chief economist, not unfortunately for Morgan Grenfell or some other merchant bank who might pay him handsomely for his services. No, he wants to be chief economist for the working class and he is offering his services free. Unfortunately the SWP have long since cornered the market.

In a classic statement, he told the CPGB's weekend school he would not be against abolishing the House of Lords if it happened. Here we have the distilled essence of economism. First, it reeks of an indifference to

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"On the level of national politics, the SWP dutifully serves up critical support for the liberal programme of the Labour Party. This is the classic economist formula — the workers are for the economic struggle, but the political struggle should be left to supporting the liberals"

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political matters, which characterises all economists. They start from the assumption of the primacy of the economic struggle. Since the House of Lords is not about economics or what happens in the workplace (an incorrect assumption), then it is nothing to be too concerned about. Second, his attitude is 'tailist' - he will go along with it or perhaps watch it happen. It is a squabble within the bourgeoisie and no real concern of ours.

Economic struggle is the struggle with the boss class over who runs the workplace and how. Political struggle is the struggle with the boss class, organised into parties, over who runs the country and how. The House of Lords is very much about

the latter. The boss class is divided over what to do next. But our economists seem to think that the working class should simply watch and perhaps cheer occasionally and concentrate on wages and trade union struggle. This is how Ian Donovan thinks and it is how a non-political working class thinks. He is thus pandering to the most backward ideas amongst the workers.

A party of the working class is set up to intervene in the political struggle. That is its prime function. On the question of the House of Lords, the workers' party must have an independent view and mobilise the working class to take direct action to bring about its class policy. We approach the question of the House of Lords as republicans, not as liberals who want to patch it up. If workers are indifferent to this, then the party must educate them to see the importance of constitutional affairs. The bourgeoisie understand the centrality of politics and political power and how this affects what happens in the workplace. A workers' party must educate and organise the workers to understand the same.

The connection between the fight against economism, to which the weekend school made an important contribution, and rapprochement is this. The fight against economism is not the private preserve of the CPGB. It should be a joint struggle. We want to win as many allies as we can to this struggle. This is why we are in favour of an anti-economist tendency.

The Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency has identified a common starting point for unity between the RDG and CPGB. Its platform is implicitly anti-economist. This is why we immediately got into an argument with Ian Donovan over point 1. Unfortunately it seems we will be waiting a long time before *Revolution and Truth* tells the truth about economism and whether the immediate political tasks of the working class movement are to abolish parliament or to abolish the monarchy.

We have also had rejection of the platform from Open Polemic. We are still in the dark as to exactly which

points they disagree with. On the face of it they reject revolutionary democracy, workers' power, international socialism and world communism. What that leaves them with I can only guess. We have also had opposition from Allan Armstrong of the Communist Tendency, who is opposed to international socialism and world communism.

On the more positive side, a number of organisations are not opposed to the platform. In the past I have mentioned the *Marxist Bulletin* which is now part of the International Bolshevik Tendency. Sean Matgama of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty has endorsed the platform. The AWL has now agreed to print the platform in the January issue of their journal and seek the views of their members. We have asked the Trotskyist *Workers Fight* group to consider their views and we have had a positive response from one of their leading comrades. It is obviously premature to claim support, or no disagreement, with the platform from AWL or *Workers Fight*. But the signs are positive.

Rapprochement has, for us, two sides. One is to seek to broaden the process through involvement with other groups, not by liquidating our platform, but by defending it. Second is to seek to deepen our alliance with the CPGB and bring us closer together. On this we had reached an impasse. However, we have now begun to take small steps in the right direction. The CPGB wrote to the RDG proposing that we were invited to each other's aggregates and events and that we contribute some regular finance to support the *Weekly Worker* and proposing a date for another joint national aggregate. The RDG made a modified proposal as follows:

- National aggregates of both organisations should contain a standing item at the end of the agenda for tendency business. Either organisation can submit via their representative, items for discussion, notified two weeks in advance. Voting on motions will be possible. But these will be advisory or non-binding on either organisation.
- The rest of the aggregate agenda should be in theory divided into closed or private business and open business at which the other organisation is invited as observer/guest. In practice the organisation holding the aggregate should decide if either of the sections be reduced to zero (all private or all open).
- Special national aggregates as originally agreed should continue. One is provisionally agreed for January.

On the question of the *Weekly Worker*, we said that we are prepared to make a financial contribution. We have done so already, but not on a regular basis. We asked that the CPGB provide us with full information on the costs of production and distribution. Such information will be treated as confidential. This has now been agreed by the Provisional Central Committee. Detailed points will be worked out by the representatives of both organisations. This agreement is modest, but if it works it will be important in getting some forward momentum ●

**Dave Craig**  
RDG (faction of the SWP)

## RDCT platform

### 1. For revolutionary democracy

We hold a revolutionary democratic attitude to all questions of bourgeois democracy (eg, civil liberties, women's rights, national question, racism, constitutional change, etc). We utilise bourgeois democracy, defend it against all anti-democratic forces, including the capitalists and the fascists. We seek to extend all democratic rights by mass struggle and revolutionary action. We consider the working class is the only genuinely democratic class under capitalism. We consider that the working class can become the leading force in society by championing the struggle for democracy.

### 2. For workers' power

We support the democratic self-organisation of the working class in trade unions, workplaces and communities. We are in favour of workers' control of all industries and services. We are in favour of replacing

parliamentary democracy with a more advanced form of democracy, based on workplace and workers' councils electing delegates to a workers' parliament. This must be defended by an armed working class organised as the state (ie, the dictatorship of the proletariat).

### 3. For international socialism

Socialism cannot be built in one or a few countries. It must be developed by the international organisation of the working class. Socialism is the transitional period between world capitalism and communism.

### 4. For world communism

Our aim is to abolish the world market system of capitalism and replace it by world communism. Communist society is a classless worldwide community based on global planning, cooperation and mutual solidarity between the people of the world.

