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ILN split danger

CPGB call for left unity

Developments in the Independent Labour Network have placed London - and for that matter all-Britain - negotiations for a united left slate to contest the June European elections in real jeopardy.

Mike Davies - the Leeds-based secretary of the ILN - has attempted to circumvent the London ILN as presently constituted because of its 'lefty' composition and the "sectarian", "ultra-left" platform it has agreed with others under the banner of the United Socialists. Comrade Davies told me that he regards this platform as "not viable". He has "some concern that no one would vote for it".

He is confident however that this is a "solvable problem" and that the platform can be "renegotiated". Indeed, he assured me that he would be "surprised if the London ILN didn't agree" to this. But I can confirm that comrades in the capital have rejected his clumsy move and reconfirmed their commitment to the unity slate at a meeting on Wednesday evening.

However, despite a fog of rumour and counter-rumour, this only seems to be part of the story. London ILN is awash with tales of an 'alternative' ILN being established around Dave Palmer, a comrade with a long history on the 'soft-Trot' left. Comrade Palmer has angrily stormed out of ILN meetings in the past and seems to regard the organisation in London as dominated by political flotsam. His project - which he appears to have convinced Mike Davies at least of - is for a shift to a borough-based London ILN to replace its current city-wide form. This task, he suggests, would be "quite easy", although he seems to have had little success so far in his native Haringey.

Clearly, the assumption is that these imaginary borough ILNs would be composed more of the naive, raw social material that leading ILNers believe must be cohered around their project - pensioners, green campaigners, students and the like. City-wide organisation encourages the domination of 'lefties'.

Of course, this is a re-run of the argument in the London Socialist Alliance between communists and advocates of 'local alliances first'. Localism actually conceals a non-political agenda. It is not without irony then that some of the same individuals who used these arguments against the Communist Party now seem to be finding themselves targeted by the ILN right - which is using exactly the same philistine logic against them.

If the attempt to tear up the agreed US platform fails, as now seems likely, there is even talk of a rival Davies/Palmer list of tame celebrities such as Tariq Ali. *Red Pepper* has already mooted such an idea and would be in a better position to gather possible participants. However, the magazine's editor, Hilary Wainwright, assured me that she firmly believes that "two lists would be damaging. The left should do everything it can to stand together on a joint list."

Of course, it is already too late to prevent two lists. In the last few days, John Hendy of the Socialist Labour Party has confirmed that Scargill's crisis-wracked shell intends to stand a full London slate - probably with Hendy at the head of the list. Further fragmentation of the forces of the left would be disastrous.

Leading ILNers in London are angry at what they see as a reneging on the agreement to "autonomy" for ILN regions in working out what platforms they stand on and the electoral agreements they come to. The anger is per-

**Ken Coates:
only one list**

fectly legitimate. The actions of Mike Davies do indeed violate the approach agreed at the December 5 ILN-convened meeting in Doncaster: ie, that the 'national' ILN would adopt a "background" position paper with "participating regions [having] full autonomy to stand on platforms agreed through local negotiation and debate" (*Weekly Worker* December 10 1998).

There are conflicting reports of the position of Ken Coates MEP on all of this. One ILN comrade assured me he was encouraging comrade Davies's activities. Others - probably better placed to know - were adamant that he had repudiated any attempt to impose a platform rewrite on London and is down on paper to this effect. Furthermore, Mike Davies seems to have been warned to "stay out" of the capital.

However, this pressure on London may have the desired effect without any split being necessary.

A meeting took place between Mike Davies and Dave Packer of Socialist Outlook and Nick Long of the Socialist Democracy Group on Monday February 1. Comrade Packer in par-

ticular was described as "panicked" by the prospect of the withdrawal of the ILN and anxious to maintain the "broad" nature of the US - even if this means further concessions on a programme that is already deeply flawed from the point of view of working class politics.

This reflects something quite profound about the *formal* nature of the revolutionism of Socialist Outlook and the like. At the very first US meeting attended by the CPGB, representatives voted and agreed the platform of the US, primarily drafted by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (*Weekly Worker* January 14). Obviously, because our organisation had no opportunity to take part in the presentations and arguments around it, we abstained. The CPGB regards the platform as rightist, economic and therefore totally inadequate. However, in the interests of unity, we are prepared to *critically* accept it.

At the last meeting of the US on January 5, the discussion of the political basis of the bloc took an interesting twist. Comrades from Workers Power presented a draft election manifesto to the meeting. While it has many formulations that we would regard as wrong, it is a revolutionary document and clearly superior to anything yet produced by the US.

Interestingly, during the perfunctory discussion around WP's contribution, comrades from ostensibly revolutionary organisations were at pains to emphasise that they "preferred" many of its formulations, yet in order to preserve a "broad" slate, they had to keep it rightwing. (Discussion revealed that five organisations had been involved in drawing up the present US platform - the SP,

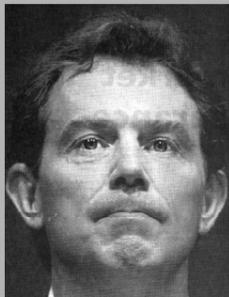
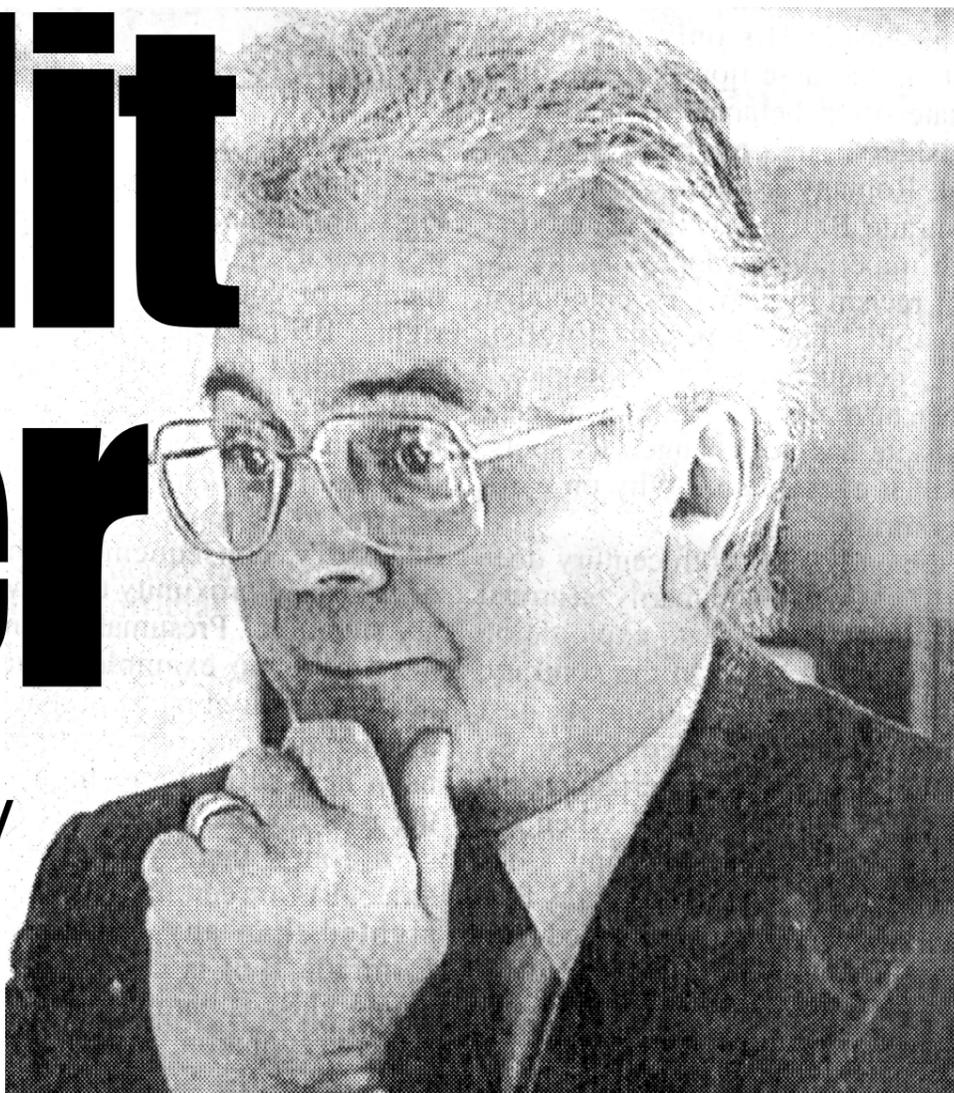
SWP, Socialist Outlook, the AWL and the ILN). In other words, to accommodate the Potemkin-village London ILN, the revolutionary *majority* of the US was prepared to bow before its social democratic shibboleths.

This is a useful insight into the method of the contemporary revolutionary left. Its principles are reserved for internal consumption: in its practical work, it caves in to the right (even if it has to invent a *phantom* right wing).

Peter Brown, Hugh Kerr's right-hand man, confirmed that more behind-the-scenes negotiations are on the cards: "Ken Coates, Hugh Kerr and I have discussed these problems," he admitted. "We are agreed that there should be only one left list for London, and we should try to reach some understanding on the programme that goes forward. I do think that the platform should be reconsidered. Important constituent elements of the US have approached me and asked if I can broker a discussion with them, Ken and Hugh, so the differences can be aired. I am trying to do this. I hope people take this on."

The Communist Party opposes any moves to rip up the platform that has been agreed so far - at least, when they come from the right. We already believe that what we have in front of us is not a socialist platform in substance. The CPGB will press for principled politics when drafting of the actual election manifesto begins. Furthermore, we believe that the debate on this vital question for the entire left should no longer be conducted in 'smoke-filled rooms'. We will fight to make it open and transparent so that all comrades can contribute ●

Mark Fischer



**Blair moves
against ILN -
see p2**

Compromise

The Scottish Socialist Alliance recall conference which voted last year to set up the Scottish Socialist Party passed a motion on internationalism, calling for the building of links with socialists across the UK, Europe and the rest of the world.

The European elections provide genuine international socialists with an opportunity to put this rhetoric to the test. Given that these elections will take place throughout the UK on the same day, it is nonsensical for socialists to stand on different slates north and south of the border. Let the eight million Londoners and five million Scots and, hopefully, others in the UK all benefit from a coordinated effort by socialists standing on an agreed platform. Let us agree to pool our financial and other resources. Let us all try to coordinate our efforts, not just across the UK, but with those French revolutionaries who stand the best chances of us all of actually getting a member elected.

This would entail a compromise for the SSP since they are, currently, opposed to standing under any other name. But a good case can be made for their doing this in the name of international solidarity rather than narrow nationalism.

