

Open letter to SWP members

Since last month your political committee has been cleaved down the middle. The immediate issue is stark and clear-cut. The leadership has been deadlocked over whether or not to maintain or abandon its electoral turn - agreed only at the end of 1998. Pat Stack frankly admitted the split to the London Socialist Alliance - the AWL-CPGB-ILN-ISG-SPEW-SWP electoral bloc - in late March. Comrade Stack's willingness to ignore the restrictions of *bureaucratic* centralism and go public surely testifies to the seriousness of the crisis. As does its duration.

Unsurprisingly *Socialist Worker* refuses to involve you in the debate. Policy-making is the monopoly of a closed circle. A circle traditionally centred around the now frail personality of comrade Tony Cliff. Unlike the Bolsheviks there is no enlightening polemical clash between openly contending factions. Nor is there a members' bulletin to serve as a clumsy and leaky substitute. Activists and branches grope in the dark. Potential dissidents are either cowed with threats or fobbed off with private assurances that Tony Cliff, Chris Harman, Lindsey German, Chris Bamberg and other tops know best. Internal gossip and the *Weekly Worker* are the only source of information for those below. Clearly the SWP has a huge democratic deficit.

Your crisis has cost the Socialist Alliance in London dear. Time is slipping by. Candidates are unchosen. Finances, even the minimum necessary for a deposit, are noticeably absent. Our manifesto has yet to be ratified. No labour movement support has been garnered.

The SWP was asked to come to a firm decision by March 29. One deadline after another has passed. The message is that the SWP is neither out nor is it committed to active participation.

The official excuse for the disarray was the eminently predictable decree by Arthur Scargill that he was to head the SLP's list in the capital. Besides Scargill, the SLP is fielding a strange mix of ultra-Stalinists and warmed-over left reformists. Half of them - Joti Brar, Ella Rule, Amanda Rose, Harpal Brar and Hardev Dhillon - are actually members of the Stalin Society. London's regional committee is in rebellion. So the would-be labour dictator imposed his 10 candidates via the SLP's national executive committee. We say, expose Scargill. Do not let him divide and silence us.

Giving the lie to the official excuse, the SWP's crisis is not confined to London. Your representatives have failed to appear at other Socialist Alliance meetings. Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, etc. Coincidentally at least two cars have supposedly broken down en route. Having long campaigned and paid a big political price to secure an agreement with the left nationalist Scottish Socialist Party for next month's elections to the Holyrood parliament - no place on the list - the SWP leadership has suddenly developed cold feet when it comes to June's Euro elections.

Evidently nothing to do with Scargill. Evidently the SWP leadership is riven by a crisis of perspectives and programme.

For over two decades the SWP eschewed even token candidates. Auto-Labourism was combined with syndicalistic abstentionism. Rightist practice with leftist posturing. The SWP would as a matter of routine print its 'Vote Labour, but ...' posters, all the while telling its cadres that elections are not important for *bone fide* revolutionaries. A position in complete contradistinction to the theory and practice of the Bolsheviks and the Communist International - both of which you in the SWP claim to be the living continuation of.

Bolshevik deputies famously sat in and brilliantly exploited the tsar's duma. Even after the October Revolution the Russian Communist Party stood for the Constituent Assembly - in form a bourgeois parliament. Except under the most promising circumstances - "an immediate move to armed struggle for power" - the newly formed Communist International considered parliamentary work obligatory for affiliated sections (A Alder (ed) *Theses, resolution and manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International* London 1980, p235).

Apart from a brief, unsatisfactory, fling in the latter half of the 1970s, the SWP has left parliament to Labour. As a direct corollary the leadership has shunned presenting its strategy for socialism in the form of a testable and democratically sanctioned programme. *Socialist Worker's* 'What we stand for' column is all very well for propaganda purposes. But its abstractions bear little or no relationship to daily practice or any discernible vision of how the working class is to make itself into a ruling class. That, when it comes to the SWP, is a mystery.

