

Abolish the second chamber

While Blair pushes for a 'modernised' House of Lords, the working class must go further and champion the fullest democracy

Last week's Tory split over the House of Lords provided a foretaste of the kind of deep divisions amongst the establishment that Blair's constitutional revolution will provoke.

It is true that his far-reaching changes are being introduced from above. There is no great social movement from below - one that could oblige the bourgeoisie to seek to rule in a new way. On the contrary the working class is at present so docile that it does not exist at all in a political sense. Yet, even when all below is quiet, radical reform of the constitution will at the very least cause conflict at the top. That is why our class must be prepared - initially through propaganda - to take advantage of the establishment's difficulties, and why it is essential for the left to break with its ingrained economism and recognise the vital importance of the struggle for democracy.

As any of the broadsheets will tell you, this is not the first time this century that reform of the Lords has been tried. As far back as 1911, following Lloyd George's successful bid to reduce the powers of the upper house, more fundamental change was promised. It never happened. Labour made a half-hearted attempt to abolish hereditary peers in 1968. It failed. Hence throughout the 20th century the second chamber remained a bastion of reaction with an overwhelming inbuilt Tory majority.

The Tories fear that Blair's project of remaking Labour as the permanent party of government in the form of Lab-Libism - and the constitutional 'vandalism' necessary to ensure it - opens up the possibility of British 'subjects' questioning the way they

are ruled. If hereditary power is so archaic and undemocratic, then what about the monarchy itself and the whole constitutional monarchy system? To save themselves and old Britain from new Britain requires derailing Blair's programme.

The House of Lords with its Tory majority has proved to be a very useful salient. This was admirably demonstrated by their lordships' refusing five times to sanction Blair's plans for electoral reform for next year's European elections. The Tories may be impotent in the Commons, but Hague has to some extent been able to make up for that simply through issuing blocking instructions to his colleagues in the Lords.

Clearly Blair has an interest in putting an end to this state of affairs. If he could get away with it he would replace the chamber of Tory privilege with a chamber of Labour patronage. However, the events of the last week show that he was prepared to compromise.

A bloc of mainly Tory hereditaries will remain. Instead of pushing ahead with the immediate abolition of all 759 hereditaries, Blair offered a stay of execution for 91 of them. This would allow the most active to retain their cherished seats until stage two of the Lords reform was implemented, when many of them expect to find a place for themselves - through election or nomination, depending on the final structure of the reformed second chamber.

It was the fact of compromise that caused the rift between the party leader and Tory peers - Lord Cranborne was sacked supposedly because he did a secret deal with Labour behind Hague's back. The di-

vide between the two arms of Conservatism was amply illustrated by the support Hague won amongst MPs for his stance, while Tory peers overwhelmingly backed Cranborne.

When Hague sacked Cranborne, 80 out of around 100 Tory peers sided with their ousted leader in a meeting immediately afterwards. The entire front bench in the Lords offered to resign; four of them did anyway despite being asked to stay on by Hague; two backbenchers resigned from the party. Hague had to virtually beg Cranborne's former deputy, Lord Strathclyde, to take over the job, yet he had himself been fully involved in Cranborne's dealings. Strathclyde (full name - Thomas Galloway Dunlop du Roy de Blicquy Galbraith) is himself a hereditary, and he insisted that the agreement struck by his predecessor - to cooperate in reducing the number of hereditaries to 91 in exchange for dropping plans to ditch the lot - is still on.

Cranborne clearly believed that Hague could be bounced into accepting the "extraordinary good deal", which would have "made the prime minister eat his words" in pulling back from an immediate abolition of all hereditary voting rights. Cranborne was evidently speaking for the majority of peers when he said he would "rather do a deal than die gloriously", and added: "My primary loyalty has to be to the House of Lords."

But Hague had wanted them to make a "principled stand". He was willing to fight to the last lord, and was still insisting last weekend: "It is wrong to destroy the independence of the House of Lords and replace it with a 'house of cronies'." Their "independence" is only from *this* gov-

ernment of course, not from party, class or individualistic interest. However, as *The Daily Telegraph* commented, the peers had "no stomach for a protracted struggle against the government's legislative programme" (December 5).

The paper's editorial of the same day backed the Conservative leader's actions: "It cannot be proper to meddle with the upper house unless there is a specific and obviously better alternative on offer." But it continued: "Mr Hague's only real failing - and it is a serious one - was to have become so out of touch with his party in the Lords. He ought to have seen that the Tory peers were hankering after a deal. A commander is no better than his troops at the front."

While the *Telegraph* has a straightforward and downright reactionary position - why "meddle" with something that is working so well? - Hague's stance is highly contradictory and hypocritical in the extreme. He now claims - along with his entire shadow cabinet - to have been miraculously converted to the notion of an accountable second chamber, and is bringing forward to March next year the report from the semi-independent commission he set up, in order to beat Blair in the race to table proposals. Meanwhile, not to be outdone, Labour is scurrying to find a chair for the official royal commission which will make stage-two recommendations for the second chamber's structure and composition.

There can be no doubt that the *Telegraph's* criticisms of Hague are well aimed. If he had read the mood of his peers, he could have embraced Cranborne's deal and gloated over Labour's retreat. Instead he ended up accepting Blair's offer anyway, but succeeded in destroying his authority in the Lords in the process. It now looks most unlikely that he will be able to persuade the Tory peers to block

government legislation, as he did with its European proportional representation bill. Indeed there is now a greater chance that New Labour will manage to bring in PR in time for the 1999 Euro elections. Hague's strategy in therefore in crisis.

Revealingly, Tony Benn has been virtually alone on the Labour benches in criticism of Blair's compromise. He claimed that there would be no further incentive to complete the reform, as both sides would be happy: the 91 most active hereditaries would be able to continue as before, while Blair would eventually be able to stuff the Lords full of cronies. However, the abandonment of stage two appears more and more unlikely, now that the Conservatives are paying lip service to reform.

What view should communists take of Blair's reform of the second chamber? We do not belittle it as irrelevant to the working class because it "will not create a job, a hospital bed or a decent pension for anyone", as does Andrew Murray in the ultra-economistic *Morning Star* (November 27). On the contrary communists want to take democracy way beyond the narrow confines of Blair's revolution from above. The second chamber - whether it is partially elected (by direct franchise or electoral colleges), filled with nominees or contains elements of both - will have one purpose: to provide 'checks and balances' on democracy. It will help insure the ruling class against radical change from below.

While the bourgeoisie seeks to reform the Lords, communists and democrats demand the abolition of the second chamber, lock, stock and barrel. While the ruling class wants to phase out heredity from the Lords alone, we call for the immediate abolition of the whole constitutional monarchy system ●

Jim Blackstock



Party notes

Step forward

The Independent Labour Network-sponsored national meeting in Doncaster on December 5 brought together about 70 comrades from a wide variety of political backgrounds. Despite problems with an over crowded agenda, it represented a step forward for the left in establishing a united national challenge to Blair's Labour in the place where, as Ken Coates MEP correctly pointed out, it can really be hurt - the ballot box.

As well as groups of disgruntled Labour Party members (and those about to become ex-members) who had been drawn to the ILN, the meeting also had the participation of the Socialist Workers Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Socialist Perspectives, the Socialist Party in England and Wales and representatives of the Liaison Group of the Network of Socialist Alliances. While the agenda precluded a full debate, a particularly useful part of the meeting was the reports from ILN sympathisers from around the country, and the contributions from the representatives of the national organisations.

These underlined that our movement still functions at a very low level. Dave Nellist from Coventry - representing probably the largest and most successful of the Socialist Alliances so far - described the 400-odd names the organisation holds as "primarily a mailing list", with a "couple of dozen at meetings". Similarly, Toby Abse of the London ILN reported his organisation formally had 120 members, with 15-20 activists coming to committee meetings.

Tediously, the SWP thought it worthwhile prefacing its remarks - it too "welcomed" the meeting and pledged cooperation - with the information that it was currently "an organisation of 10,000". Of course, while the SWP is qualitatively larger than its rivals on the left, its mass influence and base is almost non-existent. In comparison with what is needed by the workers' movement, the political organisations of the working class are pathetic. *All* of them, SWP comrades.

That said, as well as this unfortunate truth, the Doncaster meeting also contained the possibility that some positive lessons are being drawn from the fragmented and ineffectual state of the left.

First, the need to seek higher levels of unity. While we should all be clear that the present negotiations have a narrow focus on the coming rounds of elections, more is needed. It was encouraging that a number of comrades spoke of the need for "a new workers' party". This was a refrain coming not simply from SPers - who have formally held this position for a few years - but also comrades currently still members or at least in the orbit of the Labour Party.

Second, the recognition that the need for an inclusive, democratic approach is not an optional extra. The cohesion of the project remains tentative, despite the palpable desire to build something serious. Thus, it was refreshing to see the ILN convenors defer to majority votes on proposed names for this united bloc and emphasise that, while they intended to adopt a "background paper", participating regions would have full autonomy to stand on the platforms agreed through local negotiation and debate.

Interestingly, the most contentious part of the agenda concerned the joint name to be adopted. Essentially, the debate was divided between those who urged the meeting to avoid "narrow class politics", and "maximise votes" by avoiding words like 'socialist', 'workers' or even 'left'. This approach - reflecting the pressure of the period of reaction we continue to live under - had already been anticipated in the notes circulated by the meeting's convenors, which urged that we "avoid inviting caricature or using names with (justifiable or otherwise) negative vibes", such as 'revolutionary', 'peoples' or 'workers'. This was overwhelmingly rejected, with proposed names like 'Left Alliance' and 'Socialist Alliance' topping the poll.

