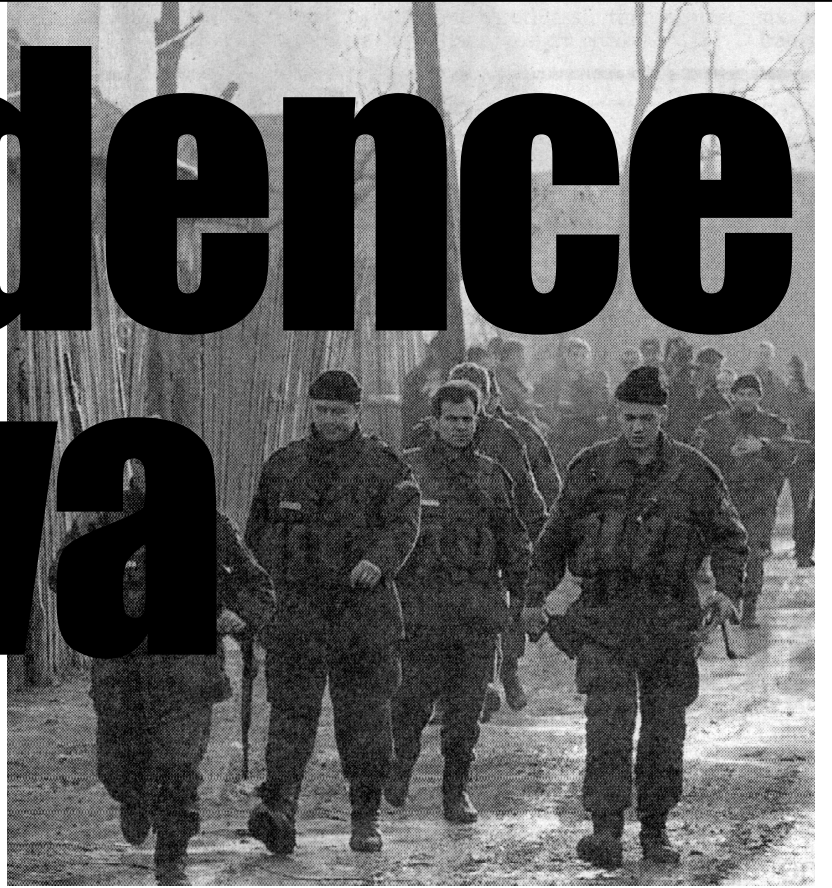


Independence for Kosova

For the KLA - against the Serbian army



Serb police march into the Kosova village of Vraganica

National oppression and violence continues to tear apart the former Yugoslavia. As is all too evident, the 'collapse of communism' led to Recak and Rakovina, not to peace and democracy. With the Serbian/Yugoslavian occupying forces in Kosova conducting a 'scorched earth' policy against the two million ethnic Albanians of this region, we can only expect a further descent into barbarism.

Last week was particularly ghastly. We saw the grisly spectacle of the monitoring team from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe squabbling with the Serbian authorities for access to the corpses found in Recak. Belgrade claimed that the victims were all members of the Kosova Liberation Army killed during a battle - and even accused the KLA of 'tampering' with the bodies so it looked like an indiscriminate massacre. This was the 'scientific' conclusion of the Serbian forensic team.

The head of the OSCE, William Walker, was at first given 48 hours to quit by the Serbian authorities when he came to a different conclusion from that reached by the Serbian forensic team. "Ambassador Walker lied intentionally and consciously placed his lie before the world," said a spokesperson for the United Left, the semi-government party headed by Mirjana Markovic, the wife of Slobodan Milosevic. The latter quickly backed down and froze the order expelling Walker.

But the exact details behind the killings at Recak are neither here nor there. Even if the KLA had tampered with some or all of the bodies, so what? The Kosovar people are being terrorised by the remnants of the Yugoslavian state - in the shape of the Serbian army - both by its regular and irregular forces. This is a fact which cannot be denied.

This is not a new development. The relationship between Kosova and Serbia has been characterised by violence for over 20 years - beginning with Tito's crackdown in the early 1970s. Interestingly, the original leadership of the KLA described itself as Marxist-Leninist. Its aim was to wage a war against the 'Titoist-revisionist' Yugoslavia and to be united with Enver

Hoxha's Albania - the Marxist motherland. This is certainly not the KLA's objective now - it takes a look at Albania as it is today and shudders. Whatever the exact nuances or details of the KLA's programme may be, it is fighting for full independence - nothing less.

The overwhelming majority of the two million inhabitants want independence. It is our duty therefore to support that democratic desire - not advise them they 'must' unite with Albania; still less remain 'united' with Serbia. The KLA has hegemony over the masses, and its support is increasing with each new terror offensive by the Serbian forces. Autonomy - whether to a greater or lesser extent - within Serbia is now out of the question. The struggle of the KLA is a struggle for democracy and self-determination. Given the concrete circumstances, it is clear that the KLA is a fighting a *just war* against the forces of oppression. The *only* principled position for communists is to defend the KLA and to demand independence for Kosova.

Imperialism of course takes a fundamentally different approach. It is desperate to devise a strategy to 'contain' the situation in Kosova and stop it 'going out of hand'. In other words, one of the main policy aims of imperialism is how to prevent the KLA from winning independence. Nato air strikes could just as easily be directed against the KLA as against the Serbian forces. Both are considered equally 'destabilising' whenever they engage in violence. Imperialism wants to see the KLA disarmed, not driving out the occupying army. A spokesperson for Downing Street was explicit: "We are not going to act as the KLA's air force."

The six-nation Contact Group - Russia, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the US - has been attempting to knock Kosovar and Serbian heads together. With little success. Officials have become increasingly irritated by the KLA's intransigence - its leadership has so far refused to negotiate directly with Belgrade. The KLA has snubbed all the compromise plans cobbled up by the Contact Group, all of which are predicated on the basis of *autonomy* for Kosova.

At the weekend, Robin Cook warned the KLA that its "uncompromising" position would lead to its "marginalisation" and that it "is not going to throw the Yugoslav army out of Kosova". Under the new scheme being hatched up the Kosovars are being offered police forces run by local communities, an autonomous assembly and democratic local communes - with the promise that there will be a 'review' of Kosova's status after three years. Imperialism wants to impose a solution *from above*. The KLA has rejected it.

For the imperialists the guiding 'principle' is the sovereignty of existing states - ie, lines on a map. By contrast communists support the right of *people* to determine their future. We should not underestimate the genuine dilemma facing imperialism. To intervene or not to intervene? It is beyond doubt that Nato forces could *militarily* crush the Serbian - or KLA - forces. But politically the problems are immense. Whatever course it eventually takes - intervention or non-intervention - it could end up strengthening the hand of either the KLA or Milosevic. Both scenarios are unwelcome. *The Guardian* summed it up in this way: "But no one in or outside Nato is prepared to support the KLA's secessionist goal for fear of destabilising the entire Balkan region and sending the dangerous message to any other disgruntled ethnic minority that war will bring them independence and foreign recognition ... In Kosovo, Serbs are fighting KLA guerrillas who any Nato intervention would have to tame" (January 22). A British diplomat put it even more bluntly: "Political or military pressure on Milosevic to back off simply encourages the KLA to proclaim their ambitions for independence."

If it decides to intervene, Nato will police an anti-democratic settlement designed to stifle the will of the Kosovar masses. Communists oppose the imperialist schemes of Nato, Robin Cook and the Contact Group - even if the KLA leadership itself, like the Kosovar masses, does look to Nato intervention and a Nato 'protectorate' as one of its means of achieving independence.

Naturally, the Serbian regime em-

ployes the normal rhetoric we associate with all oppressive states. It condemns the KLA as 'bandits', 'terrorists', 'criminals', etc. How often did we hear the IRA, PLO or ANC described in the same terms? Communists treated those phrases with contempt then and we treat them with contempt now. Freedom fighters have *always* had such epithets heaped upon them - and regimes have always attempted to whitewash or excuse massacres and atrocities. Serbian 'specialists' declare that the Racek massacre never happened. Milosevic states that Serbian forces in Kosova are merely exercising - as all normal governments do - the "legitimate right to fight terrorism".

For decades the British establishment echoed the Milosevic line in Northern Ireland. The Bloody Sunday massacre was justified and excused - the Paras were under attack from "terrorists". The lies of the British establishment have been exposed. The Serbian regime continues to live off lies and deceit.

We must also emphatically reject the apologetic ramblings of those pseudo-communists who defend the bloody actions of the Serbian regime in Kosova on the grounds that Serbia is a 'workers' state' - and that the KLA are 'Islamicists' or 'medievalists'. Distortions worthy of Joseph Goebbels himself - and *Socialist News*, the newspaper of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party.

It is important to stress that communists support the call for Kosovar independence in the *here and now* as an immediate or minimum demand. We do not think the Kosovars should have to wait for 'socialism' in order to have their democratic aspirations met. Unfortunately - but predictably - this appears to be the approach of the Socialist Party in England and Wales. It argues: "Only independent workers' organisations advocating class unity and an independent socialist Kosova, as part of a socialist Balkans, can offer a lasting, peaceful solution" (*The Socialist* January 22).

Is the SPEW saying that Kosova

can have its independence only *if* it establishes a 'socialist state'? If so, the SPEW's abstract socialism is *counterposed* to the right of self-determination - ie, in reality it denies the Kosovars the right to independence. Also, does the SPEW think Kosova can achieve 'socialism' on its own - or does it have to wait until the rest of the Balkans, if not the world, becomes socialist? It is precisely through fighting for full democratic rights that oppressive classes are challenged and socialism can be put on the agenda.

Communists resolutely fight for workers' unity and against all forms of nationalism and separatism. As Leninists we support the *right* to self-determination, up to and including secession, but *in general* we do not call for the latter to be exercised. Thus, in our slogan for a federal republic for Britain we support the right of Scotland and Wales to self-determination. But we vehemently oppose those who call for independence for Scotland or Wales. The relationship between England, Scotland and Wales is not characterised by violence - separation would only be reactionary and backward. Support for the right to divorce is not the same as a demand that all marriages be dissolved.

However, it is a different matter when it comes to the relationship between the British state and Ireland - which has been characterised by centuries of violence and oppression. Communists call for an independent *united* Ireland under these concrete circumstances. We do this not out of any misty nationalist sentiment for the emerald isle, but in the hope that separation will lay the ground for a future voluntary unity of the British and Irish nations - under conditions this time of peace, genuine equality and democracy. The same principle applies to the relationships between East Timor and Indonesia - and Kosova and Serbia.

Nato has its plans for Kosova, as does Milosevic and Robin Cook. But it is the Kosovar masses themselves who must be allowed to determine their *own* future ●

Eddie Ford

Exquisite irony

The *Weekly Worker* is delighted to carry the article by 'Delphi' (see pages 4, 5 and 6). This somewhat shy but erudite comrade is clearly a leading member of the rapidly fragmenting Socialist Labour Party. With even a cursory reading of the piece, it will not be hard for regular *Weekly Worker* readers to guess the identity of our contributor. The new levy of witch hunters in the SLP will have no problem either.

Others writers will have plenty to say about the comrade's convoluted arguments, but a few general points are apposite.

Delphi cannot resist a side swipe at our organisation and its supposed proximity to the "Stalinism" of Harpal Brar, both politically and organisationally. There is an irony here that is really quite exquisite. Delphi's co-thinkers in the SLP are more guilty than even Brar, Bull and others in letting what they now call in private "that bastard" Arthur Scargill create an internal regime of anti-communist bans, proscription, organisational fiat and arbitrary expulsion a million times more akin to "Stalinism" than anything the Provisional Central Committee could ever be accused of - even by our most rabid critics. Actually the Communist Party has won for itself the banner of revolutionary democracy and openness precisely through an unremitting struggle against those like Brar - and Delphi - who regard politics as a conspiracy behind the backs of our class.