Indeed comrade Cliff and other SWP

intellectuals have made a virtue of anti-programmism. They have written on countless occasions about the *advantages* of not being tied down. Without a programme, it is true, the rank and file cannot seriously hold the leadership to account. Since it came into existence as a trend the SWP's history has therefore been one of sudden opportunist zigzags. Any line can be adopted as long as it is perceived to serve short-term interests, usually judged arithmetically in crude membership figures.

Again this is contrary to the spirit and example of the Bolsheviks. Lenin's party united around and fought on the basis of a minimum-maximum programme originally presented to the 2nd Congress back in 1903. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that without the revolutionary programme there would have been no revolutionary party. Naturally key sections were modified, given developments in the struggle. But only after extensive, often exhaustive, debate and a democratic vote.

The programme was considered of cardinal importance. That is why attempts to compromise or liquidate it were met with the fiercest hostility. Around the programme the Bolsheviks were able to organise the workers not merely in defence of their own economic terms and conditions, but as the hegemon or vanguard of the revolution. The tiny working class was empowered by the scientific rigour of the programme - it summed up the Marxist analysis of Russia and placed it in the context of the world revolution. As a result the workers came to master, or take a lead, in all political questions - national self-determination, anti-semitism, war and peace, women's equality, etc - and crucially were able to put themselves at the head of the broad peasant masses in the fight to overthrow tsarism.

Your 'Action programme' would seem to represent a break with the past. Since it was first published in September 1998 it has not only been reproduced as a glossy brochure, but there has been an effort to get labour movement bodies to adopt it as their own. Sad to say though, what we actually have is another zigzag, not a conversion to Bolshevism.

The 'Action programme' is premised on a fundamentally incorrect understanding of the period and, for all the revolutionary eloquence employed to sell it, the content amounts to nothing more than a repackaging of economism. Instead of a fully

rounded and comprehensive alternative to Blair's constitutional revolution from above - ie, a minimum programme from below - the SWP leadership concentrates entirely on *minimal* questions of pay, hours and union recognition. The workers are to be left as an economic class of slaves, not elevated to a *political* class of self-activating revolutionaries.

When it does make an appearance, politics is entirely within the narrow horizons of militant trade unionism. Reducing the arms bill, curbing financial speculations, etc. All very well and good, but completely inadequate. How our rulers rule through the UK's constitutional monarchy system is entirely absent. No mention then of crucial *political* questions like abolishing the monarchy and the House of Lords, or the fight for self-determination for Ireland, Wales and Scotland. That is, democratic demands through which the working class can and must take up as part of its historic mission to free humanity. The SWP leadership effectively hands such matters over to Blair.

The 'Action programme' is backed with reference to Trotsky's 1934 'Action programme for France' (see Alex Callinicos *International Socialism* No81 and John Rees *Socialist Review* January 1999). But the boldest claim is that it is based on Trotsky's 1938 'Transitional programme'.

In my opinion Trotsky was badly mistaken in 1938. He maintained that capitalism was in terminal decline. It could no longer develop the productive forces or grant meaningful reforms. Hence, he declared, defence of economic gains would spontaneously produce an apocalyptic collision with capitalism. No matter how we excuse Trotsky in terms of how things appeared on the eve of World War II, there is no escaping that he was wrong in fact and method.

In the midst of the miners' Great Strike - a strategic contest of class against class - the SWP specialised in pessimism. The year-long strike - with its hit squads, mass pickets, support groups, women against pit closure movement, etc - was, said Chris Harman, an "extreme example" of what the SWP called the "downturn". Such dire pessimism along with congenital anti-programmism led comrade Cliff to write - only six years ago - that Trotsky's 'Transitional programme' was only relevant when there was "a situation of general crisis, of capitalism in deep slump", and that many of the programme's proposals - eg, workers'

defence squads - "did not fit a non-revolutionary situation" (T Cliff *Trotsky: The darker the night, the brighter the star* London 1993, pp299-300).