Given that this would be to ask the SSP to make a concession to their international critics, I propose that something is offered in return. First of all, I want the SSP to affiliate to an all-UK Network of Socialist Alliances, and I want individual members of the SSP, such as myself, to be allowed, both by the SSP and by the self-appointed Network leadership, to be able to take out dual membership in anticipation of the SSP affiliating as a whole. However, I now think the best strategy for bringing this about is to get them enmeshed in joint, across-the-UK work in the European elections and demonstrating, in practice, that this is more fruitful than nationalistically dividing our forces.

However, in order to maximise the prospects of getting the SSP to agree to this, we need ourselves to be prepared to consider compromises. A recent System Three opinion poll, inevitably lauded by the SSP leadership, suggests that as many as 21% of voters are thinking of voting SSP, and that at least five percent (the very threshold of getting a candidate elected by the list system) were very likely to do so. In such circumstances, socialists outside the SSP would need to think very seriously before presenting an alternative list, one likely to rob socialists of any chance of getting anyone elected. Doing so would play into the hands of New Labour and the SNP. And it would strengthen the hands of sectarians in the SSP in the aftermath of the elections, sectarians who would like an excuse to cut off contact with all component parts of the United Socialists.

The price I think the United Socialists should be prepared to pay in order to guarantee that rank and file SSP members have access to the valuable experience of joint work in the European elections is one which, so far, the SSP's critics in the CPGB and SWP have not been prepared to countenance. What I am proposing is that, for the elections to the Scottish parliament in four months time, the United Socialists reluctantly agree not to put up an alternative slate to the SSP. Socialists outside the SSP can and should bargain over this. The

United Socialists should make clear that they are unhappy that SML went ahead and drafted its SSP constitution prior to bringing on board those socialist groups now involved in the United Socialists.

It should be made clear that in the aftermath of the Scottish parliamentary, local and European elections in a few months time, there will need to be renegotiations involving all those organisations previously excluded. Renegotiations would then take place in the light of our combined experience in all these elections.

Further, given that the SSP have pushed things through, including the selection of candidates, prior to getting any agreement with the other organisations involved in the United Socialists, some concessions will have to be made by the SSP.

Firstly, compromises will have to be given to allow the SWP, and others in the United Socialists, to be placed on the SSP lists. I would propose one token SWP member in Glasgow, and for the lists in other parts of Scotland to reflect the relative strengths of the SSP and component parts of the United Socialists.

Secondly, the terms for standing as a candidate would have to be relaxed. Instead of proposing an independent Socialist Scotland, which current SSP members could still do, candidates from groups not as yet involved in the SSP should merely have to agree to support Scottish self-determination, up to and including the right to secession, and to prove this by advocating a referendum on the subject.

Tom Delargy
 Paisley SSP

The answer

Anne Murphy's result in the Hackney by-election was disappointing. Standing as a Socialist Unity candidate with a much improved (since May) joint programme benefiting from the political realism of comrades from the SLP, SWP and the Socialist Party, her (two percent) vote was a disappointment for all those working towards a united left challenge.

The result contrasts sharply with the 100-plus votes (13%) gained by socialists in Lewisham during a by-election in December for Ian Page and the dissident SP branch. Socialists in Lewisham were able to halve the Green vote, not by labelling them pro-capitalist, but raising environmental issues from a socialist perspective and by years of local joint socialist activity in the borough.

What the result in Hackney suggests is that the programme and platform needs to go much further in relating to the life struggles of working people. Workers will only start voting for socialist candidates after a record of real local campaigning. Comrades in Hackney Socialist Alliance have only just embarked on this work. Those socialists in Hackney with a track record of local socialist campaigning, the Socialist Party, need to be in the forefront of this work.

The by-election in Hackney was always going to be a difficult battle for socialists. The principal protagonists, the Greens and Labour, were able to concentrate all their resources into the ward, maximising their vote, and our vote was squeezed. The surprise was not that Labour regained the seat, but that the Green vote held up, especially in light of the reasons for the vacancy. The level of support for the Green Party in the ward is therefore considerable and has been built up over many years of local campaigning.

This is the lesson the socialist left needs to draw. In the absence of mass political or industrial struggles we need to sink deep roots in the life of local communities. We need to sup-

port and initiate local struggles to defend jobs and services. It means not just living in the community, but becoming part of the daily struggles and experience of working people, as local services are slashed, libraries, welfare and legal advice centres are closed and jobs destroyed. It means becoming involved in not just campaigns to prevent the closure of local schools, but standing as parent-governors. It means helping to initiate and sustain local community, tenant and direct action groups campaigning around road safety, homes zones, council housing sell-offs, privatisation of old folks homes, police harassment and traffic-calming measures, and - yes - it does mean campaigning about uneven pavements that make it difficult for people with buggies and are hazardous for the elderly. It means campaigning to save the local swimming pool and indeed the local park from sale and development.

A recent report in the *Financial Times* suggests that Straw and Blair are supporting the idea of PR for local elections in the face of the embarrassing cronyism and corruption of Labour's rotten boroughs and by way of throwing a bone to the Lib Dems. Already under first-past-the-post socialist rebels are breaching the castle walls in Glasgow, Doncaster, Hull and Coventry. Even a likely restricted form of PR in local government will form the building blocks for helping to build a workers' party to the left of Labour.

Local campaigning is the answer. There are no short cuts.

Nick Long
 Lewisham

Otherworldly

This is just a quick note for Don Hoskins (*Weekly Worker* January 21): unless you believe in the thoroughly idealist notion of an afterlife, then it is impossible that "Karl Popper ... has an avowed and open anti-communist agenda". He is dead.

Unfortunately this is not the only example of Don's ahistorical 'otherworldliness'. When he praises Newtonian physics he does so with a voice that echoes to us from some no doubt deeply desired but nonetheless imagined past. The approximations contained in Newtonian physics may well be accurate enough to help Don catch the bus on his way to the local SLP branch meeting, but they are not (so far as we know) as accurate an approximation of the state of the universe as those offered by quantum theory - which is itself being challenged.

Comrades of the *EPSR*, welcome to the late 20th century.

Ray Hickman
 Brighton

Esperanto

I read the article 'Hurricane of persecutions' (*Weekly Worker* January 21) with great interest. It is a long time since I have read material which hits the mark so well. Congratulations and thanks.

You are totally correct that the Soviet Society for International Friendship and Cultural Links (which indeed received instructions from the international department of the central committee of the CPSU) strongly opposed cooperation with the Communist Esperantist Collective (KEK) and even obstructed it: seemingly because of the fact that KEK did not completely subordinate itself to the politics of the Soviet Union, unlike the World Esperantist Peace Movement (MEM), which supported the USSR one hundred percent.

Boris Kolker
 Moscow

Blair moves against ILN

Another witch hunt has begun. In an effort to stem the rising tide of grassroots disaffection with Blair's authoritarian leadership and his government's relentless rightwards trajectory, Labour's NEC last week turned its guns on the Independent Labour Network. The pioneering Leeds branch of the ILN, founded in June 1998, has been selected as a suitable case for treatment.

Leeds in general, and the Leeds North East Constituency Labour Party in particular, have been a thorn in Millbank's side for some time. As readers will recall, Leeds North East infuriated the party centre by democratically selecting a leftwinger, Liz Davies, as their candidate to fight the 1997 general election. With a characteristic contempt for the rank and file, the Labour leadership simply vetoed the CLP's choice and imposed its own candidate on the constituency in the form of the safe Blairite, Fabian Hamilton, who was duly elected. (Ironically Ms Davies was elected onto Labour's national executive in 1998, much to the chagrin of Tony Blair.) Unsurprisingly, this diktat from London served merely to exacerbate tensions. In the interim a number of local party bodies have been subjected to suspension. Four individual party members have been expelled and two suspended. The NEC has since moved to expel another party member, Jane Young, specifically on the grounds of her involvement with the ILN, which it denounces as an organisation "operating contrary to the aims and values of the party" (*The Independent* January 26).

By declaring that the Leeds branch is "ineligible for affiliation to the Labour Party", the NEC is making use of a time-dishonoured bureaucratic mechanism designed to isolate and destroy dissent - the same tactic that was used by Kinnoch in the 1980s to neutralise the threat posed by Militant. Somewhat ironically, the target this time is not a group of 'revolutionaries' intent on 'subverting' the Labour Party, but a network of old Labour's left social democrats, for whom John Smith's brand of socialism was quite acceptable. It is a measure of New Labour's iron-fisted authoritarianism and paranoia that such people as make up the ILN should now be cast into outer darkness.

As Mike Davies of the Leeds ILN told the *Weekly Worker*, the objective of the NEC's resolution is to prevent cross-membership of the two organisations: the message is that you can either be a member of the Labour Party or of the ILN, but not both. This intimidatory edict is targeted both at members of the Labour Party already involved with the ILN and those who are minded to join forces with it. Asked about the effect of the NEC's action on the ILN's work in the area, comrade Davies told us that they were unsurprised and undaunted by this turn of events. Leeds had been the focus of Millbank's hostility for some time and the reaction among Labour's deeply disillusioned members and supporters locally, according to comrade Davies, was: "Stuff them; we'll carry on".

Of course, New Labour's dishonest attempts to bully and smear the ILN are hardly new. Back in June 1998, poor Tony Blair had to suffer a whole 90 seconds of criticism from

Ken Coates MEP in the European parliament. Coates had the temerity to suggest that Blair had turned his back on the poor and to accuse the Blair regime of being undemocratic. Blair's response was characteristic: "I think that Mr Coates said that the British government was undemocratic. I would like to respond by saying that they [Coates and his colleague Hugh Kerr] were elected as Labour members of parliament on a Labour ticket. They left the Labour Party. They still sit as members of parliament without any democratic mandate for doing so at all. That is not my idea of democracy." The falsehood of this statement was brazen indeed. Messrs Coates and Kerr did not "leave" the Labour Party at all, but were unceremoniously ejected from it. As Coates himself remarked, "We were thrown out on our ears, without the courtesy of any hearing, still less of any investigation or enquiry" (*K Coates President Blair and democracy* June 1998). The same dishonesty, hypocrisy and lack of democratic openness lie behind the NEC's decision on Leeds. No investigation has taken place; no 'crimes' have been proven; it is enough that the omniscient *Excalibur* database indicates that members and supporters of the ILN are "rebels" and must therefore be declared *persona non grata*.

Neither in theory nor in practice can the ILN credibly be described as hatching some kind of Marxist conspiracy. Though support is by no means drawn exclusively from Labour ranks, its theoretical platform overtly eschews any desire to constitute itself as a formal 'split' from Labour as a new party.

