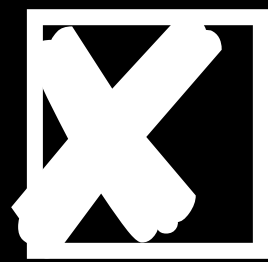




# Vote Socialist Unity



Left organisations in the North Defoe ward in Hackney have united under the banner of Socialist Unity in a by-election battle. Voting is on January 21. As well as individual revolutionaries, this bloc comprises the Hackney branches of the Socialist Labour Party, Communist Party of Great Britain, the Socialist Alliance, the Socialist Workers Party and Turkish and Kurdish organisations. The unity candidate is **Anne Murphy** of the Communist Party and Hackney SA, who gives us this report

**T**he constituency is a mixed one, with little middle class islands dotted about here and there. We were not surprised to discover that these areas were fairly solidly Green Party. In the working class areas, the feedback we are getting is positive. Practically everyone who answers the door to our canvassers is anti-Labour, or very disillusioned. Here we are getting a good response - the fight is to translate this into votes on the day.

There is a chance that our vote will be squeezed as there is a needle match between Labour and the Greens. But this is not a foregone conclusion - we need as many people out as we possibly can on the doorsteps in the final week or so.

Obviously, we are fighting to win. But probably what is the most important feature of the whole campaign is the degree of practical working unity that has been achieved. Despite the Christmas and New Year breaks, we have managed to bring comrades together to decide the candidate, the manifesto, everything. We have divided up the constituency between organisations and - because everyone has been involved and feels the cam-

paign is theirs - we are getting the work done quickly and pretty effectively.

With all modesty, this campaign and the way it has been run provides some positive lessons for the vari-

ous unity projects of the left. We certainly plan to continue working closely and debating with comrades in the aftermath of this by-election. North Defoe is only the beginning! ●

## Join the campaign!

**Public meeting:** Candidate hustings hosted by Socialist Unity. Monday January 18 - 6.30pm, public library, Church Street, N16.

**Lobby the council:** Wednesday January 20 - 6pm. On the eve of the by-election - Stop Hackney Council's cuts and attacks on services. Called by Hackney Unison, TGWU and GMB branches.

**Socialist Unity social.** Wednesday January 20, from 9.30pm till late. The Cema Gallery, 129 Stoke Newington High Street, N16. Music, film, sound system and more.

**Donations to the campaign urgently required.** Please make cheques and postal orders payable to London Socialist Alliance and send to LSA, Box 22, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS

## United Socialists edge forward

**T**he last meeting of the united left bloc for the 1999 Euro elections, currently titled the United Socialists, met on January 5. Comrades were present from the Communist Party of Great Britain, Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Independent Labour Network, Socialist Democracy Group, plus observers from Workers Power.

We took a number of decisions that edge the whole process forward and - importantly - began discussions around the thorny issue of London mayoral elections in 2000. All decisions of the bloc so far have been by consensus, reflecting the present tentative stage of unity. A format for voting was agreed - one organisation, one vote - which is yet to be tested.

The meeting agreed:

- A date for a launch press conference and a rally.
- That we should stand under the same name as the ILN initiative, as this will maximise our collective chances of national publicity, including the possibility of a TV broadcast.
- That organisations that have candidates on the final slate will be expected to stump up a percentage of the deposit - £500 per candidate. The question of other running costs for the campaign were raised, but left to subsequent meetings to discuss in more detail.

The question of a unity candidate

for the London mayoral elections came up at the end of the evening. As we have reported, comrades in these meetings have expressed some disquiet about the announcement of the SWP that it intends to stand Paul Foot in the event of Ken Livingstone's candidacy being blocked (see *Weekly Worker* December 3). This decision appeared to have been foisted on London, effectively pre-empting any open, properly constituted discussion of the political basis for such a united challenge.

In a very welcome move, the SWP representative at the January 5 meeting regretted the arbitrary and sectarian impression that had been created. He emphasised that Paul Foot is being put forward as a *possible* candidate and that the question should be discussed by other organisations (see 'Party notes', p2).

The meeting also agreed a press launch, to be held on January 26, and a launch rally for April 24. The next organising meeting will be on Tuesday January 19 - phone the Socialist Party for details ●

United Socialists can be contacted at PO Box 23323, London SE16 1YR

# Party notes

## Livingstone for mayor?

Speaking on behalf of the Socialist Workers Party at the January 5 United Socialists meeting (see report, front page), Pat Stack described the way that the left found out about the possible candidacy of Paul Foot for London mayor as “not ideal”, even “unfortunate”.

Quite true. Socialists and revolutionaries first learned of this when comrade Foot was presented as *the* “socialist candidate” - in the pages of *The Guardian* (November 24 1998). This particularly rankled with those involved in discussions with the SWP within United Socialists to create a united left platform for the European elections this year. In a healthy move, SWP comrades have now underlined their commitment to a democratic process, and that they are open to suggestion and arguments from other organisations.

So what should be our approach to this important round of elections?

First, there is Livingstone. In principle, there is absolutely nothing wrong with supporting his right to stand. This would be a blow against the Blairite stranglehold over the Labour Party, something which could create fluidity. With this in mind, it is hard to understand the article from Mark Osborn of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty in last week's paper.

Mark ticks off comrades from Workers Fight, implying that AWL could not support any possible Livingstone candidacy. He suggests that “the left must make honest, public balance sheets of its actions, policies, etc” (*Weekly Worker* January 7). This accounting would presumably include criticism of those who advocated backing for Blair's party in 1996 - including a vote to Livingstone, of course - as a prelude to a ‘crisis of expectations’, comrade Osborn?

Of course, supporting Livingstone's right to stand should in no way equate with unconditional backing for him as mayor. Under present conditions, he does not represent any sort of mass movement, but feeds off inarticulate left sentiment in society itself. More than that, Livingstone is an unprincipled careerist. He is not fighting to become London mayor to spark the working class into life, but to further his own ambitions. His real priority is a government post - perhaps as a junior minister of transport.

The SWP has suggested that it will unconditionally support the man in the (unlikely) event that he stands, “because [ordinary people] see him as a leftwing opponent of Blair's pro-business policies” (*Socialist Worker* November 28 1998). Paul Foot suggests that he is “100% behind Ken, but if he is not selected ... then there should be a socialist candidate” (*The Guardian* November 24 1998).

Surely the correct position - aside from whatever tactical support is offered to Livingstone in his tussle with Blair - is ensuring that there *will* be a socialist candidate. The notion that a Ken Livingstone standing as the official Blairite candidate would have anything to do with ‘socialism’ is mere wishful thinking (if he broke with Labour in order to stand, it would be a different story). Thus, any candidate - Livingstone, Foot or anyone else - must be evaluated *politically*.

Which brings us back to Paul Foot. At the moment, his is the only name in the hat. He is a reasonably well known political figure, associated with socialist opposition to Blair's Labour. He certainly has a long record of principled campaigning. He could be an effective unity candidate.

However, London comrades - including SWP members themselves - should have the right to question the candidate. A minimum platform should be negotiated that Paul Foot or any other candidate must defend. This can act as the unifying element in a joint campaign. It should go without saying that any component part of such a bloc - including comrade Foot and the SWP - must be free to produce their own, supplementary or critical propaganda alongside such a minimum platform. As we have learned from our practical work in the London Socialist Alliance and in the current by-election contest in Hackney, this is a precondition for principled unity.

Lastly, our candidate must be adopted democratically - in stark contrast to squalid machinations in Blair's party, of course. We have already suggested that this should take the form of an open meeting of the entire London left. The numerical strength of the SWP may appear to make the result a foregone conclusion. But this is not the point. The exemplary nature of such an approach - open, mass and democratic - should not be underestimated. ●

**Mark Fischer**  
national organiser

## Petty bourgeois?

The letter by Steve Johns (*Weekly Worker* January 7) outlines three main areas of criticism of my analysis of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* journal. Firstly, the relationship between theory and the material world. Secondly, whether prediction is necessary for explaining political development. Thirdly, the character of sexuality.

In relation to the first point, in contrast to Johns' claims, I was not trying to suggest that the conflict between different theories represents an idealist autonomy from the material world. On the contrary it is not possible to separate theories from the world: rather the conflict between different theories represents a divergent conceptual mediation and interpretation of the material world. Thus theory is ultimately related to different class interests.

The conflict between different theories occurs throughout all theoretical disciplines, such as between rigid Darwinists (Richard Dawkins) versus moderate (sceptical?) Darwinists (Stephen Jay Gould). The complexity and diversity of theories does not mean we have to become relativist and sceptical: it is still possible to make choices between them in rational terms. The capacity for cognition to make choices is an important reason why we choose to become Marxists in a world dominated by bourgeois ideology.

An additional question needs to be asked. Why is Marxism more coherent and intelligible than rival ideas and theories? My answer would be that Marxism has a better comprehension of the class struggle than rival theories. Marxism is not emphasising class struggle because of dogma, but can show that social structures represent exploitation and oppression that generate class struggle. This does not mean that Marxism is complete and represents absolute truth. Marxism can become one-sided and stagnant. The Marxist approach will only gain support if Marxists defend their perspectives in an open and flexible manner.

Thus in order to be convincing Marxists have to be prepared for dialogue, but to Johns dialogue with non-Marxists is just opportunism and conciliation. Thus Johns' mention of Aristotle shows the EPSR's rigid differentiation of theory into ‘Marxism versus reaction’. Aristotle is dismissed as an anti-Marxist thinker, which leads to an effective denial of his contribution towards the development of the law of value, and his role in the development of philosophy is also treated with contempt.