## Debating the USSR

# The external dynamic of negative ideology

In a recent article we identified the 'problematic of negative ideology' as being pertinent to the study of the USSR (*Weekly Worker* October 8 - for Jack Conrad's reply see *Weekly Worker* October 15). This outline identified the abstract status of Marxist-Leninist ideology within the Soviet Union, arguing that it suffered an endless blocked mediation as a result of distinct bureaucratic distortions. In that sense the ideological power of the USSR was seen to be manifest in the most negative of connotations. Readers may have identified a definite teleological thrust to the argument, in that the 'bitter end' of August 1991, the collapse of the CPSU and the Soviet Union, was never far from the author's mind. However, we also have to consider the *survival* of socialism in the USSR, a mere trifle of 73 years.

The phenomenon of 'negative ideology' that the Soviet Union represented was found to be a product of its *internal* political blockage. Clearly this represents a theoretical assertion and not a 'finished' analysis. Nevertheless we can certainly pose the *external* relation of the USSR - the international communist movement that was a response to its creation - as a point of nurture for the continued existence of Marxism-Leninism. Therefore it is proposed that our point of departure for investigation should be the dialectic of the internal and *external*.

It should be of no surprise that the subject of the relations between the CPSU and the fraternal parties of the Comintern (alongside the looser associations of latter years) would be mutilated by the dual canon of Trotskyite and bourgeois scholarship. This complex historical problem is resolved into a simple instrumentalist relation whereby 'subordination to diktat from Moscow' becomes the organising principle. Such one-sided inanities have even begun to filter into the ranks of our contemporary CPGB. In various formal and informal gatherings, communists who remained loyal to the defence of the USSR have been depicted as suffering from a 'mass-psychosis'.

I think we can safely put such judgements aside. Of course the CPSU was an important specific determination inside the international movement, but never an unmediated one. There also existed other determinants, the national communist parties and their relationship with the 'host' society. Any exploration of this edifice therefore needs to grasp such interrelationship through the mantle of its totality.

Some readers may question exactly what sort of international movement existed after 1945. After all, Stalin dissolved the Comintern in 1943 and the revisionist idea of 'national' roads to socialism became current in the various communist parties in the years immediately following the World War II. However, one must not be misled into the myth that the international communist movement manifested itself as a fully 'polycentric' tendency through the Cold War and beyond.

Writing in 1983, Ponomarev articulated the Soviet definition of 'proletarian internationalism': "Operating under specific national conditions,

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"... within the confines of their own alienated form, the various national communist parties reflected back their own ideological concerns onto the edifice of the Soviet Union, establishing in turn an outlet and sustenance for Marxism-Leninism *within* Soviet society, trapped as it was in a negative form"

.....

guided in its struggle by the basic ideas of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, each communist party is an independent organisation. It formulates its own policy, its programme and tactics and is completely independent in working out the forms and methods of its activity. If the points of view of all the communist parties or of most of them on a particular issue coincide, surely this is not because someone has given them a directive to harmonise their stands. Their common approach to major issues springs from their common ideology, and people of like mind, sharing the same world outlook, naturally have similar stands on specific problems" (B Ponomarev *Marxism-Leninism in today's world: a living and effective teaching* Oxford 1983, pp135-36).

Ponomarev appears blind to the fact that his revisionist formulation of "national conditions" and "independent organisation" is the living negation of proletarian internationalism. In fact it functions as an apologia for the fracturing of the international communist movement in latter years. Nevertheless, Ponomarev's arguments concerning a commonality of ideology have a definite truth that was broadly operative for much of the movement's history. For example, as the CPGB proceeded with its disastrous condemnation of the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, "The party leadership did not by any means renounce their Soviet attachments, and depicted their stance as being one of fraternal criticism" (W Thompson *The good old cause: British communism 1920-1991* London 1992, p157).

Even during periods when the national communist parties became severely infected with opportunistic nationalism, the USSR and hence the international movement was never far from their intellectual horizon. Thorez, the general secretary of the French Communist Party, argued in 1937: "On

the whole, it is legitimate to affirm that life is happier, freer, and more beautiful in France, our country. Apart from the Soviet Union, France now occupies first place in the world; once again it has become a land of progress and liberty" (cited in P Spriano *Stalin and the European communists* London 1985, p19).

From this point onwards our analysis will be primarily based on the experience of British communism. The CPGB was no different in its retention of close fraternal ties with the Soviet Union prior to and after the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943. That much is well known. Less well formulated is the exact meaning of these bonds, presuming of course that we have ditched the one-sided instrumentalism of the Trotskyites.

Kevin Morgan, in his interesting biography of Harry Pollitt, addresses the question of how much the CPGB leaders knew of the practice of the CPSU during the various stages of political show trials in the USSR and eastern Europe. He utilises a story told by George Matthews of Pollitt's reaction to the exposure of a Polish communist member as a Titoite: "You know, it's extraordinary ... I met this chap and I stayed in the same room as he did and he showed me his back with the scars on it which had been inflicted on him in Pilsudski's jails. Here's a man who's undergone these tortures for the communists and he turns out to be a traitor" (cited in K Morgan *Harry Pollitt* Manchester 1993, pp175).

Morgan asks how this presumed suspension of judgement could occur, giving his answer in the lack of a "clear dividing line between knowledge and ignorance" (*ibid* p174). In a similar vein, Doris Lessing details a fictionalised account of her life in the CPGB through the eyes of one Anna Wulf: "... this evening had dinner with Joyce, *New Statesman* circles, and she started to attack [the] Soviet Union. Instantly I found myself doing that automatic-defence-of-Soviet Union act, which I can't stand when other people do it ... Fascinating - the roles we play, the way we play parts" (D Lessing *The golden notebook* London 1993, p153).