Now, having been complicit in the creation of a self-devouring Scargillite regime of intolerance and silent intrigue, Delphi is forced to turn to the *Weekly Worker* to combat elements they previously tolerated while they were hunting down democrats and communists in the SLP. Now Delphi bemoans Socialist Labour's "abysmal level" of political culture and the "urgent need for the history of the world socialist movement to be discussed critically and objectively". One might ask - where, comrade? In the pages of *Socialist News*? Via the thriving internal life of controversy, discussion and principled factional clash facilitated by your once beloved leader, the almighty Scargill?

No - in the *Weekly Worker*, a publication banned and proscribed by the SLP apparatus. We sincerely welcome the comrade. But it would have been nice to hear from you long before now.

Delphi says that Brar's views need a "point by point" refutation. That is why his dismissal of the critique authored by comrade Phil Sharpe (see *Weekly Worker* December 3 1998) smacks of philistinism. Yet Delphi's eclectic theoretical framework militates against a coherent Marxist analysis. Delphi's views are an odd amalgam of standard Trotskyism, anti-Bolshevik liberalism and social democracy.

Thus, large parts of the article consist of little more than formally accurate corrections of some of the more crass historical distortions of Brar's Stalinist mythology. The author seems in some places to be situated firmly in the tradition of Trotskyism, as with the claim that 1917 "vindicated" the theories of "uneven and combined development and permanent revolution". Brar's selective quote-chopping is designed to discredit Trotsky and bolster the case for Stalin, the great leader. Delphi counters by identifying the source of these apparent contradictions in the nature of Soviet social reality itself, not in Trotsky's logic. Thus the suggestion that "Trotsky contrasts the actual and potential developments based on the gains of the revolution, particularly state ownership of the means production, with the deadening effect of the rule of Stalinist bureaucracy which was engaged in betraying the revolution." In other words, a restatement of the Trotskyist analysis that the central contradiction in the Soviet social formation - an assumption that "state ownership of the means of production" under Stalin - remained a 'gain'.

Yet towards the end of the article, Delphi collapses. The USSR was "not socialism; it was not a workers' state". In fact, the rul-

ing stratum constituted "a ruling class based on the collective control of production and the state apparatus" (my emphasis). He chides the "Trotskyists [who] have been incapacitated by the need to maintain the myth of the 'workers' state', a problem they inherited from their founder ..."

In this way, as a bureaucratic collectivist fresh out of the closet, Delphi implicitly rejects the earlier assertion that Trotsky's supposed "contradictions" were a rational theoretical reflection of Soviet society - "in fact, the fundamental contradiction in the situation itself". That is, the progressive gains of the revolution - centrally "state ownership of the means of production" - presided over and defended by a reactionary bureaucracy.

Now, in the theoretical schema Delphi casually adopts, nationalised industry has become in fact the 'property' of an anti-proletarian ruling class. Indeed, the bureaucratic collectivist school (which Delphi becomes a convert to somewhere in the course of this article) argues that national property forms were in fact a mode of control of the workers, a form that increased their exploitation and powerlessness. That is, in contrast to the assertions of Trotsky - and Stalin, of course. In fact, nationalised property forms facilitated the vicious exploitation of a totally subordinated and alienated working class.

Delphi is thus all over the place. It is established that Trotsky was hostile to the Soviet bureaucracy, despite what he regarded as the progressive survival of the achievements of the revolution, gains over which the Stalinites were the illegitimate and unreliable custodians. Brar's selective quotes from Trotsky were certainly mischievous, but clearly caused Delphi some pain. However, by the time of the concluding paragraphs, Delphi has subsided into a totally untheorised rejection of the whole Bolshevik tradition - Lenin, Zinoviev, Trotsky: the lot. Thus, "the whole Bolshevik tradition in fact has played a stultifying role on the development of Marxism in particular, but also socialism as a whole ..." (my emphasis).

Really, if he has any sense - which he does - Harpal Brar will fall on this passage with some glee. His essential point - like that of Stalin's - has always been that, whatever the subjective intentions of those who follow Trotsky, the logic of these politics will lead them into the camp of the bourgeoisie, either in the form of social democracy, or even more explicit reaction. Here, Delphi presents Bolshevism as a retrograde step from the centrist Marxism of the Second International, which not only degraded Marxist thought, but "socialism as a whole..." - which in contemporary terms can only mean social democracy, I presume.

This is a species of the miserable views held by some leading SLP comrades from a Trotskyist background that the best that could be achieved by the working class in this country is a variant of Labourism. According to the dogma of these comrades the Communist Party of Great Britain was an aberration, a growth "gouged" out of the viable main body of the workers' movement in 1920 which separated from its host organism could only dwindle and die. Indeed, Delphi goes further, appearing to believe that this was a phenomenon which characterised communism internationally. That the whole experiment of the Third International (of the October Revolution itself, perhaps?) was at best a mistake, at worst delirium.

Brar, Bull and their perversions of Marxism cannot be fought with this brand of limp disdain for the actual history of the workers' movement in the 20th century. Delphi is to be congratulated for a brave leap into the light, for at last beginning an open fight. But this should not blind us to the opportunist and thoroughly defeatist nature of such politics ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Open debate

We have read with interest Mark Fischer's 'Publish and be damned' article (*Weekly Worker* December 10). You have indeed published and your own words do indeed damn you - well done to the comrade who came up with the title for the article!

It is unfortunate, if not entirely unexpected, that in their narrow-minded response to our proposals for discussion the PCC has decided to place their 'openness' fetishism before our attempts to move towards genuine political regroupment. Leaving aside your dubious arithmetic (a set of five six-weekly discussions is actually just over seven months, not "nearly one year"), we find it strange that such vocal proponents of 'Partyism' can only conceive of serious political discussion taking place within one framework.

The IBT has a proven commitment to serious political engagement with the CPGB. Over the past year we have, for example, given presentations at your Sunday forums and Communist University and have attended your 'Against economism' school - all were public discussions with other organisations and individuals present and at events organised by you. We note, however, the low attendance of your comrades at public forums organised by us. These public discussions were useful and certainly should not cease if we were to undertake a serious programme of organisation-to-organisation talks. Surely it is not unreasonable to expect you to try it our way for five meetings. You are employing the most simplistic formal logic to counterpose our discussion proposal to all other forms of interaction between our organisations.

Our disagreement is over whether private, organisation-to-organisation discussions would represent a higher level of debate, and resulting clarity, than less structured, public discussions with a wider range of views represented. The structure of discussions is, of course, a tactical question but, as you recognise, this disagreement indicates more profound differences in methodology between our organisations. We understand this difference to be based on the different emphasis the two organisations give to the struggle for programmatic clarity between the different tendencies in the workers' movement.

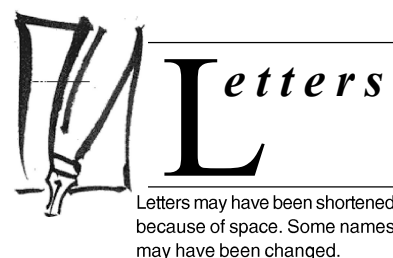
This is, in part, over the nature of democratic centralism. Bolsheviks subordinate themselves to the democratically decided degree of centralism for all aspects of our political activity. The IBT considers that it is useful to generally draw the line of centralism to cover all public activity - both written/spoken propaganda and concrete actions. The CPGB applies centralism only to joint actions, while relaxing that discipline for most written and spoken propaganda. Although you formally recognise that an organisation can prevent minorities arguing their views in public, in practice your members interpret your advocacy of 'openness' as an inherent individualistic 'right' on the level of principle. This is nothing to do with genuine democratic centralism.

Hence your insistence on these meetings being regularly 'reported' in the *Weekly Worker* before the series is completed. From past experience we note that such 'reports' are often your major polemics against other organisations, based on comments made during verbal debate. Even when reported in context (which is often not the case), such comments will inevitably be a less sophisticated representation of the organisation's position than published material - thus, conveniently for your writers, easier to polemicise against. The resulting misinterpretations create a barrier to political clarity and waste precious time.

We were intrigued to read in the last letter from the PCC that you "think these sharp polemical exchanges, the correcting, refining and the evolution of positions as they are reflected in the written words of the other organisation, is actually the core of the search for the type of programmatic 'clarity' you [the IBT] purport to be seeking" (my emphasis).

We have published a large number of programmatic articles in the *Marxist Bulletin*, our international journal 1917 and other IBT pamphlets. Yet most significant polemics against us in the *Weekly Worker* have concentrated on tactical manoeuvres in the SLP or on reported discussion. Your article in which you attempt to justify your failure to defend Iraq against US and British attack is a welcome recent exception.

A verbal debate is one thing; an exchange of written polemics is another. A public, multi-faceted discussion is one thing; a focused discussion between two clear sets of views is another. All these fit very nicely alongside each other in discussions between organisations. But they are not the same thing, and cannot be blindly achieved through universal 'openness'. A major obstacle to the process



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

of clarity is your organisation's inability or unwillingness to define such a clear set of views: that is, a programme.

In politics there inevitably will be occasional misrepresentations of others' positions, written as well as spoken. We were disappointed to see that you do not have the political courage to own up when one of these misrepresentations is exposed, as in my letter to the *Weekly Worker* (November 26 1998). Does the CPGB seriously expect anyone to believe that the earlier article written by Danny Hammill is not a misrepresentation of our politics? Let us repeat what he wrote in case you have forgotten. Quoting from a *Marxist Bulletin* supplement on the recent rail disputes, he said: "We are informed that 'railworkers need what all workers need - secure jobs, good pay, strong unions, decent free healthcare, good education, and more leisure time'. Not a mention, you notice, of what workers really need so that they can take control of their own lives - political power to make a revolution" (November 12).

What are the words "not a mention" supposed to mean when we read them in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*? Or perhaps for the CPGB the phrase "political power to make a revolution" has nothing in common with our following paragraph: "But militant trade unionism by itself is not enough to get what we need. Any major strike of workers against the bosses comes up sooner or later against the cops, courts and government - the forces of the capitalist state. Instead of trumpeting the virtue of the rank and file in and of itself, we need to build caucuses in the unions around a political programme for working class power that can successfully meet the assaults of the bosses" (my emphasis).

At least comrade Fischer's article includes something approaching a political argument as he attempts to justify the CPGB claim that we are economist. Because our leaflet does not include a long list of general democratic demands, it seems that this proves that the IBT merely limits itself to economic struggles and the demands associated with them. This accusation is bizarre - as any reader of our journals would attest. We would suggest that CPGB members actually read our material (now also available on our website - www.bolshevik.org/mb/) and judge for themselves whether the programme of the IBT is deficient on "the realm of high politics, the question of how the people of this country are ruled and by whom, the task of making the working class the hegemon of the fight for democracy", and whether "all of this is left unaddressed".

The topics we proposed for discussion represent what we consider to be some of the central questions of Marxism which keep our two organisations apart politically. We note that comrade Fischer does not respond to my point that Marcus Larsen was at fault in his description of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. We suspect that differences of approach to the Socialist Alliance and the SLP might have something to do with our different conceptions of united front work. Our differences on Ireland are well known, but there are also differences on the national question in terms of distinctions between imperialist and non-imperialist countries and how revolutionaries should relate to conflicts between them, such as the imperialist bombing of Iraq. These are all worth discussing.