Johns argues that materialism recognises that before theory Marx got to know the world “through conflict, actual material struggle”. But what he is justifying is the view that knowledge at the level of appearance, sensation, experience and intuition is primary. However, this is not theoretical knowledge, and such a standpoint leads to subjective idealism. Marx and Engels had an intellectual background of Hegelianism, and this gave them the theoretical and political confidence to become active adherents in the struggle for bourgeois democratic political change. Subsequently, without this theoretical development it would not have been possible for them to have interpreted the beginning of capitalism in a revolutionary proletarian manner. Johns is reluctant to elaborate upon the intellectual context of the development of Marxism because it would show the limitations in his empiricist standpoint.

With regards to the second main area of criticism John argues: without prediction is capitalism unknowable? In reply I would suggest that an emphasis upon prediction is an expression of ideological consolation about the world, and represents the diversity of idealist illusions that have sustained religion and utopian socialism. In 1916 Lenin predicted that it may be a long time before the next Russian revolution, but getting this prediction wrong did not stop him from being a great revolutionary. Rather what is indicated it how foolish it was to make such a prediction. Bourgeois ideologues sometimes try to discredit Marxism on the basis of producing selective predictions by Marx about the relationship between economic crisis and revolution. This arbitrary procedure does nothing to tell us whether Marxism is an explanatory approach.

Johns maintains that Lenin's theory of imperialism is connected very closely to prediction. Lenin considered the development of monopoly capital and finance capital as a structural representation of the intensification of the contradictions of capitalism, in particular the contradiction between the increased socialisation of production and the regressive private ownership of the means of production. Lenin's perspective outlined the potential for international proletarian revolution in the short term, but this analysis did not represent prediction, which is inherently rigid, specific and impressionistic. Prediction is superficial because we can never control, or project what will happen in relation to, human actions in the future. Indeed, human actions can have many unintended consequences that show prediction is a pretext for wishful thinking, because prediction represents the illusion that human activity can defy objective problems and reach its self-proclaimed end.

Contrary to Johns' claims I was not trying to suggest that it is not possible to understand capitalism. Rather I was arguing that prediction about the effects of crisis, decline and recession, can be virtually impossible because of the anarchic nature of capitalism. But this theoretical problem concerning the accuracy of prediction does not mean the crisis of capitalism cannot be explained. For example, possible causes of the crisis include the role of finance capital, the falling rate of profit and the decline of industrial capital, which has led to the decrease in the objective basis for the production of surplus value in the imperialist countries, and the end to the boom in the expanding capitalist countries. The significance of these developments is not yet generalised, and has not yet brought about trade war, which would signify the onset of global crisis. It is necessary to be cautious in relation to the conclusions of economic analysis. This is not in order to adapt to what exists, but to avoid subjective guesswork. For subjective analysis has more to do with generating false optimism than developing a scientific approach. Possibly one day the EPSR will be able to tell everyone, ‘We told you so’, but this will still not mean that their rigid predictive approach has explained why we have arrived at the situation we are in. Instead they will only be able to tell us that we have arrived.

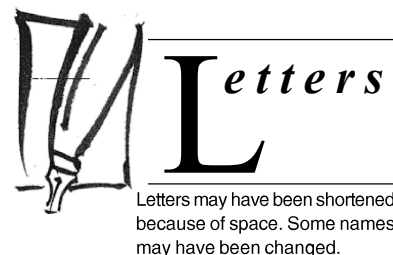
Having read the EPSR closely for over two years, it presents a catastrophist stance that crisis can lead to trade war, war and the potential for revolution. This approach represents an emphasis upon objective processes that humans can do nothing to alter or modify. Thus the question not asked by the EPSR is: will the capitalist class do nothing in order to try and prevent the onset of world war and revolution? Has the imperialist bourgeoisie not learnt from two world wars, and countless smaller wars, that war leads to political instability and the prospect of revolution, whether this be proletarian or anti-imperialist revolution?

The third area of criticism made by Johns concerns my comment about the complexity involved with regards to understanding sexuality. I was trying to show that Roy Bull's explanation was antiquated, unscientific and an accommodation to bourgeois ideology. Personally I do not have an alternative theory, because unlike Roy Bull I am not a theoretical expert on sexual orientation. But one aspect of sexuality not mentioned by Roy Bull and Johns is love. Love is a central aspect of durable relations, and is obviously not limited to one type of sexuality. Human beings seem to have a basic need for love, and it is this need which can advance not only our understanding of sexuality, but also express an aspect of the potential for overcoming capitalism and establishing communism.

**Phil Sharpe**  
Nottingham

## Pointless game

In his article on Jesus (*Weekly Worker* December 17) Jack Conrad reaches the interesting conclusion that “Jesus was a brave -



albeit ultra-left - revolutionary who wrongly staked all not on the masses, but a coup and outside intervention” (by the heavenly host of angels).

This conclusion, he admits, is based on “imagination and common sense” - ie, is not based on facts. It could not be, as there are not any. The only historical evidence we have for the existence of Jesus is the Christians' holy book they call the ‘new testament’, which was written more than 50 years - at least - after Jesus was supposed to have lived. But Conrad admits that this is so full of myths, legends, interpolations and redactions that it is quite unreliable as history.

It is, nevertheless, a historical document, but the only facts we can extract from it are that there was a person of that name who was a preacher and teacher in Galilee in the first century of our era. We could probably add that he called on his Jewish co-religionists to repent and change their ways, as the end of the world was nigh. Beyond this we can say nothing. We cannot say, as Conrad's scenario posits, that he was proclaimed “king of the Jews”, nor that he was executed by the Romans, nor that he led a “mass movement”.

In fact, in view of the fact that he is not mentioned at all by the Jewish historian Josephus (except for forged insertions by later Christian scribes), who wrote at the same times as the authors of the new testament, we can conclude that his movement and demise were not significant. Josephus mentions one incident concerning someone who Conrad would perhaps regard as another “brave ultra-left”, a certain Thaddeus, who, he said, tried to take over Jerusalem with only 300 followers. To not have rated a mention in Josephus, the historical Jesus must have been even less significant.

The materialist approach to christianity is not to join in the pointless game of trying to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus (there is nothing to go on except speculation, but how can you choose between speculations?), but to explain the rise and triumph of the Christian religion in Europe and the Middle East in Roman times or, rather, of a universalist religion based on the self-sacrifice of a saviour-god - since, had Jesus never existed, economic conditions would still have required the development of such a religion and we in Europe would have been taught over the past 1,700 years to worship, as the son of a god sent to save us, Mithras, Dionysus, Attis or even Thaddeus.

**Adam Buick**  
West London

## Defend Mumia

IBT comrades in Britain are helping to build a public meeting in defence of Mumia Abu-Jamal, to be held at Conway Hall at 7.30pm, Thursday January 28. There will be speakers, discussion from the floor and space for stalls. It is hoped that this meeting will be the launch of a united front coalition to organise further events in defence of Mumia.

**Barbara Duke**  
IBT Britain/*Marxist Bulletin*

## Fascist march

On Saturday January 9 the Nazis of the National Front held their third march against asylum-seekers in Dover. Despite having had barely three days' notice, anti-fascists were able to mobilise some 60 people to oppose the fascists' march along the seafront - twice the number mustered by the NF.

Despite the overwhelming police presence, thanks to the efforts of the anti-fascists it took the NF more than three quarters of an hour to march the half-mile from the Eastern Docks to the Western Docks.

The NF say that they intend to keep holding marches in Dover every few months. Local anti-fascists will keep on trying to stop them.

**Residents Against Racism**  
Dover



# Not to bring peace

**action**

For decades the christian establishment was known as the Tory Party at prayer. Then it became, according to some, the SDP at prayer - and perhaps New Labour at prayer. But now the rapidly declining cult has decided that it is time for a face-lift.

Remember all those rightwing Conservative MPs like Norman Tebbit who used to fulminate against "Marxist bishops" (when they were not condemning the BBC as the "Bolshevik Broadcasting Company")? These "Marxist bishops" had committed the cardinal sin of mentioning the poverty and social deprivation of Britain under Tory rule - and in the case of the then bishop of Durham had expressed some sort of vague humanitarian-philanthropic solidarity with the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85.

It seems that the good brethren have taken inspiration from the jibes of Tebbit *et al*. It has now decided to repackage itself as the Tooting Popular Front at prayer - or at least to make an effort to convince us that to be a christian is to be part of a radical counter-culture. A group called Christians in Media have launched a poster campaign which seeks to associate Jesus with the semi-mythical revolutionary, Ernesto Che Guevara. This takes the form of manipulating the classic 'student bedsit' Che image (which seems to have become a capitalist product *par excellence*) in order to make Jesus look like the charismatic Argentinean - so the Guevara image now has a crown of thorns as opposed to a beret with a five-point star. The slogan underneath the 'Jesus Guevara/Che Christ' depiction has the words, "Meek and mild, as if: discover the real Jesus". This also ties in nicely of course with the razzmatazz surrounding the 40th anniversary of the Cuban revolution.

In other words, the iconography of the suffering and passive martyr, Jesus, is being replaced - at least for this particular campaign - by the iconography of the violent revolution-



Both Jesus and Che were violent revolutionaries

ary martyr, Che Guevara. As the reverend Tom Ambrose, of the Churches in Advertising Network, put it, "We want people to realise that Jesus is not a wimp in a white nightie or someone who is a bit of a walkover, but a strong, revolutionary figure."

Naturally, this has proved all too much for the delicate sensibilities of the christian 'traditionalists'. Harry Greenway of the Conservative Christian Fellowship has denounced the Christians in Media campaign as "grossly sacrilegious". Ann Widdecombe, new convert to Roman catholicism from Anglicanism, retorted: "As far as this poster goes, we should be modelling ourselves on Christ, not modelling Christ on us." Quite understandably, the bishop of Wakefield did not think the poster campaign was "the proper way of presenting the message of love and peace".