Lessing further expounds the function of such role-play in coming to an understanding of the reasons why CPGB members identified with the struggles of the USSR. On the occasion of Stalin's death, Anna Wulf and her flatmate Molly find themselves unexpectedly upset at the news and Anna thinks about "... how odd it was we all have this need for the great man, and create him over and over again in the face of all the evidence" (*ibid* p158). Earlier in the 'Red Notebook' Anna offers a solution to the dilemma: "I came home thinking that somewhere at the back of my mind when I joined the Party was a need for wholeness, for an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live. Yet joining the Party intensified the split - not the business of belonging to an organisation whose every tenet - on paper anyway - contradicts the ideas of the society we live in; but something much deeper than that" (*ibid* pp156-157).

Lessing's description of the alien-

ating nature of inner-Party life in the early 1950s is a familiar refrain, partly explained by the CPGB's adoption of a national, gradualist programme in this period. Reformism is of course the absolute negation of wholeness. Existing structures become naturalised and immutable, leading to a partialised expression of humanity in the struggles of the Party. In this scenario the Communist Party becomes an inferior link to mastering the outside world. Therefore the identification with the USSR becomes an alienated means by which to surmount that world. This is illustrated rather well by Cliff True: "Nobody can deny what [Winston] Churchill said, that it was the Soviet army that tore the guts out of Germany ... I was a product of the war. [I'd] just joined the Communist Party, the Germans were advancing into the Soviet Union ... People, not in a nasty sense [were saying] 'oh, the Soviet Union's failed' and then when the Soviet Union started to overtake and smash the [Germans], well, crikey, you thought, nothing could be wrong with a government that could do that" (author's interview with Cliff True, Treherbert, February 1996).

Another perspective on this discussion is given by Edward Upward in his beautiful novel, *The rotten elements*. Alan Sebrill (Upward's fictionalisation of himself) is driven to a nervous breakdown after resigning from the CPGB along with his wife, Elsie. The Sebrills have been involved in a struggle against the political direction of the Party after the war and Alan has suffered from a complete lack of reconciliation between the desire to express himself poetically and his life as a Party member. Upward details Sebrill's breakdown in haunting prose: "He found he could stop his trembling by thinking of Stalin and by speaking the name of Stalin, repeatedly but not quite aloud, much as a religious believer might have called on the name of god" (E Upward *The rotten elements* London 1979, p194). This illustrates, in the most painful human terms possible, the nature of this alienation, rooted in an attempt to mend discord but primarily the responsibility of political failure.

It can thus be considered that the identification of the CPGB with the USSR follows a comparative dynamic to that of Marxist-Leninist ideology inside the Soviet Union. What we are left with is a similar process of abstraction, in that 'defending the USSR' could never *of itself* be a point of mediation for the programme of human liberation. What it could do is strengthen the presence, however abstract, of the progressive tenets of Marxism-Leninism, both internally to the USSR and in the face it presented to the world. This was of course positively promoted by the CPSU. In 1952 Stalin expressed the *international* need for a Marxist textbook of political economy, "... an excellent gift to the young communists of all countries" (JV Stalin *Economic problems of socialism in the USSR* Moscow 1952, p51).

The Soviet Union was decidedly 'thing-like' in the narratives of CPGB members. However, ideology and its symbols are never immutable and natu-

ralised, they can be mediated and altered. In this case we can identify a definite tendency to gain a sense of closeness to heroic figures such as Stalin, partly through myths, which in turn represented a modification of existing myths. For example Charlie Swain saw "Joe Stalin" as a "straight-forward, honest politician" (author's interview with Charlie Swain, Cardiff, April 1996), which in some ways echoes the colloquial designation of 'Uncle Joe' that was given to Stalin by British workers during World War II.

A more literal expression of this narrative was given by Dai Francis. On his return from a miners' delegation to the Soviet Union in 1952 he exclaimed to CPGB members in his village that on one occasion "I was as near as that house across the road [about 10 yards away] to Stalin". His son Hywel depicts this tale as containing "a certain degree of awe". However, this is a very particular form of awe in its attempt to refashion its symbols in such close physical proximity (P Cohen *Children of the revolution: communist childhood in Cold War Britain* London 1997, p124).

Such mythology could be further embroidered. Doris Lessing details a tale told by Anna Wulf to a Party writers' meeting of a young man invited to the Soviet Union on a teachers' delegation. In the middle of the night the protagonist gets escorted to see none other than Stalin himself. After passing "his rough worker's hand across his brow" Stalin invites the young man to talk frankly about the direction of the British CP. Revealingly, all the members of the writers' group cannot admit to each other the parodic intent of the narrative (D Lessing *op cit* pp273-276). This fantasy is the ultimate abstraction, whereby the problems of the CPGB are pushed into the lap of Stalin. The story simultaneously attempts to overcome this. Reading it is almost like having Stalin put his arm around your shoulder. However, these partial attempts to override the alienated effect were doomed to failure precisely because the attempted resolution is enacted on the grounds of abstraction itself.

This article is an initial attempt to establish the process of a particular determination, the CPSU, in its external relations with the international communist movement. In our short dissection we have shown how such effects were mediated through the prism of other determinations, in this case the CPGB. In fact within the confines of their own alienated form, the various national communist parties reflected back their own ideological concerns onto the edifice of the Soviet Union, establishing in turn an outlet and sustenance for Marxism-Leninism *within* Soviet society, trapped as it was in a negative form. What we have here is not *the* dynamic of international communism in the 20th century but *a* dynamic. In itself it is an abstraction of a shifting determination. Nevertheless if it can aid the action by which instrumentalist methodologies are cast into the darkest of dungeons then its author's struggles will not have been in vain.

Phil Watson



# Unity breaks out

London Socialist Alliance took a significant step forwards at its November 22 conference. As Anne Murphy, LSA convenor put it, the London meeting showed the "way forward" for the Alliance project as a whole. That is, towards constructing an environment of trust where *all* socialist views are openly debated - and not just grudgingly tolerated. Even more importantly, we saw that left unity - if based upon inclusive democracy - is possible, and not just an empty truism which is trotted out for form's sake.

