

# Scargill's new purge

## Defend the Appeal Four!

In an outrageous move, four leading dissidents have been hauled before a disciplinary panel under the Socialist Labour Party's 'complaints procedure'. Comrades Brian Heron, Carolyn Sikorski, Terry Dunn and Helen Drummond are to appear separately at a hearing in London on Saturday February 13, accused of breaking the SLP constitution.

In line with the December 12 national executive resolution, general secretary Arthur Scargill wrote to the 'Gang of Four', as they are known by NEC Stalinists, demanding that they withdraw their 'Appeal for a special conference', "cease their activities immediately, and undertake to abide by the party's constitution". They were given until December 29 to respond. Comrades Dunn and Drummond did not reply, while the responses of comrades Heron and Sikorski of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus (Fisc) were deemed 'unsatisfactory' by Scargill. The charges are not specific, only alleging that certain named clauses have been contravened.

Of course all four believed that their appeal was fully in accord with the constitution, which states that "A special congress may be convened ... upon request by 25% of the membership calculated for this purpose on the voting entitlement at the last party congress" (clause VI(2)).

Scargill, having succeeded in getting the November 1998 annual congress "postponed" (ie, cancelled) and replaced by a special congress where no membership motions were allowed, was determined that there should be no further gathering until the 1999 annual congress. He was furious that his former Fiscite courtiers, along with their allies, had dared to demand a more extensive and wide-ranging debate in order to "bring [the problems within the SLP] out into the light".

He alleged that their appeal was unconstitutional on two grounds: firstly, there is no provision for a "special conference" - only a "special congress", and using the wrong word is clearly a serious offence; secondly, he decreed that only constituency branches or affiliated trade unions, not individuals, can request a special congress (although nowhere is this spelt out in the constitution). Indeed his resolution at the Decem-

ber 12 NEC claimed that no "individual member" or "group of individuals" (ie, no-one) is permitted to circulate any document whatsoever within the party, which means that there is no way in practice of attaining the 25%. Again there is no such ban laid down in the constitution.

The original appeal, initiated by the four 'accused', carried 53 signatures, but has since been boosted by many more. The signatories now represent well over 25% of the *individual* membership, as calculated on "the voting entitlement at the last party congress", where it was around 450. But the total actually includes the 3,775 affiliated members. One affiliate alone, the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association, numbers 3,000. Therefore, even if every single CSLP spontaneously made a simultaneous "request" for a special congress, the benchmark could never be reached. The NWCCMA casts its shadow over the whole party.

So not only is Scargill intent on preventing by bureaucratic means any hint of membership self-assertion, but he has decided to take action against those who have dared issue the mildest and most tentative criticism. Fisc can hardly be said to have a record of open, public dissent. Yet one of the accusations levelled against the 'Gang of Four' is, incredibly, that they have "used the *Weekly Worker*" to air their views - a monstrous crime.

After Scargill issued his membership circular earlier this month, many comrades believed that his 'even-handed' reprimands against both the sponsors of the appeal and their sworn enemies of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* would signal an end to talk of disciplinary action. He ended the circular in an apparently conciliatory tone: "Hopefully these decisions will allow us all to get on with the *real* fight: against the capitalist system!"

But Scargill urgently needs to regain control of London, where comrade Heron is regional president and comrades Dunn and Drummond are influential committee members. They have stated that London will refuse to contest the European elections unless the "former editor" of the *EPSR*, Roy Bull, is bureaucratically removed from the vice-presidency by Scargill. Fisc



Brian Heron: from courtier to criminal

is especially sore because Bull democratically defeated sitting Fiscite Pat Sikorski, who now holds no SLP position. Pat Sikorski's 'tactical' decision not to sign the original 'appeal' does not seem to have done him any good. But at least he is not threatened with disciplinary action - for the moment.

This month has seen the SLP take another significant step towards the strangling of remaining inner-party life. Scargill's dictatorship is almost complete - and with it any remote possibility that it could be transformed into a useful vehicle for pursuing the class struggle. The NEC has in effect banned all membership initiative - from circulating any document to publicly expressing a dissenting view. The warning to the *EPSR* not to "comment on the affairs of the SLP" and not to publish any article which "may lead members to conclude" that it is "attacking and discriminating against" homosexuals, far from representing a victory for progressives, should be seen as a new gagging assault on freedom

and working class debate.

To cap it all we have the move against the Appeal Four. All of them have a record of giving at least tacit backing to the witch hunt against communists and democrats - the Fiscites, like the *EPSR*, were enthusiastic practitioners. Nevertheless, there must be the widest possible campaign to defend them against these shameful charges. And they too have a responsibility. They must not wait passively to be expelled, but must actively and openly encourage a principled rebellion of the membership.

Remaining party activists must link their opposition to Scargill's dictatorial and sectarian regime with a turn to the wider working class movement. They must keep intact party units, but back every move in favour of common political action - in particular through the Socialist Alliances and the United Socialists electoral campaign ●

Simon Harvey

# Party notes

## Half decent

Comrades looking for an example of why the Socialist Party is going down the plughole should cast an eye over the front page of *The Socialist* of January 8. In a small article, we are informed that the SP now fights for "a £7 an hour minimum wage, with no exceptions". This is a requirement for workers to enjoy what the SP calls - without a hint of any irony that I can detect - "a *half* decent living standard" (my emphasis).

The justification for SP's adoption of a minimum wage that it estimates is about "half" of that required to lift people out of poverty is very instructive. The £7 an hour figure is plumped for because "the low pay unit has recently said that the European union decency threshold now stands at £6.90 an hour". Further noting that "a number of unions are now calling for a £5 an hour minimum wage", the SP tells us that it also "supports the campaign for [this] as the first step towards ensuring a £7 an hour minimum wage".

This logic may be miserably timid, convoluted and self-contradictory - but at least SP is consistent about it. Replying last year to the criticism from its dissident Merseyside regional committee that the national leadership was trying to "water down our demands for a £6 per hour to £4.60 as a step towards £6" (MRC statement September 26 1998), the Taafe leadership attempted to explain its thinking thus:

"We have always argued in party material for £6 per hour. But at times, we also have had to make it clear we support trade union demands for a minimum of £4.61. In our work for the Unison demonstration we should not appear to be counterposing our demand for £6 per hour to Unison's demand for £4.61, but rather support the campaign for £4.61, while at the same time pointing out in our material that it is not sufficient to lift people out of poverty" (SP executive committee statement, November 11 1998).

OK, so the argument goes like this. SP's preferred minimum wage is £7, plumped for after the EU decided it could be afforded. This is a minimum that SP itself characterises as "*half* decent" - that is, it is a poverty wage *below* the real level of subsistence. However, in its practical intervention in the workers' movement, SP is at pains not to 'counterpose' its left reformist demands to those of the trade union bureaucracy. Thus, in practice, SP agitates for an *even lower* minimum - £5 an hour - because it does not want to offend the various trade union leaderships that support this.

It is very easy to laugh at this miserable tailism of the official union tops. Clearly SP's politics are an incoherent left version of the Labour reformism that politically dominates - and suffocates - our movement. However, the important point to note is the question of *method*.

The SP leadership would no

doubt dub all of this an application of 'transitional' demands. While it takes a particularly rightist, reformist and muddled form with the SP, I think in essence such pathetic demands *do* result from the Trotskyite 'transitional' method. It underlines once again the profound superiority of the programmatic method defended by our own organisation - a minimum/maximum approach.

Ian Donovan of the journal *Revolution and Truth* penned a useful critique (*Weekly Worker* October 29 1998) of the draft programme worked on collectively by a number of Communist Party comrades and then written up by Jack Conrad. He expresses a common misconception when he writes that we seem unable to make up our minds "whether [our] 'minimum programme' really is a minimum programme of reforms under capitalism, or whether it is a *transitional* programme aimed at providing a bridge from 'bread and butter' reforms to the overthrow of capitalism itself".

Essentially, the comrade confuses a minimum programme with a *minimal* approach. Thus, he is genuinely baffled by what we include as our "immediate demands": "Just as much as 'councils of action' are out of place in a minimum programme, so is the demand for a workers' militia!"

In fact, our starting point is what the working class and oppressed sections of the population *need*. As it is based on profit, real capitalism constantly negates human need. Therefore the logic of the struggle for our immediate demands poses the task of overthrowing the system as a whole. The fight for a minimum wage is an excellent example of what we mean.

Rather than adopting a left version of the demands of the official movement (which are essentially pro-capitalist, based on what is 'sensible' within the parameters of *existing* society), our starting point is what working people need for subsistence, to physically and culturally reproduce themselves in contemporary capitalism. The category of 'need' therefore is an ever-expanding one. As technology expands, things that yesterday were items of 'luxury' - society's access to them being necessarily limited - become *necessities* for all. This is the process we can see when we look at something like the internet. (see also John Walsh's article in *Weekly Worker* December 17 1998).

Of course, the 'transitional' method of the SP has the advantage of avoiding the serious study and research a minimum programme like this entails for it to be credible. You just wait for what the bosses or the trade union bureaucrats offer, then position yourself slightly to the left of it.

It is pretty easy, but it is not Marxism ●

**Mark Fischer**  
national organiser

## Fight for what we need

Join Unison's minimum wage demo  
Saturday April 10, Newcastle

## Defend Iraq

The CPGB's critique of the International Bolshevik Tendency is not assisted by its decision not to side unequivocally with Iraq against the west.

Of course, your position on that issue needs to be decided on the merits of the issue, not on whether it furthers your critique of the IBT or anyone else. But I think your position is wrong, and the analogies which Mark Fischer uses to back up his case (*Weekly Worker* January 7) are not really analogies at all.

In *Socialism and war* Lenin is unequivocal that in a conflict between an imperialist power and an oppressed nation Marxists side with the oppressed nation regardless of who fires the first shot or the nature of the regime. Trotsky made the same point in the 1930s in relation to a war between 'democratic' England and 'fascist' Brazil.