We were somewhat disappointed that your responses, both written and verbal, to our proposal for organisation-to-organisation discussions have focused quite so completely on organisational questions with virtually nothing to be said about the political content of the topics proposed (casually dismissed by comrade Fischer with a petty slur about our international connections). If the PCC believes that there are more important political questions that could be usefully discussed between our organisations then we would welcome alternative suggestions - but we have been deafened by the silence.

Despite your unwillingness to move the discussions between us onto a more tightly focused organisation-to-organisation level, we still wish to engage your organisation in debate. To that end we propose a public debate, chaired by a mutually agreed independent figure, on the following topic, which we consider deals with one of the central differences between us at this time - 'Democratic revolution and permanent revolution'.

Alan Gibson
IBT (Britain)

Blair runs aground

action

It has become a commonplace to say that “all political careers end in failure”. Whatever we think of the dictum, it certainly applies to Paddy Ashdown. In deciding to abandon ship, the ‘captain’ has not only plunged his own party into a damaging six months of fratricidal turmoil; he has also dealt a significant, perhaps even a decisive, blow to Tony Blair’s project of creating a single, ‘centre-left’ for British politics in the 21st century.

Neither the vain boast in Ashdown’s valedictory letter to Liberal Democrat MPs that the tasks he had set himself to achieve were now nearing completion; nor the prospect of a big job and a fat salary in some European post; nor the predictable plaudits of a liberal press mysteriously caught unawares by events; nor even Ashdown’s solid achievement in sorting out the “bloody mess” that was the SLD in 1988 and transforming it into a party with 46 seats - a bench of Liberals greater than at any time since 1929; none of these can disguise the fact that in the *one* thing that really mattered to himself and his party - delivering a PR system in Westminster elections - Ashdown was a failure.

The defining moment in this respect came early last November with the publication of the Jenkins report on electoral reform: as co-conspirators in an attempt to bounce their respective parties into a formal coalition, both Blair and Ashdown were exposed. The myth of Blair’s invincibility was shattered; Ashdown’s credibility was damaged beyond repair. As we observed at the time, “It is Ashdown for whom the Jenkins report represents ... an acute embarrassment. What is a lifeline for his party may turn into a noose for his own political fortunes ... his principal argument for persuading his party to get

into bed with Labour in an informal coalition was that he could induce Labour to honour its unambiguous manifesto commitment to conduct a referendum on electoral reform *before* the next election. It is pretty clear now that this is not going to happen. The Liberal Democrats must wonder whether the sacrifice of their virtue was worth it after all ... Adept as he is at making the best of a losing position, even Ashdown cannot disguise the poverty and powerlessness of his party’s position” (*Weekly Worker* November 5).

Within a matter of days, in an effort to bolster his friend’s authority over a party that was displaying unmistakable signs of fractiousness, Blair put his signature to a joint statement heralding an extension of the cooperation between the two parties. In the event, what was meant as a sop to Ashdown’s wounded vanity merely did him further damage: “By a sublime irony, a document that set out to foster a spirit of unity has succeeded only in actualising the latent tensions between and within the two parties ... The joint statement reflects not so much the interests of two *parties*, as the will and ambition of two *leaders*” (*Weekly Worker* November 19).

Sensing that their moment of opportunity had arrived, Ashdown’s rivals began to position themselves for the inevitable challenge by overtly distancing themselves from a policy in which they had hitherto acquiesced. The most outspoken was Simon Hughes who established his credentials by voting against the joint statement in a meeting of the parliamentary party. Posing as the voice of conscience, he questioned “whether the strategy of increasing national agreement is either appropriate or acceptable without both parties, by democratic decision, being signed up to deliver it. My concern is that the party was forced into making a decision that may not have been taken if there had been a proper democratic proc-

ess” (*The Independent* November 14).

Leaving aside his motives, Hughes correctly pinpointed the central flaw not only in the process of rapprochement between New Labour and the Liberal Democrats, but in the entire Blair project: it rests not upon a genuine democratic consensus, but on a pact between two leaders, neither of whom, as it turns out, can deliver the support that they arrogantly presumed was already in their pockets.

By removing the project’s prime advocate and ‘theorist’, the Mandelson debacle sounded the probable death knell of the whole enterprise and, by unifying the forces within the Labour Party opposed to Blair’s vision for the two parties, made Ashdown’s position untenable and his resignation inevitable.

What of the future for the Blair project? Its fate and the direction of the Liberal Democrats are inextricably connected. Ashdown’s appeal for a moratorium on the leadership campaign until after his departure in June this year demonstrated a pitiful lack of political realism. The campaign is already underway, with all of the seven likely runners vying with each other to express their scepticism about the wisdom of accepting a situation in which, as they rightly observe, their party is expected to take responsibility for Labour’s policies without having any real power to influence their formulation. All the candidates must take into account the discontent among the party’s 100,000 members and its 4,600 councillors about what many of them see as Ashdown’s betrayal of the party’s fundamental interests and identity. Pressure groups like the Campaign for Liberal Democracy, representing a significant cross-section of peers, MPs and councillors, will ensure that the issue of Labour-Liberal Democrat cooperation becomes a litmus test in the leadership struggle. To speak, as

some commentators have done, about the possibility of a formal split in the Liberal Democrat party is probably wide of the mark, but open warfare among the contenders for Ashdown’s mantle already exists and will be damagingly divisive.

Blair’s own situation is not without some long-term danger. Since the announcement of Ashdown’s impending resignation, he and the Millbank machine have constantly reiterated their determination to continue with the project. The message - patently hollow - is that nothing has really changed. Blair’s strategy of absorbing the Liberal Democrats by *Anschluss*, may still be in place, but the tactical means available for its implementation look seriously threatened, and failure to make the project a reality would surely exact a political price in terms of the prime minister’s own credibility.

In the meantime, we see fresh evidence of New Labour’s continued movement to the right: the appointment of Lord Wakeham, a Tory, to head the commission into reform of the Lords, together with speculation that Blair is cultivating Lord Hurd as a possible fellow traveller, suggest the continued possibility of significant realignment. At the same time, as *The Daily Telegraph* informed us on January 26, the Tory leadership looks set to discard some of its most prominent rightwing shadow cabinet members like John Redwood and Michael Howard in an effort to boost their own project of creating a “compassionate conservatism” modelled on that of the rising George Bush jnr in the USA. Interesting times lie ahead.

Whatever the fate of the Blair project, it seems certain that the yawning chasm on the left of Labour will continue to expand. Politics, like nature, abhors a vacuum and sooner or later the chasm will be filled by a fundamental realignment ●

Maurice Bernal

CPGB agrees perspectives

The Communist Party aggregate at the weekend discussed *Perspectives '99*: that is, our plans for the coming year.

While, in the words of the agreed document, “we must remain alive to the possibilities ... and prepare to dramatically change our tempo and form of work”, unlike others on the left we are not *expecting* an immediate global crash, political crisis or a sudden upsurge in working class consciousness.

The world economy is certainly fragile and in Britain it is touch and go whether New Labour’s spending plans will be thrown into disarray by depression, but there is no automatic correlation between difficulties for the bourgeoisie and a working class fightback. Disillusionment with the mainstream could just as easily lead to a growth in influence of the far right as the phenomenon of workers flocking to the revolutionary left.

Thus “our world view will not go into crisis if at the end of the 12 months the situation of our movement is broadly the same or worse”. While bourgeois triumphalism after the fall of the Soviet Union has been

wiped away by the world financial crisis, that does not mean that the period of reaction has come to an end as well. The collapse of ‘communism’ has left the idea of any kind of working class alternative discredited. Therefore, for the CPGB, “continuity and preservation are important watchwords”.

However, with the influential *Weekly Worker* at the centre of our work, we will continue to intervene actively on the left - in particular whenever there is a break from New Labour. As Blair continues to move right at a rate of knots, such breaks, by definition, will be to the left. A motion to that effect was overwhelmingly passed by the aggregate - there was only one vote against.

This comrade thought that we should be more selective in where we seek to intervene. The comrades cited the obvious negative characteristics of such splits and labelled some of their leaders “rightwing”. Clearly the majority felt that, while new broad organisations fall far short of what is required, they are all characterised, particularly at the time of their formation, by a certain

fluidity. Many who join them are open to new ideas.

Perspectives '99 outlined a more carefully planned and coordinated CPGB intervention in the trade unions. But, as the agreed document stressed, “We are in the unions to fight *politically*. The unions can be important points of application of our fight for a communist programme, against economism.” Other plans for expansion were also discussed.

Immediately following the CPGB meeting, an aggregate of the Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency - grouping together comrades from the Communist Party and the Revolutionary Democratic Group - took place. Unfortunately no comrades from the RDG were present. The CPGB comrades heard a report on the Socialist Alliances and agreed to continue our campaign for a broad, inclusive Network. The meeting confirmed its belief in the necessity of winning disaffected members of the Socialist Labour Party to cooperate with the SAs, while continuing to fight within the SLP ●

Alan Fox

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Centre Prise Bookshop 136-138 Kingsland High Street, E8 2NS
Compendium Books 234 Camden High Street, NW1 8QS
Dillons Bookshop Queen Mary College, 329 Mile End Road, E1
Housemans 5 Caledonian Road, N1 9DX
Index Books 10-12 Atlantic Road, SW9
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The Economists Bookshop Portugal Street, Clare Market, WC2

■ Bristol

Greenleaf 82 Colston Street, BS1 5BB

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■ Edinburgh

James Thin Books 53-59 South Bridge
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■ Glasgow

Barrett Newsagents 263 Byres Road
Fahrenheit 451 Virginia Street, G1

■ Hull

Page One Books 9 Princes Avenue

■ Leicester

Little Thorn 13 Biddulph Street, LE2 1BH

■ Liverpool

News from Nowhere 98 Bold Street, L1 4HY

■ Manchester

Frontline Books 1 Newton Street, M1 1HW

■ Southampton

October Books 4 Onslow Road, SO2 0JB

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday January 31, 5pm - ‘The Marxist theory of crisis - introduction’, using Simon Clarke’s book 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.

■ Bloody Sunday march

Saturday January 30 - March for Justice/Time for Truth. Assemble 12pm 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.

■ 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

■ Is Cuba socialist?

Debate - 40 years on: assessing the Cuban revolution. Speakers: Bernard Regan and Paul Hampton. 7.30pm, Wednesday February 3. Lucas Arms, 245 Grays Inn Road, Kings Cross.

For more information, contact the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA; 0171-207 3997.

■ 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).

■ 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.

Harpal Brar, Stalinism and the SLP

The gravedigger's

'Delphi', a prominent member of the SLP, writes for the *Weekly Worker*

In the *Weekly Worker* dated November 12 1998 the Communist Party of Great Britain published an article entitled 'In praise of Stalin'. Its author, Harpal Brar, was described as a "member of the national executive of the Socialist Labour Party", implying that it was in this capacity that Brar made the speech of which the article was a transcript. The speech was delivered to the CPGB's 'Communist University' on August 2. It was not printed for over three months. The November 12 issue, which carried it as a centre page spread, appeared two days before the SLP's special congress in Manchester, outside the doors of which *Weekly Worker* sellers were doing brisk business to convince delegates that Mr Brar was the guru of the SLP.