This hopeful and optimistic outlook was vividly demonstrated by comrade Toby Abse of the Independent Labour Network, a well known critic of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Comrade Abse had previously subscribed to the mistaken view that the CPGB's draft rules for the LSA and the Network of Socialist Alliances were an attempt to impose a 'central committee' structure - if not democratic centralism itself. This is a view, incidentally, which is reiterated in the latest issue of *The all red and green* (winter 1998), which wrongly summarises the debate at the Rugby launch conference of the Network in September as one between "those who still want us to be a mass party with a central committee, based on the UK state", and others who "want a looser federal structure, based on networking and mutual respect".

Yet, after the debate, comrade Abse voted for the organisational structures being proposed by the CPGB. As did comrade Terry Liddle, secretary of Greenwich Green Party and convenor of the Greenwich SA, another former 'opponent' of the CPGB's position. He rightly calls the proposed rules "good stuff". The comrade from Socialist Outlook likewise said that the CPGB's proposals were "fine" and that he "had no problems with the organisational structures". An very interesting - and welcome - development, as *Socialist Outlook* recently featured a silly article from John Nicholson, joint covenor of the Network, fulminating against the CPGB's supposed intention of voting in a "central committee".

The real irony is of course that it is the CPGB's proposals which are in reality flexible and inclusive - as opposed to the inflexible, bureaucratic and *exclusionary* model advocated by the unelected Liaison Group of John Nicholson, Dave Nellist, Dave Church and Pete McLaren.

As comrade Peter Manson of the CPGB pointed out in the London debate, the preamble to the proposed rules explicitly states they represent "arrangements ... to work together under one loose federal structure in agreed common actions". Unless you believe that the CPGB is involved in a peculiar plot to destroy the SAs from within, then it is clear where the dividing lines *really* stand - inclusive democracy or bureaucratic exclusion.

The Liaison Group's original proposals were of course *designed* to exclude the CPGB. The CPGB's rules are consciously designed to exclude nobody. "Indeed", as comrade Manson emphasised, "this perspective is essential". The left is in disarray. He cited the Socialist Labour Party which is now dominated by homophobes and ultra-Stalinists. The LSA is in its "initial stage" - and it requires an appropriate structure to reflect that. The LSA is composed of affiliated individuals, borough and workplace socialist alliances and political groups

who have their "own minds" and perspectives. The inclusive democracy advocated by the CPGB also points to "some other kind of socialism" ... rather than the bureaucratic horrors of 'official communism' and social democracy/Labourism.

Comrade Manson stated that the CPGB's call for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales and for the unity of Ireland should be non-controversial. After all, it is *always* the task of socialists to "fight for the maximum democracy under existing social conditions", as it said in the CPGB's draft rules. Seeing how we live under a constitutional *monarchy* and there is a real *national question* in the shape of Scotland, Wales and Ireland this can only logically mean a federal republic.

As it so happened, the federal republic demand proved to be more contentious than perhaps it should be. Comrade Terry Liddle, wearing his Workers' Republican Forum hat, put forward an amendment: he wanted to see the call for an English workers' republic instead. Comrade Abse was worried about the position of SPEW and was therefore of the opinion that the federal republic demand was "not

helpful". Given the wide variety of opinions on this matter, such a formulation - if it appeared as one of the LSA's *objectives* - might actually "alienate others". Comrade Abse was particularly worried that a "strident" call for a united Ireland would "alienate" SPEW. Therefore, we should delete the "divisive" Clause 2 (2b). SO even thought that the words 'federal republic' were "indicative of an exclusionary mind" - suggesting that such a particular policy should not figure as part of the LSA's rules. Naturally the AWL comrades believed that the call for a united Ireland was "anti-democratic". Period.

Comrade Ian Donovan, editor of *Revolution and Truth* - "agreed with the CPGB's general thrust on organisation" - but proposed the wording of Clause " (2b) be altered to, 'for Scotland and Wales to have the right to self-determination and an immediate end to British rule in Ireland'. Comrade Mark Fischer for the CPGB accepted and seconded comrade Donovan's amendments. Comrade Liddle promptly withdrew his amendment. Unity broke out. The Donovan-Fischer amendment was passed almost unanimously, with only one

comrade from the Revolutionary Democratic Group voting against it. The motion as a whole - on the CPGB's draft rules for the LSA - was passed unanimously, with the meeting accepting an amendment by comrade Hyam Frankel of the Left Green Network of the Democratic Left to the effect that the LSA will support "all campaigns that seek to advance interests of the people - economically, politically and environmentally".

The debate on the proposed Network of Socialist Alliances rules was equally encouraging. It is vital that membership of the Network "be open to all within the United Kingdom" (Clause 3 [2]), as this counters one of the "major prejudices of the left" (comrade Manson) - ie, a compulsive pandering to petty nationalism. Now that the Scottish Socialist Alliance is no more - replaced by the nationalist Scottish Socialist Party - we must ensure that the Network is open to *non-SSP* comrades (and even the SSP itself of course). Otherwise talk of inclusiveness would be empty chatter if comrades from Scotland and Wales are *automatically* excluded from it - and the struggle against the *United Kingdom* state. And, as com-

rade Manson stressed, what about comrades from the Six Counties?

By supporting the CPGB's proposed rules for the Network - especially Clause 3 (2) - it would be sending a powerful message to comrades in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It would also challenge the economism and localism which is so rampant on the left at this juncture in time. The draft rules were passed unanimously, with some minor amendments (see below). The LSA now has an 'inclusive' mandate to take to the next Network conference.

The November 22 conference also debated the crucial role of election work. At this juncture, the left should prioritise such activity as a way to challenge Blair's constitutional revolution from above. As comrade John Bridge emphasised, the working class needs to "take on the idea of democracy and state". For the SA to be a *real* alliance it has fight Blair and the constitutional monarchy system.

An Alliance for Workers' Liberty comrade - strangely - had problems with the SA's supposed anti-Labourism, as embodied in clause 6. He mentioned the example of Lambeth SA, whose activity decreased soon after the local elections. Lambeth SA was united only by anti-Labourism, complained the comrade. Will the SAs stand against Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn or Ken Livingstone?