The aims and objectives of the ILN, as formulated by Coates and Kerr, are pretty unexceptionable: "The Independent Labour Network ... does not seek to become another political party. It seeks to promote association between those who have supported the traditional social programme of the Labour Party, and to help organise protests against the ill-effects of New Labour's attacks on those policies. This has become necessary because the new rules and structure of New Labour, pushed through in the 1997 post-election honeymoon, prevent Labour members and Constituency Parties having any control of, or even influence on, New Labour policy. This disenfranchises not only members but, more importantly, all those ordinary people who lack wealth and power. No party now speaks for them. The Independent Labour Network seeks to ensure that there is a political party speaking for ordinary people. Its preferred means of achieving this is by exerting sufficient pressure, internal and external, on New Labour to force the Labour Party to return to this role. Only if this proved impossible would it be necessary to consider forming a new Party of Labour" (*Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr The Need for an Independent Labour Network* 1998).

Despite our big political differences the CPGB has no hesitation in supporting the ILN comrades in Leeds and any others who may be the target of future attacks by the Blair leadership. We oppose all witch hunts ●

Mary Godwin

United Socialists north west launch

action

Reports of the infant death of a United Socialists challenge in the North West of England constituency in the forthcoming European parliament elections appear to have been greatly exaggerated.

The January edition of *Action for Solidarity*, paper of the Welfare State Network, an organisation led by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, contained a report of a meeting held in Preston, on January 9, which, it said, was attended by representatives of the AWL, Socialist Outlook, the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, the ex-SP 'Mersey Socialists', the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance and the Radical Preston Alliance. The report now turns out to be highly inaccurate.

The *Action* piece definitively reported that the Preston meeting had rejected a unity challenge in the European poll, but had agreed upon further non-electoral cooperation. Yet, when I spoke to Tony Reid, convenor of the Radical Preston Alliance, the organisation which had initiated the meeting, he was unequivocal. A decision has not yet been made and, indeed, a second meeting on the subject is to take place in Manchester on February 13. The organisations present at the first meeting were to come back with their views, and with statements on their willingness to commit the necessary resources - money and people. Manchester AWL comrades confirmed comrade Reid's report and admitted that the *Action* article was incorrect. They could offer no explanation of this rather serious inaccuracy.

The CPGB was not invited to the Preston meeting. When told of its participation in the London United

Socialists project and its commitment to building united slates in as many other regions as possible, comrade Reid expressed regret at the exclusion, which had not been intentional on his part, he assured me. The comrade has had no hesitation in inviting CPGB representatives to attend the February 13 meeting. I have no doubt at all, however, that further down the line of communication there was no such lack of intent in the failure to inform the CPGB. An authoritative source confirms that details of the Preston event were announced at the previous meeting of the steering committee of Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance. Those GMSA affiliates who hold steering committee seats, and whose representatives were present, were thus informed of the meeting. But my source does not recall any mention being made at the steering committee of the need to advise those affiliated organisations who have been excluded from a place on the committee. Indeed, GMSA convenor John Nicholson did not inform the major excluded organisation, the CPGB. A strange oversight, when comrade Nicholson is very well aware of the CPGB's keen advocacy of electoral intervention and of socialist unity slates.

By all accounts, the majority of representatives at the Preston meeting - the SP, AWL, SO and GMSA - were rather unenthusiastic at the idea of a north west United Socialists slate.

Several reasons were proffered - the difficulty of raising the £5,000 electoral deposit; pessimism at the prospects for mobilising sufficient numbers of people to mount an effective campaign; the splitting of the left and radical vote arising from the intention of the Green Party and the Socialist Labour Party to mount separate challenges in this constituency.

It must be stated, however, that these same organisations' representatives have consistently opposed electoral unity initiatives within the GMSA, for the last two years, and - in the case of the AWL and SO - have argued, and continue to argue, that the time has not yet arrived to issue a general call to the working class to break with the Labour Party. These comrades seem to be lagging behind the slow, but important, movement that their organisations have been displaying nationally and in London with respect to the United Socialists project. The reasons for this disparity have not yet become totally clear. It may be down to provincial conservatism. Alternatively, it may be that these organisations are engaged in a limited experiment in London that they are reluctant to see expanded.

The issue of the election deposit can be easily resolved. Firstly, it amounts to just £500 per candidate if a full 10-member slate is put forward. This should be an easily achievable sum if the candidacies are shared between the organisations participating

in the slate. It goes without saying that the united forces should work flat out to save the deposit. Whatever comrades' reservations about the 'closed list' system, it offers an opportunity for socialist organisations to begin to make joint decisions in a democratic and representative way.

Socialist unity should not be discouraged by the potential for vote-splitting brought about by the sectarian refusal of Arthur Scargill to countenance any form of cooperation. His actions must be vigorously exposed before the working class. It is *he* who is the splitter and his methods are damaging the interests of the working class. He cannot be allowed to prosper. The SLP campaign itself, of course, will be based upon a far grander splitting mission, the inane call for Britain to "get out of Europe". The United Socialists can counter this shabby, little England national socialism with a manifesto for all-European working class integration. As to the Greens, they are a non-socialist force. Theirs is not a working class platform. In many respects it is likely to be reactionary and anti-human. We can sharpen our political thrust by contrasting a programme which wants humanity to go on the retreat with a platform for our class.

Worries over mobilising sufficient comrades to work for an effective campaign are most probably just a sign of the hesitancy and uncertainty that is bound to exist in such a stage. These fears can be overcome in only one way - by starting to work together. I can think of no better slogan than that of five fingers making a fist. When we all start punching with our full weight, we will inspire and rally support.

In the early days of the London United Socialists project, passivity and reticence was widespread. It seems this phenomenon is now being dispelled. It is no surprise that such moods should also have attended the first attempt to bring together those same parties in the north west of England. The largest organisation on the left, the SWP, was, for instance, represented at Preston by just one person, who played a minor role in the meeting. *Socialist Worker* has not exactly prioritised coverage of the unity initiatives. Many of its members will be unsure of just what their leadership's position is, and what the reasons were for the volte-face - from backing to opposing New Labour in the ballot box. Driving forward the unity project will be the surest way to force onto the agendas of the constituent organisations the discussion that is so necessary for clarification of the way forward.

Only the Mersey Socialists and the Radical Preston Alliance, were reportedly for a united slate created in the north west. At the very least, they will be joined at the February 13 Manchester meeting by the CPGB. Individual comrades within the other participating organisations should argue vigorously for a positive approach. And we must be ready to push ahead with the regional slate, so vital to the building of an all-Britain challenge - with its free TV broadcast - even if some of the London participants decide that they will be non-runners in the north west contest ●

John Pearson

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday February 8, 5pm - 'Terror and terrorism', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* vol 3 as a study guide. For details phone 0181-459 7146.

Manchester: Monday February 15, 7.30pm - 'The general law of capitalist accumulation', 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.

■ 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 Unison, 29 Booth Street, Ashton under Lyne.

■ Lewisham Trades Council

Public meeting - 'PFI and the threat to jobs'. Monday February 15, 6.30pm, Lewisham Town Hall, civic suite, room 3, Catford, London SE6. Speakers - Geoff Martin (Unison), John Leech (RMT). Further details - Nick Long, GMB: 0181-690-1555.

■ International Socialist Forum

Discussion meeting - 'Marx's concept of revolution'. Introduced by Anton Mootonian. Sunday February 7, 2pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

United Socialists recall conference

Meeting to plan north west European election campaign Saturday February 13, Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester, at close of Campaigns '99 conference (3.30pm approximately).

Fighting fund

Have faith

So poor old Glenn Hoddle has finally got the elbow, after the Football Association inevitably succumbed to the mounting politically correct pressure from the establishment, capped by the intervention of Tony Blair himself. Still, losing your job can have its compensations - for some people at least. The former England coach is rumoured to have picked up a cool half million by way of a good-bye handshake.

Unfortunately the *Weekly Worker* does not have such an easy source of ready income. We cannot rely on the 'karma' to re-

ward us for our political achievements in a past life, but place all our 'faith' in our readers and supporters.

Last month's fund ended with a flourish, with last-minute gifts from IS (£30) and CM (£25). January's total was a target-busting £488. Already donations from RW (£25), TR (£10) and a young reader, SE (£5), have given this month's fund a good start. We start February with £74 ●

Ian Farrell

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

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Strained relations

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group takes issue with some recent reporting in the *Weekly Worker*

Jack Conrad's article, 'Political problems and political solutions' (*Weekly Worker* January 21) draws our attention to positive and negative aspects of the rapprochement process. On the positive side, this was the first time our joint tendency debated an issue of common concern - what view to take on the position of Roy Bull as vice-president of the SLP. Whilst I do not want to spend much more time on this, I would like to make a couple of points.

The alignment of the ex-Fourth International Supporters Caucus (Fisc), RDG and CPGB was politically inevitable. It is Brian Heron's worst nightmare. As a 'post-sectarian' he hates all small groups (except Fisc) with a vengeance. The political logic that would force us together was predicted in the *Weekly Worker* at a time when Fisc was working hand in glove with Scargill against the SLP left. Thanks largely to the sectarian methods of Brian Heron, we were kept divided long enough for Scargillism to triumph and the SLP to be destroyed.

The RDG is therefore not in the least frightened of appearing to be lined up with the ex-Fisc. We, along with the CPGB, have consistently defended democratic methods in the SLP from the start. So it is Fisc now lining up with us, whilst trying to pretend otherwise. Therefore Jack Conrad fires a cheap shot when he tries to suggest that the RDG has shifted its position to line up behind the ex-Fisc. He says: "Comrade Craig's approach neatly squares with the organisational demands of the Fisc." The only thing that is new in this is simply that the election of Bull has forced everybody, including our tendency, to clarify their position in the light of new circumstances.

By the same token the CPGB's opposition to expelling Bull lined them up with Scargill and Bull. Of course if Scargill now changes his mind, the CPGB will be on its own in trying to help Bull keep his job. Pointing to a temporary alignment of CPGB-Scargill-Bull versus Fisc-RDG is also a cheap shot. So it is much more enlightening to consider the differences.

The CPGB's position is similar to Scargill's only at the most superficial level. The CPGB would like Bull to write more articles on the subject of gay politics and then expose him. Scargill, on the other hand, demands that Bull simply shuts up. Similarly there is a huge difference between a bureaucratic expulsion and one that is the result of a democratic process. We are not in favour of Scargill stitching up Bull in some kangaroo court. Yet when Fisc refused to stand candidates in London they were trying to get Scargill to do this. Unfortunately Jack is so busy trying to paint a picture of the RDG following Fisc that he neglects to explain the differences on matters of principle and democratic political method.

The SLP is not a communist party. It is certainly no vanguard party. On this we are all agreed. But there are still communists and communist sympathisers in it. The most useful thing we can do to assist these comrades is to offer sensible advice, based on clear communist principles. Even if we are not members of the SLP, we must

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'stand in the shoes' of those comrades, if we wish to be taken seriously.