Now, Brar is not a naive man though he considers, mistakenly, the CPGB to be "Trotskyist". (It in fact describes itself as "Leninist" and in practice advocates a version of Bolshevism and party organisation closer to Stalinism than Brar would like to acknowledge!) Therefore his use of an event organised by the CPGB, which he accuses of attempting to destroy the party of which he is an executive member, in order to propound his own factionalist view, must have been a calculated decision. One which in his eyes must have paid off handsomely, as he was rewarded with a prominent place in the *Weekly Worker* to reinforce his coveted role as the main ideologue of the SLP - a position which is now challenged by the unexpected rise to prominence of another Stalin cultist, a former Trotsky cultist fired with the zeal of the convert, Royston Bull. Intent on keeping the pot boiling, the *Weekly Worker* published a rejoinder (December 3) purporting to criticise Brar's analysis from a predominantly philosophical, rather than historical, standpoint. Using unnecessarily obscure terminology the article traces Stalin's actions and Brar's support for them to "subjective idealism". This term gives undue philosophical significance to what in fact lies behind Brar's adulation of Stalin. A much simpler and accurate term would be 'self-delusion'.

I do not believe that Brar is a wilful liar. Nor does he appear to be a cruel and callous man, who would be unmoved by the full horror of his hero's deeds. Therefore Brar must actually believe the falsehoods he perpetuates and be in a state of genuine denial of the reality of Stalin's crimes against humanity. This intensity of belief is not simply "subjective idealism". It constitutes a quasi-religious fervour which is impervious to facts or reason. It imparts to Stalin and his version of socialism an ethical superiority which justifies any means, including mass murder. Stalin is the defender of the faith with the stature of an infallible pope, grand inquisitor and crusader warlord of socialism rolled into one.

The more pathological Stalinists anathematise anyone who does not bow before socialism incarnate, and the holy Soviet Union, as a servant

.....
 "There is an urgent need for the history of the world socialist movement to be discussed critically and objectively. Clearly Brar does not contribute to that. But it is insufficient just to dismiss Brar as self-deluded on an assumption that his skewed view of history has been exposed by events and any politically aware socialist will see through it"

of imperialism, condemning them as 'Trotskyist', 'revisionist', 'social democrat' and numerous other inaccurate terms plucked from the left thesaurus of political abuse. But Brar presents his eulogy of Stalin without resorting to such crudity. His lecture is conducted with characteristic humour, charm and wit, and almost disarming ingenuousness. This mode of presentation makes his views even more dangerous in the SLP, where political education has, for many reasons, not been a priority and remains at an abysmal level. There is an urgent need for the history of the world socialist movement to be discussed critically and objectively. Clearly Brar does not contribute to that. But it is insufficient just to dismiss Brar as self-deluded on an assumption that his skewed view of history has been exposed by events and any politically aware socialist will see through it. Unfortunately, there are still too many people in the party looking nostalgically to the past and not with vision to the future. This is not merely a question of history. Brar's view of Stalin totally colours his view of the present-day and what he is trying to achieve in the SLP. It is therefore necessary that 'In Praise of Stalin' is refuted point by point.

Brar begins as he means to go on - with a fatuous statement of such apparent simplicity and innocence it obscures, at a stroke, the real significance of fundamental historical

events. "Stalinism" he tells us, "is not a term which either Stalin or any of his supporters *invented*. It's a term invented by Trotskyism, and it's a term invented by the bourgeoisie, and as a result of a great deal of collaboration between the two sides." What is this banal generality supposed to mean? Of course movements named after individuals are often initially dubbed so by their opponents. Marx specifically said he was not a 'Marxist'. Lenin never called himself a Leninist. 'Trotskyist' was also a term, initially pejorative, coined by Trotsky's opponents. Arthur Scargill did not invent the term 'Scargillite' which first appeared in the hostile press! But once these terms become current they are adopted, often as a badge of pride, by those who support the ideas of the living or dead leader. Why does Brar not accept the handle 'Stalinist'? Firstly by linking Trotskyism and the bourgeoisie as the joint concoctors of the word 'Stalinism', he not only asserts the existence of a conspiracy but also attributes the whole 'Stalinist' phenomenon to a fabrication on their part. By dismissing the term in this way Brar does not have to face up to the acknowledgement that the term 'Stalinist' is one of opprobrium which even Stalin's most sycophantic supporters are reluctant to adopt.

Brar's rationalisation of the reason Stalinists don't call themselves 'Stalinists' is very revealing: "I regard Stalin as a great Leninist. I do not regard him as having done something very original, except that he had a genius for putting into effect the precepts of Marxism-Leninism. He never pretended, like a lot of Bolsheviks who shall remain unnamed, to have something new to say." So that is why there is no such thing as Stalinism. Stalin did not do "something very original" or have "something new to say". The development of Marxist theory stopped, not with Stalin in 1953, but with the death of Lenin in 1924! And the "genius" of Marxism-Leninism lies not in developing Marxist philosophy and analysis, but "putting into effect precepts". Brar's brand of Stalinism - sorry, Marxism-Leninism - as applied to the work of the SLP in the 21st century, consequently consists of putting into effect precepts established before 1924. Like Stalin, who "constantly referred to Lenin" we should unquestioningly follow "what comrade Lenin said."

Those "unnamed" Bolsheviks, including Trotsky (whose theories of uneven and combined development and of permanent revolution were vindicated by events in 1917) and Bukharin (who Lenin described as the "most valuable theoretician in the party" - if not entirely Marxist), the economist Preobrazhensky, as well as many non-Bolshevik Marxists, frequently did have "something new to say" which influenced Lenin's thought. Lenin did not consider himself infallible or dismiss other people's ideas with the frivolity of Brar. He certainly did not regard Marxism as a set of precepts to be put into effect. In what way then did the genius Stalin implement Lenin's ideas?

Stalin's "most significant contribution," says Brar, "was first of all to hold the party together by routing all the fractious elements". Now perhaps Brar is fantasising here about what

he would like to do in the SLP and perhaps the analogy is not that far off the mark. Stalin in the Bolshevik party, like Brar's group in the SLP, in fact constituted one of those 'fractious elements'. His rise to power was not some altruistic attempt "to hold the party together" but the result of the victory of the Stalin faction.

'Unity' has often been the watchword of dictators. Unity of the nation, or of the party, or in Stalin's case of both. Stalin's aim, Brar admits, was to impose the "strictest iron discipline" in order to maintain "the dictatorship of the proletariat", based on the banning of factions introduced by Lenin at the 10th Congress in 1921. This ignores the fact that this occurred against the background of strikes, the Kronstadt mutiny and widespread resistance in the countryside to 'war communism' - factors which did not exist when Stalin began to consolidate his grip on the party after Lenin's death. By then the political supremacy of the Communist Party was unchallenged and there was urgent need for open debate about where the revolution was going. This is only one of the many historical sleights of hand Brar, who has no grasp whatsoever of historical method and selects and bends the facts in a way which makes mediaeval hagiography appear scientific!

Brar's explanation of the struggle within the CP is simplistic in the extreme, even allowing for the time constraints under which the lecture was delivered. Stalin, we are told, wanted collective leadership, but Trotsky, and the Trotskyists (that is the label applied to anathematised all Marxist critics of Stalin), waged a struggle within the party from 1918, which was a continuation of the pre-Bolshevik Trotsky's earlier struggle against the party from the outside. Because the Trotskyists were not Marxist-Leninists, particularly on the question of building socialism in one country, they were inevitably defeated. Not only was the opposition not Marxist-Leninist - they were "petty bourgeois intellectuals" for good measure, "divorced from life, divorced from the revolution and divorced from the working class. And that's why it was defeated," Brar concludes smugly. QED.

In such a fashion the complex discussions and shifting alliances in the CP, in which, until early 1923, Lenin himself was involved, are reduced to a doomed attempt to replace Leninism by 'Trotskyism'. The fact that on numerous key issues, not least the October rising, Lenin and Trotsky agreed is not even hinted at. Was Lenin therefore a Trotskyist? Or was Trotsky a Leninist? What is sure is that Lenin too was a "petty bourgeois intellectual" and like the other party leaders by 1923, he was divorced from the real life of the working class, not least by his illness as well as by social position.

Trotsky is accused of two "key sorties against Lenin and his Party" in the period from the October Revolution until 1923. No mention of little things he did for the party, such as organising the insurrection as head of the Military Revolutionary Committee, or building the Red Army as commissar for war.

Brar goes on to flippantly (and for those who don't know the context,

cryptically) refer three times to Stalin's denial that his "rudeness" was a factor in defeating the opposition. This is a reference to an accusation which Stalin found extremely embarrassing and which his acolytes have trouble facing up to today. It was none other than Lenin who attempted to draw the party's attention to this character flaw of Stalin in the 'Testament' written shortly before his death. Lenin considered it such a serious impediment in a general secretary (his wife Krupskaya had been at the sharp end of it), that he believed it grounds for Stalin's removal. Stalin was unable to suppress the testament and consequently tried to minimise its impact by making light of the issue. This was not Lenin's only criticism of Stalin. On several major issues he was in full agreement with Trotsky, whom he charged, when he was ill, with responsibility for making his views known.

One of the most serious issues was the question of small nationalities. Despite Stalin being a Georgian and the author, under Lenin's guidance, of *Marxism and the nationalities* in 1913 and the drafter of the Bolshevik declaration on the nationalities in 1918 - both documents asserting the right of self-determination even so far as secession from Russia - he used his position as commissar of nationalities to foster the growth of Greater Russian chauvinism. This reached a crisis with his moves to steamroll the republics into a Russian-dominated federation and Georgia in particular into a Transcaucasian federation against the wishes of the Georgian party. Lenin proposed that this issue would be "a bombshell" under Stalin at the 13th Congress, but he was too ill to attend and Trotsky, in the interest of party unity, worked out a compromise with Stalin. The Georgians were left high and dry and Stalin's hold on the party was further compromised. This incident illustrates how Trotsky, far from projecting himself into the dying Lenin's position as the rightful heir, in fact tried to play a mediating role and remain aloof from intrigue - with tragic consequences.

Stalinist views on the right to self-determination remain current in the SLP. Not only in the context of the former 'socialist' states but also capitalist India, we are told that the right of nations to secede threatens the "balkanisation" of a "mighty" state. The consequence of this in regard to policy on the former Yugoslavia means that Greater Serb nationalism is supported as some manifestation of the "partisan spirit", rather than the reactionary, racist Chetnik ideology it is. Slobodan Milosevic's undoing of Tito's project (which tried to balance the contending nationalisms), symptomised by the removal of Kosovo's autonomous status and increased repression of the Albanian majority, is sickeningly presented as some form of anti-imperialism. Genuine anti-imperialism opposes the intervention of major powers, but it also asserts the rights of all small nations to freedom. The bloodbath which accompanied the break-up of Yugoslavia and the USSR in Chechnya, Ossetia, Ngorno-Karabakh, etc resulted not from the exercise of the right of national self-determination, but from the denial of that right. The omission of the national question from Brar's panegyrics, when it was a

apprentice

treatise on this issue which first made Stalin widely known in the Bolshevik Party, is quite significant and reflects the low priority it holds for the Stalinists today. For Stalinists the right of self-determination has never been a principle. The criterion for supporting national independence was not how anti-imperialist it was, but whether it served the strategic interests of the Soviet Union and its allies. Support for the Ethiopian military junta, dressed as a 'socialist' movement, against the Eritreans and Tigrayans exemplifies this.