Communists would indeed support the supposed aim of the poster campaign to "discover the real Jesus" - ie, the *historical* Jesus. He was certainly not meek and mild. Nor was he a wimpy pacifist who urged the masses to turn the other cheek and love their Roman oppressors. Jesus was a violent revolutionary who wanted to establish a theocratic communism. Therefore we have to disagree with the ignorant comments of the reverend Peter Owen-Jones, a key figure behind Christians in the Media: "We are not saying that Jesus was a communist, but that he was a revolutionary."

The truth is that, no matter how uncomfortable it may be for christians, Jesus was both a revolutionary and a communist - albeit of an apocalyptic or primitive sort. In that sense, the similarities between Jesus and Guevara are not to be lightly dismissed. They have much in common. However, it should be plain for all to see that you will not discover the real Jesus following the christian cult - whatever denomination or schism. To do that you will have to read - for instance - the works of Karl Kautsky (*The foundations of christianity*), outstanding Jewish scholars like Hyam Maccoby (*Revolution in*

*Judea*) or the publications of the Communist Party of Great Britain (see Jack Conrad, 'Jesus: from Jewish revolutionary to imperial god' *Weekly Worker* December 17 1998).

The positive qualities possessed by Jesus and Guevara (courage, selflessness, self-sacrifice, etc) need to be balanced with more negative ones. Both revolutionaries had their faults. Marxists are not pantheists who have a list of secular saints who are somehow above criticism. We must ruthlessly criticise everything and everybody. For materialists, the prime charge to direct against both Jesus and Guevara was the fact that they were fundamentally *utopian* revolutionaries. That is, they looked to an elite minority to bring salvation. For Jesus it was his tiny band of disciples armed with two swords; while for the more practical Guevara it was the guerrilla units (or *foci*) armed with AK47s which would descend upon the cities and introduce 'communism'. Jesus had god and divine intervention to rely upon; Guevara looked towards the guerrilla leader triggering an uprising of the masses.

Under the revolutionary doctrines of Jesus the masses are relegated to the role of cheerleaders - at best. Jesus's god-given *monarchical* communism was not democratic; it did not look to self-liberation. Ultimately, neither did Guevara's guerilla nucleus. This was amply demonstrated during his ill-fated Bolivian campaign. His forces were regarded more with fear than rejoicing by the downtrodden and oppressed peasantry, to whom the appearance of Guevara meant army retribution and hence yet more suffering.

His narodnik-utopian scheme stifled the real class struggle. Guevara's impatience and frustration was therefore often directed *against* the peasantry he was supposed to be liberating. As John Lee Anderson writes, "Fear and panic from civilians often greeted their [Guevara's unit] arrival, and to obtain food and information they frequently had to resort to coercion, adopting the practice of holding people hostage while a relative or friend was sent off on errands

for them" (JL Anderson *Che Guevara: a revolutionary life* London 1997, p722).

Jesus and Guevara were also united by their *voluntarism*, which dismissed material reality and the existing social-economic conditions as essentially irrelevant to the revolutionary struggle. Jesus had the illusion that he and his small band could seize the temple in Jerusalem and immediately inaugurate the 'kingdom of god'. Guevara thought that the chronically backward countries of Cuba, Bolivia, Congo, Vietnam, etc were ripe for 'communism' - all that was necessary was an extreme act of will and heroic self-sacrifice. In 1960 René Dumont, a French Marxist economist, held discussions with Guevara. He came to the opinion that Guevara "was far ahead of his time - in thought, he had already entered a communist stage" (*ibid* p480).

The flip-side of Guevara's romantic narodnik-utopianism was an attraction to bureaucracy and personality cultism. For all his criticisms, Guevara saw the 'socialist bloc' countries as models. His admiration for JV Stalin or Mao never diminished. Quite the opposite appears to be the case.

It is perfectly true that in his later years Guevara became disenchanted with the "state capitalist" Soviet Union and its vassals. But his growing, and understandable, cynicism about the Soviet bureaucracy took the semi-Maoist form of an *increased* admiration for the 'anti-Soviet regimes' in China, North Korea, Albania, etc. His hopes for the future became focused almost exclusively on the rural, undeveloped countries and the 'noble peasant'.

Consequently, he effectively abandoned the proletariat - especially those in the advanced capitalist countries - who lived in the "degenerate cities", and seemed bent on the creation of a "pastoral utopia" through guerrilla warfare (*ibid* p621 and p299). It is not too difficult to see where petty bourgeois groups like the Revolutionary Communist Group/*Fight Racism Fight Imperialism* get their 'third worldist' moralism from. For the RCG virtually all workers - except 'the dispossessed' - in the advanced countries are by definition 'labour aristocrats'.

Interestingly enough, as more evidence of his romantic utopianism, Guevara viewed Lenin as "the culprit" - if not the fallen angel - for introducing the New Economic Policy and hence 'ruining' the pristine ideals of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union. Instead, Guevara glorified the years of war communism, when money - and hence, so he thought, individualism - had been 'abolished' ... by civil war, famine, chaos and generalised want.

You could say that unlike Guevara, Jesus did not enjoy the advantage of having access to Marxism and scientific socialism - nor did he look to state dictatorships as vehicles for salvation. Then again, Guevara always looked to *human beings*, not supernatural forces, as the agency of political-social change and history.

Whatever the case, we must not let the christian cult appropriate and hijack the revolutionary kernel which you can find in the doctrines of Jesus and Ernesto Che Guevara. The established church's mission has been to provide theological justifications for the status quo and exploitative class rule. Jesus and Che were revolutionaries who sided with the oppressed ●

Danny Hammill

## ■ CPGB seminars

**London:** Sunday January 17, 5pm - 'The third period of the dictatorship of the proletariat', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* Vol 3 as a study guide. For details phone 0181-459 7146.

**Manchester:** 'Wages' in the series on Karl Marx's *Capital*. Monday January 18, 7.30 pm. For details, phone 0161-798 6417. E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.

## ■ Party wills

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

## ■ London Socialist Alliance

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

## ■ Welsh Socialist Alliance

Cardiff branch of the WSA will be discussing its election material. Monday February 1, 7.30pm at the Bo-Sun pub, Maria Street, Cardiff Docks.

## ■ Greater Manchester SA

'Time for united action' conference. Saturday February 13, 10am-4pm, Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester. £5 (organisations). For details ring John (0161-286 7679), Margaret (0161-861 8390) or Norma (0161-445 6681).

## ■ Glasgow Marxist Forum

Public meeting - 'Towards a Marxist political economy of Labourism and the welfare state'. Speaker: Pete Kennedy. Thursday January 28, 7.30pm, Partrick Burgh Halls. All welcome.

## ■ Oppose all immigration laws

National demonstration to defend asylum and immigration rights, Saturday February 27. Assemble 12 noon, Embankment tube. Called by the Coalition for Asylum and Immigration Rights. For more information contact the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC), 101 Villa Road, Birmingham B21 1NH. Phone: 0121-554 6947; E-mail: CAIR@ncadc.demon.co.uk.

## ■ Dover Residents Against Racism

For details phone Patrick on (01304) 216102 or Martin on (01304) 206140.

## ■ Support Tameside careworkers

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

## Where to get your Weekly Worker

### ■ London

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**Centre Prize Bookshop** 136-138 Kingsland High Street, E8 2NS  
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**Housemans** 5 Caledonian Road, N1 9DX  
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**New Beacon Books** 76 Stroud Green Road, N4 3EN  
**The Economists Bookshop** Portugal Street, clare Market, WC2

### ■ Bristol

**Greenleaf** 82 Colston Street, BS1 5BB  
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**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

### ■ Southampton

**October Books** 4 Onslow Road, SO2 0JB

Simon Harvey of the SLP

# Scargill goes public

## Desperate times call for desperate measures

**O**ur general secretary has at last been forced to openly admit the existence not only of leadership differences, but of rival factions within the Socialist Labour Party, including on the national executive.

The *SLP Information Bulletin* - dated December 1998, but circulated to the membership within the last week - gives us a rare report of controversial decisions taken by the NEC at its December 12 meeting (see extract below). Of course comrade Scargill would have preferred not to have to inform 'his' party about such matters. Much better to "focus on the real struggle" - ie, where the membership simply follows the leadership's wise guidance on questions of policy, and does not concern itself with the small matter of the kind of party the working class needs. But recent events had left him with little option but to take the bull by the horns: not only did he force through three motions to reinforce his control, but felt obliged to actually tell the members about what he has done.

The problem was that these questions were already public knowledge amongst remaining party activists. Many of them are on the verge of resigning because of recent events, which culminated in the election of Royston Bull, then editor of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, to the vice-presidency last November, replacing Scargill's former close confidant, Patrick Sikorski of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus (Fisc).

Readers will recall that the leading Fiscites (Pat Sikorski, Carolyn Sikorski and Brian Heron) were increasingly dissatisfied with Scargill's dictatorial regime - a mood which was exacerbated by his failure to organise a full annual congress for 1998. The only show of democracy allowed at the November 14 special congress in Manchester was in the elections for national officers and the new NEC. When it was known how the Manchester congress was to be organised, Fisc decided to launch their 'Appeal for a special conference' in order to "bring [the problems] out into the light and fix them together". They quickly gathered 53 signatures from among their close contacts, headed by comrades Heron, Carolyn Sikorski, Terry Dunn and Helen Drummond.

Clearly Fisc and their allies felt that this move was totally in line with the constitution, which states that "A special congress may be convened at any time by the national executive committee or upon request by 25% of the membership calculated for this purpose on the voting entitlement at the last party congress" (clause V1 (2)). Their appeal even included the sentence, "We have a constitution which all must respect and abide by." In order to provide some background, they circulated Pat Sikorski's proposals aiming to clip Scargill's wings, 'Renewing our sense of purpose' (see *Weekly Worker* November 12 1998) and the general secretary's rambling 'A reply to renewing our sense of purpose'.