Jack says that in a communist party "anyone whose main purpose consisted of propagating backward prejudices would quickly be shown the door". Why should communists in the SLP have any different attitude? Should we actually advocate a lower standard for the SLP? Do we say to racists and homophobes that we will show you the door if you try to join our party, but we'll fight to the death for you to be allowed to remain in left reformist and centrist parties? If Jack could stand in the shoes of communists in the SLP, he would immediately see why the 'hard' line he seems to adopt for a communist party and the 'soft' line for the SLP would be treated with suspicion. Why does Jack Conrad want us to tolerate something in the Socialist Labour Party that he wouldn't tolerate in his own?

So Jack and myself are in agreement that it is quite valid to show racists and homophobes the exit door. When it comes to the facts, Jack seems clear about the nature of Bull's views on gay politics. He describes them as "reactionary", "unscientific" and "prejudiced". If he is serious about this and not indulging in demagoguery, then he must admit that these are the type of views that have the words 'exit sign' written all over them.

However, and I must emphasise this, the RDG is opposed to Arthur Scargill, Jack Conrad, Dave Craig or Brian Heron showing anybody to the door. There must be a democratic process, in which an informed membership makes the decision to expel a

comrade or simply remove him or her from office. And if Bull was innocent, or being unfairly maligned, the collective views of the membership and their congress representatives is the best safeguard any unjustly treated comrade can have.

This was the main point of my argument. It is the main point that differentiates us from the methods of Scargill and Fisc. Anybody who listens carefully will understand that we are *not* calling on Scargill to expel Bull. We are calling for a special congress, so that the rank and file members can decide the question. We are calling for an immediate investigation and report to be presented to that congress. On the basis of our current information, there is no doubt what we would urge that congress to do. We do not want Scargill to expel Bull: we want to do it ourselves. What we consistently defend is the democratic method.

Overall I am very pleased to see the tendency having its first debate. I hope this will be the first of many debates as we try to coordinate our work and establish ever closer unity. However, we should not hide some of the problems. There is hidden friction over whether the RDG was "embarrassed" by the first aggregate or whether the CPGB is deliberately trying to embarrass us. Is the RDG too sensitive or the CPGB too insensitive? We need to give this an airing.

In correspondence, the Provisional Central Committee suggested that recent proposals from the RDG "are an attempt to avoid the situation where an organisation is embarrassed by a split vote or disagreement in its ranks". In his article, Jack tells readers that at the aggregate an amendment from comrade Bridge "united the CPGB and was carried by a big majority. The RDG split down the middle when it came to the final vote." This is factually accurate, but somewhat overdramatic. It tells us very little about what politics the RDG "split" over. By failing to explain the issues it presents the CPGB in a good light and the RDG less favourably.

In itself the fact that Jack should tell readers that the RDG "split" is not significant. The problem is that RDG comrades have come to view the CPGB's reporting of events with suspicion. So whilst Jack Conrad's comments are innocent in themselves in a wider context, they are adding to our comrades' slight irritation. Some of us are wondering if the CPGB have come up with a new tactic of trying to embarrass us into joining them or that they are wanting to pull back.

The first attempt to develop ongoing discussions occurred last September when I proposed three motions to a CPGB aggregate. I put them forward in the belief that debating our differences over, for example, the right of reply, would help the rapprochement process. But it was soon clear that this was divisive in the worst sense of the word. Some comrades felt this was not legitimate. At the start of the meeting, I immediately withdrew the motions. This was not the proper forum for the important task of clarifying our politics.

Nevertheless, the aggregate decided to discuss the motions anyway. So I sat there while the motions were attacked by all and sundry. Comrades had a lot of fun 'proving' not only how wrong they were, but speculating why I put the motions forward in the first place. A report was given of this in the *Weekly Worker* (Septem-

ber 24 1998) by Ian Mahoney. There were follow-up letters from myself and James Frazer. The upshot of this was that the CPGB majority accused the CPGB minority of acting out of a desire to "punish" or humiliate me. To which the minority from Manchester replied (October 8) that it wasn't them: it was the other lot that were so motivated. Neither myself nor other RDG comrades were sure who to believe. In January 1999 we made a new attempt at coordination. Two RDG representatives attended a CPGB aggregate. Under the auspices of our joint Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency, we agreed to debate the situation in the SLP. A motion was proposed. We agreed on virtually all points, except we differed on what to do about Bull. It was anticipated before the meeting that the CPGB and RDG would disagree and felt that it would be useful to clarify our views. This was the main debate. However, another amendment was proposed which called on SLP members to join the Socialist Alliances. Both RDG comrades spontaneously voted against this. We did know of this amendment before we arrived. We did not caucus, nor did we deliberately vote the same way. We voted the same way independently, instinctively sensing that far from strengthening the fight against Bull and Scargill, it tended to weaken it.

The reason we opposed this amendment is specific to the current situation in the SLP. We want members to remain in the SLP and challenge the party's current disastrous direction. This is especially true when the more class conscious members are thinking of dropping out or just resigning in an individualistic fashion. The call to join the Socialist Alliances could be interpreted as a call to leave the SLP and join an alternative. Whilst there might be a time when this is correct, we must not encourage comrades to walk away now. If there is to be struggle, it is all hands on deck, not some on deck and others leaping into lifeboats.

This amendment was overwhelmingly carried. RDG comrades voted against. However, when the new amended motion was voted on, I voted for it and comrade May voted against. I wanted to support the main parts of the motion, despite the amendment. Comrade May saw the amendment as the CPGB pushing forward its own interests, which are weighted towards the SAs, rather than what was necessary for communists in the SLP. In other words he perceived the amendment as sectarian. He therefore voted against the whole motion. It should be noted that neither of us spoke against this pro-Socialist Alliance amendment for quite different reasons. Comrade May came to the first meeting of our tendency more as an observer, open to be persuaded that it could be useful, rather than an active participant. My reasons were different. I did not speak against it. But then nobody else spoke for it or against it either. It got 'lost' or 'forgotten' because the debate focused almost entirely on Bull. I spoke possibly three times on that. I had more than my fair share of speaking. We were only reminded of the Socialist Alliance amendment when we were called to the vote. I would have had to start objecting and demanding a new round of debate. It had been a long meeting, especially for CPGB comrades. It would have tried some comrades' patience to start up again. Clearly I should have spoken up, but

in the context of this first meeting, I am sure comrades will understand my error in not doing so.

Now let us turn to the reporting of this meeting (*Weekly Worker* December 17 1998) in which the RDG "split". The report informs us that "RDG members present voted against this amendment, although nobody from the group spoke in the debate to explain why they opposed it". This is factually accurate, with the proviso that there was no debate on this particular point at all.

However, the article goes on to give readers the benefit of the writer's inside information. We are informed that this behaviour was contradictory because "RDG comrades are themselves working in the SAs". If you think that was strange, we are told that "Even stranger, one RDG member subsequently voted against the whole motion". Here the facts are being spun. The writer does not know the reasons for the behaviour of the RDG comrades. Nevertheless in the spirit of fearless investigative journalism, he decides to report his ignorance as our strange behaviour.

CPGB comrades may think our behaviour was "strange" and beyond rational explanation. RDG comrades think it is equally "strange" that you should choose to report the meeting in this way rather than find out the truth and report that. We are not asking you to cover up the facts for some pseudo-diplomacy. But if something is not explained, then we would request that you do us the courtesy of asking for our explanation and reporting that. The advantage of this method is that it would get the truth to your readers more quickly and accurately. It would save precious time in not having to reply. And it would help to create a greater degree of trust between those publicly claiming to be allies.

The apparent contradiction between RDG comrades "working in the Socialist Alliances" and our opposition to the amendment calling on SLP members to join the SAs is a figment of the writer's imagination. RDG comrades are supportive of the SAs but we are not "working" in them. Some comrades have attend a couple of meetings and paid some subs. We did this for limited objectives: for example to support the CPGB against a possible witch hunt and on another occasion to demand the right for Scottish socialists to be allowed to join the SAs.

I know of no individual comrades who are doing serious work in both the SLP and the SAs. It is definitely not a priority for communists in the SLP to become paper or token members of the SAs. Talk of joining the SAs is either a call for more paper members or for comrades to abandon the SLP to do serious work in the SAs. If the CPGB wants the latter at what is a crucial time for the SLP, then you should be honest enough to say so. If the CPGB has any active supporters in the SLP there is one priority - and that is the fight to save the SLP from Scargill's megalomania.

What is my conclusion? The first joint aggregate and the debate was potentially an important step forward for our joint tendency, regardless of the content of the debate. I hope we can build on that. But it has also revealed some strains in our relations that need to be ironed out. I hope that representatives of the RDG and CPGB can meet soon to discuss these matters about creating a greater level of confidence and trust on both sides ●

Obituary: Mick McGahey 1925-1999

Devoted to his class

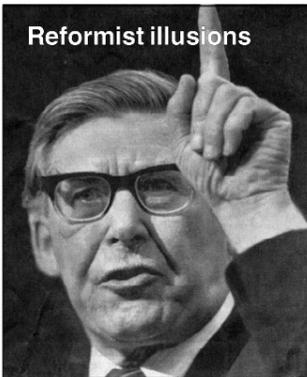
Michael McGahey died on January 30 1999, aged 73. His death marks the passing of an indomitable class warrior, an accomplished trade union leader, activist and agitator, and an authentic tribune of the working class.

Comrade McGahey joined the old Communist Party of Great Britain in his teens and remained a member for some 50 years, until the Euro's liquidation. He took pride in describing himself as a "devout communist". Devotion, expressed in dogged loyalty to the CPGB and to the National Union of Mineworkers, was the defining characteristic of McGahey's political life. It represented both his great strength and, in certain respects, his weakness.

Comrade McGahey's communist convictions, rooted in a profoundly humanist Marxist ethic, were formed under the influence of his father, James, a founder member of the CPGB and a leading activist in the Scottish NUM during the General Strike of 1926. As McGahey himself said, "I learned from my father a bitter resentment at the conditions and exploitation of ordinary working people." This resentment, focused by diligent self-teaching and honed by a communist education into a political weapon, was transformed into a passionate commitment not only to the miners, but to the working class as a whole. As a formidable orator, as a tactician in the major battles and minor skirmishes of the class war, in whatever capacity the cause required him to exercise, McGahey remained faithful to his communist vision.

Sadly, his fidelity was bestowed on a Party leadership that, by the time he reached maturity, had already forsaken the revolutionary principles of 1920. The CPGB to which McGahey devoted his unswerving loyalty had degenerated into a Party of reform, a Party whose programme, enshrined in *The British Road to Socialism*, had little to offer the working class but fine words and the vain hope that socialism could be achieved through bourgeois democracy and the agency of the Labour Party.

