



SWP in crisis

Only two weeks after its launch, the Socialist Alliance in London - the bloc of left organisations formed to contest the European elections - is in danger of losing its softer elements. The decision by SLP dictator Arthur Scargill to nominate himself as the number one candidate in his party's slate has caused some participants, most notably the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party, to have second thoughts.

Being deeply divided at the top and fearing that a low vote in June would completely expose its grandiose pretensions and end-is-nigh predictions to its own rank and file, the SWP is caught on the horns of a dilemma. Auto-Labourism is increasingly painful, given the Blairites' open espousal of bourgeois values. At the same time, while claiming that there is "deep bitterness against the government in Britain" (*Socialist Worker* February 13), the leadership does not dare test its thesis at the polls. Such exaggerations are for internal consumption only. The activists have to be kept active.

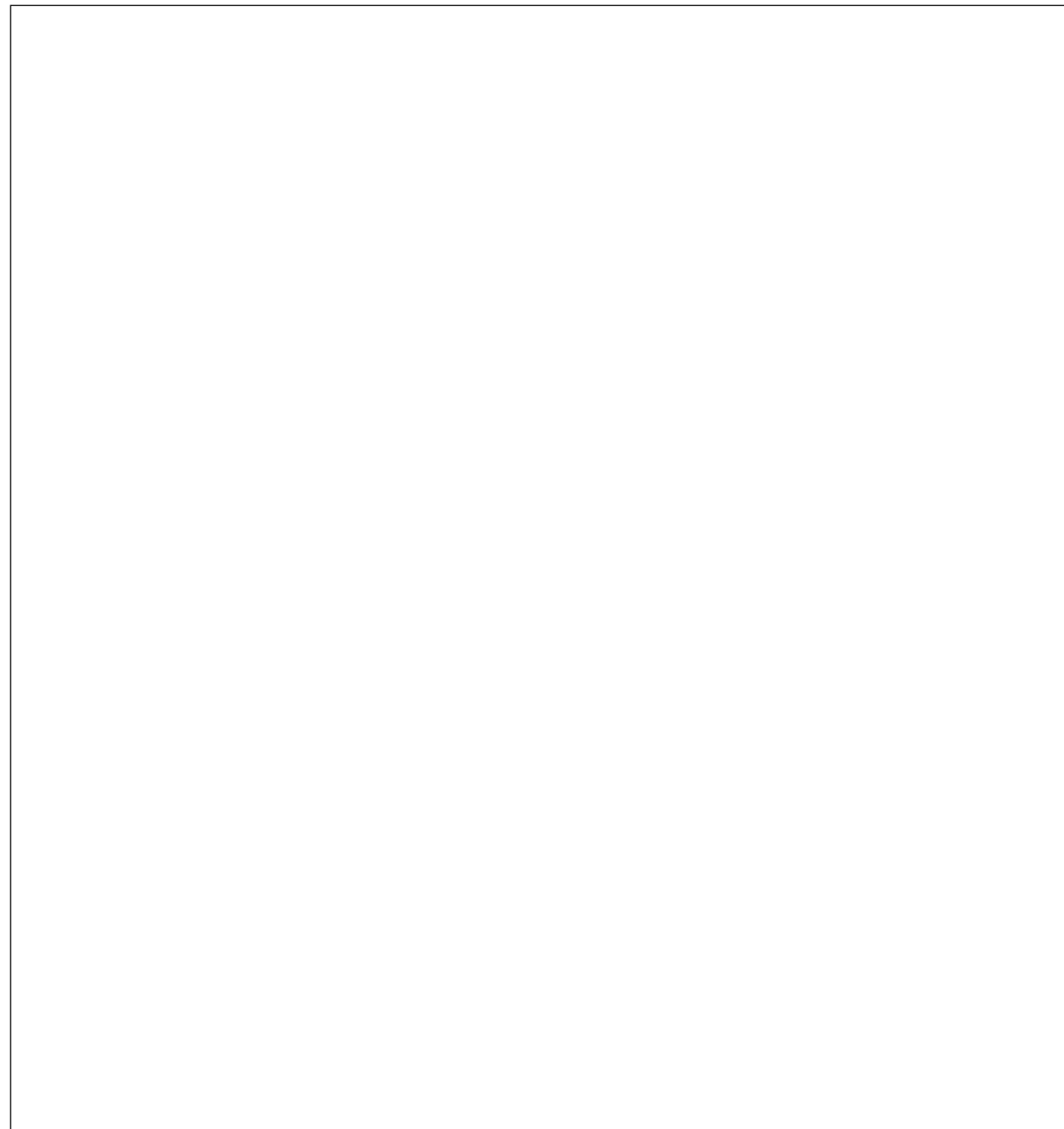
Typically the Cliff leadership clique has kept the rank and file totally in the dark. The SAs have hardly rated a mention in *Socialist Worker*, and there was no debate on the 'electoral turn' at the SWP's national conference. Nor has the latest wobble at the top been relayed to and agreed by the branches. Clearly the SWP is an organisation bereft of democracy and any clear sense of direction. Fragmentation will surely come.

The SWP question dominated Tuesday's meeting of the London SA committee. The outcome of the ensuing debate within the constituent organisations will exert significant, probably decisive influence on the prospects for the whole left unity project. It is therefore a matter of cardinal importance.

The CPGB wishes to make its own position absolutely clear: along with the *majority* of participating organisations, we demand that the SA should stand firm in the face of what would appear to be Scargill's deliberate spoiling operation, designed to split the left vote and thereby give some semblance of credibility to the shell that *was* the SLP. Embryonic though the SA may still be, it represents the future for united socialist cooperation in battling against Blair. The project is too important to be placed in jeopardy by the sectarian vanity of one man, and those who are too cowardly to face him down.

Earlier this month, the SA addressed an urgent appeal to Scargill, calling on him to prevent the socialist vote being divided, by uniting with other socialists in a single electoral slate. Individual organisations have contacted him with a similar message. None has received a reply, and, judging by past experience of

Scargill's decision to contest the Euro elections has thrown Tony Cliff's organisation into disarray



What will they make of the leadership's on-off electoral turn?

Scargill's intransigence and dogged sectarianism, our calls for rapprochement seem bound to fall on deaf ears. So be it. We would rather fight with the SLP in the alliances against the common enemy, but stand we must - Scargill is the splitter, not the SAs.

The 'threat' to the SA posed by Scargill's candidacy needs to be judged soberly. Comrades agree about the obvious fact that among militant workers Scargill's name still has considerable resonance. It is self-evident that the SA's potential vote will be squeezed to some extent but, as a number of comrades pointed out, the impact could well be equivocal. The London electorate is diverse and,

where the left in general is concerned, relatively sophisticated. To the younger generation, Scargill may well have little appeal. To speak in terms of the Scargill intervention as leading inevitably to a "derisory" showing by the SA, and thus causing the alliance grave harm, is to be pessimistic, indeed defeatist.

The SLP's election battle will consist entirely of a 'top-down' attempt to play the Scargill card with the media. This cannot be otherwise, as its infrastructure in the region, as throughout the country, is practically non-existent. Given the degree of disillusionment with the antics of king Arthur among the few remaining or-

dinary SLP members, it is quite probable that many of them could be persuaded to work for the SA, providing we hold firm to our principles.

Then there is the question of policy. The SLP's entire approach to Europe, clearly the dominating issue in the coming campaign, is entirely negative. "Vote us in to get us out" is the slogan that encapsulates a policy objectively little different in substance from that of the Tory right-wing Europhobes.

With these concrete factors in mind, we would argue that there are no grounds whatever for any panic reaction on the part of the SA. Scargill's intervention was hardly a bolt from

the blue. Yet the SWP appears to have been badly spooked and now feels compelled to "weigh the pros and cons" of its continued participation in the SA. Comrade Pat Stack made it more than clear that the SWP may decide to leave the alliance.

Of course, as comrade Marcus Larsen of the CPGB pointed out, the SWP has a right to pull out, but we would urge our SWP comrades *not* to do so. Whatever the outcome of the SWP's frantic deliberations, there can be no question of the SA abandoning the field. If the SWP backs away from the fight, their action will undoubtedly hurt the SA in London and, as Independent Labour Network comrade Toby Abse noted, it would also weaken the efforts of other Socialist Alliances, as well as surely damaging the SWP's own reputation as a serious organisation.

Even if the most gloomy prognostications of our SWP comrades were fulfilled, we would still say that the SA is about more than winning votes in one election. Our task, as comrade Julie Donovan of the SP observed, is to put down a marker for the future by demonstrating the left's willingness and capability to unite.

Along with the CPGB and SP, both the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the ILN were in favour of standing firm. The International Socialist Group, whose commitment to putting up a candidate has always been questionable, is now more uncertain than ever.

Despite having just expressed his organisation's doubts over the whole project, comrade Stack gave full backing to the majority view that the slate should be headed by well known names and non-party activists. Comrade Larsen's proposal - that all 10 slots should be allocated to the six participating groups, who could then, if they wished, surrender their places to such candidates - was rejected by all the other organisations.

Also comrade Larsen's attempt to have three motions considered was declared inadmissible by comrade Donovan from the chair, who ruled that all motions to be discussed must be presented at the previous meeting from now on. In addition the CPGB's draft election manifesto was not debated - the other representatives declaring themselves well satisfied with the economic platform previously agreed (before the CPGB was allowed to participate).

The only circumstances under which comrade Stack was prepared to contemplate reopening discussions on the platform would be if the SLP did a miraculous about-turn and agreed to participate.

The comment of comrade Jill Mountford of the AWL was rather apt: "Just when will we stop allowing Scargill to veto us?"

Michael Malkin

Urgent appeal

The Communist Party is now preparing a legal challenge to the outrageous ruling of the registrar of political parties to prohibit us from standing under our own name in elections. Instead, the Blair 'franchise' has been awarded to the so-called Communist Party of Britain, the dull Labourite split from the CPGB dating from 1988 (see *Weekly Worker* March 18).

'Justice' never comes cheap. The CPGB faces a bill of at least £15,000 if the challenge goes all the way to the High Court. We need the support of all readers and friends of the *Weekly Worker* to help us fight this anti-democratic exclusion. (Cheques, postal orders and cash are urgently required by Party centre.) We are already having to pay out thousands to get the legal ball rolling - money we had earmarked for other, *political*, purposes, not lining the pockets of a well heeled QC.

Apart from being a form of insidious authoritarianism, the case of the registrar is manifestly absurd and full of legal anomaly. We have been banned from standing under our own name because of the "confusion" this may cause a potential electorate. Yet this has not stopped the registrar, Mr John Holden of Companies House in Cardiff, allowing organisations like the Democratic Labour Party; no less than five organisations with the term 'socialist' in their title, one with 'socialists'; the Liberal Party of Michael Meadowcroft, and the Pro-Euro Conservative Party.

There are three points to make about this "confusion" nonsense. The history of the left - of political organisations in general, in fact - is that of disputed claims to a *common* heritage. Thus the CPB, for example, poses that it is now "carrying on the finest traditions of the [CPGB]" (*What we stand for* CPB pamphlet, p3).

Yet for us - despite our common antecedents - it is manifestly absurd that an organisation which envisages socialism arriving "using mass struggle to transform parliament" (*ibid* p2) is carrying on the "finest traditions" of our Party, constituted in 1920 on the basis of "the soviet idea as against parliamentary democracy" and "the dictatorship of the proletariat" (J Klugmann *History of the CPGB* Vol 1, London 1968, p37). In other words there is a dispute, contested claims: there is "*confusion*".

Second, the electorate should be treated like grown-ups. We would not entertain the idea for a moment that the CPB for example should be *deregistered* in favour of our organisation, despite our profound disagreements with its politics. We have no intention of competing in a 'beauty contest' for the title of 'Communist Party'. Surely it is in the interests of both organisations that the difference between our parties is patiently explained to potential supporters in the electorate. The idea that the state should step in and resolve through administrative fiat what is essentially a political question is typical of the big brother paternalism of the whole Blairite project.

Third, there is the "moron in a hurry" argument. In 1978, the publishers of the *Morning Star* - the Peoples Press Printing Society - challenged the launch of the 'tits 'n bums' rag, the *Daily Star*. The PPPS suggested that the name of the new paper would be 'confused' with their own and would affect sales of its publication (I remember thinking at the time that it would probably push them up). This was rejected by the High Court. It was underlined that when examining any potential "confusion" it was important to look at the type of persons affected, to ascertain their "standard of literacy and education". It was judged that "only a moron in a hurry would be misled" into confusing the *Morning Star* and the *Daily Star* (*Morning Star Cooperative Society v Express Newspapers Ltd*, 1979).

While we recognise that there is potential confusion between different organisations, the *type* of person who votes communist or socialist knows why they are doing it. Indeed, one could say such a group of people would be precisely characterised by their propensity to be less confused over the difference. A parallel could be drawn here with the Pro-Euro Conservative Party.

The potential voters for the PECP will be natural Tory voters who will - by definition - be far more likely than non-Tory voters to have followed the developments that have led to the PECP. Thus, a vote for it will almost certainly be a *conscious* vote. Only those who do not normally vote Tory might be confused.

Thus, despite the similarity of the names, anyone who looks at the respective politics of the CPB and the CPGB and gets confused would certainly be "a moron in a hurry". A very big hurry, I would suggest.

This is a question not simply for the CPGB and Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party (also banned). It is important for the entire left and all democratic opinion. Who knows what splits, realignments and fusions life will throw up in the future? Why should a faceless 'jobsworth' in Companies House decide what a mass split from the Labour Party be allowed to call itself? Why should an 'apolitical' representative of the state rule on the affairs of the *opposition* to the government?

We call on readers and supporters to stand up for the rights of working class organisations to define themselves as they see fit, without the interference of Blair's stooges.

