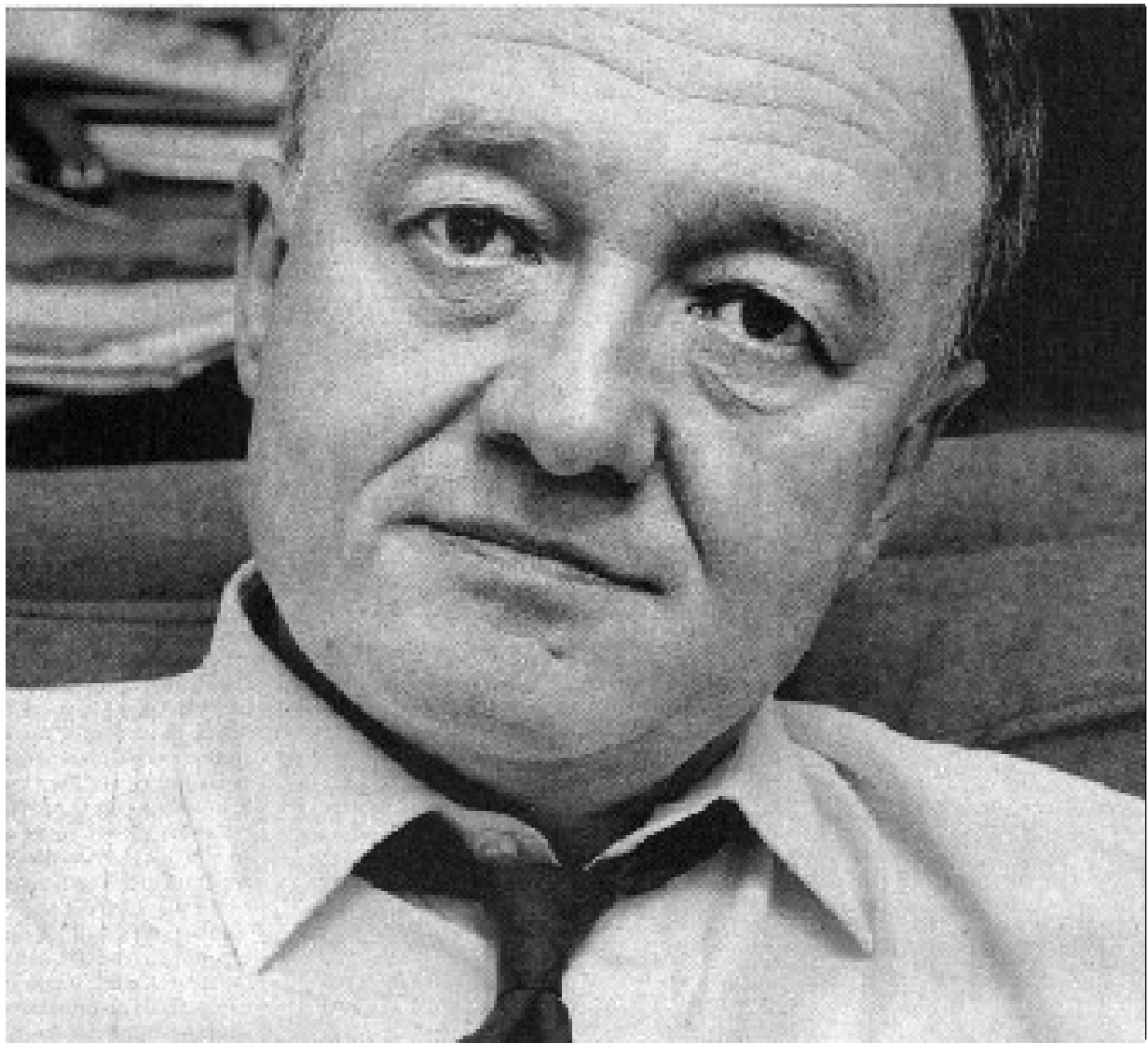


'Red' Ken shadow boxing with Blair



Standing ovations for Livingstone's populist rhetoric

Left needs its own candidate for London mayor

Ken Livingstone's so-called campaign to win the Labour Party's nomination for mayor of London reached new heights this week at a packed and enthusiastic 'Let Ken Stand' rally at Westminster's Central Hall on Monday February 15. With a platform of minor celebrities - Jo Brand, Peter Tatchell, Lee Jasper, Diane Abbott, Mark Seddon - and a 1,000-strong crowd, the former leader of the Greater London Council skillfully turned up the pressure on the Millbank machine. He won himself two standing ovations for his populist rhetoric. Yet, as far as Livingstone's actual candidacy goes, it is all shadow boxing.

Despite being the favoured candidate of a very broad electorate - from

Labourite Trotskyists to City property developers - there is simply no way Livingstone will be the name New Labour puts forward in 2000. The Blairites have made it clear since 'devolution' for London came on the agenda that Livingstone would be blocked by a bureaucratic stonewall. He is just too 'off-message'. This is despite Livingstone's grovelling statement that all he wants to do is help New Labour. Paradoxically then, as Livingstone's campaign intensifies, Millbank simply becomes more determined to oppose him.

While there will be a direct ballot of members to choose the mayoral candidate, the process foisted on Labour's London regional committee entails a vetting process for the short

list. No doubt newt-fancying MPs from north-west London constituencies will be speedily consigned to the 'rejected' file.

Yet even this stitch-up is not tight enough for Millbank. The latest bureaucratic twist turns Livingstone into his own hangman. New Labour officials have now let it be known that Monday's 'Let Ken Stand' rally will in all probability disqualify him. In the Kafkaesque world of Blair's Labour Party, potential candidates for the Greater London Authority are debarred from canvassing except in an official letter to be sent to party members with the ballot papers. Senior Millbank figures are also adopting good, old-fashioned red-baiting tactics, raising questions about the fi-

nancing of Livingstone's campaign - supposedly from 'anti-Labour parties': ie, the Socialist Workers Party. So the more Ken tries, the harder away is his declared goal.

Even with the success of the February 15 rally, Livingstone knows as well as Blair that he will not be Labour's candidate. So what is he playing at?

With the purging of Militant, the rise of the Kinnock-Smith-Blairite 'modernisers' and the triumphant Blairisation of Labour, many have written off the Labour left as a spent force. The Socialist Party needs to maintain this as an axiom for its own sectarian ends: having dropped the name 'Militant Labour' and now operating in exile, it now claims that Labour's transformation into a unadulterated bourgeois party is complete, leaving itself as the nucleus of the future mass workers' party. The old Labour left of Tony Benn has been eclipsed but a New Labour left of one variety or another is inevitable. While the supposed 'radicals' in cabinet such as Robin Cook and Clare Short are barely distinguishable from the Blairites, the success of the Grassroots Alliance in last year's elections to the national executive committee shows that the emergence of a viable New Labour left is a real possibility in the short term.

However, this time the game has changed. With proportional representation looming for Westminster elections and Blair pushing on to turn Labour into a 'great' liberal party - with or without the Liberal Democrats - an electoral space to New Labour's left is opening up. Even Paddy Ashdown noted: "Under our current voting system, a *breakaway* of the left is not impossible. They could be pushed into it, for Mr Blair would not miss them." While for the party's remaining left elements the main goal is still to bring Labour 'back' to its mythical socialist roots, there is now a growing realisation that an existence outside the Labour Party is not a matter of sect politics.

But such a possibility of leading a left split from Blair is at the moment not on Livingstone's agenda. While he knows he has no chance of winning the mayoral candidacy - and these are not the conditions in which he would even contemplate standing as an independent - he is using the occasion to expand his support base within and without the Labour Party.

Livingstone is a devious political character. Claiming that the CPGB were MI5 agents on national television during the 1992 general election is small fry for this Labourite schemer.

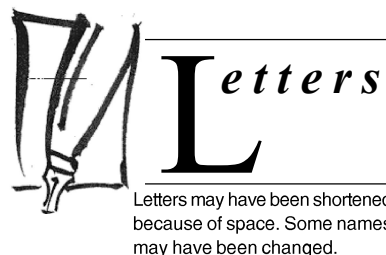
Throughout his current campaign around the mayoral candidacy, Livingstone has made it sufficiently clear that he is prepared to stop it all for a nice cosy junior ministry. He has even been taking special classes in economics to prepare him for such a job. But anyone prepared to bargain over their supposed principals needs to carry some collateral. Livingstone's perceived threat to cohere a New Labour left around himself his bargaining power. He can either direct his supporters to remain within the New Labour fold - as he has up to now - in return for a job, or he can appear to hold out the threat of taking them elsewhere. So 'Red' Ken can cause Blair considerable embarrassment and a little worry.

Livingstone's prostration before the Millbank machine - his promise to stand on a full Blair programme and allow Millbank to run his campaign - has been causing ructions on the revolutionary left. For the SWP in particular - trying on its new electoral clothes - there has been a tactical revolution.

The SWP originally came out in support of Livingstone as Labour's candidate. Tentatively, Paul Foot let it be known - Blair be damned - there would be a 'socialist' candidate: for if Livingstone was not allowed to stand, then he would. Where before the SWP called Livingstone a socialist, it now says that "Livingstone ran away from providing ... a leftwing alternative to Blair with his [recent] comments ... that he had no disagreements with the government" (*Socialist Worker* February 13). It seems the SWP might now be prepared to back a socialist candidate against 'Red' Ken. This is a very positive development unless they still hope to impose Foot on the rest of the left. Despite itself, the SWP is being forced out from under the coat tails of Labour.

The task of revolutionaries is to split the mass of the working class not only from Labour, but from *Labourism*. For this reason developments in and around the Labour left remain important. But there must be no more talk of giving Livingstone a blank cheque. The left should consider backing him only if he breaks with Blair and stands as a socialist - every speaker on Monday *apart* from Livingstone used the 'S' word. We support his *right* to stand, but whether he does or does not, our energies will be directed towards agreeing our own united left candidate, to be chosen after open and democratic debate ●

Marcus Larsen



Party notes

Call for enquiry

On the Saturday January 30 Bloody Sunday demonstration in London, Eibhlin McDonald - effectively the leader of the Spartacist League/Britain - was subjected to a violent assault by Ian Donovan, publisher of *Revolution and Truth*. This attack was serious enough to leave her with cuts and bad bruising around one eye.

The Communist Party opposes violence as a means of settling disputes in the workers' movement. Comrade Donovan's actions were totally wrong, utterly intolerable. We have no hesitation in condemning the attack. We are pleased to see that Ian himself has now repudiated his foolish act. That does not end the question however. More must be said.

First, there is no reason to believe that the SL/B will be displeased with its afternoon's work on this year's commemoration. The standard forms of intervention of this shrill sect are staged provocations.

Ian Donovan is a comrade who was chewed up by the Spartacist League's internal life - he was a member till 1986. The wretched experience of forced hysteria, the nightmarish atmosphere of denunciation and heresy-hunting that is the cultural life of this organisation took a terrible toll. The experience left him and other comrades now outside the ranks of the SL/B with deep emotional scars.

This is something that SL/Bers have been fully aware of and - grotesquely - have *revelled* in. I have personally witnessed SL/Bers taking a ghoulish delight in baiting comrade Donovan in public, fully aware that they were prodding at very sensitive emotional points. He was deliberately brought to the boil over and over again.