Whatever his private thoughts - a man with his intelligence must surely have had his doubts - comrade McGahey faithfully imparted the CPGB line that industrial action, by bringing in a Labour government, really could set us on the parliamentary road to socialism. In 1973, 12 months after a devastatingly successful strike against the Ted Heath government in which McGahey played a leading role as tactician, he chose the occasion of his election as vice-president of the NUM to rouse the union with the assurance that "We shall



Reformist illusions

speed the day when not only will we establish decent wages and a decent standard of living. We will end this Tory government and create conditions for a rapid advance towards socialism in this country."

McGahey's masterminding of the 1974 coal strike *did* end the Tory government. To be vilified by the bourgeois press, denounced in a House of Commons motion signed by representatives of all parties and personally singled out by Heath as the "leader of a small group of unelected communists who wanted to run the country" - these things must have gladdened him no end.

But the victory of 1974 soon turned to ashes. True, the incoming Labour administration repealed the Tories' Industrial Relations Act and abandoned legal sanctions on pay bargaining. Yet scarcely more than a year later they introduced their own incomes policy and suddenly the 'consensus' of 'moderate' trade unionists around Jack Jones, leader of the TGWU and the architect of the 'social contract', left McGahey and his comrades on the left exposed. The Scottish NUM's policy of total opposition to any form of wage restraint, a position it had successfully defended for years, was voted down in the Scottish TUC, and the worthlessness of Labour's promises (and those of its friends in the TUC bossocracy) became apparent to all.

The pitiful end of the Wilson-Callaghan administration of 1974-9 mercilessly exposed Labour's ideological bankruptcy. When Thatcher appointed Ian MacGregor as chairman of the Coal Board, McGahey predicted that this move indicated the prime minister's resolve "to destroy trade unionism not only in mining but in Britain". He was right. The Tories deliberately provoked a confrontation for which they had made lengthy and careful preparation. In retrospect, the eventual defeat of the ensuing miners' Great Strike of 1984-5 may seem to have been inevitable. Throughout the dispute, as vice-president of the NUM, McGahey was tirelessly engaged. Our most vivid memories of him are drawn from those desperate months of struggle.

The strike threw into relief all that was best and worst in the British working class movement. Heroism and grim determination on the part of the miners and their leaders; craven cowardice and treachery on the part of the Labour and TUC leadership - rats who deserted the ship at the first sign of choppy waters.

In the aftermath of McGahey's death, the story put about in the broadsheet obituaries - on the basis of what evidence remains unclear - is that McGahey would have given in much earlier than Scargill and that, if he had merely given the signal, the left wing of the miners would have followed him in abject capitulation. Whatever the truth, if any, behind such stories, the fact is that comrade McGahey remained staunch to the end. Then, as now, bourgeois commentators (and many 'socialists' too) contended that the strike should never have gone ahead without a full ballot of the NUM membership. McGahey's position on this question was unequivocal: "People must remember that the miners had no choice but to fight. MacGregor, without a ballot or consultation, decided ... to close pits and throw thousands of men out of work at whatever cost ... it was a challenge that could not be ducked, and the men had a moral and constitutional right to ask their colleagues in the movement for help." As we know, help was not forthcoming.

In the aftermath of the strike and in the atmosphere of unavoidable rancour that followed such a major defeat, McGahey's relations with Scargill are said to have worsened. Notably, McGahey declined to write his memoirs because to do so would have meant "having to be factual about men still alive ... like Arthur Scargill ... they are human beings and they have wives and families." The implications are clear enough.

After his retirement from the NUM, McGahey remained active in politics. In time, his fiercely patriotic Scots heart got the better of his communist head. When the Eurocommunists finally liquidated themselves into the Democratic Left in 1991, he refused to follow them and rejected the Communist Party of Britain just as forcefully. Unable to draw revolutionary conclusions like the Leninists of the CPGB, he turned to the left nationalist Communist Party of Scotland.

At times like this, it is customary to say 'We shall not see his like again'. But that is not the case. New McGaheys will come forward from the labour movement, fired with the same ardour, but hopefully unburdened by his reformist illusions. ●

Michael Malkin

Moralism and morality

Ian Brown (director), Irvine Welsh (author) **You'll have had your hole** Astoria 2, London, February 2 - March 27, Mondays to Thursdays £14.75, Fridays to Saturdays £16.75 (cons £10)

As one would expect, the promoters of Irvine Welsh's "new" - and first - play, 'You'll have had your hole', revel in the childish disgust its premiere provoked from the mainstream bourgeois press. Having ventured out from their usual London haunts and journeyed to The West Yorkshire Playhouse in February 1998, the reviewers appear to have been universally vehement in their hostility. The cold-blooded creatures were made to *feel* - in itself something of a recommendation.

For *The Daily Telegraph's* critic here was "the most obnoxious and contemptible play I have ever had to sit through". Welsh's drama supposedly "offers only pornography and unspeakable cruelty ... pandering to the public's baser instincts". *The Express* correspondent rolled out almost exactly the same conventional formula: "It is the saddest, sickest, most vile play I have ever sat through ... 90 minutes of unadulterated nastiness ... an orgy of humiliation, viciousness, profanity and suffering which will cause offence." *The Times* was offended, but prissily could not quite bring itself to print Welsh's offensive language: "After enduring this one, I feel like borrowing one of his character's trademark aphorisms: 'F*** off, you c***'." *The News of the World* found itself no less upset: "As gruesome a piece of work as you'll find outside an abattoir, a morally bankrupt, gut-churningly violent and empty play fit only for sadists, masochists and those who enjoy pulling wings off butterflies." In the opinion of the *Sunday Times* the play was "nasty and empty" and "gratuitous". Even the mouthpiece of liberalism, *The Guardian*, thought it a "disappointingly crude crime and punishment saga".

Such publicity is, of course, designed to kill. The rulers of the arts pages take an aristocratic pleasure in making or more usually breaking productions. Commercial, subsidised and fringe theatre await their judgements with fear and trepidation. They offer the promise of fame. Usually though they bring humiliating death. The traditional audience is easily swayed. It is atomised and in no way organically linked to the producers of a commodified culture. Welsh and his small circle are an exception. Due to the success of 'Trainspotting' and by deliberately targeting the club scene he has to some degree won himself an alternative audience. Welsh can therefore afford to openly treat critics with disdain. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that there exists a symbiotic relationship. He positively thrives on notoriety. On being hated by *them*. The fact that 'You'll have had' has secured a two-month run in a converted night club in London's Charing Cross Road after being slated surely proves the point.

Welsh's piece is undoubtedly dark. Despite that it is not without humour, poignancy and moments of tenderness. More, there is complexity, and through that we find truth. Welsh shines a sympathetic, but searing light on the underbelly of society. His subject matter are the so-called 'socially excluded' or lumpenproletariat. People he tries, and wants us, to understand or know. That explains, at least in part, the rancour reproduced above. Surprise, surprise: the comfortable hirelings of the fourth estate find themselves repelled and censorious when confronted by the actual human beings and human relations capitalism creates and recreates at its margins.

The bourgeois press could only see nihilistic drug-taking, rape, cynical manipulation and torture. The bourgeois press could only hear swearing and abuse. It sees, but does not see. It hears, but does not hear. Their

bible says everything about them; their closed little world and closed ideological assumptions. Certainly not much about Welsh and his finely crafted play.

Welsh takes things to extremes. So what? Extremes have attracted playwrights throughout the ages. This enables the artist to lay bare the psyche, and at the end of the performance confidently leave an audience to come to its many-faceted conclusion. Those lacking morality typically froth and fume. Others will perhaps think about themselves critically and that to be human is to empathise.

As to the notion that theatregoers cannot, will not or should not enjoy something peppered with torture, rape and murder, that is - to say the least - hypocritical, given the purulent reports that fill the pages of *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Express*, *The Times*, *The News of the World*, etc. It is moreover utterly philistine. Such is the stuff of drama. Welsh portrays in general terms nothing we have not seen on countless occasions before on the stage (let alone on page and screen). From Sophocles to Geoffrey Chaucer, from Christopher Marlowe to John Webster, from Howard Brenton to Sarah Kane, our common humanity is discovered under circumstances which one way or the other thrust particular people far beyond the norms of the everyday.

The four characters in 'You'll have had' are in fact all easily recognisable. They inhabit not only Edinburgh - where the play is set - but every big city in Britain. They live down the road. They drink in that pub. They lack for the most part neither cash nor the necessary baubles of consumerism. Quite the reverse. Nevertheless they are outcasts. Money comes illegally from a bit of this and a bit of that. It comes quick and goes the same way. They leech off society, but are its victims. They are scum and they are avengers too. They dream of easy riches, but half expect to die by bullet or knife, or to rot year after year in a tiny prison cell.

Far from being amoral, they hold to a very strong ethical code. Towards outsiders they are often contemptuous or indifferent. But friendship, gangland loyalty and bonds of trust are given the highest value. Enemies and those who transgress must suffer. So even amidst cruelty, the infliction of pain and sordid brutality, humanity is actually made visible. Welsh might not have written the greatest play of the 1990s, but it is certainly a good play, not least because it is deeply moral. There is nothing vile about it, except the vileness that surrounds us. Nothing morally bankrupt, except to the paid defenders of a morally bankrupt system.

The basic plot line is simple. Small-time gangster Dex (James Cunningham) is kidnapped by two long-time friends, Jinks (Tam Dean Burn) and Docksey (Kenneth Bryans). A score must be settled. For Docksey this involves torturing Dex and, to make revenge all the sweeter, stealing his girlfriend Laney (Kirsty Mitchell). For Jinks there is also the prospect of wanton homosexual buggery. It would be wrong in such a review to describe how the story unfolds expect to say that human intentions invariably have completely unexpected results. Thus with Welsh things turn into their own opposites. Weakness finds its power. Retribution becomes hollow. Love triumphs and is perverted. Everything moves, changes and is uncertain.

Welsh and director Ian Brown are served by an outstanding cast. The location, staging, lighting, etc are excellent too. As to the ticket prices, not least those for concessions, all I can say is - fuck. ●

Jack Conrad

Mistaken position

James Paris of the US Marxist Workers' Group argues that the CPGB's refusal to "defend Iraq" is an error that can be corrected

A recent article by comrade Mark Fischer in the pages of the *Weekly Worker* (January 7) opens a debate on the question of defencism - what it is, and how you apply it. This debate developed from discussion between the CPGB and the Marxist Workers' Group around the recent imperialist bombing of Iraq.

For the MWG, the issue of revolutionary defence is a question of method. Wars and revolutions are acid tests for Marxists. World War II graphically drew out the differences within social democracy - separating out the Marxists from the chauvinists and reformists. The implosions in the USSR and eastern Europe, specifically the August 1991 coup, separated out the proletarian communists from the petty bourgeois 'democrats' who masqueraded as 'Marxists'. Such is also true of the ongoing conflict between US/British imperialism and Iraq. All manifestations of petty bourgeois pacifism, social-patriotism and adventurism (not to mention opportunist tailing of the Ba'athists) came out during the Gulf War of 1990-91. And these failures in method continued to develop in the ensuing years.