The defeat of the "opposition", according to Brar, was the first great success of Stalin. The second was the building of socialism in the Soviet Union. The third was the building of the Red Army and the defeat of German fascism. He tells us: "These are Stalin's significant achievements and these are his legacy to the communist movement ... to me they are axioms." As axioms, or self-evident statements, they therefore do not need any evidence to substantiate them. It is sufficient that enough "working people everywhere" believe them "notwithstanding what has happened in eastern Europe, it doesn't prove anything wrong about the pursuits of Stalin and what he was trying to achieve." Here poor comrade Brar is in such a delusional state of denial of historical reality that it becomes almost impossible to continue to take him seriously. Even the verdict of history - the monumental collapse of the Soviet Union - pales into insignificance compared with Stalin's great achievement of socialism in one country. What then was this fantastic socialist miracle which, within a generation of its creator's death, was itself in ruins?

Bizarrely, perhaps because he thought he was speaking to a Trotskyist audience, Brar calls Trotsky as his main witness to the success of socialism under Stalin, quoting from his *Revolution betrayed*, with the claim that the best way to refute Trotskyism is to read Trotsky. He adds patronisingly: "I can see what the attraction of Trotsky is for the average petty bourgeois, and especially the intelligentsia. He has a terrific turn of phrase, but he doesn't enlighten anybody." Compared to the mind-numbingly turgid formulae of Stalin's *Problems of Leninism* which appears to be Brar's main literary diet, even Enid Blyton would appear to have a terrific turn of phrase. But the fact Brar does not feel enlightened is a result of his own lack of comprehension, not lack of clarity on Trotsky's part. Except when actually engaged in textual criticism, it is always a feeble device to try and 'prove' a point with chunks of quotation. It is not only feeble, but dubious when isolated quotes are culled from an author who produced a vast body of work dissecting the very thesis you are trying to establish! But it is not necessary to consult any other of Trotsky's writings to answer Brar's claims. The actual quotations he uses, when cited in full, demolish the very argument he is making. We therefore reprint Brar's 'evidence' below with the omitted sections emphasised.

"Gigantic achievements in industry, enormously promising beginnings in agriculture, an extraordinary

growth of old industrial cities, and the building of new ones. A rapid increase in the number of workers, a rise in cultural level and cultural demands. Such are the indubitable results of the October Revolution ... Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not in the pages of *Capital* but in an industrial arena comprising one sixth of the world's land surface. Not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity. *Even if the Soviet Union, as a result of internal difficulties, external blows and the mistakes of the leadership, were to collapse - which we firmly hope will not happen - there would remain this indestructible fact, that thanks solely to a proletarian revolution a backward country has achieved in less than 10 years successes unexampled in history. That is so. This also ends the quarrel with the reformists in the workers' movement. Can we compare for one moment their mouse-like fussing with the titanic work accomplished by this people aroused to a new life by this revolution?*"

What Brar dismisses as Trotsky tripping himself up with contradictory paragraphs is in fact the fundamental contradiction in the situation itself, a process which Brar cannot, or will not, grasp. Trotsky contrasts the actual and potential developments based on the gains of the revolution - particularly, state ownership of the means of production - with the deadening effect of the rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy which was engaged in betraying the revolution. In this prophetic sentence Trotsky also explicitly denies the main charge against him - that he wanted to see the defeat of the Soviet Union and its replacement by capitalism.

The reality of state oppression which Brar denies is spelt out vividly by Trotsky in the section excised from the next quote, which is used by Brar to illustrate enthusiasm for Stalin's achievements.

"To be sure the youth are very active in the sphere of economics. In the Soviet Union there are now 1.2 million communist youth in the collective farms. Hundreds of thousands of members of the communist youth have been mobilised in recent years for construction work, timber work, coal mining, gold production, for work in the Arctic, Sakhalin or in a mood where the new town of Komsomolsk is in the process of production. The new generation is putting out shock brigades, champion workers, Stakhanovites, foremen, under-administrators. The youth has studied, and is studying assiduously ...

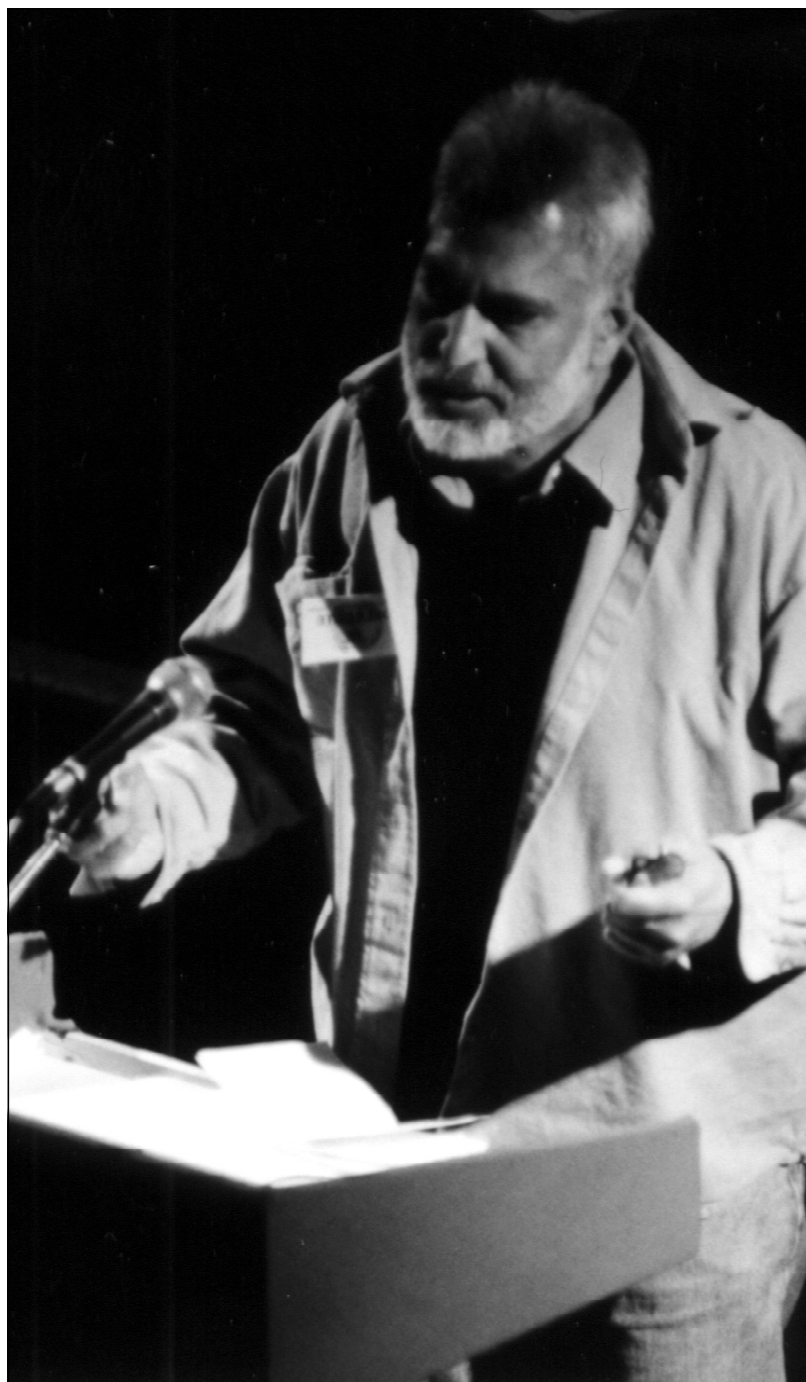
"They are as active, if not more so, in the sphere of athletics, including its most warlike forms, such as parachute jumping and marksmanship. The enterprising and audacious are going on all kinds of dangerous expeditions. The better part of our youth, said recently the well known polar explorer Schmidt, are eager to work where difficulties await them. This is undoubtedly true. *But in all spheres the post-revolutionary generation is still under guardianship. They are told from above what to do and how to do it. Politics as the highest form of command remains wholly in the hands of the so-called 'old guard', and in all the ardent and frequently flattering speeches they ad-*

dress to the youth the old boys are vigilantly defending their own monopoly. Not conceiving of the development of a socialist society without the dying away of the state - that is, without the replacement of all kinds of police oppression by the self-administration of educated producers and consumers - Engels laid the accomplishment of this task upon the younger generation, 'who will grow up in new, free social conditions, and will be in a position to cast away all this rubbish of state-ism'. Lenin adds on his part: '... every kind of state-ism, the democratic-republican included'. The prospect of the construction of a socialist society stood, then, in the minds of Engels and Lenin approximately thus: the generation which conquered power; the 'old guard', will begin the work of liquidating the state; the next generation will complete it. How do things stand in reality ... A big half of the population of the country knows nothing by personal recollection of any regime except that of the soviets. But it is just this new generation which is forming itself, not in 'free social conditions' as Engels conceived it, but under intolerable and constantly increasing oppression from the ruling stratum composed of those same ones who - according to the official fiction - achieved the great revolution. In the factory, the collective farm, the barracks, the university, the schoolroom, even in the kindergarten, if not in the crèche, the chief glory of man is declared to be: personal loyalty to the leader and unconditional obedience. Many pedagogical aphorisms and maxims of recent times might seem to have been copied from Goebbels, if he himself had not copied them in good part from the collaborators of Stalin."

Having ignored this vital passage, Brar goes on to use Trotsky to describe youthful devotion to Soviet patriotism - ie, Stalin - again missing out Trotsky's vital qualification, expanded over several pages of chapter seven, part 2 of *Revolution betrayed*, significantly entitled 'The struggle against the youth':

"It would be crude slander against the youth to portray them as controlled exclusively or even predominantly by personal interests. No, in the general mass, they're magnanimous, responsive, enterprising. In their ranks are various unformulated tendencies grounded in heroism, and still only awaiting application. It is upon these moves in particular that the newest kind of Soviet patriotism is nurturing itself. It is undoubtedly sincere and dynamic. *But in this patriotism too, there is a rift which separates the young from the old.*"

And so the intended quotation-broadside backfires on Brar, demolishing the whole edifice of the myth he attempts to prop up - of happy and heroic Soviet workers devoted to their great leader, Stalin. Trotsky, who, Brar comments without apparent irony, "should know something about Russia", quite unambiguously describes the police-state atmosphere behind the propaganda image swallowed, then as now, by those who knew little about the reality. The use of Trotsky's writing in this manner is at the best cynical and dishonest, but perhaps it is merely that Brar's



Harpal Brar: mad, bad ... or just dangerous to know

mental block is so acute, his brain just cannot take in any criticism of his super-hero. He really believes that Stalin was building socialism.

What then are the characteristics of this socialism adored by Brar, and what part was played by its ideological justification - 'building socialism in one country'? Brar says the opposition was democratically defeated in 1925 in an open debate about the feasibility of socialism in one country and so it became party policy. The choice, given the failure of revolutions in Europe, was either to build socialism in Russia alone, or to "shut up shop and go home". The opposition, Brar says, in effect advocated the last option.

This simplistic counterposing of two 'either or' alternatives again shows Brar's utter inability to grasp basic Marxist concepts. The problem, as it was regarded by Lenin, the opposition and Marxists since, was in what way could socialism be built, given the actual domestic conditions in Russia and how was this interdependent on the progress of revolution in the rest of the world? The opposition did not say that socialism should not be built and in fact Trotsky, Preobrazhensky and others proposed industrialisation plans which were opposed at the time by Stalin. But the opposition, and Lenin, believed that the ultimate attainment and survival of socialism in the Soviet Union depended on the success of the world revolution.