Specifically, on the Bloody Sunday march, SL/Bers taunted comrade Donovan as an "RUC supporter" - not an especially endearing thing to shout out on an Irish march, of course. While this was no justification for the assault on comrade McDonald, it is a good example of the type of rubbish that passes for polemic in the twisted world of Spartville.

The logic goes like this: Ian Donovan takes a leading role in the London Socialist Alliance. The Socialist Party is in the London Socialist Alliance. The Socialist Party has a chauvinist line on Ireland. *Ipsa facto*, Ian Donovan is "a Labourite toady and apologist for British imperialism, in the tradition of Arthur Henderson who led the cheering in parliament when James Connolly was shot by a British firing squad". Why? Because "the Labourite Socialist Party *which Donovan defends* upholds this chauvinist tradition" (SL/B statement, February 2).

Of course, *no* examples can be cited of comrade Donovan 'defending' the SP's politics, on Ireland or anything else. In fact, the comrade has views on this question that are more or less identical with the SL/B itself (a form of imperialist economism, in the view of this writer). Accuracy is not the point of Spart polemics, however.

Thus, I remind comrades of the last time the SL/B crossed polemical swords with us. Incredibly, the SL/B claimed that this organisation campaigned on "the demand that the NUM organise a strike ballot" during 1984-85 (Andrew Gastos for SL/B *Weekly Worker* January 9 1997). Readers should bear in mind that this accusation was made in the midst of our work around the Socialist Labour Party, a body then with a fair sprinkling of miners and activists from 84-85 and led by Scargill himself. In the context of the crassly undemocratic culture of the SLP, this lie was effectively an attempt to target our comrades for attack - bureaucratically *and* physically, I would suggest.

SL/B even produced a statement (April 21 1997) - distributed freely to SLPers - that crowed that the *Weekly Worker* "whines that [CPGB] supporters were expelled because of *Workers Hammer* polemics exposing the fact that they were on the wrong side of the class line in the 1984-85 miners strike, by calling for a ballot". Of course, there is a lie added to a lie - here is what we actually said about the fate of SL/B's outrageous fabrications: "... comrades report that witch hunting national executive committee members in the SLP have actually attempted to utilise this Spart-originated 'ballot' rubbish against the Communist Party" (*Weekly Worker* April 10 1997). However, it is not hard to spot the glee in the Sparts' words as they (inaccurately) reported how their fabrications were being used by Scargill's minions to void communists and democrats.

In fact, the SL/B's 'ballot' nonsense lie had barely got off the starting blocks before this paper kicked

it to oblivion. We *challenged* the SL/B to "cite one single leaflet, article or statement" where this 'demand' appeared (Mark Fischer and Tom Ball *Weekly Worker* January 16 1997). Further, we showed how the SL/B had cynically manipulated quotes by omission, deliberately cutting short selections from our press where we went on to actually denounce as "treacherous" the notion of "calling for ... and campaigning for" a ballot (*ibid*).

Thus exposed, the next issue of *Workers Hammer* simply *dropped* the polemic. Like most bullies, SL/Bers are a cowardly outfit, happy to taunt those they perceive of as vulnerable, quick to run squealing in the opposite direction when faced with forces they identify as strong.

Yet while the SL/B has wisely thought better of pursuing this 'ballot' line, it has continued to reiterate the central accusation that this snide polemical jibe was meant to provide some evidence for - ie, that our organisation and others at one time influential on the left of the SLP "constitute a rightwing opposition to Scargill" (*Workers Hammer* April/May). In effect, the SL/B actually gave backhanded, mealy-mouthed support to the Scargillite anti-communist purges. In a polemic against the International Bolshevik Tendency in the latest issue of *Workers Hammer* for example, they actually write that it would be justified to "accuse Scargill - who has stood to the left of the IBT on such crucial questions as the picket line and Soviet defencism - of opportunism in letting them join his party" (*Workers Hammer* January/February 1999).

In other words, the purge was worthy of critical support, or at least a smug silence. Seen through the prism of Spart dogma, Scargill, his handful of NUMists, the Fiscites, the Bullites and other witch hunters represent "the most advanced layer of the proletariat" (*Workers Hammer* February/March 1996). Informed by this 'logic', the SL/B bizarrely characterise the purge as the left wing culling the *right* - which are deemed enemies of the Great Strike and no doubt class traitors to boot. Thus, I am not aware of a single statement where the SL/B has clearly and unequivocally condemned either the witch hunts in the SLP, or the physical violence that has accompanied them. Indeed, I openly challenge it to do so now. Or are you still in a bloc with Scargill on this one, comrades?

The SL/B is clearly an organisation in deep crisis. Readers will be amused by this evaluation of the British group by one of its leading International Secretariat spokespersons, Jon B: "Unable to deal with a somewhat more complex reality, the SL/B resorted to 'simplifying' (ie, falsifying) the positions of our opponents. That is the kiss of death, enabling our opponents to dismiss us as liars and thereby keep their membership sealed off from our criticisms. And if we have to lie about our opponents in order to deal with them it means we have no confidence in ourselves and our programme" ('Opponents' work/propaganda - SL/B and SpAD', July 7 1996, cited in *The Internationalist* September-October 1998, p16).

Thus, even the international SL leadership - a body not renowned in our movement for its own commitment to the truth - characterised the British organisation as liars. And bad ones at that.

Spart-bashing is pretty easy and - given the sorry state of the group - even a little sad for those amongst us with a spark of compassion. However, the concrete issues arising from the attack on a leading SL/Ber must be addressed. We believe that this must happen in an open forum where lessons can be drawn for our entire movement. This is why the Communist Party is backing the call for the London Socialist Alliance - of which comrade Donovan is chair - to convene a commission of enquiry into this incident.

Comrades from a variety of political backgrounds are being approached. Certainly, any Communist Party members who are involved - either as commission members or as witnesses - will not be bound by Party discipline. They will be free to argue for what they see fit on this sensitive question. Our Party urges that all protagonists commit themselves to accept the recommendation of such a body. We believe that this is the principled way to deal with this unfortunate event. In its own way, such an approach can be an important example of the type of culture revolutionaries need to build - open, democratic and accountable to the movement we all purport to serve ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Bitter truth

I never thought that my little letter would appear in a British communist newspaper (*Weekly Worker* February 4). You may publish what I say if you wish, at least to stimulate discussion. It is simply the bitter truth, without rancour.

In fact I have never lived in Moscow, as you indicated, but in Ufa (Russia), and since 1993 in the USA. As a co-founder of all countrywide Esperanto organisations (Soviet Esperanto Youth Movement, Association of Soviet Esperantists, Soviet Esperantist Union, Russian Esperantist Union) I was very well acquainted with the SSOD (Soviet Society for International Friendship and Cultural Links), its members and leaders, in all matters connected with Esperanto.

However, I was never a communist. Once I wanted to join the party, but was considered unsuitable: I was not a (manual) worker nor a boss; I was here too young, there too old; and finally and chiefly (but this was not said directly) I am a Jew - and the CPSU after World War II was anti-semitic. True, it concealed its anti-semitism, unlike the present communist parties in Russia.

Perhaps these things are known to you, but they are a bitter truth. I like the beautiful idea of communism, but I know that the CPSU has compromised it forever by its ugly actions.

I am aware that many western communists are not like that and sincerely believe in that ideal and fight for it honestly. And that is praiseworthy. I know this particularly, because I worked as an interpreter with French technicians and workers, among whom were communists and supporters.

Sincere communists (not those who profit from their communism) do things which are very useful for everyone. Alas, history shows that when communists start to rule a country they often forget ideals, seek personal profit for themselves and suppress democracy. The fact that the CPSU became a party of the bureaucracy, not the working class, was understood by Soviet people already in the 1970s. I do not know whether British communists knew that then.

As to the idea that a counterrevolution took place around 1928, that is roughly correct, if you wish to use Marxist language. You could also say, if you absolutely must have a definition, that there was installed in the Soviet Union a strange state capitalism with socialist ideology in words.

Because Soviet newspapers were under ideological pressure, I used my language ability to read *L'Humanité* and the *Daily Worker*. One could see there at least a little of what was hidden by the CPSU. But western communists were not always more liberal than the CPSU. They were and are sometimes just as conservative, or even more so. If my memory serves me well, around 1991 I heard on Moscow Radio the Moscow correspondent of the *Daily Worker* [*Morning Star* - ed], and he was very conservative - much more conservative at that moment than the Soviet people could accept.

Boris Kolker
USA

Unbiased

Thank you for sending me the *Weekly Worker*. Although it took some while to understand the complex 'in-fighting' between the multitude of different political parties, your paper has been unbiased and covered them in real detail.

I myself am a member of the Communist Party of Britain, which I joined last year. When I joined I did not know that the CPB used to be called the CPGB. Nonetheless I agree with the overwhelming majority of their policies and hope to stand as a communist in my ward when I have finished my A-levels.

Despite being a member of the CPB, I help the local Labour group and have close links with the Socialist Workers Party, regularly going to their discussions. I certainly

have no time for the sectarian divides over politics. I view the above groups as being integral members of the wide-banding labour movement and firmly believe that when the left is split the alternative is basically 18 years of Conservative government.

One of the most interesting articles in the *Weekly Worker* was on Socialist Unity. The potential for a united mass socialist party is one that should not be missed and your efforts in forging Socialist Unity are highly commendable. Although it would be foolish to say that there are not significant differences between parties, the base line in reality is that unless general unification can be achieved, individual parties will simply be 'picked off' (eg, Militant and most recently the Socialist Labour Party).

I personally believe that the left will unite eventually and that parties which maintain sectarian boundaries will crumble and eventually be included in bigger parties. I hope that the efforts of both your party and the other left parties which contributed to Socialist Unity truly realise the enormous potential behind uniting together. The old saying - "United we stand, divided we fall" - could not be more true.

Once again thank you for your paper and the best of luck for the future.

Sam Earl
Norwich

Lost touch

I did not know you lot were still going. I thought you had become Democratic Left or something?

Anyhow, I read the article by 'Delphi' ('The gravedigger's apprentice' *Weekly Worker* January 28) on Stalin and Harpal Brar on your website, and that is a real sound bit of writing. He is an SLP bloke, I gather - how close are you to them?

If you have a general manifesto you could point me at on the web, I would be interested. My old man (big time Stalinist) was a member for years so I like to keep up. Also, if you could take me through the myriad splits and regroupings that go on I would be grateful. My dad thinks I ended up in the Friends of the *Morning Star* outfit (Communist Campaign Group) but I lost touch long before that.

Tom Roughan
Leeds

Free Mumia

A campaign under the name 'Mumia must live!' has been launched in Britain to join the international fight to free death row prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal and abolish the racist death penalty, open to all who agree with the above two slogans. A public meeting in London on January 28 drew about 50 people to watch the video *Live from Death Row* and engage in a lively debate on the best way to campaign for his freedom. Organisations participating in the meeting included the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT), Anarchist Communist Federation (ACF), Movement for Justice, Spartacist League, Workers Power, former members of Friends of Move, and many unaligned comrades.

Mumia Must Live! was launched two weeks later at a follow-up meeting which discussed a huge number of ideas for activities, publicity and building support for Mumia's cause. The ACF and IBT have endorsed the campaign and other organisations are likely to follow. The group will also seek support from prominent figures such as musicians, comedians, politicians, and from trade unions, youth, religious and political organisations.