Aside from the technical difficulties associated with clearing the hurdles of the new Registration of Political Parties Act, the involved discussion around a name reflected political tensions. Essentially, these flow from differing orientations. On the one side, there is the attempt of the ILN to constitute itself as a 'Labour left in exile' - neatly encapsulated in the background notes by the chair, Mike Davies, when he wrote: "We are the real Labour Party. Tony Blair is a Tory." On the other, there are those who - whatever their formal definition of the Labour Party - are moving towards the need for a new workers' party, a comprehensive challenge for the loyalty of the class.

The difference is essentially between those who look forward to taking Blair's working class voters away from him forever and those who want to hold them hostage in exchange for better behaviour.

This tension is likely to resurface in a variety of forms, but must be no barrier to principled, inclusive cooperation of the left in an electoral challenge to Blair's party. In that spirit, the Doncaster meeting was a useful gathering and its organisers are to be thanked ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

NF fiasco

Anti-fascists are celebrating victory after the neo-Nazi National Front failed to hold a planned march in Dover. The NF had aimed to capitalise on hostility local racists have been whipping up against the 400 asylum-seekers currently housed in the area.

Twice before (in November 1997 and February 1998) the NF were bussed in from the West Midlands and elsewhere to march in the town. On both occasions they met strong resistance from anti-fascists. This time they were forced to abandon their march after anti-fascists got the NF's coach from the West Midlands cancelled. Newbury Travel, the company which has twice before brought the NF to Dover, caved in under pressure from anti-fascists. Seven trade union branches in the Birmingham area had passed resolutions condemning the company for transporting the NF. The police said that the NF march was being cancelled, although they refused to tell journalists why.

Over 200 anti-fascists from London and the South East had gathered in Dover. In the early afternoon they marched along the seafront, where the NF had intended to hold their march. The banner of the London region Fire Brigades Union was carried on the march and the secretary of the local Rail, Maritime and Transport union was among the marchers. Anti-fascists also gathered in Dover town square and leafleted shoppers throughout the morning.

Several vanloads of police were present, but they kept a low profile and did not interfere with the anti-fascist march. The transport police were out in force with dogs at Dover Priory railway station, apparently in case the NF turned up by train. It was rumoured that a few fascists were roaming around the town in ones and twos, but this information has not been confirmed. One local racist turned up at the seafront apparently with the intention of supporting the NF, but after being challenged by anti-fascists he walked away.

Craig Hudson
Dover

IRSP and fheis

On December 5 the Irish Republican Socialist Party held its ard fheis (national congress) in Dublin. Approximately 90 delegates attended, including two republican socialist prisoners of war from Long Kesh and two from Portlaoise (including Eddie Hogan, serving a 40-year sentence, the longest of any republican POW).

In addition to party delegates, two representatives of the Irish Republican Socialist Committees of North America (including the North American Coordinator) and nine representatives of the IRSP Britain were present. Also present were three observers from the Italian left, one from the German left, one from the Austrian left, and one from the British left.

The year 1998 will be remembered in Irish history as the year the 'Good Friday Agreement' emerged as an answer to the age-old conflict between Ireland and Britain.

The Good Friday Agreement is the latest in a long line of stalled 'solutions' that fail to address the core issues of the conflict. The IRSP reject the agreement. We believe that, far from offering the people of Ireland justice, equality, and peace, it is in fact a betrayal. Not a betrayal of nationalism or unionism, though some would argue that it betrays both, but a betrayal of the genuine hope of the people for a peaceful future.

We opposed the GFA in the joint referendum because it institutionalises sectarianism, fails to properly address the imperialist role that Britain has played in Ireland and locks the Irish people into a capitalist alliance that will benefit only the rich to the detriment of the Irish working class.

The IRSP has always taken the view that the conflict in Ireland was more than a struggle against British occupation. It remains our view that the removal of the Brit-

ish presence is a prerequisite to tackling sectarianism and addressing the capitalist system that continues to inflict poverty on the vast majority of the population in what is one of the richest economies in Europe.

The agreement has elevated sectarianism into an acceptable political philosophy, to which the continued sectarian murder and intimidation campaign by loyalists bears witness. For unionists the GFA is as much a weapon to oppose the nationalist working class as the rifle or grenade.

We also take this opportunity to condemn without reservation a number of sectarian attacks carried out by so-called nationalists on protestant homes in the Blacks Road area of West Belfast. To attempt forced evictions is to perpetuate the myth that sectarianism is the sole cause of our problems.

Committing ourselves to a republican socialist agenda, we also have to acknowledge that the agreement is a reality. It has changed the political climate in Ireland. Time will tell whether the changed political climate will benefit the Irish working class - it is our view that it will not. But it is imperative that the IRSP begins the programme of work, internal and external, alongside the debate and consultation relevant to the political climate in which we have to work.

The outgoing ard comhairle have provided the leadership and direction necessary to steer the party through the changed political climate in 1998. This has been achieved without compromising our republican socialist and working class politics. Our objective is the removal of the British presence, both political and economic, from Ireland and the establishment of a 32-county independent Irish Socialist Republic.

We take this opportunity to thank the members of the ard comhairle who resigned for personal reasons during the past year. We acknowledge the personal sacrifice these comrades have made over the years in pursuit of republican socialist politics. But for their contribution and sacrifices, the IRSP would not be in the healthy position that it is now. We wish them well in future endeavours in the knowledge of their continued support for the republican socialist movement.

However, having learned from the past, we now look to the future. As we enter the new millennium it is imperative that republican socialist politics remain relevant - that is the task for all of us. Let the 1998 ard fheis signal the beginning of that work.

Acting international secretary
IRSP

Defend Korean workers

On October 15, Ra Hun, vice-chairman of the Chiba branch of Chosen Soren (a pro-North Korea organisation in Japan), was brutally murdered. The context for this hideous crime is the climate of hysteria and fear whipped up by the Japanese bourgeoisie following North Korea's launching of a satellite on August 31. The office of the Chiba branch was destroyed by fire.

More than 50 attacks against people of Korean ancestry have been reported in the last month, with schoolchildren being targeted the most.

Our political differences with the Stalinist Chosen Soren, which hails North Korea as the "great socialist fatherland" and promotes dangerous illusions in a "peaceful reunification" with South Korea, are many. As Trotskyists, we stand for the unconditional military defence of North Korea and other bureaucratically deformed workers' states. We call for the revolutionary reunification of Korea through a proletarian socialist revolution in the South and a proletarian political revolution in the North to oust the Confucian Stalinist bureaucracy.

We place no reliance on this capitalist government, which is the enemy of the working class and oppressed. At a November 11 demonstration in Tokyo held



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

by Chosen Soren, the organisers called on the Japanese government "to prosecute those responsible for the firebombing attacks, to end the harassment of Korean school students and to lift sanctions imposed on North Korea". But the capitalist state is not a neutral power standing above classes. It is an armed body of men whose job it is to defend and protect the property and privileges of the bourgeoisie.

To defend the besieged Korean population and its organisations, one must look to an aroused and class conscious proletariat and its potential allies among all the oppressed, not to the government. Worker/minority defence guards should be formed to defend Chosen Soren. This requires an uncompromising fight against the poisonous racism which divides the working class.

The leaders of all three trade-union federations have criminally refused to organise non-Japanese workers into common unions with their Japanese brothers and sisters. The labour movement must demand an end to the exclusion of ethnic Koreans from employment at major corporations and must organise integrated industrial unions. It must also champion full citizenship rights for everyone who lives in this country, regardless of race or national origin.

Criminally, virtually the entire left has lined up behind its own bourgeoisie's crusade to brand North Korea as a 'rogue state', thereby bearing some responsibility for the attacks on Koreans in this country. In its bid to join a capitalist coalition government, the mass reformist Communist Party has joined the bourgeoisie's hysteria over the launching of the North Korean satellite. Within 24 hours, it had issued a press release denouncing North Korea for violating Japan's 'national sovereignty'. Their members of parliament then proceeded to vote unanimously for the government's resolution condemning North Korea. This is the logical response of a party which refused to defend North Korea during the Korean War, and whose organisational rules border on outright racism, stipulating that only Japanese citizens can be members.

The Revolutionary Communist League was more concerned about the safety of Japanese boats and ships than the war-mongering coming out of the mouths of the bourgeoisie. The Bund (another left group, formerly called Senkil) advised this racist government, which is attempting to starve North Korea into submission, that its "hysterical response was not in the interest of Japan".

Spartacist Group Japan
Tokyo

Smirk

The Workers Power group habitually refers to most other revolutionary groups as irrelevant "micro-sects". According to the sad self-delusions of this profoundly inert sect, its influence dwarfs all others. In its mind's eye, there is just the Socialist Workers Party, New Labour and Workers Power itself competing for the allegiance of the working class.

Thus, I couldn't resist a little smirk when I recently compared the 'hits' on the CPGB's website and those on the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (WP's international umbrella organisation). The two sites have been up for similar lengths of time.

The scores? CPGB - just under 13,000; LRCI - 400. Not only does *Weekly Worker* outsell the monthly *Workers Power* four to one, we outdo them on the net as well. What was that about irrelevant "micro-sects", comrades?