Now misplaced pessimism has given way to misplaced millenarian optimism. With working class confidence at an all-time low and revolutionary consciousness almost non-existent, the SWP has decided that pursuit of even the most minimal demands is all that is needed to fell a supposedly tottering capitalism. In his most recent work comrade Cliff insists that we live not in a period of reaction (of a special type), but imminent revolution. "Capitalism in the advanced countries," he writes, "is no longer expanding and so the words of the 1938 'Transitional programme' that 'there can be no discussion of systematic social reforms and raising the masses' living standards' fits reality again" (T Cliff *Trotskyism after Trotsky* London 1999, pp81-2).

Pure fantasy. For those in work, especially in the private sector, living standards continue to climb in real terms. Worst paid labour is now benefiting from the minimum wage, albeit far below subsistence levels. Pathetically the 'Action programme' thunders that "at the very least" such workers need "£1 an hour more". Even if economic struggles were all that it takes to transform the workers into a class for itself - which they are definitely not - capitalism in Britain still exhibits the potential to concede substantial reforms. The financial crash is confined in the main to Japan and other Asian economies.

Here lies the root of the SWP's crisis. The leadership wants you to believe that capitalism is in terminal crisis, that there is a yearning for socialist ideas, that there is "deep bitterness against the government in Britain" (*Socialist Worker* February 13). Needless to say, both political committee factions have enough gumption to realise that the left will in all probability get a small - for some a derisory - vote in the June elections. There is then a dilemma. Not to stand will expose the grandiose pretensions and end-is-nigh predictions. By the same measure to stand will do just the same.

We in the CPGB earnestly hope that the SWP will fight alongside us in June. Either way, only a completely honest and thorough debate can put your organisation onto the firm programmatic foundations needed for the challenges of the future ●

Jack Conrad

Party notes

Commission results

The London Socialist Alliance-initiated commission of inquiry into the violent events on this year's Bloody Sunday demonstration met on Saturday April 3. The body was convened after comrade Ian Donovan, the chair of LSA and ex-member of the Spartacist League/Britain, launched a violent assault on Eibhlin McDonald, a leading comrade of today's SL/B with a common history alongside Ian in that organisation.

The concluding statement of the commission is still being finalised, but it is agreed that it will include:

- An unequivocal condemnation of Ian's actions and a call that he issues an unambiguous repudiation of it to be reproduced in either *Revolution and Truth* - of which he is editor - or the *Weekly Worker* (see opposite). This is quite correct. Violence as a method of addressing political differences has no place in our ranks.

- A recommendation that the comrade does not hold public office in the workers' movement for a period of not less than six months. Again, there can be no argument with this. It is a fair and reasonable sanction for a very wrong act.

- A recognition that comrade Donovan's action was preceded by a long history of psychological abuse, harassment and a deeply painful passage through an SL/B regime that even the cult-like SL/United States characterised as being animated by "malign neglect" of its comrades (SL/US *Towards revolutionary conjuncture* 1987 conference document, p66). According to all the evidence presented to the commission, leading the pack in this ill-treatment was comrade McDonald, a charge that goes a long way to explaining the deep antipathy that comrade Donovan still feels for her despite the passage of time. Thus, having pronounced on Ian, the commission suggested similar action be taken against the SL/B by its international leadership. Given the panicked refusal of the SL/B to submit material or take any part in the commission's proceedings however, the comrades only felt qualified to call on the International Communist League (the SL/B's parent body) to establish an inquiry into the behaviour of its British section rather than clearly state what punitive action should be taken. Failure to do so by the ICL will surely be seen as condoning the SL/B's foul, abusive behaviour.

I intend to comment at greater length on both the details of this episode and its general lessons in subsequent *Weekly Workers*. We will also reproduce large amounts of the evidence submitted to the commission. However, there are a few points to make immediately.

I believe that the commission conducted its business in a dignified and exemplary way. Whatever criticisms there are to be made of its conclusions, the fact that it took place at all is an important gain for our movement. This committee was palpably convened with no particular sectarian axe to grind. It thus carries a wider authority than any one of its constituent parts and is a living example of the type of general proletarian morality we need to consciously develop to self-regulate the affairs of the workers' movement.