To get involved, or to endorse the campaign, contact Mumia Must Live!, BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX, or email: marxistbulletin@babeuf.actrix.gen.nz.

Mumia Must Live!
London

Irish liquidators liquidate

Long journey's end

On January 24 Ireland's Democratic Left merged with the Irish Labour Party - for the DL it was the last step in a long and circuitous evolution from revolutionary anti-imperialism into the bourgeois mainstream.

In return for dissolving themselves its four TDs (MPs) have been rewarded with leading positions. DL's last president, Proinsias de Rossa, is the new foreign affairs spokesperson. There are now 21 TDs on the Labour benches, but this is still well below the 33 members it had in the 166-seat Dáil after the 1992 parliamentary elections.

The groundwork for the liquidation was laid between 1994 and 1997, when both parties formed part of a right-left coalition government cobbled together by John Bruton's Fine Gael. The FG-LP-DL alliance was defeated at the June 1997 general election by the present coalition of Fianna Fáil, under taoiseach Bertie Ahern, and the small group of Progressive Democrats.

Fianna Fáil itself had its origins in republican armed struggle against British rule. In fact the history of Ireland in the 20th century is in many ways a sorry saga of former militant liberation fighters first accommodating to, and then wholeheartedly embracing the bourgeois establishment (and imperialism). DL's evolution is unusual only in the route it took - via an Irish version of 'official communism'.

Organised in the Six Counties as the Communist Party of Northern Ireland, 'official communists' exhorting a reformist influence on the republican movement in the mid-60s, steering it away from armed resistance to British occupation and towards an emphasis on a nonviolent campaign for civil rights. But what was in effect the championing of catholic rights in the gerrymandered statelet was not seen as opening the way to a broader, mass revolutionary struggle. Far from it. The idea was to sideline the national question through the winning of a 'democratic' bourgeois Six Counties - where protestants and catholics would hopefully forget their nationality, and be able to get on with the job of fighting the 'class struggle' just as it was being fought on the other side of the Irish Sea - through 'normal' trade union-type politics.

But the abandoning of military methods (and thus guns) left the nationalist population defenceless when the sectarian Northern Ireland statelet, along with the Paisleyites, launched an anti-catholic pogrom in 1969. First-hand experience of this CPNI form of 'communism' led militant republicans not only to reject its methodology, but to adopt anti-communism. The Provisionals were born on this basis.

The revolutionary situation in the Six Counties exerted continuous pressure on all republicans, including those who did not split to join the Provisionals. The Officials first declared a ceasefire and then slowly began to evolve in a counterrevolutionary direction. The Provisionals were branded "fascist terrorists" and "anti-working class". In 1977 Official Sinn Féin changed its name to Sinn Féin-the Workers' Party. As the name implies, here was an attempt to reconcile the traditions of republicanism and 'official communism'. But it

.....
 “‘Official communism’ allowed this particular strand to excuse its betrayal, while claiming still to espouse the cause of liberation”

was 'official communism', albeit without the 'official communists', which proved the dominant pole. It was a short-lived experiment. In 1982 'Sinn Féin' was dropped and the organisation became simply the Workers' Party. The following extract from a 1985 pamphlet gives a taste of the transformation:

"The Workers' Party states that the demilitarisation of Northern Ireland society is a critical component in the struggle for peace, democracy and the creation of new viable political institutions.

"... Northern Ireland has suffered terrorism for 14 years. It is vital that not only should terrorism be defeated, but that we should learn in the process lessons which will enable us to build a strong democracy ... The elimination of terrorism and the establishment of the rule of law must be considered a priority by all the democratic parties.

"... The state and all its institutions must be bound by the rule of law. To depart from that principle is not only to demean the state and its servants. It is to place the state on the same plain [sic] as the terrorist. Once again we say that there can be no question of the struggle against terrorism as being seen as some sort of war between the state's gang and the terrorist gang" (Workers' Party *The case for devolved government in Northern Ireland* Dublin 1985, p23).

The rejection by former IRA fighters like de Rossa of everything they had once stood for was already clear. The Workers' Party, in its pathetic attempt to attract protestant workers in the Six Counties, had not only renounced republicanism, but

embraced the unionist status quo and imperialism itself.

Those British reformists and 'official communists' who did not hail the WP outright considered nevertheless that at least its move from nationalism to 'socialism' was a positive step. The exact opposite was the case. The IRA conducted a revolutionary struggle *against the state* - although its nationalism prevented it from adopting an internationalist, working class approach. But the WP's mouthing of 'Marxist' phrases were, as we shall see, a cover for a full-blooded retreat by its leadership into the arms of reaction.

Although the WP originated in the turmoil of the north, it never won much of a following in the Six Counties. Its present claim to fame is through its sponsorship of the anti-revolutionary Families against Intimidation and Terror - which receives open backing (and almost certainly covert funding) from the British state.

However, as with Sinn Féin, the WP adopted a different face in the south. When the Labour Party entered into coalition with Fine Gael in 1982, the WP was able to partially fill the vacuum Labour left behind. In the late 70s Labour had swung to the left after being ejected from a previous alliance with Fine Gael by electoral defeat in 1977. During its six years in the wilderness it had been viewed by some as a party of working class opposition.

During the 80s, with Labour back in government, the WP's electoral support in the Republic began to rise. Opinion polls showed ratings as high as six percent. Although the Communist Party of Ireland remained in existence, the WP, without the disadvantage of having the word 'communist' in its name, assumed the mantle of 'official communism'. In the general election of 1989 it made a national breakthrough with the election of seven TDs (4.97% of first-preference votes), while in the June 1991 local elections it won 24 council seats. The WP's Tomás Mac Giolla became lord mayor of Dublin in 1993.

In parallel to these developments, however, a crisis was building up within the WP. As party president, de Rossa had been closely following events within the Communist Party of Great Britain and elsewhere. Like *Marxism Today* he condemned the use of the "outmoded terms of Marxism-Leninism" and regretted the "Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917". For de Rossa, "In crude terms the communist tradition was only capable of taking power in economically backward countries or on the backs of the Red Army" (statement to members, February 1992).

De Rossa proposed to 'reconstitute' the party. After a major rebellion against his leadership he led an elite breakaway following the special congress of February 1992, taking with him six of the TDs and most of the councillors into Democratic Left. The WP claimed to have retained the loyalty of the majority of members, but it is clear that it is now a shell of its former self.

Prior to the split de Rossa wrote: "The decision to have a special *ard fheis* to reconstitute the party has been represented by some critics as a panic measure by a parliamentary cabal who would be better off in the

Labour Party ... These statements are not true" (February 1992). Almost exactly seven years later de Rossa and co are Labour Party members.

Tony Heffernan, another prominent leader of the DL split and now one of the Labour Party's two press officers, told me that the membership "wouldn't have been ready" to go straight into Labour in 1992. Heffernan, who was Official Sinn Féin's joint general secretary in the 1970s, described the republican movement he joined in 1968 as "sectarian" and "a spent force". Yet back in 1982 he had opposed the dropping of 'Sinn Féin' from the WP's name.

Just 18 months after its creation DL was propelled into government by the 'Whelehan affair', which caused the downfall of the Fianna Fáil administration. Labour abandoned its coalition partner and switched to Fine Gael, but the two needed DL's votes in the Dáil to secure a majority. However, at the 1997 general election the support of both Labour and DL (compared to its previous showing as the WP) fell dramatically. No doubt their return to the opposition benches acted as a catalyst for the merger.

Despite the Labour Party's temporary lurch to the left ("the 70s will be socialist" was its slogan), it is very much an establishment party, having formed a part of no fewer than five coalition administrations since then. The question as to *which* of the two main bourgeois parties it should back has been a secondary one. Of course it has never been in a position to *lead* a government, being very much a minority party. Its present leader, Ruairi Quinn, was instrumental in the expulsion of Militant in the 80s. Under Quinn and his predecessor, Dick Spring, Labour has undergone its own 'Blairisation', but this has been of little concern to de Rossa, whose positions in recent years have often been to the right of Labour. While still president of the Workers' Party he called for the reintroduction of internment.

Nobody could have predicted 30 years ago that de Rossa's trajectory away from revolutionary republicanism would have taken him into the Labour Party. Nevertheless, the untheorised, fragile nature of kneejerk anti-British sentiment causes many to fall prey to demoralisation and eventually to abandon every anti-imperialist principle. They can end up in all sorts of strange camps. 'Official communism' allowed this particular strand to excuse its betrayal, while claiming still to espouse the cause of liberation.

As Proinsias de Rossa, writing for almost the last time as the WP president, put it, "In the case of the Workers' Party both a certain kind of Soviet Marxist ideology and the associated ideology of the vanguard party and democratic centralism may have served a positive transitional function, as the republican movement struggled to transform itself and shed backward nationalism and militarism" (statement to members, February 1992).

The likes of de Rossa have settled instead for bourgeois respectability. How long before Nina Temple's Democratic Left follows the example and quietly slinks off into Blair's Labour Party? ●

Peter Manson

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday February 21, 5pm - 'Crisis theory in the Marxist tradition', using Simon Clarke's *Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide.

For details phone 0181-459 7146.

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

■ Party wills

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

■ London Socialist Alliance

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

■ Critique conference '99

'Political economy of post-Cold War capitalism'.

Sessions:

1. Intellectual crisis: Bertell Ollman, Savaas Matsas, Ian Spencer;
2. Crisis of social democracy: William Dixon, Mick Cox, Peter Kennedy;
3. The crisis itself: Hillel Ticktin, Bob Arnott, David Harvey.

Plus workshops

Conway Hall, February 20, 10am-6pm. £10 waged; £5 unwaged.

For more information - 0141-330 4377.

■ 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.

■ March for jobs!

There will be a major demonstration in Cologne on May 29 to coincide with the heads of government summit of the EU. This will be a protest against unemployment, job insecurity, social exclusion and racism. This will be the follow-up march to the 50,000-strong demonstration in Amsterdam in June 1997. The Cologne demonstration is expected to be at least the same size, if not bigger.

To organise effective participation from Britain under the banner of Cologne '99 a meeting has been called open to all interested organisations and individuals. It will be held on Saturday March 6 at ULU Malet Street London, 11.30-4.30pm (nearest tube Goudge Street).

For more details contact Andy Robertson (secretary of Euromarch Liaison Committee). Tel: 0191-222 0299.

E-mail: EUROMUK@aol.com.

■ Dover Residents Against Racism

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

■ Support Tameside careworkers

Support Group meets every Monday, 7pm, at the Station pub, Warrington Street, Ashton under Lyne.

Donations and solidarity to Tameside Union, 29 Booth Street, Ashton under Lyne.

■ Strike Support Group

Solidarity with workers in struggle. Meets every Monday at 7.30pm. The Cook Tavern, Phoenix Road, Euston.

For more information call 0171-249 0041 or write to SSG, 145 Imperial Avenue, Victorian Road, London N16 8HL.

'Union' Jack and defence of the 'British nation' - part 1

'Progress' and the

So, the task of opposing the Communist Tendency and the Red Republicans has passed from Mark Fischer to Jack Conrad. Jack's contribution to the debate on the national question in the UK largely consists of a two-millennium romp through British history, prefaced by an outline of Stalin's *Marxism and the national question*.

