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Fisc, Bull and the Socialist Labour Party - p5 Defend Iraq? - pp6,7 Hoddle nobbled - p8

As Trimble and Adams go to the brink, anti-imperialists need a new strategy

ot for the first time the media are full of stories about the "crisis" in the imperialist-sponsored peace process of Northern Ire-

In contrast to the alarm that has followed each difficulty since the whole process began, on this occasion there is undoubtedly a real impasse that has been building up for some time. March 10 is the deadline for the setting up of the cross-party Stormont administration, which, according to the terms of the British-Irish Agreement, is to take over all powers from the Northern Ireland office. But the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, David Trimble, the first minister of the new devolved government, refuses to allow Sinn Féin to take up the three cabinet seats to which its 17.6% vote in last June's elections entitles it.

The reason given is of course the fact that the IRA has not yet begun to 'decommission' its weapons, as the Good Friday deal requires. SF retorts that there is no specific linkage between decommissioning and its right to be part of the new administration. The agreement states only that all parties must reject the use of violence and be committed to exclusively peaceful means. They must do all in their power to encourage the disarming of paramilitary groups, which must be completed "within two years".

In an interview with The Guardian Martin McGuinness, SF's chief negotiator, showed bitter frustration at the inability of the establishment to understand his predicament. Clearly he would like to be able to give Trimble some token, but is unable to deliver it: "You can talk about symbolic gestures in terms of handing in a few guns, but I think the reaction in the Bogside communities would be: 'Why has the IRA done that? Why would they surrender? Why have they been humiliated?" McGuinness is very much aware that SF/IRA must the possibility of a capitalist stability



Adams and McGuinness: "negotiate with own supporters"

do more than just deal with its enemies: "You should also negotiate with your own supporters" - particularly when you are engaged in a series of compromises over what were formerly regarded as unbreakable principles.

He continued: "In South Africa de Klerk was faced with the same dilemma as Trimble, of whether to make a big issue of decommissioning. De Klerk has said that he has made it quite clear that the route he took was not to allow decommissioning to destroy the process, and I think that was a very sensible approach."

McGuinness is quite right. In the run-up to the 1994 elections, in the last days of the old apartheid regime, legal ANC rallies were openly watched over by Umkhonto we Sizwe liberation soldiers, with AK47s slung over their shoulders, while state forces looked on.

However, there is a difference between the two processes. In South Africa the old regime was facing an eventual defeat at the hands of the revolutionary movement, backed by the overwhelming majority of the population. De Klerk, with full imperialist support, knew that the only way to stave off revolution and open up

was to ensure a smooth handover of power. Through agreeing to incorporate liberation fighters into the state armed forces - which were then placed at the disposal of new government headed by Nelson Mandela - he allowed most liberation units the space to disband and disarm.

Clearly we have a different situation in the Six Counties. Far from a victory being achieved, either by imperialism or the liberation forces. what ensued was a protracted stalemate. The overwhelming majority on both sides have given up all thoughts of either 'driving out the British' or 'crushing the IRA'. Neither is a possibility. However, as there is no longer a revolutionary situation, most unionists, along with the Tory right wing, see no reason why they should have to give up their monopoly of power, still less allow 'terrorists' out of jail, let alone into government. While such elements might accept the need for reform, they still believe that the existing state forces must reassert their incomplete control over republican working class areas. Like McGuinness and Gerry Adams, Trimble desperately wants the peace process to succeed, but to compromise too much would be to jeopardise his own position, just as it would

for the SF leaders.

Of course Blair understands SF's predicament only too well, although he does not openly say so. He is not helped by the abandoning by the Tories of the traditional bipartisanship over Ireland in the greater interests of British imperialism. Their die-hard approach may strike a chord with some, but it is hardly realistic to halt the release of prisoners, and in so doing strengthen the hand of antiagreement republicans, who at present constitute a tiny minority. It is left to liberal elements like The Guardian to recognise the difficulty of insisting on disarmament: "To ask these men to decommission is to ask them to accept defeat" (editorial, February 5). Instead The Guardian implores the SF/IRA "to make the gesture, perhaps a new form of words, that will help Mr Trimble".

For his part the UUP leader was calling on the British to 'park' the agreement - ie, put it on hold - and there has been talk of a compromise, whereby a 'shadow executive' is set up in parallel to continued direct rule from Westminster. But that would be totally unacceptable to both sides. SF, on the other hand, is holding out the possibility of another intervention by Senator George Mitchell, the "respected" chair of the all-party talks that led to the Good Friday deal, to break the impasse.

Trimble, backed by the Tory press, has seized on the issue of 'punishment beatings' to further pressurise SF. Two well publicised cases have been highlighted to back up the claim that, in addition to its refusal to hand over any weaponry, the IRA is actually breaking its ceasefire. In January British informer Eamonn Collins was killed (to the satisfaction of many working class republicans), and last week Paddy Fox, an IRA dissident who believes that the leadership has sold out to the British, was abducted for several hours and given a good 'tanking'. As one IRA source was reported to have commented, "They know there's going to be pressure to decommission, so they have to come down hard on people like Paddy Fox." As we predicted, the IRA has started to police the agreement, while the state in effect turns a blind eye.

Another Trimble ploy was to back the call for a 'human rights enquiry' into such paramilitary activity, to be conducted by Amnesty International - although he changed his tune when Amnesty said it would also investigate the work of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The nature of the RUC is very pertinent. As McGuinness wrote on Sinn Féin's internet news service, punishment beatings, to which SF is "totally opposed", occur because of "the absence of an adequate police force and the rising levels of anti-social behaviour and petty crime". (RM List February 9). Indeed many republicans, wanting no truck with the RUC, look to the IRA to provide 'law and order' on working class estates. McGuinness's answer is to call for an "unarmed, accountable police service" - under the existing British bourgeois state.

However, SF is now trumpeting a new initiative, which is clearly aimed as a counter to the unionist/media propaganda offensive against punishment beatings. 'Community Restorative Justice' committees are being set up all over the Six Counties, if we are to believe the RM List. Their first job in the event of antisocial behaviour is to provide "mediation", failing which unspecified "non-violent activity" will be deployed (February 6-7).

With the Continuity IRA making threatening noises once again, and the announcement that the Real IRA had stolen some weaponry before its split last year, the threat to the peace process seemed even more substantial. Certainly rightwing unionists were making a meal of these stories.

But the huge size of the catholic majority in last year's referendum in favour of the agreement, and the complete marginalisation of such groups following the Omagh bomb, demonstrates that, while they may still be capable of planting explosives or shooting a public figure, a renewed campaign of resistance to the British occupation is for the moment ruled out.

Irish anti-imperialists desperately need a new strategy - one that looks to a future based on the international working class, not deals with imperialism •

Jim Blackstock

Fancy footwork

Two, three, many socialist slates for London? What testimony to the arrogance, blundering stupidity, pettymindedness, backward-looking sectarianism, blustering machismo, cack-handedness, clumsy tactical incompetence and chilling lack of strategic vision presently on display throughout the British left.

Scargillism without Scargill is a fullon no-brainer. The political prestidigitation now seen in the Independent Labour Network - coming as it does after recent events in the Manchester and London Socialist Alliances and the tragicomedy of the Socialist Labour Party - will leave many grassroots supporters of the idea of a new and electorally viable socialist formation pulling their hair out.

It's just that I am not sure whether it is sadness or anger that has sent my already thinning pate over the abyss into alopecia. The self-appointed leaders-in-waiting of Britain's slowly emerging new socialist party should bloody well get their collective act together. Now.

Rampant chicanery just does not constitute serious socialist politics. This ain't no polytechnic student union. This ain't no Constituency Labour Party general management committee circa 1983. This ain't no fooling around. Shabby back-door attempts to stuff perceived nogoodniks by the multiple miracles of fancy footwork simply will not do.

If our new party emerges anything less than open and democratic, it will defeat the very object of building it. It will instead stand condemned in advance to the many activists who have been on the receiving end of witchhunts in the Labour Party, the trade unions, and/or the SLP. Been there once, been there twice, don't want to see it dished out on others a third time.

This is a message to the stitch-up merchants. Broad-based socialist formations have to be just that. Broad. As Collins English Dictionary puts it, "having relatively great breadth or width; of vast extent, spacious; of great scope or potential; clear and open; liberal; tolerant; widely spread; extensive"

In a nutshell, it must include the nutters. Attempts bureaucratically to exclude 'ultra-leftists' are - in and of themselves - far more damaging than letting the tosspots into the tent in the first place.

I am a member of Socialist Democracy, a cuddly current mercifully not deemed beyond the pale within the Socialist Alliances or the ILN. I am also writing as a revolutionary socialist involved in all socialist unity initiatives in Britain since the Chesterfield conferences of the late 80s, a time when many were ploughing their respective isolationist fur-

Accordingly, I want to make this an explicit plea for tolerance on behalf of less respectable comrades. I only wish I'd said something similar at the height of the SLP purges, rather than keeping my head down in the forlorn hope of making the cut at the next recarding. Hello, Delphi, old chum, are you reading me?

The name of the game is not reconstructing a Bennite left in exile. The Scottish Socialist Party - and unlike the publishers of this newspaper, I wholeheartedly applaud its emergence as an exemplar of the party of recomposition we should aim for south of the border - surely underlines that.

Revolutionary socialists have earned every right to be an integral component of a new socialist party in England and Wales. All revolutionary socialists, not just those deemed acceptable to the right wing of such a formation. CPGB included. United interest.

Socialists 'R' Us. To paraphrase a great line from a great movie - I am Spartacist.

"Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently." Right on, Rosa. Even the Social Democratic Federation had a seat at the table when the Labour Representation Committee was founded.

Behind the latest attack on the London ILN lies profound ignorance - or perhaps deep-seated distrust? - of the current composition of the London left. In the capital, there just isn't a left social democratic layer, comparable to the base of the ILN in a number of provincial cities.

The effects of an explicit political virginity test, administered at the hands of a gate-keeping social democratic immigration control, will be massively more damaging than allowing a handful of headbangers to dish out their crazy leaflets and propose a few nutty motions from the conference floor. You despise them? Then the simple answer is, give 'em enough rope. Together, we can vote them down.

Remember, ultra-leftism is a moving target. The Blairites have expelled people with what would previously have been considered mainstream Labour left politics, using precisely this catch-all term as ostensible justification. Comrades from a Labour left/ 80s Trotskyist entryist background should have first-hand knowledge of this. Shame on those who would repeat the experience.