● Send your protests to the Registrar of Political Parties, Companies House, Crown Way, Cardiff CF4 3UZ. Fax: 01222-380149. E-mail: rppuser@companieshouse.gov.uk (Don't forget to send us a copy of your letter).

● Make a donation to our legal fund. Rush your cheques - payable to CPGB - to: BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX.

● Pass this appeal on to other potential supporters.

● Act quickly!

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Cheap shot

You cannot help tripping over your own big feet, can you? The *Weekly Worker* (March 4) says: "Nowadays, the very definition of respectability is to be anti-racist - not to mention anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, etc. Clearly anti-racism is now part of *bourgeois* ideology" (original emphasis). Some contradiction surely with your PC sniping at the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* for being "homophobic"?!

After all, the *EPSR* has made it patently clear that its comments on single-issue gay rights campaigning or the Mark Trotter and Ron Davies scandals are about the PC cover-up for capitalist society and parliamentary abuses of power, coupled with the attempted scientific sketching of some of the problems associated with adopting the "new ideology's" lightminded PC attitudes to sexuality and human development.

The *Weekly Worker* article quite correctly throws together bourgeois anti-racism with bourgeois anti-homophobia. Let me tell you that, for arguing for Marxist-Leninist anti-imperialism, the *EPSR* has been called "racist" many times by black nationalists.

So put a sock in the cheap-shot "homophobic" jibes. Attempt to argue scientifically with all the analysis you do not like.

Get all self-righteously offended about our failure to toe the PC line and put yourself in the camp of the "new ideology" which is "embraced - eagerly and genuinely - by virtually all sections of the establishment", "thoroughly safe", etc, etc: ie, poisonously anti-Marxist.

Chris Barratt
EPSR

Make or break

In December 1997 I wrote an article for *Labour Briefing* suggesting that the SLP would be an important element in the emergence of a new left party. I still hold to that view.

Delphi (*Weekly Worker* March 18), in comparing the development of socialist parties at the turn of the last century and their role in the formation of larger parties, appears to be coming round to a similar perspective. It must be remembered that socialists in these early parties had to fight tooth and nail against the sectarianism of their founders and leaders in order to link up with other socialists in order to build and sustain a political party of some weight and influence. Let's hope the declining membership of the SLP can live up to their current task.

The best hope for supporting this prospect is for the Socialist Alliance Network conference in Birmingham on March 27 to be a success. It is essential that the conference adopts its founding policies and agrees its constitutional structure. It is essential that it establishes a national contributory membership and has an accountable leadership.

Unless the Socialist Alliance moves forward the danger is that it will lose the momentum it has gained and fragment. This year is likely to be a 'make or break' year for the political developments of the left. If the Socialist Alliance fails in Birmingham we face the nightmare of the Stalinist SLP rising like a corpse from the grave.

Important ground-breaking developments have already taken place for the left. Despite the claims of Delphi, the Socialist Alliance and its allied forces are well and truly on the slipway. For the first time ever the Labour Party will face a national challenge from the left in the regional assembly elections in Scotland and Wales and the Euro elections. The tragedy is that the left will be split between the SLP and the forces around the Socialist Alliance.

The Socialist Alliance has registered as a political party and it seems likely it

will stand in at least three regions. The Socialist Alliance is being joined by comrades in Wales standing as United Socialists-Socialwyr Unedig. The Scottish Socialist Party has mounted a successful campaign to overturn its initial non-registration and is standing in both the assembly and Euro election, along with interventions in local elections. Comrades in the East Midlands have registered as the Alternative Labour List and in Yorkshire and Humberside as the Left Alliance. It is a pity that some component forces involved in the Socialist Alliance are engaged in attempting to register separate political parties and looking to line the pockets of lawyers to register. This diversity and pluralism however is in marked contrast to the SLP, which has almost ceased to function at a local and campaigning level.

A socialist unity conference later in the year will need to be held to take stock and draw out the lessons and debate the need to build on the unity developed over the year. The thousands who are likely to vote socialist will want to see something lasting develop. Hopefully Delphi will have broken from the Great Leader concept of building a party by then and will join us!

Nick Long
Lewisham

SSP opposition

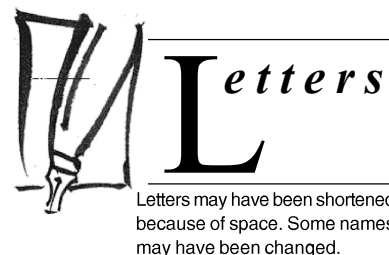
Alan Ross of the Campaign for a Federal Republic (Letters, March 18) criticised my report on the Scottish Socialist Party conference (*Weekly Worker* March 11). Specifically, he criticised it for neglecting to cover the debate on the party's separatist approach to the national question. He would be well advised to address his criticisms, in part at least, to Nick Clarke, his CFR colleague.

At the close of conference, I asked Nick if he could e-mail me some notes on how the session on the party programme went. Due to no fault of my own I missed virtually all of this. I told Nick I would be grateful if he would help me prepare a report on proceedings for readers of the *Weekly Worker*. I said we could sign the report jointly, if he wanted. Alternatively, he could file one on his own - if, that is, he was still prepared to help his old comrades. Nick promised he would give me his help. I regret to have to inform *Weekly Worker* readers that he let me down.

If I did not highlight the CFR vote, Alan ought to be grateful to me for sparing his blushes. Out of 200 delegates, they won over a mere handful. Relatively speaking, their vote remained as pitiful as it did at last year's Scottish Socialist Alliance conference. The fact that Alan 'forgot' to offer any figures to illustrate the extent of their 'advance' is ample testimony as to the paucity of their impact.

I have to accept responsibility for persuading Mary Ward and Nick Clarke to join the SSP in the face of a call by others (*Weekly Worker* essentially) to recommend a principled split. I asked them to join and to fight against its nationalism, encouraging them to call for dual membership of the SSP and an all-UK Network of Socialist Alliances. I proposed that, inside the party, we would put the case for the affiliation of the SSP, as a whole, to an all-UK Network. Although it took them a long time to agree, eventually they did. Given the much publicised tolerance of the SSP towards all socialists who disagree on quite substantial questions (not excluding the national question), atomised individuals such as us three had precious little alternative but to join the party.

In the last few days other labour movement activists (some ex-SLP members) who strongly disagree with the proposal for Scottish independence have also agreed to join, as has the relatively small AWL group in Scotland. It is now crucial that all these critics of SSP accommodation to nationalism start to



coordinate our opposition rather than to scatter our meagre forces, fighting in total isolation from one another. I therefore appeal to Sandy McBurney and his comrades in the Glasgow Marxist Forum, AWL members, and anyone else who is interested to agree to put together a broad anti-nationalist oppositional faction in the SSP. And I would appeal to Mary Ward and Nick Clarke to do likewise.

Here is my message for Mary and Nick. Trade in your sterile excuse for an alternative! Your single-issue 'campaign' without answers and without even the aspiration to recruit supporters, let alone organise a left opposition inside the SSP, is going nowhere and you both know it. Do you have your hearts set on encouraging Sandy McBurney, myself and all your natural allies inside the SSP to emulate your self-defeating tactics? Would you like to see us also set up our own equally microscopic sects parading ourselves grandly as 'platforms'? Are you looking forward to yet more deluded individuals/couples devoting themselves to fighting each other into the ground, allowing our publicly identified common enemy, carriers (unconscious, unwilling carriers for the most part) of a crippling contagion inside the workers' movement, nationalism, to triumph by divide-and-conquer tactics? You ought to agree to join with every other SSP internationalist to negotiate a genuine socialist alternative.

Just what exactly are you afraid of?

Tom Delargy
Paisley SSP

Progressive

I welcome Alan Thornett's letter (*Weekly Worker* March 18) about Europe and only regret that it was not possible to debate the issue at the London Socialist Alliance European election campaign launch meeting because of the chair's fear of public disagreement.

I accept his view that socialists should oppose the provisions of Maastricht, but not his 'economistic' method. He sees the "European bourgeoisie" as the main enemy. Hence he rejects the euro and accepts national currencies as the lesser of two evils. Also his obsession with purely economic issues like privatisation leads to him campaigning for the status quo. To do that is to lock the working class in their nationalistic past and tie them to that section of their own bourgeoisie that cannot cope with international competition. Not very clever, even on an 'economistic' basis, and it makes his claims of internationalism ring hollow.

The progressive capitalists have a project to unite the peoples of Europe and ultimately the world in a single market with a universal culture. It is a matter of regret that capitalism is leading this struggle, not communists, but even though it is being imposed in an anti-working class manner it is preparing the ground for socialism. Insofar as capitalism advances down this road then we need to meet like with like. They are organised politically on a European basis: we must do likewise. Their political parties are already in loose political alliances with common platforms. We are at the stage of trying to unite left factions into a party of some sort or other. A long way behind and with no clear idea of where we are going.

However, if the working class is to progress from its present defensive struggles to setting the agenda for Europe, the party question is key, as is the fight to democratise the EU from top to bottom. We need to develop a political programme suitable for a potential ruling class.

Phil Kent
East London

Simon Harvey of the SLP

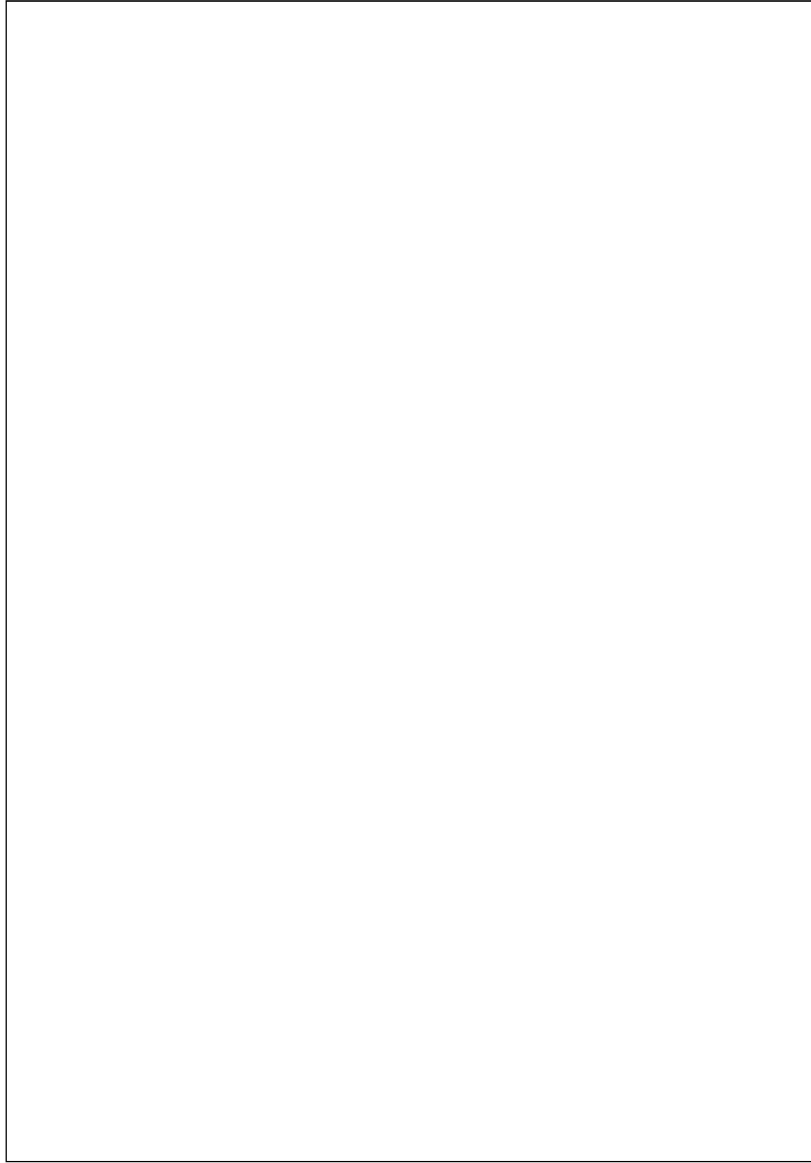
Bull and Fisc still in

Last Saturday's meeting of Socialist Labour's national executive, widely expected to rubber-stamp the expulsion of Roy Bull and give general secretary Arthur Scargill the go-ahead to continue moves to oust the Appeal Four, in fact drew back on both counts.

For over a month comrade Bull, the editor of the ranting *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* who was elected to the vice-presidency at the November 1998 special congress, has been telling the world he has been expelled. That was certainly the decision of the complaints committee, headed by Scargill himself acting as prosecutor-in-chief. The committee 'tried' Bull for "non-compliance with an NEC resolution" - he had the audacity to actually "comment on the affairs of the SLP" in the pages of the *EPSR*. However, only the NEC can implement the complaints committee's recommendation.

Bull can be excused for believing that his expulsion would go through on the nod. But Scargill ran into a little local difficulty - the overwhelming legalistic case made by lawyers Imran Khan and Mike Mansfield in defence of the Appeal Four - comrades Brian Heron, Carolyn Sikorski, Terry Dunn and Helen Drummond. They were also charged with "non-compliance" when they refused to withdraw their 'Appeal for a special conference', despite Scargill's instruction to do so, backed up by the December NEC. The December executive also banned the circulation within the SLP of any document whatsoever - a ban that has been conspicuously ignored not only by the four, but by their allies, comrades John Mulrenan and Ann Brook (see *Weekly Worker* March 4), and by comrade Chris Jones (see *Weekly Worker* March 18).

While the Appeal Four's legal team made telling points on the interpretation of the SLP constitution - Mansfield had helped draw it up of



Royston Bull - still a member, thanks to Fisc

course - the killing argument was the one presented by comrade Khan at the aborted hearing of the 'accused' in February. He pointed out then that the complaints procedure could not be followed, as no panel had been elected to hear any subsequent appeal. The procedure lays down that the 15-strong appeals panel must be voted in at annual congress, a 'minor detail' overlooked by Scargill in his haste to cancel the 1998 full party gathering and replace it with the November special congress.