Stalin's option, by seeing the problem in terms of 'either or', became a source of wish-fulfilment. World revolution became a low priority, subordinated to the diplomatic interests of the USSR. Comintern policy was dictated by the twists and turns of internal CPSU politics. In turn the resulting failure of revolutionary movements,

the expansion of fascism and the tightening grip of imperialist encirclement increased the isolation of the USSR and reinforced the belief in the necessity of socialism in one country, the survival of which transcended the world revolution itself. And so the supreme 'Leninist' stood his mentor's fundamental theory of imperialism on its head.

As Germany had been regarded as the key to the European revolution which would come to the aid of the infant Soviet republic, the impact of Stalin's disastrous policy in Germany spelt the final death-knell of socialism in the USSR and almost destroyed the macabre parody of socialism which Stalin had constructed in its place. In line with the fight against the rightist deviationists, which provided the ideological cloak for the offensive against the kulaks, the 'rich peasants', within the USSR, the Comintern was instructed in 1929 also to take a left line. The 'third period' heralded the opening of new revolutionary offensives. The main enemy holding back the working class were the social democrats, now stigmatised as 'social-fascists'. As much fire and venom was directed at social-democrats and socialists as against the Nazis, totally destroying any hope of a united working class front against the rise of fascism, particularly in Germany and Austria. By this ultra-leftist sectarian policy and the zigzag towards popular frontism in 1934, which subordinated the struggle for socialism to alliances with the western democracies, Stalin's policies led to the destruction of the organised working class of Europe and the triumph of Nazism. The people of the USSR were to pay the terrible price for this error which arose from the socialism in one country delusion.

What form did building this 'social-

ism' which Brar so admires take? "It meant pulling the Soviet Union out of its feudal and medieval integument into the modern world and building modern socialist industry and collective agriculture. I come from a peasant country, where the peasantry live in miserable conditions. I believe in collectivisation - socialist collectivisation. Stalin's was a tremendous achievement".

As usual Brar invokes Lenin to back up Stalin, recommending "his article on cooperatives". If by this he means Lenin's 'On cooperation' written in January 1923, only a few weeks before his final debilitating stroke, this is what he actually says:

"If the whole of the peasantry had been organised in cooperatives we would by now have been standing with both feet on the soil of socialism. But the organisation of the entire peasantry in cooperative societies presupposes a standard of culture among the peasantry ... that cannot in fact be achieved without a cultural revolution."

Where in the article, which this quote summarises, is there mention of "collectivisation", and specifically forced collectivisation? Lenin envisaged by "cultural revolution" a patient process of education and the organisation of peasant producer co-ops. No mention here of herding peasants into cattle trucks for deportation to Siberia, no lynchings of those with a few more acres and cows than the rest, no Red Army firing squads against those resisting expropriation of their land and produce - in fact no mention of terror at all from Lenin, who was not squeamish to invoke it when he believed it necessary.

Stalin, who had attacked the opposition for being anti-peasant when they spoke of primitive socialist accumulation to build industry, put their policies into effect with a brutality they never imagined. This was not the construction of socialism in the countryside by the peasantry working out their own destiny and liberation. This was revolution (or, more accurately in socialist terms, counterrevolution) from above, using all the force of the state to cram into a decade changes which the agricultural revolutions in capitalist countries had taken generations to achieve. The immense suffering caused by the enclosures of common land, clearances of peasants, famines and the displacement of labourers by machinery, which had been spread over 200 years, were compressed into a five-year plan.

A "tremendous achievement", Mr Brar - but was it socialism? Similarly was the forced labour in industry, the crude propaganda Stakhanovite stunts to increase workers' productivity, the massive toll in industrial illnesses and accidents? Was this vast heaving ant-hill which was the USSR a vision of the socialist future. Those like the Webbs who viewed socialism in terms of production, order, bureaucracy and efficiency certainly thought so. And so does Brar, who hails it as "labour heroism ... unleashing the initiative of the masses".

But this is not the socialism of Marx or even the pragmatic Lenin. Stalin's practical policies, irrespective of any pronouncements he might have made, elevated technology and the development of the productive forces, as the dynamo of historical change. Not human beings, not the class struggle for a better society and a new level of human culture, not the ending of exploitation and the alienation of the individual from the product of his or her creative activity. Proletarian democracy or political freedom plays no part in Brar's socialism: only abstract freedom, abstract socialism for an abstract 'proletariat'. Instead the veneration of technology, the incessant drive for production.

Even the basic socialist concept of 'equality' or equitable distribution of the wealth produced does not get a

look in. In fact growing inequalities, wage differentials, perks for party members, along with the trappings, badges of rank in the army, better consumer goods for the elite, limousines and dachas. All these were integral to Stalin's 'socialist' achievement, along with a more reactionary social policy, a more draconian criminal code and that other great achievement praised by Brar, the terror against the real or imaginary political opposition.

It is at this stage in Mr Brar's transcript that the patience and tolerance of the reader becomes most taxed, as he presents a blasé apologia for the elimination of the opposition, or the "fifth column", as he refers to them. Perhaps millions of kulaks can be dismissed as counterrevolutionaries in Mr Brar's make-believe world, but it becomes increasingly difficult to believe that Brar can be so naïve as actually to believe the obscene slanders he perpetuates about the communists arraigned as traitors, saboteurs and fascist agents. Not a jot of concern is shown for the millions who went through the GPU/NKVD gaols, the torture chambers and prison camps. The "innumerable victims" are dismissed in parentheses as "mainly Trotskyists". He concentrates on the "51 or 52 people" condemned by their own testimony at the Moscow trials.

Brar shows even less comprehension of human psychology than he does the historical process. The defendants pleaded guilty - therefore they must be. Presumably Brar also believes that witches flew on broomsticks and copulated with demons. No analysis of the situation, no allowance for physical or psychological torture, threats to family and friends, offers of rehabilitation. No insight into the minds of men who believed, as Trotsky did, even after his banishment, that the party is always right; men who had dedicated their lives to the party and the revolution and could not envisage life outside; men who could be threatened or induced to believe that this one last sacrifice was a service to that party and revolution, even if it meant 'confessing' to such a fantastic conspiracy that no one who knew of their devotion to socialism could possibly believe it.

But Brar believes it, even after the passage of more than 60 years and the revelations of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and afterwards. The fragility of his case is underlined by the absurd comparison he makes between the show trial victims and Roman Malinovsky. Malinovsky, head of the Bolshevik group in the duma and central committee member, was, after the revolution, revealed to be an agent of the okhrana (the tsarist secret police) and shot. He was a state agent who was being used to infiltrate a subversive, revolutionary party. But the Moscow trials took place 20 years after the CP seized power when the party was politically unassailable and it was running the secret police. The reason they were not summarily shot like Malinovsky was not because of Stalin's respect for the judicial process. It was because he wanted to destroy the potential and actual alternative leadership politically, by discrediting them before the world in an act of public self-abasement. The idea that many of its oldest leading members, who had played important roles in the revolutionary movement, became, or were from the beginning, hostile to the party and revolution which was their life could only be accepted by a society and individuals reduced to a state of pathological fear, suspicion and uncritical subservience to authority. That they could be linked with Trotsky who they had either always opposed, or repeatedly renounced, also defies rational belief. And to tie Trotsky to some international fascist conspiracy, when his life was devoted to socialism, accusing

him of wrecking, sabotage and assassination, when he even opposed terroristic methods in the fight against capitalism - let alone against a workers' state, as he still considered the USSR to be - is a fabrication of fantastic proportions, rivalled in the 20th century only by the big lie of the international Jewish conspiracy.

Brar rounds off his calumnies about Trotsky by the off-hand reference that "another Trotskyist did him to death". This attempt to discredit Trotsky even in his last moments of agony is currently doing its rounds in the SLP in the form of a leaflet claiming, on the basis of the 'confession' of Trotsky's assassin that he was not Ramon Mercader, the NKVD agent, but Jackson, the disillusioned Trotskyist, distraught at being told to call off his affair with the secretary, Sylvia Ageloff. Almost 60 years after his death, Stalinist lies and smears continue to pursue the 'old man' beyond the grave.

While the 'Trotskyists' were being accused as fascist agents, Molotov and Ribbentrop were working out the 'non-aggression pact', a collaboration to partition Poland and sell out the working class of Europe. This vital background to the Great Patriotic War is not mentioned by Brar, although an examination of this period is essential to appraising Stalin's ability as a socialist leader. Was the alliance with the Nazis a cunning plot to gain time, as Stalinists claim? Or was it a cynical move to expand Russian national boundaries, which betrayed anti-fascists in the west and trampled on the national rights of neighbouring peoples? The flaw in the claim that it was a necessary strategy to allow the USSR to prepare lies in the fact that it also allowed Nazi Germany to grow stronger. The pact with Stalin covered the Nazis' flank while they invaded the Low Countries and France. Russia actually provided a base for the attack on Norway. Essential to the Nazis war effort were the vast amounts of raw materials - oil, cotton, grain, minerals - supplied by Russia or via Russia. The truth is, Stalin embraced the alliance with Germany with enthusiasm, even to the handing over of exiled German communists to the Gestapo. How could this be justifiable as being in defence of the USSR?

Eager to sing the praises of the victorious Red Army as another glorious creation of Stalin, Brar, at pains to prove it was not affected by the 'decapitation' in the purges, does not mention the near disastrous Russian imperialist offensive against Finland, which revealed poor leadership and lack of preparation. Nor does he mention that Stalin was so confident of his pact with Hitler that he failed to heed warnings about the Nazi *blitzkrieg* attack in July 1941, leading to the loss of massive amounts of equipment, troops and territory.

Brar claims that Stalin's "modernisation" of Russia was necessary to prepare for this inevitable attack by an imperialist power. Again a dominantly economic and technological solution is prescribed instead of the Marxist method of defending the revolution - winning the support of the world's working class and oppressed peoples, instead of politically disarming them in the face of fascism, as the Stalinists did in Germany and Spain. The dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 is even passed over without mention.

For Brar only the heroic face of war is apparent, since it demonstrated Stalin's great abilities as a leader and his popularity. This is proved by the assertion that "The average soldier went to his death with one slogan on his lips: 'For the motherland, and for comrade Stalin'." It is significant that he does not query why the slogan was not 'For socialism and for international revolution'. The fight of the people of the USSR was for survival:

they had no choice but to resist, this does not mean they endorsed all of Stalin's actions or that they were fighting for his version of 'socialism'. He became a figurehead, as Churchill did in Britain. If the ability to motivate people to fight and resist tenaciously is in itself a mark of popularity, then tsar Alexander who defeated Napoleon and Hitler himself must also have been a popular leaders. Stalin's ability to rally the Soviet people and organise a counter-offensive might make him a great nationalist and war leader - but not a Marxist or a socialist.

Even the undoubted heroism of the Soviet people was not universal. There were hundreds of thousands of defections, especially among national minorities, for whom Stalin's rule was an extension of Russian imperialism, and there would probably have been more but for the Nazis' ruthless racist policies which classified all Slavs and, of course, orientals and Jews, as *untersmenschen* - subhumans. Also Stalin, whose own son was captured, decreed that Soviet soldiers must not surrender and if they did their families would be penalised. NKVD units were behind the front to make sure that deserting soldiers were summarily shot.

There is also the other dark side of Stalin's glorious war which Brar does not mention - the massacre of 20,000 officers captured during the occupation of Poland; the failure to assist the Warsaw uprising; the revenge inflicted on German civilians including systematic rape of women; the persecution of returned POWs. All perhaps small crimes excusable in a great, ruthless military conqueror, an Alexander or a Tamerlane - but in an international socialist leader?