Jack's resort to Stalin's theory of the nation forces him to adopt some of the notions of the high social democracy which developed in the heyday of imperialism. Most Second International social democrats viewed capitalism as progressive and socialism as inevitable. Each nation or "definite community of people" was brought about "by the dynamic of capitalism". Acknowledging the social democratic provenance of Stalin's theory, Jack states that "Karl Kautsky had a similar objective approach." Thus, provided your nation passed the 'objective' test of being 'historic', there should be a one-directional movement towards a greater unity, which 'objectively' helped to create the basis for a socialist future. This notion has certainly given much succour both to the British Marxist and wider 'Brit left' traditions from Henry Hyndman, the SDF and Sidney Webb to the CPGB, Neil Kinnock and Tam Dalyell.

For Jack, nations cannot arise until there has been a sufficient development of the productive forces. Therefore nations can only be said to exist with the triumph of capitalism. The first weakness in Jack's approach arises from his concentration on the 'objective' development of economic forces and his ditching any notion of dialectical contradiction expressed through class struggle. Jack's method is more akin to the bourgeois materialist approach of Ernest Gellner and the neo-Second International Marxism of Eric Hobsbawm. Faced with this, it needs to be emphasised that nations and nationalism rise primarily due to political, not economic factors. Their fullest development comes about as a product of increasingly democratic practice connected with rising class struggle, which then leads to further growth in the scope of democratic and national ideas. Elements, which later contributed to fuller democracy and to modern nations, can be seen to have existed before capitalism became dominant.

Marxists and others have examined the notion of 'primitive democracy' associated with pre-state communal social systems. The Scottish historian, William Skene, in *Celtic Scotland* describes an example of this in the Outer Hebrides, still remaining in 1847. Land was tilled, sowed and reaped in common and the crops divided amongst the producers. This was all arranged through assemblies of the males in the township. Now, one of the features of communal societies is the integrated nature of what would later, with the development of a state, and even more so with the development of capitalist social relations, become separate economic and political arenas. The notion of democracy itself could not really develop until a separate political arena arose, so it was 'unrecognised' by its practitioners in communal societies. In retrospect, though, we can identify 'primitive democratic' aspects of this communal form of society.

Furthermore, when such societies are severely disrupted by external

Allan Armstrong of the Red Republican faction of the SSP replies to 'Unenlightened Myths' (Weekly Worker November 19 1998)

pressure, as occurred with the clearances, then the class struggles and political awareness arising from these can bring new life to previously socially embedded and undeclared 'democratic' practices. A new democracy, resulting from the mixing of the old and new, can arise. Such an occurrence partly inspired the Highland Land League, which itself gave impetus to the Scottish Labour Party's first attempts to stand independent candidates against the Liberals in 1889.

Similarly, we can recognise democratic notions held in the class-divided medieval urban communes, by Scottish Presbyterians such as Knox and Buchanan in the 16th century, and by the English Republicans in the 17th century. Their notions of democracy (again, not always expressed as such) were limited by the social conditions of their time - yet are recognisable today nevertheless. Many Levellers entertained a notion of a small property-owning democracy consisting of yeomen and artisans. Some opposed the extension of the franchise to wage-workers because they were seen to be under the control of their masters. A similar argument of lack of independence, rooted in lack of property rights, was also used to deny women the vote. Despite such limitations, communists today should have little difficulty recognising the democratic character of the Levellers, in contrast to the military republican Caesarism of Cromwell, or the 'divine right of kings' notions held by the Stuart kings.

Similarly, the term 'nation', along with many other notions, which we would regard today as contributing to the modern idea of nations and nationalism, predate both full bourgeois democracy and the development of capitalism. It was with the advance of democratic ideas in the American and French Revolutions that the notion of a nation incorporating all the male citizens first took firm root. Of course, it took most of another century and more, long after capitalist social relations had been firmly established, for the franchise to be extended to all male and female citizens, or to previously excluded ethnic minorities, in most 'advanced' capitalist states. However, the wider influence of more democratic notions meant that the ideal nation could now incorporate all of its members (including women and children), before the franchise itself was more fully extended.

Today, of course, it is widely accepted that a 'sovereign nation' expresses its political will through having the fullest suffrage. For bourgeois democrats universal suffrage guarantees that the working class has a place and say in the running of society. Communists, however, say that such bourgeois democracy disguises the real political relations which exist in a class-divided society. Democracy can only exist when these class divisions are fundamentally addressed.

Despite the limits of the bourgeois understanding of democracy, there can be little doubt that there is a close link between the idea of a wider franchise and the idea of a nation which incorporates all its citizens. It is the

vote which makes you a full citizen of the nation. This is central to most versions of developed or modern nationalism, even if the nationalists themselves do not always adhere in practice to the fullest tenets of bourgeois democracy. However, neither universal suffrage nor modern nationalism suddenly emerged out of nowhere, with the triumph of capitalism.

There is a second problem with Jack's approach. The "dynamic of capitalism" was not an inevitable outcome of history and was and remains constantly contested. Even in those parts of the British Isles, where capitalism developed out of an internal dynamic and was not imposed from without, there were other possible outcomes. Communal and freehold land was long defended by the peasantry, whilst artisans long resisted waged labour under direct capitalist supervision. Furthermore, despite the disparaging put-downs of those advocates of the 'inevitable' and 'progressive' development of capitalism, the resistance offered by peasants and artisans was not always a conservative defence of the existing order. The Levellers and the Diggers; the various United and Corresponding Societies in Ireland, Scotland and England; and the Chartists - all fought to achieve new social orders, which, to different extents, represented real historical alternatives to the capitalism which did emerge.

Jack's theory, however, needs capitalism to 'objectively' emerge, and to open up the road to 'progress', as much as the nationalists need their nation-states to emerge 'naturally'. This presents Jack with further problems when dealing with pre-capitalist societies. For it seems central to Jack's understanding that only the development of larger economic units can provide the basis for capitalism and its nation-states later in history. By ignoring the actual class struggles which did take place in pre-capitalist societies, Jack has to look for other bearers of historical 'progress'. In particular he is looking for "revolutionary centralisers" such as Edward I, 'Hammer of the Scots'!

If we are examining societies which offered some possibility of 'progress' in the Middle Ages, it certainly was not the dynastic empires, whether Plantagenet, Hapsburg or Capetian. The most 'advanced' societies of the period were to be found in the city states of northern Italy, in Flanders and later in the Hanseatic League. These cities, which were major production and trading centres, faced both intense class struggles within and attempts by surrounding feudal magnates and empires to subordinate them and impose a fully feudal order. Many of these cities preserved their political independence for several centuries. Their richness, productivity and command of resources gained through trade (and sometimes plunder), allowed them to hold off the power of seemingly much vaster feudal-imperial states. These conflicts were prolonged and many city states did succumb, as the dynastic empires grew in size, enabling them to field much larger armies. Wherever these

dynastic empires succeeded in overthrowing independent cities, progress was halted and society pushed back. A possible alternative path of social development was aborted.

However, it was not only in the major city-states that such resistance to the feudal dynasts took place. In some areas, like Switzerland and Scotland, urban centres were relatively close to rural societies where feudalisation either had not yet penetrated deeply, or was still being contested, whether by a free peasantry or those still involved in more patriarchal communal production.

Jack's support for "revolutionary centralisers", like Edward I, puts him in direct opposition to those contemporaneous heroic struggles led by the William Wallace in Scotland, Pieter de Coninck in Flanders and William Tell in Switzerland. William Wallace, a minor non-noble landholder, led an army of mainly foot soldiers, backed by urban burgesses, against the feudal host of Edward I. The new schiltrons military formation he pioneered, with its tight blocks of foot soldiers, projecting long pikes from every side, proved capable of dealing with attacks by the previously undefeatable medieval 'panzer divisions' - the mounted feudal lords and knights. At Stirling Bridge in 1297, Wallace's army provided a similar upset to the arrogant feudal order as Pieter de Coninck's weaver pikemen did at Courtrai in 1302 and the Swiss foresters and their urban allies did at Morgarten in 1315.

Nor is it necessary to place William Wallace in an unbroken nationalist tradition. Communists do, however, champion those heroic struggles which were the product of resistance to the tyranny of the day and which strove, within the limitations of the period, for a wider idea of freedom. Hence our admiration for Spartacus, Wat Tyler, the Hussites, Anabaptists, Levellers and many others who have filled this role in the past.

Despite what Jack appears to believe, William Wallace was not a Norman lord. *Braveheart* may indeed be largely "Hollywood hokum", but enjoyable nevertheless. However, the one unrelenting message that comes across is Scottish commoner hostility to the feudal nobility. Neither is it Patrick McGeehan's wonderfully portrayed Edward I of England who appears most sinister. This role is reserved for the completely unprincipled Scottish feudal lord, the elder Bruce. The treacherous role of Robert the Bruce, at the Battle of Falkirk, is also portrayed. Bruce then represented the interests of feudal lords with land in both Scotland and England, who were fearful of the growing resistance of the commoners. Furthermore, unlike the Scottish feudal host, which merely agreed to new terms of submission, after being thoroughly defeated by Edward I at Dunbar in 1296, William Wallace and his allies fell back once more on a guerrilla war after the defeat at Falkirk in 1298. In the end it was the Scottish nobles who betrayed Wallace to Edward, handing him over for torture and execution. Despite some amusing historical anachronisms and colourful alterations in location, even *Braveheart* has a sounder grasp of the class issues at stake than Jack.

Jack finally attempts to dismiss the whole affair by quoting the academic historian, Michael Lynch: "The celebrated Declaration of Arbroath ac-

quired its status of a surrogate Scottish constitution only in modern times." The Declaration of Arbroath was written in 1320, long after the death of Wallace, at a time when the war against the kings of England was firmly back in the hands of Robert the Bruce, now king, and the feudal nobility of Scotland. We can agree that this Declaration includes only the most embryonic and limited idea of the 'nation', and more importantly excluded most commoners - the peasantry and artisans. Furthermore, it was in no way inevitable that a Scottish nation or nationalism would develop. But Jack is wrong about the date and circumstances which led to the re-emergence of the Declaration of Arbroath from its long period of relative historical obscurity. It was resurrected by Sir James Mackintosh in his *Vindiciae Gallicae*, written in 1791 to defend the French Revolution in the face of Edmund Burke's attack!

However, if we turn to William Wallace, he provided a constant inspiration both to the 'lower orders' in Scotland, and to later struggles for freedom, whether democratic, national or international. Blind Harry's *Wallace* was written about 1477 and appeared in 23 printed editions up to the Act of Union in 1707. It was translated and adapted by William Gilbertfield in 1722 and became the most commonly owned book in Scotland after the bible. Rewritten as a novel by Jane Porter in 1810, it was translated into French, German and Russian, but banned by Napoleon as too subversive! The legacy of Wallace was very much an influence in the period of the Great Revolutions following from 1789. Burns, Wordsworth, Lord Byron and others were inspired by his example. Burns' anthem, *Scots wha' hae' wi' Wallace bled*, became an alternative anthem to the *Marseillaise* and was sung by black Cato Street conspirator, Davidson, as he was escorted away by the Bow Street Runners in 1820. Ten thousand Scottish democrats had also marched in 1815 to Wallace's first battlefield in Ayrshire.