Since the hearing comrades Scargill and Khan have exchanged convoluted correspondence on the validity of a procedure which cannot be followed through to an appeal. It goes without saying that the general secretary is no match for the Lawrence family solicitor when it comes to such legal niceties. So, with the question unresolved, Scargill merely asked the March 20 NEC to postpone its considerations for another month. In the meantime the case against the Appeal Four is in abeyance, and Royston Bull remains a party member.

But this unexpected turn could well produce unfortunate consequences from Scargill's point of view. Readers will recall that, in a bid to ward off the disciplinary attacks, Bull had written to Scargill, stating: "If what you are saying with this complaints procedure is that such a prominent *EPSR* link as myself is an uncomfortable problem in the leadership of the SLP, then I would prefer to offer my resignation [from the vice-presidency] herewith, rather than haggle with the complaints committee over the finer points of interpretation of what each clause in the constitution actually means, etc" (*Weekly Worker* March 4).

Bull correctly pointed out that the controversy over the expression of his views while holding national office in the SLP should be viewed "as a political question, not a disciplinary matter". He requested that his statement offering to resign should go "immediately to all members of the NEC for their decision".

However, far from placing it before his executive, Scargill refused point blank to allow the January NEC to see the statement. He could not even be persuaded to read out the relevant parts. Instead he announced comrade Bull's resignation from the vice-presidency as a fact, and subsequently informed the membership that it had been "accepted" (*SLP Information Bulletin* February - see *Weekly Worker* March 4). This clearly ignores the fact that only the NEC, not the general secretary alone, is in a position to accept an offer to resign. And Bull's offer was conditional not only on the "decision" of the NEC; it was clearly made in exchange for the dropping of complaints committee charges.

As neither condition was met and the NEC has yet to consider the vice-president's status, it seems to me that, since he remains a member, he is fully entitled to withdraw his resignation offer and resume his duties as elected vice-president. At least that will save Scargill the expense of changing his letterheads.

Meanwhile, the general secretary has made fresh complaints against the Appeal Four. Following the publication of details of correspondence between them and Scargill in the *Weekly Worker*, he has accused them of "unauthorised disclosure" - something declared to be "detrimental to the SLP" at the foot of each and every

missive the general secretary issues. Obviously Scargill would prefer it if as little as possible of his unsavoury behaviour ever saw the light of day, but with rival party factions trying to do each other down, it is hardly surprising that leaks occur - including from some completely unexpected and trusted sources.

Apart from the Scargill loyalists, there are three other main factions. Firstly, those around the Fourth International Supporters Caucus, whose leaders are no less than comrades Brian Heron and Carolyn Sikorski - along with Patrick Sikorski, the former vice-president, who was ousted by Bull. Royston's *EPSR* gained a foothold, despite its small size, when Arthur fell out with Fisc last autumn. And now the ultra-Stalinites around comrade Harpal Brar have gained ground at Fisc's expense, taking over the women's section, thanks to a fine piece of Scargillite gerrymandering. But, with Scargill's disgraceful attacks driving more and more members to quit in despair and disillusionment, the party is crumbling before his eyes.

■ Euro elections

Despite the sorry state of our party, the general secretary's decision to head the Socialist Labour list in London for the European elections appears to have thrown some into disarray (see front page - ed). Of course the few anti-sectarian democrats remaining in the SLP have continued to call on the party to cooperate in a united slate, but Scargill has contemptuously rejected any such suggestion. Why should he have to compromise with anyone? His position - once echoed by the likes of comrade Heron - has been that everyone else should simply disband their organisations, close down their publications and join 'his' party as atomised individuals.

Any decision by the Socialist Alliance to compromise will play into Scargill's hands and further weaken the position of SLP anti-sectarians. It would simply confirm Scargill's view that the left is spineless and only a dictator like himself can provide leadership.

■ Subcommandante

If Scargill *was* given a clear run by the left (a big if, in view of the CPGB's, AWL's and SPEW's determination to contest), one person who would no doubt celebrate such a coup would be a certain Delphi, whose letter appeared in last week's *Weekly Worker* (March 18).

By his own admission our friend would be "quite happy to see Arthur expel" all the "factionalists - be they CPGB, the Bullites or 'Fisc'" (note the devious use of quotation marks around 'Fisc'). The catastrophic membership loss, caused by Scargill's dictatorial rule and resulting in the party virtually grinding to a halt, is of no concern to Delphi - just "teething troubles", you see.

The comrade certainly has an inflated sense of his own importance, likening himself to "subcommandante Marcos". Delphi is apparently beaver away from his jungle hideyhole in the cause of "liberation". Our 'Fiscite' even provided the *Weekly Worker* with his own personal logo - a mysterious design composed of the Greek letters, delta and phi. Sorry, Delphi, but you are no "NUMist" or "Scargill 'loyalist'", despite your adamant insistence. I know who you are ... and so does Arthur ●

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday March 28, 5pm - 'Russian tsarism: state and bureaucracy', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* vol 1 as a study guide. For details phone 0181-459 7146.

Manchester: Monday March 29, 7.30pm - 'Primitive accumulation', in the series on Karl Marx's *Capital*. Phone 0161-226 6133 for details. 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.

■ Socialist Alliance

Trade union rally: Saturday April 17, 2pm, at South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, NW1.

■ Mumia must live

Our coalition is open to all who support the fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal and abolish the racist death penalty. A rally is being organised in London on April 25 as part of a huge wave of international protest aimed at freeing Mumia and making this a focus for a broad struggle against the barbarous use of legalised murder - the death penalty. mumia@callnetuk.com, www.callnetuk.com/home/mumia.

■ Dover Residents Against Racism

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

■ Support Tameside careworkers

Support Group meets every Monday, 7pm, at the Station pub, Warrington Street, Ashton under Lyne. Donations and solidarity to Tameside Unison, 29 Booth Street, Ashton under Lyne.

■ 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.

■ March for jobs!

Prepare for the big demonstration in Cologne on May 29, to coincide with the EU heads of government summit. For details contact Andy Robertson, Secretary, Euromarch Liaison Committee: 0191-222 0299; EUROMUK@aol.com.

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Britain is a national trinity according to the stipulations of the monarchical constitution. Yet neither England, Scotland nor Wales are nations. Rather they are the archaic legal-geographical demarcations of the state of Great Britain: ie, two kingdoms and one principality. The actual inhabitants themselves are united by a common territory, a common language, a common economy and a historically formed common culture and psychology. In other words Britain is not, as comrade Allan Armstrong suggests, some loose or ephemeral conglomeration of peoples who are doomed to a quick divorce, but a stable, historically constituted community: ie, a nation.

Of course, it is clear that every nation is a process of making and re-making. Cromwell's Commonwealth was forged in the fire of a puritan revolution from below. Cool Britannia is the ideological cloak of a Blairite constitutional revolution from above. In other words Britain is not a fixed category, let alone a personality. Nations are a multitude of connected moments, realities and living beings. As a nation Britain is a relatively recent phenomenon. I would link its inception with protestantism and the translation and printing of the bible in English during the 16th century. That and the growth of commercial and agricultural capitalism began to lay the foundations of a neoteric common culture and economy. So Britain can be only some 450 years old.

Nevertheless in terms of embryonic raw material and cultural roots the British nation must be located in the murky undercurrents of the past – in its nothingness. It is not that the Roman conquest of Britannia under Claudius and the subsequent Germanic and Norse invasions from the 5th to the 11th centuries 'inevitably' produced the present British nation (the 'Danish' and 'Norwegian' Norse, including the Normans, being an integral part of the folk movement of Germanic tribes and warrior bands that migrated into the decaying western Roman empire). There were, as there always are, many avenues, many courses history could have taken. The dark ages and certainly the Norman tornado were accidental. But happen they did, along with the negative formation of the British-Welsh and then the English. It is not a matter of using DNA tests to prove the Brito-Romano-Germanic origins of the modern British cline. Biology is irrelevant. The key overriding factor that culturally unites the overwhelming majority of the people in Britain is English (a greatly simplified Low Germanic language with a huge number of loan words).

In arguing that a British nation exists, I am not asserting that it has only a single identity. I profoundly disagree with comrade Armstrong who cyclops-like can only see official Britain (and a largely mythical Scotland). There are, as I have often said, many identities - regional, local, age, gender, religious, ethnic, etc - and by no means least, there are the competing identities advocated by those above, and crucially for us, those below. Leveller democracy, Owenism, physical force Chartism, militant trade unionism, Labourism, CPGB communism. Britain is plural. Britain is therefore open-ended. Hence there can be disunity in defeat or unity in revolt, disunity in passivity or unity in victory. Nothing is predetermined. But we do have a starting point. That is why a firm, scientific, grasp of the present and a vision of the future is so essential. Our political programme has no worth unless it is extended into tomorrow, when, in the poetic words of the outstanding French historian, Fernand Braudel, "we pass through the gates of today" (F Braudel *The identity of France* London 1989, p27).

To an unbiased observer Jack Conrad's motive in stressing the cor-

Scottish national socialism and its red prince - part 4

Self-determination and the federal republic

Jack Conrad concludes his reply to Allan Armstrong of the Scottish Socialist Party

poreal reality of the British nation is plain and unmistakable. It has nothing whatsoever to do with some 'Union Jack' British patriotism, as ridiculously insisted upon by comrade Armstrong. His royal saltire is white and blue and flies this day over Edinburgh castle. My flag is red. I am an internationalist and, following in the footsteps of Thomas Paine, a "citizen of the world". Nor is it because I entertain some project of British national socialism. I am by birth and upbringing British, or, if you like, English. But by conviction I aspire to Marxist communism. Not surprisingly then I hold that there can be no road to socialism which premises itself on the isolated British nation or United Kingdom state. Socialism is a universal act of self-liberation by the universal class. Though it is not a formulation I would normally use, I am a "global nationalist" (a paradoxical phrase coined by our pro-nationalist Stalinite correspondent, Ivor Kenna - see *Letters Weekly Worker* March 18).

No, the reason I wish to highlight the British nation is to wield it as a polemical scythe. My intention is to lay bare the debilitating consequences that lie hidden underneath the carefully nurtured myths of Scottish nationalism ... and thus lessen the danger of a disastrous split in the historically constituted working class in Britain. By definition Scottish nationalism, both right and left, must on the one hand deny the tangible British nation and on the other hand invent a phantom Scottish nation. If in modern times there was, and today there still is, a British nation, Scottish nationalism has a big problem. Crucially the absence of a Scottish nation.

That implied lacuna in good part explains the malevolent bile about the CPGB and its co-thinkers being pro-UK "unionists" and even "racists" (comrade Armstrong freely throws about both charges). Without its fanciful 400 years of English oppression, Scottish nationalism - whether it be the SNP or Settler Watch, the CWI in Scotland or Allan Armstrong's Red Republicans - is electoralist opportunism at best or at worst crude anti-English bigotry. (The CWI in Scotland is opportunistic in an almost chemically pure form. Its break with Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party was justified in terms of swimming with the tide of nationalist opinion.)

My politics are very different. In actual fact I do not need the British nation. I discuss and analyse Britain because that modality must be taken into account by revolutionaries. No more. Marxists start programmatically not with nations, but the enemy state. Within each state we seek to organise the workers into one Communist Party (needless to say, we also envisage a new International with subordinate sections). That state could be a nation state: eg, Britain, Germany, France and Italy. By the same measure it could be a multi-national state, like Belgium, India or Canada. To the extent that it is transformed from a trading bloc into a superstate that also applies to the European Union - as a good nationalist, comrade Armstrong can then call us the 'Euro-left' or perhaps even 'Eurocommunists'. Either way the aim

of our programme is to unite the workers as a *political* class in order to overthrow first the existing state, and then, according to the forward march of the world revolution, all existing social conditions. Our efforts today are designed to that end.

Unfortunately most of the left in Britain is hopelessly mired in economism or strikism. Pay, anti-trade union laws, health and welfare cuts are their main diet. Socialism is a splendid, but disembodied future. However, the main characteristic of economism is a denial or downplaying of democratic demands. For example, in pre-revolutionary Russia the economists maintained that the task of social democrats (ie, communists), was to support, promote and politicise the economic struggles of the working class. As proletarian confidence, solidarity and trade union organisation grew, so would socialist consciousness. Or so the strike-chasers thought. The tsarist monarchy, the fake duma parliament, demands for a constituent assembly, the right of self-determination for the innumerable oppressed nationalities in the Russian empire, peasant land hunger, women's equality, etc were patronisingly described as being above the workers' heads - or issues that would be solved by socialism.

In contrast Lenin and the Bolsheviks believed that the working class had to be united to smash the tsarist monarchy system. Socialist consciousness would not primarily grow by workers improving their own pay and conditions through economic strikes, but by taking up and fighting for the fullest, most extensive democracy. Every denial of justice, every act of bureaucratic arbitrariness in the countryside, every resentment, every example of national oppression had to be the concern of the workers if they were to become the hegemon of the revolution. Such an ability to think and act strategically comes from Marxist science and building and educating a mass proletarian party.

The CPGB models itself on the Bolsheviks politically and programmatically. Hence in Britain the CPGB takes a revolutionary democratic approach to the UK state and the constitutional monarchy system. Here stands the main enemy. In our minimum programme (ie, within the social parameters of the capitalist system) we therefore demand the immediate abolition of the monarchy, the House of Lords, the acts of union and self-determination for Scotland and Wales, and the reunification of Ireland. In place of the constitutional monarchy system the CPGB poses the need for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales.