The flimsy allegation retailed by *Workers Hammer* (SL/B's paper) that it was a cynically cobbled-together hanging jury for Spartacism is easily dismissed. Its composition was broad and - most tellingly - the deci-

sions of the body can hardly be dubbed an 'Ian Donovan white-wash'.

Yet despicably, both the SL/B and its estranged child, the International Bolshevik Tendency, claimed that the body could have no honourable purpose. As the IBT put it, "In circumstances where the facts of an incident are not in question ... it becomes a process of seeking an excuse or explanation for inadmissible violence" (IBT e-mail to commission, March 10). Likewise, the SL/B crudely characterise the Bloody Sunday clash as a simple "open-and-shut case of violent thuggery" (*Workers Hammer* March/April 1999). In other words, for their own reasons, neither one of these symbiotically entwined sects wanted the background to the assault to be investigated. This 'string 'em up' approach bears the same relationship to natural justice as do the ethics of a lynch mob. Surely it was correct from the point of view of simple humanity - as well as the wider interests of the workers' movement - that the incident - so out of character for comrade Donovan - was set in context and thoroughly investigated. Despite our clear condemnation of the attack, there were clearly mitigating circumstances which explain this 'moment of madness'.

So, the accusation should be thrown back with some contempt against the SL/B and IBT - these were the organisations engaged in a cover-up, not the LSA. Clearly, both felt extremely vulnerable to a dispassionate and thorough LSA investigation into the murky sect world they inhabit.

If anything, the commission should be criticised for the *timidity* of its conclusions relating to the SL/B. More than sufficient evidence was presented to it to be able to conclude that - whatever the subjective motivations of this woman, who surely joined the movement with the sincerest intention - Eibhlin McDonald has played an utterly despicable and inhuman role in relation to Ian Donovan, behaviour which the left as a whole should find offensive and intolerable. Based on this evidence, the commission should have had no hesitation in explicitly calling for the removal of McDonald from her positions in the SL/B.

After all, this would hardly be a new experience for the comrade. Evidence submitted - and not refuted by the SL/B, despite numerous invitations to do so - described Eibhlin McDonald's removal from the SL/B leadership in the mid-1980s by an extraordinary executive decision of the international tendency's leading figure, James Robertson. The reason - as the man himself put it in direct reference to the brutalising regime run by McDonald and one Len Meyers and its effects on Ian Donovan and others - was that "ostensible Marxist-Leninists are not such if they run their organisations according to the 'survival of the fittest' ... people so abused or neglected either die, become disabled or drift away in disgust. This is an elementary moral question for communists" (November 1986).

In the near future, I will be looking in some detail at the evidence presented to the commission and some of the other elementary moral - and political - questions we need to absorb from it ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Clarification

Just a note of clarification regarding the Bloody Sunday incident. As part of the provisional judgement of the Donovan Commission, the commissioners have asked me to restate my position. I can refer people to the statement that I put out immediately after the incident:

"To the Spartacist League - formal response from Ian Donovan:

"Dear comrades,

"You are entirely correct that violence within our movement has no role to play. I felt angry at the particular debate yesterday and for many events built up over years and I lost my cool and struck comrade McDonald above the eye, unfortunately drawing blood. My reasons for losing my temper with McDonald were more personal than political, but this was a serious mistake that cannot be condoned irrespective of its subjective motivations. I join you in condemning my own misguided action. This will not happen again - of this you can be assured.

"Yours for communism,
Ian Donovan."

Any statements made since then that appear to detract from this statement are misformulated, and thereby give a wrong impression of my position. While I continue to hold the view that violations of the democratic rights and security of other leftist tendencies and individuals in the workers' movement by the Spartacists, which happen frequently, should be stopped by the collective action of the left and workers' movement, acts of individual violence are not admissible in this regard, and nothing I have subsequently posted should be interpreted in this way.