Scargill was furious. He decided to ditch his former Fiscite courtiers, giving the nod to the 'Campaign to support Scargill and the national leadership of the Socialist Labour

Party' with its list of recommended candidates for the NEC elections. Comrades Heron and Dunn were beaten by a slate of loyalists, *EPSR* supporters and Harpal Brar of the Stalin Society, while a sullen comrade Drummond withdrew. And of course Roy Bull easily saw off Pat Sikorski for the vice-presidency. Only Carolyn Sikorski was successful - re-elected unopposed by the Fisc-dominated women's section.

Fisc hit back in its London power base, where Heron is regional president. Suddenly 'discovering' the homophobic contents of the *EPSR*, Fisc demanded that Bull be "immediately removed from his position" (ie, that Scargill should overrule the democratic election), failing which it would be "completely impossible to consider any further electoral challenge on behalf of the party in London". In other words Heron and co would go on strike when it came to the European elections in June.

So now we have comrade Scargill's 'even-handed' response. Both Fisc and the *EPSR* are told to behave in the hope that he can keep both factions on board. He even lets it be known in another part of the *SLP Information Bulletin* that he has "paid tribute to the hard work of Brian Heron" in the setting up of the youth section. But the Scargillite motions - all backed "overwhelmingly" by the NEC - are full of contradictions.

Firstly there is the outrageous ban on members circulating *any* documents within the party "other than with the authorisation of the NEC". Members are told they have the abstract right to request a special congress - but no means whatsoever of coordinating such a call. Branches are clearly not allowed by this edict to write to each other at all (although Scargill has carelessly forgotten to outlaw telephone calls).

There is only one organisation which - theoretically - could muster 25% support without contacting any other CSLP or party affiliate: the 3,000-strong North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association. Even if the party membership total is calculated using Scargill's normal method - adding up all the names of every person who has ever applied to join - the NWCCMA would have around half. Using the 'constitutional' method - the "voting entitlement at the last party congress" (3,775 affiliated members, plus a mere 450 individuals) - it would have almost three quarters. In reality most affiliated members, including those belonging to the NWCCMA retired miners' club, have never even heard of the SLP.

In other words only Scargill himself can call a special congress. Either he gets the NEC to exercise its constitutional right or, in the unlikely event of his inability to win an NEC majority, he tells Paul Hardman to fix it through

the NWCCMA. Of course in normal circumstances membership consultation is the last thing our general secretary wants.

The motion on the *EPSR* is noteworthy in that it more or less forces Bull to distance himself from his own bulletin. In fact Bull has let it be known, using an intermediary through the *Weekly Worker*, that he is no longer the editor (officially at least). Neither he nor his *EPSR* comrades on the NEC are likely to write for it under their own names. But the *EPSR* is clearly not a proscribed publication, even though clause II (4) of the constitutions supposedly bans groups "which have their own programme, principles and policies, distinctive and separate propaganda" from membership.

Up to now Scargill has turned a blind eye to the *EPSR*'s open circulation - the Bullites have been more than useful to him as sycophantic cheerleaders and anti-communist witch hunters. But now the widespread outrage at its homophobic contents, intensified after Bull's election, means that comrade Scargill can no longer simply ignore the cut-and-paste weekly. The *EPSR* must submit to self-censorship. Not only must its publishers "give an undertaking that it will not comment on the affairs of the SLP", but its contents must not "lead SLP members to conclude" that it is being discriminatory against women, homosexuals, etc.

The ban on public "comment on the affairs of the SLP" is yet another dictatorial, anti-democratic and

frankly counterproductive ruling for any working class organisation that genuinely wants to find a way forward. Then there is the implication that any individual SLP member need only "conclude" that a publication is "attacking and discriminating" - irrespective of the truth - to presumably allow Scargill to demand its closure.

Personally I have no time for many of the opinions that find their way into Bull's rag. Despite its supporters' denials, its views are homophobic - whether they like it or not. See, for example, Steve Johns' horror in his letter to the *Weekly Worker* last week at the thought that "homosexuality is as preferable as, and on a norm with, heterosexuality" (January 7). As all good 'Marxists' know, homosexuality is a "perversion", an "emotional and sexual malfunction". The *EPSR* prefers good old bourgeois 'family values', where "a loving father figure" guarantees that little Johnny will turn out straight as a die. And they call this "science".

But that is not the point. Surely the best way to defeat wrong and reactionary ideas is through exposing them out in the open. I am not suggesting that, for example, the *Weekly Worker* should have a liberal, 'anything goes' policy on what it publishes. Everything must be judged on its merits. I would not expect it to give prominence to a dissenting voice during a key action. And we ought to have no hesitation whatsoever in stamping on racist or homophobic views being put out in the name of the party. Nevertheless, in general comrades must be entitled to say what they want - and in their own publications if necessary.

In my opinion it is not the *EPSR*'s homophobia which is the most dangerous aspect of its views. In fact it is symptomatic of the Bullites' contempt for all working class struggles for democracy - whether it be national self-determination, women's equality or gay rights. They have no notion of our class championing the oppressed in order to liberate itself, nor of the victory of communism ushering in a new age of freedom, where each individual can find full expression - physical, cultural and, yes, sexual. Their 'socialism' is one where the workers must conform to the Great Leader's will.

But back to the *SLP Information Bulletin*. It is always useful when bureaucrats are forced into print. For instance, in 1996 Scargill bluntly told an SLP trade union conference, "There will be no factions in the SLP." His leaflet handed to a meeting of the Campaign for a Democratic SLP (by his then ally, Terry Dunn) in 1997 informed those present that "any member who attends a 'faction'" is acting contrary to the constitution. Yet his third NEC motion states that only those "individuals, groups, factions or journals/bulletins" who "refuse to comply with these policy decisions" will face disciplinary proceedings.

The implication of this sentence is that in general it is now quite all right not only to form a "faction", but to publish a "journal" - just what the *EPSR* and comrade Harpal Brar (editor of the Stalinite *Lalkar* bi-monthly) have been doing ever since they joined our party. Yet even this is apparently contradicted by a warning to "those individuals who organise groups and/or factions contrary to the party's constitution".

Just who can do what, Arthur? ●

## Report from NEC

### Part of document circulated to SLP membership

**A**t its meeting on December 12, the NEC also adopted several motions put forward by the general secretary, which he had formulated, he explained, in hope of helping all within the SLP to focus on the real struggle - to win mass support for socialist policies - that lies ahead for our party.

One resolution dealt with an 'Appeal' from a number of individual members calling for a special two-day conference to discuss the direction of the party, which has been circulated together with NEC documents (but without the consent or prior knowledge of the NEC or the general secretary, author of one of these documents) since October.

On this matter, the NEC overwhelmingly agreed: "That the initiators of the 'Appeal' be instructed to withdraw the 'Appeal', cease their activities immediately, and undertake to abide by the party's constitution. The NEC emphasises that no individual member of the party and no group of individuals within the party is allowed to circulate any appeal, document, letter, etc to CSLPs, affiliated trade unions, sections, etc, other than with the authorisation of the NEC."

All members should be organised in CSLPs and/or membership in affiliated trade unions. If any member wishes to call for the convening of a special congress (the 'Appeal' called for a "special conference") this would have to be in accordance with clause VI (2) of the party's constitution; a member would have to raise this through her/his CSLP and/or affiliated trade union; if such a call secured support of 25% of

the party's membership calculated on the basis of votes at the previous congress, then a special congress would be convened in accordance with the constitution.

Another resolution dealt with concerns arising from the election at the special congress of the current vice-president, and material appearing regularly in a bulletin called the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* (*EPSR*), with which he is closely connected.

The general secretary proposed: "That the publishers and contributors of the *EPSR* cease publication of that journal, or alternatively give an undertaking that it will not comment on the affairs of the SLP or carry contributions that may lead members to conclude that the *EPSR* is attacking and discriminating against women or sections within our society because of sexual orientation/preference and/or religion, etc." This motion was overwhelmingly adopted by the NEC.

It was also agreed by the NEC: "That if any individuals, groups, factions or journals/bulletins referred to refuse to comply with these policy decisions by the NEC, then the general secretary be empowered to bring proceedings against the individuals responsible for the production of 'Appeals', bulletins, journals, etc, or those individuals who organise groups and/or factions contrary to the party's constitution, such proceedings to be brought under the terms of the party's complaints procedures."

Hopefully, these decisions will allow us all to get on with the *real* fight: against the capitalist system! ●

# Tendency debates Bull

Arthur Scargill has a little problem with Royston Bull's fear of gay people. The newly elected vice-president of the Socialist Labour Party was, until very recently, the editor of the *Economic and Philosophic and Science Review* in which he regularly gave full vent to his prejudices against homosexuals. This is no more or less a crime than if Bull was to publish 'scientific' articles on the inferiority of black people.

There is a second and less obvious implication of Bull's election. It signals a change in the political character of the SLP itself. The only future for the SLP is as a broad-based party open to comrades with both Labourite and communist or Marxist views. The election of a national executive consisting almost exclusively of Bull and his *EPSR* cronies, along with Harpal Brar and Scargill and his close supporters means that the SLP is becoming clearly identified with one trend, namely Stalinism.

The leadership of Bull, Brar and Scargill has Stalinist instincts, methods and ideas. All it needs is for comrade Scargill to take control of the *Morning Star* to complete the picture. This narrowing down of the SLP project is the logical consequence of a series of defeats suffered by the SLP beginning with the witch hunt, the use of the block vote, and various attempts to silence members who have criticised this.

Many anti-Stalinist comrades have been prepared to work and cooperate with Stalinists in a broad-based party, in the interests of the working class. But such a party could only survive and prosper on a democratic and open basis. It needs of necessity the infusion of open polemic, the life blood of new ideas, theories, and programmes. It needs members contesting for their ideas in front of the membership. As such, we have no problem with Harpal Brar selling *Lalkar* or Roy Bull publishing the *EPSR*. We should defend the right to publish for all members.