The lessons to be gained from parties of recomposition on the continent are instructive too. The Fourth Internationalist current within Rifondazione Comunista is acknowledged as an integral part of the party, despite the depredations of now-departed rightist sections of the leadership.

A recent speech from none other than outgoing Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown recently observed that under proportional representation, "a new party of socialists, credibly led, could hope to win a small group in parliament". Got that, guys? The man said "credibly led"

Of course, winning a small group in parliament is hardly the limit of socialist ambition. But in the current UK political stalemate, it would represent a key advance.

Time to end carve-up culture. Base steering committees on one delegate per affiliate. Don't erect ridiculous artificial preconditions based on magazine subscriptions.

Yes, the far left can be a royal pain in the arse. But a minimum requirement for the leadership of anything that deserves the name of a socialist party will be sufficient leadership skills to swallow a couple of aspirins, and live with it.

Dave Osler

North London

So wrong Long

The significance of the Hackney byelection is that different socialist trends were able to cooperate on the basis of class interest. Including the SWP and Turkish communists, who are just beginning to break from supporting Labour electorally. This could not have happened a year ago. Blair's repositioning of Labour as an openly capitalist party has created currents that are washing away old certainties.

Nick Long (Letters Weekly Worker February 4) confuses a tactic to bring the left together around a political, not economistic, orientation in the here and now with his own long-term economistic strategy to bring a proworking class party to power in the far distant future. It is foolish to emphasise the size of the vote at this stage before the left has proved to itself, let alone anyone else, that it can sink its own rivalries in the class

Nick is easily enthused if, after 'years of joint socialist activity" with policies he approves of, they only get 13% of the vote with Ian Page - a former Labour Party councillor. This is not very much when you consider that about 70% of the electorate do not bother to vote at all, having noticed that local government is merely an extension of central government bureaucracy. While searching out the real struggle in its true home, he fails to notice that most of the class is sloping off in the other direction.

Of course, if millions were marching on Westminster demanding flat pavements, I'd be singing from a different hymn sheet, but somehow I suspect it is not a big enough idea to generate much passion. Anyway the problem with acting locally is that it splits the left into myriad groups with private agendas while the state operates centrally. We cannot educate the class, or ourselves, by defining socialism as the honest, but ineffective defender of the welfare state. Socialism is a programme to smash the state, or else, like Old Labour, it is a fraud. We should have the democratic right to argue this case in front of the class as part of a united left. We should not run away from it because it is an electoral liability. Revolutionary politics usually are, but necessity is necessity.

Comrade Long wants to challenge the Greens but does not see the secret of their success. Namely, they start from what they believe to be the urgent universal needs of all humanity to which all institutions must be subordinated. Civilisation or barbarism, not palliatives to give local activists something to do while nothing really is happening. Their local growth reflects their international growth. They are making their ideas the ideas of the masses, which the masses can then use everywhere. Green ideas operate in society, far beyond the bounds of the Green Party. They shape the way people feel as well as think and affect the activities of their opponents.

The ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas of society. They represent a tendency in society, not just a party organisation.

Phil Kent

North London

Defend Iraq?

It is difficult to know where to start with the James Paris article (Weekly Worker February 4) on defence of Iraq. As an example of turgid and undialectic thinking it would take some beating. For comrade Paris the world has not changed since Lenin wrote Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism. The sun has not set on the British empire; the bi-polar superpower world of the Cold War period is a figment of fevered imaginations; the USSR's satellite states in eastern Europe have never existed; and India - along with numerous others - still languishes under the colonial yoke.

According to comrade Paris, were India - an independent capitalist state with a developed finance capital sector and nuclear capability - to declare war on Britain tomorrow this would be a defensive - and therefore progressive - war. The comrade sides with small slaveholder against big.

And what, specifically, about Iraq? An independent, if relatively weak, capitalist state with imperialist ambitions? A proto-hegemon in a region where a number of states vie for the title? A state with a degree of developed finance capital which demands to be exported but which is limited by youth and a lack of opportunity? Is Iraq semi-colonial? Or is Iraq protoimperialist?

The world, as comrade Paris points Iraq is in no position to force a cialists. Dismissing democratic de- East London

redivision. At least not with the big boys. But it has attempted to impose its dominance regionally; it has attempted to expand by force. Its war against Iran was no class war. This was no head-to-head between Iraqi Ba'athist 'socialism' and Iranian clerical fascism: revolution versus counterrevolution. This was a war about oil, a war between "slaveholders". Small slaveholders, yes, but slaveholders all the same.

What then of the current situation? Do we declare 'a pox on both your houses' and refuse to intervene. Clearly not. A victory for either side will reinforce reaction - the imperialist arrogance of the USA; the protoimperialist ambitions of Iraq. Our position must be one of revolutionary defeatism and independent working class organisation. Comrade Paris allows capitalism to set the agenda. He sees no independent role for the working class in practice - only downtrodden cheerleaders. The grateful slaves of the small slaveholder.

A victory for Saddam Hussein would "prepare the groundwork for the revolutionary proletarian overthrow of the Ba'athists". "A defeat of imperialism would have added boldness and strength to ... the working class in Iraq ... to fight Saddam Hussein." And, as history never tires of showing us, military victories always bring social unrest and the threat of insurrection at home. Isn't that true, comrade Paris? I think not.

Comrade Paris accuses Mark Fischer of popular frontism. Rich indeed. Comrade Paris writes:

"... 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?"

Counterrevolutionary fascism without a revolution to counter - an interesting idea, but not one I intend to dwell on. The crux of the argument is thus - in the absence of an independent proletarian force during a war between reactionaries and not-so-nasty reactionaries, shouldn't Marxist side with the not-so-nasty reactionaries? Sorry, comrade, but Marxists should side with the working class.

Where soviets or other proletarian anti-fascist organs do not exist, Marxists should seek to organise them not throw in their lot with the 'progressive' bourgeoisie. Marxists worth their salt would seek to lead such organs against fascism with the object of defending existing political freedoms and extending those freedoms beyond the boundaries of the bourgeois republic. This is proletarian revolution, comrade: you advocate counterrevolutionary popular frontism.

Marxism is about movement, change, fluidity, not dogma and stasis. Go with the flow, comrade Paris: you just might enjoy it.

Andy Hannah

South London

Homosexual deviation

I must comment on Roy Bull's remarks concerning homosexuality (Weekly Worker January 28).

Bull continues to peddle the idea

that involvement in the fight for the rights of lesbians and gays does little but "disastrously helps sow, under capitalism, the illusion that reformist pressure can cure all ill". Really? Clearly Bull does not believe that championing the rights of the out, has been divided up already and oppressed is the responsibility of so-



mands as simply the "last great wave of 'reformism' to steer social revolt away from revolutionary Marxism", he feels it more prudent to ignore the discrimination, the victimisation, the assaults, the attacks, the abuse and the prejudice that many individuals from the gay community face on a daily basis. Indeed, by describing himself as a socialist and disassociating himself completely from the struggle for lesbian and gay rights, Bull not only alienates those from that community who see socialism as a vehicle for progress, but also allows political elements hostile to the idea of socialism to set the agenda for the oppressed.

I agree being 'PC' will not eradicate prejudice against the gay community. But tarnishing those who take up the rights of the oppressed with the same brush is wrong. The choice for socialists is clear: get stuck in and fight for our political mark on the issue or leave it open for others to determine what constitutes the way forward.

Secondly, despite claims to the contrary, Bull's thoughts on homosexuality are certainly not 'scientific'. After reading his article, I have no doubt that newer readers of the Weekly Worker will already have serious doubts about his musings on the subject, but let me take this opportunity to remind everyone of some of Bull's earlier rantings.

In the Economic and Philosophic Science Review (October 8 1996), lesbians and gays are described as "sufferers", and "homosexualism" a 'sexual deviation".

In the edition of February 18 1997, it states that the "homosexual disorder is not unethical as such but its demonic drive can lay sufferers open to a more conspiratorial prevalence of such behaviour". Bull then kindly reassures those suffering from this "disorder", myself included, that "persecution of such abnormalities is a barbaric instinct and will die out under socialism".

However, we are also told, should "society establish that heterosexualism procreation remains the basic natural revolutionary pattern for the species, then cleverly rationalised deviations from this by emotionally charged male or female homosexuals in a position to strongly influence the education of minors is clearly going to remain a potential problem, possibly requiring continued differentiation within childcare and the teaching professions" (my emphasis).

Who needs Section 28 when we've got Bull to protect the youth of society from all those "cleverly rationalised" and "emotionally charged" homosexuals out there? I ask the reader: do such ideas form the basis for objective, "scientific socialism", or do they represent the overt prejudice of an individual camouflaged with socialist credentials?

Only to those who need to find a cure for the gay "phenomenon" is there such a thing as "homosexualism". Only to those who want to put right "malfunctioning sexual orientation" does the gay "condition" exist.

To address same-sex relationships as a phenomenon to be studied because of "its obvious disadvantages for any species in evolutionary terms" (as if under communism people's sexual freedom will lead them to indulge exclusively in same sex relationships!) would really be quite laughable if it was not so vile and of-

Bob Paul

On prediction and partial knowledge

the approach favoured by Don Hoskins of the Economic and Philosophic Science Review and Socialist News in his polemic against comrade Phil Sharpe is deeply flawed, to put it mildly ('Historical idealism' Weekly Worker January 21). Then again, in my opinion, there are also weakness in comrade Sharpe's philosophical methodology.

The first comment must be that, because someone is an anti-communist, it does not mean they can never be right. But if their other beliefs are to be used as a criterion, then quoting Newton as the arbiter of truth in the same article is a bit of a joke. Newton was, by any standard, including those of the time, a religious lunatic. He thought that he had discovered the ground plan of the Temple at Jerusalem and that this was the ground plan of the universe. Newton also faked his results to prove his theories on optics, even if he did turn out to be right. On top of that he would not have been admitted to the Howard League for penal reform, given his general approach to crime and punishment. He bought the position of magistrate for all of the home counties, and had one man hung, drawn and quartered. Yet, for all this, he is still amongst the three or four of the greatest scientists the world has ever known.

An even bigger criticism of Don Hoskins is that he misunderstands Popper's main point - one of Popper's very few gems in a sea of rubbish that no scientific statement can be considered, as such, unless it is possible to state the condition for its refutation. In fact, this proposition is a way of stating the precise proposition that Don Hoskins requires for science: ie, that science is predictive. So the real objection to Hoskins' position is that he does not understand it fully.