It is wrong to try and project modern democratic and national ideas back into the times of Wallace. There is no unilinear or inevitable outcome to history and nation-states may well not have arisen. However, as democratic struggles did indeed widen their scope and fuse increasingly with nation-building, it is important that we can appreciate the significant class struggles and historical turning points in history, which allowed for the possibility of new social and political developments.

Thus, although Jack does make the point that "nations come into existence and will certainly go out of existence", his commitment to Stalin's social democratic theory leads him astray. For, although Stalin's theory appears to allow for a more dialectical approach, through the introduction of an historical element in the make-up of the 'nation', this is vitiated by his view that capitalism was historically 'inevitable' and represented the only 'progressive' option in history prior to socialism. We have already seen how Jack has to resort to "revolutionary centralisers" to prepare the ground for capitalism. However, once firmly established, the 'objective' "dynamics of capitalism" eliminate all contradictions and begin to chalk up Stalin's ideal checklist characteristics of the nation one by one. Furthermore, in

nation

contrast to the nationalists, Jack also sees these 'objective' "dynamics of capitalism" going further and preparing the ground for superseding the nation and nation-state under socialism.

Now, in this view Jack is not alone. An increasing number of neo-liberal, 'free' market advocates of the new global economy and the New World Order view the continued development of capitalism (albeit 'post-industrial') as inevitably bringing about the merging of states and of peoples. They believe that their new capitalist economy, based on transnational corporations and the widespread use of information technology and linked through the worldwide web, will finally bring about 'the global village'. So blinkered are these ideologues that they leave unexplained the formation of at least a dozen new states in Europe since 1991.

But there are also Marxist adherents in the 'capital logic' school who echo this theme. For, if you abstract the development of capitalist social relations from the actual state and social formations within which they developed, there is no apparent reason why capitalism should not create a genuinely global economy with a single global political centre. However, capitalism did not develop on the basis of its own logic, but out of the contradictions of already existing pre-capitalist social systems. Furthermore, this development began in a number of independent centres and developed at different rates.

Although a global market was created relatively quickly from the 16th century, a single integrated global capitalist production system has still not been developed. Imperialist competition remains the key characteristic of the current world economy. Capitalism also coexisted and continues to coexist with non-capitalist relations of production - slave, bonded, domestic, artisan and peasant labour, even if it has increased its power to subordinate these to its needs. It is this historically multi-centred, combined and uneven development of capitalism and its associated class struggle which largely account for the increased number of new states and the advance of some nations along with the decline of others. Furthermore, only conscious class struggle can lead to the superseding of nation-states.

Although Jack never makes it explicit, he is right in assuming we need some idea of 'progress'. However, if the notion of 'progress' is based on the development of the forces of production and their greater centralisation, it will become totally disconnected with any idea of human emancipation. Liberal theorists used to champion the European colonisation (read conquest) of North America, which they claimed paved the way for the 'advanced' capitalism found in the USA. The 'small matter' of genocide was largely ignored. Indeed, it is not so long since some western historians attributed the greater economic development of states like the USA and Canada, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay to the relative 'absence' of American Indians, compared to countries like Mexico and Peru!

However, it was not only liberal economic theorists who defined progress by the degree of development of productive forces. As hundreds of thousands were sent to labour camps, or were shot or deliberately starved of

food and shelter, in Stalin's USSR, many socialists turned a blind eye and looked on in admiration at the growing tonnage of coal and steel produced. Such notions of 'progress' cannot lead to human emancipation.

Worse still, if some continue to see external conquest as a legitimate contribution to human 'progress', it also follows that, if the 'ruined fragments', represented by remnant crushed peoples, are not to remain a constant reservoir of 'backwardness' or possible source of support for reaction, then the best 'solution' is complete genocide! There are plenty of precedents for such actions, whether the elimination of the Guanches in the Canaries by the Spanish or the Caribs in the West Indies and numerous native American peoples by the Spanish, English, British and white Americans. And it is not only in Africa, Latin America and Asia that such notions of 'salvation', 'improvement' and 'progress' held sway. They have informed the extremes of Ulster loyalism, white supremacism in the USA and Serb Chetnik actions in Bosnia and Kosova. These notions have not just contributed to the actions of the far right. During World War II Stalin practised genocide against the Crimean Tartars. And, in order to build up a wider base of support in central Europe for his invading Red Army, Stalin actively encouraged Czechs and others to physically eliminate Germans living in 'their' territories. Germans were now, in effect, relegated to 'unhistoric' pariah status, because they had succumbed to the Nazis.

Recently, the growing heroic resistance and consequent cultural and political re-emergence of the still remaining native American peoples has forced a new questioning of the baleful legacy of 'progress' externally enforced by conquest. In Mexico, the Zapatista movement, for example, has directly confronted the political agents of the transnational corporations and their US imperialist-sponsored 'multinational' Nafta. Such developments highlight the need to jettison some of the outdated notions of 'progress'.

We have to look instead to whether historical progress led to greater real freedom or not. The key distinction, therefore, is whether new social relations were the result of attempts to resolve internal class contradictions arising out of pre-capitalist or only partly capitalist conditions, or whether they were imposed by conquest. The former was certainly the case in England and parts of Scotland. In other areas, capitalist relations were sharply imposed from without. This was true of much of the capitalist development of the Highlands and Ireland, and of course in the Americas, following the suppression of the communal production relations there, in the aftermath of Columbus. Capitalism, which develops out of internal domestic contradictions, may indeed be progressive in comparison with its preceding social system. Although once again it has to be remembered that many of those struggling to overcome these contradictions did not have capitalism as their ideal. However, capitalism which has been imposed by conquest is not progressive.

The idea of progress has become closely linked to the idea of 'historic' nations first put forward by Georg Hegel. Marx and Engels were initially deeply affected by this legacy. Engels,

in particular, was vehement in his denunciation of the role of the "ruined fragments of peoples", the "unhistoric peoples" utilised by reaction to crush the German and Hungarian Revolutions in 1848. The Ukrainian Marxist, Roman Rosdolsky, in his *Engels and the 'non-historic' peoples*, however, has exposed the role of middle class German and Hungarian nationalism in these revolutions. The mainly middle class revolutionaries failed to champion the cause of the downtrodden peasantry of central and eastern Europe. This was the real cause of the mainly Slav peasantry's shift into the arms of the counterrevolution.

Furthermore, as the centre of gravity of revolution moved increasingly eastwards in the 19th century, the same peasantry became increasingly revolutionary and "unhistoric peoples" became 'historic'. In addition, Russia, an undoubted 'historic' nation, but which for Marx and Engels had previously represented an undifferentiated block of deep reaction, later became the very epicentre of revolution. Marx and Engels, later in life, were already registering these changes and modifying their theories of national development accordingly. By the end of the century Kautsky was also viewing the role of Slavs, such as the Czechs, positively. But the earlier enlightenment and liberal notions, particularly of certain "unhistoric peoples" when applied to colonial non-white Africa, the Americas and Asia, made a deep impression on Second International social democracy. These notions were later absorbed uncritically by certain schools of Marxism.

Now, if "unhistoric peoples" can become 'historic' under the impact of particular class struggles, it also follows, unless you hold to a single unilinear view of 'progress', that apparent 'historic' nations can become 'unhistoric'. The key to determining such shifts lies in the changing nature of the class struggle within the particular nation. It is this class struggle-based view that helps us to understand the development of the UK state, British empire and rise of the 'British nation'. It also enables us to appreciate the decline of the British empire, UK state and the likely impending demise of Jack's 'British nation'.

It is significant that in Jack's excursion through "Britannic" history from the "withdrawal of the Roman legions in the fifth century" to the Tory "opposition to Irish home rule", class struggle is virtually absent. When class is allowed to intrude into Jack's unfolding great "Britannic" pageant, there is only one class imposing its will. When conflicts do occur, they are only the 'family' concerns of the dominant class of the time: between "rival feudal interests" in the 14th century or "religio-dynastic struggle between Stuarts and Hanoverians" in the 17th and 18th centuries. Ironically, this is also the view of nationalist historians - it is just that, in the case of Scotland, they support the other side in these 'family' quarrels! Jack supports "revolutionary centraliser" Edward I, whilst nationalists support Robert the Bruce; Jack supports William of Orange and the Hanoverians, whilst the nationalists support the Jacobites - James VII and Bonnie Prince Charlie.

By failing to adopt a class struggle-based view, Jack once more finds himself looking for 'objective' structures and 'motors' to build and drive his 'British nation'. The underlying social democratic theory Jack adopts continues to take its toll. He resorts to an undeclared geographical determinism to conjure up "a common territory of Britain". Thus, going back to the dim mists of history, he declares that, "A Britannic approach which accounts for the existence of many overlapping cultures is far more accurate and rewarding" than the "traditionally academic historiography [which] has been taught within an in-

vented 'national' paradigm".

The problem with Jack's "Britannic approach" is that this is just about as restricting as the nationalist approach he opposes. In reality, Jack is not offering an alternative to a nationalist approach. He is just anticipating a bigger nation - the 'British nation' - to develop his view of history. So whilst the "revolutionary centralisers" are carrying out the task of building the preconditions for capitalism, Jack introduces us to the iron necessity of geography, the "Britannic approach" to create the preconditions for the 'British nation'.

Roman Britannia was merely a peripheral province of a much larger Roman empire, the history of which cannot be understood without taking this much larger area into consideration. Furthermore, Roman Britannia never encompassed the whole of 'Britain', never mind the British Isles. When it comes to the age of invading "Germanic cultures", once again "a Britannic approach" divides the two sides of the North Sea where these "Germanic cultures" developed. Temporary Northumbrian advances notwithstanding, "Germanic" advances left the majority of geographical Scotland and Ireland virtually untouched. Similar problems arise when it comes to the Scandinavians. None of the Scandinavian kingdoms covered the whole of the British Isles. Some were independent of the original Scandinavian homeland, whilst others formed part of the wider kingdoms of Norway and Denmark. And despite nearly being overwhelmed, an Anglo-Saxon kingdom held out in Wessex, an amalgamated Scots-Pictish kingdom formed in Alba, and also various Welsh and Irish petty kingdoms and lordships survived the Viking onslaught.

Exactly the same problem emerges with the Normans. Along with their Angevin, Plantagenet, Lancastrian, Yorkist and Tudor successor kingdoms, their territories always, to different extents, crossed the English Channel. What was the Hundred Years War about? - did royal fortunes in France not have a considerable bearing on developments on the kingdoms of England and Scotland?

Furthermore, the fact that Norman knights were invited by the Gaelic King David of Scotland to help him impose a feudal system meant that the paths of state development diverged in England and Scotland. England was conquered and the English language did not become official there until the 14th century, French remaining the official court language till then. Serfdom was greatly extended. Most Normans moving to Scotland were absorbed into a Gaelic-speaking ruling class, which in many areas was based on communal landholding. It was only later that this ruling class increasingly adopted the Scots English developing in the new urban centres. Feudal serfdom was mainly restricted to this area. In Ireland, many of the 'old English' or Norman conquerors 'went native', becoming Gaelic speakers living beyond the shrinking English-speaking pale. Feudalism withered and retreated.