Comrade Bridge replied by saying - first - that the AWL should join the SA. Second, the SAs were being asked to campaign *for* socialist candidates - not *against* Labour Party members. It could be perfectly principled to support Livingstone - despite his vile opportunism - if he rebelled against Blair and stood for London mayor. Unfortunately the AWL is deeply divided over Labour - its recent debates on Ireland in the pages of its journal have been a debate on Labour by proxy.

On this question of the London mayor it was pointed out that the comedian Mark Steel - a member of the SWP - *announced* on Radio Four that "the left's" candidate for the London mayor was going to be Paul Foot. If of course Livingstone decides not to stand. Comrade Bridge denounced this as "disgraceful sectarianism", as did many at the meeting.

It is also disgraceful hypocrisy as well - the SWP comrades are talking 'unity' to the SSA/SSP while presenting everybody in London with a *fait accompli*. The left should come to an *agreement* on who the candidate in London should be. We should have a forum to question and agree Paul Foot or someone else as the left's candidate.

But it is healthy at least, as comrade Abse and others correctly pointed out, that the SWP is attending United Socialists meetings - along with SPEW, CPGB, SO, ILN, AWL, etc - and is *beginning* to talk to others on the left and is gradually distancing itself from auto-Labourism. The legacy of decades of sectarianism will take some time to break down. We remain hopeful.

The meeting - which included representatives of six borough Alliances and nine national political organisations - also unanimously passed a motion that "pledges" the LSA to "full support to the Indonesian revolution".

Taking a firm political stance on issues not immediately connected to London - or even the UK itself - is essential ●

Danny Hammill

## Draft rules for the Network of Socialist Alliances

Submitted by LSA for discussion, November 22 1998

### Preamble

The following represents arrangements to allow socialists and socialist organisations to work together under one loose federal structure in agreed common actions. It is recognised that differences will exist. This should not be a barrier to electoral arrangements, campaigning or open and frank exchange of views. The Network will encourage and facilitate debate and the process of clarification. Our principle is inclusion, not exclusion. Through joint work and no-holds-barred discussions genuine trust can develop. It is therefore hoped that the individuals and groups involved will move closer and towards a higher organisational structure.

### Clause 1. Name

Network of Socialist Alliances (hereinafter called the Network)

### Clause 2. Objectives

1. To bring together through affiliation, national, regional and local political organisations and individuals for the purpose of establishing a socialist society. The Network considers:

- Socialism and democracy are inseparable.
- Socialism is conquered by the working class. It cannot be delivered from on high.
- Socialism is international or it is nothing.
- The Network will fight for the maximum democracy under existing social conditions - ie capitalism. In particular:
  - Abolition of the monarchy, the House of Lords and all constitutional hereditary privileges.
  - For an immediate end to British rule in Ireland. For the right of Scotland and Wales to self-determination.

- For the closest political and organisational unity of the working class.
- Support for all campaigns that seek to advance the interests of the people - economically, politically and environmentally.

3. To work with other national or international organisations in pursuit of these objectives.

### Clause 3. Membership and membership conditions:

1. Membership of the Network shall consist of:

- Affiliated national organisations
  - Affiliated local, regional and single-issue organisations
  - Local or regional Socialist Alliances
  - Individual members
2. Membership shall be open to all within the United Kingdom who agree to the rules and accept the objectives of the Network.

### Clause 4. Subscriptions

1. Annual membership subscription shall be as follows:

- Affiliated national organisation £50
  - Other affiliated organisations and Socialist Alliances £10
  - Individual member £6, £3 (unwaged), to include annual subscription to *The all red and green*.
2. When an organisation or individual fails to renew their annual subscription their membership shall be deemed to have lapsed after two months.

### Clause 5. Organisation

- There shall be an annual conference called by the Network Liaison Committee or a special conference at the demand of a third of affiliated Socialist Alliances.
- Conferences of the Network shall be open to individual members and individual members of affiliated organisations, but voting delegates shall be on the following basis:

- Affiliated national organisations: two delegates.
  - Affiliated local, regional or single-issue organisations: one delegate.
  - Local Socialist Alliances: one delegate per 10 members.
  - Regional or metropolitan Socialist Alliances: one delegate per 100 members.
3. Voting shall be by a simple majority. The role of the annual conference shall be to:

- Debate and express a view of political questions.
  - Change the rules and objectives of the Network.
4. The Liaison Committee shall be responsible for the administration and day to day running and promotion of the Network. The Liaison Committee shall elect and remove officers as it so chooses. The Liaison Committee shall consist of elected and recallable delegates on the following basis:
- Affiliated national organisations: one delegate (plus one observer with speaking rights).
  - Regional, metropolitan and local Socialist Alliances: one delegate per 20 members.
5. The Liaison Committee shall present audited accounts to the annual conference.
6. Standing orders for the purpose of conducting conferences of the Network and the Liaison Committee may be adopted by resolution of a conference of the Network.

### Clause 6: Electoral arrangement

The Network shall facilitate and co-ordinate the electoral work or regional and local Socialist Alliances. It shall encourage the biggest possible socialist challenge in local, regional, national and European elections ●

“Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and person-ages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.” (K Marx, F Engels *Selected Works* Mos-cow 1935, vol 1, p247) These words from the opening of Marx’s brilliant *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bona-parte* shed some interesting light on the two major constitutional confron-tations between the Lords and Com-mons that have taken place this century.

The first - ‘tragic’ in the classical sense because it involved the decline of a great party - took place in 1909. The old Liberal Party, the voice of mercantile and manufacturing capital-ism, was entering its senescence. With its left flank exposed to attacks from the Labour Party and under pressure from its own radical wing, the Liberal Party decided to try and woo the work-ing class by embarking on a pro-gramme of radical social reform. The outcome was the ‘people’s budget’ of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, which proposed the introduction of higher death duties, a supertax on high incomes and a new levy on unearned income derived from land development. These measures represented a frontal assault on the interests of the landed aristocracy and the big bourgeoisie, so it is hardly surprising that the House of Lords persistently refused to approve the budget. After fighting an election in 1910 on the slogan of ‘peers versus people’, the Liberals brought in the Parliament Act of 1911 to curb the powers of the upper house.