The 'federal republic' slogan encapsulates both the democratic right to self-determination and the unity of the working class in Britain, in opposition to Blair's plan for a new constitutional monarchy system. It also encapsulates the unity of the working class in Britain against nationalism. Actually Blair has unwittingly done us a great service. In remaking the UK constitution - albeit to strengthen the system of class rule - he shows everyone that the constitu-

tion is neither timeless nor natural. It is plastic, artificial, a product of historical making and contemporary re-making. Consequently the call for constitutional change is no longer fringe politics. Constitutional change today lies at the heart of political debate and action. What Blair has begun from above we can complete from below.

Comrade Armstrong feels threatened. To save his precious national road he deviously caricatures the call for a federal republic as the "most 'advanced' defence of the British state" (*Weekly Worker* February 25). Revolutionary federalism is merely a form of "accommodation" with the state, he froths. Virulent nationalism turns him away from class unity and drives him towards anarchist irrationality. Automatically and instinctively he rejects anything pan-British, even the growth of working class power. He might have been trained by Ivan Pavlov. Marxists, it should be said, are not indifferent to state forms. Nor do we advocate the instant abolition of the state. Under capitalism we fight to extend democracy to its limits, preferring - surprise, surprise - dual power to fascism. Certainly the workers will need their own semi-state for a few decades after the socialist revolution. So what determines the communist attitude towards a state is not whether its borders stretch from John O'Groats to Land's End, but democratic and class content. Surely ushering in a federal republic using proletarian methods, as we intend - workers' councils, etc, would see not the salvation of official Britain, but its death. Only a narrow-minded nationalist could describe that as "accommodation" or "defence".

It should also be noted that we do not put a scientific assessment that there is a British nation before the palpable feelings of masses of people in Scotland and Wales. Millions think they are nationally disadvantaged or oppressed (a subjectivity that constitutes a material factor). So Stalin's five-fold classification of what constitutes a nation is not used as a "check list" of who qualifies and who does not qualify for self-determination, as comrade Armstrong hints. That was not Stalin's intention as a pamphleteer in 1913. Nor was it his practice as the commissar for nationalities in the Soviet government of 1917. Those who take such a dry and utterly repellent stance are alien to the spirit of Bolshevism. Our approach is designed to further democracy and puts politics, not dogmatism, in the driving seat.

Having left no room for confusion that Scotland's right to self-determination is entirely a political and democratic question, let us proceed to discuss the CPGB's attitude to that right.

Advocating self-determination is not the same as advocating independence. The former is a democratic demand. The latter is nationalism. Scotland ought to have as a matter of principle the right to freely decide its own future. But that does not mean communists are agnostic about how that right is exercised. On the contrary we are very partisan. The CPGB is for the closest possible voluntary unity

of people in general and the workers in particular. That means resolutely combating nationalism in its many and varied manifestations.

Nationalism and Marxism are antithetical. Nationalism considers nations and national cultures positively. National differences or distinctions between people are viewed as essentially healthy and something to be sustained into the distant future. Left nationalists like comrade Armstrong and the SSP give this 'principle' a national socialist gloss. The road to socialism is seen through the prism of the nation. Marxism on the other hand considers nations and national distinctions negatively. We want to create conditions whereby nationalism, nations, nationality and the nation state quietly wither away, not proliferate. Hence Marxists oppose every form of nationalist ideology, whether this is represented by an established state or those forces striving to create a new state through a breakaway.

It is essential not to conflate all nationalisms as equally reactionary. The nationalism of an established capitalist state is inherently conservative. Fascism, the most degenerate form of bourgeois nationalism, is counter-revolutionary and thoroughly undemocratic. But petty bourgeois nationalism may contain a revolutionary democratic content. Communists support that content unconditionally. At the same time it is vital not to abandon or water down criticism of petty bourgeois nationalism or advocacy of an independent working class approach to the national question.

I have argued that the relative decline of British imperialism laid the basis for a novel Scottish nationalism (certainly not the revival of a nationhood going back to Kenneth MacAlpine or Macbeth). From the mid-19th century onwards being Scottish - with the obvious exception of worst paid labour - was to share in the "lucrative" booty of the British empire (L Colly *Britons* London 1992, p373). Under Thatcher it meant cuts, the poll tax and a denial of rights. Identification with the state reached its zenith in World War II and in the subsequent long boom. Now there is widespread alienation. Blair's constitutional revolution has yet to reverse that trend.

Given the perceived absence of a viable socialist alternative, bourgeois petty nationalism comes to the fore. In the form of the SNP it promises to secure for Scotland a better position in the world economic pecking order through the formation of a new, independent Scottish state within the European Union. Sectionalism is undoubtedly rife. Not only opinion polls tell us that. Every election, every grievance, every strike is coloured by the national question. And no SWP attempts to economically explain away the national question by listing the 'primacy' of all-Britain "issues like health, education, welfare and union rights" - will make the Scots forget their "Scottishness" nor the undemocratic denial of their right to self-determination within the UK (*Socialist Worker* June 13 1998).

Its secretary, Chris Bambery, claims the SWP is committed to "politics,

politics, politics". By that he means giving a political coloration to strikes. "Every strike becomes political," he says, bowing in the direction of his leader's latest line in catastrophe prediction. According to the sage, the "smallest improvement in the workers' conditions ... bring conflict with the capitalist system" (T Cliff *Trotskyism after Trotsky* London 1999, p82). Demonstrably untrue. Yet when it comes to real politics - ie, the relationship between all classes and the state, the way we are ruled and our rulers rule - the SWP has miserably tailed Blair. Instead of formulating constitutional demands in its much vaunted *Action programme*, the SWP reflects and panders to narrow trade unionist consciousness and even attempts to breathe life into the so-called Alternative Economic Strategy of the 'official communists' (the SWP's *Action programme* was first published in *Socialist Worker* September 12 1998).

Mesmerised by economism, the main slogan of the SWP for the post-May 1997 period has been 'tax the rich'. This is, of course, a perfectly correct demand. But, unless placed within the context of a *communist minimum programme*, it challenges neither the way we are politically ruled nor economically exploited. The Liberal Democrats entered the last election under the banner of increased taxation. Communists must raise political - ie, constitutional - demands and slogans. We need a working class alternative to Blair's new constitutional monarchy system.

What is particularly notable about Blair's programme of constitutional reform at this moment in time is the complete absence of any working class input or alternative. Indeed, as we have long argued, it is the atomisation, the (temporary) disappearance of the working class from the political stage that has created the conditions whereby Blair can propose and feel safe in carrying through his programme. Though millions are alienated from the state, there is neither pressure nor threat from the working class. That can, must and will be ended.

To that end we consider ourselves obliged to criticise those such as the SWP, Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the SLP who downplay, avoid or dismiss the national question in Scotland by appealing for the "unity of the Scottish, English and Welsh workers" around routine trade union demands and "true socialism" (C Bamberg *Scotland: the socialist answer* London 1997, p16). Such organisations are in effect English chauvinists. Their socialist rhetoric is not internationalism. It is nothing else but preaching submission: ie, the other side of the coin peddled by Tony Blair and Donald Dewar.

Wherever a national question exists, Marxists approach it from the principles of democracy and internationalism. We seek at all times to build the maximum unity and ever closer relations between nationalities. The working class has no interest in any delay in solving national questions, and has everything to gain from an immediate settlement of disputes. Communists therefore seek an immediate solution. We denounce any and every delay or procrastination as reactionary.

That is why in 1997 we did our utmost to expose the proposed Edinburgh parliament and the rigged nature of Blair's September 11 referendum (not 1998, as comrade Armstrong mistakenly says). In the name of genuine self-determination we made propaganda for an active boycott. The CPGB found itself in a difficult but enviable position. Alone we intransigently defended and boldly advocated *independent* working class politics: ie, the right of Scotland (and Wales) to self-determination. Our call for a boycott of Blair's rigged referendum earned us hatred from all manner

of high-ups. Scotland Forward coordinator Paul Vestry unsuccessfully tried to eject us from meetings. Donald Dewar's cronies banned our material in Glasgow. Alan Green proposed our expulsion from the Scottish Socialist Alliance. Nevertheless our message found a definite, mass, echo amongst nationalist and radical workers.

It was not only the SSP's Alan McCombes and Alan Green who wanted a sop parliament. Secretly the SSP's other Allan entertained a similar agenda. Shamefully comrade Armstrong cannot bring himself to tell the truth. He maintains that the CPGB called for a "stay-at-home abstention on September 11". He even pretends that our politics leave us "well placed" in the future to serve the "British ruling class" as "critical cheerleaders" in its "project to maintain the unity of their state" (*Weekly Worker* February 25). Evidently comrade Armstrong has overplayed his hand. True, Holyrood can marginally alter income tax rates. But it has no say over the constitution. MSPs cannot make Scotland independent. The whole thing, including the September 11 1997 referendum, is a prophylactic designed to reinforce Labourism and preserve the UK constitutional monarchy system.

We support the right of nations to self-determination, up to and including forming an independent state. Communists are for peaceful and democratic secession, as opposed to any kind of coercive or violent maintenance of unity. The use of force to maintain unity, for example in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1998, is an admission that the state's territory has divided into oppressed and oppressor. Unlike the SSP, the CPGB unconditionally defends the right of the oppressed to take up arms to win its democratic rights from the oppressor. That is why we said: For the IRA, against the British army!

Supporting the right of self-determination does not mean communists desire separation. On the contrary, advocacy of separation is something exceptional. For example, between Ireland and England/Britain there is a whole history of violence and brutal oppression. Comrade Armstrong would have it that now, under the conditions of Good Friday, the CPGB urges Irish republican socialists to "accept partition and British rule". Jokingly he asks "how much longer before" we raise the demand for the Twenty-Six Counties "to join the UK too" (*Weekly Worker* February 18). I will put such silliness down to comrade Armstrong's inability to distinguish between his own fetid imagination and our long record of solidarity with Irish republicans and opposition to British imperialism. Suffice to say, we still demand the unconditional withdrawal of British troops and right of Ireland to reunify. Significantly comrade Armstrong's SSP does not. His party leadership supports the Good Friday British-Irish Agreement, which legitimises the undemocratic division of the island.

As a certified break-up merchant, comrade Armstrong might care to tell us what programmatic position he would take under an independent SNP Scotland (no wild speculation). There would appear to be three basic options. Serve the new governing elite as a "critical cheerleader"? Join us in fighting to unite the workers to overthrow the state? Keep bashing away with the separatist hammer?

There are plenty of fault lines. Glasgow resents Edinburgh. Aberdeen has oil. Gaelic speakers would be advantaged if it were the official language over 'colonial' English. It is hardly inconceivable to imagine Orkney and the Shetland Islands hankering for separation. There are also the old border counties - Roxburgh and Berwick. They have far more in common with northern England than the Scottish highlands.

We communists are quite prepared

to take self-determination to extremes - if there is a genuine democratic grievance let Orkney, Cornwall, Shetland, the Isle of Man, etc, decide their own fates, up to and including independence. But we communists would try and persuade people to unite. Separation into tiny statelets is neither a communist method nor principle. Fragmentation, or breaking up, is not a road to socialism. It is though the ideal of anarchism. When put into practice, as it was in Spain in 1868-74, it led, as Engels famously illustrated, to "the boundless, and senseless disintegration of the revolutionary resources" and a walkover for counterrevolution (F Engels *MECW* Vol 23, Moscow 1988, p597). Think again, comrade Armstrong and the SSP, think again.

Separation, as I have said, only becomes a communist demand if unity is imposed by force. The relationship between England and Scotland has not primarily been characterised by violence. At least since the 1707 Act of Union. So our policy is decided on the basis of historical conditions and the circumstances in each case. Communists in general favour voluntary unity and the biggest possible states as providing the best conditions for coming together and the merger of peoples. Under present circumstances there would be nothing remotely progressive about a Scottish army, a customs post at Gretna Green and the splitting of the historically bonded peoples. That Marxist approach also informs our politics *vis-à-vis* the EU. The CPGB refuses to defend the pound sterling against the euro. We also oppose all campaigns for a British withdrawal from the EU.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is constitutionally the unity of hereditary crowns, not the voluntary union of peoples. Sovereignty formally lies with the monarch, not the people. Therefore self-determination for Scotland and Wales does not and cannot exist under our present constitutional system. The 1707 Act of Union, which merged the two parliaments of England (and Wales) and Scotland, had no popular mandate. The rich and powerful decided. Democracy was entirely within their fief. It suited their interests for Scotland to make a union British state - massive bribery helped no end. Not surprisingly there was a *quid pro quo*. For example in 1712 Scottish MPs in Westminster voted unanimously to repeal the Act of Union. They were swamped by English MPs.

Given the huge disparity between the populations of England on the one side and Scotland and Wales on the other, the UK must be dominated by the English (who have no problem with self-determination). It is the peoples of Scotland and Wales who cannot freely determine their own future. With or without Blair's Edinburgh parliament and Cardiff assembly they must go cap in hand to Westminster. Hence there exists within the UK monarchical system an inborn democratic deficit. So Scotland's constitutional status is not only a matter for the Scots. It is a democratic question that must see the whole of the working class in Britain united around a correct strategy. Only by mastering the gamut of such social contradictions can the workers raise themselves from the economic, trade unionist struggles of a slave class to that of a political and potential ruling class.

Communists have no project to save the existing British state. Comrade Armstrong's numerous statements purporting to show otherwise go beyond the normal bounds of serious polemics. To say nothing of clarity and saving valuable time, he would do his own cause less harm by sticking to what the CPGB actually says, rather than resorting to what are transparent fabrications. Needless to say,

the CPGB wishes to create the best conditions for the closest unity of the people of Britain against the UK state. We seek to mobilise the working class of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in a political struggle for a federal republic and a united Ireland.

Comrade Armstrong knows that Marx, Engels and Lenin wrote favourably about a federation in the British Isles. The comrade introduces an irrelevance from Lenin - a mere social democrat, according to Armstrong - about federation under Russian tsarism being meaningless. Indeed it was. But that was hardly the case following the October Revolution. The USSR was formed as a federation of workers' republics with the right to self-determination for nations enshrined in the constitution. Anyway, that aside, the comrade interestingly discusses Engels' position on Ireland in 1891.