I shall be saying nothing more about this matter until the full conclusions of the commission of enquiry are published. I should say, however, that I have cooperated fully with the commission and I am not displeased with the provisional outcome. I shall not be pre-empting the publication of the full findings, which it is up to the commissioners to present to the workers' movement.

Ian Donovan
London

Disingenuous

As hard as I try, I find it difficult to feel much sympathy for Militant's present predicament, regarding its inability to register as the 'Socialist Party' for forthcoming elections ('Fight Blairite ban!' *Weekly Worker* March 18).

Peter Taaffe is crying foul play, and has written: "We would never set out to deliberately mimic the name of any other party, because we do not want to cause confusion where it can be avoided" (*The Socialist* March 12). This statement is totally at variance with the facts.

When Militant announced in 1997 that they were relaunching themselves the Socialist Party (of Great Britain) contacted Militant, both nationally and locally, informing them that there already existed an organisation called the Socialist Party, and such a name change would only cause unnecessary confusion. From what I can gather, Militant did not have the decency to even reply to these letters. The best response they could come up with was Wally Kennedy (former Militant councillor) telling his local newspaper that Militant was going to call itself 'Socialist Party', whereas the SPGB called itself 'the Socialist Party'. No confusion there then!

It should be pointed out that the whole business owed little to political principle (and even less to the much touted 'red 90s'), and was more an attempt on their part to carve out a niche between the electoralist SLP and the semi-syndicalist SWP. This lack of

principle explains why they have decided to play the 'numbers game' when staking a claim for the name 'Socialist Party'. Taaffe, in the same article mentioned above, asserts that they are 10 times bigger than the SPGB, and yet in an article published in *Socialist Democracy* (February-March) John Bulaitis (a former member of Militant's national committee) estimates Militant's membership at below 400, and recent articles in the *Weekly Worker* have placed Militant's numbers below 500. In either case, this means that Militant have a smaller membership than the SPGB.

Peter Taaffe makes great claim for their electoral work, but, if one studies their results in both national and local elections, you find that once you take into account the personal votes afforded to candidates such as Dave Nellist and Tommy Sheridan, it transpires that their vote is as derisory as the rest of the left.

The term 'ban' is overstated by Militant. Obviously they should be allowed to contest elections, but they are being disingenuous when they suggest that no confusion is meant when they use 'Socialist Party'. Could I suggest that they adopt a back-up name like the CPGB have with 'Weekly Worker'? The 'State Capitalist Party' comes to mind; it rolls nicely off the tongue, and it neatly encapsulates the politics that Militant have been espousing for the last 40 years.

Darren O'Neil
Hemel Hempstead

Scargillism

The letter from Delphi (*Weekly Worker* April 1) spreads confusion on the question of Scargill's "leading class struggle role in post-war Britain", supposedly having its continuing "considerable resonance" enhanced by SLP "socialist opposition to Europe".

Political leadership is precisely where Scargillism has proved its utter worthlessness. Many flocked to, effectively, the NUM banner on its break at last with Labour, 10 years after the betrayal of the miners' strike. Sadly only the nastiest bureaucracy and 'anti-theory' has been 'independently' established by the SLP, and the anti-state heroism of the picket line has not even tried to find a political leadership voice.

Without a single major political analysis article by Scargillites in two years, working class political re-education has been left stagnant - deliberately. Articles to *Socialist News* are rarely encouraged and always dumbed down; discussion and polemics are banned - even a letters column. Trade union journal-type activity reports dominate; the front page lead rarely conveys more than 'Here we go' or 'Capitalism bad, socialism good'; and serious conflicts actually ravaging the SLP, the richest source of political education, do not even get reported, leaving the mass of membership completely in the dark - deliberately.

As a leader of heroic NUM determination and ability to defy capitalist state repression, Scargill could have become a great figure in the break from Labourism. But, by deliberately refusing to let the party's political development go beyond his own demagogic limitations, bureaucratic 'constitutionalism' and anti-theory censorship, he has already become a reactionary, falling far behind the needs of the day.