Paul Williams
Sheffield

Editor's note: CPGB website = <http://www.duntone.demon.co.uk/CPGB/>

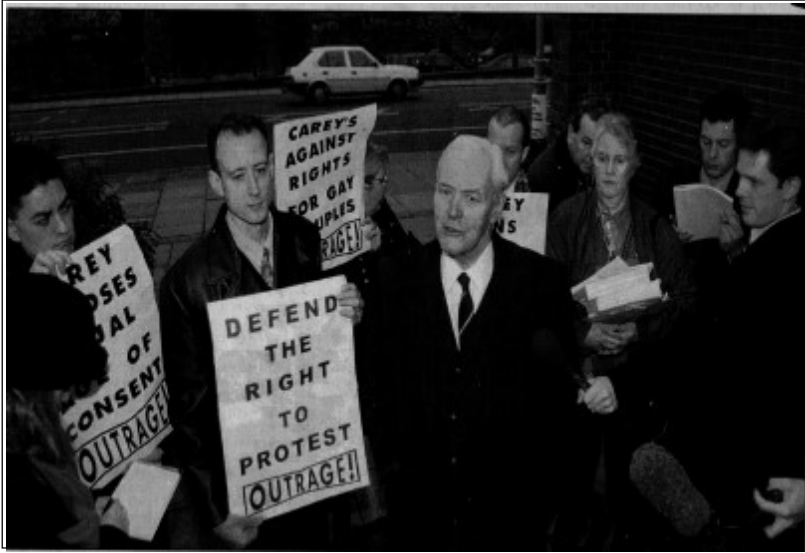
Church standards and gay rights

action

Communists are consistent and militant fighters for democracy. This is in marked contrast to the bourgeoisie. In order to serve their narrow class interests and hence preserve exploitative capitalist society, these supposed lovers of freedom like to 'cherry pick' when it comes to democratic rights. We oppose *all* abuses of democracy and fight to extend democracy to its utmost limit under existing social and political conditions. As a logical corollary, this means sweeping aside all anti-democratic laws.

Peter Tatchell, leading campaigner for the gay rights group Outrage, recently ran into one of these anti-democratic laws that clutter up the British statute books and keep armies of barristers and solicitors in well remunerated employment. On April 12 he climbed into Dr George Carey's pulpit as the archbishop was about to deliver his Easter Sunday sermon in Canterbury Cathedral. Tatchell was protesting against Carey's opposition to the equalisation of the age of consent for gays and straights - and also his absolute refusal to countenance gay fostering. Tatchell was "scratched and clawed" - to use his own words - from behind, as frantic church stewards dragged him away. One of the cathedral's vergers, Mark Punton, actually hit Tatchell's hand in a bid to prevent him from using the microphone. Sounds like a clear case of assault to me.

There endeth the story, you might think - with Mr Punton possibly being cautioned by the police for GBH. In any other public place, Tatchell could only have been charged with a public order offence, which nearly al-



Indecent behaviour - Tatchell and Benn

ways amounts to a relatively small fine.

Much to Tatchell's amazement however, he found himself being prosecuted under the obscure and rarely used Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act of 1860 (Section II) - formerly part of the Brawling Act of 1551 - which states that "any person who shall be guilty of riotous, violent or indecent behaviour in any cathedral church ... shall be liable to penalty". Under the 1860 act, whose sole purpose is to give *special protection* to the *establishment* church, Tatchell was liable to a two-month prison sentence and a hefty fine. The last time this act was used in such a manner was in 1967 when two anti-Vietnam war protesters, Nicolas Walter and Jim Radford, were jailed. They had shouted: "You hypocrites! How can you use the word of god to justify your policies?" as Harold Wilson read a lesson at a methodist service during the 1966 Labour conference.

Tatchell was spared a prison sentence. He was fined £18.60 (a sum carrying an ironic message, obviously) and ordered to pay costs of £320. At the trial the prosecuting counsel, Robert Montague, condemned Tatchell's protest for being "inappropriate both as to time and place; it was unseemly; it was indecorous." He solemnly added: "Mr Tatchell is not being prosecuted on account of any views that he may hold. It is with regard to the protection of the sanctity

of the place and the time of the particular occasion." In his summing up the Canterbury stipendiary magistrate, Michael Kelly, could also not disguise his pro-establishment prejudices. He rounded on Tatchell's "puerile conduct", and praised the "robust institution" of the Church of England. Then again, perhaps Tatchell could always look on the bright side. Under the original 1551 act you had an ear cut off for a second offence; the other ear cut off for a third offence and, in the fourth instance, your face was branded.

Since the court decision last Tuesday, there has been a rumbling of discontent from reactionaries who claim Tatchell got off too lightly. Conservative MP Sir Patrick Cormack thundered: "It is a derisory fine, but his behaviour was thoroughly outrageous." An editorial in *The Independent* echoed the sentiments of Kelly, declaring that Tatchell's actions were "childish and counterproductive, fixing in the public mind an image of gay rights campaigners as irresponsible extremists" (December 1). Adding to the anti-Tatchell offensive, the reactionary wag Richard Ingrams attacked the "obnoxious and priggish" Tatchell. The headline to his article asked: "Why can't we just stick him right back inside the closet?" (*The Observer* December 6).

Unlike the good and upright Christians who run the Canterbury

court and write leader columns for *The Independent* and *Observer*, communists do not think it is "indecent" or "puerile" to protest against the anti-human doctrines of the state-sponsored Church of England, which prattles on every Sunday about 'Christian love' and the bliss of the next life, while denying the full equality of real sexual relations between members of the same sex here on earth. Or if the church does entertain the possibility - albeit with a slight shudder - it thinks that gays and lesbians should keep their relationships *secret*, as if it were something shameful.

There has been resistance to the anti-democratic nature of this legislation. The Secular Society, whose national secretary is now the aforementioned Nicolas Walter - one of the two 1966 anti-Vietnam war protesters - denounced the prosecution of Tatchell and has organised a petition calling for the repeal of the 1860 act. Signatories include such figures as Harold Pinter, Ludovic Kennedy, Alan Bennett, Vanessa Redgrave, Jonathan Miller and Richard Dawkins. Communists demand that all such laws - which exist to protect the Church of England - be abolished. Above all we demand the separation of church and state.

The Secular Society petition infuriated Richard Ingrams. He ridiculed the signatories, "who apparently think the law should be abolished leaving Mr Tatchell free to disrupt worship whenever the urge takes him". He also detected a cunning atheistic plot to crush all the faithful: "What motivates these eminent people more than anything is a simple hatred of religion. It's not that they don't approve of freedom to worship; they hate the very idea of worship in the first place."

Yet Tatchell was right to emphasise that he had not attacked the Christian religion nor "disrupted the sacred part of the service". We too respect the humanity contained in aspects of Christianity and the humanity of many practising Christians - lay and cleric - but not the pro-state, anti-sex hypocrisy, lies and cant promulgated by the established church. Frankly, that deserves our contempt. Not that we have any plan or desire to erect an Enver Hoxha-like theocracy in Britain - far from it.

There must be freedom for atheistic education. But there must also be complete freedom for religious worship ●

Eddie Ford

Where to get your Weekly Worker

■ London

Bookmarks Bloomsbury Street, WC1
Centreprise Bookshop 136-138 Kingsland High Street, E8 2NS
Compendium Books 234 Camden High Street, NW1 8QS
Dillons Bookshop Queen Mary College, 329 Mile End Road, E1
Housemans 5 Caledonian Road, N1 9DX
Index Books 10-12 Atlantic Road, SW9
New Beacon Books 76 Stroud Green Road, N4 3EN
The Economists Bookshop Portugal Street, Clare Market, WC2

■ Bristol

Greenleaf 82 Colston Street, BS1 5BB

■ Cardiff

Rebecca Books 131 Crwys Road, CF2 4NH

■ Edinburgh

James Thin Books 53-59 South Bridge
Word Power 43 West Nicolson Street, EH8

■ Glasgow

Barrett Newsagents 263 Byres Road
Fahrenheit 451 Virginia Street, G1

■ Hull

Page One Books 9 Princes Avenue

■ Leicester

Little Thorn 13 Biddulph Street, LE2 1BH

■ Liverpool

News from Nowhere 98 Bold Street, L1 4HY

■ Manchester

Frontline Books 1 Newton Street, M1 1HW

■ Oxford

The Inner Bookshop 111 Magdalen Road

■ Southampton

October Books 4 Onslow Road, SO2 0JB

Fighting fund

Small price

When the December/January issue of the Socialist Party's discussion journal *Socialism Today* dropped on my doormat, I searched eagerly for the elaboration of the SP leadership's valiant struggle against the nationalist turn of its Scottish section or the rightist liquidationism of its Merseysiders - but in vain. Indonesia, France, Cuba, USA - all are covered. But for concrete questions of the day actually facing the organisation, we have to turn to the *Weekly Worker*.

What a priceless weapon is the openness championed by our paper in its struggle for a Communist Party! And what a small price is the £400 monthly fighting fund - a price recognised by comrades BA, MP, MR and TR, whose contributions to this week's total of £57 take the December figure to £102 ●

Ian Farrell

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

CAPITAL & CLASS

Journal of the Conference of Socialist Economists

Issue 66

Available NOW

£6.00 from CSE, 25 Horsell Road
London N5 1XL
Tel/Fax: 0171 607 9615

Visa, Access/Mastercard accepted.
Ask about subscriptions and back issues.
Email: cseoffice@gn.apc.org

Stuart Svensen

The Australian Wharf Lockout

Patrick Cunningham & Carolina Ballesteros Corona

A Rainbow at Midnight: Zapatistas and Autonomy

Frederick S. Lee & Sandra Harley

Peer Review: The Research Assessment Exercise

Jonathan Moran

The Dynamics of Class Politics & National Economies in Globalisation

Lucien van der Walt

Trade Unions in Zimbabwe

Charlotte Yates

New Divisions in the Working Class

Gregor Gall

Evaluating Fairbrother's Union Renewal Thesis

Book Reviews

End of the road?

The election of Royston Bull as vice-president of the SLP raises serious questions about the future of the party. For many SLP members, such as London election agent Tony Goss, this was the last straw. The SLP is now facing an internal crisis that could prove to be final.

Raging Bull is a hellfire and brimstone preacher, who edits the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, the bulletin of a small sect called the International Leninist Workers Party. He is an anti-communist witch hunter and homophobe. He used to be the unacceptable face of Stockport SLP. But now, thanks to the backing of Arthur Scargill, he has become the unacceptable face of the whole party.

Let us consider Bull's attitude not only to gay members of the SLP, but to any member who opposes him. It was Bull who organised the conspiracy to have comrade John Pearson expelled from the SLP. John's only crime was that he stood in the way of Bull's total control of the Stockport branch. The vice-president stitched up John, lied about him and acted in a completely unprincipled and undemocratic way to remove him from membership. Of course he would not have got away with this except for the fact that Arthur Scargill had shamefully backed Bull up.