The same thing applied in the war in the South Atlantic - in Britain it was surely necessary to side with Argentina, regardless of the nature of the regime in Buenos Aires. I was in Britain during that war and I remember being appalled by the British left, or most of it, who would dream up all kinds of excuses to get out of siding with Argentina. The worst, of course, were Militant, who even refused to call for the withdrawal of the British forces and argued that Argentina was on some kind of par with Britain because there was a stock exchange in Buenos Aires. Militant were much more concerned with how to bring down the Galtieri regime than with how to bring down British imperialism.

**Philip Ferguson**

Auckland, New Zealand

## Free Mumia

In October last year the US courts ruled against the appeal of Mumia Abu-Jamal, the black activist and journalist who is on death row for a crime he did not commit. Ever since his days as a teenager fighting for racial equality and social justice in the Black Panther Party, the US government has targeted Mumia for elimination. The FBI has a file 700 pages long on Mumia, and called him "armed and dangerous" even though he had committed not one crime in his life.

The rulers of this society want him dead for exposing the racist nature of American capitalism. Mumia's conviction over 17 years ago was the product of phony evidence and perjured testimony coerced from alleged witnesses. Although Mumia's lawyers have cut through all the lies and exposed the political agenda behind the persecution of Mumia, he remains on death row and the death warrant could be signed over the next few months. Of the thousands on death row, predominately black, Mumia's case shows most clearly how the death penalty is used as a political weapon to maintain the oppressive rule of the capitalist state.

International action to fight the death penalty and save Mumia's life is urgent. A public meeting has been called for January 28 to bring together the different groups and individuals who support Mumia and to launch a non-sectarian united front coalition which can organise significant protests in the coming months.

**Barbara Duke**  
IBT

## Missed opportunity

Saturday January 9 saw one of the biggest demonstrations ever in Basque history. More than 100,000 people braved the pouring rain to march through the streets of Bilbao.

Women and men of all ages marched together with friends, family and work-

mates - sometimes three generations could be seen marching together. A truly massive mobilisation of the Basque working class.

The demonstration - called by the Basque nationalist parties (PNV, EA, HB) - demanded the immediate restoration of the Basque political prisoners to the Basque country. This elementary demand has been the focus of a series of militant demonstrations in the three months since the Basque elections. Basque prisoners - including the entire former leadership of Henri Batasuna - are currently dispersed all over Spain, often more than 500 miles away - making it next to impossible for family and friends to regularly visit those in prison.

The Basque government itself has pointed out that this is in clear violation of Spanish law, which states that prisoners should serve their terms close to home. Apparently, the Spanish government likes to give Basque prisoners special treatment. Special treatment of a different sort from the former PSOE ministers jailed for their part in the notorious GAL operation. They have been let out 'pending appeal' - after only four months.

The last six months have seen an entirely new political situation. September's ETA ceasefire was followed by October's elections, with the nationalist parties winning a clear majority on a record turnout. The new government is a PNV-EA coalition supported "from outside" by Herri Batasuna/Euskal Herriarrok. There is a real danger of HB/EH actually entering the bourgeois government. At the moment HB leaders say this is "not on the agenda", but they do not rule it out for the future. Given that a number of HB leaders are known to be in favour of such a move, it is likely to be the focus of a major battle for the heart and soul of Herri Batasuna.

The present situation provides enormous opportunities for socialists, but what has been the role of Izquierda Unida (United Left)? The IU could have taken a lead in the situation. They could have fought for the UGT to support these demonstrations, bringing together their banners, marching in trade union contingents and raising demands against the PNV. What an opportunity.

The Basque labour movement is at present tragically divided between nationalists (ELA and LAB) and non-nationalists (UGT). Who gains when they fight each other, when they make deals with the management against each other, when they cannot even organise joint May Day demonstrations? The bosses are laughing all the way to the bank.

Izquierda Unida should have gone all out for those demonstrations. Never before has there been a better opportunity to go directly to the base of the nationalist parties. But, while probably



thousands of IU supporters turned out from all over the Basque country, they had no profile - and did not intervene.

Every IU member there should have had specially produced leaflets to hand out, attacking the PNV on its record and outlining a socialist alternative. Every one of those 100,000 should have gone away knowing there is a clear alternative to both the PP and the PNV.

The IU did none of this - what a *missed* opportunity. It is not long ago that someone in Bilbao won 19 million pesetas (£90,000) on the national lottery and forgot to collect the prize. I wonder if they are in the leadership of IU?

**Jim Padmore**  
Vitoria, Spain

## Keep your distance?

I must ask what are your opinions on the European Union and the single currency. I am sure that you understand the problems Great Britain faces in the EU, with the loss of sovereignty to Jacques Santer, Sir Leon Brittan and Neil Kinnock. Blair has sold us down the river in the name of ethical socialism with only the resignations of Peter Mandelson and Geoffrey Robinson to console us.

I myself am a member of the Youth Against the EU, which is a cross-party group including communists, socialists, liberals, greens, nationalists and Conservatives (who are the most dominant). I rest more on a centrist point as, although I was raised as a child under the Conservatives, my family (on my mother's side) is from Merthyr Tydfil, Old Labour's second oldest seat, which means a red spirit is in me, as well as a blue one. I am no Thatcherite though.

You may want to distance yourself away from me. But I agree with many things you say - especially on devolution and welfare (the NHS is very important to me for many reasons). The left wing in this country has been divided in a very bad way ever since 1983 and the communists isolated since 1991.

If the left becomes united against Blair the remaining socialists will, hopefully, join you which will weaken Blair's grip on power greatly. A new strategy will be needed to rid the Labour Party of its greatest enemy since Baroness Thatcher. I was once a Labour supporter, until Blair was elected. I would enjoy very much being able to support your Party.

**Gareth Brown**  
Hereford

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# European Union Corruption or democracy?

action

The second half of the 20th century has seen the start of the long process of coming together of European governments whose logic points to a united European capitalist state.

The successful establishment of the euro on January 1 as a common currency of 11 of the wealthiest European countries was an important step in this process. In three years time Euro notes and coins will replace the national currency in participating countries.

Euro-federalists intend this to be followed by political union, with a strong central government. At present the EU is run by an unelected commission and a weak parliament with limited authority over the national governments.

Elections to the parliament in June will give us an opportunity to place the issue of democracy before the working class. The United Socialists initiative, bringing together left groups in Britain, allows us to pose a working class alternative to the bourgeois parties - Tory, Liberal, Labour, Green, and Scottish and Welsh nationalists - all of which are for a capitalist Europe. We want

the Communist Party of the EU.

The working class can best fight the state which oppresses it by building the maximum organisational unity throughout the whole of its territory. To the extent that the bourgeoisie's European convergence takes state form, to that extent the working class must also unite on a Europe-wide basis to oppose it. The CPGB will therefore aim to work with other comrades in the United Socialists to build links with socialists and workers' organisations throughout Europe.

In Britain a significant factor holding up convergence is the strength of national chauvinism. This has been most felt within the Tory Party - divided between the pragmatic pro-European wing, representing the real material interests of capital, and the Eurosceptic wing, which both reflects and promulgates a repulsive, narrow, union jack-waving little Englandism. This ultra-reactionary majority sees anti-European nationalism as a vote winner, and a way of distinguishing themselves from New Labour.

The national chauvinist press has taken full advantage of the rev-

elations of corruption inside the 20-strong European commission, and of the failure of the European parliament to get rid of the most corrupt bureaucrats. Unfortunately for the tabloids the corruption does not seem to have involved any sexual scandals to keep their readers interested. But they did their best to play up stories of commissioner Edith Cresson awarding contracts to her friends and cronies, and of financial irregularities in the humanitarian aid budget administered by commissioner Manuel Marin. The parliament caved in to threats by commission president Jacques Santer to disrupt the bureaucracy by resigning himself if the parliament voted to sack either of these corrupt commissioners.

As we have seen in the case of Peter Mandelson, and even more so in the sleaze which characterised the Tory government under John Major, corruption and anti-corruption is endemic to capitalist politics. Every capitalist wants to gain an advantage over competitors - by fair means or foul - yet needs a stable overall framework which of necessity outlaws corrupt practice. In

some European countries - for example Italy - the ruling class has tolerated a high level of corruption among bourgeois politicians. This occurred as a consequence of the distortions deliberately incorporated into the process of bourgeois democracy in order to prevent communist parties gaining office after World War II. Elsewhere - for example West Germany, where the Communist Party has never been strong enough to pose a threat - the bourgeois establishment has preferred to root out its most corrupt and dishonest members to safeguard the credibility of the system.

Capitalist politics will, however, always throw up people like Edith Cresson or Nick Hamilton willing to break the rules for their own gain. The level of corruption tends to be inversely proportional to the degree of democratic accountability.

As internationalists we do not react to such scandals SLP-style, with inane calls to 'get out of Europe'. The demand must be for an EU constituent assembly to promote the democratic interests of the European masses ●

Mary Godwin

# Republicans debate way forward

On Saturday January 9 a meeting was organised in Edinburgh sponsored by the Campaign for a Federal Republic and the Red Republicans. These organisations were formerly in the Scottish Socialist Alliance and have now joined the new Scottish Socialist Party. In what might be seen as an example of rapprochement in Scotland, there were supporters from Socialist Outlook, the Revolutionary Democratic Group, the Commu-

nist Tendency, and the Scottish Republican Socialist Party, as well as a number of independent socialists and communists participating in the debates.

The Campaign for a Federal Republic has recently gained new supporters and has decided, after opposing the formation of the SSP, that it was necessary to join and openly oppose its nationalist politics. The Campaign has also been forced by these events to redefine itself. Originally it was set up as a single-issue campaign within the Scottish Socialist Alliance. But with the current move to set up a left nationalist party, the Campaign was now basing itself on the politics of 'republican communism'.