Scargill's Euro-election statement, his first published political analysis (such as it is) for two years, reeks of social chauvinism, and Delphi is in the same camp. To describe the EU as "the actual concrete form taken by imperialism in post-war Europe" is a ludicrously nationalistic, one-sided view. The American Marshall Plan/IMF/Nato Cold War domination, tail-ended by Britain, has been the main imperial-



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

ist driving force overall. The EU became a ruling class *challenge*, started by six west European states, to that Anglo-Saxon domination.

To caress the notion of "British national sovereignty" while living under a monopoly capitalist ruling class, which is as much a part of the international imperialist system as anything, is social chauvinism. Scorn for EU membership is only *not* petty nationalism in the context of the revolutionary perspective for the overthrow of the entire imperialist system.

Scargill's anti-EU electoral statement clearly places Britain still within a capitalist trade war environment, and his arbitrary declaration that "import controls are SLP policy" is in the same context - as the Welsh EU statement in the same copy of *Socialist News* makes clear, and as do other sections of Scargill's statement.

At this rate of social chauvinist degeneration Scargill will not remain the British state establishment's "most dangerous single 'enemy within'" for much longer. SLP members will have a hard job holding back this 'left' petty nationalism.

Royston Bull

Former SLP vice president

Anti-EU

Will ordinary people in the south of Ireland listen to the anti-European message before it is too late? Will they wise up to see the likes of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Irish Labour Party for what they are: the political parties who have organised society to give people low wages, to facilitate politicians who cheat millions, who attack the basic dignity of the unemployed? Will ordinary people ever have the sense to see the need to reject these parties? - for it is the Bertie Aherns, John Brutons, Mary Harneys, Ruari Quinns and Prionsias de Rossas of the world who have turned the south of Ireland into an elected dictatorship, at the behest of unprincipled multinational capitalism.

The moves to set up a nationwide series of welfare checkpoints have not occurred by accident, for the policy meets with the requirement imposed on the south of Ireland through membership of the EU to reduce state spending on social programmes. Furthermore similar social spending cutbacks are being instigated in the north by the Tony Blair-inspired 'New' Labour champions of 'peace and prosperity'. Whatever became of the promised 'peace dividend'? What proves ironic, however, is that, while mainstream political groups in Ireland such as the SDLP, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and others condemn the cutbacks, they demonstrate a clear hypocrisy by supporting the very reason why governments across Europe have worked to instigate cutbacks in the first place. This many have done primarily to meet the fiscal requirements in accordance with the conditions governing entry to the EU project as outlined in the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties.

The Garda welfare checkpoints proposed by Fianna Fáil will be continued by each of the major political parties, once they have themselves achieved office. In a roundabout way exactly the same applies in the case of the SDLP and others in the north. People there should not be fooled when these parties express bogus concerns for the rights of the unemployed, disabled and other marginalised elements in society, while each express support for the politics of the EU.