Stalin's post-war years receive scant mention apart from restoring production to above pre-war levels (no mention of the 'reparations' plundered to make this possible, or of the slave labour) and the struggle against "people in the party who were trying to bring in the ideas of market socialism" - a code for the relaunching of the domestic terror. There is no examination of how the liberation of eastern Europe was reinforced by the hangmen and firing squads as 'communism' was imposed on the working classes. The overtones of anti-semitism in the post-war terror are naturally ignored. Nor is there mention of attempts to bring to heel the Yugoslavs, who had resisted the Nazis almost unaided and carried out their own revolution.

Brar closes with an eulogy of generalissimo Stalin's triumphal parade, drawn from the "Trotskyist" Isaac Deutscher. Again the quotation is doctored. The restored sentence reveals that it was far from Deutscher's intention to give Stalin's victory an uncritical endorsement: "These were days of undreamed of glory. Yet rarely had triumph and frustration been as close neighbours as they were in Russia in 1945: and never perhaps had any victory been so chequered with grandeur and misery as was this one. Stalin stood in the full gaze of popular recognition and gratitude. These feelings were spontaneous, genuine - not engineered by official propagandists."

The price of the victory over fascism was over 20 million dead. There is no homage to these workers and peasants in the conclusion of Brar's oration, which ends transfixed by the glory of the Great Leader. No doubts are expressed as to how many of these deaths resulted from Stalin's lack of political and military preparation, how many from his policies of internal repression. But, as Brar claims in conclusion, those who do not share his pride in Stalin's great achievements, are merely "sceptics".

Is this colossal delusion the sort of vision of socialism we in the SLP wish to be putting across to work-

ers? Is this glorification of enforced socialism from above as "labour heroism", of war, of the great leader, a recipe for winning people at the dawn of the 21st century to socialism? The mirage of idealised Stalinism which had deceived many well-intentioned socialists was dispelled in 1956. The concrete basis of that mirage itself dissolved with the collapse of the USSR. The rapidity of that disintegration provided the ultimate confirmation that, whatever system existed in the USSR and eastern Europe, it was not socialism; it was not a workers' state. There was no bloody counterrevolution apart from that already carried out by Stalin. Instead workers were either actively involved in attempting to overthrow the communist political system, or stood by with approval or apathy whilst it happened.

What occurred was basically the self-reform (with varying degrees of external pressure) of a ruling class based on the collective control of production and the state apparatus into a ruling class based on state and private ownership - a process apparent in China now. As individuals, some were losers and some gainers. Some like Shevardnadze ended up running their own fiefdoms; others ended up advertising pizza. There was no counterrevolution violently destroying the machinery of a 'workers' state', not even in Romania. The ease with which the state and economy of the GDR was integrated into a united Germany reveals the absence of any fundamental opposition to capitalism. The state was instead adapted by the reformed ruling class of eastern Europe and the former USSR to maintain the social stability and legal framework for the free-market economy they are attempting to build.

Stalinists, despite all their condemnations of 'revisionism' and imperialist agents responsible for destroying Stalin's legacy, are at a loss to explain the process. Trotskyists too have been incapacitated by the need to maintain the myth of the 'workers' state', a problem they inherited from their founder who, despite Stalinist claims, only reluctantly broke with the CPSU. The whole Bolshevik tradition in fact has played a stultifying role on the development of Marxism in particular, but also socialism as a whole, and lingering illusions about the USSR continue to undermine critical analysis of the revolutionary movement in the 20th century.

It is clear that Brar and his co-thinkers cannot hide behind the term 'Marxist-Leninist' and believe that by denying the term 'Stalinism' they are exorcising all the crimes of Stalin. Stalin represents a break with the ideas of Marx and Lenin, a warping of their philosophy and socialist aims. Marx and Lenin are prostituted to serve Stalin in his final destruction of the gains of the October Revolution and the establishment of a new system of political repression and economic exploitation. Stalin represented the dominance of a new class: not the dictatorship of the proletariat, but of a privileged class based on party apparatchiks, with little experience or allegiance to the revolution and even less to Marxist internationalism, and on bureaucrats and technocrats for whom the administration of the machinery of the state and the economy was the prime interest. All the ideals of two generation of Marxists and other leftists were drowned in blood and fear by the Stalin regime. He acted, as Trotsky said, as "the gravedigger of the revolution".

Harpal Brar stands by with his spade of dogma and pick of sectarianism to perform the same role on the SLP. Under the leadership of Brar, Bull and the other Stalinoid fossils the SLP will not live to adulthood, let alone create a revolution ●

Your ‘principled’ response that “communists should resolutely expose Bull’s thinking” (*Weekly Worker* January 21) as an alternative to the Revolutionary Democratic Group’s demand for my expulsion from the SLP, will not get far by calling me “huckster” - a ‘peddler of small wares’, ‘a petty greedy tradesman’, ‘one engaged in the advertising business’.

Your problem is that the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* just keeps trouncing you with its vastly better grasp of Marxist-Leninist science, and its greater ability to make the most successful tactical use of that greater understanding. You would do better with a ‘coherent’ response, at least, but your ill-concealed emotional spleen against the ‘cut-and-paste’ *EPSR* (which your ‘Around the left’ columnist was once rebuked for ‘paying too much attention to’) always gets the better of you.

You correctly report my interest in political cooperation with the CPGB in 1996, but you still pretend to misunderstand the reason for the split, and you forget the role your arrogant abusiveness played in drawing harder *EPSR* attacks than you might have otherwise suffered.

You were just *wrong* about the SLP, and you remain wrong. It was not a vehicle for organised entryism, and history did not require that sort of swamp-alliance either. A regular *party* had to be built, and it will hopefully still happen, even if I get expelled.

It was because of falling out over the SLP (which we were all then members of) that you subsequently fabricated this nonsense about me wanting articles in the *Weekly Worker* in return for cash, a silly distortion about a completely separate argument entirely (over journalistic ethics as differently affecting a paid capitalist journalist compared to a voluntary socialist journalist when it came to commissioned articles - as your twisted recollection at least makes clear in spite of itself).

Your lying perversion of this record is worth mentioning only to expose your Goebbelsian ‘big lie’ method, clear also in your slanted versions of SLP history, WRP history, and how ‘splendidly’ Phil Sharpe is supposed to be doing in his polemic with the *EPSR*. This ill-tempered emotionalism then means you lose your aim completely.

Carelessly, you deride *EPSR*-think with the words: “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’,” and imagine you have said all there is to say with this sneer. And Sharpe joins in with his own faint-hearted insincere ‘acceptance’ of the dictatorship of the proletariat by requesting one “based upon the highest forms of democracy”.

You academic philistines simply refuse to study. Expanding on Engels, Lenin explains in *State and revolution* that “Democracy is a *state* (end of chapter four) ... an organisation for the systematic use of *force* by ... one section of the population against another.” Lenin approvingly quotes Engels’ plea for a communist party “whose ultimate political aim is to overcome the whole state and consequently democracy as well”.

In *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*, Lenin adds: “The proletariat cannot achieve victory ... *without forcibly suppressing its adversaries*, and that where there is ‘forcible suppression’, there is no ‘freedom’, *there is of course no democracy*” (original emphasis).

Lenin’s apparent contradiction, here using ‘democracy’ in its undialectical Sharpian sense, meaning ‘freedom’, only emphasises your problem. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the only true democratic state, only

Raging Bull

The SLP vice-president replies to Jack Conrad

.....
“The *EPSR* just keeps trouncing you with its vastly better grasp of Marxist-Leninist science”
.....

withers away through the successful *strengthening* of its dictatorship, or forcible suppression of its adversaries: ie, when world bourgeois-class influences (ie, all bourgeois ideological nonsense) have been utterly defeated in the world.

Marxism wants proletarian dictatorship based on the ‘highest forms of democracy’ to mean the most successful forms of repression against adversaries so that *all* forms of the state can then disappear. You want to set up forms of ‘democracy’ in its daft ‘freedom’ sense, to soften the dictatorship, ending up exactly where the philistine Gorbachev did. You spell this out with Sharpe’s dismissal of China for its “one-party, oppressive rule”, which shallow muddle Lenin answers below. But the proof is self-evident. The Chinese workers’ state lives on to fight another day. Gorbachev is history’s biggest ever joke, not just surrounded by imperialism, but wiped out by it.

In his 1975 [sic - editor] letter to Bebel, Engels adds: “As the state is only ... used ... in the revolution to hold down one’s adversaries by force, it is sheer nonsense to talk of a ‘free people’s state’. So long as the proletariat ... still needs the state, it does not need it in the interests of freedom, but in order to hold down its adversaries.”

And in *Leftwing communism*, Lenin explains that: “The mere presentation of the question ‘dictatorship of the party *or* dictatorship of the class; dictatorship (party) of the leaders, *or* dictatorship (party) of the masses’, testifies to most incredibly and hopelessly muddled thinking ... Classes are led by political parties; political parties as a general rule are led by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential, and experienced members, who are elected to the most responsible positions, and are called leaders”, and so on.

Finally, in *Proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*, Lenin again stresses: “Dictatorship is rule based directly upon force and unrestricted by any laws.”

Repeatedly, Marx, Engels and Lenin declared that the dictatorship of the proletariat would have to last throughout the entire period between capitalism and communism (and the withering away of the state). Due to the pattern of history, and explained a thousand times by Lenin before he died, the Soviet workers’ state would have to get on and construct the socialist order as best it could under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and not just do nothing while waiting for the completion of the world socialist revolution.

By 1990, the philistine revisionist degeneracy had become so stupid that the Gorbachev bureaucracy *deliberately* dismantled the dictatorship of the proletariat in the delusion of ‘faster, market-led growth’. All that was inevitably achieved was bour-

geois counterrevolution - hardly surprising in a still imperialist-dominated planet.

Marxist science says the Soviet bureaucratic debacle was finally the weakening of the dictatorship of the proletariat, exactly as Marx, Engels and Lenin insisted a thousand times must *never* be allowed to happen. Your petty bourgeois emotionalism cannot resist misdescribing this as “the weakness of the means of oppression”, and jeers the KGB.

And it is emotive language which distorts your otherwise almost correct (surprise, surprise!) characterisation of the ‘political correctness’ problem at least. You write: “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 capitalism will remove the sordid breeding ground for the homosexual ‘perversion’.”

I would translate: “PC and gay pride campaigning can help partially educate society away from primitive homophobic backwardness, but disastrously helps sow, under capitalism, the illusion that reformist pressure can cure all ills.” Along with feminism, black nationalism, etc, it is the last great stand by reformist ideology, rescuing a system which otherwise under modern conditions would by now be being seen as intolerably unequal, class-ridden, unstable, envy-creating, crime-disposed, dumbing-down, backwardness-breeding, sexist, chauvinist, racist, warmongering, degenerate nonsense.

The previous great ‘reformist’ pretences by bourgeois ideology rescued capitalism via the New Deal and the fascist New Order in the 1930s; and via social democracy welfare-stateism after 1945. Neither can be revived in that form. The last great wave of ‘reformism’ to steer social revolt away from revolutionary Marxism is the entire PC/single-issue ‘revolution’ of feminism, gay pride, etc, etc, etc. It is already being used as the great diversion to protect anti-communists (such as Fisc) from being exposed on matters not even connected with the single issues themselves. It will increasingly be used as the last refuge for ‘left’ anti-communist scoundrels.

But paradoxically, it is *only* the ‘end of capitalism’, which single issue reformist politics now usually *deliber-*

ately obstructs (examine New Labour’s close embrace of PC attitudes) that can guarantee *any* long-term human freedom at all, including the flourishing of any and every one of the endless variety of human sexual responses. *Only* such a society could possibly stand a chance of recreating stability in whatever forms of family and social relationships moves onto when freed from capitalism’s impossible contradictions and psychological damage; so *only* then will the dubious ‘normality’ of homosexuality, with all its obvious disadvantages for any species in evolutionary terms, be able to be judged and appropriately related to.