Almost 90 years later ‘peers versus people’ has made its reappearance, but this time as part of a farcical battle between Labour and the Tories about ‘democracy’. Ostensibly, the argu-ment is about Labour’s European Parli-amentary Elections Bill: specifically its commitment to use the closed-list form of proportional representation in next year’s Euro elections. In reality, however, it is a dress rehearsal for the hereditary peers’ last stand in resist-ing the withdrawal of their right to sit in the upper house - a measure that forms the centrepiece of Labour’s leg-islative programme for the new parla-mentary session announced in Tuesday’s queen’s speech.

By rejecting the government’s bill on an unprecedented five occasions, the Lords have set in train a constitu-tional confrontation that seems likely to dominate Westminster for many months to come. A minor issue that is of no interest whatever, except to pro-fessional politicians and the metro-politan media, has been erected into a major question of ‘principle’, but in trying to seize the democratic high ground, both sides have indulged in an orgy of sanctimonious high-mindedness that merely serves to demonstrate their bad faith.

First, the Tories. In point of fact, it is a mistake to view the 272 hereditary peers who take the Tory whip and the 311 hereditary cross-bench peers as the last remnants of feudalism. Only a small segment of the hereditary peer-age is composed of the traditional landed aristocracy. The vast bulk of hereditary peers are recent creations and owe their titles to the fact that their forebears paid for them in hard cash. These ‘noble lords’ are for the most part political and industrial mag-nates, representatives of the big bour-geoisie, whose fortunes are derived from trade. Acting as a coalition of reactionary class interests, they have consistently done everything possi-ble to promote the cause of capital. The ladies and gentlemen who now strain at the gnat of closed lists in the European elections - they had no dif-ficulty, incidentally, in supporting such a system for the Scottish parla-ment and the Welsh assembly - were happy to swallow the camel of the poll tax and any number of other repres-

# Constitutional confrontation

sive measures. Ironically, were it not for the fact that Blair plans their liqui-dation, they would no doubt be eager to help him realise his authoritarian, anti-working class vision of ‘New Brit-ain’ through such policies as the re-form of the welfare system.

In a profoundly disgusting specta-ple, these men, whose very existence as unelected members of the upper house is a blatant affront to the most elementary notions of democracy, now mount their chargers in defence of the democratic principle. Yet, in another irony, their hypocrisy and bad faith have brought forth arguments that have some truth in them.

In the first place, Blair’s determina-tion to emasculate the hereditary peers, so long as it is unaccompanied by concrete proposals for a wider re-form of the second chamber, leaves him open to the accusation that all he intends is to replace a house of privi-lege with a house of patronage - that he intends to stuff the Lords with placemen and women who will ensure a smooth passage for all Labour’s leg-islation. Blair has promised a royal commission, but has failed so far even to set out its terms of reference. No full-scale review of the Lords is likely to be completed until well into the next century.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that the closed-list system, whereby elec-tors cast their vote not for an indi-vidual but for a party, is part of a pack-age of measures designed to centralise power. The selection of candidates for huge, multi-seat constituencies would certainly be more easily manipulable. Blair will ensure that only ‘trustwor-thy’ candidates find their way into par-liamentary bodies that thus become mere tools in the hands of government and its unelected bureaucratic organs.

Notwithstanding the truth of these objections, it is self-evident that the Tories’ stance is profoundly hypocriti-cal and founded on Hague’s desper-ate search for an issue which he can use as a stick to beat the Blair govern-ment, thereby enhancing his own weak position as Conservative Party leader. Hague’s is not a struggle for democracy, but a desperate wrecking tactic.

What of the agreements of Labour and the Liberal Democrats in this bat-tle for ‘democratic’ supremacy? Here too we find bad faith and plain decep-tion in abundance. To begin with, Blair may cry that the Tories’ rejection of his bill is an “affront to democracy”. Ashdown may go into apoplexies about the Tories thwarting “the sov-ereign will of parliament and the Brit-ish people”. But the fact is that there is no electoral mandate whatever for the closed list system. The Labour manifesto merely contained the bland statement that Labour had “long sup-ported a proportional voting system for election to the European parla-ment”.

Secondly, Blair misrepresents the argument as one between a notion-ally united Labour Party in the Com-mons and a bunch of recalcitrant Tory hereditary peers in ‘the other place’. Not so. As Dr John Marek (Labour member for Wrexham) pointed out in a speech on November 10, there is no majority among the parliamentary La-bour Party in favour of closed lists - merely a three-line whip to ensure compliance with the leader’s orders. If Blair were sincerely intent on dem-

.....

“... we insist that the monarchical state, in which our people are not *citizens*, but *subjects* of the crown, must be thrown on to the scrapheap of history, where it belongs”

.....

onstrating his party’s commitment to democracy, why did he not allow a free vote in the Commons? Likewise, there is no absolute unanimity among Labour peers on the question. Three Labour lords, notably the former cabi-net minister Lord Shore of Stepney, have rebelled against their party throughout. As Shore put it: “The so-called ‘people versus the peers’ issue is bogus. It has been introduced sim-ply because the real issue has been lost” (*The Daily Telegraph* Novem-ber 20). But a glance at the voting fig-ures for the fifth and final rejection of the bill is instructive. On a miserable turnout of just 395 peers out of a total of 1,164, the Tories succeeded in re-jecting the bill with the support of 26 cross-benchers, five bishops and just three Labour rebels.

Blair’s attack on the undemocratic nature of the hereditary peerage and his assault on the hereditary principle in general falls down in two signifi-cant areas. First, *all* members of the Lords are unelected - some sit there by virtue of their birth, others by vir-tue of their political appointment by successive governments. Secondly, and more importantly, Blair’s distaste for the hereditary principle is highly selective. He shows no sign of wish-ing to remove the very fountainhead of all hereditary privilege in this coun-try, namely the monarchy itself. On the contrary, Blair wants and needs to retain the monarchy, albeit in a ‘mod-ernised’, more ‘democratic’ guise, as a source of legitimation for his plans to bring about a constitutional revolu-tion from above.