Republican communists are those who take seriously the question of republicanism, and see it as an im-

mediate political struggle on the road to communism. Campaign supporters explained that they wanted other republican communists to join with them in fighting for a federal republic. This, they believed, would open the way to workers' power, international socialism and world communism.

The main business of the meeting focused on two questions. First, after discussion, it was agreed to form a republican united front between the Red Republicans and the Campaign for a Federal Republic. The purpose of this was to unite all republicans in the SSP, regardless of whether they were communists, to campaign for militant republicanism and strengthening democracy within the new party. The meeting discussed and agreed a series of amendments to the SSP

constitution, to put before the founding conference in February. The aim of these is to extend the rights of platforms and tendencies within the party.

The second main discussion concerned a proposal from the CFR that the meeting considered the possibility of forming an ideological bloc. Such a bloc would not be confined either to Scotland or membership of the SSP. The aim of such a bloc would be to promote agreed slogans and hold educationalists to discuss and debate the ideas behind the agreed slogans. We might agree for example to make propaganda for "world communism", whilst having open debate over what constitutes world communism.

The CFR proposed five slogans - democratic republic, revolutionary democracy, workers' power, international socialism and world communism. Agreement was soon apparent over the slogans of workers' power and world communism. The idea of a democratic republic was not acceptable to some comrades and a proposal to substitute 'republicanism' gained broad approval. The slogan of revolutionary democracy was also accepted by those present with the exception of Socialist Outlook.

However, the biggest stumbling block proved to be the slogan of 'international socialism'. This was opposed by comrades from the Communist Tendency. Allan Armstrong protested that he had been misrepresented in the *Weekly Worker* as being opposed to both international socialism and world communism. The debate therefore helped us to clarify that Allan accepted the idea of world communism and was only opposed to the slogan 'international socialism'. The discussion ended without agreement. Nevertheless it was agreed that a positive start had been made and that we would have to go back for further clarification and debate. A further meeting is being planned for February ●

Dave Craig  
Revolutionary Democratic Group

## ■ CPGB seminars

**London:** Sunday January 24, 5pm - 'State autonomy in pre-capitalist societies', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* Vol 1 as a study guide. For details phone 0181-459 7146.

**Manchester:** Monday February 1, 7.30pm - 'The process of accumulation of capital', in the series on Karl Marx's *Capital*. For details phone 0161-798 6417 E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.

## ■ Party wills

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

## ■ London Socialist Alliance

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

## ■ 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.

## ■ Defend Mumia Abu-Jamal!

Public meeting, Thursday January 28 - 7pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London. All welcome.

## ■ Bloody Sunday march

Saturday January 30 - March for Justice/ Time for Truth. Assemble 12 noon at Victoria Embankment (opposite Temple tube). March 1pm via Westminster, Downing Street and Trafalgar Square. Rally 3.30pm - Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, NW1 (nearest tube: Euston). Invited speakers: Sinn Féin, SDLP, Bloody Sunday Relatives for Justice Campaign, Justice for Diarmuid O'Neill Campaign, Stephen Lawrence Family Campaign and the Labour Party. For more details contact the Bloody Sunday March Organising Committee, PO Box 10132, London SW2 3BZ. Call: 0181-442 8778.

## ■ 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 Union, 29 Booth Street, Ashton under Lyne.

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# Fighting fund

# Unbeatable

Marx's comment that capitalism tends to reduce everything to a "cash nexus" is beautifully illustrated by Tony Blair's latest efforts to bully teachers with performance-related pay, which the unions quite rightly say will be extremely difficult to implement. "When we are putting in that extra money," Blair said on BBC radio, we must get "something back in return".

The writers of this paper do not expect anything "back in return" by way of money for themselves. But that does not mean we get free newsprint, free postage and free computers. The *Weekly Worker* costs money ... and as a non-commercial enter-

prise relies on you - its readers. Those who value the *Weekly Worker* and want to see our struggle to reforge the Communist Party come to fruition must take your personal share in its financial sustenance.

Donations this week include £15 from MS, £10 from MC and £25 from JS. Your commitment is much appreciated.

The January fund has reached £280 towards our monthly £400 target ●

Ian Farrell

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



# Historical idealism or

Socialist News writer **Don Hoskins** breaks Arthur Scargill's "Nazi", "bookburning" ban and outlines his *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* views on homosexuality, etc

It will take more than the cod philosophy put forwards by Phil Sharpe (*Weekly Worker* December 17) to make the reality of imminent imperialist collapse disappear, make the titanic and now eternally established reality of 70 years of Soviet achievement disappear, or deny the urgent necessity to warn the working class of the need to overturn capitalism by making revolution against it.

Revolution to end capitalism is an inevitable development historically, but one that will only occur with conscious understanding and leadership (a contradiction that seems impossible only to someone who does not grasp even the basics of dialectics). Being as right as humanly possible is crucial for the leadership of the revolutionary fight, and the struggle for clarity is the core of getting it right.

But grasping dialectical materialism and the philosophy of scientific understanding is a million miles away from Sharpe's actual aims, despite his opening welcome for "detailed discussion", as called for by the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*. Far from wanting the discussion, he sets out to attack the *Review* and its clarity.

Nor is he really interested in the application of science to understanding human sexuality and homosexuality, his ostensible reason for the article. Sharpe uses the question of homosexuality only to mobilise the censorious abuse that current PC, single-issue hysteria produces against all attempts to analyse homosexuality objectively. Any attempt to explore the issue politically, psychologically, socially or philosophically is slandered as "homophobic", unless it kowtows to the existing PC wisdom (within capitalism) that homosexuality and heterosexuality are completely equal. There is nothing more between them, it is suggested, than 'lifestyle' preference perhaps, rather than the expression of deep seated social-development difficulties, as some analyses have begun to explore.

And the reason to attack the discussion with abuse rather than argument is to avoid science.

And the real purpose of avoiding science it to be able to continue trying to rubbish all major communist understanding without having to tackle the facts, which begin with developments in the real world. As Phil Sharpe's preoccupations in the article make very clear, he is especially afraid to look at capitalism's growing crisis and the terrifying weaknesses it is producing in the ruling class.

But abuse will not do to head off a growing general willingness to tackle the understanding of these questions by serious people and thoughtful workers. They will produce a growing depth of consciousness that the fight against the capitalist crisis will demand.

Sharpe is so fearful of the weight of understanding being produced now that he has to try a new tack, proving that there is no such thing as truth. Science, he declares, cannot produce an objective world view because it is not testable. He sweepingly declares "predictability" to be an inadequate and flawed concept for defining scientific understanding.

Tellingly, his hostility to "predictability" (a code here for 'testability') is triggered by descriptions of the capitalist crisis in the *EPSR* and the existence and achievements past and present; of the workers' states, particularly the USSR, but also China, Vietnam, Korea, Cuba and most of east Europe.

He wants to cover up the more and more glaringly wrong perspectives presented by the *Weekly Worker*, by pretending that it does not matter that events are developing in a completely different direction to the relentlessly gloomy and defeatist CPGB world view. After all, he asserts, prediction is not what science is about.

But far from a revitalised New World Order in capitalism, led by a resurgent US imperialism, pushing back revolutionary and nationalist struggle (as the CPGB absurdly says) and far from imperialism "cooling down the hot spots" in the anti-imperialist struggle worldwide, real world events point to growing upheaval. And at its core is ever deepening inter-imperialist conflict and political and economic undermining of the system on an unprecedented scale.

Never before has imperialism - and its leading force, the US ruling class - been so split politically, and never before has so much humiliating and degrading sleaze and infighting beset Washington. Militarily and politically its interventions in hot spots from Somalia to the Sudan, the Balkans to Iraq, despite fascistic barbarity, have been disastrous or ineffectual. But the *Weekly Worker*-type theories of a 1990s rebuilt imperialist confidence would predict otherwise. And the prediction does not match events. So, to get round it, Sharpe says science is not really about predicting at all. He means there really is nothing to test and therefore no way to distinguish one view from another. There can be "no one main reason" to explain homosexuality, for example, he says, implying that therefore we give up the battle to understand. The great 'multanimous' swamp of 57 varieties of Trotskyism and quasi-Trotskyism is unavoidable.

Aware that this is not the strongest of philosophy, he says elsewhere that "of course a theory can be tested", by "its capacity to explain reality". But how can anyone know what this "capacity" is, unless there is something to test against reality, which in all normal understanding means predictions?

The anti-prediction argument has an element of slyness to it because it tilts, correctly, at a bourgeois rigidity in the concept of predictability, but it uses this to go right on past and dismiss 'prediction' altogether.

In the narrow mechanical sense 'predictability' is a mainstay of post-war capitalist 'philosophy of science' as expounded by Karl Popper particularly, who has an avowed and open anti-communist agenda. The pre-digested simple version of this, as thrust down every science undergraduate's throat for the last 40 years, is that only mechanically repeatable, experimentally verifiable predictions constitute science at all. All observation, cat-

egorisation, description and analysis of movement, development and trends is useless story-telling in this narrow view.

And even then there is no such thing as 'knowledge', or truth, and especially not absolute truth or eternal truth - only disprovable hypotheses (ideas) or temporarily convenient analogies, all waiting to be shot down as another comes along which is a better 'fit for the data'.

The greatest problem for this Cold War Popperian 'philosophy' - whose only rationale is to push Marxism outside the realm of science and discredit it - has always been the profoundly influential theory of evolution, which has built an ever deeper and more solid base in science over the post-war decades despite Popper. It now numbers among its protagonists some of most thoughtful and combative of the modern bourgeois scientists. Darwinism incurred Popper's wrath because it uses a method of historical materialism as part of its structure, just as Marxism does (and Darwin won Marx's admiration).