At the 1997 annual congress Bull and his gang were the most rabid witch hunters who sought to stoke up an anti-communist purge with two motions from Leicester East and Bristol East. The first of these motions identified the major threat to the SLP not as the Tories and New Labour, but as the CPGB and Workers Power. These organisations were full of dangerous communists and subversives. The Bullites pointed to the "enemy within". Unnamed members were accused of "sympathising" with these dangerous organisations.

This was a factional motion in the worst sense of the word. It was about one faction trying to oust its rivals using the good name of the party. It was a call to start an all-out civil war inside the SLP. Naturally the Bullite speakers were at pains to tell congress that good people had nothing to fear and they would not be interrogated by the Stalinist thought police about their sympathies and impure thoughts. Of course the NEC did not support this. Neither did they oppose it. They simply asked Roy Bull to remit, and he duly obliged.

Bull's attitude to communists in the SLP who do not fall into line with him is mirrored by his attitude to gay members of the SLP. Bull has his own hang-ups about homosexuality. He is never one to miss the chance of telling everybody about how he feels on the subject. The Ron Davies affair is the latest opportunity for SLP vice-president to do his bit of investigative journalism. Bull is soon searching round the men's toilets for evidence of wrong-doing. Having staked out "the men's bogs all the way from Wales to Clapham Common" and hung around "the bogs behind the Windmill pub", the vice-president was able to report in the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* (November 3) that Ron Davies had been seen there on many occasions. According to the vice-president, Ron "does very little in his spare time except cruise the men's bogs" where he engaged in "unrestrained homosexual foraging".

The vice-president feels very sorry for Davies. He sees him as a "sad victim" who was "brutally humiliated" by

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group examines the state of the SLP

the need to protect the Labour government from the scandal-mongering Murdoch press. Bull explains that "being homosexual cannot help but constantly be recorded as an aberration. It is always an abnormality." This, asserts the vice-president, "has nothing to do with homophobia, but with biological reality and with the obvious clinical/social frustrations and deviations which give rise to and result from the homosexual condition". This condition, says Bull, is "equally clearly not remediable, no matter how enlightened social attitudes become".

Bull's view of homosexuality is that of a liberal, not a communist militant. He is in favour of "homosexual tolerance and understanding". Beneath this 'tolerant' view is reactionary prejudice. He lines up behind a notorious reactionary, saying: "Tebbitt's comment, implying the emergence of secret homosexual mafias in many key institutions, is almost certainly true."

What the vice-president of the SLP hates most is the struggle for gay rights and gay liberation. It is the "gay rights lobby" that has caused the problem. There would be no place for Peter Tatchell in the SLP. The gay rights lobby refuse "to accept the clinical description of how homosexual orientation arises out of inadequate parenting in the crucial emotional formative years and especially up to the age of five". They adopt a political stance in which "compensating aggressiveness is substituted instead, which insists that being abnormal is perfectly normal or even as good as or even better than being straight". Still Bull finds comfort in the fact that not all homosexuals are militant. He says that "many reject this militant irrationalism, and prefer to stay in the closet to actually deal more tolerantly with their own sadness".

Bull's opinions on these matters are reactionary-liberal and nothing to do with socialism and communism. All sexuality under capitalism is the product of bourgeois morality - and the needs of the ruling class to control the masses, including their sexuality. All sexuality is distorted, dehumanised, alienated by this system of exploitation. The question is politicised and revolves around relations of power. Communism will liberate humanity, including our sexual, as well as material and cultural, side. The struggle for communism is the struggle against capitalism, including the fight for sexual liberation. The struggle for gay liberation is part and parcel of that struggle.

Not according to Bull. It is not capitalism that is the problem. Homosexuality is a problem of biology from which there is no escape. His vision of communism was made in the USSR circa 1954. It will presumably be more tolerant of gay "abnormality", but the vice-president and his mates, in charge of a new KGB, will still be outside the "bogs" keeping an eye on things.

Of course Bull is not the central problem. It is Scargill. But the election of Bull shows the mess into which Scargill has landed himself. The whole working class movement is in a sorry state, and that includes the SLP. But it is how you get out of it that is the key to the future. The whole socialist movement can see that Scargill is han-

.....

"The only way to fight ... is by forming a united front and openly challenging Scargill"

.....

dling it like a petty dictator, surrounded by a bunch of sycophantic yes-men.

In the *Weekly Worker* (December 18 1997) I pointed to two main problems facing the SLP: "The first problem is the Blair honeymoon ... There are still no mass rebellions, protests or strikes against this capitalist government. New struggles would still find the SLP, despite its obvious weaknesses, well placed to grow. But at present the SLP is like a beached whale. An anti-Blair tide has not yet come in to refloat the party and lead it out into deeper waters. The SLP is high and dry. Its membership is contracting or locked into tiny branches, which are impotent and demoralising. It is not a pretty sight."

"The second problem is internal faction fighting. Internal political struggles are natural and inevitable for any party seeking to lead an advanced class. Such battles generate huge energy. Harnessing this energy is what gives a party its strength and vitality to face the future. Whether this process has a positive or negative effect on a party depends on how it is handled."

"Internal differences have been dealt with in a negative way. They have been suppressed. This creates an authoritarian internal regime, which flatters the cult of the personality. Opposition to this is inevitable. In its wake comes a very unhealthy situation of fear, suspicion, purge and even physical violence."

"This downward spiral will lead to the party imploding. This negative approach has been taken by comrade Scargill. It expressed itself in the voiding of members. It expressed itself in the NEC statement banning members meeting to discuss party issues. It expressed itself in the refusal to accept the subs of some comrades who were behind in their payments. It expressed itself in some highly dubious decisions to rule motions out of order, especially the federal republican amendment from Liverpool Riverside CSLP."

"The positive way to deal with differences of opinion is to encourage the open contest of ideas. The SLP needs new ideas and new perspectives in order to arm itself for the upturn in struggle. The present impasse is a golden opportunity for education and debate on matters of programme and tactics. It is the failure of the SLP

to adopt the democratic methods of the working class which has done so much damage and blunted the original high hopes of the militants who joined."

Whether the battle of ideas within the SLP is productive or destructive depends on the politics of the rival factions. Shortly after the 1997 congress I wrote an analysis of the contending factions in the *Weekly Worker*. I identified four basic trends in the SLP: "First came the right (Scargill supporters and the Stalinists) and the right-centre (ex-Fiscs). This bloc in alliance constitutes the broad right. Second we had the left-centre (republicans) and the ultra-lefts (*Marxist Bulletin*). This picture needs to be modified by the emergence of some independent democrats. These comrades formed a united front with the republicans, under the name of the Democratic Platform. Taken together the republicans, independents and *Marxist Bulletin* constitute the broad left of the SLP" (*Weekly Worker* December 18 1997).

The SLP centre was occupied by those who see the SLP as potentially some kind of communist-Labour party or party of recomposition. I identified some ex-SWP members and the ex-Fiscs holding this position. The ex-Fiscs look to a model like the Italian Rifondazioni. Those in the SLP centre who called for a communist-Labour party, I wrote, pointed out that it "must necessarily have a democratic internal regime. A party with a mixed ideological component could not possibly work without democratic methods and procedures. Hence there is a democratic imperative in the politics of the centre" (*Weekly Worker* December 11 1997). For opportunistic reasons, the ex-Fiscs seem to have ignored this fact.

I argued: "The present situation is characterised by the division of the centre into hostile camps. With this split the party has no centre of gravity. The centre lacks a common programme and has instead been dominated by the rotten sectarian manoeuvrings and the elitist politics of Fisc" (December 18 1997).

The SLP centre was divided over the witch hunt. The Fiscs supported Scargill's attacks on the SLP left. The republicans saw this as anti-democratic and opposed it. The Fiscs blocked with Scargill, Harpal Brar and Roy Bull. The republicans formed a united democratic front with the independent lefts, *Marxist Bulletin* and supporters of the *Weekly Worker*.

Things have changed since then. Virtually the entire Trotskyist left has exited after the 1997 congress. Many left the party. The Socialist Perspectives group, led by Martin Wicks and Lee Rock, went in one direction. The *Marxist Bulletin* turned from the Cinderella of the SLP lefts into the pumpkin of the International Bolshevik Tendency. They are now trying to get the CPGB to eat Trotskyist pumpkin pie (I notice that none of this delicious dish is being offered to the RDG).

The witch hunt divided the SLP left and right and split the centre. The witch hunt came to an end at the 1997 congress. We left the regime of the witch hunt to enter the regime of the block vote. I wrote: "We never had real democracy under the witch hunt.

What will it be like under the block vote? Obviously the same but different. How different will depend, as always, on the class struggle inside and outside the SLP" (*Weekly Worker* December 18 1997).

The block vote protected Scargill, Brar, Bull and Fisc. Everybody else was excluded by it. Now it has been wielded against Fisc. They have now become shocked and outraged 'democrats'. The Fisc have now become the main opposition. Yet still their sectarian methods of plotting continue. Not long ago they organised a meeting of 'democrats' in Conway Hall prior to the 1998 congress. This was history repeating itself as farce. On the previous occasion - a meeting organised by the Campaign for a Democratic SLP - Terry Dunn was outside alongside the *EPSR's* Adrian Greenman taking the names of anybody who attended. Now things are different. When supporters of the SLP Republicans turned up to Fisc's meeting, their names were not put on any official list. They were simply barred.

Heron and co get up a petition calling for a special congress. Naturally it does not contain any of the republicans. Perhaps the covering letter read: 'Dear Arthur, we, your most loyal members, humbly beg you to accede to our demands for a special congress. Please note this petition only has on it your most loyal supporters and not any of that other horrible lot that you hate and we helped you witch hunt.' Of course Arthur was totally contemptuous of this type of crawling sectarian politics.