Furthermore, Jack's description of "a common experience across the British Isles" could be termed somewhat euphemistic, given the conquest of Wales by Edward I, the Scottish Wars of Independence for over a century and the ruthless Tudor wars to conquer Ireland. Wars may well be common experiences to both sides involved, but they do not usually promote brotherhood and unity! Despite this, we can still agree that our present-day arrangements of 'England', 'Scotland', 'Wales' and 'Ireland' are accidental results of feudal marriage-bed deals, the fortunes of war and the continuation of the monarchical system. But then the present-day arrangements of most other nations or states in most of Europe have simi-

lar pasts, even if some have later become republics.

Jack's whole method though prevents him from understanding both the emergence and decline of the 'British nation' he wants to uphold and the distinctive English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish nations he wants to deny. Jack makes the quite reasonable point that, "Neither Scotland, nor England, nor Wales were ever nations in the sense of having a unique common language, economic life and culture." However, the impact of his argument is somewhat lessened when he goes on to state: "They were as much divided as Britain as a whole." So bang goes his British 'nation' too! To fully understand their development, you have to look wider than the British Isles and to unfolding class struggles, which gave each of these nations their changing form.

However, even as we approach more modern times, when a recognisable UK state and British ruling class begins to emerge, the "Britannic approach" still fails. The "British nation" which Jack wants to uphold has rarely ever been coincident with the geographical area of Britain or the British Isles. Large areas of Ireland, separated by sea, were part of a joint kingdom with England and Wales long before Scotland, linked by land, joined to form the United Kingdom. This newly created UK, sometimes labelled the three kingdoms, first promoted English, Scottish and Irish settlement and later, after the Unions of the Parliaments, British settlement, in colonies around the world.

The struggle to create an independent United States of America, in the 18th century still left behind the colony of Canada, formed by those who wished to remain British subjects. Well into this century, a remnant British identification has been a barrier to the creation of an Australian republic. And, of course, there are still many in the 'Six Counties', who would insist on their British nationality today, in continuing disregard for Conrad's "common territory"! British identity remains stronger in the 'Six Counties', albeit within one section of the population, than in today's Scotland. And, whether the UK was involved with colonial America and Australia, or remains involved with Ireland or Scotland, there has undoubtedly been a developed "common economic life". So perhaps Jack should have sided with George III as a "revolutionary centraliser" and opposed American independence too!

Nor is this just a question of past history. It even mars the otherwise very good Socialist Unity platform for the North Defoe council by-election. The platform clearly states that, although "the peoples of Scotland and Wales must have the right to self-determination", this "does not mean that socialists stand for the break-up of the UK"! Leaving aside the differences between the Communist Tendency and the CPGB-PCC on the exercising of the right of self-determination for Scotland and Wales, does the CPGB-PCC really want to support a United Kingdom? Whatever happened to the 'federal republic'? Furthermore, since the UK state also incorporates the 'Six Counties', does that mean the CPGB-PCC has abandoned the struggle for Irish unity and now supports the partition of Ireland?

And Jack thinks we are being "rather hysterical" when condemning the 'Brit left'? Did John Bridge, writing as the CPGB-PCC delegate to the IRSP conference, in the same issue of *Weekly Worker* (January 7), inform the assembled Irish republican socialists that they should now accept partition and British rule? Perhaps this follows logically from their living in the 'British Isles'. And how much longer before the CPGB-PCC raises the demand for the 'Twenty Six Counties' to join the UK too, in the interests of a truly 'Britannic approach'?! ●

Socialist Alliance

Meeting the challenge

Michael Malkin reports on the latest developments in London

The last 10 years have been profoundly demoralising for many sections of the labour movement: liquidators and reformists have had a field day; many cadres have abandoned the struggle and retreated to the illusory pleasures of 'private life'; the working class itself is atomised, passive, lacking in self-belief and leaderless.

In these circumstances, the call for 'left unity' is no mere slogan expressive of a pious desire to fight against the evils of Blairism - it is an objective necessity imposed by life itself. However daunting the task may seem to be, we must fight hard to demonstrate that 'the left' is not a collection of hopelessly divided sectarian grouplets propounding an outmoded ideology and more interested in battling against one another than against the real foe. If we fail to do so, we shall inflict further damage on the labour movement and be guilty of nothing less than a betrayal of the working class.

In January this year a beginning was made. Fighting under the banner of Socialist Unity, comrades from the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party, united their efforts in support of a common platform, campaigning on behalf of the CPGB's Anne Murphy in the North Defoe ward by-election in Hackney. The experience of hammering out an agreed manifesto and engaging in practical action together did much to dispel the mistrust and misgivings that have bedevilled our relations for too long. For the SWP comrades, North Defoe surely represented a real watershed. It was the first time in 20 years that they had chosen to work in support of a candidate standing against the Labour Party. Given the special circumstances - Labour's determination to regain overall control of the council by wresting the seat from the Greens - Socialist Unity's 2.8% of the poll was a creditable performance.

Now the focus of struggle has shifted to more important terrain: left groups have set about pooling their resources in order to fight the June 1999 European elections. Readers will already be aware that the CPGB has joined forces with five other organisations in the United Socialists project with the intention of fielding a slate comprising 10 candidates for the London region. The other groups involved are the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, the Independent Labour Network and Socialist Outlook. In addition, representatives of Workers Power have been attending meetings, but have yet to decide whether to become full participants in the project.

At the latest meeting of their organisation committee on February 8, in a move bringing them into conformity with the nomenclature adopted by the West Midlands region, London's United Socialists agreed to register for the forthcoming elections as the "Socialist Alliance" (SA). The name may cause some confusion, but it is a useful starting point for examining the complexion and political orientation of the joint venture.

Let us begin with the word *social-*

ist, which immediately raises issues of programme and platform. The participating groups represent a broad spectrum of opinion, ranging from our own CPGB on the extreme left, with its commitment to the revolutionary democratic overthrow of the United Kingdom state and the arming of the masses, to the left social democracy of the ILN and Socialist Outlook. Nominally at least, a *majority* of the forces involved are revolutionaries, so some people (ourselves included) are bound to be dissatisfied with the economic, rightist, milk and water contents of the platform in its current form, as exemplified by a leaflet produced for immediate distribution, pending the drafting of a formal manifesto. From our own theoretical perspectives, this document, with its concentration on "saving jobs and services", "people before profit", "save the environment", "end discrimination" and "the unity of workers and jobless in a socialist Europe" - however worthy these things may be - cannot realistically be described as anything more than a workerist shopping list. In essence, it goes no further than seeking to resurrect the failed social palliatives of old Labour's left social democrats.

Worse still, as Mark Fischer reported recently (*Weekly Worker* February 4), tensions between the Leeds and London centres of the ILN, together with the evident existence of an informal bloc between the latter and Socialist Outlook, threaten to create pressure for a further rightist dilution of an already weak platform. In his wisdom, comrade Mike Davies, the maverick quasi-New Labourite who paradoxically sits atop a quite radical group of disaffected leftwingers in Leeds ILN, has decreed that the current platform is "sectarian", "ultra-left" [!], and therefore "not viable".

Yet, according to Davies, the "problem" can be solved by the renegotiation of the platform in its fundamentals. Such renegotiation is not to be conducted openly and democratically, of course, but by pressure and influence behind the scenes. This is the sort of dishonest, backroom politics to which so many Labourite activists have become congenitally addicted. It poses a danger to the hard-won cohesion and cooperation underlying the SA, factors that represent a *sine qua non* for any move towards left unity, and is plainly unacceptable.

Discussions at the February 8 meeting confirmed that the form and content of the eventual SA election manifesto will constitute a source of continuing tension. Comrade Dave Packer of Socialist Outlook, frankly stating that the chances of *any* electoral success or significant impact by the SA were zero - if that is the case, one wonders why he is bothering to take part at all - contended that the SA's platform must eschew any revolutionary content; the agreed position "corresponds to the issues of the day" and must primarily focus on meeting the challenge posed by the Greens. Whatever the subject under discussion, all we hear from comrade Packer is the same mournful, wretchedly defeatist dirge - a "leftwing carve-up" would fatally damage the SA; only a "broad" platform and a "broad" slate are realistically feasible. What the

comrade means by "broad" is obvious: not merely non-revolutionary but also non-*socialist*, except in the "broadest" - ie, the most dismally reformist - sense of the term. Behind the comrade's cautionary homilies, we hear the admonitions of comrade Davies and other siren-voiced 'possibilists', whose efforts, if successful, will ensure that the SA as a coherent political force is aborted or at best stillborn.

Much the same can be said for the position taken at the meeting by comrade Richard Garside of the London ILN, who advocated a programme that avoids any revolutionary content in favour of "something which reaches beyond to ordinary working people". While maintaining (in a clear reference to Davies's machinations) that the London ILN does *not* wish to re-open the agreed platform for discussion, the comrade stressed the importance of a "pragmatic" (viz, a "broad") approach.

What applies to questions of platform applies equally to issues concerning the SA's campaign strategy and the composition of the SA slate. Again we hear earnest calls for the greatest possible "broadness" in both areas. Comrade Garside (a member of the media sub-committee) told the February 8 meeting that what was needed was a campaign fought on a "broad front", rather than specific campaigns by individual organisations - soundbites and slogans should be devised to appeal to the greatest possible number of electors. We find no fault with such suggestions *in principle*, but suspect that *in practice* the language of "broadness" is a cover for seeking to run a campaign from which all genuinely socialist content has been sanitised.

As regards the slate, the ILN-Socialist Outlook bloc urges the SA to look for candidates outside the alliance. The name of Ken Loach surfaced more than once as a good choice. Mr Loach is a talented director of films, but by no stretch of the imagination can he be seen as a socialist *politician*, nor is he someone whose name is exactly a household word in the working class. The whole idea of looking for 'names' who can supposedly bolster the SA's credibility with the electorate once again smacks of an opportunistic, fundamentally defeatist approach. Socialist politicians arguing forcefully and cogently for a genuine alternative to the status quo are evidently deemed inadequate for the task in hand.

Is it not also significant that the ILN is even now not in a position to say who it wants to run? Are we to assume that this is merely a matter of continuing deliberation within the ILN, or does it perhaps indicate that their commitment to the project is conditional upon the SA's acceptance of "broadness" in all its ramifications? Similarly, one wonders why comrade Packer, with a characteristically downbeat shrug of the shoulders, announced that his organisation would propose only one candidate in the form of Greg Tucker, while stressing that big names were required if the SA were to avoid accusations of foisting a "narrow" leftwing slate on an unwilling electorate.

The response of some of the other participating groups to the clearly perceptible intentions of the ILN-Socialist Outlook bloc of rightists was disheartening. To foster conciliation and consensus is one thing - clearly we must do all that we can to keep the SA vessel afloat; but to acquiesce in

a situation whereby a minority of the crew could force the ship to sail under radically different colours is something quite different.

The position of the CPGB in relation to these issues is well known. We were effectively locked out of the United Socialists (aka Socialist Alliance) during the vital period of formation and therefore had no hand in influencing the project's platform. Even after we began to attend and make constructive contributions to the organisation committee's sessions, our name was mysteriously (though no doubt 'accidentally') omitted from publicity material and other draft documents.