He concludes that Engels' call for a British-Irish federation in his 'Critique of the Erfurt programme' was historically conditioned. That with the upsurge of class struggle around the Irish TGWU, the 1913 Dublin lockout and then the 1916 Easter uprising, the Dáil Eireann and the Black and Tan war, independence again became the only principled demand. I wholeheartedly agree. But the CPGB advances a federal republic not as some universal panacea. For us it is a democratic and transitional aim specific to a Britain which now has a burning *internal* national question.

And, having cited the 'Critique of the Erfurt programme', perhaps comrade Armstrong would forgive me if I refer to Frederick Engels' central point. Federalism "would", he wrote, "be a step forward" in the UK which in spite of its single parliament has four "nations" - a term he used loosely - and "three different systems of legislation" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 27, Moscow 1990, p228). However, and this is the point, federalism was "a step forward" to the "one and indivisible republic". This is the form most suited to the needs and struggles of the proletariat. Engels reckoned already in the 1890s that federalism was becoming a "hindrance" in the eastern states of the USA. In Switzerland it was "tolerable" only because of the country's torpor. Furthermore, in Bismarckian Germany, said Engels, federalism on the Swiss mode; would be "an enormous step backwards" (*ibid*).

Over 100 years later looking at capitalistically advanced countries like the USA, Australia and catatonic Switzerland, I am of the opinion that communists should be for sweeping changes. Federalism in these countries now constitutes a constitutional weapon in the hands of backward states, territories and cantons. In Switzerland it perpetuates alpine insularity. The majority of Australians want to abolish the monarchy. But a referendum majority is required in the majority of states. State rights are the main bulwark against republicanism. We favour a united republic and a single chamber of parliament. In the USA too not only should federalism go but so must the presidential system and the Senate. Logically comrade Armstrong should rush to defend Uri and Nidwalden, Queensland and Tasmania, Louisiana and Alabama, and urge them to split away - Jefferson Davis tried in 1861.

Unlike Engels our present-day critics on the left generally absolve themselves from what they wrongly describe as the 'bourgeois' task of ending the monarchy and winning a federal republic. Comrade Armstrong defines his sect around the maximum slogan, 'Scottish workers' republic'. The SSP tops find the terms 'republic' and 'republican' a ticklish problem, given the catholic-protestant, Irish-Scots divide that lurks beneath the surface in Scotland. They opt for the less provocative 'independent

socialist Scotland'. The difference is important, but at the end of the day secondary. Both the revolutionary-nationalist and reformist-nationalist wings of the SSP abstain from independent working class politics under capitalism. Naturally their ultra-left pose is never applied to wage and other economic demands. When it comes to trade union politics they do not turn up their noses with haughty references to the maximum demand for the abolition of the system of wage slavery - which like the call for communism is quite correct in terms of propaganda. So in rejecting the communist minimum programme these comrades make maximalist gestures while practising the *capitalist* politics of the working class.

Through their own self-activity the workers become organised, strong, confident and full of initiative. Through experience they also become convinced that it is impossible to transform society without first conquering political power. Hence for Marxists the demand for Scottish self-determination is primarily about the struggle it can engender. At every stage we stress the cardinal importance of working class self-activity. So while the CPGB fights for reforms, we always seek to do so using the most revolutionary means the situation allows. Only in this way can the workers be made ready for state power.

Frankly, neither comrade Armstrong nor the SSP majority defends the Marxist point of view. Of course, the SSP majority promotes a Scottish national road to socialism (which comes via the Holyrood parliament and introduces nothing more than minimal social democratic reforms, leaving by its own admission wage labour and hence the capital-labour relationship intact). Its socialism is national, statist and bureaucratic: ie, it is objectively anti-working class and thus anti-socialist. In contrast comrade Armstrong and his Communist Tendency are national revolutionaries. They would introduce an instant communism in Scotland. No doubt intentions are sincere. Everything must be terribly democratic. But their whole project will produce results that are completely opposite. Pol Pot is an awful warning.

Being backward and to some extent peripheral, the USSR, China, etc could temporarily develop the productive forces and wealth available to the state by means of universal statification and forced mobilisation of resources and labour power. That is hardly the case with Scotland. It is not only an advanced country in terms of industry and economic activity. It is thoroughly integrated into and reliant on the world economy. General nationalisation would be woefully regressive. The very notion of a Scottish steel, car, computer or shipbuilding industry is a reactionary utopia. Such industries operate nowadays on a global scale and according to a global division of labour. Instead of breaking them apart - which would surely mean ruination - the historic task of the working class is to fully socialise them. Only by bringing capital where it exists as a system under social control can the workers - necessarily as a world class - really free themselves.

What really unites comrade Armstrong with the SSP majority (Alan McCombes and the CWI in Scotland, Alan Green, Hugh Kerr, Bill Bonnar, etc) is the fight for a separate Scotland: both wings of the SSP therefore share a programme to *weaken*, not *smash* the UK state, presumably leaving the workers in England and Wales to overthrow it. Instead of working class unity against the UK state the SSP would end the historic unity of the working class in Britain. Hence, as capital becomes increasingly global, the two wings of the SSP irresponsibly try to divide the forces of the working class.

Communists will oppose both nationalist wings equally ●

In the 1980s we predicted the effects of monetarism and recession would sweep Thatcher away. But the political issue of the Falklands war cut across this process. Following this there was a period of heightened class war. Important as these events were, the underlying issues were much more important. These can be briefly characterised as the restructuring of the economy, developing globalisation and the imposition of neo-liberal policies.

If there had existed a revolutionary leadership, capable of winning the support of the leading layers of the working class, then the possibility of socialist change could have been posed, but this was not the case. Instead the destruction of the old traditional industries paved the way for service industries and information technology, which, together with the setbacks and defeats of the period, especially the miners' strike, fundamentally affected the consciousness of the working class.

The Labour leadership during the 1980s played a disgraceful and baleful role, but the key factors were de-industrialisation, unemployment, changing work patterns and industries - all combining and interacting with the class defeats, acting to drive working class consciousness backwards, particularly amongst the most advanced layers. The Labour Party leadership was only able to get away with their shift to the right because of this. The debilitation of the rank and file movements also arose due to these conditions. The 1980s threw up class battles, but any renewed economic crisis in Britain starts from a totally different vista. There have been 15-20 years of neo-liberal policies worldwide. Globalisation and the information society is radically changing economic and class relationships.

So the questions which should be asked are: if there is a recession how long will it last? Will capitalism be able to find a way out? What economic counter-measures will be employed? And critically how will the working class respond? Central to this last point should also be the question, will a recession/slump stun or activate a response from workers? Over the past decade, movements have been of a defensive, often local nature. Why? Because of the impact of neo-liberal policies, globalisation, defeats and lowering of class-consciousness.

Globalisation was denied as a concept by the SP leadership, except in regard to financial transactions. The Asian tigers were regarded initially as not important to the world economy and not important in the globalisation process. Now the opposite is stated. This region accounts for one third of world trade, and from this statistic the Socialist Party draw the conclusion that there will be a worldwide crisis. Moreover, we are told that there is now globalisation of finance and trade. Not only this, but it is acknowledged that new technology and the changing nature of the advanced economies has played a role in "facilitating" globalisation (L Walsh *Socialism Today* October 1998).

Globalisation can be summarised as: privatisation, deregulation, liberalisation, the attacks on middle class and working class living standards, the exploding movements of capital, which together have created the conditions for the present crisis. Additionally the nature of the information society has dramatically changed the systems of communications and financial transactions and is therefore another key factor. Socialist Party predictions of a global slump, something which has never happened before, are currently way off the mark. Recession and slump encompasses 40% of the world economy, but markets in Europe and the US are still growing, albeit at a reduced rate. It would be foolish, because capitalism is unplanned and inherently is a sys-

Socialist Party split - Merseyside's view, part 2

Europe, the unions

The Merseyside Socialists, who recently left or were suspended from the Socialist Party in England and Wales, continue their critique of the leadership



“... the leadership, continuing to ignore the very facts, insisted that Emu would not be launched in January 1999!”

tem of crisis, to rule out completely the possibility of a world 'crash' or even a 'slump'. But the key question would be of the impact this will have on consciousness and working class struggle. For the moment we have no reliable way of estimating this: it only amounts to either lucky guesswork or idle speculation.

(...)

Post-World War II, the existence of workers' states (albeit deformed), the strength of the working class - the expectations and crucially the experiences of workers and the traditions of mass and revolutionary struggle - provided the consciousness to underpin alternative rank and file traditions and movements. In turn this motivated the leading layers of the class, and formed the backdrop to a whole historical period. This workers' power posed a central threat to the ruling class in the 60s and 70s. Combined with the women's, black and other emerging movements, this created a turbulent and radical period, partly based on the factors above. In the ex-colonial world this was of a revolutionary character.

These movements came about because it was a time of change. Capitalism in the advanced industrial economies was moving away from Fordist models of large-scale production to a service/information-based economy. Allied to this, the ruling class had to challenge the power of organised labour. There was a crisis of capitalism in the sense that in Britain, in particular, the old imperial traditions could no longer exist in a rapidly changing world economy. That is why Britain in many respects was catapulted to the forefront of class struggle.

In Britain, New Zealand, America the changing nature of the economic foundations resulted in the 1980s in political assaults of the capitalist

class, tough monetarism, privatisation, deregulation and neo-liberal policies. Significantly there is a body of evidence showing that in these countries the results have been very much along similar lines. The working class movement was in many cases confronted with decisive challenges. In Britain with the miners, New Zealand (seamen and dockers), America (air traffic controllers), and now in Australia (dockers). Failing to rise to these challenges (except in the case of Australia), the movement has been forced onto the defensive, and is fragmented. (In Britain TU membership is now at 30%, down from 50%. NZ likewise: down to 36%). The result has been a falling away in class-consciousness, in rank and file and trade union organisation.

Europe

The mistaken perspectives for monetary union were fully revealed at the national conference in 1997. Throughout the 1990s the leadership followed on with the orthodox line inherited from Ted Grant, who frequently predicted the collapse of the Common Market and European project. In the early 90s the national leadership were initially repeating this line, with a slight modification: "A shattering of the EC is only likely in the event of a deep slump" (*A world in crisis - a Marxist analysis for the 1990s* CWI pamphlet, March 1994).

In 1993 in an article for *Militant International Review*, written by a comrade from Liverpool (unpublished, presumably because it took a position contrary to that of the leadership), it was argued:

"Deflationary policies will lead to class conflicts ... nevertheless, it is likely, though not certain, that five or six countries could implement a single European currency ... Can political union be achieved? That is unlikely due to the separate interests of each capitalist class ... International solidarity has been undermined through the role of the Stalinist parties and social democracy in the last decade. The seeming triumph of the market and the collapse of the Stalinist states has reinforced this. European monetary union will bring back onto the agenda the pressing need for international solidarity" (Unpublished article, full text available).

Instead of taking such points into account the analysis centred on European Monetary Union and its inevitable non-completion. There is no need to overburden the text here; a few quotations will suffice to show the main trend, especially those taken from the latter part of the 90s, when it was increasingly likely that the project would be completed. In 1994 predictions were being made that Maastricht was in tatters and would be "shredded" by the time of the EU summit in 1996. Then when that did not happen the prediction changed to the impossibility of the other eight EU members meeting the Maastricht criteria.

The statement presented to the 1997 conference said: "One of the by-products of the French events is the shipwrecking of European Monetary Union (Emu). For the first time, there is an admission from bourgeois spokespersons, like Clarke, that 'it

[Emu] might not happen at all'. Despite all the efforts of Kohl to plough on regardless, even the 'core group' of countries around German capitalism will not be able to adhere to the Maastricht criteria by 1999. The defeat of Juppé and his plan, which is what the French election signified, was a shattering blow to Maastricht and Emu. The softening of the criteria for Emu will completely undermine the idea of a strong 'euro'. This in turn could lead to currency turmoil and competitive devaluations" ("General election and perspectives for Marxism").

In opposition to this Merseyside argued: "The election of Jospin in France has not fundamentally altered the prospects for European Monetary Union (Emu). The government is staffed with those who believe that monetary union must go ahead and the view of the governor of the Bank of France is that there is no possibility of postponement. There is great uncertainty surrounding the project, but the underlying tendencies now point in the direction of its eventual completion - even if it is postponed for a period. These tendencies are rooted in the competition of the major world economic powers. The blocs which have emerged in America, Japan and Europe push in the direction of free trade areas, and a common currency is a necessity within Europe for the multinationals and financial institutions.

"Whilst in France and Germany there are political ambitions of creating a united Europe as a counterweight to Germany, the most important underlying issue initially is economic monetary union. The prospects of political union are a far distant prospect and on the basis of capitalism it is very hard to see anything like this being achieved. With monetary union only one and half years away there is likely to be a core of countries who will jump onto the train and the other countries will not be far away. Even if the convergence criteria were to be softened this would not automatically undermine the moves in this direction, though it could bring deleterious effects for European capitalism in future years. Neither will a renewed recession, which could coincide with the launch of the project, in the world or European economies fundamentally undermine the process" (*Members Bulletin* No24, August 1997).

On this issue the leadership were hopelessly at sea - so much so that they could marshal little support from the rank and file delegates. The majority of speakers in the debate around Emu opposed the leadership. Sensing that the debate was heading in the direction of a defeat, the executive committee proposed that the sections of the document and the amendments tabled by the branches be remitted and the EC draw up a document on the issue. Such a document, at the time of writing, has never been produced or distributed to the national committee or the party. Instead the leadership, continuing to ignore the very facts, insisted that Emu would not be launched in January 1999! Peter Taaffe at the March 1998 national committee declared that on balance it was unlikely that monetary union would be

launched (in January 1999), but if it was it would not go through to completion (in 2002). In fact he was categorical: "Emu will blow - take it down, write it down" (Speech by Peter Taaffe - written notes from national committee meeting).