The current debate with the comrades of the CPGB allows us an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the Marxist method, and to attempt to influence the development of a corrective trend.

To begin tackling this question, we must begin with a Marxist understanding of defencism: what it is and what it is not. Marxists have always understood that there are two types of war: 1) progressive wars - wars of national liberation, anti-imperialist wars; and 2) reactionary wars - wars of redivision of the world, inter-imperialist wars. A Marxist organisation develops its position on war based on the analysis of the class relations in all wars. By class relations we not only mean the subjective elements of the wars (regime, ideology, etc) but also the objective elements (relations between oppressed and oppressor, questions of markets, etc).

The seminal work on this question was *Socialism and war*. The position was outlined by Lenin and Zinoviev very clearly in 1915: "The period between 1789 and 1871 left deep traces and revolutionary reminiscences. Before the overthrow of feudalism, absolutism and foreign oppression, there could be no thought of developing the proletarian struggle for socialism. When, in speaking of the wars of such periods, the socialists always recognised the justice of a 'defensive' war, they had in view of the above aims: namely, a revolution against medievalism and serf labour. Under a 'defensive' war the socialists always understood a 'just' war in this particular sense. (Wilhelm Liebknecht once expressed himself in this very way.) Only in this sense did the socialists recognise, and so recognise at present, the legitimacy, progressivism, and justice of 'defending the fatherland', or of a 'defensive' war. For instance, if Morocco were to declare war against France tomorrow, or India against Britain, or Persia or China against Russia, etc, those wars would be 'just', 'defensive' wars, no matter which one was the first to attack. Every socialist would then wish

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"Only through a consistent defence of semi-colonies against 'great power' countries like the United States and Britain can the Marxists win leadership in the struggle"

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the victory of the oppressed, dependent and *unsovereign states* against the oppressing, slaveholding, pillaging 'great' nations.

"But imagine that a slaveholder possessing 100 slaves wages war against a slaveholder possessing 200 slaves for a more 'equitable' redistribution of slaves. It is evident that to apply to such a case the term 'defensive' war or 'defence of the fatherland' would be an historical lie; in practice it would mean that the crafty slaveholders were plainly deceiving the unenlightened masses, the lower strata of the city population. It is in this very fashion that the *present-day imperialist bourgeoisie*, when war is waged *among the slaveholders* for the strengthening and consolidation of slavery, deceive the people by means of the 'national' ideology and the idea of defence of the fatherland" (our emphasis, VI Lenin *CW* Vol 18, Moscow 1930, pp220-221).

So, what does this mean? Lenin was attempting to show through example what kind of different wars exist under capitalism. For him and the Bolsheviks, wars of "oppressed states" against imperialist powers (France, Britain, Russia) were "just", "defensive" wars. In other words, they were wars that Marxists "would ... wish victory". Lenin goes on to explain the nature of inter-imperialist wars. He is clear to show that wars "waged among the slaveholders" are wars between competing imperialist powers, fighting to redivide the world. Further, he shows how the imperialist bourgeoisie uses "defence of the fatherland" as a means to deceive the working class, and that Marxists need to expose these lies.

But then why do Marxists defend "oppressed states" against imperialism? Why do Marxists consider them "just" wars? Marxists defend these states against imperialism for two reasons. First, we unconditionally oppose the movement of imperialism toward further subjugation of oppressed peoples around the world. Second, the defeat of imperialism in a fight with oppressed states weakens

the base of imperialism at home and around the world, and allows an opening for the working class to fight capitalism.

Leon Trotsky, co-leader of the October Revolution and Marxist theoretician, wrote on this: "Maxton and the others opine that the Italo-Ethiopian war is 'a conflict between two rival dictators'... They thus define the character of the war by the political form of the state, in the course of which they themselves regard this political form in a quite superficial and purely descriptive manner, without taking into consideration the social foundations of both 'dictatorships'. A dictator can also play a very progressive role in history: for example, Oliver Cromwell, Robespierre, etc ... Should a dictator place himself at the head of the next uprising of the Indian people in order to smash the British yoke - would Maxton then refuse this dictator his support? Yes or no? If not, why does he refuse his support to the Ethiopian 'dictator' who is attempting to cast off the Italian yoke?"

"If Mussolini triumphs, it means the reinforcement of fascism, the strengthening of imperialism, and the discouragement of the colonial peoples in Africa and elsewhere. The victory of the Negus [Ethiopian king Haile Selassie - JP], however, would mean a mighty blow *not only at Italian imperialism but at imperialism as a whole*, and would lend a powerful impulsion to the rebellious forces of the oppressed peoples. One must really be completely blind not to see this" (our emphasis, LD Trotsky, 'On dictators and the heights of Oslo' *Writings 1935-36* New York 1977, pp317-318).

The crux of this debate, according to comrade Fischer, stems from the question of whether military support of Iraq is the same as political support to the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein. According to Fischer, "The fine distinction such comrades attempt to draw between military support for the Iraqi regime and political support is entirely spurious. After all, war is the continuation of politics by other, violent, means. And surely taking sides with Saddam Hussein is a political act by the various Trotskyist sects. The defensive measures that the Saddam dictatorship may take against imperialist attacks are designed to secure the conditions for its continued rule as an anti-working class despotism. There can for us be no question of a military bloc with - or, what is the same thing, political support to - such a reactionary regime."

With this opening, comrade Fischer confuses the issues of military and political support. Of course, according to the comrade, there is no fundamental difference between the two. Moreover, for him, the differences between Iraq and the US are quantitative - a simple matter of degrees. We believe that this exposes a severe lack of Marxist understanding. The confusion inherent in these positions - the inability to discern between oppressed and oppressor states - shows the centrist character of the CPGB as it stands. It negates the Leninist understanding of war, as well as the understanding of imperialism and the world division of labour.

Comrade Fischer's position is not new to us. Some members of the MWG were at one time in the Communist Party USA. The more savvy members of the CPUSA used the same argument as the comrade from Britain for the same reasons (though not for the same ends). In fact, the position is a hallmark of 'official communist' parties. And it is still just as non-Leninist and false. However, from the CPGB, it is not designed to justify support for a 'negotiated solution' by the United Nations. In our opinion, the CPGB's argument against defencism is an opportunistic vestige of the 'official communist' parties' old practices.

The central question behind the argument around Iraq is whether or not the latter is an oppressor (imperialist) or oppressed (semi-colonial) state. In his book *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism* Lenin outlined five essential features of imperialist capitalism. They are:

"1. The concentration of production and capital developed to such a high stage that it created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life.

"2. The merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this, 'finance capital', of a 'financial oligarchy'.

"3. The export of capital, which has become extremely important, as distinguished from the export of commodities.

"4. The formation of international capitalist monopolies which share the world among themselves.

"5. The territorial division of the whole world among the greatest capitalist powers is completed" (VI Lenin *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism* New York 1945, p89).

Even a cursory glance at Iraq shows that it does not fit these five features. Iraq does not export capital, it has not formed international capitalist monopolies and it has not divided the world alongside the "greatest capitalist powers". For Lenin, these five features were decisive criteria. For us, they fulfil the same role.

But, if Iraq is not an imperialist power (even a minor power, like Canada or Greece) then what is it? While at times Iraq has played the role of imperialist proxy in the Middle East (eg, the Iran-Iraq War), it is fundamentally an exploited state - an oppressed semi-colonial state.

For comrade Fischer, what is defining the "anti-defencism" of their position is not the position of Iraq in the world division of labour, but rather the ruthlessness of Hussein's Ba'athist regime. He writes: "Viewed in this way, we would ask our 'defencist' comrades - what possible progressive content does the Ba'athist regime embody? If there is none, what justification can there be for siding with it against imperialism?"

Here the comrade makes the same mistake as Maxton in the piece by Trotsky quoted above. Comrade Fischer elevates *form* (the lack of "progressive content" in the Iraqi regime) over *content* (the semi-colonial character of Iraq). This is a superficial and impressionistic argument. It ignores the relationship of imperialism to the rest of the world, and reduces the argument to moralistic appeals of 'good' and 'evil'.

The Communist International was able to develop a clear position on the work of member sections in the colonial and semi-colonial countries: "The refusal of communists in the

colonies to take part in the fight against imperialist tyranny, on the pretext of their supposed 'defence' of imperialist class interests [ie, rejection of defencism due to the reactionary nature of the semi-colonial leadership - JP], is the worst kind of opportunism and can only discredit the proletarian revolution in the east ... The working class of the colonies and semi-colonies must be firmly convinced that it is only the overall intensification of the struggle against great power imperialist oppression that can promote it to revolutionary leadership. On the other hand, it is only the political and economic organisation and the political education of the working class and semi-proletarian layers that can increase the revolutionary scope of the anti-imperialist struggle" (*Theses, resolutions and manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International* London 1983, pp414-415).

In other words, only through a consistent struggle against imperialism and imperialist attack can a communist organisation win political leadership. Only through a consistent defence of semi-colonies against 'great power' countries like the United States and Britain can the Marxists win leadership in the struggle. Communists see imperialism's need to capture markets (a question of content) as paramount to the blood-thirsty regime of a semi-colony (a question of form). This is not to say that we do not take form into account. On the contrary, this is where the question of the difference between military and political support comes into play.

Comrade Fischer uses the example of the Bolsheviks' struggle against Kornilov as a means to defeat the position of the "defencists". In this, the comrade constructs straw man after straw man to demolish the position. He writes: "Replying to this idea, Lenin starkly stated that 'you do not conclude agreements or make blocs with people who have deserted for good to the enemy camp' (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 25, p251). And further still: 'A Bolshevik would say, "Our workers and soldiers will fight the counterrevolutionary troops if they start an offensive now against the provisional government; they will do so not to defend this government ... but to independently defend the revolution as they pursue their own aim"' (*ibid* p251-252).

"Thus what Lenin is outlining here is the fight for proletarian political independence. The revolutionary proletariat will fight to defeat the Kornilov counterrevolution as a precondition for the fight to make its revolution. If that struggle happens to parallel the struggle of forces loyal to Kerensky then this is a purely episodic, coincidental phenomenon. In no way does it imply a 'bloc' - political or military - with the provisional government which remains the enemy of the revolution.

"The position of those who advocated cooperation, a certain alliance between revolutionaries and the military forces of Kerensky, would in effect have tied the proletariat to the coat tails of this anti-revolutionary government. In the context of the politics of revolutionary Russia at this time, this was a grave opportunist mistake, but at least explicable. After all, the provisional government was a product of a revolution and contained people who regarded themselves as Marxists."