However, the question of whether the SLP should contain publications that are openly racist or homophobic is a different matter. The allegation of homophobia against the vice-president Bull is highly damaging to the SLP. Most obvious is the damage to the reputation of the party amongst gays and lesbians, whether they are activists, supporters or simply voters. It reflects badly on the current leadership of the SLP that backed Bull's election, including Scargill himself. It reflects badly on SLP members who voted Bull into office. If this situation continues it will call into question the credentials of the SLP as a socialist party.

What should be done about Bull? There are four basic options - do nothing, censor the *EPSR* and gag Bull, openly criticise and expose his views, or take the route of a democratic disciplinary procedure.

The London committee of the SLP has demanded instant expulsion or they will refuse to stand candidates in the Euro-elections. Arthur Scargill obviously recognised that the option of doing nothing is politically impossible. So he has decided to gag Bull and censor the *EPSR*. The *EPSR* must make no comment on the SLP or spread the word that gay people are a sad, unfortunate and inferior species. This is in effect a cover-up.

Neither the RDG nor the CPGB are part of the SLP. Nevertheless we reject the narrow view that the internal affairs of other socialist organisations are no concern of ours. However, our

**Dave Craig** of the Revolutionary Democratic Group argues that SLP members should demand action against Socialist Labour's vice-president

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**"A party needs to investigate the facts. It needs a special body elected by the membership and charged with responsibility of gathering any evidence, interviewing witnesses, and ascertaining the facts"**

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criticisms must not be based on narrow, sectarian self-interest and point-scoring. We must approach the question from the interests of the working class movement. We must advocate the best solution that revolutionary communist have to offer. We do not seek the ignominious collapse of the SLP project. Our proposals must be based on what is necessary to divert it from its current disastrous road to ruin.

The SLP has had a positive impact on the socialist movement. A leading trade unionist openly broke with official Labour and has tried to set up a party to fight Blair. This was positive. It changed the climate of opinion in the working class movement. There is little doubt in my mind that this has helped to persuade the SWP, for example, to stand candidates, which in turn helps to build a stronger anti-Labour current. The political impact of the SLP on the socialist and trade union movement may not yet be clear. Equally the negative impact of its demise may not be immediately obvious. Only if communists fight in a principled way can anything positive be saved. Whether communists are in the SLP or out, they have every right, responsibility and duty to propose the best way forward. They have to approach the crisis in the SLP in a constructive and principled way.

The alternative to censorship and cover-up was debated by the Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency at its recent meeting. There was a division of opinion. The RDG comrades have since considered the motion (see *Weekly Worker* December 17 1998). We support continuing the "campaign to expose Bull's ideas on

gays and lesbians". But this does not go far enough. We are in favour of action being taken against Bull. The question is - what action and who should carry it out?

As revolutionary democratic communists we must argue the case for 'best practice'. We want Bull dealt with in an exemplary and democratic fashion. This is the very opposite of the methods deployed by Bull himself when he plotted and engineered the expulsion of John Pearson from the SLP. We are not opposed to expulsions, provided they are politically justifiable and the result of an open and democratic process.

Libertarian communists have a quite different approach. They would not wish to expel anybody from anything. They tend to believe in the 'party of the whole class'. Accordingly there is a place in the party for a range of views, both backward and advanced. After all, if some workers are racist, why shouldn't this be reflected in a workers' party? So whilst we opposed racism, we would be prepared to tolerate racist ideas, albeit critically, in a Communist Party.

Revolutionary democratic communists fight for a vanguard party, not a party of the whole class. The vanguard must be based on the most advanced scientific ideas. The party would not seek to reflect the range of views within the working class, but to combat all backward and reactionary ideas and prejudices. Such ideas would be rooted out, by a combination of ideological struggle and in some circumstances the expulsion of individuals from membership. We are not libertarians who believe in tolerating every kind of reactionary and chauvinistic prejudice. We have no problem with the principle of excluding racists, sexists and homophobes from the party.

It is therefore quite legitimate to expel someone from a Communist Party, if they hold or advocate particular reactionary views. The party is a voluntary organisation. People volunteer to join. The Party can also volunteer not to accept somebody. The voluntary nature of the organisation cuts both ways.

The issue is therefore a question of fact, interpretation and due process. Roy Bull stands accused of promoting anti-gay prejudice. He has been accused by the *Weekly Worker* and by many members of the SLP, including some of its leading members. This matter cannot be dismissed or simply swept under the carpet.

A party needs to investigate the facts. It needs a special body elected by the membership and charged with responsibility of gathering any evidence, interviewing witnesses, and ascertaining the facts. This includes the right of those being accused or investigated to state their views. In the SWP, for example, there was such a body, known as the control commission. The purpose of the control commission is to gather the facts, make a report and recommendations. This report serves as the basis for either action or further debate and must be open and available to all members.

It is then possible for the membership through the medium of the congress to decide what is the appropriate action to take. This does

not rule out a special congress if members felt the matter of urgency warranted it, or a ballot of the entire membership. The point of a democratic procedure is that the membership decide between removal from office, temporary suspension from membership or permanent expulsion. If the members of the SLP decide that the allegations against Bull are correct, they will be able to decide at congress whether to vote him out of office or out of membership.

What role should the leadership - for example, the SLP national executive - have in this process? They should not have the power or responsibility to expel anybody. They must have the right to suspend a member - but this should be restricted to cases where there is *prima facie* evidence of violence or a threat of violence or fraud.

However, the national executive has the responsibility to instruct the control commission or equivalent body to carry out any investigation. This is a political decision and as such is accountable to the membership. The national executive may fail to do its duty by implementing the necessary procedures. This might be because it has failed to assess the situation correctly or because it is protecting its own allies for sectarian political motives. Either way the membership will draw their own conclusions.

The question of due process has sometimes been mistakenly polarised into 'doing nothing' or asking Arthur Scargill to expel Roy Bull. Posed in this way, there is a natural reluctance to call on comrade Scargill to exercise such dictatorial powers. This is a red herring. As revolutionary democrats we are not calling for such dictatorship. It is however quite right for SLP members to demand that the national executive, on which Arthur Scargill has one vote, to behave in a responsible fashion and act as a responsible leadership.

It is not responsible for either the membership or the leadership to do nothing. If the national executive sits on its hands, plugs up its ears, and puts the proverbial telescope to its blind eye, then its means that admiral Scargill is steering the ship straight onto the rocks. Many will soon be jumping onto the life rafts. Scargill is not that stupid and has opted for censorship and cover-up.

Nevertheless in a democratic procedure both the leadership and the whole membership have a role to play. But the final decision about Bull's fate must rest with the membership. There is no doubt that, had such a democratic procedure been applied to the case of John Pearson, he would today be a member of the SLP using his talents and experience to advance the party.

Some comrades at the meeting of the RDCT argued that although Bull's views are anti-gay, we must not publicly call on Scargill to expel him. This would give credence and legitimacy to Scargill. First, as I have already said, it is not a question of Scargill expelling Bull, but of the national executive immediately beginning the investigative process that may lead to his expulsion. Rank and file SLP members who already feel strongly about this should support

the campaign for a special congress, which is the appropriate body to decide, and sooner rather than later.

Secondly the idea that it is wrong in principle for SLP members to call on their national executive to act is a false argument. It comes from the same stable as 'We shouldn't stand for parliament or attend bourgeois law courts because that creates illusions.' Of course it is permissible under some circumstances to boycott parliament or law courts, etc. But we are not calling on SLP members to 'boycott' the national executive. SLP members will quite rightly demand that their elected executive function in a democratic fashion. This is true whether this is in relation to voiding members, using the block vote, convening the congress or dealing with an outbreak of homophobic agitation. If we adopt this leftist moralising and refuse to demand action only on the issue of gay rights, then we could be accused of double standards and being soft on homophobia.

The meeting of the RDCT was divided on what to do about Bull. The vast majority wanted to expose and criticise Bull's ideas, but could not support calls for action against him. I opposed this but not with sufficient clarity or conviction. The RDCT majority was an accumulation of different views. There were libertarians who seemed to believe in the party of the whole class. There were those who wanted the SLP to stew in its own juice and have nothing further to do with it. There were those with 'clean hands' who were not against expelling Bull, but refused to call on SLP members or the national executive or Scargill to do their duty. There were those who were possibly reacting against the ex-Fisc ultimatum calling for expulsion or refusing to stand candidates in the Euro elections.

The ex-Fisc have treated the issue of Bull as a political bargaining counter in their own factional struggle. They have shown very little consideration so far for democratic processes. They have shown the same contempt for democracy over the John Pearson expulsion as they now do over Bull. It boils down to the prima donnas trying to play the political huckster with Scargill. No communist should go along with this unprincipled approach.

There is a complex range of issues and arguments that underpin the refusal of the RDCT majority to countenance disciplinary action against Bull. I would request that the CPGB (Provisional Central Committee) look at this again and clarify exactly where they stand, with a variety of different arguments.

Bull was elected under false pretences by a congress, many of whom were unaware of his anti-gay politics. Only a special congress can put that right with sufficient urgency, whether that means sacking him from his post as vice-president or expelling him from the SLP. Many communists in the SLP and readers of *Weekly Worker* are already well informed about Bull's views. Whilst we are in favour of a full and open investigation into Bull's brand of gay politics, there is no for reason for us to be shy in saying that we think a case for his expulsion already exists.

Unless or until Bull comes up with a public statement that will persuade us to change our minds, we should call for his expulsion. We should demand a proper investigation by a control commission or equivalent body which will enable members to be better informed and capable of making the correct democratic decision ●



*After the USSR*

# Impossible utopia

**Hillel Ticktin** addressed the CPGB's Communist University '98 on market socialism

**M**arket socialism as a concept only really revived with the evolution of Stalinism itself - it became particularly important in the 1970s and 1980s as Stalinism started to die. It appeared as an alternative to the complete elimination of the old system. That is, by 1989 the alternatives were either market socialism or what actually came about. In fact, Gorbachev tried to maintain the old system, but he failed and instead introduced the market.