It is in fact also strongly predictive, as one of its current leading figures, Steven Jay Gould, points out. As he says, every time he chips away at a piece of rock to find a fossil he 'predicts' that the sequence of fossils will be present in a certain order; as it invariably is. If he found a human skeleton lower down (older) than a dinosaur, then a major rethink would be needed.

However this predictability does not stop the anti-predictability Sharpe from citing Darwinism as the "most outstanding" example of a theory apparently to show his materialist credentials and put him on the right side against the crudities of Popper.

Against moribund Popperism, holding up Darwin is good for the 'revolutionary' credentials, and commendable. But Sharpe cannot bring himself to cite Marxism as the major theory with even greater philosophical depth and range than Darwin, and thereby demonstrate some real revolutionary credentials, Marxism is after all the theory which analysed the whole revolutionary nature of all development (including species), material and theoretical.

It is Marxism that showed the "necessity of an alternative to idealist philosophies of history to analyse society" (which Sharpe credits to Darwin astoundingly!) and it is Marxism that first disentangled the great class-based conflict of materialist versus idealist philosophy as precisely reflecting the interests of the working (progressive, materialist) class in history and the reactionary idealism of the ruling class.

Sharpe cannot have the remotest understanding of Marxism, which he immediately goes on to prove by saying that he would never "suggest Darwin's views are infallible and eternal". Whyever not? The *body* of evolutionary science has been established for all time, no matter what developments, elaborations and modifications continuously developing human knowledge might make to the basic theory.

Sharpe gives away that he is actually as Popperian as Popper, by add-

ing: "but at present no other theory explains the natural world in a more coherent manner". So, theories come and theories go, one supplanted by another, a battle of *ideas*.

Just to underline the point, Sharpe casually writes off Newton's laws of motion, which are possibly an even greater intellectual materialist achievement than Darwinism. Newtonian mechanics was the major intellectual product of developing 18th century bourgeois industrial culture.

But Newton's grasp has been *supplanted* by the theoretical revolution of modern physics, says Sharpe. It is no longer valid. In 1908 Lenin took on and ridiculed exactly the same argument, put forward by the idealists of the then 'new physics'. Newtonian physics remains the norm for most terrestrial purposes. Human knowledge builds up a core of understanding which becomes fully established, despite transformation and development and continuous deepening of the theories. This continuous dialectical process goes on with the gathering of new knowledge as new practice is tried, revealing shortcomings and contradictions, which lead to new knowledge, which then further refines practice. There is established knowledge, and then the cutting edge of human understanding where argument is needed to clarify the picture (the Trotskyists, instead, want a permanent soup of endless argument about everything).

OK, concedes Lenin: "Of course we must never forget that the criterion of practice can never, in the nature of things, either confirm or refute any human idea *completely*. This criterion too is sufficiently 'indefinite' not to allow human knowledge to become 'absolute', but at the same time it is sufficiently definite to wage a *ruthless* fight on all varieties of idealism and agnosticism. If what our practice confirms is the sole, ultimate and objective truth, then from this must follow the recognition that the only path to this truth is the path of science, which holds the materialist point of view.

"... But inasmuch as the criterion of practice - ie, the course of development of all capitalist countries in the last few decades - proves only the objective truth of Marx's *whole* social and economic theory in general, and not merely one or other of its parts, formulations, etc, it is clear that talk here of the 'dogmatism' of the Marxists is to make an unpardonable concession to bourgeois economics. The sole conclusion to be drawn from the opinion held by Marxists that Marx's theory is an objective truth is that by following the *path* of Marxist theory we shall draw closer and closer to objective truth (without ever exhausting it); but by following any *other path* we shall arrive at nothing but confusion and lies" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 14, p143).

A century later and there remains so many alleged 'revolutionaries' like Sharpe who would have "confusion and lies" reign overall, covering it over by daunting talk of supposed 'philosophy' when all development proves the objective truth once again of Marx's (and Lenin's) understanding, taken as a whole.

Picking out and dismissing bits of science as "rightwing bourgeois", as Sharpe arbitrarily chooses to do with psychoanalytic theories (about homosexuality being a problem of socialisation and family interactive development) is silly. Or dishonest, more likely, because Sharpe happily

cites other (equally "bourgeois" scientific) theories about homosexuality when they support his PC stance. For example he suddenly loses sight of the bourgeois nature of science when he chooses to cite the supposed discovery of a homosexual gene, 'proving' homosexuality to be 'normal'. Even within bourgeois science this discovery is widely contested incidentally.

The bourgeois limits to modern psychology or science in general do not make science wrong so much as hamstrung: at best mechanistic and unable to broaden out; at worst paralysed by stupid idealistic fantasies.

In the greatest achievements of human struggle and class struggle, the instrument evolved to test theory is the party. Arguments and polemic are here most closely focused and most sharply tested and fought out, as far as possible to clarity. Testing theory against reality by practice is constantly crucial, which requires that the party, and the class behind it, develops a line based on its theoretical battles (of course it needs to have the theoretical battle to establish a line).

As the devaluation crisis now ripping through Brazil on the coat tails of the ever deepening Asian and Russian crisis shows, there is still nothing to disprove Marx. And plenty to show he was right, profoundly. And just to be sure we can put forward a prediction (that the *EPSR* has alone pointed to) - the crisis will rapidly draw in the once-mighty dollar bringing it and the US imperialist order to collapse and chaos.

Strangely the Trotskyists and the quasi-Trotskyists, in their PC mode, suddenly are the least willing to argue and battle out developing understandings. Even to most tentative hypotheses that homosexuality might not be identical to heterosexuality produce demands for silence, for shutting down publications on a par with the most draconian bookburning demands of the inquisition or the Nazis. Suppressing the real argument is capitalism's major weapon against the truth.

In case that does not work, Sharpe finally goes all the way back to medieval ducking stool witch-finding. If you drowned, you were innocent (but dead). If you floated, you were a witch and had to be burned.

Says Sharpe, if you do not *agree* with his PC views on homosexuality, and (oh horror) uphold the allegedly "traditional bourgeois ideology and morality about the family unit" (though the tens of thousands years long path of family evolution long predates capitalism or even feudalism), you are showing signs of "the problem of latency", an "obsessive fear of acknowledging their particular sexuality by repressed individuals". The more you deny this, the argument runs, the more you latency you have and therefore, it is to be presumed, the more you *secretly* go along with the opposite argument. So only one argument really exists - Sharpe's. A veritable philosophic ducking stool!

None of this diatribe of misrepresentation, distorted quotes and agnosticism has anything to do with science: just hostility to science and an attempt to confuse the working class. It will not work, as Sharpe and the Trotskyist swamp will discover, as revolutionary practice necessarily rapidly sharpens in the coming imperialist disintegration. It will give short shrift to nonsense. That is another prediction - to be tested shortly ●

# Marxist analysis?

**Phil Sharpe** argues that the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* defends utopian socialism and opposes revolutionary Marxism

The *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* editorial board has outlined a second reply to my *Weekly Worker* article of December 17 1998. This response of the *EPSR* is generally a defensive exercise consisting of repeating its political positions, and denouncing my article as an example of academic Marxism. Significantly, this approach represents a regression from the polemical content of Steve Johns' letter in the *Weekly Worker* of January 7.

Johns was content to define my emphasis upon the importance of competing theories for understanding the world as idealist, but now the *EPSR* prefers to exaggerate this point and contend that I am arguing that these various theories have equal validity. This caricature of my original stance serves a purpose for the *EPSR* in that it allows it to dogmatically uphold its own theories about social reality without having to thoroughly compare and contrast them with rival theories. Thus the *EPSR* denounces alternatives as petty bourgeois and revisionist.

This point can be shown in relation to understanding the history of the Soviet Union. The *EPSR* maintains that despite Stalin's revisionism and bureaucratic deformations the Soviet Union was a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and its achievements showed the superiority of the workers' state compared to the capitalist system. Thus it is deductively argued that the achievements of the Soviet Union represent an important criterion for defining and comprehending its class character. This generalised abstraction does not explain the content and character of the social system in relation to the extraction of a surplus from the producers. A profound silence on this question is necessary, because it means that the *EPSR* can ignore examining whether there are class differences between the bureaucracy and proletariat. Instead the *EPSR* insists that the bureaucracy and proletariat are united around the achievements.

If we apply this transhistorical abstraction of achievements to other societies, we could argue that the formation of the NHS is an achievement that represents class unity within Britain, and it expresses the potential to overcome class contradictions. This standpoint is part of the ideological mythology of the British ruling class and Labour Party, because the structural mechanisms of British capitalism, which are based upon the extraction of surplus value, were still upheld and consolidated when the NHS was formed. Yes, to a certain extent it is an achievement of proletarian political pressure, which means the NHS was a concession made by the ruling class and Labour Party in order to prevent the possible development of revolutionary struggles, but this achievement cannot be abstracted from the class content of British capitalist society. In the Soviet Union the proletariat, peasantry, and gulag labour have all contributed to the making of immense achievements, such as massive industrial projects, and there have been impressive cultural advances. But these developments do not alter the situation that the bureaucracy dominated the relations of production in an exploitative manner.

Hillel Ticktin and the journal *Critique* have shown that the Soviet system was not durable because it was not possible to establish a systematic process of the extraction of a surplus from the proletariat, and it was this problem that primarily established the acute contradictions of the Soviet Union (I differ with Ticktin concerning his refusal to define the bureaucracy as a ruling class). However, it is also necessary to explain that the increasingly serious ideological crisis within the bureaucracy in the 1980s was a dynamic mediation of the economic situation. In this context of tensions within the ruling class Gorbachev's perestroika became a failed attempt to overcome the economic crisis. This acute economic situation of decline, and the related ideological crisis, led to a fragmentation of the bureaucracy and facilitated the development of Yeltsin's bourgeois counterrevolution. In contrast to this analysis the *EPSR* dismisses any suggestion that the system was failing as defeatist.