In order to argue this, let us break

it down into its component statements.

First, comrade Fischer uses quotes by Lenin to attempt to justify the anti-defencist position. Unfortunately for him, though, the comrade accidentally stumbles upon the Marxist understanding of defencism. We agree with Lenin when he writes: "A Bolshevik would say, 'Our workers and soldiers will fight the counterrevolutionary troops if they start an offensive now against the provisional government; they will do so not to defend this government ... but to independently defend the revolution as they pursue their own aim'."

This is the essence of the Marxist position of revolutionary defencism. We do not defend Iraq to shore up the bloody Ba'athist regime. On the contrary, we defend Iraq to further prepare the groundwork for the revolutionary proletarian overthrow of the Ba'athists, and the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship.

And, "if that struggle happens to parallel the struggle of the forces" of Saddam Hussein, "then this is a purely episodic, coincidental phenomenon". But, unlike comrade Fischer, we understand that this very position is a "military bloc", the only kind of bloc allowed between proletarian and non-proletarian forces.

Military defence in no way "advocates" - either explicitly or implicitly - any kind of "cooperation". A Marxist military force would not "cooperate" with the Ba'athist forces beyond simply coordinating attacks against imperialist forces. In a sense, revolutionary defencism is a military application of the united front. There only exists the most basic of coordination, and the Marxists "support" the Ba'athists in a war against imperialism like a rope supports a hanged man.

As we said above, such defencism is predicated with the understanding that our work is designed to strengthen the independence of the proletariat. The victory of imperialism, and successive stalemate, has done nothing to strengthen the resolve of the Iraqi proletariat. On the contrary, it has served to demoralise the working class and tie it to the Ba'athists. A defeat of imperialism would have added boldness and strength to the actions of the working class in Iraq, giving impulse to moving beyond - that is, to fight Saddam Hussein.

Finally, we feel compelled to ask comrade Fischer: if the Kornilov revolt took place in the absence of soviets, would Marxists have still mobilised to fight him? Or, by the logic of your position, would you declare a pox on both houses and let the Kornilov fascists take control? The same question can be asked around the Spanish Civil War: would you have declared dual defeatism between the republic and the Franco fascists?

As an aside, we would like to clue comrade Fischer in on the rest of the quote he uses to justify his anti-defencist position. It reads: "... a Bolshevik would tell the Mensheviks: 'We shall fight, of course, but we refuse to enter into any political alliance whatever with you, refuse to express the least confidence in you. We shall fight in the very same way as the social democrats fought tsarism in February 1917, together with the Cadets, without entering into any alliance with the Cadets or trusting them for one second ...'"

"It is all too advantageous for the Mensheviks to put about false rumours and allegations to the effect that the government they support is saving the revolution, while in reality it has already formed a bloc with the Kaledins, is already counterrevolutionary, has already taken a great many steps, and is daily taking further steps, to meet the terms of this bloc with the Kaledins" (first paragraph - our emphasis; second paragraph - emphasis in original, VI Lenin

CW Vol 25, p252, Moscow 1977).

If we were interested in a psychological understanding of comrade Fischer's argument, we might say that he was polemicising in denial. The reason for this would be due to the established positions of the CPGB, which run counter to the position of the comrade. For example, the CPGB has an historical position of defending forces like the Irish Republican Army against the military might of British imperialism. This position alone would be enough to expose the contradiction. But - and perhaps more important - the position of the CPGB on Iraq is another example.

On their internet website, the CPGB raised the slogan "Hands off Iraq!" as opposed to "Defend Iraq" (our demand) or "Defend the peoples of Iraq", the slogan they counterposed in the course of our discussions around the joint statement. Both of the demands they raised - "Hands off Iraq" and "Defend the peoples of Iraq" - are objectively defencist slogans. Calling for "Hands off Iraq" can be taken two ways. It can be a weak, pacifist slogan or it can be seen as a weak call for defence.

The call to "Defend the peoples of Iraq" appears to fall in the defencist category within the context of imperialist bombing. However, how can it be taken seriously unless it is understood to mean that proletarian internationalists would be episodically aiming their guns in the same direction as the Iraqi armed forces? To distinguish this slogan from a defencist position makes sense only if it is to argue a pacifist point of view. We do not believe this is the case with the CPGB, but comrade Fischer's polemic is clearly muddled by such influences. In many ways, the position of the CPGB is similar to that of Trotsky and the Inter-District Group in the early years of the World War I: they are essentially internationalist, but prone to lapses into social-pacifism.

Far from falling into the CPGB's stereotype of "Trotskyist sects", the Marxist Workers' Group bases its method on Bolshevism and the Bolshevik-Leninists of Trotsky's time. It is ironic that the 'Leninists' of the CPGB and the 'Trotskyists' of the MWG have reciprocal positions on war and imperialism from Lenin and Trotsky in 1914-1915.

This brings us to the 'fine distinction' between the position of the Bolshevik-Leninists of the MWG and the Trotskyists. The final straw man it is necessary to contend with is where comrade Fischer attempts to draw parallels between our position and that of the various "Trotskyist sects", like the rotten and doubly-misnamed 'International Bolshevik Tendency'.

The comrade quotes a part of the IBT's statement on the bombing where they say: "The international working class has a side in this struggle - and it is with Iraq, and its government, against the British and US pirates" (Fischer's emphasis).

Like comrade Fischer, we would also take exception with the statement of the IBT for precisely the same reasons. The IBT, making a mistake very common among the centrists, does confuse military defence and political support. Like the milieu they emerged from, the Spartacist/Healyite/Shachtmanite tradition, the IBT confuses the masses with the leaders. Like their mentors in the Spartacists, they equate the revolutionary actions of the masses - done in spite of their reactionary leadership - with the leaders.

For the Spartacists, it led to "hailing the Red Army [sic!] in Afghanistan" and an obituary for former USSR leader Yuri Andropov. For the IBT, it led them to giving implicit political support to the neo-Bukharinite restorationist leadership of the CPSU during the August 1991 coup and now to the bloody Ba'athist leadership of

Iraq. But the situation can also work in the polar opposite direction. Both the Spartacists and the IBT refused to call for a general strike during the Ontario teachers' strike of 1997. While the teachers demanded "general strike!", the centrist dilettantes of the IBT declared, "It's all cut and dry", and the Spartacists whined about how the "union bureaucrats" would be in control of any general strike.

The Spartacist/Healyite milieu is characteristic of the 'orthodox' post-World War II Trotskyist movement. This includes their petty bourgeois composition, 'r-r-revolutionary' abstentionism, hyperpropagandism, and general centrist muddle-headedness.

We understand that the history of the British workers' and socialist movement has a wing that traditionally confused military defence with political support. The British Workers' Revolutionary Party took this trend of centrism to its extreme by openly acting as the franchise for the Iraqi Ba'athists and Libyan nationalists. So we do understand if Marxist organisations attempt to correct this historical revisionism. But we caution comrades not to bend the stick too far in the opposite direction. Such a move can be viewed as capitulation to British imperialism and 'little England chauvinism'.

For us, there is a methodological root to comrade Fischer's position. This root, this failure, has plagued the workers' and socialist movement for decades. In essence, it is the loss of dialectical method: the failure to see contradiction and analyse how these contradictions create motion. Because of this failure of method, comrade Fischer cannot make use of these contradictions to move the struggles of the working class forward. Moreover, because of this failure, he cannot interact with these contradictions in concrete ways.

Building a revolutionary working class party requires understanding and taking advantage of contradictions in bourgeois society. This includes contradictions and divisions among the capitalists. Moreover, Marxists must be able to exploit these contradictions to the benefit of the working class in order to move closer to the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship. However, comrade Fischer's failure to see, understand and exploit these contradictions lead to dangerous conclusions and methods. Instead of seeing the contradictions and differences between imperialist bombings and the actions of Saddam Hussein and his Ba'athists, comrade Fischer equates Hussein's actions with the actions of US and British imperialism.

Thus the only thing left to base an analysis on is moralism. Moralism is a concrete expression of the larger ideology that is promoted by the bourgeoisie. This is an ideology that rests on formal logic, as opposed to dialectical analysis. It is imposed on the working class every day, in countless ways, by the capitalists in power. The working class is indoctrinated in this method from birth, and taught by all institutions in society that this is the only way to view the world. But bourgeois ideology has changed and evolved throughout history to meet the needs of the ruling class.

The various ideological changes in society have a direct relationship to the various periods of development of capitalism. But one fact always remains: the bourgeoisie needs this ideology in order to maintain itself in power; the working class must reject this ideology in order to take power. The bourgeoisie can afford to stand on moral and idealistic appeals; the working class cannot. The job of the revolutionary party is to provide the working class with an alternative method of viewing the world - a scientific and Marxist method.

At the root of the analyses of most

of the groups in the workers' and socialist movement is the same bourgeois ideology: moralism instead of materialism, formal logic instead of dialectics. Thus, while different individuals and groups, like the IBT and comrade Fischer, may come to very different sounding conclusions, and may formulate things in ways that sound diametrically opposed to each other, the effects are really two sides of the same coin. The IBT does not politically fight Hussein while the latter is under attack, and comrade Fischer does not fight him at all because he rejects a struggle out of hand.

It reminds us of leftists on a picket line, yelling "shame!" at the scabs, but not doing anything to stop them. They are either doing this because they are tailists of the union bureaucracy or they see everything as "cut and dry". A Marxist does not give moral propaganda, but leadership. Anything else is only an impotent appeal - nothing more. If we were to extend the logic and use comrade Fischer's method consistently, he would abstain from supporting strikes, and reject calls for general strikes, because they would be led by the union bureaucracy. He would say, 'Not orange against green, but class against class!' in Ireland, and abstain in a war between British imperialism and a semi-colony like Argentina.

This method, although it may seem very 'leftwing' at first glance, poses some very rightwing dangers. Whether the form is open political support or abstention, the content is the same: a rejection of the Marxist method of the workers' united front, because of an inability to identify contradictions between leadership and base. Ultimately, this is a methodological rejection of the need to build workers' councils (soviets) unless the leadership is somehow magically 'pure' revolutionaries.

If the CPGB adheres to comrade Fischer's position, if they ever want to lend military support to a force, they will have to give political support as well. They will have to subordinate their programme, or simply abstain from almost all of the struggles today. That will be the choice facing them. If it is taken to a logical conclusion, they will either sink into an isolated oblivion or sacrifice their programme on the altar of the popular front.

Comrade Fischer, it is not too late to change your current course! A principled defence of Iraq and other semi-colonies against imperialism can be raised without slipping into tailism and opportunism.