When we questioned this on February 8, we were told that the other parties still doubted the seriousness of our commitment. Let there be no room for doubt. We are committed to making the SA a viable force capable of putting forward a genuine *socialist* alternative. We make no secret of the fact that, from our viewpoint, the SA's current platform, as expressed in its leaflet, is woefully inadequate, and that if the platform question is to be reopened, we shall argue for a much more radical, socialist and democratic document.

This does not mean that we are blind to the exigencies of working cooperatively with other organisations. Comrade Julie Donovan was right when she said that the SA's platform is "fragile" and of necessity a "fudge". What has weakened the SA's programmatic formation so far, however, has not been the inescapable need to accommodate varying positions; it has been the tendency for important matters of this kind to be decided at the level of subcommittees, whose conclusions are communicated to the main committee for approval.

On the *platform* in general, we say: let the discussion be open and democratic. Even when a common position is arrived at, let all concerned feel free to criticise those aspects of the platform with which they cannot agree. In other words, as comrade Fischer puts it, "no gagging orders". On the SA *manifesto*, we say: let the candidates speak for themselves. The manifesto should consist primarily not of low-est-common-denominator platitudes,

but of specific, personal statements from each of the candidates outlining their political affiliation and policies. In this way, the electorate, whose political acuity we seem chronically to underestimate, will have something concrete to think about.

In this respect, although we respect his sincerity and commitment, we disagree profoundly with the conclusions drawn by comrade Nick Long of the Socialist Democracy Group and London ILN in his analysis of the significance of North Defoe, conclusions which he summarised in a letter to this newspaper (*Weekly Worker* February 4) and reiterated on February 8. Local campaigning on grassroots issues in the boroughs is no doubt a part of our work as socialist activists, but is decidedly not "the answer". Our experience of canvassing the working class estates in North Defoe indicated, *per contra*, that what the class needs is a party capable of restoring the socialist project. In other words, we must rearticulate a *global vision*.

Finally, let us turn to the other component in the SA's new name. An *alliance*, if it is to have any meaning beyond the purely formalistic, must be based on full equality for *all* its participants; it must function *democratically* and *openly*. The SA thus far has exhibited some serious shortcomings in this vital respect. The real work of the alliance has been carried out behind closed doors in sub-committee, with the full organisation committee being expected effectively to rubber-stamp all decisions. Voting on matters of policy has been regarded as dangerously divisive, a potential threat to the continued cohesion of a "fragile" coalition of disparate organisations. We believe this is unhealthy. We welcome the decision of the February 8 meeting to accord the CPGB full membership rights on all sub-committees and urge the SA to make the minutes and decisions of these bodies open to the collective participants in the alliance as a whole, amenable to debate and, where appropriate, democratic endorsement by voting. In this way, we shall demonstrate the political maturity and mutual, comradely confidence that are fundamental prerequisites of any serious attempt to build meaningful unity on the left ●

Fighting fund

Full-time

Lucky old Kevin Keegan, who is to take over from disgraced Glen Hoddle as England coach. The 'chief operating officer' (is that what used to be known as a 'manager'?) of Fulham will pick up a handy £2 million when he is officially appointed - and for the first 18 months of his contract Keegan will work on a *part-time* basis.

Unlike Keegan, our comrades devote themselves full-time for communism. Just take a look at the *Weekly Worker* - it did not get into your hands by a miracle. It took human and *financial* resources. So, it is disappointing to note that donations received so far leave us

well short of our monthly target of £400 - though if I was the head of a privatised rail company I could put a positive spin on it and declare, "The rate of getting worse is slowing down".

Thanks to HG from Manchester (£20), LM from Hull (£15) and DC from South London (£10). The total stands at £183. Comrades - dig deeper and search harder. Don't forget, February is a short month - we have only 10 days to reach our target ●

Ian Farrell

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

All-Britain alliance

Tom Delargy of the Scottish Socialist Party, discusses some of the issues and differences that are beginning to emerge and outlines his views on left unity

The Scottish Socialist Party held a day school on Sunday February 7. It was an interesting event. ‘Interesting’ is unlikely to be the word Bill Bonnar and Allan Green would have chosen. I caught them in intense discussion outside the venue immediately after it ended. Neither looked particularly happy. Of the two, it was Bill who had the best excuse for such a long face. Allan had after all been soundly thrashed in only one of the two debates - the one on Europe. At least in this debate, Allan and Bill had each other (and a third SSP big gun, Hugh Kerr MEP) to keep themselves company.

But when it came to the morning session, on drugs, Bill found himself completely isolated. So much so that he apparently saw no point in making a contribution in defence of the policy paper he distributed at last November’s national council. This paper attempted to dress up an authoritarian populist approach in philosophical garb. Our Bill’s ‘philosophy’ and that of the SLP’s Royston Bull (on drugs at least) share much in common. Our Willie just cannot compete with Royston’s literary skills. The absence of such talents inside the SSP by those arguing against the decriminalisation of drugs might, in part, explain why Bill has found himself so spectacularly isolated.

Frances Curran, SSA candidate in the Paisley South by-election, wrote the four-page conference discussion paper on drugs. She also opened off the discussion, acquitting herself well on both accounts. She had to admit that there remained one, but only one, area of controversy between herself and Kevin Williamson - the SSP’s ‘Decriminalise Drugs’ candidate for the Scottish parliament. In Frances’ paper, she advocated a five to 10 year period between the decriminalisation of cannabis and a comprehensive decriminalisation. This sentence jumped out at me in precisely the manner it did, apparently, at Kevin. It has no place in a document which so powerfully puts the case for drugs decriminalisation. The insertion of this sentence looks like the price Frances was asked to pay in order to get some of Bill’s friends, kicking and screaming, into the ‘decriminalise cannabis’ lobby. But it is far too high. Unless we decide to junk Frances’ general analysis, effectively endorsing Bill’s instead, we need to be clear that if and when we get the power to legalise cannabis, we will not sit on our hands for another decade giving tacit endorsement to Jack Straw’s law and order crackdown on drug users.

Frances stated that comrades’ attitudes to this issue reflected a generation gap in society at large. If there was ever any doubt about this, the debate should have dispelled it. Although no one spoke in defence of Bill’s position, some older comrades wanted an ‘emphasis’ which would completely undermine the policy. Harvey Duke, SSP candidate in last year’s European by-election, stated that decriminalisation should not be our main emphasis! He then listed (in a manner which the CPGB would denounce as bowing to economic side-issues - I would not) a set of alternative approaches. Approaches which would focus virtually exclusively on the economic misery in-

.....
“Make positive overtures to socialist organisations throughout the UK”
.....

flicted on millions of victims of capitalist society. Every single point Harvey raised is valid and has to be encompassed into our overall message. But it is wrong to counterpose these economic arguments in favour of a society where production is for human need, not profit, as against the case for decriminalisation in the here and now under existing capitalist society.

Those who are hesitant about decriminalisation are not the only ones tempted to take a one-sided approach. Kevin Williamson, apparently, has also been drawn into choosing between a false set of alternatives. It would appear that he took some persuasion before agreeing to stand on a party label, wanting instead to put himself forward as a single-issue candidate. However flawed the SSP’s programme is, Kevin would be making a grave mistake if he tried to detach the issue of drugs decriminalisation from the society which conjures up the conditions within which this cancer continues to spread.

Debate within the SSP on this issue is far from over. But a positive consensus is being formed, one which can allow us to prise open the cracks appearing within the British establishment. We have it in our power to provoke a wide-ranging debate throughout society at large, provided, that is, that we do not take fright and start backsliding towards Bill Bonnar’s position.

If the SSP can draw up policies which flow logically from Frances’ analysis, then I expect to be in the majority at conference, which will make a nice change. I had almost forgotten what this feels like. If I am not in the majority on the European debate (and I will not be), my only crumb of comfort is knowing that Mr Bonnar will not be either. If the balance of arguments at the day school was anything like an accurate reflection of the state of the party as a whole, then SML (or the “CWI in Scotland”, as they now refer to themselves) can push their line through. If they choose not to impose their line on the party, this will be because we have here a highly explosive issue. They must realise that they are playing with fire, and that a serious split cannot be ruled out if any attempt is made to mandate Hugh Kerr to argue in the European parliament in favour of the CWI line - one he vehemently opposes.

I cannot win this one, if for no other reason than that I do not know what my own line is at the moment. I am genuinely rethinking the whole subject. I have never believed in socialism in one country, nor even in one continent. My instincts, nevertheless,

remain thoroughly opposed to the Maastricht Treaty and Emu as proposed on a capitalist basis. Exactly how to formulate such opposition in a manner which unites the genuine left throughout the entire continent and builds ever greater solidarity amongst workers’ organisations (in the first place trade unions) is the question I am now examining. If I cannot uncritically support the CWI motion, this is primarily because there is an unspoken context committing the party to the idea that workers’ power must necessarily unfold in Scotland prior to taking root in the rest of the UK. For my part, I accept this as a possibility but by no means likely and certainly not worth advocating.

Although I will not be on the winning side in this debate, I recognise that it marks a crucial turning point in the brief history of the SSP. It offers us all the opportunity to wake up to the real balance of forces within the party. These have, thus far, been kept in complete darkness. People have been voting together not realising (or, in many cases, pretending not to notice) that they are fundamentally divided and are voting for entirely different things.

This European debate has polarised people who all belong to the “independent socialist Scotland” camp. I have to confess to feeling a little sorry for the anti-CWI coalition of Hugh, Bill and Allan. Allan in particular seems genuinely gobsnapped that his CWI partners are taking such a fundamentalist line of opposition to the Maastricht Treaty and the single currency. During his contribution, he posed what he took to be a rhetorical question in order to highlight the lunacy of the CWI: “Would an independent socialist Scotland have an independent currency?” He seemed shocked by a chorus of “yes!” Allan’s definition of socialism would appear to be compatible with pooling sovereignty with a capitalist United States of Europe, with all economic power vested in a capitalist central bank. Although he would argue for greater democratic accountability and scrutiny by the European parliament, his vision of an independent socialist Scotland clearly has little, if anything, in common with his CWI partners.

Hugh Kerr and Bill Bonnar were never in any doubt about the divergence between their attitudes and those of the CWI. But Allan appears not to have understood this. As I have said, this debate is surely going to prove a watershed for the party. Those who have clearly always wanted little more than a leftwing version of the SNP, or a pre-Blair Labour Party which wants Scottish independence, should, for all our sakes, stop pretending that there is greater agreement with the CWI than is in fact the case.

Whatever the CPGB’s attitude to the SSP in general, and the European debate in particular, I am clear that what we have here is a classic left/right split. While I disagree with large parts of the CWI analysis, my differences with them pale into insignificance in comparison with what divides me from the Kerr-Bonnar-Green coalition.

That said, I would like very much to reiterate what I wrote in a letter to the *Weekly Worker* last year. Despite all my disagreements with Bill Bonnar,

and despite his undisguised sectarianism towards the rest of the revolutionary left in general and the SWP in particular, I am still strongly in favour of a political organisation which can embrace everyone who wants to present an anti-capitalist electoral alternative to New Labour - provided they unconditionally support all workers’ struggles regardless of nationality, and all struggles of the oppressed in their defence and for their liberation. So long as Hugh Kerr likewise fights for such an organisation capable of embracing the SWP, so long as he is playing no role in the alleged attempts to split the ILN from the United Socialists in London, then, despite my differences with Hugh (and they are not small), I am in favour of a united socialist organisation able, at this stage, to embrace us both. The necessity of presenting a united electoral challenge to the Blairites imposes compromises upon all of us.