In June 1998 a CWI statement/update on the world economy was circulated, once again predicting a 1999 crash. Significantly nowhere in the statement is there any mention of the actual social and political movements of the working class, except that there will be the re-emerging of an anti-capitalist mood (note: nothing about socialist consciousness). But there were no predictions about the impossibility of Emu in 1999. Instead the document said this: "Now the EU countries have decided to set up the world's biggest peg on the basis of superficial economic convergence. The looming world recession will put enormous pressure on that peg ... a new world recession, political and social unrest in Europe itself will tend to blow the continent's currency union apart" (CWI statement, 'The threat of financial meltdown, mark two').

This position was repeated in *The Socialist*: "Emu could be shattered by massive currency turmoil even before the fixing of exchange rates and interest rates in January 1999. If that does not happen, then in all probability it will break down under the pressure of economic collapse, currency turmoil and huge social revolts before the euro replaces national currencies in January 2002" (J Beishon *The Socialist* June 12 1998). In other words the past position of Emu not being completed in 1999 has been conveniently forgotten, and a new prediction now takes its place.

(...)

Sitting back and waiting for the collapse of the euro will do nothing to assist the struggles of the working class. Understanding what the representatives of capital are planning, and trying to organise against this can impact on the euro's future. The only force likely to stop the completion of European Monetary Union is the political, social and economic struggle of the working class on a European-wide basis - otherwise the euro will be the common currency in 2002.

(...)

Too much has already been invested in Emu by the banks, the multinationals and national governments to go back. Additionally Emu is part of a political strategy to attack the living standards, especially the social wage of the working class and middle classes. The only way in which it could be halted or stopped would be on the basis of revolutionary upheavals. Recession, if it unfolds, will drive in the direction of even greater concentrations of industry and finance, and further attacks on the working class.

(...)

Monetary union is not an abstract economic issue: it has enormous practical consequences for British and European politics. In November 1998, Ken Jackson, the leader of the AEEU, urged Blair to abandon the pledge to hold a referendum and instead make joining Emu an election issue. In the days prior to this the CBI and the Chamber of Commerce both came out

and crisis

enthusiastically backing Emu. The TUC leaders almost to a man enthusiastically support joining Emu. Top foreign industrialists are warming up the debate by asserting that jobs may be lost if Britain does not join. The social democrats throughout Europe are openly urging Blair to announce a target date for joining. Mandelson and Brown are softening up the ground for Blair. The chancellor will spend millions selling the euro and indirectly this will play a part in re-electing Labour. What will be the impact on the Tories? Such a campaign in an election will split them down the middle and could result in further electoral isolation.

Such issues are not abstruse, they raise practical consequences issues. How will parties respond to this? What will be the impact on the political alliances between Labour and the Liberals? How will it impact throughout Europe? And what strategy should workers adopt in relation to European-wide alliances (already top trade union leaders are talking about pay bargaining on a European basis)? How can working class resistance be organised on a European basis?

Trade unions

Militant identified, in the 1960s, ad hoc and shop stewards committees, post-war, as going over the heads of the official structures, but it had warned that "the taking of issues away from the official organisations at the present time is fatal" (Trade union document, February 1968). This position, whilst broadly correct, has now taken on a one-sided interpretation. It was not always like this. In the early 1990s after strikes at Barrow, Dover, in the NHS and post office the analysis was: "All the major strikes ... developed from below. Ad hoc rank and file organisations will be thrown up during the strikes ... new broad lefts will spring to life" ('Building in the workplaces', April 1991).

Generally in this period the emphasis was on ad hoc, rank and file bodies and our role in initiating such activities. However, the EC also had a mistaken perspective of major industrial disputes, local and national general strikes leading to an increase in trade union membership and pressure from below forcing the leaders into action. Even up until 1993-94 the Socialist Party nationally were still calling on the TUC to organise a general strike.

Merseyside as far back as September 1989 were suggesting caution. In a letter about the draft *British perspectives*, it was argued that the outcome of the industrial struggles over the previous 10 years had to be taken into account: "Central to this is the attitude of the labour and trade union leadership to the industrial relations legislation and the way in which they are paralysed by their inability to take on the government. The docks dispute (1989) being the worst example. Linked to this is the question of the collapse of the left and the disappearance of the broad left structures, which at this stage hamper effective opposition ... the nature of the [future] disputes mean that local or sectoral actions will take place, but national actions involving a number of unions together are unlikely ... general strike actions are not likely this side of the general election" (Letter to EC, 1989).

In the early 90s Merseyside's position was to warn against putting all our forces into the broad lefts and

instead favoured setting up rank and file ad hoc bodies. At the 1993 conference the national leadership, supported by comrades from Merseyside, argued for the setting up of a Public Sector Alliance to fight cuts and for a campaign to organise not just trade unions, but also community groups. In the report of the trade union commission it states: "Whenever we are blocked using the official structures of the movement, like in Nupe and TGWU, we must turn our attention to the unofficial bodies" (*Members Bulletin* March 1993). Such was the opposition to this proposal from trade union comrades that Lynn Walsh from the EC had to intervene to tell comrades that "trade union work had developed out of our political work we did: eg. the anti-poll tax and Liverpool" (*Members Bulletin* March 1993). This position was further ratified at the 1994 congress when the leadership argued for a patient and skilful intervention into strikes and picket lines: "The best way of doing this is through initiatives such as the PSA" (Congress document, February 1994, p17).

But this correct position was also accompanied by the optimistic perspective, which was still very much in evidence in 1994. The EC were arguing: "Union leaders, as in Europe, could be compelled to sanction a one-day strike"; "Workers [will] flood back into the unions" - and the best way for Militant to work would be through the PSA. By 1995 reality seemed to be creeping in: "Superficially there appears to be a deadlock in the class struggle" (*Members Bulletin* No12, 1995).

Industrially the expectation was not quite as confident as previous predictions, but once again it was expected that there would be an upsurge in the struggle, though there might be no 'big bang' of national strike action. In fact it was printed in bold that, "nothing is more fatal for a Marxist organisation than to base itself merely on the idea of an industrial 'big bang'" (*ibid*). By December of 1995, one month before the 1996 conference, the organisation was beginning to acknowledge, without openly saying it, that there was a crisis in the unions, but in doing so they were making new mistakes: "The decline in union numbers throughout the 80s was primarily due to the decline in manufacturing industry ... the internal life of the unions might have seen a decline in activity ... this conference agrees that 1996 will be the year of a turn to the workplaces" (*Members Bulletin* No14, pre-conference special, December 1995).

The PSA was consequently dropped in favour of broad left work - something which completely ignored the opportunities presented by the Liverpool docks and national post office workers (just to mention two examples). But incredibly by 1997 the national position was both for fighting broad lefts and to understand the possibilities of splits taking place in the unions: "This may entail going with workers ... including being temporarily placed outside the official union structures." Moreover, "It would be fatal for us to concentrate our trade union work on working solely within the official structures" (*General election and perspectives for Marxism* 1997).

It has to be said that for all the emphasis on broad left work, no real effort has been put into uniting the broad lefts from the various unions.

In other words a complete zigzagging in policy. Yet in practice everything has been concentrated around broad left electoral work within the official structures. When Merseyside opposed the bland perspectives for the transformation of the unions they were accused of abandoning the official structures.

Merseyside throughout the 1990s had raised points in relation to these perspectives. An amendment to the 1997 document (*Members Bulletin* No24, August 1997) argued that the process in the unions would be much more complicated, and particularly tried to combat the illusions that the SP leadership were sowing in the potential for change at the top of the unions, when they argued: "The unions will swing towards the left at a certain stage ... some of these [official] leaders can shift to the left under mass pressure" (*General election and perspectives for Marxism* 1997).

The area further sought to steer away from sole reliance on broad left work which primarily concentrated on winning positions. The leadership, however, went in the opposite direction. The statement on trade union work to the 1997 conference goes as far as announcing which comrades have won elected positions in the unions (*Members Bulletin* No24, August 1997). The Liverpool docks managed a cursory, one-sentence mention (better perhaps than the 1997 CWI school in Belgium, where a London comrade, leading off on trade union work, failed to even mention the docks). The reference, however, was to only obliquely lecture Merseyside on using the dispute to "campaign for an open democratic broad left in the TGWU as another means of furthering the dockers' struggle itself" (*Members Bulletin* No25, December 1997. For further material on this subject read 'Docks dispute 1995-98 - Merseyside's record of solidarity').

In contrast, Merseyside argued: "Rank and file activity may move some trade union leaders. But in the main the trade union leaders are moving in the direction of isolating themselves from this kind of pressure. The process of closing down democratic structures in the trade unions, restricting the rights of trade union activists, is at an advanced stage and is likely to be taken further. This will meet with resistance as the rank and file see the bureaucracy acting as policemen for a Labour government. Whilst in some unions there could be a shift to the left or even splits, there is also the possibility of further decline in the unions. Therefore, the tendency could develop for a smaller percentage of workers being organised in the unions, with disputes being localised and marginalised. In the past couple of years in Britain, disputes nationally have been characterised by long drawn-out battles. New, generalised movements cannot, of course, be entirely ruled out but, given the attitude of the union leaders, the anti-trade union legislation and the weakness of the rank-and-file structures, the most likely perspective is of a continuation of present trends.

"Movements outside of the unions could also begin to have an effect of radicalising struggles. The anti-poll tax movement was an example of this and the environmental movements may, at a certain stage, begin to impact on the activities of the rank and file activists. In this sense, new and

varied coalitions may develop, especially through the construction of solidarity networks, though there will be considerable difficulties in uniting these. Nevertheless, such developments could encompass both official and unofficial characteristics. We need to emphasise the importance of the unions as organised expressions of the working class. Especially for union activists there will be a tremendous loyalty to these bodies but, at the same time, if the unions only encompass a minority of the working class we have to see the possibility of new formations arising alongside and complementing their activities. In this sense, issues such as disaffiliation from the Labour Party could be used to actively draw new alliances - in the unions and outside of them - towards the idea of creating a new independent, mass party of the working class" (*Members Bulletin* No24, August 1997).

These ideas were unfortunately rejected by the conference, though in the debate there was substantial support. Part of the reason for the rejection by the leadership - although not openly stated - to the idea of disaffiliation from the Labour Party is the opposition from leading trade union comrades, who see this demand as being ahead of the present consciousness. Yet opinion polls show only 28% of trade unionists currently identify with the Labour Party. Consequently the demand, whilst being raised in Scotland and occasionally surfacing in some of the areas, is not featured in the national material.

The arguments against Merseyside largely centred around the idea, put around by the EC, of the comrades wishing to abandon trade union work, which is palpably not true - the very opposite is stated in the amendments. Secondly, the area was accused of drawing incorrect comparisons with the process of bourgeoisification in the Labour Party. Thirdly, for good measure, comrades were accused of ultra-leftism.

Here insults take the place of analysis and not surprisingly result in all sorts of confusion over the trade unions. This can be seen in the article written by Roger Bannister, one month before the end of the Liverpool docks' dispute. In this article Roger was belatedly arguing that the docks should have used their dispute to launch a campaign to transform the union: "It is in this light that the demand to make the dispute official has to be viewed, rather than opening up a 'second front' ... It is common for workers in struggle to move on to democratise their union ... an opportunity may be missed if the official structures of the union are ignored ... A dispute with such wide support as the docks enjoy provides an excellent basis for campaigning within the TGWU for change" (*Members Bulletin* No25, December 1997). Roger conveniently ignored the fact that the docks had campaigned for official action by the union.

Yet Peter Taaffe, speaking to the Australian Democratic Socialist Party, had this to say about campaigning to make the dispute official: "... when it was raised by some sections of the left that we demand the official intervention of the Transport and General Workers Union, the docks said 'no' and we agreed with them" (*Links*, journal of the DSP, No9, November 1997).

But these abstract expressions take no account of the existing reality. In 1989 the broad left effectively 'controlled' the union. The union gave official backing during the national dock dispute, as did the International Transport Federation, who issued instructions telling affiliated members to take solidarity action. But such appeals failed. Even in Liverpool, where road transport had built a powerful position, the majority of lorry drivers crossed the picket lines. The dock shop stewards in 1989, as in

1995-98, combined unofficial action with working through the union. Ron Todd in 1989 not only betrayed the dockers: he effectively destroyed trade unionism in the ports. So any analysis in the present period, if it is not going to turn into an abstraction, has to take this into account. (...)

The SP leadership cannot have it both ways - if they want to argue, as they did in the name change debate, that consciousness of the advanced layers has gone back and even the numbers involved from this layer have declined, then they cannot expect that intoning the need to work within the official structures will result in immediate radical transformations. As argued by Merseyside in the amendments to the *British perspectives* document in 1997, the union leaders have largely isolated themselves from the pressures of the rank and file by altering the democratic structures. This may not be a generalised process and it is not completed, but this is the general tendency. In the international discussions it seems that the leadership agree with this. Lynn Walsh referred to the "bourgeoisification" taking place (Report of the IEC, November 1997). Such terms are obviously considered indiscreet in Britain.

Even in the case of Unison, where there are genuine rank and file bodies, the pressure of union activists could not prevent the bureaucracy from isolating the Hillingdon women, who 'won' primarily because they broadened the struggle beyond their own union. Union democracy has to be fought for, but how will it be achieved? Struggle is the most likely avenue. The unofficial bodies, such as those in the CWU, may turn away from BL activities, but that is not to say they will split or entirely ignore the official structures.