Blair’s brilliantly opportunistic stage management of the aftermath of Diana’s death inaugurated a new rela-tionship between Downing Street and the palace. Minor changes in royal protocol are just the superficial signs of a more significant attempt to save the House of Windsor from itself and give it a new role. A key figure in this process is the Prince of Wales, who knows that his own fate will be bound up with that of New Labour for the foreseeable future. Not for nothing was Mandelson a guest at the prince’s recent birthday party. Turning this Hanoverian emotional cripple into a credible figurehead capable of presid-ing over a ‘21st century of radicalism’ will stretch even Mandelson’s presentational talents, but he will use every means to achieve it.

The common thread which runs through every manifestation of Blair and New Labour’s politics, including its approach to the current constitu-tional confrontation between the

Lords and Commons is an authoritar-ian determination to exercise control over every aspect of political life. Blair’s penchant for ‘strong govern-ment’ means nothing less than the ruthless centralisation of power in the hands not of the bourgeois parlia-ment, but in those of the government and Labour’s Millbank machine. No-tionally, according to the mythology of bourgeois ‘democracy’, the House of Commons should be the keeper of the executive, but in reality it is no more than an impotent creature. It is in the power of the executive to make up the rules as the game proceeds. Those constitutional reforms that ap-parently concede greater representa-tion and pluralism in politics by devolving some of Westminster’s powers to the Scottish parliament and the Welsh assembly are in reality little more than peripheral window-dress-ing or sops.

In the meantime, the debacle over the European elections has only added to the strains in the relation-ship between Blair and Ashdown caused by Labour’s cool reception of the Jenkins report and the misbegot-ten efforts to give Ashdown a lifeline in the form of closer collaboration be-tween the two parties. Blair’s initial response to the Lords’ rejection of his bill - a truculent threat that he would abandon a commitment to PR in next June’s elections - caused Ashdown yet more difficulty with his own party and led him to charge Blair (in private at least) with outright betrayal of their covert coalition.

Significantly, Ashdown has felt compelled to warn his party that as-pirants to the Liberal Democrat crown “should not hold their breath” and that there are more things he wants to do with the Liberal Democrats before giving up the leadership. If, as seems possible, even the use of the Parlia-ment Act is not sufficient to guaran-tee that the European elections will be held under some form of PR, we can expect that the replacement of Ashdown as leader will be placed on the agenda.

His fall would mark a significant set-back for Blair’s plan effectively to co-opt the Liberal Democrats as a wing of an enlarged ‘centre-left’ New La-bour party. Preserving the present shaky alliance and transforming it into a unified force capable of keeping the Tories in permanent opposition re-mains Blair’s key strategic objective. Small wonder, therefore, that Blair’s mask has slipped in recent days, and that his determination to destroy the Tory majority in the Lords has been redoubled.

While various sections of the bour-geoisie line up against each other in defence of the constitutional monar-chy system, we communists and par-tisans of the working class raise the banner of *republican* democracy. We call for the *abolition* of the House of Lords, not for its reform, and we insist that the obscenity of a monarchical state, in which our people are not *citi-zens*, but *subjects* of the crown, must likewise be thrown on to the scrapheap of history, where it belongs. We de-mand the fullest democracy under capitalism, including the right of self-determination for the peoples of Scot-land, Wales and Ireland. We fight for a federal republic of England, Scot-land and Wales, and a united Ireland ●

Maurice Bernal

## 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 oppor-tunism and revisionism in the workers’ move-ment 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. Social-ism 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 chauvin-ism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.
- War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world’s problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

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

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# Terminal decline

Over the last few years comrades from the Merseyside region have raised political and organisational differences with the executive committee on a number of issues, such as perspectives for capitalism worldwide, trade union issues, and how to build a new workers'/socialist party. These political differences resulted in a questioning of the orientation of the Socialist Party to campaigns and in a number of financial and organisational matters.

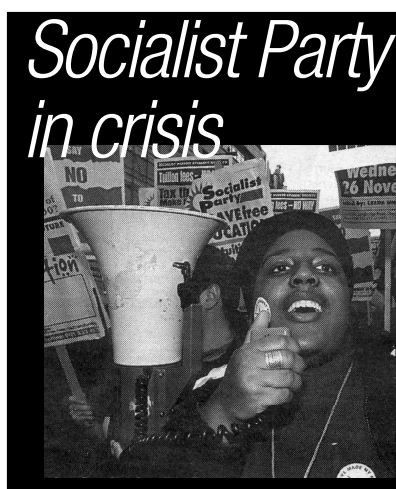
We did not think at the time that these differences were fundamental enough to mean that we should be removed from the party. Such a debate should have been welcomed. It could have resulted in a clarification of perspectives and programme for the party as a whole. It could have built on the ideas of comrades that have been actively involved in one of the most important struggles of the working class in the post-war period.

Instead we saw a leadership of the Socialist Party that saw these different ideas as a threat, that had to be 'removed'. During this whole period of differences over several years the EC did not attempt to discuss with comrades on Merseyside. In fact the EC were hardly seen in Liverpool until the last few months. Only when we discussed the possibility of producing a journal did the EC start coming to Merseyside. However, rather than welcoming an initiative to find new methods of discussing socialist ideas, once again it was seen as a threat. Many branches have already set up their own web pages on the internet - what is the difference?

The political positions of comrades on Merseyside have been totally misrepresented by the EC. We have been totally honest in raising doubts on perspectives and orientation based on the concrete conditions of our work on Merseyside. The EC in contrast have given no direction in the current period. The Socialist Party has no constitution, a programme that is hardly changed from the period of entryism in the Labour Party, a continual emphasis on the ensuing collapse of the economy worldwide, and the only direction for political work is to build amongst students with no explanation for the reasons for a turn to students. During the last few years the only thing that has held the party together has been loyalty and the continual demand to raise more and more money on the streets.