He wrote back the same kind of letter that he sent to members of the now defunct Democratic Platform. Did you sign this and why? Please reply immediately, etc. Many comrades were shocked and offended. It was OK Arthur writing that kind of offensive letter to that other horrible lot, but not us. We are loyal democrats.

This has been typical of the problems. Fisc have pursued a sectarian political method in which they were prepared to align themselves not on the basis of agreed policies but on expediency. It was previously expedient for them to align themselves with Scargill and Bull, and against democratic methods. Now they have lost out and Bull has taken Sikorski's seat as vice-president, it is expedient for them to discover that Bull is a homophobe and how important democracy within the party has suddenly become.

What is now to be done? Very soon it will be all over for the SLP. The SLP is degenerating into a Stalinist sect. The only way to fight this is by forming a united front and openly challenging Scargill. Given the current crisis, we need a united front of all democratic forces in the SLP.

Our demands should be:

- Recall congress - disciplinary action against Bull, on the grounds that his views on gay people contradicts the SLP constitution.
- Support for a broad-based party, open to communists and ex-Labourites.
- A republican programme which can unite both communists and Labourites.
- Emphasis on rank and file democracy in the trade unions and workplaces.
- Support for party democracy and openness.
- Joint work with other socialist organisations for agreed aims, including cooperation where possible in elections ●

Simon Harvey of the SLP Crunch time for dissidents

This Saturday's meeting of the national executive committee of the Socialist Labour Party - the first since the election of the new NEC - will undoubtedly be dominated by the rebellion of the London regional committee under the presidency of Brian Heron.

Comrade Heron of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus lost his seat on the executive at last month's special congress in Manchester after Arthur Scargill decided to dump him, along with fellow Fiscite Patrick Sikorski, from the leadership of our party. Comrade Sikorski was easily unseated from the vice-presidency by Royston Bull, editor of the wondrously misnamed *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, whose rabid homophobia has been well documented by the *Weekly Worker*. The only remaining Fisc supporter on the NEC is Carolyn Sikorski, who was returned unopposed by the women's section.

The three Fiscites were prominent among the comrades who initially began discussions with Scargill about the formation of Socialist Labour back in 1995 and were elected onto the leadership at the founding congress in May 1996. They threw themselves into the witch hunt of communists and democrats, and were fully behind the policy of voiding (ie, effectively expelling without right of appeal) comrades alleged to be members or supporters of other political organisations.

Strangely however, they kept quiet about Bull and the *EPSR* supporters, despite the publicity given by the *Weekly Worker* and the fact that his cut-and-paste weekly circulated openly within the SLP in contravention of Scargill's imposed constitution. Nor did Fisc or any of its supporters put in an appearance at the well attended Campaign for a Democratic SLP fringe meeting at the 1997 2nd congress. This meeting addressed by Peter Tatchell was designed to expose the homophobia of the *EPSR*.

After briefly lending support to the democratic wing of the party, the *EPSR* gang suddenly did a complete about-turn, switching to sycophantic pro-Scargillism and enthusiastically embracing the witch hunt. Although Fisc was prepared to tolerate the *EPSR* as anti-communist minions, Heron and co never for a moment suspected that the Bullites would ever be able to win top positions in the leadership. But they failed to account for the Scargill factor. King Arthur brooks no criticism. No independent thought, no hint of opposition. When the full 3rd Congress due for November 1998 was abandoned after Scargill had neglected to make the necessary preparations, Pat Sikorski had the temerity to criticise the general secretary for his "over-centralised" autocratic regime and issued a mildly worded set of proposals aiming to clip his wings.

Scargill decided that Fisc and its allies had to go. He switched to the only other contender for vice-president, Roy Bull. Scargill even gave tacit backing to the 'Campaign to support Scargill' at the special congress. Its seven candidates for the NEC, in-

.....
 "Scargill could well dissolve the London regional committee and impose his own loyalist alternative - in the 'interests of the party' of course"

cluding two other *EPSR* men and ultra-Stalinist Harpal Brar, were comfortably elected.

Clearly, with Bull in high office the SLP is no longer a viable proposition for Fisc. The press would only have to lay hold of his rantings to blow the entire project, and Fisc know it. So Brian Heron and Carolyn Sikorski finally broke their long silence on Bull's anti-constitutional "own propaganda" carried in the *EPSR*. Comrade Heron proposed a motion at the November 24 London regional committee meeting calling on Scargill to remove Bull from his democratically elected position. The LRC further resolved not to contest next year's European elections unless Scargill agreed to their demand. This blackmail motion was carried by six votes to two.

Heron has since circulated London branches with a report of the LRC's stance along with examples of the disgusting homophobia found in the *EPSR*. It was the first time he had spoken out on the issue. If the Fisc comrades had previously objected to Bull's view that homosexuality is an "emotional and sexual malfunction", they had done so very quietly indeed.

Now that Heron and Carolyn Sikorski (who also came out in favour of the LRC resolution) have gone public, there is no way that Scargill will tolerate them. He was already furious that they, along with Terry Dunn and Helen Drummond, were the initial backers of the 'Appeal for a special congress', where branches would be allowed to put motions and amendments, in place of last month's Manchester rally. Even worse, they circulated copies of Scargill's correspondence with Pat Sikorski to their close contacts - and our general secretary considers any disclosure of his 'private' comments as an act "detrimental to Socialist Labour", even when they concern such public matters as the nature of a working class party. But of course he regards the SLP as 'his' party, not the property of the working class.

Comrade Heron is convinced that he and Carolyn Sikorski will be singled out for expulsion. He believes Scargill will view their behaviour as particularly "detrimental" since they were both NEC members at the time.

But expulsion is not a foregone conclusion. No doubt NEC member John Hendy, just back from his lengthy visit to Australia, will caution against hasty action. Comrade Hendy is the lawyer who drafted the party's constitution, and is well aware that the disciplinary code agreed at the December 1997 congress cannot be put into operation, as there were no elections for a disciplinary body at last month's special congress.

No one has yet been expelled from the SLP under any disciplinary code. And it is difficult to see how Scargill could void the membership of former and current members of the NEC. He can hardly claim to have just discovered that they were supporters of Fisc all along and therefore falsified their membership application forms. Besides, arbitrary action against prominent members would surely further alienate comrades such as Hendy, Bob Crow and other more independent-minded NEC members like Bakers' Union president Joe Marino, who all have more than a little respect for Heron and the Sikorskis.

But Fisc's pathetic tactics have left Scargill a better way. Claiming the high moral ground, he will no doubt label the call to remove Bull an outrageous slight against the membership's democratic will, and declare the refusal to contest the Euro elections a breach of discipline. Scargill could well dissolve the LRC and impose his own loyalist alternative - in the 'interests of the party' of course.

■ Embarrassing Rix

I was interested to hear how SLP member Dave ('Mick') Rix would perform on last week's *Any questions*. Comrade Rix is the general secretary-elect of Aslef, the rail drivers' union, and is thus, along with Imran Khan, Bob Crow and Scargill himself, one of our party's few public figures.

After a tentative start Mick began to speak more confidently. But he hardly differentiated himself from New Labour on a range of questions. On the House of Lords he correctly dubbed the existence of hereditary peers an anti-democratic anachronism, but he raised the abolition of the second chamber only as one possibility to be considered. And he did not make the obvious link between the ending of hereditary power and privilege and the dumping of the monarchy.

However, his contribution on the European Union was just embarrassing. Siding with Tory Nigel Evans, he thought that the main issue to consider was "whether we should give up our sovereign power as a nation". It was left to Tory defector Emma Nicholson, now a Liberal Democrat, to raise the question of the working class - even if it was from the point of view of an enlightened bourgeois. Calling on Blair to join the EU social chapter, she said of Britain, "A market without workers' rights is a slave market."

British road national socialists like Scargill may mouth phrases about 'internationalism', but their politics tie in perfectly with national chauvinism. Unfortunately it seems that comrade Rix comes from the same *BRS* school ●

United list rejected

Tom Delargy of the Scottish Socialist Party gives his views of the November 29 meeting of its national council

The national council met to discuss, among other things, proposals for a united left slate in the elections to the Scottish parliament embracing the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Labour Party. The SWP's proposal was dismissed out of hand by all bar Allan Armstrong, Bob Goupillot, Nick Clarke and myself. While Hugh Kerr MEP associated himself with the tone adopted by Allan Armstrong, and is clearly genuine in wanting to bring the SWP on board a broad workers' party (or else he is a very good actor), he too voted against any compromise over a single united slate.

Phil Stott, Allan Green and Richie Venton all argued that the only possible deal with the SWP is for them to join the SSP. Speaking personally, my recommendation for all revolutionaries in Scotland, who either do not want to join the SWP or who are not allowed to do so, is that they should join the SSP. Then, as members, we should fight within the party for as much unity with revolutionaries and other socialists outside as we can achieve. I am convinced that the editor of *Socialist Worker* would not have it any other way.

However, if the SWP does not agree to join (because the conditions for joining are considered too onerous, which is at least debatable), the fallback position of the SSP national council is utterly unreasonable, and the SWP leadership will easily be able to demonstrate this come the elections.

It is certainly true that a deal on the first-past-the-post seats is on offer. However, agreeing to stand down in seats where they are stronger than we are could, plausibly, be presented as having less to do with magnanimity on our part than with anxiety that our weakness will be demonstrated if we do not face reality and give them a free run. We know that our only chance of getting anyone elected is via the PR second vote. The same is true for the SWP. They will take a lot of convincing before they capitulate to the SSP on this issue. And, given the relative size and influence of both organisations, lack of flexibility on our part will go down very badly with the mass of workers who genuinely advocate an anti-sectarian electoral alternative to the Blairites and the tartan Blairites.