While dealing with things not understood, Ray Hickman (Letters Weekly Worker February 4) does quite a job on that himself, because Newton made no comment on subatomic particles, and Newtonian laws of motion apply down to the atomic level. Newton knew that it should be possible to have a unified theory of matter, but also knew there was no possibility of him providing one. So it is not quantum physics that modify Newton. What has modified Newton's position is non-Euclidean geometry. Moreover his physics have not been replaced - they are merely a special case of Einsteinian physics, and they are as true today as they were then. And, as it happens, Einstein also got it wrong, not just in the sense he presented a special case, but also in that he included a constant in his theory of the expansion of the universe that is not only not required, but should not be there. Thus, even if Ray's point - that all scientific theory is only a partial truth - is cor-

instances wrong. Now if we turn to the roots of this debate, starting with Phil Sharpe's article (Weekly Worker December 17 1998), it is possible to see plenty of nonsense there. Phil thinks that science is, primarily, explanatory! Well, Genesis is that, and so is a lot of mumbo jumbo. In Highgate cemetery he will find a tombstone on which it says that philosophers have explained the world. The point however is to change it. If we ask the question, "What does it mean 'to know'?" the answer must be that we can do something or that we can make something. The fact that we cannot do or make everything just illustrates that our knowledge is partial. We have to predict the outcomes of our action

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and the behaviour of the material

Phil maintains that the problem with all new theories is that they emerge from old theories, which are not only inadequate, but also idealist in character. It may be that this is sometimes the case, though in the sciences I am most familiar with that is certainly not the problem. It is likely to occur in sciences which directly affect people's interests. The normal problem is lack of data, adequate instalment and mathematical technique. It is also the lack of manpower, brains and in particular money.

In the case of Newton and Darwin, that was certainly the problem. Newton was only able to make his breakthrough as a result of the invention and improvement of telescopes and lenses on the one hand, and the development of mathematics on the other. Only when the king provided the money for the Royal Observatory was he able to get the data that allowed him to predict the position of the moon.

Darwin's problem was also lack of data as far as fossils were concerned and the general state of knowledge of the world's fauna and flora. What is noticeable is that most of the modern advances in the theory of evolution have depended on mathematical techniques and the finding of a lot of fossils. While on the subject of Darwin, he was of course a racist and also a Tory. Darwin also could not account for the fact that favourable changes were not eliminated by outbreeding. The solution to that problem was provided by Mendel, who was a friar and eventually an archbishop in the catholic church. None of which makes any difference to the fact that Darwin ranks pretty close to Newton in his stature as a world scientist. Indeed, Mendel was right even though he was an idealist while Darwin was a materialist. The fact that Marx wanted to dedicate the English edition of Capital to Darwin does not prove he was not a racist nor that he was wrong in important respects.

The problem with the Bull-Sharpe-Hoskins debate is not that one or other of the writers is petty bourgeois (or whatever term of pseudo-Marxist abuse that may come to mind), but that they simply do not know enough science. Obviously they make individual points that are worthwhile or are interesting, but in order to deal with many of the questions they raise, it would be necessary to send them on science degrees in several subjects. That would be better than trying to prove a point on homosexuality on the basis of Newtonian physics, which is not only impossible, but shows that Don Hoskins has not read that much about Newton, as there is some quite weighty evidence that he may have been homosexual himself.

Science is not *just* predictive: it also categorises and systematises knowledge, and provides techniques and methods. It further tells us what is not true or cannot be true, but the measure of its maturity is the degree it can accurately predict.

If we look at meteorology, we see a science that is quite as advanced as any social science. Michael Fish however would soon tell us of its limitations. The problem is that, although even Don or Phil can tell us that June will be on average hotter than February, they cannot tell us what the weather will be like in 20 days time nor can Michael Fish, and science can say why. It is simply not possible with our current computers or mathematical techniques. If all of these were improved a millionfold, we would not advance weather prediction by more than a few days. The reason for this is that the weather system is chaotic (in a mathematical sense) and therefore is calculable, but not predictable.

I noted that comrade Sharpe wrote that capitalism was anarchic. This may be true, but that is not the reason it is unpredictable. Capitalism, like every social and biological system, is chaotic: that is determined by non-linear functions. If this is true for the weather system, what does Hoskins think it is like for the capitalist system as a whole?

This does not mean we cannot make general predictions either about society or about the weather, nor that we cannot do anything to change them in a semi-predictable way.

Several things are certain: 1) the outcome of our social actions cannot in general be precisely predicted; 2) we have to have constant intervention in order to modify the feedback; 3) not even the EPSR can tell which club will win the FA Cup ●

John Walsh

Where to get your Critique **4** Weekly Worker

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Fighting fund

Sharp contrast In yet another attack on working

people, the Asylum and Immigration Bill proposes to end all welfare benefit payments to asylum seekers. This anti-human, chauvinistic approach is in sharp contrast to the Weekly Worker's opposition to all not just 'racist' - immigration controls: a point emphasised by comrade BS, who sent us a generous donation of £30.

However, after last week's good

start, things seem to have slowed down, leaving our monthly target of £400 a far way off. We thank comrades TT and JK (£10 each) for their gifts, but we need many more like that. The total stands at £138. Comrades, we need your help •

lan Farrell

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

action

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London: Sunday February 14, 5pm - 'State bureaucracy and class', using Hal Draper's Karl Marx's theory of revolution Vol 1 as a study guide. For details phone 0181-459 7146.

Manchester: Monday February 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

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■ Greater **Manchester SA**

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■ Lambeth SA

Public meeting to discuss the Euro election, Unison low pay demonstration, 'Save our schools' and tube privatisation. Monday February 22, 7.30pm. Hope and Anchor pub, 123 Acre Lane, London SW2. For more information call 0181-671 8036.

■ 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.

False picture

Former secretary of the GDR's Esperanto Association **Detlev Blanke** argues that Stan Keable's 'Hurricane of persecutions' (Weekly Worker January 21) misrepresents a complex question

The article by Stan Keable (whose father, Bill, I knew well and greatly respected) was unfortunately a one-sided black presentation of the Esperanto movement in the countries of the so-called "bureaucratic so-cialist regimes". I will not pass judgement here about those systems themselves; history has given its unfortunately true verdict). I am precisely informed about the Esperanto movement in those countries, unlike the author, who evidently has only a very superficial knowledge, but presents his opinion very self-confidently.

If the first part of his article had limited itself to the characterisation of some traits of the Esperanto movement in the Soviet Union, I would not protest. But he writes about the situation "in the USSR and eastern Europe", about the "movement in the Soviet bloc states", but mentions only examples from the Soviet Union itself.

I only partly understand the enthusiastic reaction of Boris Kolker (once in Russia, now in the USA) in Weekly Worker February 4. He quite correctly accepts the analysis of Keable in relation to the Soviet situation (a situation which always angered my colleagues from the other associations as well as myself). But Kolker, perhaps unlike Keable, knows very well that the Soviet situation was absolutely not identical with that in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland or Yugoslavia, where the movement was relatively strong, of quite high quality and many-sided: it was something of a mass movement, with Esperanto officially taught in some schools and universities, a varied scientific application, serious scientific research, active book production, cultural activity, many international events and incomparably impressive world congresses - eg, 1987 in Warsaw, with 6,000 participants from 70 countries.

In spite of obvious limitations, different in each country, due to the political systems (eg, relating to travel), the movement in those states, naturally with many differences, in certain respects had a level about which one could only dream in the western states (Romania is a separate chapter; in Albania Esperanto was in fact non-existent). In the countries mentioned (besides the Soviet Union, of course) I did not know any "salaried officials ... imposed from above to keep Esperanto in check". Does Keable know any?

The various "secretaries responsible" for Esperanto in the Soviet Union I will not defend. Not only the Soviet Esperantists truly hated them. Keable unfortunately seems not to know that a "secretary" of an Esperanto organisation in the Soviet Union was something totally different from in the other socialist countries.

Also it is untrue that the movement in the other eastern countries (again excepting the Soviet Union) was tolerated only as "a wing of the official peace movement". If that were so, it would not explain the unique development in those countries. Speak-

ing only about the German Democratic Republic, where I as secretary actively influenced the position of Esperanto, the link with the official peace movement was only one aspect. Other reasons to support Esperanto (in order of importance) were:

a) The potential to deepen relations with Esperantists in the world, especially with those of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries (we published correspondence requests from more than 30 countries in our journal Der Esperantist, freely subscribable through the state post).

b)To utilise Esperanto as a means of information about the GDR. c)To teach and apply Esperanto as an educational resource for spare-time occupation, assisting general cultural, language and other education.

d)To examine Esperanto as a model of international communication worthy of scientific exploration.

The GDR Esperanto Association was part of the Culture League, in which it had pretty good conditions. Of course, we too had to fight against stupidity, being ignored and being slowed down. But those who put on the brakes did not sit in my office, nor in the leadership of the Esperanto Association. We gained respect and progressed Esperanto.

Besides, after German 'unification' the Culture League was rated "not close to the state regime" (in principle a somewhat strange judgement, pointing to the liberal character of that GDR organisation, which still exists and is now even one of the biggest cultural organisations in Germany as a whole).

When Keable writes that today "the official communist Esperantist movement has blown away", he does not understand that in those countries the movement was simply not that "communist", but in the first place pluralist, containing members from the most varied 'classes' and social strata, and having party members along with priests and non-party people in the various leaderships. Of course, the movement was not anti-regime, not only because that would have killed it from the very beginning, but also because sincere one-time worker Esperantists, communists, true anti-fascists (having suffered in concentration camps, prisons and so on) had leading positions and were generally respected.

Among them was one of the first influential leaders of the Esperanto movement in the GDR, Rudi Graetz, who was highly respected in 'non-communist circles' - not only in the GDR, but also internationally. Likewise in Bulgaria, Nikola Aleksiev, today an honorary member of UEA (World Esperanto Association). I will not accept an attack on the honesty of such people by simplistic and twisted articles.

Yes, the Communist Esperantist Collective (KEK) in GDR and other countries was not regarded as necessary. Under the contemporary historical conditions we did not see sense in the aspiration of KEK - namely to revive the Cuba, December 4-11 1999 •

'International of Proletarian Esperantists', which Bill Keable helped to create in 1932. At least in the GDR this was not a decision on the part of state officials. The leadership of the GDREA was, in its own right, none too tolerant of the simplistic level and agitational style of KEK and its journal Internaciisto, which in its time was even more sloganising and boring than the daily party reading matter. Even so, the actual people in KEK - who were honest communists, fought in the Spanish Civil War and so on - were truly worthy of respect. For the sake of solidarity with them, our office of the GDREA, among other things, even distributed the journal to our subscribers in the GDR. But we did not take steps to form a KEK section. Today I still keep up some contact with IKEK out of respect for the various people active in it. But still today the content of *Internaciisto* is not very attractive, repels intellectuals and unfortunately often displays the sloganising style of the past.