This is why I would ask the CWI majority and the rightwing minority of the SSP to recognise that the move of the SSA towards a party structure last year has proven to have been premature. Hugh Kerr will not accept the majority line if the CWI wins. In order to stop Hugh jumping ship and building an Independent Labour Network organisation in Scotland - one which will, along with Scargill’s SLP, split our vote - the CWI is highly unlikely to insist it gets its way. Their problem though is that if they refuse to set any limits on what Hugh can do or say, he will continue to go his own way. It is hard to see how this can lead to anything other than a split in the SSP or a split in the CWI or to the discrediting of the idea of what a party in actual fact is. If we accept that *de facto* the maximum unity we can achieve at this stage is that of an alliance, then we can avoid all these problems.

It is important to recognise that it is not just the European debate which divides us. More fundamentally, we are divided on our ideas as to what socialism is. Belated recognition by Allan Green of the extent of his differences with the CWI is liable to lead him to join forces with others to put together a coherent oppositional faction to defend themselves against encroachment by the CWI majority. Notwithstanding their support for workers’ struggles, their opposition to capitalism (at least for some) is little more than a rhetorical flourish: something they can live with printed on their party card and to sing about in songs; but something which is an unreal utopia, not to be confused with the real alternatives facing us of a capitalist Britain, a capitalist Scotland or a capitalist United States of Europe.

The attitude of these people to capitalism on the one hand and to workers’ struggles on the other run directly counter to one another. Given time, they will all be forced to choose. While they are still mulling over how to resolve this contradiction (and different individuals will jump in opposite directions), they ought to resist any temptation to split from the SSP. They ought instead to call for a return to the old SSA structures.

The left and the right now have an incentive to ensure that no minority is denied representation inside the party. As part of this recognition, all sections of the SSP (left, right and centre) ought to make positive overtures to those socialist organisations in London, and throughout the rest of the UK, that are coming together under the banner of the United Socialists. And we ought not to wait until after the European elections before doing this ●

What we fight for

- Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.
- The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers’ movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.
- Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.
- We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.
- The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single Party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.
- Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs: ie, communism.
- We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.
- War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world’s problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

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

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Simon Harvey of the SLP

Scargill changes tack

Two cases pending under the Socialist Labour Party's complaints procedure are still very much up in the air this week. In a surprising move, Scargill decided to hold his fire at the disciplinary hearing of the Appeal Four on February 13.

Brian Heron, Carolyn Sikorski, Terry Dunn and Helen Drummond had been charged with contravening Scargill's constitution for daring to circulate their 'Appeal for a special conference'. Comrade Drummond - once an ardent Scargillite - has already been battered into demoralised despair by the general secretary's bureaucratic assault and failed to turn up for the hearing. But comrades Heron and Sikorski, two leaders of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus, along with comrade Dunn, arrived together, despite having originally been told to appear at separate times.

After Scargill opened proceedings with a list of the Appeal Four's heinous crimes, they coolly pointed out that the hearing could not be considered legitimate. For example, the complaints procedure allows the right of appeal for any 'convicted' comrade.

But the 15-strong appeals panel laid down has not been elected. Faced with these legal niceties (backed up by the SLP's most well known solicitor, comrade Imran Khan, and the joint author of the party's constitution, leftwing lawyer Mike Mansfield), Scargill decided to beat a retreat, cutting short the hearing with the intention of seeking fresh backing from the national executive.

The second case pending involves vice-president Roy Bull, the "former editor" of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, which was banned by the December NEC from commenting on the affairs of the SLP. At the following meeting of the executive in January, Scargill waved a piece of paper which he claimed was Bull's resignation letter - although he refused to read it, or allow comrades present to read it for themselves. Strangely the vice-president has refused to confirm his 'resignation' and the name of Royston Bull still appears on all the party's letterheads sent out by the general secretary.

One such letter, dated February 5, has been posted to all constituency

SLP women's sections, regarding the annual meeting of the national women's section, up to now the stronghold of comrade Sikorski and Fisc. Scargill decided he could not tolerate the situation where an SLP component is controlled by oppositionists. So, using his exclusive access to membership records via NUMist, Paul Hardman, he attempted to load the voting entitlements for Scargillite branches so that the section AGM would be flooded and Sikorski and co voted out.

In a circular dated January 13, the national section officers, comrades Sikorski, Liz Screen and Rachel Newton, reported that, in order to do this, Scargill had decreed that the whole voting system would be changed. The few party women organised in sections had previously come together in regions, but now the regional sections were to be disenfranchised in favour of CSLP-based groups, added to which Scargill claimed that over 40 new sections had suddenly materialised.

At the November 1998 special congress comrade Hardman informed the

section that its voting entitlement was 72 - the number of paid-up women members of the party. Yet now, according to the credentials being claimed for the women's AGM, the CSLP section delegates will be entitled to cast votes on behalf of over 100 women who "have signified they wish to be a member of the women's section". It appears that just two or three Scargillite sections, or those from the handful of branches controlled by the followers of Stalinite NEC member Harpal Brar, will determine everything. Comrade Brar had previously made his disdain of the women's section, like the black section abolished by the 1997 congress, more than plain.

The January 13 circular announced the cancellation of the AGM. But Scargill hit back on February 5, stating: "I emphasise that the SLP national executive committee has instructed the national women's section officers to organise an AGM on Saturday February 27 1999 in Manchester." He asked all women members who may have received a letter from the national section officers regarding their cre-

dentials to "ignore" it. This document, sent out on January 31, stated: "We cannot regard the list we have been sent as proof that there really are 57 new CSLP women's sections." It asked local women's groups to send details of their membership.

Scargill, pretending to be deeply upset by this "offensive" remark, assured the women that everything was above board.

But his bureaucratic bullying has borne fruit. Comrade Screen has broken ranks and is now prepared to do his bidding. But comrades Sikorski and Newton are also on the point of giving up. Outmanoeuvred by Scargill, they have no notion of trying to fight back in the conference hall. The general secretary's gerrymandering may ensure that they lose the vote, but surely oppositionists and the few remaining democrats are in a strong position to win the argument.

As Scargill tightens his stranglehold on every section of the party, he alienates more and more of his former courtiers, ensuring in the process that he will be left with nothing but a corpse ●

Around the left

Euroland and internationalism

On January 1 the European single currency was successfully launched. Some on the left had foolishly declared in advance that this was impossible. Others on the 'refusenik' left view the euro with overt misapprehension, harbouring the suspicion that an EU 'superstate' will scupper their pristine plans for socialism.

So, Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party wants nothing to do with the European Union - single currency or not. Similarly, the Socialist Party will also say 'no' to the euro in any referendum, while the "internationalist" *Socialist Outlook* too wants to "sink the euro" and keep the pound sterling. Now it looks like we must add the name of the Workers International (to Rebuild the Fourth International) to the 'no to the euro' roll call.

The WI is one of the many anti-Healy fragments of the late and very unlamented Workers Revolutionary Party. It endeavours to be implacably orthodox in its Trotskyism. So much so that WI members Dave Temple, Cliff Slaughter and Bob Myers have very recently "placed themselves outside" the WI for raising criticisms of the Fourth International and Trotsky's 1938 *Transitional programme* - ie, they have been expelled. The WI as a matter of biblical certainty rejects all minimum programmes

or demands as heresy. It fights for nothing less than the 'transitional programme'. To this end, an editorial in the monthly *Workers International Press* polemicises against the *Weekly Worker*'s position on the EU and the single currency.

Despite the fact that the author of the editorial thinks there is "political confusion" amongst the left on the question of Europe and the single currency, it has to be said that exactly the same could be said of the WI. We can discern this quite easily. Clearly puzzled, it quotes from the *Weekly Worker* of January 7: "The single currency is a harbinger of political union - just as capitalism itself is the harbinger of socialism. In so far as an 'EU superstate' lays the foundation for advanced socialism, it is to be welcomed. But this in no way means we throw our hats in the air and exclaim, 'hurrah for the euro!' or 'three cheers for the City bankers and speculators!' The single currency and Euroland represent an undemocratic union from above" (February).

The editor comments: "So it is a big 'yes' and a little 'no', as far as the *Weekly Worker* is concerned, although the article points out that the European commissioner Jacques Santer has called for more 'modernisation' and 'flexibility', the classic

buzzwords which august organs like *The Telegraph* or *The Times* normally salivate over."

Well, comrades from WI, in a certain sense it is indeed "a big 'yes' and a little 'no'" to the single currency. As Marxists it is our internationalist duty to support, nurture and foster *all* movements and developments which help to create the *objective* conditions for universal human liberation - which of course can only truly happen on a world scale.

How does saying 'no' to the euro and the single currency alongside John Redwood and Dennis Skinner assist the development of these objective conditions, WI comrades? Obviously, it does not. But neither would voting 'yes' to an undemocratic union from above of bankers and technocratic politicians.

Seemingly slightly upset by our robust language, the editorial states: "The *Weekly Worker* implies that all leftwing opponents of the European Union are blinkered nationalists. However, despite its 'internationalist' appearance, the position of the *Weekly Worker* shows a no less dangerous limitation. Despite the occasional mention of a socialist future [?], its proposals for a supra-national workers' organisation are tied to an agitation for bourgeois democracy -

'crucially an EU constituent assembly'."

It seems that "bourgeois democracy" exists mainly in the eye of the beholder - if you are a Trotskyite anyway. Of course, nowhere in the above *Weekly Worker* article would you find "agitation for bourgeois democracy". WI must have a very low opinion - or expectation - of democracy if it really thinks we have got it already in Europe. Presumably, for the WI, it is now time to move on to the more interesting socialist 'stage', seeing how the 'bourgeois democratic revolution' was completed aeons ago.

Naturally, as apostles of Trotskyite orthodoxy, the WI is prejudiced against the fight for a minimum programme and the struggle for democracy. As it says, "To limit a European workers' movement to the horizon of bourgeois democracy is to condemn it in advance to impotence ... Fighting for a principled, internationalist stance and building unity between the workers of different countries in Europe will require not a minimum programme fighting for a bourgeois democracy that is under threat [it is? - DP], but a transitional programme. That is, one which shows that integral to the day-to-day struggle of workers for economic and political rights is their role in abolishing capi-

talism and creating a socialist society."

In reality, it is the WI's approach which is "impotence". Despite its lip service to the "day-to-day struggle of workers for economic and *political* rights" (my emphasis), the only political fight it actually calls for is "rebuilding the Fourth International". However, to achieve the WI's "socialist society" the workers must cease to operate as a slave class and become a *political* class, a class that can act as a hegemon over society. The workers can only do this by becoming the champions of democracy. Only by upholding and defending the democratic rights of *all* oppressed classes, groups and strata and by mastering *all* political questions can the workers be made into a ruling class. This requires fighting for minimum or immediate demands *now*, in order to place real, as opposed to abstract, socialism on the agenda.

Typically, the much vaunted 'transitional programme' method of dogmatic groups like the WI leads to economism, and its "day-to-day struggle of workers for economic and political rights" leads to reformism. And if the WI is advocating a 'no' vote for the referendum on the single currency its 'internationalism' will only be a thin cover for national socialism - "blinkered" or otherwise ●