As this vote demonstrated, the majority of the national council think the SSP are fireproof against accusations of sectarianism because we are openly calling for the SWP to join. This is an offer which, I want to repeat, is not one the SWP should dismiss out of hand. Justification for doing so should at any rate be based on detailed tactical grounds rather than grounds of principle, this being what we have been given so far. Nevertheless, this offer is perhaps not quite what it seems.

While Richie Venton and Allan Green did repeat this call, and I am sure they are genuine in making it, they both expressed certainty that the offer would not be accepted - certainly not in time for next May's elections. In that case, however se-

rious they are in wanting the SWP on board, there is something less than satisfactory about proposing terms for unity they themselves think unacceptable.

More important still, while Richie, Allan, Phil, Hugh and others advocated the SWP joining the SSP, at least two NC members took a contrary position. Bill Bonnar, not for the first time, stated in effect that they would be allowed to join over his dead body. He never used this precise phrase, but I do not think he would deny that this is the reality of the situation. Bill went further still, suggesting we stop pussyfooting around and declare unconditional warfare on the SWP. He argued that it was a waste of our time to call on the SWP to join the SSP because they do not agree with us on anything significant.

This was certainly not the message put by Alan McCombes, Colin Fox and others at 'Socialism in Scotland'. And, whatever Bill thinks, the SWP leadership in turn also accept that we do have much in common; otherwise they would not be proposing an electoral agreement.

It is nevertheless true that differences remain. The SWP does not, for instance, agree with Bill Bonnar (or Jack Straw) that socialists ought to peddle a cheap and nasty authoritarian populist approach to the drugs issue, to call for a law and order crackdown, rather than to recognise that this is a health, education and social problem. Neither do they accept that the role of socialists is to fight for a "left government whose aim would not be socialism". Nor do they celebrate the Stalinist counterrevolution in Spain in the mid-1930s. But on all of these issues it is Bill, not the SWP, which is marginalised from majority opinion inside the SSP.

Another member of the national council was won over by Bill's sectarianism into expressing the exact same sentiments. Nobody proposed a motion of censure against either of these individuals. Why not? It was suggested to me in the pub afterwards that perhaps Bill is merely being more honest than some others. I could not possibly comment.

I do however recall that during the Paisley South by-election last year, one Scottish Socialist Alliance member told me that many members voted very reluctantly for my motion at the second conference on socialist unity. I was told that a cold calculation had been made giving rise to fears of considerable damage to the SSA's reputation for anti-sectarianism if it was voted down. These members apparently voted for the motion only because they were certain that doing so was 'risk-free', given that the SWP would, in their opinion, never join the SSA in a million years. My confidante never told me that this was her motivation (although I suspect it was) and I have no way of verifying if what she said was true.

But I do have to ask myself whether the doors are being kept open for the SWP only for so long as there is no movement by them in our direction ●

Dirty war of demoralisation

The British Workers International League (WIL), one of the most leftwing of Trotskyists groups, has dissolved. While most of the WIL's former members are now outside any group, two of its offsprings (Workers Action and Workers Fight) are now engaged in a bitter dispute.

This article will examine the political achievements of the WIL and the reasons for its collapse, and argue that these, and the problems that the two different groups are facing today, are consequences of the legacy of Healyism in particular, and post-war 'orthodox' Trotskyism in general.

In 1985 under the pressure of the collapse of the left before Thatcher's neo-liberal offensive, the British WRP fell apart and the comrades who later set up the WIL supported the wrong side in the split. They backed Gerry Healy's minority. In 1987 they created a new group, the WIL, which was very much influenced by left orthodox Trotskyist currents like Workers Power, the International Trotskyist Committee and comrades like Al Richardson.

They rejected their former view that the anti-'Pabloite' International Committee was the most progressive side in the breakdown of the Fourth International in 1953-54.

After the creation of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) in September 1989, Workers Power and the WIL engaged in fusion talks. Unfortunately the process was aborted. WP initially tried to push for a quick unification without previous serious discussions and joint actions. This provoked an early rupture.

Workers Power had developed an orthodox Trotskyist position. However, WP's orthodoxy proved to be shallow. In the early 1990s under pressure from the transition in the workers' states, WP adopted an optimistic view of the world period. They viewed the transition in the east initially as the beginning of a political revolution. This led to a retreat from revolutionary defencism. WP started to consider Stalinism as the main enemy, so that it was necessary to make united fronts with bourgeois democrats and nationalists against it.

The LRCI ceased to be an orthodox Trotskyist group as it revised its programmatic positions and organisational structure.

The WIL adopted a much more orthodox position on the nature of the world situation and the character of the transition from degenerate workers' states to bourgeois states. While WP typified the international period as a revolutionary one and for eight years continued to describe all the countries east of Germany as moribund workers' states, the WIL arrived at the conclusion that in eastern Europe the states that were promoting capitalism were incipient bourgeois states. This meant that the period was one of an international strategic defeat for workers at the hand of bourgeois reactionary forces.

The WIL had a contradictory position. On the one hand it managed to adopt a more realistic analysis of the period based on the counterrevolutionary overthrow of the former workers' states. However, it never broke completely with Healy's Stalinophobia. So while the WIL saw correctly that the bourgeois counterrevolution had the initiative and that it was the greatest danger in the east, they did not adopt a consistent revolutionary defencist view.

In its last years the WIL openly rejected Marx's and Engels' conception on the national question. They adopted Rosdolski's revision on the

John Stone of the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International discusses the dispute between Workers Action and Workers Fight

Marxist position regarding historic and non-historic peoples. This is not an academic debate. In fact, in a period in which liberal-democrats are on the offensive, the Rosdolski-WIL thesis was that national self-determination was a principle that was universal in the phase of early capitalism, and against Stalinism.

Against Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, who always subordinated national rights to class questions, the WIL adaptation to nationalism led them to unconditionally support every national movement even when it was led by a proto-bourgeoisie against a degenerated workers' state.

The WIL formed a new international current: the Leninist Trotskyist Tendency (LTT). It included groups in different continents and from very different traditions. The German and Belgian LTT were inside the Usec and the Parity Commission with Lambert and Moreno; the South African CWG were associated with the International Committee; the Ceylonese WV were part of the Sammarakody/VO grouping; the Canadian LTG were a new split from the Spartacists; and the Jamaican CWG were a group of comrades against the PNP. The Swedish AFS are young comrades that were in the Usec.

In 1996, when we founded the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International (LCMRCI), the WIL sent us a very short letter in which they said that they wanted to discuss with us in order to create a united tendency that would have sections in all continents. We believed that the WIL and LTT had some progressive positions and that it might be possible to overcome their limitations. (Most of the LTT groupings, before fusing with the WIL, were discussing with the LRCI, but the arrogant sectarianism of WP's ruling clique avoided any possible rapprochement.)

We started a process of discussions and we elaborated around 10 joint resolutions. Nearly all of these documents were produced by us and one of the current members of WF. Twice we had international public meetings. The LCMRCI and the LTT were capable of forging a serious pole of attraction that could have created a framework of political discussion and revolutionary regroupment. The USA Workers Voice group and the Brazilian Internationalist Bolshevik League wanted to participate.

However, these possibilities were damaged by some negative pressures from inside the WIL. On the one hand, there were many demoralised comrades who were pushing the group to become a passive and fatalistic club. On the other hand, there were some comrades that were pushing the WIL towards the open rejection of some positions from Marx and Trotsky.

In the mid-1990s the WIL put a lot of effort into building its own faction inside the British Usec section (Socialist Outlook). However, instead of winning comrades from that milieu towards Trotskyism or its traditional positions, the WIL was being influenced and changed by that milieu. In 1995 the pro-WIL faction made an unprincipled bloc with SO's rightwing faction in order to win the leadership. This manoeuvre created a very serious problem inside the WIL. The

comrades who later were to found Workers Fight originally started to question the WIL's orientation.

The adaptation to SO led the WIL to very Labourite perspectives. The WIL's congress (February 1997) adopted a resolution that referred only to work inside the Labour Party. At that time we said that it was correct to give a critical vote to Labour and build a faction inside it. But we also said that revolutionaries should understand that due to Blair's right turn, many activists were trying to develop movements outside a very rightwing reformist party which had very little internal life. We argued strongly that an orientation should be made also towards Socialist Labour, the Socialist Alliances and other movements on the left of Labour.

In the 1997 general election the WIL called for a vote for Labour, Scargill, Sheridan and Nellist. However, they were against voting for the remaining 80 socialist candidates (even in places where SLP candidates got more votes than Scargill). Later, the same comrades that were against any serious tactical orientation towards the SLP called for a fusion with the SLP's Socialist Perspectives. After their 1997 congress the WIL simply ignored all its previous agreements in favour of joint discussions, aggregates and statements with the LCMRCI. They never gave any explanation and they never bothered to reply to any of our letters.

During 1997 all the internal contradictions inside the WIL developed to the point where they resulted in the dissolution of the organisation. The groups Workers Action and Workers Fight appeared later.

However, neither of these groups contained a majority of the WIL's previous membership. Most of these comrades no longer belong to any organisation. One of the most talented WIL leaders, comrade Bob Pitt, is producing *What Next?*, a journal which also carries internal discussions amongst the LTT. Another very important WIL leading cadre, Ian H, left the WIL with other older comrades, attacking its turn towards the Usec.

The majority of the international Leninist Trotskyist Tendency does not back either Workers Action (WA) or Workers Fight (WF). The German, Belgium and South African comrades are critical of both groups. The South Africans, which is the largest LTT section, consider that WA is moving away from Trotsky and towards the right and that WF is producing a trade union paper which is not a party organ nor a united front bulletin. The Canadian group has dissolved. The Jamaican CWG was not accepted as a section. The Ceylonese WV are not very integrated. The Swedish group has critically backed WA.

The WIL split happened in a non-serious way. The first issues of *Workers Action* and *Workers Fight* did not give a clear account of the reasons for the rupture and still the political motives are unclear. However, following the articles that these comrades published in their own press and in *What Next?* it is possible to see their different political evolutions.