The role of the World Esperantist Peace Movement (MEM) Keable similarly presents in a totally one-sided manner, again judged according to the Soviet circumstances. Yes, certainly much was stupid and boring. And some resolutions were, perhaps, "mind-numbing" (I know dozens like that from Internaciisto). But that is not the complete MEM. If Keable had a little contact with the activists of MEM, if he had read the various editions of Paco, he would not judge so superficially. MEM was not only extremely important in regaining official status for the Esperanto movement in the European socialist countries. Working in MEM and for MEM were also very honest and wise people who were not as "mind-numbing" as Keable's article implies.

To the "communist Esperantists" around IKEK who wish to "learn the lessons of failure of the official' communist movement", I sincerely wish success and appropriate methods. The first step nevertheless must be to understand and precisely analyse the previous situation, and not once again to paint black and white. Such simplistic reflection (or ignoring) of reality was one of the reasons for the gigantic fiasco of that social experiment which was called (incorrectly, as we know today) the "construction of socialism". Judging by the article of Keable, I only hope that in future he will prepare himself better to "learn lessons".

- Detlev Blanke will be the main visiting lecturer at the Workers' Esperanto Movement (SATEB) weekend conference, May 21-23 at the Wedgwood Memorial College, Barlaston, Stoke-on-Trent, ST12 9DG, speaking on: 'The German workers Esperanto movement in the political currents of its time' and 'Blessings and curses of German unification'.
- The annual conference of the International Communist Esperantist Collective (IKEK) will be held in

Around the left

Economists fall out

Some argue that hypocrisy is an essential part of the human condition. Naturally, communists do not subscribe to such a pessimistic viewpoint. But when you examine some left publications you begin to understand how such a gloomy perspective can arise.

A prime candidate is the "democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist, ecologist, anti-militarist and internationalist" Socialist Outlook - or as it is affectionately known in some quarters, Socialist 'sink the euro - save the pound' Outlook. It cannot be denied that this Fourth Internationalist organisation - whose distant origins lie in the International Marxist Group of Tariq Ali - has a less than perfect record when it comes to the struggle for democracy and 'pluralism'. Indeed, in the specific case of the London Socialist Alliance, SO aligned itself with the anti-communist witch hunters in their bid to exclude the 'ultra-left' CPGB and its supporters.

To this end SO happily engaged in petty bureaucratic games and local governmentstyle political correctness to curtail discussion and democratic debate - including stomach-churning displays of moralistic feminism. SO has also constituted itself on the extreme nationalist wing of the Scottish Socialist Party, positively advocating independence and denouncing in tones of baffled outrage the CPGB which argues for working class unity.

However, in the latest issue of its monthly journal, SO believes this time it is on the receiving end of behind-the-scenes double-dealing. The object of exclusion rather than the agent of exclusion - and it does not feel nice. Under the dramatic headline, "This is no way to build left unity!", SO lashes out against the Alliance for Workers' Liberty for its "blatant hijack" of a "broad campaign network" ie, the Welfare State Network. Instead of bureaucratic maneouvres, Socialist Outlook demands "honesty, transparency, democracy and integrity" - in the WSN, that is - and attacks the AWL, "whose long and grisly track record of failure to work for any length of time and with any consistency with other currents is matched only by its succession of proposals for 'unity' and for new 'broad' organisations"

So what has gone wrong in the cuddly, broad, hands-across-the-water, all-friendstogether WSN? After all, it did seem, according to SO, that the WSN was the one arena where the AWL was prepared to work in a non-sectarian manner. Thus, "for over four years the WSN managed to operate as an organisation linking activists and campaigns from a wide range of political organisations and backgrounds - including the AWL, Socialist Outlook, Socialist Labour Party, and others who simply wanted to fight back in defence of health and welfare services and benefits. Although there were a number of political - and even some more major programmatic - differences between the various component currents of the WSN, we found in practice that these could easily be contained within a common organisation which remained focused on the unifying issue of welfare state campaign work."

However, it has all gone horribly wrong. Previously, the WSN had a monthly publication, Action for health and welfare. which was "produced with substantial resources from the AWL, but with a degree of 'power sharing', with John Lister from Socialist Outlook elected as joint editor, and initially open access to a wide range of contributors". Then, last year, the

AWL "forced" through the WSN steering committee a decision to move Action for health and welfare from a monthly to a fortnightly publication. "The frequency of publication was clearly intended to meet the needs of the AWL rather than match the pace of any objective events or the rhythms of labour movement activity," says Socialist Outlook. It continues: "Fortnightly publication made Action even more reliant on financial, organisational and political input from the AWL, narrowed the range of contributors, and led to the paper being increasingly filled not with the specific campaign-orientated material which had been its early strength, but with general 'lefty' political articles on topics unrelated to the welfare state, largely written by AWLers. Many of these extraneous articles were in themselves politically contentious and divisive because they dealt with issues on which there was no basic unifying agreement.'

Personally I found that the introduction of "contentious and divisive" articles made Action for health and welfare almost worth reading.

SO further chronicles the perfidious and devious actions of the AWL. By November 1998, the WSN steering committee in Liverpool was attended by just seven people - five AWL, plus the chair, Alec McFadden (SLP), and SO's own John Lister. The January steering committee was cancelled at the last minute by AWL, with no new date fixed. Then the bombshell. In the words of SO: "In mid-January, a new publication, Action for solidarity, plopped through mailboxes of WSN affiliates and subscribers, accompanied by a letter from WSN national organiser Jill Mountford - on WSN headed notepaper, carrying the name of Alec McFadden, who knew nothing of the letter or the new paper asking people to 'reaffiliate to the campaign and subscribe to Action'.

The letter went on to stress the alleged continuity between Action for health and welfare and the new (and unilaterally-launched) AWL newspaper: 'We hope that you continue to support our campaign and Action ... You will see that the first issue of 1999 is redesigned. There will be a number of new columns, four extra pages and the paper is now called Action for solidarity. We believe that this best sums up the most fundamental principle of working class organisation'.'

SO writes: "The newspaper and the

letter are a transparent political fraud. The renaming and redesign of the paper are unilateral decisions not of the WSN, but of the AWL and its political leadership." On receiving the "redesigned" Action John Lister immediately resigned from the WSN, denouncing Jill Mountford's letter as "a sectarian master-stroke" and the AWL for seeking to "annex the resources of the WSN for the latest AWL publication". In the opinion of SO, the AWL has now "reverted to type, contenting itself once more with a tame, sterile, sectarian front organisation pliable to the whims of AWL guru Sean Matgamna".

He who lives by the bureaucratic manoeuvre dies by the bureaucratic manouevre. The slightly sorry story detailed above illustrates, yet again, the crying need for genuine openness and democracy - whether it be in the SAs, the WSN or United Socialists •

Don Preston

Simon Harvey of the SLP No Fisc fight

t the insistence of Brian Heron and Carolyn Sikorski, there has been no attempt to rally the Socialist Labour Party's remaining democrats to defend them from imminent expulsion.

Comrades Heron and Sikorski, along with Terry Dunn and Helen Drummond, face charges of contravening the constitution before a complaints committee on Saturday February 13 at The Place, Dukes Road, Euston. But the two Fourth International Supporters Caucus leaders have dismissed any notion that the membership should be informed of this shameful new purge, let alone actually mobilise in order to fight back.

The four have been hauled before the disciplinary hearing for having dared to issue their 'Appeal for a special conference', following the national executive's decision to cancel the 1998 annual congress. But general secretary Arthur Scargill decreed that party organs could only "request" a special congress, not publicly 'appeal" for one. He got the December 1998 NEC to ban the circulation within the party of any document whatsoever - thus ruling out any possibility of such a "request" winning the support of the necessary 25% of the membership. When the comrades rightly refused to withdraw their appeal, Scargill decided to invoke the complaints procedure.

Despite the obvious fact that he has resolved to expel the Appeal Four - why bother with the disciplinary procedure if you do not intend to follow it through? -Fisc seems to believe that it can still persuade the general secretary of the error of his ways. Like the class struggle itself, it seems, internal disagreements are best pursued through the power of reason alone, without having to resort to distasteful mass action - at least according to Fisc.

However, in this case 'reason' has been severely impaired by Fisc's past behaviour. As Scargill is only too keen to point out, it is a little disingenuous of Heron and co to make the claim (however correct) that there is nothing unconstitutional in circulating an appeal within the party, when in 1997 the Fiscites made up part of the "unanimous" NEC vote to threaten the SLP's Democratic Platform with disciplinary action for doing just that. The DP comrades drew up a list of the SLP's democratic failings which they sent to Scargill, having asked members across the country to sign it. At least Scargill is consist-

Fisc's unwillingness to launch a real fight - even when comrades Heron and Sikorski appear to be on the verge of expulsion - is further illustrated by the controversy over the cancellation of last month's women's section annual conference. A circular signed by comrades Sikorski and Liz Screen, the two section representatives on the NEC, complains of foul play. A number of previously unknown constituency women's sections were suddenly notified to the national section in January. In addition Scargill was claiming that there were now no fewer than 57 women's groups based on constituency branches. He was attempting to show that the handful of members who have supported the Sikorski-Screen leadership were out of touch with this mass of female com-

But where are these mysterious 57 groups? Comrades Sikorski and Screen point out that they were informed by Scargill stooge Paul Hardman at the November 1998 special congress that the women's section block vote would be limited to 72 - no, not the number of section members: the number of paid-up women party members. Clearly 72 is a pretty dismal figure compared to the 2,265 individual membership that president Frank Cave claimed at the time. Even alongside the the teeth •

actual 400-450 paid-up individual members represented at the congress, it is low. Nevertheless a membership ratio of one woman for every six men is probably about right - and a sad commentary on the failure of the overtly feminist approach pushed by Fisc and accepted by Scargill from the party's birth.

It is worth noting here that comrades Sikorski and Screen see nothing untoward in the fact that they were able to cast these 72 votes in whatever way they saw fit (they were not enough, however, to save Fiscite vice-president Patrick Sikorski from defeat at the hands of Roy Bull, the "former editor" of the Economic and Philosophic Science Review). Apparently the views of 'women' on every issue are faithfully reflected by the section's congress delegate, Carolyn Sikorski.