Roger Bannister also points to the need to call for a new workers' party (with no mention of the demand to disaffiliate from the Labour Party), yet goes on to say: "We would not call for new unions." Yet the national leadership had argued that the leaders of unofficial actions could be expelled by the unions and "could be forced to organise *new formations* [our emphasis] to keep their struggles going ... our role would be to help develop the struggle, whatever organisational form it took" (*General election and perspectives for Marxism* 1997).

Apart from these two references nothing else was said about the need for the docks to campaign for a fighting broad left. Peter Taaffe did not raise it in an article which coincided with the second anniversary of the docks' dispute. Instead he concentrated on trade union trends and pointed to the fact that where trade unionism was weak the "spontaneous" struggles of the working class were much more successful than in those countries where trade union power was still strong and the bureaucracy acted on behalf of capitalism. Realising the contradiction in his own argument, he went on to write that it would be erroneous to conclude that if the British workers had relied purely on ad hoc "spontaneous" forms of organisation they would never have been able to conquer the rights and conditions which they enjoyed throughout most of the post-war period (*Socialism Today* September 1997).

This strange interpretation of trade union history seems to pose the issue that the official trade unions were responsible for gaining all sorts of reforms. This ignores the economic boom, the partnerships between trade union leaders and business, the social partnerships intended to buy off sections of the class and most importantly the role of the shop stewards and rank and file bodies, who acted as the main catalyst in forcing the union leaders to act on behalf of the members in the 1960s and 1970s ●

Socialist Alliances

Progress on NW slate

Two more organisations have joined the Socialist Alliance slate to fight June's European election in the North West of England.

At the second full organising meeting, on March 21, the delegation from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty declared its unconditional decision to put forward a candidate for the 10-place slate and to raise a proportionate share of the electoral deposit and agreed campaign costs. It reaffirmed its desire to involve "the wider labour movement - eg, the sacked Liverpool dockers and Tameside careworkers - in the campaign". A representative of the Socialist Party reported that it was "almost certain to want a candidate in the North West list". A final decision was due to be taken by the SP at a meeting on March 25.

These early announcements lifted a meeting which had suffered an initial discouragement caused by the non-attendance of representatives from the Socialist Workers Party - now deep in crisis. At the inaugural meeting the SWP, the CPGB, and the ex-SP Merseyside Socialists had declared their commitment to the united slate in the North West and their intention to stand candidates (see *Weekly Worker* March 11).

Progress reports were then received from the other organisations which had been represented at the inaugural meeting. The International Socialist League confirmed that it wished to support the united campaign, but that it would not be putting forward a candidate and would have great difficulty in raising finance. The ISL was to prioritise its support for the Tameside careworkers, six of whom were to contest May's local council elections as 'Defend Public Services' candidates.

Comrade Tony Reid, who had attended the previous meeting representing the Radical Preston Alliance, reported that he had failed to persuade the RPA to either join or support the slate. He explained that Labour Party members, and those opposed to all electoral participation, had rallied to raise up a majority against him. He had therefore, with a number of contacts from the Lancaster and Morecambe area, now formed the Lancashire Socialist Alliance, and was, he told us, more hopeful of winning some level of commitment to the project from this new formation.

The Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance had been represented at the inaugural meeting by the SP's Margaret Manning. Comrade Manning had been the main conservative voice at that gathering. As the *Weekly Worker* has reported, she had articulated the GMSA's position of "keeping an open mind" regarding a left alternative to Blairism, and its uncertainty as to whether the political space existed at this time for another slate in the European elections. She had outlined a possible alternative approach of seeking the agreement of Scargill's Socialist Labour Party and the Green Party to putting "some of our ideas" in their electoral programmes.

At this second meeting, comrade Manning's place as spokesperson of the GMSA had passed to its convenor, John Nicholson. As he began to speak, a copy of the latest edition of the SLP's *Socialist News* was passing around the table, showing its headline, "Put us in to get us out!", making the SLP's intentions more than clear. It was unsurprising that

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"The meeting had suffered an initial discouragement caused by the non-attendance of representatives from the Socialist Workers Party - now deep in crisis"

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comrade Nicholson indicated a shift in the GMSA position. Whilst he reasserted the continued desirability of "talking to Scargill", he nevertheless reported that GMSA now held a position of "conditional interest and conditional support for the North West Socialist Alliance slate, whilst continuing to question how realistic the project is".

Comrade Nicholson did offer some elaboration as to the nature of GMSA's doubts in the realism of the alliance. The emphasis here had shifted from the 'political space' argument to worries over resources and the political commitment of some organisations, such as the SWP. However, on the rather substantive matter of what were the GMSA's *conditions*, governing not only whether it will support the alliance, but whether it has any *interest* in the project, the comrade remained characteristically cryptic. It became clear though, from comrade Nicholson's later interventions, that it was the issue of "accountability" of the candidates to be put forward by the participating organisations that would have to be resolved to his satisfaction before GMSA would come on board. As the meeting progressed, this conditionally interested observer showed a more than conditional interest in seizing the tiller.

John Pearson of the CPGB, who is also a member of the Independent Labour Network, read a letter he had received from Ken Coates, MEP, the co-founder of the ILN. This expressed the latter's views on "efforts to put together a socialist challenge in the North West. I am sure that this is a good thing to do, and I am very pleased that you are going to try to create an inclusive movement ... the need for a challenge becomes more obvious every day, and I think that it is very important to go ahead!" Comrade Pearson reminded the meeting that the ILN is a full participant in the Socialist Alliance in London and he expressed the hope that it could become so in the North West. To this end he had arranged with comrade Coates to convene a meeting of the ILN's North West members to discuss

a response to the formation of the alliance.

This report brought forward an immediate response from Nicholson: "Comrade chair, we will need to come back on that one. The ILN doesn't really exist. The two dozen people on its North West list are on every mailing list going. They only want to receive correspondence." The *Weekly Worker* (March 4) had exposed Nicholson's political dalliance with Mike Davies of the Leeds ILN, aimed at superseding the locally determined electoral platforms in London and the West Midlands, and setting up a rival national platform with centralised control of the alliance electoral campaign. Since comrade Davies's activities brought forward the wrath of John Rothery and Pete McClaren, leaders of the West Midlands Socialist Alliance, one of the power bases of the Network of Socialist Alliances, of which comrade Nicholson is the convenor, the latter has moved rapidly through becoming a stern critic to personifying the nemesis of the Independent Labour Network.

Discussion then moved on to how to respond to the SLP's decision to stand a separate slate in the election. CPGB comrades drew attention to the rebellion of the SLP's Merseyside Regional Committee against Scargill's move to disband it (see *Weekly Worker* March 18). In an open letter, comrade Chris Jones, secretary of Merseyside SLP, has savaged the undemocratic and authoritarian methods of Scargill. Comrade Pearson argued that, in declaring a separate slate whilst refusing to first enter into negotiation with the alliance organisations, Scargill was acting against the

interests of the working class. His SLP was responsible for splitting the class and, as such it would be legitimate for the alliance organisations to encourage rebellions within the SLP. Comrade Jones and the Merseyside SLP, together with SLP branches that had shown an interest in joint electoral work, such as Hackney and now Sheffield, should be approached directly and asked to join the alliance for the European elections. Cathy Wilson of the Merseyside Socialists expressed support for this proposal and it was agreed that the organisations present will endeavour to engage with appropriate SLP comrades to this end.

Several organisational steps forward were made. A sub-committee has been set up to negotiate the electoral platform. This will look at the platforms already negotiated in London and the West Midlands, as well as submissions from the participating organisations, and will report back to the next full meeting on March 8. Comrade Bruce Robinson of the AWL reminded all that the first meeting had agreed that participating organisations will be permitted to put forward their own propaganda, including critical support for the agreed platform. He urged that the platform be short and punchy. Comrade Sean Matgama, also of the AWL, argued that the platform should focus on the "central issue" of the current disfranchisement of the working class. The CPGB was in a minority of one, in proposing that the sub-committee be comprised of the five organisations which had committed themselves to standing candidates, with the door being left open as more organisations

were recruited to this level of participation. The majority agreed to grant seats on the sub-committee to the ISL, to the 'pre-in' Lancashire Socialist Alliance, and even to the conditionally interested and doubt-ridden GMSA. A similar formula was adopted for a finance sub-committee.

A debate began on the issue of ranking the candidates within the 'closed list' system imposed for this election by Blair. The Merseyside Socialists opened, through Cathy Wilson, in declaring support for the principle that any industrial movement leaders, such as ex-Liverpool dockers, who could be recruited to stand, should be automatically granted top rankings on the list, "to show the working class that the alliance had support beyond the ranks of the allied socialist and communist organisations". This idea had been floated at the first meeting by both the SWP and the AWL. With comrade Nicholson now in the chair (having taken over from the Merseyside Socialists' Ann Bannister, who 'needed a rest'), and sniffing out 'consensus', it looked as if this issue was going to be summarily determined in the same manner as that of the composition of the sub-committees. But then comrade Ralph Parkinson of the SP declared his surprise at his agreement with the CPGB position that the converse priority - political organisation before industrial 'tokenism' - should apply.

This precipitated the closure of the meeting with the item being assigned to the next meeting's agenda. The scene is set for a crucial and important debate within this fast growing movement in the North West ●

John Pearson

Cold War legacy

Formation 60 - modern jazz from Eastern Germany - Amiga 1957-69
Jazzanova Compost Records

For those who think this review stands on the threshold of an elaborate cultural joke I will begin by quoting the liner notes: "The unique and refreshing vibes of these rare recordings from behind the Iron Curtain are always in our DJ boxes as they merge smoothly into the club sound of the 90s jazz movement." That this turns out to be true will no doubt be bemusing to some people. For this crowd the fact that these tunes were initially released on Amiga, the German Democratic Republic's state-owned record label, will be enough to damn it into obscurity. After all, it is simply inconceivable that communism can sponsor anything beyond the artistically banal.

The cultural history of the Cold War is often represented as the struggle of binary opposites: the eastern bloc with its emphases on tradition, folk sources and 'realism'; the west with the themes of 'freedom', abstraction and the individual. It would be foolish to disown such a typology as a starting point, but when one comes to consider the creative products of this demarcation, reality becomes considerably more messy.

The same is true of the recordings collected here. All but one

originates from the 1960s and it is in this era that the cultural opposition between east and west tends to founder, with both sides of the 'Iron Curtain' subject to explosive social conflicts. It is in this social paradigm that particular art forms become vulnerable to re-elaboration, refracting that aesthetic experience back into social being (one only has to consider the shift in the west from abstract expressionism to pop-art).

The titles featured here give us some clues as to the nature of this shift. On 'Chano's track' by Toby Fichelscher and Gunter Wilk is a tribute to Chano Pozo, Dizzy Gillespie's percussionist. Similarly, the Modern Jazz Big Band 65's 'Kleines Lied für Eric' pays due homage to Eric Dolphy. However, these are but subsidiary motifs. What is most revealing to the listener is the structure that these recordings seek to illustrate. On the first listen they appear almost too clipped and precise in their accents. In time the realisation dawns that this a masterly exploration of theme and improvisation, the two becoming interlocked, not in the cause of a bland exchange of equivalents, but of revealing their most sensuous characteristics.

The best exponents of this here are the Manfred Ludwig Sextet. The fact that the haunting melodies, 'Scandinavia' and 'Gral', use traditional German waltz forms in the pursuit of such innovation simply adds another dizzying contradiction, effortlessly surmounted.

Western jazz performers were faced with similar contradictions to those in the east. The ossification of bop into a ritual of theme-then-improvisation was running the risk of turning modern jazz into another avenue for abstraction. 'Free jazz' was one solution, but (and it is here that the purists will wince) it is the music of the American trumpeter Donald Byrd that immediately comes to mind.

Like the jazz musicians of the GDR, Byrd sought to break down the demarcations in bop. His solution was a turn to driving R'n'B rhythms that underpinned and nuanced his improvisations to an almost magisterial degree.

The answers posed by the recordings featured here are radically different in texture to those of Byrd, but they are rooted in a universal problematic that forces us to question the precise cultural legacy of the Cold War era ●

Phil Watson

European Union

Neither the pound nor the euro

This week's European union summit in Berlin has an unusually packed agenda. Overshadowing the entire meeting are the military actions by Nato forces in rump Yugoslavia. The ministers assembled in Germany naturally want to present a united face to the world. Besides Kosova/Serbia, the main item of discussion are the plans to reform the EU's budgetary system - especially farm spending, which accounts for some 50% of the total budget of £60 billion. They will also be looking at plans for EU enlargement, with Poland and Hungary already halfway through the door. And Tony Blair insists that Britain's annual rebate of around £2 billion is sacrosanct.

On top of all that, the EU is still feeling the effects from the dramatic events of the last two weeks, which saw the shock resignation of ("red") Oskar Lafontaine, the German finance minister, and the even more sensational mass resignation - or, to be more accurate, sacking - of the 20 EU commissioners. This has turned the Berlin summit into a political hot-house, as national governments look for a replacement for Jacques Santer, the disgraced former EU president.