WA is not interested at all in discussing with any of the groups which participated in the WIL's February congress. They are not interested in building an international liaison com-

mittee for refounding a Trotskyist international. In *What Next?* No8 a WA comrade said that they want to regroup with non-Trotskyist organisations and not necessarily on a Trotskyist basis.

While WP is so blind that it sees revolutionary advances in a period of social counterrevolutions, WA is going the other way. They are adopting a fatalistic and pessimistic approach to history.

In summary, the comrades from WA are becoming the sort of free-thinking pro-Labourites around the Usec who are always trying to 'discover' new mistakes in Marx, Lenin or Trotsky and new advances made by western Marxists. In fact, what they are doing is adapting the positions of old Mensheviks or centrists.

The main motive that pushed the WIL's left wing to create WF was its battle against the majority's adaptation towards the Usec and its constant appeals to revise the classics. WF proclaimed that they were going to defend the transitional programme and the necessity of a regroupment with all the left-oriented Trotskyist forces.

In that sense they were in general a progressive split. However, the comrades are still influenced by the same WIL methods which they say they are trying to overcome. In summary, WF is to the left of WA and is formulating a necessary, albeit insufficient, response to the passive and post-Trotskyist tendency of WA.

However, in a recent statement comrade Charlie Langford from Workers Action wrote that "the central factor that caused" the dissolution and split of the WIL was the attitude "that [the minority] took to the sexual misconduct case that we had to hear and decide on in July 1997." Comrade Steve Myers had been accused of the "unfastening of the clothing and the sexual touching of a sleeping woman". We do not have enough information on that issue to take a position and we are still waiting for WF's version. However, even if all the accusations of WA against comrade Steve are true, nobody has suggested his expulsion from the organisation or from the workers' movement. He is not being accused of rape, betraying a strike, or crossing class lines.

When comrade Steve entered the WIL in early 1997 he was a strong supporter of the group's pro-Labour and anti-LCMRCI wing. We have many disagreements with the comrade and, if the verdict that was adopted by comrades from the WIL's majority and minority (WA and WF) was correct (something that we do not know), we most probably would have voted with them for a suspension of some months.

However, it is very opportunistic to try to use this case in order to discredit a new group and avoid a political debate. Comrade Steve could be criticised for his positions and his moving in and out of different groups. Nevertheless he has proved to be a very energetic comrade who has built very successful campaigns (solidarity with our Bolivian former comrade Eleuterio Guterrez, unionisation of supermarket workers, a big rally against Le Pen, Bosnia Aid, etc.). His dedication to the labour movement produced some significant tragedies

in his own life.

It is very dishonest of the comrades of WA to try to take the opportunity of a possible mistake to sideline him. They claim that this incident would have paralysed the WIL, so it was necessary to dissolve the organisation and to found a new group. But this is not the way in which an organisation which had been in existence for a decade should liquidate itself. The comrades from Workers Fight correctly denounced this move as an attempt to prevent further political discussions and to exclude them from the new organisation.

Disputes over personal offences and internal discipline should not be used to avoid political discussions. They are completely subordinate to the political and programmatic issues which are in dispute. These personal attacks are also damaging WA's own image. It is also an expression of its lack of political argument. In our brief relation with the WIL we experienced how they often tried to substitute manoeuvres and personal intrigues for political debate.

On the other hand, WF is also trapped in the same subjective web. They are also using personal abuses and adopting a paranoid attitude. Threatening to use the bourgeois courts is no way to stop WA and, even worse, is discrediting WF. There is no reason to call on the bourgeois legal system and state to intercede in a dispute over alleged sexual abuse amongst people who call themselves revolutionaries.

If WF do not think that the comrade made any mistake and that this is an incident which is being used to discredit WF's editor, they could appeal to the LTT's control commission or to a tribunal of the labour movement. However, we think that we should concentrate on the political issues which are under debate.

We are experiencing the death of what was a progressive left-oriented Trotskyist current that came out of the Healyite disintegration. Interestingly, the LRCI, another left-Trotskyist organisation, is also moving to the right. The immediate cause of this regression of both currents is their incapacity to understand the post-1989 social counterrevolutions and their adaptation towards the new democratic-liberal wave. While the LRCI is becoming a cult around Harvey, the LTT is atomising.

More decisive is the tendency of all currents of post-war Trotskyism towards liquidating the vanguard party. This makes the tendency to shift away from revolutionary politics towards petty bourgeois class interests impossible to reverse unless the root causes in method and class composition are understood and corrected. The LTT, like the LRCI, reclaimed some of the elements of orthodox Trotskyism in the 1980s, but these were shallow developments that could not survive counterrevolutionary defeats of the 1980s and 1990s.

WA is moving away from what remains of the programmatic achievements of the WIL. In that process many former LTT comrades are being demoralised and the resistance that some comrades are making is insufficient.

We demand WA stop its dirty war against WF and that WF should abandon its threat to use the bourgeois courts. Both groups should renounce subjective disputes and discuss in front of the class and the vanguard their *real* political differences so they can be judged in the court of the class struggle. ●

Readers will have noted last week's letter from Alan Gibson on behalf of the *Marxist Bulletin*, British section of the International Bolshevik Tendency (*Weekly Worker* December 3). Alan complains of the "misrepresentations" of his organisation's positions in the report of our 'Against economism' school (*Weekly Worker* November 12). Centrally, he contends that the charge of economism directed against *MB* was not proved, but simply reiterated from an "ill-thought out comment made by a CPGB speaker during the discussion". Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that we have a practice of distorting the politics of our opponents - something for which we are "increasingly well known on the left" (all Alan Gibson/*MB* quotes from *Weekly Worker* December 3 unless otherwise stated).

We dismiss his accusation about our credibility. It deserves contempt. The fact that Alan and his comrades raise such a smokescreen says nothing about the veracity of reports in this paper; everything about the political sensitivity of those on the receiving end of them. When we call centrists, national socialists or reformists by their proper names and provide evidence for our assertions, those attacked often complain that we are "misrepresenting" them, or even telling "sensational lies".

Frankly, comrades, if this paper simply filled its pages with "lies" and distortions then nobody at all would be worried about it and its circulation would not make it one of the most influential papers on the left. What would be the point of taking it, still less *replying* to it?

This paper follows Lenin's blunt maxim, *aussprechen was ist* - to say what *is*. It is not distortion, but accuracy that our opponents object to. For examples, let us cite the Socialist Alliance, the SLP, the SWP, the Socialist Party and the CPB-Morning Star split. Those who want the *truth* turn to the *Weekly Worker*. Our method always has been to report facts to the best of our ability and to draw a sharp line of demarcation between Leninist politics and opportunism.

Thus, comrades - particularly those who participated in our school and witnessed the political knots comrade Gibson and other *MBers* tied themselves into, not least over the slogan for a federal republic - will need little convincing that what has actually hurt these comrades is our *accurate* reporting of their problems. Indeed, if further proof were needed of the charge of economism against the *Marxist Bulletin*, comrade Gibson's brief letter generously supplies ample evidence of it. But I will come to this later. In the meantime it is worthwhile shading in some of the background to the exchange. This will explain why we were pleasantly surprised to receive an invitation from the comrades.

The Communist Party was approached by the *MB* comrades for a "series of discussions between our two organisations to follow on from discussions at the Communist University and continue the process of movement towards political clarity between our organisations" (letter, October 4 1998). Concretely, the comrades proposed five meetings - on the united front, the popular front, World War II, permanent revolution and the national question - at six-weekly intervals.

Before going on, a comment is in order on the narrowness of the topics proposed for study. The leadership of our organisation was prepared to accept them without amendment, as they appeared to be the issues that the *MBers* regarded *themselves* as strong on. Given that we are keen to engage with these comrades, we were anxious not to place any obstacles in the way of meeting them. However, as a means of engaging with *our* or-

Publish and be damned

ganisation, they illustrate something quite important about *MB's* sectarian method.

Frankly, these seminar titles have the feel of either being banged out quite casually without any genuine thought as to what our Party majority actually stands for, or having been cobbled together by an out-of-touch international leadership with a 'left-Stalinist' template already in mind for the CPGB.

This notwithstanding, our organisation was prepared to accept this series. We estimated that at least one section of participants in such meetings might find the proceedings enlightening - the *MB* comrades.

However, we have totally rejected demands from the comrades that other left organisations and individuals are excluded, and that no reports are permissible in the *Worker Worker*. In a meeting between representatives on November 25 convened to discuss details, the *MBers* indicated that they would find open publication acceptable only *after* the series had ended.

Readers with a command of elementary maths will note that - with the interruption of the schedule by other meetings - the comrades were thus proposing that reporting restrictions be imposed for nearly *one year*.

Challenged on this, the *MBers* suggested that reports in the *Weekly Worker* - as evidenced by our comments on their participation in the 'Against economism' school - were so full of "misrepresentations" that too much time would be wasted responding to them. Yet last week, comrade Gibson fired off a reply on behalf of *MB* - in other words, precisely the open, democratic procedure urged on them in the first place and rejected at the November 25 meeting as "a waste of time".

In fact, what we can draw from this puzzling episode is further confirmation of the nature of this group.

The last *Marxist Bulletin* was actually in May of this year. Strangely for a political organisation, the comrades appear to feel no imperative to publish, to see their views in public, where they can be assessed and perhaps attacked by others. Evidently, this reticence even extends to being unwilling to fill the space offered to them in *this* widely read newspaper, let alone going to all the time and effort of producing a journal themselves.

This brings to mind a polemical exchange this paper had with the Spartacist League/Britain (internationally the parent organisation of the IBT, of course) last year. We wrote of the "ponderously bureaucratic" and "excruciatingly slow lumbering" of the SL/B's political life, evidenced by their rarely glimpsed press (*Weekly Worker* January 16 1997). This "painfully slow pace provides a protective shield to the SL/B. Working at such a polemical pace, it is impossible to do much more than simply reiterate positions, rather than provide proof, clarification and justification. This is why we offered a robust polemical exchange in the pages of this more frequent and influential paper - a clash, given the SL/B's evident political fragility, we speculated would probably be the death of it. Clearly,

.....