As to the 57 new sections, they are clearly a figment of Scargill's manically overproductive imagination. Perhaps he looked through the constituency branches that still exist on paper and added up those that can boast a woman member. Comrade Screen, who until recently thought that Scargill could do no wrong and still cannot quite believe that Carolyn is about to be booted out, is being rapidly disabused

In addition to threatening to flood the section conference with phantom female Scargillites, the general secretary ruled that the women comrades must not discuss his disciplinary action against the Appeal Four, nor the repercussions for the party of vice-president Bull's election. Clearly our women should not worry their little heads about such matters. Bull, who has still not confirmed Scargill's claim at the January NEC that he has "resigned" from his post, is notorious - along with his EPSR - not only for homophobia, but for his own peculiar twisted form of anti-feminism, which sees all campaigns for women's rights as a 'diversion'. Fisc of course is suffering from the common misapprehension on the social-democratised left that anti-feminism per se is synonymous with male chauvinism.

Obviously it is perfectly proper for the women's section to discuss any question it chooses, including the vice-president's views - and those of an EPSR woman like Jane Douglas, Bull's partner, who recently wrote attacking feminism, saying that: "If women want equality with men and more support with the domestic division of labour, then let's make sure men get to political meetings where there is a chance of raising real socialist awareness and advance" (Socialist News December-Janu-

You might have thought that Carolyn Sikorski would relish the opportunity provided by the conference to wield the full weight of dominant political correctness and ridicule comrade Douglas's Bullite recipe. In the process she could have used the meeting as a focal point to cohere the swelling ranks of disaffected and demoralised members into some kind of opposition to Scargill's shameless dictatorship and ruthless determination to drive out those who object to it - now including comrade Sikorski herself.

She could have gone ahead with the conference, attempting to mobilise the admittedly meagre remaining forces at her disposal, and seen just how many of Scargill's imaginary 57 women's sections turned up. But instead of calling his bluff, Sikorski and Screen played into his hands. They called off the conference and meekly requested discussions with the NEC in order to reach a 'sensible understanding'.

The Fiscites' touching faith in Scargill's ability to 'see sense' - even after he has tripped them up and knocked them off their feet - is about to be repaid with a kick in

Royston Bull: facts and Fisc

he 'former' Socialist Labour Party vice-president and editor of the Economic and Philosophic Science Review, Royston Bull, responded with his customary indignation (Weekly Worker January 28) to Jack Conrad's exposé of his politics in the previous week's paper.

This amused me, particularly as comrade Conrad had been rather soft on Bull. Branding the latter's approach to homosexuals as "reactionary, unscientific and prejudiced", the comrade had continued: "His press carries dark warnings about homosexual cliques. Their predilections for children. Their unnatural vices and practices. But he is not out to unnecessarily persecute or discriminate. That is, if homosexuals shun campaigning, hide their sexuality and join the Scargillite crusade in the sure knowledge that the end of capitalism will remove the sordid breeding ground for the homosexual 'perversion'" (my emphasis Weekly Worker January 21).

In fact, comrade Conrad has set about Bull and the EPSR with a blunt sword. His purpose in doing so becomes clear, I think, when he turns the polemic onto the Fourth International Supporters Caucus and the 'Appeal' faction within the SLP leadership: "Fisc and the 'Appeal' faction have conveniently 'discovered' Bull's homophobia and for their own narrow ends are baying for the only fitting punishment. Instead of winning a rational argument they rely instead on the bigotry fostered by local government-style PC. It does not matter about the past, the facts or freedom of debate. Bull is a homophobe and therefore must

Whether or not Fisc thinks so, of course the facts matter. And one of the key facts here is that the EPSR most definitely has promoted a manifesto of persecution and discrimination against homosexuals. Just one working class newspaper has consistently exposed the full vileness of the Bullites' attacks on gays, and that is the Weekly Worker. It is vital that the current debate should be informed by the restatement of all of the facts which have previously been revealed.

In an article sub-titled, "SLP witchhunter calls for discrimination against homosexuals" (Weekly Worker May 15 1997), comrade Ian Mahoney quoted from the EPSR of February 18 1997: "Paedophilia, pederasty and lesbianism will never not be describable as emotional or sexual malfunctions or a major disruption of natural evolution. Persecution of such abnormalities is a barbaric instinct and will die out under socialism. But differentiation and discrimination on matters where sexual orientation remains a key factor in the outcome (child upbringing; all education; protection of minors; sensible use of resources; health concerns; acceptable public order and workplace conduct; practising and being susceptible to exploitation; counterrevolutionarv agitation, etc.) ... is a sepa-

... the EPSR most definitely has promoted a manifesto of persecution and discrimination against homosexuals"

emphasis). " ... if malfunctioning sexual orientation persists, then it could only not be a problem if it continued in complete openness: ie, with the known proclivities of male homosexuals, for example (as well as of sick heterosexuals, obviously), universally openly acknowledged and the individuals at risk identified." "If society eventually establishes that heterosexual procreation remains the basic natural evolutionary pattern for the species, then cleverly rationalised deviations from this by emotionally-charged male or female homosexuals in a position to strongly influence the education of minors is clearly going to remain a potential problem possibly requiring continued differentiation (or discrimination) within childcare and the teaching professions.'

Is the author of this stuff out to unnecessarily persecute or discriminate? I see little room for doubt. It is pertinent to add, I think, that the context of all of the above filth is Bull's discussing how homosexuality will need to be handled after the working class socialist revolution. In his reply to Jack Conrad, Bull dwells upon an exposition of the problems which will confront the dictatorship of the proletariat: "The dictatorship of the proletariat, the only true democratic state, only withers away through the successful strengthening of its dictatorship, or forcible suppression of its adversaries: ie, when world bourgeois class influences (ie, all bourgeois ideological nonsense) have been utterly defeated in the world" (emphasis in original).

What is characteristic about Bull's treatment of the dictatorship of the proletariat is that the adversaries he appears to be keenest to suppress are, by and large, proletarians. Not the bourgeois class, but "world bourgeois class influences". And we know the ideas he has on what constitutes the latter category. We have seen above that the EPSR lists "counterrevolutionary agitation" as one of the "matters where sexual orientation remains a key factor". Gays are counterrevolutionaries, says Bull. And the very occasional reader of the EPSR will have seen enough to have learned that Trotskyists too are dangerous counterrevolutionaries in the crazy world of the Bullites. This is anti-working class divisiveness of the worst rate question entirely" (my kind. This man and his followers

should be drummed out of any working class revolutionary party as quickly as their legs will carry them.

To return to the matter of Fisc's opportunism (my apologies for the tautology). The critique of this phenomenon is not diminished one iota by our reiterating the seriousness of the Bullites' crime. Bull and the EPSR are not victims of "PC" censorship. Fisc stands all the more condemned because it knew of Bull's queerbashing for over a year and a half but deliberately choose to do nothing, whilst continuing to use the EPSR group as auxiliary witch hunters. The Weekly Worker of July 10 1997 reprinted in full my letter to Arthur Scargill detailing the homophobic content of Bull's rag. The same edition contained my open letter to all SLP branches calling for action on the issue. I sent personal copies of both letters to two leading Fiscites, Brian Heron and Carolyn Sikorski. They did not reply. Fisc were well aware of the letter of complaint sent to Scargill by the London-based Lesbian and Gay Commission of the SLP, on April 29 1997. Fisc became interested in Bull's queerbashing only after the latter democratically defeated their man, Patrick Sikorski, in the SLP vice-presidential election of November 1998. Indeed Fisc are not interested in the facts, as comrade Conrad correctly charges. This makes it all the more important that those facts are accurately restated.

In July 1997, I condemned the refusal of Scargill to act against Bull and the EPSR. I would no longer pursue such a demand. At that time the fight for democracy in the SLP was still very much alive. This is no longer the case. Since that date, every last vestige of democratic practice has been extinguished. Branch motions to the 1997 congress that met with Scargill's displeasure were arbitrarily ruled "out of order". That congress itself was rendered a travesty by the advent of the 3,000-strong block vote of the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association. The 1998 congress was cancelled by the leadership. Branches have been warned that it is "unconstitutional" to communicate with each other. Four members of the Fisc-supported 'Appeal' faction face possible expulsion for gathering members' signatures calling for the cancelled congress to take place. The overwhelming majority of revolutionaries and democracy campaigners have either been thrown out of the SLP (with Fisc's approval), or have left.

I most certainly do not desert those who remain. However, I am sure that the issue of the EPSR group's attacks on homosexuals cannot possibly, as a single issue, be dealt with in any kind of democratic manner within the shell that is today's Socialist Labour Party. I prefer the approach advocated by comrade Conrad: "to urge SLP members to organise a democratic rebellion, to break politically with Bull and the whole stinking corpse of Scargillism" ●

John Pearson

the comrades of the Marxist Workers' Group - a small, but militant United States-based Trotskyite organisation - "defending" Iraq in both the 1990-91 Desert Storm and the 1998 Desert Fox conflicts is a matter of the highest principle. Comrade Paris calls them "acid tests" - decisive moments which separate out the "Marxists from the chauvinists and reformists" (Weekly Worker February 4). He puts their consequences for Marxists on a par with World War II and the collapse of bureaucratic socialism.

Not surprisingly then, given his great respect for, and feelings of solidarity towards, the Communist Party of Great Britain, the comrade is concerned, to say the least, that we refused point blank to sign a joint statement siding with Iraq in the midst of the most recent attack by the combined forces of the USA and the UK in December 1998.

Thankfully, instead of frothily denouncing our Mark Fischer and the CPGB as "Stalinist" or "capitulator" and casting us into his mind's outer darkness, the comrade is determined that we see the light and come to walk alongside the MWG in righteousness. His 5,000-word polemic is, he says, an attempt to "correct" our supposedly "mistaken position" by demonstrating the correctness of "the Marxist method". The comrade asks us to take his "pedagogical" and "comprehensive" remarks in that spirit. Indeed we do. Yet I have to say that, having carefully studied what the comrade has written, I for one remain firmly convinced that we are not

On the contrary, as I will demonstrate, our stance is not "an opportunist vestige of the 'official communist' parties' old practices", but results from a considered analysis based on qualitative changes in the world economy - notably the ending of colonialism and the emergence of finance capital in the medium developed countries. Opposing imperialism and proto-imperialism is for us the only principled position. Ipso facto those who talk of giving Iraq and similar such states - "support" of any kind are the "mistaken" ones.