The *EPSR* dogmatically refuses to recognise the contradictions within the Soviet Union, and instead blames its demise upon Gorbachev. This subjective approach means it does not have to acknowledge that the system was not the dictatorship of the proletariat, and was not as efficient as capitalism in relation to extracting a surplus from the proletariat. The *EPSR* praises the economic system of the Soviet Union, yet planning and the nationalised economy were essentially fictions in revolutionary Marxist terms. But they were the necessary economic forms for the production of an exploitative surplus.

Does criticism of the Soviet Union express an indifference towards the dictatorship of the proletariat? I would suggest that it is vitally necessary to struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, which has to be based upon the highest forms of democracy and internationalism. The *EPSR* uses different criteria in its definition of the term. This is shown in relation to its proclamation of China as an expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The reality of ruthless capitalist exploitation and one-party oppressive rule is glossed over in order that the *EPSR* can maintain its artificial optimism that socialism is not finished and its inevitable victory is imminent. Thus it identifies the interests, content and future of socialism with the nation state. Or, in other words, it justifies its own version of socialism in one country. This means it contemptuously denies that the approach and ideology of socialism in one country is utopian and so facilitates the rule of an oppressive bureaucratic socialist regime, which has a tendency towards capitalist restoration.

The *EPSR* critique of my article refers to Ireland in order to indicate my supposed self-indulgent academic Marxism, and abdication of political responsibility in relation to building revolutionary Marxism. I think that what has motivated this criticism is the desire to establish differences between myself and the *Weekly Worker* about Ireland and the peace process. Well, *Weekly Worker* supporters already know I have differences with their perspective, and I have never

hidden my views. But, in the world of the *EPSR*, differences between comrades is perplexing and requires Bolshevik explanation.

I would maintain that whilst Sinn Féin and the IRA have a bourgeois democratic class content in relation to policy and perspectives, they also have a proletarian mass base, and have opposed British imperialism successfully. This has resulted in the peace process, and has led to moves towards overcoming the sectarian nature of the Northern Irish state. In general bourgeois democratic opposition to imperialism has been limited and unsuccessful because the national bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation is still dependent upon the economic power of imperialism. Thus Rosa Luxemburg was right to suggest that the demand for national self-determination is only an attempt to transcend class antagonisms, but in practice expresses the domination of the national bourgeoisie over the proletariat. However, in Northern Ireland the proletarian mass basis of republicanism is expressed through principled anti-imperialism, even if this is not socialist anti-imperialism.

Proletarian revolutionary leadership and perspective cannot be achieved spontaneously. Realising bourgeois democracy does not represent a mechanical, objectivist and inevitable process, in which Irish republicanism will automatically accept the supposed ongoing logic of bourgeois democratic revolution merging into social revolution. A revolutionary party should attempt to win over Irish republicanism to a perspective that the bourgeois democratic revolution is not separated from the social and proletarian revolution. In this manner the contradictory proletarian aspect of Irish republicanism is realised and becomes hegemonic.

However, if a revolutionary party does not intervene and try to establish dialogue with Irish republicanism, its bourgeois democratic aspects may become increasingly dominant, and the proletarian base will become subordinate and secondary. In contrast, the *EPSR* defines political leadership as cheerleading anti-imperialist struggles, and thereby effectively denies the need for conscious political struggle to establish the hegemony of a proletarian revolutionary perspective.

In relation once more to the question of predictions, the *EPSR* refers to Marx as providing the definitive answer to my criticism of the usefulness of predictions. Reference is made to the *Communist manifesto* and Marx's view that the proletariat is the "gravedigger of capitalism". In terms of the important structural location of the proletariat within capitalist society it certainly has the potential to carry out revolution and overthrow capitalism.

However, to the *EPSR* 'potential' seems to have the same meaning as 'inevitability' but, as we know from history, this revolutionary potential of the proletariat can be undermined in many different ways, such as through the counterrevolutionary actions of capitalism, social democracy and Stalinism. This shows that history contains the contradictory aspects of uncertainty, barbarism and defeat, as well as the potential for victory and

progress. The *EPSR* turns Marx's comments about inevitability into a timeless formulation that transcends analysis and is beyond criticism. But, if we are to be serious about our theoretical responsibilities, we have to decisively reinterpret, and if necessary modify, the significance of comments from past theoretical works if these comments no longer seem to explain a constantly changing social reality. To the *EPSR* this theoretical task is identical with revisionism and opportunism because it represents disagreement with Marx, who is a world historical individual not capable of being wrong.

This formal approach - Marx wrote something: we agree with it - does not recognise that it is objective reality itself, and its developments, which should be the primary basis to evaluate classic texts. In this context of relating the text to reality, the word 'inevitable' has become more descriptive than analytical, and does not contribute profoundly to the elaboration of perspectives. Indeed, if inevitability is defended dogmatically it can be used to justify historical idealism, or the conception of a predetermined end to history. Such ideological consolation may express formal support from Marx, but it does not explain profoundly the complexity of social reality, and it does not provide the basis for a perspective that acknowledges this complexity in relation to developing a revolutionary approach to the problems of the class struggle. Indeed, in the *Communist manifesto* Marx refers to history consisting of class struggle, and class struggle can lead to the common ruin of the contending classes. This approach, which Engels and Luxemburg reconstructed as 'socialism or barbarism', defends an understanding of history as being open-ended.

Can the *EPSR* consider favourably this open-ended approach, or will its historical idealism remain dominant? The comment that the world imperialist crisis is "heading towards worldwide revolutionary upheaval" (*EPSR* January 12) shows that the perspective of imminent revolution is upheld by the concept of inevitability, and this is why the *EPSR* is eager to locate inevitability within the classic texts of Marxism. This stance is historical idealism, because even though the *EPSR* would probably formally acknowledge the complex problems involved in trying to build a world revolutionary party, it would also effectively deny these problems through placing emphasis upon economic crisis leading to world revolution. Thus the objective processes, or the logic of history, are going towards socialism and will resolve the subjective problem of consciousness.

This approach is similar to Pablo's 1950s thesis that the prospect of World War III will lead to political confrontations that express a logic of international civil war and the transition to (deformed) workers' states. Hence there was no time to build the Fourth International, which was effectively reduced to being a cheerleader for revolutions led by Stalinism. With a form of this catastrophist perspective, the *EPSR* considers the SLP as a centrist agency of revolution, even if the SLP is not considered to be revolutionary. This opportunist logic is important for understanding why the *EPSR* puts emphasis upon a determinist Marx, and is indifferent about a more explanatory Marx.

The *EPSR* argues that its main aim "is not to predict but to precisely explain reality whilst it is happening and

before the history is completed - ie, before the facts are fully known or knowable" (*EPSR* January 12). The *EPSR* has made an important concession in that it now agrees with me that the main aspect of developing a theory is to explain reality. But it is still trying to justify prediction, even though this is formally a more modest formulation about describing things before history has been completed. But it does not differentiate between cause and effect. The cause of something, such as the law of value, can be explained in relation to economic changes, as with the development of monopoly capital. But the unknown, that which has not yet happened, or the potential effects of these economic changes, may be very complex and difficult to describe in advance.

This is why to Lenin and Luxemburg monopoly capital seemed to have only a short-term future because of the problems involved in accumulating capital, but Hilferding and Bukharin considered that monopoly capital could have a long-term future because monopolies were able to organise the production of value in a less anarchic manner than smaller competitive capital.

Thus whilst Lenin, Luxemburg, Hilferding and Bukharin all had something explanatory to contribute about monopoly capital, it could be argued that all of them were wrong about its effects. Lenin and Luxemburg were right to suggest that the contradictions of monopoly capital did contribute to the acute crisis of capitalism, leading to two world wars. But, as Bukharin and Hilferding may have argued, it was monopoly capital that also proved to be the main structural basis of the economic boom after 1945. Unknown (future) counterrevolutionary political factors were crucial to the prospect of the continuation of monopoly capital. It is not possible to predict in a rigid manner the outcome of the development of monopoly capital - although we can explain the causes of its development and decline, such as the falling rate of profit - because the complexity of the balance of class forces means that the political effects of the structural cause will be initially unknown and constantly changing. Indeed, the political is the dynamic aspect of the economic crisis and its development. In contrast, for economic determinists the future can be predicted because it is reduced to its economic causes.

The *EPSR* once again makes the comment that the *Weekly Worker* and Phil Sharpe have ignored Marx's comments about homosexuality. These comments relate to a supposed rightwing homosexual political conspiracy within Germany, and so they do not represent any real theoretical basis to develop an understanding of sexuality. Hence, the 'significance' of Marx's comments is used by the *EPSR* to claim Marx for its rightwing Freudian views about homosexuality. The *EPSR* has nothing constructive to add to its views about sexuality apart from calling the *Weekly Worker* and Phil Sharpe 'politically correct'.

This shows that the *EPSR* uncritically accepts bourgeois ideological opinion, and so fails to acknowledge that to use the 'politically correct' label in an insulting manner is a linguistic means to oppose sexual emancipation and liberation from all forms of oppression. The *EPSR*, which criticises Trotskyist accommodation to bourgeois ideology, is itself prepared to uphold conventional views about sexuality, whilst formally supporting sexual equality ●

# Political problems, political solutions

Royston Bull's election as SLP vice president demands a principled response

Our friend and comrade Dave Craig raised some interesting and pertinent questions in his recent article on developments in the Socialist Labour Party (*Weekly Worker* January 14). Since Royston Bull's election as its vice-president at the Manchester special congress in November 1998 there has been considerable debate about how best to respond. The Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency itself divided over the issue at our last meeting. Not, it should be stressed, in strategic terms. More over tactical details.