It was only after the end of the dockers' struggle the EC must have felt confident to attempt to remove the Merseyside organisation. Merseyside was then deluged with letters, putting organisational demands on the regional committee that in many cases were impossible to respond to. The Merseyside comrades correctly viewed these letters for what they turned out to be - preparing the grounds for suspension/expulsion. The majority of comrades on the

The 13 former members of the Merseyside committee of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, suspended by the Taaffe leadership, explain why they could not agree to the seven-point ultimatum of the executive committee



Merseyside committee had received similar series of letters during the period of expulsions and suspensions from the Labour Party.

The seven points of the last letter in this context become irrelevant. They were written by the EC in the knowledge that some of the points could not be implemented by members of the Merseyside Committee. Many comrades have asked us why we could not have just agreed the seven points. We gave honest answers to the questions. We did not believe we should pretend to implement decisions that we could not carry through. Even where we had implemented the requests in the seven points, the EC have continued to say we have not agreed with any of the points. Where we said that the journal to be produced in Merseyside would be "based on the present programme of our party" we were told by a member of the EC that they did not believe us! We are of the belief that even if in words we had said we would agree, the EC would still have proposed our suspension on the basis that they did not believe us.

### ■ The seven points

(1) We were asked to put all our political and organisational differences in writing. A document was put forward by the Merseyside committee within the week deadline which put in writing some, but not all, of the major political and organisational differences with the EC. We agreed to produce a more detailed explanation of our political and organisational differences, for circulation and discussion by the whole party, in time for the national conference next year. In contrast the EC have not carried out

"We did not think at the time that these differences were fundamental enough to mean that we should be removed from the party. Such a debate should have been welcomed. It could have resulted in a clarification of perspectives and programme for the party as a whole"

the decision of the last conference to produce a document on EMU - are they acting outside democratic unity? (2) We were asked to abide by democratic unity in carrying out the national decisions on student work and the week's income. We had honestly raised, as have many other areas of the country, the lack of response to the SFE [Save Free Education] campaign. We have instead been campaigning around low pay, orientating to young workers. *Is this really a reason for suspension?* We had agreed to circulate the week's income material to members. However, we did not feel confident in actively campaigning on the week's income when the Socialist Party was about to sell the national centre and would be sitting on £600,000 raising interest in the bank. How many other comrades, branches and regions are carrying out the above tasks? Wasn't Merseyside being singled out?

(3) We were asked to inform the EC of aggregates. The EC had been informed of all aggregate meetings. (4) We were asked to provide information on all debts. Full information

was provided on the debts within the week's deadline, and full accounts for 1996 and 1997 were produced. Although all this information was provided, we were told by EC members that it was not the full information. We have no knowledge of any other information that could be provided. Despite giving information, and asking EC members for discussions on a way forward on the debts, there was a refusal to discuss. All the information was used as further 'evidence' against us rather than entering a dialogue and coming up with a solution. (5) We were asked to pay to the national centre 90% of all subscriptions from individual members from September 26. We were physically unable to send off this money because the bank has been taking over £500 per month from the account to pay off a loan. Merseyside had been behind in paying the required percentage to the national centre, but committed to pay the debts in subs. The last payment for subs was an amount in September for May's subs. For the last few months there had been particular cash flow problems because we had not been receiving sufficient rent to cover the loan. A fuller explanation is given below.

(6) We were asked to give information about members of the Merseyside committee involved in projects and Club Resistance. We did not believe it was appropriate to give information on individual comrades' employment. Why are Merseyside comrades being singled out when leading trade union comrades have not been asked to account for their expenses? The EC and members should be able to question all finances and decisions taken by members on behalf of the party, but this does not apply where the party has no direct say in how that organisation is run. Information was given about Club Resistance including a draft strategy for youth and student work.

(7) We were asked to review the position of the full-timer. We raised the issue that there needs to be discussion nationally on the role of paid party work, and for a national strategy. Is it right that many regions now have no full-timers?

### ■ The true financial position on Merseyside

We have been accused of financial mismanagement by the EC. We completely refute this allegation and ob-

ject to an individual comrade being singled out for this charge. Various decisions were made on Merseyside on a collective basis. Many of these decisions were made with the full agreement of members of the EC - for example the setting up of the printshop.

We believe that we acted in good faith, with the knowledge that we had at the time. The necessity of the intensity of the class struggle in the period of the 80s meant that we built up a huge structure on Merseyside - over 30 FTs, a three-storey building, and a printshop. Nobody could have predicted the extent and the length of time of the retraction of the class struggle. At the end of the 1980s we predicted the red 90s! Up to the mid-90s we still had five FTs, the centre, comrades on the council, an advice centre, and printshop - and still expecting things to change in the near future. We took a decision to turn our centre into flats in order to provide an additional income. The EC's claim to have offered £15,000 towards debts at the time would not have gone anywhere near any debts left from selling the centre and the printshop. The EC offered no other solution. We believe we took the only possible and responsible decision at the time. The EC have never taken time to come to Merseyside and discuss the finances or look at the books. During this period the percentage of subs to be paid to the national centre increased from 60% to 90% - putting an additional burden on the Merseyside organisation.

Any comrades wishing to see the financial situation for themselves are welcome to come to Merseyside and look at the books.

### ■ What next?

Comrades that have built up a significant base amongst the working class on Merseyside - a base that was not just built upon the struggles of the 80s, but has continued to the present day - have now been denied any access to discussion and debate within the Socialist Party, including access to the Socialist Party website.

The experience over the last few years, culminating in our suspension over the last few months, has led us to the conclusion that there is no future within the Socialist Party for honest revolutionaries and socialists. In fact the Socialist Party and the CWI appear to be in terminal decline, resorting to lies and distortions to maintain their position. We recognise that many comrades will not have come to the same conclusion as yet and we welcome debate and discussion with all members of the Socialist Party.

There is an urgent need for socialists and revolutionaries to debate and discuss ideas. The methods of the past may or may not be the methods of the future. If you want to be involved in these discussions please contact us ●