Let me prove this, to begin with indirectly, by systematically cross-examining the propositions that comrade Paris seems to regard as self-evident; propositions which disastrously lead him and his comrades into the camp of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad (and every other such anti-working class regime in the so-called third world).

Comrade Paris kicks off with an oversimplified discussion of the Marxist attitude towards war and the legitimacy of certain wars. "Marxists," he declares baldly, "have always understood that there are two types of war: 1. progressive wars - wars of national liberation, anti-imperialist wars; 2. reactionary wars - wars of redivision of the world, inter-imperialist wars." It is, of course, untrue that Marxists "have always understood" that there are "progressive wars - wars of national liberation, anti-imperialist wars" and "reactionary wars - wars of redivision of the world, inter-imperialists wars".

Marxists are not pacifists. Yes, we consider some wars as unjust (reactionary) but others are just (progressive). However, what decides our attitude is complex, being determined by an interweaving of changing historical development and class interest. Imperialism and anti-imperialism are not categories that have "always" existed. There were just wars prior to the age of imperialism (beginning in the late 19th century). Not only defensive wars, like the one brilliantly conducted by Jacobin France against the Hapsburg Austrians and the other counterrevolutionary invaders, but

Defeatism or

The CPGB's refusal to 'defend Iraq' is no error. **Jack Conrad** replies to James Paris of the Marxist Workers' Group

class. Spartacus, John Ball and Thomas Münzer formed and led armies of the oppressed against *their own* class oppressors.

Marx and Engels earnestly looked forward to the day when leaders of the modern proletariat would do the same (unlike previous attempts their 'utopia' is fully realisable). And it was precisely to foster the growth of the working class and thus the *objective* conditions for universal human liberation that both men at various times lent support to certain wars of expansion and annexation (redivision) by capitalistically more developed countries.

For example in February 1849 Engels cited the 1845-47 war between the "energetic Yankees" and the "lazy Mexicans" (following which large tracts of Mexico, including Texas, were ceded to the US). Against a sermonising Mikhail Bakunin he unashamedly praised the American volunteers and their "war of conquest". Their war, he said, "was waged simply and solely in the interests of civilisation". Admittedly the "independence' of a few Spanish Californians and Texans may suffer by this, 'justice' and other moral principles may be infringed here and there; but what does that matter against such world-historical events?" (F Engels MECW Vol 8. (F Engels MECW Vol 8, Moscow 1977, pp365-66).

After Bowie and Crockett came gold prospectors, cattle ranchers, captains of industry and the teeming multitude: ie, the dynamic pulse of progress. We could also usefully mention the writings of Marx and Engels vis-à-vis the British in India, the rights of the non-historic Slavs, etc. Comrade Paris is certainly aware of all this. My intention is not to 'pedagogically' teach people what they surely know already, but to simply bring to the fore the fact that our attitude towards war alters because it is historically determined. In other words there is no timeless formula. Those who preach that there are certainly do not apply the Marxist method.

Comrade Paris writes eloquently about dialectics. However, his line of argument is damaged, made inflexible and brittle by a normative approach redolent with dogmatism. Instead of discovering the dialectic through material changes in the real world itself he presents us with quotes, followed by conclusions which are supported by nothing more substantial than formal logic.

Hence for our comrade the "central question" concerning Iraq is "whether or not it is an oppressor (imperialist) or oppressed (semi-colonial) state". There are no other possibilities. Iraq must be one or it must be the other. It is a classical 'either-or' method. All comrade Paris needs to do is reproduce Lenin's 1916 descriptive outline of the "five essential features" of imperialism and he is home (basing himself on Burkharin's Imperialism or Hilferding's Finance Capital would have been slightly more problematic).

conducted by Jacobin France against the Hapsburg Austrians and the other counterrevolutionary invaders, but civil wars which pitted class against

let us reproduce Lenin's *Imperialism*, the highest stage of capitalism schema (a work which, it should be emphasised, he modestly described as "a popular outline" along with a definition, which, no matter how useful, was in his own words "inadequate", "conditional and relative"). Anyway what were the five "basic features" highlighted by Lenin? They were: "1. the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has 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, as distinguished from the export of commodities, acquires exceptional importance; 4. the formation of internamonopolist capitalist associations which share the world between themselves; and 5. the territorial division of the whole world amongst the biggest capitalist powers is completed" (VI Lenin CW Vol 22, Moscow 1977, p266).

Comrade Paris is triumphant: "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 has not divided the world alongside the "greatest capitalist powers" (diligent readers will note that comrade Paris is using an earlier translation than mine). Therefore Iraq is not even a minor imperialist power "like Canada or Greece". It might have played the role of "proxy" in the war with Iran, but it is "fundamentally an exploited state - an oppressed semi-colonial state"

The reasoning employed by comrade Paris here reminds me of the crude metaphysical approach taken by Tony Cliff towards the Soviet Union in his much overrated "Marxist" analysis. For him too countries have to be "either ... or": in this case either capitalist or socialist (T Cliff State capitalism in Russia London 1974, p282). Thus having methodically and correctly proven that the post-1928 Soviet Union was neither socialist nor any kind of workers' state - no matter how degenerated - he 'logically' concludes that it has to be an example of capitalism, albeit a bureaucratic state capitalist variation. That it might have been an ectopic - ie, non-capitalist, non-socialist - social formation does not even occur to him.

What of comrade Paris? How would he analyse the Soviet Union in respect of Lenin's fivefold criteria? Obviously it was not imperialist in the sense meant above. But are we then left with no choice other than to categorise it as a "semi-colony"? I know full well that comrade Paris would laugh the suggestion out of court. So why apply such formal logic to Iraq? Surely it must be studied concretely, not classified *a priori*.

If we treat Lenin's "conditional and relative" definition of imperialism as timeless, we are in danger of being forced to throw the baby out with the bathwater and declare, in step with social democracy, that imperialism is a thing of the now distant past. Do the big capitalist powers of today really "divide the world" up amongst

themselves? Is the division "complete"? There is no longer any British or any other colonial empire. There are indeed something like 150 politically independent states represented in the UN. Moreover, small some very small countries - like Greece and Ireland, have joined what we would call the imperialist club ... and rather effortlessly at that. Even in terms of 1916, in spite of his fivefold definition Lenin could still categorise backward Russia as imperialist. Another renowned Marxist from the same school, who will be familiar to comrade Paris, called it a colonising semi-colony, which both acted for its masters and itself - Russia therefore was a "twofold imperialism" (L Trotsky History of the Russian Revolution Vol 1, London 1965, p33). In other words, comrade Paris, Lenin is a excellent starting point, but he should not be used as a substitute for thinking.

Backwardness allows - or compels countries to make leaps to what is most advanced. There is neither the possibility nor the necessity of retracing the path taken by Britain: ie, the deracination of the yeomen by landed interests, the slow commodification of free labour-power, the real subordination of workers with the introduction of technology, the steady concentration and depersonalisation of capital in limited companies, etc. Each in their turn, Germany, Japan and Russia fielded the enormous power of the state to skip the intermediate historical stages of capitalistic development. Their autocracies adopted, sponsored and attempted to generalise what was most advanced. Primitive accumulation resulted not in numerous small manufacturers, but industrial giants. Trotsky famously named it the "law of combined development". That theory helps to explain why Russia in 1914 had finance capital - ie, the "confluence of industrial and bank capital" - and why in terms of industrial technique it "stood at the level of the advanced countries, and in certain respects even outstripped them"; though it was in the midst of a peasant sea (ibid pp31,27).

Imperialism is not merely an expansionist or aggressive foreign *policy* pursued by various governments. It is a stage of capitalism itself whereby monopoly capital is exported and reproduced on the basis of a world division of labour. The contradiction between labour and capital is that way universalised and the world as a whole becomes increasingly ripe for socialism (the first stage of communism).

Between the capitalist states there is a definite pecking order determined by size and degree of development. Fundamentally we can say that the world is divided between oppressing and oppressed countries. Yet to leave things there would, needless to say, be a lifeless abstraction. After World War II the metabolism of international capitalist exploitation underwent a marked transformation. In place of the colonial system, epitomised by an economically uncompetitive Britain, there was a shift to a system epitomised by the economically competitive USA.

This victory of the greenback over

the colonial sunhat does not preclude a neo-colonial relationship with certain capitalistically underdeveloped countries (central America being a case in point). Nevertheless the main characteristic of the post-World War II capitalist system was the dismantling of the colonial empires and the opening up of markets to the stiff winds of monopolistic competition. The imperialist club has thereby been made relatively open and in consequence has tended to steadily expand. There has also been the emergence of what must be called intermediate or medium developed countries in which the ruling classes, often in cooperation with core imperialist powers, have managed to take capitalist development to a high level, whereby not only is it the dominant mode of production, but domestic finance capital is created (Turkey, South Korea, Brazil, Argentina and Taiwan being examples). Nor must the existence of the Soviet Union be discounted either. As the other superpower from 1945 to 1991, it acted as a counterweight to US hegemony. A number of capitalistic countries, including medium developed ones, were able to align themselves to it so as to ply something approaching an independent course (eg, Iraq).

Let us examine the recent history of Iraq. The country was granted formal independence by Britain in 1932. It remained pitifully backward, not least because revenues generated by the increasing demand for oil went directly into the pockets of British shareholders. In return for what amounted to a few crumbs the king and his entourage acted as little more than local agents for Britain: ie, classic neo-colonialism. Things began to change rapidly with the 1958 Free Officers revolution. The monarchy was overthrown and state power passed from the big landowners and the aristocratic elite into the hands of middling elements who typically had worked their way up through university and military academy. This new state power sought to wrest by degrees ownership of the oil and refining industry from the transnationals.