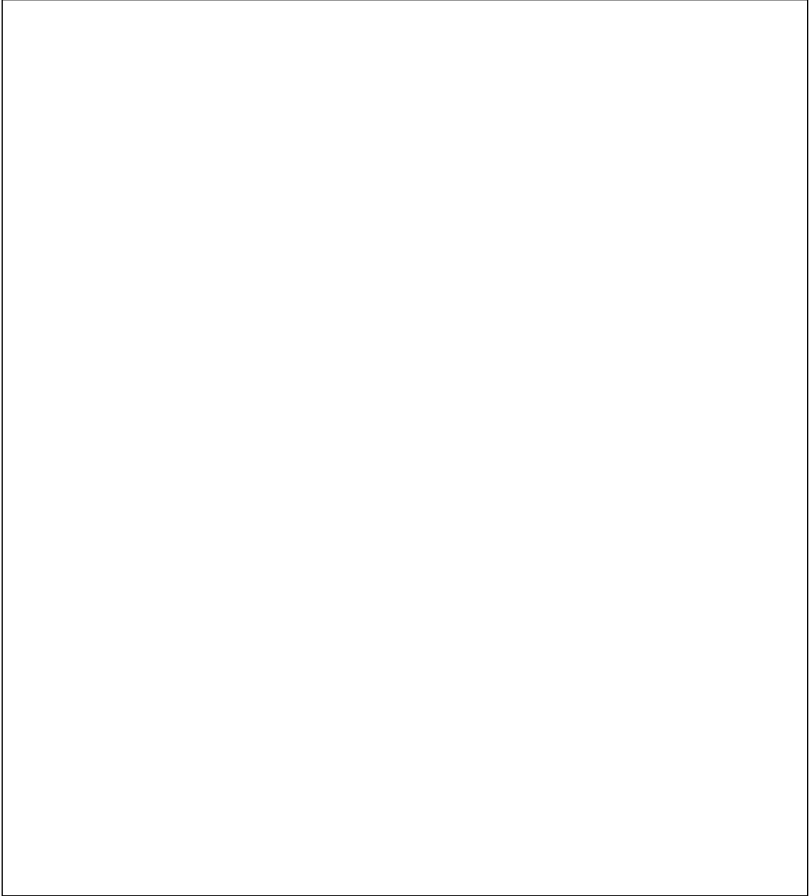
Blair is waving the flag for the ex-'official communist' (ie, social democrat), Romano Prodi, the former Italian prime minister, who has been described by Downing Street as "a man of considerable ability and a very high-quality person". He is a Euro-reformist in the Thatcher mould. Prodi savagely slashed public spending, privatising everything that moved, in order to meet the Maastricht criteria and hence enable Italy to join 'the club'.

It should come as no surprise that the EU bureaucracy is characterised by cronyism, nepotism and corruption. With billions of euros sloshing around the corridors of Brussels and Strasbourg, it would be a minor miracle if this was not the case. The behaviour of Edith 'no regrets' Cresson is typical. Appointing your ageing 79-year old dentist to head the EU Aids research centre on a salary of £60,000 (despite suffering a heart attack) is all par for the course for the arrogant bureaucrats who run and staff the EU proto-superstate.

Yes, 'accountability' and 'democracy' are not words you associate with the EU gravy train. Blair's answer to the corrupt antics of the unelected EU commission is to bring in a not yet corrupt ... unelected commission. A gaping democratic deficit indeed.

How should communists in Britain respond to the great EU scandal? Perhaps by defending 'our' parliament and 'our' pound sterling from the 'Brussels bureaucrats', and by having a general sneer at all things European? Naturally, this is the automatic reaction of the Communist Party of Britain/*Morning Star* camp. Just more grist to the 'no to the euro' mill for the likes of the CPB, committed as it is to a national road to socialism.

However, 'left' jingoism is not confined to the sad relics of the CPB. Scargillism - therefore the Socialist Labour Party - shares the same national socialist delusion. Arthur Scargill has long dreamed of decoupling Britain from Europe in order to emulate Cuba



The left should not side with the chauvinists

or North Korea. Despite claiming to be a man who does not believe in slogans, he is now fond of saying, 'Vote us in, to get us out'.

And some Trotskyites share a similar faith to Scargill - or at the very least exhibit a strong degree of theoretical confusion on this matter. This was exemplified by last week's letter from Alan Thornett of Socialist Outlook. Attempting to justify his organisation's 'no to the euro' position, the comrade writes: "The idea that we can be indifferent to how the class enemy organises against us seems bizarre. We are not neutral when an individual employer reorganises against the workforce or when a national government takes measures which increase exploitation or attack the working class. Why should we be neutral when this is done by the European bourgeoisie?" (*Weekly Worker* March 18).

The comrade spectacularly misses the point. The CPGB is not "indifferent" or "neutral" to attacks on the working class. Exactly the opposite. We are fully aware of what lies behind the single currency and the euro - a bankers' Europe ruled *from above*. But to use comrade Thornett's own - and rather apt - analogy, if company B decides to launch a merger or takeover of company A, communists do not go round advising the workers to 'defend' the bosses who run company A. Class politics is not about choosing the butcher. It is time SO and all those who advocate a 'no' vote come the referendum realised this basic fact.

No, the CPGB are not 'Europhiles' in the mould of John Palmer, old sparring partner of Tony Cliff and a contributor to *Red Pepper*. He says that the EU and the single currency are excellent. With the proviso of course that the left tries to make it worker-friendly. What John Palmer and Alan

Thornett are doing is asking us to side with different sections of the bourgeoisie - symbolically the pound or the euro.

There are useful historical analogies and precedents to look at. For example, the heated debate surrounding the protectionist Corn Laws in the 1840s. This saw a struggle between the liberal free-traders and the Tory protectionists. Marx's comments in particular are illuminating - did he side with the protectionists against

and so we intend the *Weekly Worker* to be both informative and *challenging*. How heretical. But to enable us to provide such reading matter we must have funds.

That is why the donations from comrades BT (£20), GH (£15), FD (£15), ML (£10) are more than welcome - and of course the gift from comrade PC from Stoke-on-Trent. This takes our £400 monthly fighting fund total to a rather limp £270. Comrades, it is looking pretty close. Do not let us down - especially when we are facing daunting legal expenses at the moment ●

Robert Rix

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We know who our readers are -

laissez-fairism? Or vice versa? No. He polemicised against both from a working class viewpoint, whilst seeking to identify and advance all developments which create the *objective* conditions for human liberation. Hence, in his address to the Democratic Association of Brussels in 1848, Marx stated: "But, generally speaking, the protective system in these days is conservative, while the free trade system works destructively. It breaks up old nationalities and carries the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the uttermost. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. In this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, I am in favour of free trade" (*The Poverty of philosophy* Peking 1978, p207).

Does Socialist Outlook really believe that Marx would have said 'no to the euro', let alone campaign to "sink the euro"? Like Marx, the CPGB "in this revolutionary sense alone" is in favour of the single currency and a European superstate.

It is essential that we see a vigorous debate on the EU and democracy - or the lack of it. The logical demand for the working class is for a constituent assembly of the European Union. And this goes hand in hand with fighting for the maximum democracy - the working class is thereby readied for revolution. In this way we 'conquer' democracy - not by abolishing it, as some Trotskyists seem to believe, but by extending it so that it breaks the limits imposed by capitalist social relations. Hence the *struggle* for democracy by the working class is the way to socialism.

Instead of being *defensive* when confronted by the single currency and the EU, the left should be equipping our class with its own *independent* policy ●

Danny Hammill

Fighting fund

.....

Challenging

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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Hands off Kosova and Serbia

After months of prevarication and dithering, imperialism has finally decided to take decisive military action against Serbia. On Tuesday night, Javier Solana, Nato's secretary-general, ordered air strikes against targets across the territory of Serbia and Montenegro (ie, the rump Yugoslavia). In justifying the Nato action, Solana rehashed the line given by imperialism when it launched air strikes against Iraq: "Nato is not waging war against Yugoslavia. We have no quarrels with the people of Yugoslavia who for too long have been isolated in Europe because of the policies of their government".

Backing up Solana, Nato's supreme commander, general Wesley Clarke, warned the Serbian regime: "If required, we will strike in a swift and severe fashion."

The first wave of air strikes were expected to come from volleys of cruise missiles launched from the sea and air, and also raids by Stealth B-2 bombers. It is unclear as to what Nato's military strategy will be after the first wave of aerial bombing has been completed. To date, Nato officials have ruled out the use of ground troops before a peace deal. On Tuesday in the House of Commons both Tony Blair and George Robertson, the defence secretary, repeatedly said there were no plans for the 4,800 British troops in Macedonia to move into Kosova.

The reaction of the Milosevic regime in Belgrade has been predictable - and hypocritical of course. Serbian television has quoted Milosevic saying that "anyone who is out to impose solutions by force will have to

face the responsibility for actions aimed against a policy of peace and the consequences that would ensue". He also damned western governments for "threatening a small European nation which is defending its territory from separatism. Belgrade is tolerant but not stupid."

As we know, Serbia/Yugoslavia has attempted "to impose solutions by force" against the Kosovar people. Since the moment the United Nations observers left Kosova on Monday, Serbian forces have stepped up their campaign of terror - adopting a scorched earth policy reminiscent of American tactics in Vietnam. It seems that Belgrade wants to annihilate the Kovovar Liberation Army once and for all - by driving out the Albanian population.

Tony Benn, correctly denouncing

British troops in Macedonia - imposing imperialism's 'peace'

any military intervention by Nato, said on Radio Four's *Today* programme (March 24) that the KLA was "armed and funded by Germany". This may or may not be true, but nothing can hide the fact that the Kosovars and the KLA are fighting a just war against Serbian oppression. We unconditionally support the right of the Kosovars to national self-determination. In the concrete, this means supporting *independence*. Autonomy inside the rump Yugoslavia is no longer enough for the Kosovar masses. The forcible attempt by the Serbian regime to stifle the rights and aspirations of the Kosovars has seen to that.

However, as we have consistently argued, Nato and imperialism in general are not stalwart defenders of democracy. And they are certainly not friends of the Kosovar people. The likes of Robin Cook and co have made it perfectly clear that in their opinion the Kosovars do not have the right to self-determination. Nato opposes any independence for Kosova. It wants to spread the new world order. This means it aims to *impose* a solution - on both the Serbians and the Kosovars. Even-handed imperialism is the order of the day. In his briefing to reporters, Solana threatened: "We urge in particular Kosovar armed elements to desist from provocative military action." KLA - don't step out line ... or else.

The proposed Nato action has received cross-party support in Britain, albeit with a few reservations about the military effectiveness of aerial bombardment. Liberal opinion, as always, is right behind the Nato action, with *The Guardian* being particularly gung-ho: "The only honourable course for Europe and America is to use military force to try to protect the people of Kosovo" (March 23).

Communists are obliged to denounce Nato warmongering in rump Yugoslavia - and anywhere else in the world. As Milosevic - and surely Nato planners - must know full well, air

strikes against Serbian targets will only act to mobilise *support* for the Belgrade regime, not ferment rebellion against it. As with Saddam Hussein, every bomb props up the reactionary regime, which appeals to the most backward and vile nationalist sentiments in order to cohere Serbian society and whip up hatred against the Kosovar people. Judging by official Serbian statements, the entire Albanian population in Kosova are 'terrorists'.

As we have repeatedly seen this century, air strikes alone have never toppled a regime. Without *ground troops*, imperialism will find it impossible to impose its solution to the 'Serbian/Kosova question'.

If Nato does decide to employ ground troops, that would be a risky gamble. Serbia has a well oiled military machine. After all, Tito's Yugoslavia was in a constant state of readiness to resist the might of the Soviet Union. Rump Yugoslavia has over 200,000 well equipped and well motivated men to call upon. It has a squadron of high-performance MiG-29 jets. Its anti-aircraft missile systems are reasonably sophisticated too. Almost every road in the country has tank traps. There is also the Russian-designed ZSU anti-aircraft quadruple cannons, which are mounted on mobile armoured hulls. But the real danger to Nato is not this - in comparative terms - puny arsenal. Russia feels threatened by Nato expansionism. It even promises to aid Serbia if Nato attacks - so things could soon escalate in a most dangerous way.

The entire left and workers' movement must condemn Nato's imperialist war. That does not mean support for Serbia. We call for peace through class struggle. All imperialist armed forces must withdraw from the region - and all Serbian forces must leave Kosova. And, crucially, it means no support for own ruling class in Britain ●

Eddie Ford

Network of Socialist Alliances conference No exclusion of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Saturday's conference of the Socialist Alliances in Birmingham must decide between an inclusive constitution for democratic socialist unity across the UK state, or rules to exclude comrades from Scotland, Wales (and Northern Ireland).

What's in a name? There is nothing to choose, it seems to me, between 'Network of Socialist Alliances', proposed by the London Socialist Alliance and Nuneaton SA, and the alternative 'Socialist Alliance', put forward by Greater Manchester SA. Yet a stench of divisive English nationalism, however, emanates from the GMSA proposal in the 'membership and subscriptions' section to restrict membership of the Network to England.

The question of principle embodied in the LSA/CPGB proposal to include comrades in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is very straightforward. What stands in the way of the working class struggle for democracy and socialism is not just the capitalist class, but the capitalist state. The struggle of the international working class for

socialism is a struggle to overthrow existing capitalist states, not their parts. The real, actually existing, states - not of our choosing - are the ones against which working class struggle must be orientated.

In our case, the enemy against which we must organise is the United Kingdom state and its New Labour government led by Tony Blair. The only effective way to fight it is for socialists to unite our forces across all parts of the UK. It is naive in the extreme to imagine this proposal offers some kind of *support* for the state.

Every major class struggle in Britain, from the Chartists to the 1926 General Strike, from the mass political strikes of the early 1970s to the 1984-85 miners' Great Strike, demonstrates the historically established unity of the British working class. The dissolving of the strongest Socialist Alliances in Britain into the left nationalist Scottish Socialist Party was a breach of this unity, and a weakening of the class. Consolidating this Scottish nationalist division by excluding socialists not

"living or working in England" from full and equal democratic participation in the fightback against Blair would mean shooting ourselves in the foot.

Comrades should support the LSA/CPGB motion to keep membership "open to all within the United Kingdom who agree to the rules and accept the objectives of the Network". Support should also be given to Steve Freeman's amendment to the Rugby interim agreement, which would also widen the Network to comrades in Scotland and Wales.

Of course, not all socialists in Scotland have joined the SSP. Some belong to the Socialist Workers Party, some to the Socialist Labour Party, to name but two. Our message to them, as well as the SSP itself, must be to unite all of our forces - despite differences, which we must continue to debate - against our common enemy, the UK state and its Blair government.

United we stand, divided we fall! ●

Ian Farrell