Gerry Ruddy
IRSP

Irish peace process

Arms compromise

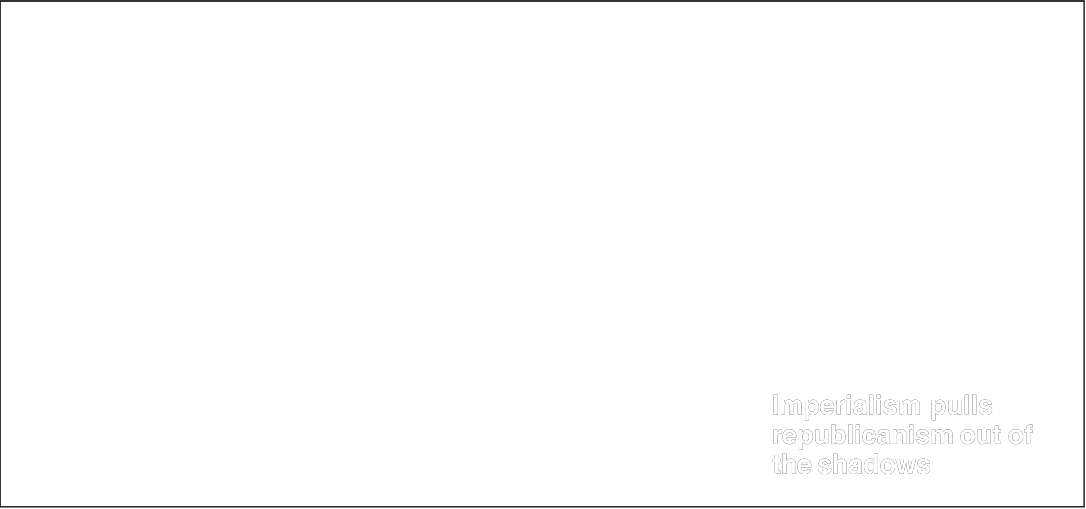
As yet another ‘deadline’ came and went, Tony Blair and taoiseach Bertie Ahern last week dreamed up a new formula to keep the long drawn out Northern Ireland peace process on track.

Bourgeois pundits have been claiming that “the Good Friday agreement is dying” (*The Guardian* March 25) for some time. The continuing impasse over decommissioning left the same newspaper bewailing, “If there is no IRA decommissioning soon, the agreement seems certain to fall” (April 2). That statement appeared immediately after the Blair-Ahern declaration. The previous day Hugo Young had taken this short-sighted scepticism a step further: “If Good Friday fails, then some kind of terrorism will resume” (April 1). Another *Guardian* writer, Kevin Toolis, warned: “Unless the British and Irish governments start furiously backtracking, the entire Northern Ireland peace process is going to collapse in 10 days time” (April 6).

It is a good job from the point of view of imperialism that Blair, Ahern, David Trimble and Gerry Adams are not so easily deflected from the aim they all share: a settlement based on the permanent ending of nationalist armed resistance to the British occupation of the Six Counties. Of course within that shared aim there are huge differences of emphasis reflecting distinct and opposing interests. Nevertheless, overwhelmingly all the parties want to avoid a return to armed struggle like the plague.

So the peace *process* itself is very much alive. The fact that Adams, the Sinn Féin president, is having regular meetings with Ulster Unionist Party leader Trimble, the fact that the IRA ceasefire is absolutely firm, and the fact that British and US imperialism, the Irish government, the UUP and SF all want the agreement to succeed - all these truths point to the likely achievement of a settlement. Only Ian Paisley’s Democratic Unionist Party, Robert McCartney’s UK Unionist Party and a tiny minority within republican opinion are still hoping to thwart a deal.

Having said that, it is hardly surprising that there have been many difficulties, obstacles and crises. Blair and Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam have tended to react to these by imposing deadlines at every stage. In fact Good Friday 1999 is more than five months beyond the date by which the Northern Ireland executive was supposed to have been set up - October 31 1998.



Imperialism pulls republican out of the shadows

Although the whole process has clearly been sponsored, backed and driven by imperialism in the interests of the New World Order, that does not mean that compromises have not been, and will not continue to be, made. The biggest single contradiction to be resolved revolves around the fact that the ‘criminal terrorists’ who so heroically resisted the imperialist occupation are now central to the success of a settlement, although they are still armed. It is this that lies behind the continuing row over the decommissioning.

SF’s chief negotiator Martin McGuinness put this most aptly in an interview with the BBC in February: “It’s effectively all about being unable to accept that in the course of 30 years that they hadn’t the ability to militarily defeat the IRA.” In an article on SF’s internet news service he added: “The Ulster Unionist leadership under David Trimble need to divest themselves of the notion that you can bring about what essentially is a military objective against the background of comparative peace in the north” (*RM List* March 2).

However, there is no doubting that Sinn Féin is “completely and unambiguously committed to contributing in an entirely peaceful and democratic process of discourse with all shades of political opinion” (SF chairman Mitchell McLaughlin); that it is “totally and absolutely committed to democratic and peaceful means” (Gerry Adams).