Since coming into contact with the CPGB in 1997, we regarded them as one of the healthiest and most dynamic organisations in the British workers' and socialist movement. We have always seen the CPGB as worthy of revolutionary respect. This is why we have attempted to answer the arguments of comrade Fischer in a comradely, pedagogical and comprehensive manner, and not simply denounce him as a 'Stalinist' (which he is not) or a 'capitulator' (which he does not appear to be). We see this article as a contribution to the development of Marxist method. And we hope the comrades of the CPGB see it in the same light.

All organisations make mistakes in the course of intervening in the class struggle. The comrades of the MWG have made their fair share; and probably will as time goes on. But the difference between a Marxist and a revisionist organisation is that Marxists recognise their mistakes and attempt to correct them; revisionists compound their mistakes with more mistakes, cloaked in either 'orthodoxy' or a 'new word'.

We regard the position of the comrade Fischer as a mistake - a mistake that can be corrected ●

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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Simon Harvey of the SLP
**Waiting for
the chop**

There is still no confirmation that Roy Bull, the "former editor" of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, has "resigned" from the vice-presidency of the Socialist Labour Party, as general secretary Arthur Scargill announced at January's national executive committee meeting. Scargill held up what he claimed was vice-president Bull's resignation letter, but refused to read it out - still less to allow NEC comrades to read it for themselves - because it allegedly made "personal attacks" on other SLP members.

If Bull has gone, the whole party should be told and the reasons given. After all, it is less than three months since he was elected at the November special congress, when he unseated Patrick Sikorski of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus. His success threw the SLP into crisis, with a large minority in uproar at the election of the editor and main contributor of the homophobic *EPSR*. Stung by their own defeat, the Fiscites called on Scargill to fix Bull's removal, threatening otherwise to boycott this year's European elections in London, where the regional committee is still controlled by Fisc.

But why is vice-president Bull so uncharacteristically silent on the question of his own 'resignation'? Surely it is because he is awaiting the outcome of the 'complaints procedure' consideration of the *EPSR* before committing himself as to whether he should remain in post, while Scargill on the other hand has pre-empted the complaints committee's inevitable findings. The Bullites are challenging the decision of the December NEC prohibiting their bulletin from commenting on the affairs of the SLP or publishing any article which "may lead members to conclude" they are attacking women or homosexuals. If (or rather when) the NEC's ruling is upheld later this month, the vice-president has let it be known that he will have to "review his position".

It was Scargill himself who insisted on using the complaints procedure to press charges against the Appeal Four - Brian Heron, Carolyn Sikorski, Terry Dunn and Helen Drummond - who had had the temerity to circulate an 'Appeal

for a special conference' after the cancellation of the 3rd Congress.

When the four refused to withdraw their appeal and "cease their activities", Scargill decided they had to go - and the complaints procedure is his chosen vehicle. Comrades Heron and Carolyn Sikorski are leading Fiscites. Heron is London regional president, while Sikorski is an NEC member elected by the women's section. Comrades Dunn and Drummond were the most important activists involved in the setting up of the party in London in 1996. All four were among Scargill's closest allies and courtiers. Yet he now intends to purge them from the SLP they helped found.

The January NEC rubber-stamped Scargill's proposals to 'try' the Appeal Four on February 13. The hearing will be at The Place, 17 Dukes Road, Euston. Of course the Appeal Four have absolutely no case to answer in reality. They intended and believed their appeal to be fully in accord with the constitution, but Scargill ruled that only constituency branches or affiliates, not individuals, could request a special congress. The December executive meeting unconstitutionally outlawed the circulation within the party of any document whatsoever - except by itself.

So what is the complaints procedure? Comrades with long memories may recall that this four-page, closely typed paper suddenly surfaced at the December 1997 2nd Congress. Despite objections from the floor Scargill insisted on having it ratified there and then. In this he was successful - with a little help from a previously undisclosed 'trade union affiliate' and its 3,000 votes.

The document states that any individual or constituent part of the party may bring a complaint against any other. But only "the general secretary" can give authorisation for it to proceed. He acts as prosecutor in every case. The three-person 'jury' is appointed by the NEC. The defendant may call witnesses - but only if they meet with the approval of the committee!

There is no provision in the procedure for the accused to be represented - although com-

rade Imran Khan is said to be willing to defend the Appeal Four. Another well known leftwing lawyer, Mike Mansfield, has written to Scargill stating that all the charges are completely unfounded and cannot be supported by the constitution. And he should know - he wrote it.

Just to be sure there are no slip-ups, the NEC can overrule the complaints committee's recommendation - with the sole proviso that it cannot increase any penalty awarded.

Obviously this Kafkaesque procedure guarantees "the general secretary" gets his way in every case. But Scargill is facing a little local difficulty further down the line. The procedure allows for an appeal by the convicted comrade, to be heard by five members of an appeal panel. The 15-strong panel is elected at the annual congress, but again it is "the general secretary" who selects the five comrades from the panel to hear the appeal. Another Scargillite fail-safe.

Unfortunately for the Great Leader, in his rush to enshrine his dictatorship, he forgot to allow for the election of the panel at the special congress. No doubt he will dream up some way of overcoming that little problem - contravening his own constitution has never bothered our general secretary up to now.

The Appeal Four and Scargill have exchanged enough paperwork to consume a small forest, but so far the accused have declined to publicise their case. Comrade Heron rather touchingly believes that he will leave behind a "democratic memory" in the SLP after his expulsion - so why bother to inform the members in the here and now? He appears to have ruled out a principled fight, which would necessitate the fullest mobilisation of remaining SLP democrats - particularly in London, where the four have the most support. That would be 'disloyal', it seems.

Having backed Scargill to the hilt when he bureaucratically voided the left, banned meetings, closed down branches and tried to suppress any hint of opposition, the Fiscites are at a loss when he uses the same methods against them ●

Reject Nato ultimatum

This weekend sees a deadline over the war in Kosova. Four months into the US-sponsored 'ceasefire', Nato has ordered both Serbia/Yugoslavia and representatives of the ethnic Albanian majority in Kosova to the negotiating table on Saturday in Rambouillet, outside Paris. With the threat of military action against the Serbian army and the Kosova Liberation Army, the opposing sides will be given a fortnight to come to a 'political settlement'. If either side fails to comply, force will be used.

Western imperialism is waving the big stick, with some commentators suggesting that the UK, France, Germany and the United States are prepared to commit up to 30,000 ground troops to 'implement' any brokered or enforced settlement. What is clear at this stage is that imperialism's prime objective is not a democratic solution which will satisfy the just aspirations of the brutally oppressed Albanian majority of Serbia's once autonomous republic. Instead, what is foremost is the attainment of imperialist interests. As the *Financial Times* explains, "Europe and Nato cannot abandon Kosovo - stability on its southern flank is too important" (editorial, February 1).

The talks, which seem likely to be attended by all parties, will be a far cry from negotiations without preconditions - independence for Kosova is not on the table.

Instead, the six-nation Contact Group is intent on bending both sides to imperialism's agenda. Kosovar independence would be too much for the west (as it is for Serbia). And Serbia, one of the New World Order's pariah states, cannot be allowed to maintain a self-defined and undemocratic 'national integrity' based on intransigence towards the west - and on aspirations for a Greater Serbia. So we say 'no' to all imperialist threats against Serbia, and 'yes' to Kosovar independence from Serbia. Our main enemy, here in Britain, is not Serbia, but the UK state.

The 'framework document' for the imperialist settlement drawn up by the US and agreed by the Contact Group last Friday provides for an interim accord of three years during which Kosova will have 'autonomy' within the Federation of Yugoslavia. Beyond that time period, nothing is laid down.

The west aims to deny democratic self-determination - an idea that may produce more dominoes in the region. Instead, what is wanted is a delaying period which would, as Robin Cook said in the Commons, "establish a political community within Kosova, which if independence were to be the outcome ... could be ready to take that extra step". One would have thought that the community in Kosova is fairly political already. In fact Cook wants a subdued community and a compliant, pro-western government.

Despite all the liberal soundbites under the guise of an 'ethical' foreign policy, the goal is clear - bring both the Serbs and the uppity Kosovars to imperialism's heel.

Nato is threatening to bomb Serbia, crush the KLA and put in ground troops - all to back up a US-designed 'solution' that Cook says will include a "democratic, self-governing Kosova free from fear and bloodshed". Evidently this 'democratic and bloodless' solution will be imposed whether the Kosovar

people want it or not.

However, the proposed Nato solution is untenable. Firstly, it lays blame equally at the door of both Serbia and the KLA. Speaking in the House of Commons on Monday, Cook stated that the text of the Nato document is "even-handed and has authorised [Nato secretary-general] Javier Solana to take action, depending on the response of both parties - not just one party". In a statement last Friday, the foreign ministers of the Contact Group countries said: "The KLA shared responsibility with the Yugoslav security forces for the escalation of violence."

This 'even-handed' approach is a ruse to disguise the fundamentally undemocratic approach with which imperialism is approaching this conflict. Imperialism cannot and will not accept that the war of the KLA is a just war. Given the history of violence, the only democratic solution is independence for Kosova. Plans for 'autonomy' and the continued domination of Kosova by Serbia - 'only' in the areas of foreign policy, external defence, monetary policy, the single market, customs and federal taxation - is flagrantly undemocratic.

However, the ultimatum handed down by Nato is militarily untenable. If the talks fail to go ahead this week, or if there are breaches of the enforced 'solution', Nato can only strike effectively against the Serbs. The conflict is not between two belligerent powers, but between an oppressive state and an oppressed people, risen in arms. Nato can bomb Serbian airfields, attack Serbian barracks and take out the buildings of the Serbian security forces. But the KLA is like a fish amongst the Kosovar people. To bomb them means taking up the methods of the Serbian forces - razing Kosovar villages to the ground and wiping out at random alleged 'terrorists'.

Cook said: "We are not going to be scripted as the KLA's air force." Yet in any enforced settlement, what is to stop the KLA provoking Serbian forces in order to force Nato to bomb Serbia? Indeed, what is to stop the KLA turning their guns on Nato enforcers?

Settling this conflict is for imperialism not just a question of dealing with an immediate 'security issue' and managing lesser states. On top of this is the wider agenda of building an international legal framework for the New World Order.

Although the UN Security Council has sanctioned the Nato threats, under international law its right to bomb Serbia over what is ostensibly an internal problem is not sustainable. According to such legality, the sovereignty of existing states is paramount. Kosova is as much a part of Serbia as Northern Ireland is of the United Kingdom. Communists, by contrast, are for the democratic rights of actual peoples, not concerned with upholding lines on maps.

Clearly, imperialism offers nothing positive. Yet the military and political resistance of the Kosovar Albanians alone is not enough. Key is winning the Serbian masses away from Greater Serbian nationalism to an internationalist and democratic championing of Kosovar independence and building a genuinely anti-imperialist movement in the west ●

Marcus Larsen