Comrade John Bridge submitted a short substituting amendment and this was opposed by the mover of the motion - ie, the Revolutionary Democratic Group. The Bridge amendment united the CPGB and was carried by a big majority. The RDG proceeded to split down the middle when it came to the final vote.

Comrade Craig is clear. Bull should be investigated by an SLP control commission, sacked "from his post" and "expelled" - all because of his unacceptable views on homosexuality. Incidentally this call to purge Bull is a new departure for the RDG. The CPGB is also clear. Bull and co must be ruthlessly "exposed". We continue to urge SLP members to organise a democratic rebellion, to break politically with Bull and the whole stinking corpse of Scargillism.

The difference between us might appear only one of nuance. Nevertheless comrade Craig's approach neatly squares with the *organisational* demands of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus and its followers in the SLP's 'Appeal' faction.

These spurned courtiers want Bull expelled and themselves reinstated. Arrogantly they call upon general secretary Scargill to unilaterally reverse the defeat of their candidate, Patrick Sikorski, by Bull and his 'Campaign to support Scargill and the national leadership of the SLP' bloc. In London, under Fisc president Brian Heron, the 'Appeal' faction have resorted to crude blackmail. Unless Scargill immediately removes Bull, there will be no SLP slate for the European elections in the capital.

What is so objectionable about Bull and his cohorts around the cut-and-paste *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*? It is hard to know exactly where to start. Essentially the *EPSR* faction espouses an extreme, not to say bizarre, form of economism. Virtually every democratic issue - from Scotland to homosexual equality - is vehemently denounced as a diversion from the catastrophic collapse of capitalism and inevitable revolution. A consoling outlook directly inherited from Bull's years as a functionary in Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party. Another characteristic WRP trait is fawning before the 'great leader' and a rabid loathing of every leftist group, albeit nowadays given an anti-Trotskyite twist by Bull. In fact the *EPSR*'s original Trotskyism simply flipped into its Stalinite opposite.

.....  
**"Communists should resolutely expose Bull's thinking"**  
 .....

Thus the collapse of the so-called workers' states in eastern Europe and the USSR is explained away by the *weakness* of the means of oppression. The KGB should have been "stronger". The Berlin Wall "higher".

How to sum up Bull's approach to homosexuals? Reactionary? Undoubtedly. Unscientific? Certainly. Prejudiced? Definitely. His press carries dark warnings about homosexual cliques. Their predilections for children. Their unnatural vices and practices. But he is not out to unnecessarily persecute or discriminate. That is, if homosexuals shun campaigning, hide their sexuality and join the Scargillite crusade in the sure knowledge that the end of capitalism will remove the sordid breeding ground for the homosexual "perversion".

Till recently Fisc and the 'Appeal' faction found none of this objectionable. No polemic nor hint of disapproval. When they were a faction in power circulation of the *EPSR* was tolerated. Indeed the *EPSR* was used, particularly in Greater Manchester, to witch hunt communists. This had the full blessing and encouragement of the 'Appeal' faction. Only when Fisc was ousted was it suddenly discovered that Bull and the *EPSR* were "homophobes" (the Campaign for a Democratic SLP held a fringe meeting on the question as the 2nd Congress with Peter Tatchell as main speaker - no Fiscite saw fit to attend). Yet now on the basis of this high crime against political correctness the 'Appeal' faction demand expulsion. In other words Fisc and the 'Appeal' faction have conveniently 'discovered' Bull's homophobia and for their own narrow ends are baying for the only fitting punishment. Instead of winning a rational argument they rely instead on the bigotry fostered by local government-style PC. It does not matter about the past, the facts or freedom of debate. Bull is a homophobe and therefore must burn.

Scargill understands this bureaucratic method perfectly. But he has no intention, for the moment, of throwing his second in command to the flames. He has though moved to prevent a war of words or at least curb the factional activities of his minions. At January's national executive committee he got a motion "overwhelmingly" passed calling upon Bull's *EPSR* to close down - denounced by *Socialist News* writer Don Hoskins of the *EPSR* as something "on a par with the most draconian book-burning de-

mands of the inquisition or the Nazis" (see p4). Failing that, its publishers are obliged to maintain a complete silence on the SLP and not offend anyone's sensibilities when it comes to women or gays. Just to be fair, Scargill issued an edict ordering the 'Appeal' faction to stop its agitation and dissolve. Having received no "satisfactory" assurances, its leaders - Brian Heron, Carolyn Sikorski, Terry Dunn and Helen Drummond - are to face trial before a Scargill 'control commission'.

We critically defend Fisc and its allies. But we accuse them of hypocrisy. They only issued their call for organisational measures against Bull *after* he democratically replaced Patrick Sikorski. What then are we to make of the RDG? It only issued its call for organisational measures against Bull *after* the Fiscites. In order to excuse what might perhaps unfairly be construed as tailism comrade Craig is reduced to branding the CPGB as a mix of "libertarians" and those merely concerned to have "clean hands". The implication is clear. CPGB comrades supposedly aspire towards a "party of the whole class" in which "every kind of reactionary and chauvinist prejudice" is tolerated. The RDG, in contrast, fights for a "vanguard party".

To put the record straight, let me "clarify exactly" where we stand - as requested by comrade Craig. The Communist Party is a process. Scientific ideas are the dominant ideas to the extent that there is a culture of open debate, polemical struggle and continuous questioning of established truths. Under such fertile conditions advanced theory can go from being the property of lone individuals to the democratically agreed practice of the whole.

Backward ideas exist. That is inevitable. Development is uneven. A mass Communist Party will have members carrying all sorts of ideological baggage. The comrades must be kept and at the same time their old notions progressively shed. That can be done effectively only through a combination of political education and the actual day-to-day work of Party-building organised around the highest obtainable programmatic and theoretical level.

The suggestion that the millions-strong CPGB necessary to make a successful revolution in a country like Britain would exclude those holding backward ideas - eg, green irrationalism, nationalist sentiments, retrogressive attitudes towards women or homosexuals - is simply untenable. That does not denote libertarianism however. The CPGB operates according to the tenets of democratic centralism. Every member, no matter what their particular opinions, is expected, as a matter of discipline, to *accept* the programme as the basis of joint activity and to *fully and conscientiously* carry out agreed actions - ie, by congress, central committee, aggregate, cell or those appointed to act in their name. It should also be stressed that anyone whose main purpose consisted of propagating backward prejudices would quickly be shown the door. The guiding principle can nevertheless be encapsulated by the slogan, 'unity of action, freedom of criticism'. Put another way, the Party is an organism for advanced

ideas to combat and overcome backward ideas.

But what sort of political formation is the SLP? It is no vanguard party. Previously comrade Craig has described it, or called for it to become, a communist-Labour party. In fact the SLP is better classified as Scargillite. Politically it is a unique amalgam of anti-EU national socialism, Stalinism, NUMism and MacDonaldite anti-communism, ruled over by a single, all-powerful personality. It is then a vehicle not for socialism, but a would-be labour dictator.

Comrade Craig states that the SLP "has had a positive impact on the socialist movement". "There is little doubt," he says, "in my mind that [the break of Scargill from the Labour Party] has helped to persuade the SWP, for example, to stand candidates." I beg to differ. Surely the overriding factor in terms of the SWP is the permanent right shift of New Labour. Either way, the impact of the SLP has in many respects been negative. Let us simply ask ourselves whether or not its existence encourages or discourages further splits from Labour. Unfortunately at present the balance tilts towards the latter, not the former.

The reasons are plain to see. Firstly, it has failed electorally and anatomically. There has been no breakthrough. Members exist in tiny, non-functioning constituency branches or unknowingly as trade union block votes. Secondly, it has failed as a unity project. The SLP is famously sectarian. Scargill is against electoral unity or cooperation as a matter of principle. Thirdly, it has failed democratically. There is an absence of the barest minimum of democratic procedure or control from below. Members have been voided by decree. Others unofficially expelled. Congresses are a farce. One retired miners' association - which naturally Scargill holds in his back pocket - can decide everything. Fourthly, *Socialist News* has failed. Circulation is abysmal. In terms of debate and intellectual level it scores zero. It vies with *The New Worker* and *The Socialist* for the title of the dullest paper on the left.

Under these circumstances it is strange that comrade Craig and the RDG display such an affinity towards the SLP. After all here is a party whose delegates gave Bull a majority (without the intervention of the notorious North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association). Which elected a batch of *EPSR*ers, together with the Stalin Society's Harpal Brar and son, Ranjeet, and gave Scargill a free ride along with his customary standing ovation.

Instead of echoing the bureaucratic call to expel Bull - no matter how dressed up in the garb of a control commission - communists inside and outside the SLP should be resolutely exposing Bull's thinking - and not only on homosexuality - as wrong and reactionary. That is the only hope of educating and constructing a viable majority that can replace him and the whole incumbent leadership.

It should be mentioned that the CPGB has been perfectly consistent in its attitude towards Bull and the *EPSR*. Like comrade Craig we too "defend the right to publish for all mem-

bers". Not because we preach 'live and let live'. On the contrary. We are determined to create the best conditions for *exterminating* backward ideas. It was on just such a basis that the CPGB, along with the RDG, supported the Revolutionary Platform at the SLP's 1st Congress. Incidentally Bull and his chums were then anti-Scargill and formed a constituent part of that bloc.

With the full knowledge of the RDG our Provisional Central Committee even challenged Bull to take up CPGB membership. At the Community University in Swansea in 1996 he agreed in principle. National organiser Mark Fischer visited the Bull mansion in Stockport to explain terms and conditions. Bull would have freedom to publish, but as a Party task he was to be a regional *Weekly Worker* journalist (Bull has a record of employment with a range of provincial bourgeois papers). We commissioned a test piece on the Liverpool dockers' dispute. The result - an *EPSR*-style tirade, characterising the strike as an "anachronism". We stuck it in as a letter under the name, Ben Tully (*Weekly Worker* October 10 1996). That elicited a protest note from Jimmy Nolan, chair of the Liverpool dockers, "taking issue" with what he saw as a scurrilous *attack* on the strike (October 17 1996). Bull also informed us that he was willing to work as a *Weekly Worker* journalist for cash. We flatly and *openly* rejected this ultimatum - an event which coincided with him throwing in his lot with Scargill and the witch hunters (see SL Kenning *Weekly Worker* November 21 1996). Our ways parted.