Dismissing the potential *reactionary* role politically of any single-issue, ‘reformist’ lobby is very short-sighted indeed. All dying societies in history notoriously lack all-round, model-representative hero-leaders by the end. All kinds of cults and exaggerated chip-on-the-shoulder behaviour begin to be the only driving forces - the Rasputin effect, Adolf Hitler, all kinds of gurus, astrology, and holy men; worshipped entertainment stars, who then turn political; Peter Mandelson, etc, etc. But what are the unusual driving forces? What are the specialised personal connections? Is the BBC run by a secret Mafia? Is New Labour? To pretend indifference out of PC posturing just toadies to reaction. All freemasonries under capitalism are bad news.

Lastly, emotional and sexual instability and frustration are obviously an infinitely more widespread phenomenon within disintegrating capitalist society than just concerns the problems created for homosexuality, but that this *is* a phenomenon does not get altered just because persecution and discrimination by capitalist-society backwardness has to be ridiculed and fought against, or unjust laws defeated; or just because the gay community can bring outstanding creativity to their ‘glad to be gay’ philosophising (which objective analysis might show to be flawed with wishful thinking, as is the single-issue reformist ideology itself). The psycho-sexual damage to *everyone* from capitalist society is better constantly universally denounced rather than selectively declared “only a problem for homophobes masquerading as Marxists”.

You think you’ve done well with your joke, but beware its shallowness bouncing back on you eventually ●

Royston Bull

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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Fighting fund

Splendid

January’s £400 target has just been surpassed as we go to press - a splendid £421 and still a few days to go. We are delighted to have received £20 from a “thoroughly cheered off” “dissident”, Constituency Socialist Labour Party.

Thanks also go to comrades HD, TG, RB and CD. February is a short

month - nevertheless we confidently look forward to again surpassing our vital fighting fund target ●

Ian Farrell

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

Simon Harvey of the SLP Disarray as Bull 'resigns'

Arthur Scargill rocked the Socialist Labour Party's national executive at the weekend with a blockbuster announcement that Royston Bull, the "former editor" of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, had "resigned" from his post as SLP vice-president.

But is it true?

Bull, who was not present at the January 23 NEC, had been referred to several times when, towards the end of the meeting, Scargill suddenly made the announcement. But he read out no resignation letter and refused to elaborate any details or allow any discussion. Within 24 hours every remaining party activist 'knew' that the vice-president had gone. Yet vice president Bull himself has issued no statement and is saying nothing.

After the December 12 NEC meeting Bull and his *EPSR* comrades on the executive made it known that they would fight Scargill's ruling effectively banning them from expressing their views. The general secretary had forced through a resolution which demanded that the cut-and-paste weekly "give an undertaking that it will not comment on the affairs of the SLP or carry contributions that may lead members to conclude that the *EPSR* is attacking or discriminating against women or sections within our society because of sexual orientation/preference and/or religion, etc" (see *Weekly Worker* January 14).

Clearly Bull was not about to shut up shop. His obscure bulletin had at last achieved notoriety through its circulation within the SLP, and some people - apart from the handful of *EPSR* supporters - were actually reading his catastrophist views. Why should the vice-president be barred from commenting on the affairs of his own party? The *EPSR* decided to challenge the ban using the party's as yet untried 'complaints procedure'. Bull was adamant that he could not accept the gagging order, and if it was upheld he would have to "review his position". But he stressed that, even if he was forced out, the *EPSR* is still committed to Scargill's party.

So it seems that Scargill has simply pre-empted the inevitable findings of the complaints committee - which will be stuffed with Scargill loyalists and sycophants. There is no way that it will find in vice president Bull's favour unless the general secretary himself should decide to retreat.

The complaints committee - whose composition has still not been announced, but is certain to include Scargill himself - is going to be very busy. It is also about to hear a disciplinary complaint against four of Scargill's former courtiers - Brian Heron and Carolyn Sikorski of the Fourth International Supporters Cau-

cus (Fisc) and their allies, Terry Dunn and Helen Drummond. The comrades had dared to issue their 'Appeal for a special conference', which now has around 200 signatories. But the December 12 NEC passed another resolution instructing them to withdraw it on the grounds that "no individual member of the party and no group of individuals within the party" is allowed to circulate any document whatsoever. The show trial was set for Saturday February 13 after the Appeal Four correctly refused to comply with the NEC's disgraceful and unconstitutional ruling.

The January NEC also dealt with the repercussions of the Fisc-led rebellion in London. The regional committee had declared that it would not contest the European elections in June unless Scargill overturned the result of the November 1998 special congress, which saw Bull depose sitting Fiscite Patrick Sikorski. Fisc suddenly 'discovered' the homophobic contents of the *EPSR* and called on Scargill to remove Bull. Predictably the NEC decided to impose its own list of candidates, headed by Harpal Brar, editor of ultra-Stalinite bimonthly, *Lalkar*, but including Fisc ally Imran Khan. It remains to be seen whether comrade Khan will accept the honour.

In view of these developments you might have expected the Appeal Four to redouble their efforts. After all, king Arthur appears to have ditched Bull, as his former Fisc courtiers had demanded - a sign of weakness? Perhaps they would try to press home their advantage by attempting to mobilise the membership in their London stronghold?

Not a bit of it. Earlier this week, not one of the four turned up at the London regional committee (LRC) meeting. Carolyn Sikorski was known to be unwell, but none of them even sent an apology (comrades Dunn and Drummond are both committee members, while comrade Heron is the regional president). In their absence the meeting was chaired by Fiscite Bernard Gibbon. Another member of the Fisc B team, Colin Meade, gave a report on preparations for the Euro elections (which the LRC had been going through the motions of following, despite its threat of going on strike). When he was challenged by comrade Brar and Adrian Greenman of the *EPSR*, who argued in favour of the NEC's decision on the question, comrade Meade simply declared he was no longer interested and walked out. He was followed soon afterwards by comrade Gibbon and co-thinkers, leaving a hard core of Stalin Society/*EPSR* supporters in control.

The SLP is visibly crumbling before our eyes ●

New vision

Left organisations in Hackney came together under the banner of Socialist Unity to fight a by-election in Hackney's North Defoe on January 21. The candidate, **Anne Murphy** of the Communist Party, gives us her thoughts on the campaign

How did Socialist Unity come together?

Hackney Socialist Alliance has been going for about three years. I stood in North Defoe last May as an HSA/Communist Party candidate. So we had the beginnings of electoral work there. As soon as the by-election was announced, we thought about standing again. But this time, given the developments nationally around the question of left unity, we were determined to make every effort to stand on a platform with others if possible. We convened a meeting attended by comrades from the HSA, the Socialist Workers Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain, Hackney Socialist Labour Party and the Turkish and Kurdish community.

What about the Socialist Party? Was it invited?

Of course! Unfortunately, the comrades did not get involved until the very end - and then, only on a low level. In fact, they pitched up only after I approached Dave Nellist at the Network of Socialist Alliances meeting in London. Almost immediately, we got a phone call from his London comrades, although perhaps it was just a coincidence.

Was it difficult to get agreement between these different groups?

No, pretty smooth really. Areas of important disagreement like over the minimum wage were certainly raised, but explored only in a limited way. Time factors didn't allow us really get to grips with some of the other differences between us, such as winning the battle for democracy.

How would you evaluate the campaign?

A qualified success, I think. North Defoe was an important step forward for the left and it's vital that the initiative should be followed up. Crucially, it was a unity campaign. Some of these groups would barely have spoken to each other in the past. That sort of sectarianism has got to go, and if North Defoe had achieved nothing more than aiding that process, it would have been positive.

For the SWP clearly it was a new experience - the first time since the 1970s when they have actually been campaigning for a candidate against Labour that they had helped choose, on a platform they had taken part in negotiating. Their response was somewhat uneven - Manor House branch made an excellent contribution, but unfortunately Stoke Newington SWP did not put much

effort into the campaign - maybe there are unresolved differences over the electoral turn. Switching from an automatic 'vote Labour, but ...' position to openly supporting their own and other revolutionary candidates will raise a lot of questions about past practices, including the belief, drummed into the rank and file by the leadership, that the Labour Party is the *only* alternative for the working class in elections. We will continue to encourage joint work and discussions with these comrades. Through working together and having open debates I feel confident that barriers will be broken down.

Comrades from Hackney SLP fought vigorously alongside us throughout the campaign - challenging the stupidity and blind sectarianism of Scargill's 'go it alone' diktats. We also need to encourage other remaining SLP branches to take the same brave stand. Brian Heron and the current SLP London leadership should take a leaf out of the Hackney book. Rather than threaten not to stand in the European elections they should approach the United Socialists and join together with us on its platform. Such positive defiance - rather than the churlish attitude that is currently exhibited - will inspire advanced workers.

What about the vote? Were you expecting more?

Well, some comrades did; others didn't. It is a hard constituency for the left in some ways, with strong Green enclaves. Plus, this really was a needle contest between Labour and the Green Party. Quite a few people told our canvassers that although they had voted for me back in May (on a much harder platform, it must be said), they couldn't support us because this time "it matters" - control of the council hung on the result.

It was clear from conversations outside the polling stations that in general it was the middle class New Labour/Green occupants of trendy Stoke Newington that turned out to vote. Those in the run-down estates in the ward - people you might call our 'natural constituency' - generally stayed at home. At the moment, their alienation from the system leads them in the direction of passivity and lack of political self-belief.

Labour's local grandees were enraged by the loss of the seat to the Greens last year and pulled out all the stops this time. As I said, Hack-

ney had a hung council, so if it won in North Defoe, Labour would gain overall control. The Greens were equally determined to hold on. This made for one of the hardest contests I have ever witnessed. It was not surprising that our vote was squeezed between the two larger forces, both competing furiously for the latent left vote - it's good that our small, hard-core vote held up the way it did.

We must also recognise the nature of the period - internationally and nationally. We are definitely not living in the 'red 90s'. Nor do we appear to be on the verge of an instant breakthrough - despite Blair's permanent counterrevolution. The vote we received in North Defoe mirrored those the left is getting nationally at the moment. Just under three percent is not the best we could have hoped for, but it's a base to build on. If we on the left were able to organise and programmatically equip this advanced section, we could have a major impact on society and the class struggle.

But surely we should be fighting for that breakthrough?

Yes, but there are no short cuts. Some comrades were disappointed by the vote. Their solution is to water down our politics, to retreat in terms of principle. One comrade from Turkey suggested that it was wrong to have even mentioned the word 'socialism' - "British people just won't vote for that," he told me.

I think this is a mistaken conclusion. We should not follow the road of New Labour. On the contrary socialists in the 1990s have something to learn from the socialists of the 1890s. We have to renew socialism, ruthlessly criticising the past - not least the failures of bureaucratic socialism in the USSR and of Labourism. But that must go hand in hand with a crusading spirit exemplified by Kier Hardie, William Morris, Jenny Marx-Aveling, John Maclean, AJ Cook and other pioneers of modern socialism in Britain. To think that working class people - even *British* ones - are somehow incapable of voting socialist, let alone fighting for their own self-liberation, is to give up on humanity. We have to inspire people with a new vision, a vision of international socialism.

Standing together for this has been a real achievement for the left in Hackney. I'm very proud to have been the Socialist Unity candidate. I think the way the campaign came together points the way ahead ●