"Our method always has been to report facts to the best of our ability and to draw a sharp line of demarcation between Leninist politics and opportunism"

.....

the SL/B thought so too" (*Weekly Worker* April 10 1997).

And clearly the *MB* can see its point. Yet it is axiomatic for Marxists that open publication is an essential requirement of the fight for precisely the type of political clarity the comrades purport to be fighting for. *MB/IBT's* laid back attitude illustrates that it is actually seeking something other than "clarity". The purpose of the organisation is not to change the real world - a hard process of testing and *re-elaborating* programme. The activity of the group is strictly subordinated to the preservation of the integrity of a *dogma* and the sect organisational apparatus that serves it.

Perhaps comrade Gibson's letter of last week indicates that the comrades are breaking at long last from this. This is to be welcomed, although it would surely spell death for the *MB/IBT* as currently constituted. Open debate would inevitably reveal differences of opinion and perspective in its ranks. Such differences - even the most *nuanced* - are enough to precipitate crisis within organisations based on 'agreement with' rather than 'acceptance of' a collective programme that brims with as much extraneous detail as the *MB/IBT's*.

Thus, the *MB/IBT* recently lost comrade Ian Donovan - who now produces *Revolution and Truth*. He left over whether it was correct to offer critical electoral support to workers' parties involved in popular fronts. Incredibly - despite the fact that all sides in the dispute agreed that "nothing of immediate application" in terms of the work of the group was raised by the non-discussion (in

other words, *practice* was not involved), comrade Donovan felt it necessary to resign.

Of course, it is easy to criticise the comrade for this - and this paper has. However, it should also be noted that he was following a method lodged in the IBT since inception. In a communication to IBTers internationally, Adaire Hannah on behalf of the organisation's international secretariat, characterises this question as one of the "fundamentals of its politics ... [a matter that is] *settled* in our tradition" (my emphasis, undated). Clearly, polemic is dangerous territory for such comrades.

Essentially, comrade Gibson's letter asserts that the charge of 'economism' against the *MB/IBT* is misplaced on the strength of the evidence presented. Specifically, a leaflet issued by the comrades around the Steve Hedley dispute was characterised as "economistic" by comrade Danny Hammill (*Weekly Worker* November 12). This leaflet states - correctly - that "railworkers need what all workers need - secure jobs, good pay, strong unions, decent free healthcare, good education and more leisure time".

Comrade Gibson however cites the very next paragraph as proof against the "economism" charge. This states that "militant trade unionism by itself is not enough to get what we need ... We need to build caucuses in the unions around a political programme for working class state power that can successfully meet the assaults of the bosses." The leaflet ends with the flourish - "Break with the New Labour traitors! Union funds only for pro-working class candidates! For a workers' party funded by the unions to fight for a workers' government!"

This is perfect, comrades. Really, we could not have illustrated the miserable method of left economism better if we had tried to concoct a parody of it ourselves. In terms of the immediate demands the *MB/IBT* advance for the struggle in the here and now, we get a series of low-level, essentially 'economic' calls that on face value could be accepted by most people to the left of William Hague.

But tacked on the end is the supposedly distinctly 'Trotskyist' feature: the demand for 'socialism', a "workers' government" - in reality such abstract slogans are common to the entire economistic spectrum - from the Bennites to the SWP. The realm of high politics, the question of how the people of this country are ruled and by whom, the task of making the working class the hegemon of the fight for democracy - all of this is left unaddressed. Comrade Gibson attempts - naively or cynically - to restrict the definition of economism to the denial of the need for *any* sort of politics. Assuming this falsehood, he seriously suggests that blandly stating, "Militant trade unionism by itself is not enough", or we need a "workers' government" is sufficient to absolve the *MB/IBT* of the charge of economism!

Perhaps before the comrades present another tetchy defence they could perhaps expend some energy to find out what economism is ●

Mark Fischer

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

WW subscription £ _____

Donation £ _____

Cheques and postal orders should be in sterling.

| | 6 m | 1 yr | Institutions |
|------------------------------|-----|------|--------------|
| Britain & Ireland | £15 | £30 | £55 |
| Europe | £20 | £40 | £70 |
| Rest of World | £28 | £55 | £80 |

Special offer to new subscribers: 3 months for £5.00

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TEL _____

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

Overturn Pinochet constitution

Chilean society is deeply divided. The arrest of Augusto Pinochet on October 16 and this week's decision by Jack Straw that he must be extradited to Spain have carried with them the threat of reopening all the old wounds. This threat of 'destabilising Chile's fragile democracy' has been one of the main arguments from Pinochet's supporters in their demand to free the self-appointed 'senator for life'. This is nothing less than a veiled threat of a coup. There is in other words a burgeoning constitutional crisis.

According to a Mori poll 60% of Chileans believe he is guilty of mass crimes. Only 16% think he is innocent. And 57% want him to face trial. But the majority is so far passive. As a result Pinochet's supporters are more visible.

The difference is programme. The Chilean right is out to save *its* constitution. However, the left is not out to destroy it. According to the British/Chilean Ad-hoc Committee for Justice, up to 500 rightists are on their way to Britain to demonstrate for Pinochet's release. They must be swamped. We in Britain must organise mass demonstrations insisting his extradition be upheld and demanding his jailing in Spain. This is the best way to encourage and empower the working class in Chile.

Far from fearing the reopening of political divisions, the working class movement in Chile can use this opportunity to solve the country's constitutional crisis positively. Falling meekly behind 'official' Chilean society and its liberal and socialist spokespersons actually emboldens the right and the forces of reaction.

Even though there has been civilian rule since 1990, Chile has a blatantly undemocratic constitution. Moreover, the active participation of the military in political life continues both overtly as well as covertly. And the constitution reserves a permanent role for the armed forces as 'guarantors' of the nation's institutions. Pinochet himself only retired as head of the armed forces in March this year, to immediately take his seat as senator for life - despite demonstrations to oppose him.

On numerous occasions since the handover to a civilian president, those who have suggested that Pinochet be prosecuted have themselves been threatened, attacked, arrested or imprisoned, and actions against human rights violators have been frustrated.

Examples include:

- September 26 1990: three journalists are jailed by military courts for causing 'offence to the armed forces'.
- January 26 1991: the Supreme Court



Chilean rightwingers stand by their man (top right)

suspends Judge Carlos Cerda for refusing to invoke the 1978 amnesty law to dismiss a case relating to the disappearance of 13 persons.

- May 28 1993: armed soldiers in camouflage uniform appear near the presidential palace in a calculated threat to the continuation of human rights trials. Military courts subsequently dismiss 14 cases and the Supreme Court applies the amnesty law to seven others.
- September 23 1993: the Supreme Court upholds the decision of a military court to apply the amnesty law to close the investigation of the clandestine cemetery at Pisagua, where 19 bodies of disappeared prisoners were discovered.
- October 1993: the Supreme Court refuses an application by the Chamber of Deputies for a special prosecutor to investigate the assassination

of Allende's defence minister, general Carlos Prats, in Buenos Aires in 1973.

- October 5 1996: Communist Party general secretary Gladys Marin is jailed for two days on charges of defamation after calling Pinochet "a psychopath who reached power by means of intrigue, treason and crime".

Sending back Pinochet to Chile for 'trial' would have been the equivalent of freeing him. That is why it remains correct for us - be we in Britain, Chile or Spain - to keep up the pressure for his extradition to where he really will stand trial. But that is not all that must be done. A guilty verdict would be gratifying. But now is the time to overturn the Pinochet constitution in Chile.

As a life senator, Pinochet is immune from prosecution. Nevertheless, the seemingly innocent offer

from foreign minister José Miguel Insulza to pursue 11 existing legal cases against him has been the crack in the wall which has opened a flood of questions about the 'reconciliation' process in Chile.

From the time of the coup against Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government on September 11 1973, Pinochet's regime justified itself in terms of anti-Sovietism. The coup was referred to as the 'day of national restoration' by the right wing, and claimed as a defence of the nation and constitution against communism. Pinochet was given full backing by the US. Secretary of state Henry Kissinger famously said: "I don't see why we should stand idly by and see a country turn Marxist because of the stupidity of its own people."

On April 19 1978 the military junta declared the amnesty law. The law



pardons all individuals who committed crimes between September 11 1973 and March 10 1978: that is, throughout the state of siege period. This piece of legalism was followed up with the drafting of a new constitution and its approval in a sham plebiscite on September 11 1980. The 1980 Pinochet constitution included several 'transitional' articles which ended with the return to civilian rule in 1990.

As well as demanding justice against Pinochet, the Chilean left must campaign for the total rejection of the constitution and all the legal protections for the former regime. The current legal and judicial system cannot be relied upon to deliver justice. The demand must be for the reopening of all cases of the disappeared through a rejection of the 1978 amnesty decree and the convocation of a constituent assembly.

The arrest of Pinochet must be placed in the context of the New World Order. Despite having no Soviet rival, imperialism, under the hegemony of the United States, needs political legitimacy for its global domination. The new doctrine of making dictators pay, even if they are the 'legitimate' heads of state, initially applied to rogue regimes. It is permissible to gun for Saddam Hussein, Kim Jong il or Slobodan Milosevic - this was all test-run when the US invaded Panama to arrest Manuel Noriega, then public enemy number one. Now that doctrine has been extended to ex-dictators. Imperialism is cloaking itself in democracy. It can do that only in conditions of working class passivity and defeat. That can and must be changed.

An upsurge to sweep away Pinochet's constitution would open up the possibility of the working class and its organisations winning political hegemony. Only then should the Chilean people accept the return of the dictator, in the full expectation of winning justice at last ●

Marcus Larsen