What if Bull had joined? Would we have excused him from fighting anti-homosexual prejudice? No. Would we have let him off distributing election material demanding equal rights? No. Would he have been freed from the exacting task of winning the working class to take the lead in all democratic struggles. No.

Had he carried out his duties as a CPGB member but still kept his backward views, he would have been fought politically all along the line. We do not offer such elements peace, but the sword. If he had refused to perform his duties, then it would be perfectly legitimate to consider expulsion. Especially if he persisted in justifying himself in his own factional press.

Were we right to challenge Bull with CPGB membership? I think we were right. His manner of refusal showed him to be little more than an unprincipled huckster. Are we right to publish the *EPSR* views of *Socialist News* writer Don Hoskins in this issue? I think we are right. Not only has he broken Scargill's "demands for silence" using the *Weekly Worker*, but in so doing he provides yet more ammunition for those such as comrade Phil Sharpe, who is doing such a splendid job in dissecting the whole *EPSR Anschauung*.

Fundamentally the problem in the SLP comes down to politics, not organisation. Bull was elected not through some trick or deficiency in the SLP constitution, but because of woe-ful political backwardness. We believe that such a political problem needs a political solution ●

Jack Conrad

Around the left

# Vote United Socialists?

Nobody ever said left unity would be easy. Or if they did, they were being foolish. There is still a long way to go. But it is important not to lay the blame for our current non-unity purely on a history of bad will, prima donnaism, chronic sectarianism, etc. We all come from very different historical and theoretical traditions. Therefore, there is no magical short cut to unity and rapprochement.

In other words, we are involved in a process. The United Socialists initiative, for all its obvious shortcomings, is part of this process of edging towards unity - or at least a 'pre-unity' stage. A wide and broad

number of left groups have been pulled into the United Socialists orbit.

It is encouraging that one of the group that attended the January 5 meeting to discuss this year's Euro elections was Workers Power, even if it was only as an observer. Traditionally, this tiny - and growing ever smaller by the month, it seems - Trotskyite group has been one of the most Labour-loyal organisations on the left. Its auto-Labourism made it instinctively hostile to any left group that dared to challenge Labour at the ballot box. No vote for Arthur Scargill; no vote for Dave Vellist. Dogma decreed - and still does - that *instead*

WP is "for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party, in order to win workers within those organisations [?] away from reformism and to the revolutionary party", as it says each month in the *Workers Power* 'where we stand' column. (The leadership of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International really needs to take another look at this column.)

Happily, life itself is eating away at WP's dogmas. The collapse - and continued decay - of the (degenerated/deformed) 'workers' states' and the rapid de-Labourisation of Labour under Blair is forcing WP to engage with formations like United Socialists. Thus, the editorial in *Workers Power*, entitled 'A socialist challenge?', states: "The shine is beginning to rub off New Labour ... However, in the absence of an upsurge in militant action against the government, disgruntled ex-Labourites and far left groups are turning towards elections as a way of opposing Blair. The Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Workers' Liberty, Socialist Outlook, *Weekly Worker* and the Independent Labour Network (a group of left reformists around expelled Labour MEP Ken Coates) have come together to form the United Socialists to fight the European elections in the London region in May" (January).

It goes on to say: "The US electoral platform was published in December's *Socialist Outlook*. It fails to provide a revolutionary way forward, and to outline the link between today's struggles and the need for socialist revolution. Its calls for a 35-hour week without loss of pay, a minimum wage of £6 an hour, full trade union rights and taxation of the rich to pay for a improved services are good. But when the platform tackles the question of nationalisation it blurs the dividing line between reform and revolution. It calls for 'public

ownership and democratic control of industry and finance'. But what does this mean?"

Yes, in some respects WP is quite right. What does it mean? Yet this is precisely why communists and socialists should welcome the advent of United Socialists, the Socialist Alliances, etc. They are sites in which we can openly - in theory anyway - fight the battle of ideas - ie, *struggle* for clarity and a scientific Marxist understanding of the world. Just thumping down the *Transitional programme* or WP's *Trotskyist manifesto* at meetings as 'the answer' will persuade no-one

Naturally, and quite rightly, WP has its own solutions and answers. It tells us: "Only the expropriation of the rail companies - nationalisation without a penny in compensation to the private profiteers - and placing them under the control of the workers who run the trains and those who use them, can answer our need for a cheap, safe and clean transport system. This is a revolutionary answer. But to pose it clearly in the platform would split the forces that make up the US. So we are left with a confusing fudge, which each part of the alliance can spin differently."

The editorial also objects to the United Socialists call to "scrap all racist immigration controls", saying: "What immigration controls aren't racist?"

All these issues need to discussed in great detail. Does the call for "nationalisation" really represent the 'reformist' and 'revolutionary' dividing lines? - and are the immigration controls of the British state *racist*? Some might disagree. And what about constitutional-democratic questions, which the *WP* editorial in its criticisms does not even mention. These important issues have to be hammered out ●

Don Preston

## Esperanto Hurricane of persecutions

The fall of the bureaucratic socialist regimes in the USSR and eastern Europe was a body blow to the Esperantist international language movement, removing at a stroke substantial material resources, such as subsidised premises and publications, paid officials and teachers. Esperantist organisations were decimated and clubs closed down as the cold hand of capitalism focused workers' attention on bread and butter questions.

For historical reasons Russia and the Soviet Union have, ever since the birth of the language in 1887, held the largest numbers of Esperanto speakers, while the greatest concentrations have been in Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria. And this despite the persecution of Esperanto speakers under Stalin's Great Russian chauvinism.

The closing down of the Soviet Esperantist Union at the height of Stalin's xenophobia as a "counterrevolutionary organisation" gave the international language a bad press in the 'official' communist movement which has left its mark of anti-Esperanto prejudice to this day. When Khrushchev declared the banning of the SEU to have been illegal, for many imprisoned, executed or disappeared Esperantists it was too late.

The survival and flourishing of Esperanto after the 'hurricane of persecutions' wrought by both the Hitler and Stalin regimes underlines the fact that it is no mere project, but a living language with a substantial international population of speakers, not to mention a body of literature which surpasses many a small national language.

The revival of the movement in Soviet bloc states in the 1950s and 60s was tolerated, but only as a wing of the official peace movement, and as long as it fell in line with the needs of state diplomacy. Full-time officials were imposed from above to keep the Esperantists in check. Incredibly, the bureaucrat sent to 'represent' Soviet Esperantists at the 1973 World Esperanto Congress in London was not even able to speak the language.

When the International Collective of Communist Esperantists (IKEK), with its journal *Internaciisto*, was set up a few years later by Austrian comrades with the financial backing of the Communist Party of Austria, this small step forward was, by and large, frowned upon by the salaried 'communist' bureaucrats of the official state-sponsored Esperantists. Organising under the diplomatic banner of 'peace' was OK. Organising ourselves as communists, we were told, was sectarian and either old-fashioned or premature.

Now the 'official' communist Esperanto movement has been blown away. Communist Esperantists must organise themselves - as communists, not pacifists. In place of the mind-numbing diplomatic resolutions of the World Esperantist Peace Movement (MEM), the IKEK can make itself into a weapon in the struggle for clarification, to learn the lessons of failure of the 'official' communist movement, and to reforge it at a higher level.

The 11th conference of the IKEK, held in France in August 1998, pointed towards this potential role by confirming that the organisation is open to all tendencies of the workers' movement. The new president, Fausto Castano Vallina from Spain, is calling for the pages of *Internaciisto* to become "the tool of ideological debate of the Esperantist communists" (*Internaciisto* January-February 1999). All members can attend the annual conference, elect the leadership and change the rules by a simple majority.

The 12th conference is planned for Cuba at the end of 1999 and beginning of 2000. Given the relative ease of learning, it is not too late to study the language in time to take part in the debates in Havana.

A section of the organisation has been founded in Britain, with regular meetings in London. Write to Stan Keable, IKEK Secretary, Galaxy News Box 100, 37 Walm Lane, London NW2 4QU ●

Stan Keable

## Obituary

# Paul Smith

It is with great sadness that we report the death, on January 11 1999, of comrade Paul Smith of Manchester. Paul was a lifelong socialist and a fighter for his class, who will be greatly missed.

Paul was a miner in the Yorkshire coalfield and a member of the National Union of Mineworkers for 18 years, until he became one of the first shot-firers in the new Kellingley colliery and transferred his union membership to Nacods.

In his youth, Paul was a member of the Leeds branch of the Communist Party and, although he left in the mid-1950s, he maintained fraternal links with many of his comrades. He met his future wife, Audrey, at the World Youth Festival in Moscow in 1957.

Moving to Manchester in 1965, Paul took up new employment as a lift engineer. He and Audrey actively and energetically supported working class struggles and, during the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85, they were key organisers of

support and solidarity work in the Manchester region.

After the defeats inflicted upon the working class from 1985 onwards, Paul and Audrey concluded that it was time for a new mass party of the class to be built and they became founding members of the Socialist Labour Party, until - along with many hundreds of other class fighters - they left the SLP in disillusionment at the witch hunting and the exclusivist, anti-democratic behaviour of the leadership. Latterly, when 200 careworkers in Tameside were sacked, Paul and Audrey were soon fighting for solidarity in their union, the TGWU.