It was the July 1968 Ba'athist Party revolution which put Iraq on a confrontational course against the big imperialist powers. The oil industry was nationalised and Baghdad cuddled up to the Soviet Union for protection. That alliance and the boom in oil prices after 1973 allowed the country to make huge strides forward in terms of wealth and development. Radical land reform was enacted, effectively abolishing the old ruling class. Industry was built up using state capitalist methods - unions were banned in nationalised concerns, but the relatively well paid workers were guaranteed lifetime employment (they were not free however to choose their place of employment). Relative labour costs were huge - two or three times higher than in comparable countries. Nevertheless by the late 1970s in terms of per capita levels of production Iraq stood in the same league as Portugal and Greece, not India and China. It was medium developed. There was not only finance capital, but the export of capital. Its Rafidyn Bank was calculated to be the largest commercial bank in the Arab world in 1983; the country itself had assets totalling \$50 billion invested throughout the world (above all through the London and New York markets). Militarily too Iraq was transformed. Massive imports of Soviet arms made

defencism

it a regional power to be reckoned

In general finance capital, whatever the particular level of development reached by a country, brings with it a striving to expand outwards. Capitalist development sharpens class and national antagonisms domestically no end. Accumulation means fabulous wealth for high officials and their friends and relatives. But the gap between rich and poor, the 'haves' and the 'have nots', grows continuously and visibly. Democracy is therefore precarious, often nonexistent. Class and social contradictions become acute. Economically it is very difficult for medium developed capitalist countries to take full advantage of the world economy. In terms of competition they are invariably outmatched by the transnational players. As an alternative - also as a means to prevent internal explosion, to prevent civil war - "other" means (ie, military adventures) become ever more attractive. Hence our designation of proto-

In 1980 Iraq invaded Iran. US diplomats may well have given the goahead. However, Iraq was no mere "proxy". Saddam Hussein wanted a greater Iraq. He hoped to gain a string of oilfields and a quick victory. The war proved long and hugely costly. Nearly a million people died. Economically is was equally disastrous. The Ba'ath regime was committed to a 'guns and butter' strategy. Where the theocracy in Tehran were prepared to use human waves against tank emplacements, Saddam Hussein willingly sacrificed territory and equipment. Moreover domestic peace was brought by maintaining living standards and compensating the families of those killed in action with cars, land and other such expensive items. At the same time oil production plummeted as facilities and shipping was destroyed. Foreign assets became debts. All in all the war is thought to have cost Baghdad something in the order of \$226 billion (Japanese Institute of Middle Eastern Economies).

By May 1987 the 'guns and butter' strategy was unsustainable. The regime issued its decree no652, abolishing the lifetime employment guarantee in the attempt to shift from state capitalism to competitive capitalism; and thus increase the very low rate of exploitation. The war ended a year later - the social tensions could only but increase. It is against this background that Saddam Hussein gambled on an invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The country was forcibly annexed and declared Iraq's 19th province.

Was Iraq acting again as an imperialist "proxy" in ousting the al-Sabahs, comrade Paris? The idea is not really tenable.

Possibly Iraq was set up by a US itching to launch its New World Order crusade. Either way, the principled position for communists and workers is straightforward. The main enemy is at home. The reason we opposed the US-led coalition was not only because of the sickening death and destruction Desert Storm was bound to wreak. There was, and is, nothing progressive or democratic about imperialism's campaign against Iraq. Everything hypocritical and reactionary. Imperialism was not out to liberate 'poor little Kuwait' or remove a regional dictator. It was intent on reasserting its own power and re-establishing a dominant military presence.

The CPGB had no hesitation in denouncing demands from the Labour left and 'official communists' in Britain for UN sanctions (which naturally would not hurt ordinary folk). UN sanctions are, we said, "nothing more than a form of imperialist economic warfare". Neither did we make a call for the restoration of the al-Sabahs and the Kuwaiti state. Instead we said that the Arab, Turkic, Kurdish and other peoples of the region should be free to redraw the boundaries of the region "as they think fit" (*The Leninist* December 1990).

Throughout the hostilities the CPGB was extremely active. There was, comrade Paris, no "abstention" nor "oblivion". We led a highly successful and militant non-stop picket of the US embassy in Grovesnor Square and intervened on every mass demonstration. Our slogan was not for peace, but the revolutionary defeat of both belligerents, above all by class struggle methods at home. In every respect the CPGB fulfilled its proletarian internationalist duties and obligations. We used every opportunity to expose the predatory nature of the US, Britain, France, etc. The CPGB is, comrade Paris, against imperialist military actions wherever they take place, be it in Vietnam, Ireland, ex-Yugoslavia, Cuba, Somalia or Iraq. We demand the withdrawal of imperialist forces and prefer their military defeat to their military victory.

But there is another string to our bow. The CPGB criticised those such as the 'official communist' New Communist Party and the various Trotskyite sects, the Workers Revolutionary Party, Workers Power, etc, whose hatred of imperialism took them into the camp of Saddam Hussein's proto-imperialism. Some of these organisations sought monetary reward for their services. Most were simply wrong, constituting a naive pro-Ba'athist left.

We evaluated both sides in Gulf War II strictly from the point of view of their class interests and the class and historical and social conditions which gave rise to the conflict. Hence we denounced Saddam Hussein's Anschluss with Kuwait. Nothing in the policy or actions of the Iraqi regime could command our sympathy or support. That is why we sided with the Iraqi masses - the communist workers, the Kurds and Marsh Arabs - who refused to 'suspend' their struggle against the Ba'athists and who declined to enter a "military united front" with them. They have "every reason" to use Saddam Hussein's "difficulties as their opportunity: an opportunity to make revolution" (The Leninist December 1990).

A revolutionary situation did present itself in the aftermath of the Iragi army's defeat and headlong flight from Kuwait. We did everything we could to aid and encourage the Iraqi masses in their courageous uprisings. Not the pro-Ba'athist left in Britain. They excused or glorified Saddam Hussein. For the WRP he was the leader of the pan-Arab revolution; for the Revolutionary Communist Party Iraq was the small guy facing a big imperialist bully; for the NCP Iraq was "non-capitalist" and therefore somehow socialistic - they all attacked us for our revolutionary defeatist position, branding it "proimperialist".

Now in 1999 comrade Paris quotes against us the resolution of the Communist International on the tasks of communists in the colonial world from boldness and strength to the actions of the working class in Iraq", communist sin the colonial world from not unfold in victorious US nor Brit-

1922. It criticises any "refusal" by its sections to "fight against imperialist tyranny, on the pretext of their supposed 'defence' of independent class interests" (*Theses, resolutions and manifestos* London 1983, p414). Comrade Paris again treats texts in a timeless fashion.

Any intelligent reading of this and other similar resolutions will show that economically and socially such countries were then extremely undeveloped. They were not only ruled by the colonial administrators and local client potentates, but in the main languished in what Comintern describes as "feudal" backwardness. The rising bourgeoisie might therefore play a revolutionary role in bringing about "state independence" and a "democratic republic". Once the proletariat had established itself as an independent revolutionary factor", "temporary agreements with bourgeois democracy" - ie, political support - could be "considered permissible or necessary" (ibid p416).

Suffice to say, the key for the workers in these counties was not an alliance with the national bourgeoisie: rather winning over the peasant mass to the revolutionary struggle, and an alliance with the proletariat in the advanced west.

Is Iraq still mired in "feudal" backwardness? Is Saddam Hussein not at the head of a state monopoly capitalist and anti-working class regime? Is Iraq nowadays not ripe for socialism as part of the world revolution? In our opinion the facts speak for themselves. That is why in 1991 we wished for the victory of the Basra uprising in the south and the Kurds' rebellion in the north, and from there the spread of the democratic, anti-Ba'ath revolution. Such a development would really have threatened imperialism, and not only in the Middle East, but in its heartlands too.

Saddam Hussein is opposed to US and British imperialism. But he is no anti-imperialist. No one should be fooled by his socialistic and anti-imperialist rhetoric. Nor is he a democrat. Iraq is not ready for "state independence", but a proletarian-led democratic revolution and the sparking of the wider, worldwide conflagration. That is the only realistic and consistent way of taking the lead in fighting imperialism in the Ba'athruled Iraq of today (as opposed to the British-ruled Iraq of 1922).

Of course our comrade Paris attacks those Trotskyites and others who carried portraits of Saddam Hussein in Gulf War II and who openly prostituted themselves to the Ba'athist regime. The comrade claims he can do this, without having to adopt our position for the revolutionary defeat of both sides, by drawing a sharp line of distinction between what he calls "military support for Iraq" and "political support" for its regime.

As we have repeatedly argued, the division is entirely spurious. Comrade Paris twists and turns, but in the end is implicitly forced to admit, all the while denying it, that this would involve "cooperation" with the forces of Saddam Hussein: ie, "coordinating attacks against imperialist forces", though, rest assured, it would be a "purely episodic, coincidental phenomenon". Why fight alongside the Ba'athists? Victory for Saddam Hussein would have "added boldness and strength to the actions of the working class in Iraq", comrade Paris claims. Such a scenario did

ain. And that is why we at least fought for the *defeat* of our own ruling class - as shown by Russia in 1905 and 1917 defeat, not victory, breeds revolution. That the revolution in Iraq was brutally crushed and that defeat has "demoralised" the working class is undoubtedly true, But it was the defeat of the revolution by Saddam Hussein, not the defeat of Saddam Hussein by US imperialism, that is the cause of this: ie, comrade Paris is engaged in wishful thinking at best.

But what is military support? Along with Carl von Clausewitz all serious Marxists define war and peace, and military and political methods, not as opposites, but two sides of the same coin: "War is the continuation of politics by other (violent) means" (See On war Harmondsworth 1976). Surely then, in giving Iraq military support one is also giving it political support. To argue otherwise is to descend into logical incoherence. Furthermore to claim that in "coordinating" with the military forces of the Ba'athist regime one is not offering any political support is to define war and politics as being entirely separate and unrelated - an elementary error. War - or, put another way, military "coordination" - is a form of politics. Taking sides with the Ba'athist little slaveholders against the US big slaveholders is to consciously or unconsciously fool oneself and those who follow your lead. Military "coordination" with the armed forces of Ba'athism must be based on some measure of political support for the regime and its aims. To defend Iraq militarily is to assist it in practice in attaining its political objectives and is in fact to support the Ba'ath regime politically, however much one may verbally deny it.

Of course, the comrades of the MWG have no military formations that we are aware of, certainly none in the Gulf to our knowledge. No tanks, no missiles, no MWG battalions or international brigades. Hence they cannot, even if they wanted to, offer Saddam Hussein, actual military "coordination". As a small organisation based in the USA what do they really do? They conduct political propaganda work, like most of the left in Britain. Your main weapon, comrades, is the power of words. That is actually the only support you put at the disposal of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath regime, though you insist for your own reasons on calling it "military support". Who are you trying to kid? Be honest, comrades.