Historically, therefore, one ought not to be discussing market socialism as an ongoing fact. But, as I have previously commented, it became clear that market socialism had not gone. Although it had died in a historical sense as the alternative to Stalinism in Russia and eastern Europe, it remained as an apparent alternative to certain semi-socialist and so-called socialist circles. For instance, Robin Blackburn of *New Left Review* supports market socialism.

I also discovered to my surprise that it seems to be quite alive in the United States amongst some intellectuals. It is very odd that amongst the left in the USA there is a real attitude that the only alternative to capitalism is social democracy - hence market socialism is alive there. Even today it is an intellectual viewpoint.

At another level, why on earth is anybody in Britain today talking about market socialism when social democracy has so obviously died? Leaving aside America - which might as well be a different planet - the fact is that social democracy in Europe is no more. As I understand it, the government in Britain represents the big bourgeoisie, and quite obviously that has nothing to do with social democracy, market socialism or anything connected with socialism. One might say then, that is that.

However, it does seem the case that in the minds of certain intellectuals - and not just in America - social democracy is still an alternative. For that reason market socialism remains as an idea.

However, there is another reason. If one imagines that the working class has taken power - what then? There is no way that the working class can introduce socialism immediately. There has to be a transition period. Of course, as people know, I argue that we are living in a world transitional period. But that is not the same thing as saying that the working class has taken power and is proceeding towards socialism. The transition period as thus understood, where the working class has taken power and is introducing its own forms, must necessarily begin with the existence of the market. This seems to me to be the only real period in which it would be interesting to discuss the relationship between the market and socialism. In terms of the current society that would be a real, not a utopian discussion.

The basis of the argument is clear. We start from Marxism, which is essentialist. Now there are various philosophers who argue against this fact. But it is a very hard argument to sustain, as Marx so obviously declares himself to be an essentialist,

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**"There is an essence of capitalism and an essence of socialism. There can be nothing intermediate which is viable"**  
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 an Aristotelian, a Hegelian and so on. But there are some Marxists, particularly in the United States, who argue this way.

However, if one starts from essentialism, then it would follow that there is capitalism and there is socialism. There is an essence of capitalism and an essence of socialism. There can be nothing intermediate *which is viable*. That does not mean to say that you cannot get something which is intermediate. You can get various historical abortions - but they cannot last very long in *historical* terms.

There cannot be an alternative system. You either have capitalism or socialism and nothing else is possible. Unless you can actually develop a theory which says that there is a 'third way', like Blair - though that depends upon whether you think the man is a serious thinker. There is no third way. Within Marxism there is no other possibility: there is only capitalism and socialism. There is no other historical system. Of course, there have been other apparent forms - such as social democracy and Stalinism. But they do appear to me to be these kinds of historical abortions, which only existed for particular reasons - and which could not last. Social democracy is coming to an end and so is Stalinism. If one takes those as examples of historical intermediate forms (what some people call hybrids, though I do not), one can say that they provide the proof of the essentialist argument. That is the fundamental proposition.

This means that one cannot have, on the one hand, the law of value, money and abstract labour coexisting with their opposites. Clearly, if one is talking about exchange value and the law of value, one is talking about money as the universal equivalent, and abstract labour as the basis of value. It is impossible to imagine that they could coexist with the abolition of money, the abolition of the law of value and the abolition of abstract labour - which is a necessary definition of any form of socialism. A fun-

damental law of socialism is the *conscious* regulation of the economy by the direct producers.

Obviously, if you have a socialist society which is consciously regulated by the direct producers - and hence is a planned society - there will be no abstract labour. If you do not have abstract labour, there will be no law of value and no market. This is the concrete result of the essentialist proposition I outlined earlier. You have the law of value. You have the law of the plan. The two simply do not fit together.

They can only fit together if you define them differently. In fact, Ernest Mandel did define them differently. If you turn planning into a *technical* question, and do not treat it as a social relation whereby the direct producers consciously regulate the economy, then of course it would be possible to put them together. For that all you need is a bureaucratic government.

But that is not the real issue. The real issue is whether the workers transform the economy and completely change all social relations - not about having a government which issues orders to the workers who are told to work. Of course, if you want to argue that you can have a government issuing orders combined with the market, that is quite possible. That is basically the proposition of the market socialists.

To make it more concrete. One can say that the aim of capital production necessarily stands more and more opposed to the needs of the individual and of society. In other words, the contradiction between exchange value and use value becomes ever more important, more real - and more threatening. Hence the idea that you can somehow put together exchange value and use value just does not stand up. There are certain obvious cases - for example, health. The idea that you can run a health service on the basis of profit simply does not work. The same with education - it just turns the educational system into a caricature of what it was.

I am personally in the throes of this myself. They are talking about abolishing my department, the department of Russian and eastern European studies, on the grounds that it makes a loss. Of course, on this basis each person either makes a profit or a loss - fortunately I am making a profit; other people are making a loss. This ends up in completely crazy results: the Cold War is over, we do not need you any more. The department of geology has been abolished, as it made a real loss of £500,000. That is the crazy logic you end up in.

What I am trying to say is not just that in the future any attempt to bring together the market and socialism cannot work, but that sort of meshing together actually exists today - and it does not work. In other words, in a declining capitalism, what you get is an increasing move towards sectors that have to be controlled from the centre, which have to be run by government, which have to be potentially planned in a needs-based sector - health and education are obvious examples, but they are not the

only examples. Arms production is in a similar position: it is run by the state - it is not run in any country by the arms producers. The state buys the production and effectively plans it. You have the same kind of contradiction existing there. So, in other words, this contradiction between what Engels called the invading socialist society - the need to plan - and exchange value exemplifies itself in the modern economy. This of course reinforces the point of the impossibility of market socialism.

So, use value stands opposed to exchange value. The two poles have to interpenetrate to give rise to surplus value. But at the point where they do not interpenetrate you then have a crisis. And in certain respects this has been occurring over various periods of time. What one has to look at is the way in which capitalists have forced this interpenetration.

I have used the term 'declining capitalism' before and I should briefly define it. Some people simply see decline in an empirical sense. They look out of the window and see more buildings then there were before - therefore there cannot be a decline. That is a very silly way of looking at it. Or they look at Gibbons' *Decline and fall of the Roman empire* and expect the same kind of thing - the vandals come in and conquer, leaving society to completely disintegrate.

Now one could argue that some parts of the world are disintegrating - and some clearly are. But one does not have to argue that. The question of decline has to do with what is happening to the law of value. Capitalism is governed by the law of value, therefore decline must be a question of the decline of the law of value. In other words, what we have seen is the growth of monopoly, the growth of a situation where private industry is able to control production, control its prices - to the point today where prices only reflect value at the point of a depression. They are pulled into line, but for long periods of time they are out of line. You can see that just by looking at any form of commodity.

Take my watch - it could be worth £1,000 or it could be £2. The cost of producing any watch today is no more than £2 or £3, but they can quite easily charge £1,000. Or computers: they charge up to £1,000 or more, but the cost is only a fraction of that. And that is true of a very large number of commodities. There is a vast divergence now between price and value.

The law of value is governing over longer periods of time - compelling capitalist society to fall into line only at certain junctures. I think we are almost certainly at that juncture now. *The Scotsman* recently talked about a real depression coming about. I think they are correct.

The point is that there is a divergence between value and price. The fact that prices can be pushed so far out of line with value is possible because of the strong presence of very large monopolies - which means that the law of value is governing and is not governing. It is governing over long periods of time, but it is not immediately governing in the old way.

What is actually happening in individual firms is that they are able to organise production. In fact, to a considerable degree, though they have to be based on profits in the long run, on a *day-to-day* basis they work on something like targets rather than profits - they do not even know what the value is or what the price is. This is so for large sectors of production. The overall result in terms of the particular firm has to be in profits, but in the way they work, the way they manage, they cannot proceed on that basis.

Now this is something any Marxist would expect. It is in *Capital*. Marx is making the point over and over again about the contradiction between the individual factory and society - the anarchy of capitalist production and the (notionally) planned way in which the factories are actually run. Today huge firms are run like the old factories.

None of this can be undone, despite so-called Thatcherism. Remember we are talking about market

## *Fighting fund*

## Low again

Scandal and tittle-tattle has dominated the press recently. Robin Cook and his six lovers - not to mention the empty brandy bottle. Shocking stuff. Then we had the even more shocking revelations about the so-called cabinet enforcer, Jack Cunningham, hiring private jets to Brussels so he could lift the 'BSE ban' on British beef. Well, I suppose you cannot blame the Tories for trying almost anything to recover their fortunes, seeing the desperate state they are in.

We wish we could say we had money to throw around like Jack Cunningham - and perhaps under communism Cook's supposed sexual exploits will pale into insignificance.

However, our metaphorical cash box is very low yet again. Thanks to the stalwarts who did part with their hard-earned cash, such as TR from Bishop Auckland (£20), FK from Hull (£20) and LP from Nottingham (£15). Thanks also to MJ, JG and CA for their direct debits.

This brings our monthly total to the not very impressive figure of £112. Please leave the post-Xmas/New Year blues behind and dig deep for next week ●

Ian Farrell

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

socialism here - the idea that you can refine capitalism. It really is a nonsense. Capitalism itself has changed so far, you cannot break up these firms and have the form of market socialism we have been talking about. These forms of decline directly contradict the market socialist utopia.

Why? Because market socialism necessarily requires competition. Somewhat strange, you might have thought, but that is precisely the line they actually put forward. Market socialists require competition in order to ensure what they regard as efficiency. The market socialist argument is that in a socialist society there will necessarily be inefficient forms of production because workers will have insufficient incentive to work. Consequently you have to have to competition.

Our argument is not just that competition is wasteful - which it is. Why on earth do you need two companies producing exactly the same thing? Socialists have always argued against the idiocy of the duplication of resources. But what I want to argue is that it is just not possible.