Paul was a subscriber to the *Weekly Worker* and a financial contributor to the paper. He will be remembered with respect and affection by our comrades who knew him. We offer our deepest sympathies to Audrey and to their daughter, Sara Galina ●

John Pearson

# 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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# Constructive talks

Last weekend hopefully saw a step forward towards the agreement of an inclusive, democratic structure for the Network of Socialist Alliances.

Meeting in London, 15 representatives of national political organisations and regional and local Alliances engaged in useful preparatory discussions prior to a general meeting scheduled for March, which will hopefully adopt a set of rules putting the Network on a firmer basis. National organisations represented were the CPGB, Socialist Perspectives, Socialist Outlook and the Independent Labour Network, while groups from London, Coventry, Manchester, Leeds, Walsall, Preston and Kent were also present.

Pete McLaren chaired the meeting in a businesslike manner, allowing the expression of all viewpoints. This contributed to the breaking of previous barriers to mutual understanding erected by obfuscatory accusations: that the CPGB was intent on behaving in a 'sectarian', 'non-cooperative' manner; that our aim was to 'expose' others and to 'impose a Bolshevik-type central committee' on the Network.

None of them are true. We are well aware that we form the Alliances' left wing, but we are seeking a positive engagement with those to our right. We have not set out to dominate the SAs - as a minority we could not do so even if that was our intention. However, we have demanded an inclusive structure that gives all participants, including ourselves, an equal status. We do not want a repeat on a national scale of what occurred last year in the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance (GMSA), where the CPGB alone was excluded from any meaningful participation. A similar move was unsuccessfully attempted in London.

The structure adopted must reflect the Network's existence as an *alliance*. This can best be achieved by a system of automatic representation on the Liaison Committee for every affiliated organisation and local SA. Proposals previously championed by the Liaison Group for the annual election of officers and a committee are more suited to an established *party* and would guarantee the total exclusion of certain minorities. Such a structure was voted in "on an interim basis" at the September 1998 Rugby conference, but this was in fact meaningless, as no elections were held. The unelected Liaison Group - John Nicholson of the ILN and GMSA, Dave Church of the Walsall Democratic Labour Party, Dave Nellist of the Socialist Party and Coventry and Warwickshire Socialist Alliance, and comrade McLaren, also from Coventry SA - continued to operate as before.

To its credit the Liaison Group did not attempt to impose the unsatisfactory and unworkable structure voted in by a 60% majority in Rugby. After a few wobbles last weekend's inclusive

and constructive meeting took place. As a result there was little of the previous polarisation and none of the near-hysterical misrepresentation that we witnessed in September. This in turn allowed the achievement of something approaching a consensus around the need for a Liaison Committee consisting at least in part of automatically represented affiliates.

The most comprehensive set of draft rules incorporating such a structure originated of course with the CPGB. At a meeting of London Socialist Alliance last November the CPGB proposals were amended and unanimously agreed by its well attended general meeting. These call for

the Liaison Committee to consist of recallable delegates representing every affiliate, and for this committee to elect its officers and sub-committees as necessary. This would allow for loose, flexible and all-embracing representation, permitting existing organisations to work together, while not excluding unaffiliated individuals, who would still be represented through their local groups. In other words, admirably suited for an *alliance*.

At the weekend Socialist Perspectives and the Radical Preston Alliance reaffirmed their support for a delegate structure, while the comrade from Kent announced that his group was now

leaning towards the LSA proposals. The Manchester comrade offered to withdraw that part of the GMSA proposals relating to the Liaison Committee. He did, however, continue to back the GMSA proposals for individual subscriptions of a *minimum* of £5 per month, which, while by no means a huge amount for an established *party*, would hardly be feasible for the Socialist Alliances in their present tentative form.

While there now appears to be a consensus emerging around a delegate-based *committee*, some comrades were still arguing for the annual election of *officers*. Dave Nellist stuck to his idea of the election of "func-

tional officers", combined with "three or four open national meetings", where *delegates* would determine policy. Clearly this would result in two rival centres of gravity. But another Coventry comrade, Dave Spencer, disputed the fact that this proposal had ever been agreed and spoke in favour of the new majority.

It seems likely that when the March recall conference - to be held in Birmingham - takes place, the remaining area of controversy around the nature of the proposed Liaison Committee will be over whether officers will be elected annually party-style by a general meeting or by delegates on the Liaison Committee.

There remains a marked division over the fundamental nature of the Network. Is it to be a *Socialist Alliance* or, will it, as the Manchester proposals for 'aims and objectives' state, strive "to promote locally based socialist/environmentalist alliances"? Although the LSA draft pledges support for "all campaigns that seek to advance the interests of the people - economically, politically and environmentally", it does not call for alliances, as a matter of priority, with non-socialist greens, irrespective of their political coloration. While some environmentalists consider themselves socialists, many are openly for capitalism.

Another controversy sure to resurface in Birmingham is whether Network membership should be restricted to "anyone living or working in England" (Manchester draft), or "open to all within the United Kingdom" (LSA). In the name of support for Scottish, Welsh and Irish freedom many comrades appear to believe that working class organisations *must* be cleaved apart along national lines. In effect they are behaving like nationalists, *weakening workers'* unity against the UK state. While we are fully behind local, regional and national autonomy, why should organisations like the Welsh Socialist Alliance or the Scottish Socialist Party be *banned* from joining with us? Why is there a need for a specifically *English* grouping?

Finally, there is the question of the fight for democracy. The LSA draft treats the struggle for "the maximum democracy under existing social conditions" as being of the utmost importance. While all last weekend's participants paid lip service to such demands as the abolition of the monarchy and the Lords, and the right to self-determination for Scotland, Wales and Ireland, only the CPGB comrades spoke in favour of including them in the objectives. For comrade Nellist, renationalisation of the privatised companies or a campaign for a minimum wage ought to be the number one priority, but he "preferred" leaving out the lot - economic calls as well as political demands against the bourgeois state. Obviously the debate must continue ●

## Socialist Unity in action

Whatever the outcome of the by-election in the North Defoe ward of Hackney, London, it marked a significant turning point in the conduct of leftwing politics. Under the banner of Socialist Unity, comrades from the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party and from Turkish and Kurdish organisations joined forces to support Anne Murphy, a communist and a leading figure in the London Socialist Alliances, in the January 21 contest.

This campaign taught us some valuable lessons. In the first place, it is possible for socialist forces to hammer out a common platform on which to fight. This does not mean submerging programmatic differences - some of them profound. But North Defoe proved that, given sufficient political maturity and goodwill, we can unite in struggle against the common enemy. Secondly, the experience of serious and disciplined practical action undertaken side by side with comrades from different organisations did more than anything to dispel the mistrust and misgivings that bedevil our relations.

It must be said however that there was some unevenness in performance: while one SWP branch was exemplary in its commitment, the other was rather less so; Socialist Party comrades came very late into the field, but were no less welcome for that. The main thing is that reserves were mobilised and the gaps were filled. By the end of the campaign every household had been leafleted and canvassed efficiently.

The main political issue in this election was the determination of the local Labour Party to make Hackney into a 'beacon' council, to do for Blair what Wandsworth memorably did for Thatcher by cutting expenditure to the bone. Central to this strategy is a plan to sell off practically the whole of the housing stock to capitalist

landlords. In order to make this deal as palatable as possible for the parasites, Hackney is busy evicting anybody who is in arrears on their rent. Eleven whole estates have already been privatised without even a word of consultation either in the council chamber or in any public forum - which highlights the other issue at the heart of our campaign: the total absence of democracy and transparency in local politics. Small wonder that the expected turnout in North Defoe was in the region of 20%, so great is the cynicism and disillusionment engendered by this model New Labour authority.

These and other pressing issues were raised by Anne Murphy at a public meeting on January 18, a meeting to which the other candidates were invited. Not one of them turned up. Was this because they believe that the socialist agenda can simply be consigned to the history books? Maybe so, but, building on these first steps towards unity, we can show them how wrong they are. Certainly, to judge by their campaigning efforts, none of the candidates from the mainstream parties was remotely able or willing to tackle the real problems of North Defoe.

The Labour candidate, Jamie Carswell, was trying to be everything that Millbank expects of a 'modern Labour councillor'. The Liberal Democrat, Sarah Prattent, confined her election platform to bleating about the threat posed to Church Street's chichi restaurants and boutiques by a planned commercial and housing development.

While she focused on this terrible threat to the middle classes, some of her supporters were busy spreading malicious gossip about the alleged character defects of North Defoe's former Green Party councillor. As for the Greens themselves, what have they to boast about in Hackney, apart from planting a few trees? Last and definitely least was the Tory candi-

date, whose campaign was so low-key that even a council colleague, when challenged, could not even tell us the person's name.

From a personal point of view, the most valuable aspect of this election battle was the opportunity it gave me to talk to the working class of Hackney on the doorstep. In the current period of reaction it has become customary for us to describe the working class as atomised, mere voting fodder, essentially divorced from and apathetic towards politics. There is truth in this, of course, but it is by no means the whole truth.

What looks on the surface like simple apathy is often a complex amalgam of bewilderment, hurt and a sense of betrayal. One example will suffice: I spoke to a council tenant who had lived and worked in the borough for more than 30 years. He described his disillusionment with Blair and everything that New Labour stands for. Every day he walks past the newly gentrified Victorian and Edwardian terraces of North Defoe. He sees how many of them are now sporting Labour posters, and understands that Labour is now the party of the well-off, that it has nothing to offer the working class except deceit and oppression. This man's socialism and his passion for social justice were originally rooted in his religious convictions, but he is waking up to the political realities of class society under capitalism. He promised us his vote and I am sure he delivered it.

The point is that there are thousands like him - disillusioned and wary of politics, yes, but still hungry for socialism.

We fought North Defoe to win it, but in all probability the new councillor will be Labour or Green. No matter. Victory comes in many guises, and it is no exaggeration to say that the creation of Socialist Unity was a victory in itself ●

Michael Malkin

Anne Murphy