If the CPGB had the ear of the revolutionary masses in Iraq, we would indeed call for military opposition to imperialist forces, had they tried to enter a liberated or semi-liberated Basra or Baghdad. Any parallel between these forces and those of Saddam Hussein would certainly be purely coincidental. Our aim would be to defend the anti-Ba'ath revolution against those who would drown it in blood. Is this what the MWG means by "military support", as comrade Paris seems to suggest fleetingly? If so, then we gladly agree with him. We would both be on the same side of the barricades and share the same fate. But then there would be two Iraqs. A counterrevolutionary Iraq and a revolutionary Iraq. We defend only the latter. Never the former. That is why we say the term "military defence" of present-day Iraq should be junked immediately. It serves not to clarify our tasks, but to confuse and excuse

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 selfdetermination. 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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Maurice Bernal examines the implications of the Hoddle affair

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Unlikely martyrdom

oddle 0, Disabled 1 (Hoddle og)". In some respects, the sporting metaphor in this smug and tasteless headline from The Independent (February 3) is appropriate, but the real victors in the 'game' of Glenn Hoddle's forced departure from the job of England football manager were not the disabled, but the media. Another public figure excoriated, humiliated and destroyed; another scalp on the belt of a press that has come to act as judge, jury and executioner in a melodramatic tale of lynch justice.

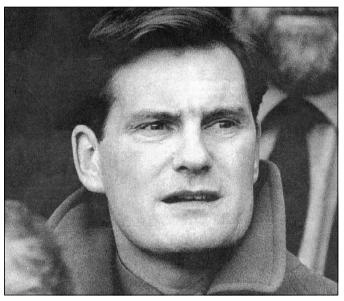
The Hoddle affair is of interest to Marxists and worthy of some commentary and analysis because of what it reveals about the society in which we live: not merely the abysmally low level of political and ethical discourse - a reflection of the ideological black hole and glib spin-doctory that characterises New Labour - but a disturbing climate of irrationality and intolerance that seems set to permeate every level of life in civil society.

The charges on which Hoddle was arraigned and summarily tried are basically twofold: first, that his remarks about reincarnation and physical handicap were offensive to disabled people and therefore unacceptable; secondly, that his religious views were 'wacky', fit only to be ridiculed and condemned for their heterodoxy.

Let us begin by reminding ourselves what Hoddle actually said in his now notorious interview with sports reporter Matt Dickinson from The Times: "You and I have been physically given two hands and two legs and a half-decent brain. Some people have not been born like that for a reason. The karma is working from another lifetime. I have nothing to hide about that. It is not only people with disabilities. What you sow, you have to reap. You have to look at things that happened in your life and ask why. It comes around' (January 30).

The sentiments are allusive, muddled and half-articulated the implied relationship between sin and divine retribution is a western one - but Hoddle's words are in part a recognisable restatement of an idea that is central to the Buddhist and Hindu traditions. Imagine the slavering excitement with which this utterance was received in the editorial offices not only of the tabloid rags, but also of the broadsheets: 'Hold the front page!'

But can it be that the noble



PC irrationality cost the England coach his job

moralists of Wapping really have no recollection of an interview that Hoddle gave to BBC Radio 5 Live last year, on the eve of the World Cup, in which he expressed exactly the same ideas? The reaction then was one of indifference, so what has changed? Basically, Hoddle's relationship with the media. Richard Williams summed it up admirably: "The tabloids were always going to get him one day. Hoddle had offended too often, by refusing to play the game their way. He had sometimes intentionally misled them, he had often let them see his contempt for them, and he had not given them the unbroken string of victories that would allow them to indulge the unfettered jingoism so pleasing to their circulation departments ... Hoddle was never quite comfortable with the beer-and-bulldog ambience of the Sun Bus, and his unease became his downfall" (The Independent February 2). The moral outrage and deluge of condemnation following Hoddle's recent remarks seem therefore to have been based on some rather sullied motives where the media were concerned. Did Hoddle 'offend' the disa-

bled? To judge by the correspondence columns, it appears he did cause pain to some at least. But was there not something odiously patronising about the way in which groups representing the disabled, and especially politicians, leaped to their defence? The suggestion seemed to be that physical disability somehow renders its unfortunate victims incapable of discerning balderdash when they read it in the papers. People with physical disabilities are much more likely to be 'offended' by the fact that lack of ter by examining the results of

provision for their needs in all manner of public places - including many football grounds - makes it impossible for them to lead a reasonably normal life.

No, Hoddle's real 'crime' was not to offend the disabled, but to flout the canons of political correctness. Here we need to be careful: as an ideological phenomenon, PC has brought about some genuinely beneficial changes to the way society treats those who by virtue of their race, sexual orientation or other factors constitute vulnerable minorities. At the same time, however, it must be said that PC has brought about some gross and occasionally bizarre distortions, often based on sheer linguistic ignorance, in the formulation of values and concepts. More troublingly and this is not surprising, given the fact that political correctness is an ideological product of bourgeois society - it has a tendency to replicate the contradictions and inversions inherent in the capitalists system: behind the mask of a commitment to freedom and diversity, we discover the ugly face of a quite ruthless intolerance, determined to trammel discourse within the confines of a set of values often arrived at arbitrarily or founded on the exigencies of the moment.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the conduct of politicians, especially the scions of New Labour. When a party has no real ideas - the periphrastic sermonising of the 'third way' can hardly be glorified with the name of an ideology - it is forced to mount every passing bandwagon in the hope of maintaining its appeal to the electorate. The outcome is a particularly unpalatable and shoddy form of populism. They test the wa-

'public opinion'; they listen to the phone-ins and talk shows and, having established what political endorsement.

affair was a classic. Margaret Hodge, minister with responsibility for the disabled, felt compelled to call for Hoddle's resignation, saying that it was "inappropriate" for such a person to have responsibility for training the nation's football side; Tony Banks, as minister for sport, followed suit. Then it was time for the great leader himself to make his oracular pronouncement. The prime minister, who only days before had told us of his determination to distance himself and his government from all that was trivial, chose to appear on ITV's 'This Morning' programme in order to give the people of Britain the benefit of his wisdom on a whole range of trivial nonsense: was Cherie terribly hurt by pictures of her cellulite in the tabloids? What did he think of Hoddle's offensive remarks about the disabled? By telling us that Hoddle would find it very difficult to remain in his position, Blair acted like a Roman emperor of old, pointing his thumb groundwards and determining the fate of the hapless England coach.

The hypocrisy is staggering in its brazenness. Here is a prime minister whose words and deeds bear no relationship to one another. As everyone knows, only an attack of nerves in the face of public disapproval prevented him from ordering the removal of disability benefit from large numbers, perhaps even a majority, of those who currently receive it, the unspoken implication being that these people were 'cheats', cunningly shamming their afflictions to milk the welfare state of precious resources. Yet the feelings of these same dodgers are so important that prime ministerial intervention is needed to protect them from the misty, eclectic musings of a football manager.

Let us turn to the religious aspect of the case, and try to contain our mirth as we read the words of Tory MP Peter Bottomley, who described Hoddle's remarks as "not christian, scientific or acceptable" (The Independent February 2). If we did not know the eccentric and pompous Bottomley better, we would surely conclude that his implicit equation of the christian religion with science and rationality was some kind of jest.

If Hoddle's notions of rein-

a few polls of media-generated carnation - shared in essence by around a billion human beings on the planet, whose religious feelings are evidently of 'the people' think, they give it no account to British politicians - are indeed 'wacky', as the In this respect, the Hoddle press dubbed them, what are we to make of the view taken by many evangelical christians that homosexuality is not merely an abomination in the eyes of the lord, but a disease, a sickness that can be cured through prayer and the inter-

vention of the holy ghost? This seems to me to be grossly 'offensive' to gays apart from being an example of the worst kind of superstitious nonsense. Or what should we say about a christian pope whose doctrinal intransigence on the subject of birth control dooms millions of the faithful in the third world to a short, brutish and impoverished existence? Is not this not 'offensive' to rational human beings, as well as being inconsonant with that essential dignity and worth of the human person which His Holiness places at the centre of his social teaching?

By contrast with these examples of christian 'rationality', Hoddle's ruminations on karma and the meaning of suffering in human life seem innocuous, but even if they were not, he has a right to hold and express whatever religious beliefs he likes. Our politically correct politicians appear to have forgotten that freedom of religious expression is enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights that they hold so dear. It is a mark of a civilised, mature democracy to be able to tolerate diversity of views.

There was a time not long ago when the propagation of the idea of religious freedom as a supposed hallmark of bourgeois democracy was part of the west's ideological battle with the Soviet bloc. Government-funded anti-Soviet organisations and commentators poured forth a torrent of accusations to the effect that the USSR was curbing this fundamental human right. With the collapse of the USSR, this rhetoric has become obsolescent, but so, evidently, has bourgeois democracy's espousal of freedom of religious expression as an important ethical value.

Of course, it rather depends who you are. If you are an illeducated, working class footballer from Essex, then your religious ideas can be condemned as "offensive" and "unacceptable". But if you are a bourgeois liberal intellectual from Hampstead who consciously and deliberately blasphemes against islam in the course of your creative literary labours, then you have every right to say whatever you like on the subject of religion, and be lauded as a martyr in the cause of freedom of expression if your words cause offence.

Varying forms of religious belief and practice can clearly be differentiated in terms of their effect on human societies, but as Marxists and materialists we contend that, at a deeper level, all forms of religion stem from the same source - the alienation that gives rise to an inverted relation between subject and object, and thereby radically distorts humanity's self-consciousness. People project facets of their own nature onto an object of their thought, then allow themselves to be dominated by this spectral being that is nothing more than a creation of the brain; the subject-object relation is inverted, so that humankind (the real and only subject) endow an object of their own thought (god) with the status of a real, existing subject and then perceive themselves as the object, the creature of this spectre. It is not god who has created man in his own image, but humanity which creates god in its own image and then bows down be-

fore its own creation. Marx understood very well the appeal of religion to oppressed human beings: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people" (K Marx, F Engels On Religion Moscow 1957, p38). What Marx detested most about religion was that it degrades human beings by keeping them in thrall to an alien, illusory power. Therefore, "The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that man is the highest being for man, hence with the categoric imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is debased, enslaved, abandoned and despised" (ibid p45). Only when the social conditions and relations that alienate humankind from their products, themselves and one another have been overthrown will religion lose its grip over the human mind.

Seen in this light, all forms of religious belief are, to paraphrase Mr Bottomley, "unscientific and unacceptable". Hoddle's notions are certainly no worse than the rest and he has become the unlikely victim and martyr of an increasingly intolerant and irrational society •