Now the concept put forward in bourgeois economic texts is that of perfect competition - it is usually admitted that no such thing really exists, but it is argued that capitalism has some approximation to it. We are saying that not only does perfect competition not exist - it has never existed and could never have existed. What we now live in is a society where very little competition exists, but where on the contrary giant monopolies are able to control production in a quite different way. These firms cannot be broken up. Anybody who thinks that they can have market socialism by breaking up IBM into a small number of firms is living in cloud cuckoo land.

Perhaps the best illustration of this is what is happening in Russia. In the old system there was a relatively small number of giant trusts and giant firms. Some of these firms were five times the size of German firms. That remains true today. Soviet economists, having moved to the right, adopted the usual bourgeois logic that what was necessary was to break up these very large firms and then have a large number of small firms all competing.

It did not happen. There are no small firms and there is no sector dealing in small firms. All that you have is finance - over 2,500 banks. You do not have small firms in the sectors that count, in terms of production. It proved impossible to break them up. I mention this to show the futility of trying to introduce something that does not exist in the west - to go backwards in time, as it were, to a period 100 years ago when there were a number of competing firms.

Today, simply because of the increased socialised nature of production - a fundamental of Marxism - the existence of giant firms is inevitable. It is not just a question of monopoly. You have giant firms which are permanent. Bourgeois economics tends to counterpose monopoly on one hand and competition on the other. In fact we have now gone *beyond* that - giant firms which simply remain and control. Take Phillips, founded in Holland by Jenny Marx's uncle. A giant firm which is now 150 years old. Obviously, it is not going to go under. In view of this it is impossible to imagine the forms of competition necessary for so-called market socialism.

I have already pointed out how today the law of value tends to govern in the long run, rather than immediately, because of the increasing role of large firms in organisation. But the government too plays an increasing role in this society despite the increasing level of privatisation throughout the world. In other areas the 'internal market' has also meant greater central control.

The idea that education or health

has become more efficient is absolutely absurd - it has become very much worse. Teachers and doctors have become completely demoralised. Now Britain is not an exception - the same kind of controls are being used throughout the world. This is not happening because we are living a reactionary period - which I do not believe anyway - but because it is a necessary reaction to the growth of the public sector. The private sector, or the capitalist class, simply has to react to it or abandon its own position.

When we look at privatisation from the point of view of the law of value, the private utilities cannot actually raise the level of prices without the blessing of the regulator. It is exactly the same in the United States. The consequence of that is that the prices in the end are governed by the state. In other words, if the state agrees, privatised companies can raise profits - if it disagrees, they cannot. So it is not just a question of internally raised profits, but very much a question of how a particular utility relates to the capitalist class, the government and to the working class.

Privatisation has not removed control over these firms. Yes, it has changed the form of ownership - the reason why these firms were privatised was *political*. However, they are not able to act simply on the basis of maximising their profits. They are restrained. One could go through all the different aspects which government continues to control - it does not matter really whether they do it through interest rates or the banking system. However they do it, the fact is that governments continue to exert very strong control of the economy.

One is therefore talking of a system which is increasingly governed from the centre. The idea that one can simply remove this does not make sense. What the market socialists are talking about is that somehow what one would have is nationalisation of the means of production, but individual firms within that operating on the basis of profit, each competing with the other. Investment will be controlled from the centre. That is what the market socialists think. It is impossible to imagine how this could work.

But let us imagine such a scenario were to come about. You have a large number of firms, each competing. You have, presumably, an institutionalised health service which is free. What about the workers? What about the ordinary people in that society? What about the managers? The answer of the market socialists has to be that you have managers, and they have to be better paid than the workers - and that workers have to sell their labour power. And that, somehow, the workers have to be controlled, otherwise you do not have a market. If there is a market it must mean that labour power is being sold. If labour power is being sold, the individual worker is therefore alienated. If you are going to have a market, you have to have the law of value. Individual workers sell their labour power, and work under the control of people who also manage other workers. In the end work becomes abstract labour. Every group of workers has to work as hard as possible in order to compete with other groups of workers.

Then you have to ask: why would one want such a society? What is so good about it? You have got workers as they are today, controlled. We have managers who are better paid. The incentive for workers to work harder is that they will get paid better - and if they do not work harder they will get fired. What they do have is a guarantee of employment one way or another - and a national health service and an education system.

But then one has to call into question - what would happen to the health service and the education system?

Can you actually have a private or semi-privatised sector and a public sector? Can they actually work together - and what we actually see is that they do not work together. Automatically the interface between the two gets corrupted.

We can easily see that the managers, the executives, sometimes the skilled workers are much better paid than the ordinary workers. Unsurprisingly, these people in the public sector get corrupted one way or another. Perhaps not directly corrupted - as in the US construction sector which often works for the state. What tends to happen is that they bribe the officials who give the contracts. Of course you do not have to bribe - you just have to know the right people and make the right contacts. Again, we know the way in which government ministers very easily move into various positions in the private sector. One of the reasons they are able to do that is because companies want the contacts that give them business. Then one has to say - is that corruption?

The point I am making here is that this is a necessary feature of a division between a public and private sector. It will necessarily be the case when you have a market sector, driven by profits, that it will make money and be better paid than the people in the public sector. Consequently, they will corrupt the public sector.

What will also necessarily happen, as we have seen, is that there will be an attempt to try to control that public sector - on the grounds that the public sector will tend to expand without limits, which is of course true. It is necessarily the case that if you have a needs-based sector, like health, it will expand and expand. Now in a socialist society it will be different - there will be full employment, preventive medicine and so on. But we are

not living in that kind of society. So in a market-driven society it will necessarily be the case that the health sector will expand and expand, and absorb all available resources. The public sector itself will expand. Consequently it will have to be controlled - along with the workers.

If you have a market socialism, you will get that division - as you have it today - but multiplied. You will have a war going on between those sectors. And you will immediately have a war between workers and management. In a society where - apparently - you do not have a capitalist class any more, you have to ask - how can the managers sustain their position? How can the workers not be controlled?

What you will immediately have is a situation where workers will demand higher wages, better working conditions and that the whole form of production be changed. On the other hand, the managers will demand the exact reverse. There is no intermediate position. This would produce a highly unstable society, where you have a division between the managerial group and the workers, between the public and private sectors, and indeed between all the different sectors of that society.

So the natural result of introducing market socialism, if indeed you ever could, is that it would break down - it simply could not work. You are, as they say in Russia, trying to fry ice.

Market socialism is a nonsense, but it remains an *apparent* alternative - even to people like Robin Blackburn. How can Marxists - or former Marxists - even talk about market socialism seriously? This all points to the low level of Marxist culture. Any real Marxist culture would rule out market socialism as an option. This shows that Marxism has not sufficiently penetrated the intelligentsia or intellectuals ●

## Postscript: end of counterrevolution

In the ensuing debate members of the Spartacist League described Hillel Ticktin's views as "anti-Soviet" and "standard anti-communist stuff". Comrade Ticktin replied:

The Spartacist League has consistently denounced me for at least 18 years. I remember the remarks made by them in San Francisco in 1981 (interestingly, one of the people who denounced me then is now on the right). Nevertheless, at least the SL is still around - unlike a number of other left groups. However, you ought to take account of something very simple. You are extremely isolated. I do not actually think that that is a good thing. It would be a good thing if the left could talk to each other in a reasonable fashion and actually develop, rather than repeating the same old slogans. I was denounced in 1981 for exactly the same thing - and I am prepared to repeat it 100 times over.

The problem with your analysis is not just that you have no analysis, but that it is not based on reality. Just reply to these simple facts. How many workers in the Soviet Union supported the regime? How many workers could possibly have supported Stalin under the post-1929 conditions? They did not - they were totally opposed to the system. And just consider the world around you. How many people outside the Soviet Un-

ion actually support what existed there? Very few.

Why isolate yourselves like that? If you are socialists, be socialists - do not go and support something which was an absolute horror in the world and which even today is retarding the possibility of socialism. What you are doing by saying these things is putting people off, avoiding the possibility of socialism and failing to see the nature of the period. For you it must be a period of reaction. But for me it is not a period of reaction. The end of the Soviet Union is a victory. I am sure you will denounce me for saying these terrible things - but I am prepared to be denounced.

It is critical that the Soviet Union has been removed. We are in a completely new period now, a period of the possibility of change. It is not a reactionary period. Trotsky talked about a period of counterrevolution. We have come to the end of that period. The end of the counterrevolutionaries saw the end of the counterrevolution. That is what we are talking about.

We have to analyse this new period, not repeat old slogans ●

## What we fight for

● Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.

● The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers' movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.

● Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.

● We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.

● The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single Party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.

● Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs: ie, communism.

● We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.

● Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.

● War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world's problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

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

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# Network must choose

**H**aving abysmally failed at Rugby in 1998, the unelected Liaison Group of John Nicholson, Pete McLaren, Dave Church and Dave Nellist is to make another attempt to put the Network of Socialist Alliances onto something like a firm footing this March. A repeat conference which minimises discussion and tries to railroad through a pseudo-party structure could prove disastrous.

Thankfully, as urged by the CPGB from the start, this time round there is to be a pre-meeting. Delegates from the various Socialist Alliances and supporting political organisations come together in London on January 16. The idea is not to vote on the various proposals that have been tabled: rather to give them a reasonably full airing. Even though the three-hour agenda is woefully inadequate, the CPGB wholeheartedly welcomes such an approach. At last we can sit down with each other and coolly and constructively thrash out the various options.

The Nicholson-McLaren-Church-Nellist Liaison Group appears to have lost what little coherence it once possessed. Profound fault lines visibly exist. Despite getting its 'Fair society' aims and structure adopted on an "interim basis" at Rugby the majority were quick to abandon the creaking ship. Not only was there a determined 40% opposition - centred on the CPGB - but the Liaison Group recognised that their elaborate structure was bound to sink on launch. Sad to say, the alternatives on offer from that quarter are not much of an improvement.

Coventry and Warwickshire Socialist Alliance - headed by comrades McLaren and Nellist - rejects any "large or unrepresentative committee". It has also taken a stand against "an annual conference". Strangely at the same time Coventry suggests the annual election of "functional officers" by a delegate meeting. Besides this contradictory and unelaborated position there are a couple of other discussion notes. Kent Socialist Alliances favours preserving the non-democratic status quo. In contrast the Radical Preston Alliance wants "functioning officers" elected at an annual conference and organisations "whether national and local" having "one representative". Martin Wicks, on behalf of Socialist Perspectives, simply calls for a committee made up of representatives of affiliated local alliances and political organisations.

Only two sets of draft rules have been presented. On the one hand those "amending" the Liaison Group's from John Nicholson and the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance majority. On the other hand the draft unanimously agreed by the London Socialist Alliance general meeting in October 1998 (originally proposed and fully backed by the CPGB). If those who presently constitute the Network of Socialist Alliances desire unity under a clear set of rules, then they will

have to choose one or the other.

Despite superficial similarities their approaches are fundamentally at variance. Stripped of the details, Manchester outlines a party-type structure based on a relatively committed individual membership. Its Liaison Committee would exercise wide powers, including "arrangements for seeking and enabling electoral unity" (organisation, clause 5). London recognises that we are far from any such stage yet. An 'alliance' party is premature, to say the least. London therefore envisages the Network as a "federal" arrangement designed to coordinate the work of *autonomous* local and regional Socialist Alliances and affiliated socialist organisations. Evidently claims that London SA and the CPGB argue for the Network to adopt "hardline Marxism" and a "Bolshevik-style" central committee are either mischievous, dishonest or plain stupid.

In drafting the Manchester rules, comrade Nicholson has given ground to our criticisms of the Liaison Group's two original sets of proposals. They are not so overt in terms of top-down dictatorship. Less sickly green. Slightly more red in hue. For example "individual socialists/greens and autonomous socialist/green direct action organisations" has been replaced by "individuals and organisations" (preamble). In the same compromising spirit it is now stated that our aim is "to build a democratic socialist society".

Nevertheless it goes without saying that Nicholson and his Manchester draft owes everything to sentimental socialism and the passing fad for greenism and not a thing to *working class* socialism (nowhere is socialism defined, nor is the class struggle or even class mentioned). And, as a certain Karl Marx once observed, "Where the class struggle is pushed to the side as an unpleasant, 'crude' phenomenon, nothing remains as the basis of socialism but 'true love of the people' and empty phrases about 'justice'" (K Marx *MESW* Moscow 1975, Vol 3, p92). In the realm of reality, of course, socialism without the *rule of the working class* can only exist as its opposite: eg, Stalin's USSR, Attlee's Britain, Pol Pot's Kampuchea, Olaf Palme's Sweden.

Means determine ends and ends determine means. Not surprisingly then comrade Nicholson's "immediate objectives" ignore the necessity of the workers winning the battle for democracy under today's social conditions and promoting their own class internationalism. Unlike the London proposals, nothing about the monarchy, House of Lords, nor self-determination for Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Our friends in the Manchester majority merely seek "to promote locally based socialist/environmentalist alliances and to encourage constructive dialogue and practical action between these and other organisations and individuals, at local and national levels" (aims and objectives). Anodyne stuff.

In contrast LSA makes it absolutely

clear that the Network of Socialist Alliance is an alliance of *socialists*. Not all environmentalists or greens are socialists. Many are liberals. Others are conservative. Some are downright reactionary. Actually the greens as a whole represent a petty bourgeois movement which covers a wide spectrum ranging from the critical-utopian to the overly fascist: eg, David Icke, the Third Wave, etc. Needless to say, LSA is not opposed to the affiliation of green organisations and individuals who declare themselves socialists. Such affiliations are to be applauded.

Where politically the Manchester proposals are weak the organisational details are malign. Far from facilitating the convergence of socialist individuals and organisations, they would achieve the reverse.

Let us begin with the section on membership. Manchester excludes everyone not "working or living in England". Socialists in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are barred. Though we are all ruled by the same United Kingdom state, in the name of an unspoken English nationalism our forces are to be deliberately and perversely divided.

The Manchester draft has junked the Liaison Group's hypocrisy about striking a "balance" between "smaller groups and individuals" and "larger organisations". Instead of its Byzantine electoral college we are now presented with an "alliance" of individual members. Affiliated organisations have no role apart from the privilege of "nominating" people for election to a Liaison Committee. In fact they have less rights than individuals. Only duties. Despite that comrade Nicholson still fears any undue influence they might exert over his project. That explains a whole raft of bureaucratic clauses.

We are told affiliation "assumes" a "commitment to an anti-sectarian and cooperative way of working". A pious hope, perhaps. In all probability though, a thinly veiled threat. Will those deemed 'sectarian' or 'uncooperative' be barred along with socialists from other parts of the United Kingdom? Events in Greater Manchester, where comrade Nicholson spearheaded a purge of the CPGB, give us legitimate cause for concern; as did the similar but unsuccessful coup attempt by an unprincipled bloc in London.

Individuals joining the alliance from "other groups and organisations" are supposedly "welcome". However, comrade Nicholson dreads any such influx. These 'aliens' are to be policed. The Manchester draft demands on "application/renewal of membership of the Network" that these comrades "declare" their true political allegiances. Such McCarthyism should be given short shrift.

Worse comes. Affiliates "must also ensure individual paid-up membership from within their respective organisations". 'Encourage' would be fine. But frankly "ensure" is sinister. Take the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

We know for a fact that it cannot get its own membership fully "paid-up". Despite a rapid decline to well below 500 many lag far behind. Yet the Manchester draft insists on high dues payments. Individuals are expected to hand over a *minimum* of £5 per month: ie, £30 annually. If SPEW fails to "ensure" all its membership carry the double burden, what happens? Would it too be barred?

This system of dues payments, collected monthly, with local Socialist Alliances passing on two fifths of the total to the Network, shows all too clearly that comrade Nicholson is determined to instantly conjure up a party-type structure and level of commitment. It is both foolish and untenable.

The Socialist Alliances are a loose, immature and ill-defined political formation. To impose such a regime, even if it could be administered, would, in fact, kill the project stone dead. The Socialist Alliances do have a layer of individual members, the biggest concentrations being in London and Coventry. But our strength derives not from unattached socialists. In general their morale is low. No, our strength comes from the various organisations we unite. That must be recognised and patiently built upon.

Finally in terms of the Manchester draft let us turn to the section on organisation. A 15-strong Liaison Committee would be elected "annually" by a conference of individual members. Obviously this introduces a tremendous geographical bias. Those living nearby will find it easy to attend. Those living far away will not. That is why a system of elected delegates is altogether better.

In another denial of real democracy the Manchester draft states that a decision-making conference can be called by one quarter of "paid-up members". Who has the list? Who is "paid-up"? Does anyone really expect individual members to write in spontaneously? The London draft is far more democratic. Under its stipulations a special conference is called at the wish of one third of the Socialist Alliances. Transparent. Easy to organise. Impossible to argue with.

The whole Manchester construct runs counter to the idea of building alliances. Far from including minorities and guaranteeing representation for all groups, the opposite is the case. What we have before us is an annual poll whereby any political bloc that can muster or negotiate through some backroom deal 51% of the votes of those who turn out or can be bussed in for the day can dominate the whole Network. Such a bloc chooses all "five officers" along with the "10 other" members of the Liaison Committee. Hypothetically a 49% minority, consisting of bigger or smaller political groups and Socialist Alliances is thereby excluded.

The problem is compounded by a clause which bureaucratically circumscribes even that democracy. No one political organisation "shall have

more than 30%" of the Liaison Committee "or of any other elected body *within* the Network". Furthermore the Manchester draft insists that "organisations as a whole shall not have more than 50% of such membership" (organisation, clause 2).

The Manchester rules require affiliated Socialist Alliances to operate a ceiling limiting who can be elected. One more violation of local autonomy. The LSA Steering Committee is usually attended by delegates representing half a dozen political groups and a similar number of borough Socialist Alliances. Apart from a single exception, they are all in political parties or groups. According to the Manchester draft, meetings could only proceed with that unaffiliated comrade *alone* ... the presence of anyone else takes us over the one third threshold. It should also be noted that the same applies to the present Liaison Group. Those with votes must surely be free to elect whomsoever they wish. If that gives a political organisation over 30%, that is democracy.

How can the Manchester system be made to work? Would successful candidates be declared null and void? Would they be turfed out because they took the quota of political organisations above 50%? Who decides? Would nominations be monitored by an incumbent Liaison Committee? The whole approach stinks. Then there is the loss of talent. There is a general tendency for those who are organised to be more politically advanced, dedicated, experienced and crucially more representative. Either way there must be free elections.

Obviously comrade Nicholson and other members of the Liaison Group are haunted by a growing acceptance commanded by the LSA system. Our draft rules stand firmly for inclusive democracy. Every affiliated national political organisation should have the *right* to send one *instantly recallable* delegate (that could include the Scottish Socialist Party). However the Network should be solidly based on local, regional and workplace Socialist Alliances. For every 20 members Socialist Alliances should be able to elect one - recallable - delegate (a ratio which must increase as more members are accumulated). Here in Socialist Alliances individuals can really be represented.

The LSA plan applies the same flexible practice to officers. Treasurers, editors, chairs, coordinators, trade union organisers, etc should be elected when and where needed, not according to some snapshot popularity poll by an atomised membership. Officers should be strictly accountable to their peers. They should be elected and replaceable by those whom they work alongside. The mayoral or presidential system has no legitimate place in our tradition. It breeds arrogance. We need another Arthur Scargill like a hole in the head.

**John Bridge**  
CPGB representative on LSA  
Steering Committee