Nevertheless, the prominence of SF/IRA in the process - despite their refusal to decommission up to now - is indeed a bitter pill for many in both the unionist and British imperialist camps to swallow. The fact that most of the IRA’s prisoners of war have been, or are in the process of being, released while not a single bullet has been surrendered is the source of almost uncontrollable fury in some quarters. When Michael Caraher, Bernard McGinn, Seamus McArdle and Martin Mines laughed contemptuously after being sentenced to a total of 435 years in jail last month, this was more than *The Daily Telegraph* could stomach. These IRA soldiers “will be loosed in 16 months to resume their daily business, terrorism”, it raged, under an editorial titled “Laughing at Britain” (March 20).

Such a seething reaction gives anti-imperialists not a little pleasure. But that should not blind us to the fact that, while SF/IRA look likely to pull off what in their terms is an honourable deal, it is imperialism that will be the main winner, as these most intransigent of former enemies are drawn into bourgeois respectability. Large sections of establishment opinion have come to the pragmatic conclusion that leaving powerful weaponry in IRA hands (at least in the short term) is a small price to pay, taking into account the overall picture.

One unionist politician who would clearly like to openly embrace such pragmatism is Trimble himself, but of course he knows only too well that he must move slowly in order to keep his right wing on board and Paisley’s DUP at bay. That is why he was adamant that SF could not enter the devolved Northern Ireland administration unless IRA decommissioning had first begun. But Adams has his own constituency of militant republicanism to consider. As Belfast’s ‘red priest’, Des Wilson, put it, “Democrats are being asked now to leave themselves naked to the protection of the RUC and the British military in all its forms - regular army, secret army, territorial army, unofficial armed groups, armed clergymen - and hope for the best, without any of these bodies making even the slightest promise that their war against democrats is over.

We have had the smell of burning houses in our nostrils far too often” (*RM List* March 4).

Put another way, SF/IRA *cannot* surrender their weapons - not until majority republican opinion is won to believe that the new government institutions set up are in some way theirs. As a result of this deadlock Adams and Trimble needed to be seen to move simultaneously, so that neither would be viewed by their supporters as having sold out. Adams said: “I want Mr Trimble in the loop, before I stretch the republican constituency once again, because we have in the last year taken a number of initiatives. Because there has been no meaningful response it has tended to undermine the credibility of our leadership, so I am prepared to stretch, I am prepared to reach out, but I want to make sure that Mr Trimble and I jump together on this.”

In the event the Maundy Thursday deadline was marked only by the Blair-Ahern Hillsborough declaration, not yet agreed to by the Northern Ireland parties. It contains several points which can be portrayed as minor victories by both SF and the UUP, if they are so minded. In order to meet SF’s objections that there is nothing in the Good Friday agreement which specifies that decommissioning must have begun before the Stormont executive is formed, the two prime ministers propose that the composition of the 10-member executive is agreed - including the two seats to which SF is entitled as a result of the June 1998 elections.

But the named representatives will be ‘ministers-in-waiting’, for there will not even be a ‘shadow executive’, let alone a fully devolved administration. Within a month, after a “collective act of reconciliation”, “some arms” will be “put beyond use, on a voluntary basis, in a manner which will be verified by the independent commission on decommissioning”. As another carrot Blair promised to remove more troops from the Six Counties - “demilitarisation in recognition of the changed situation on security”.

Of all the parties attending the Hillsborough talks, only SF seemed less than pleased with the declaration. Yet, despite militant and defiant noises from IRA leader Brian Keenan, Adams conceded that it “may have merit”, while McLaughlin stated that some “good work was done”. It was noticeable that some unionist hard-liners were already dismissing any SF/IRA move as insufficient. Peter Weir, a dissident UUP member of the Northern Ireland assembly, said: “If the Provos handed over two guns tomorrow, that would fulfil the terms of the declaration, and you could find yourself in the position where they’ve got more guns than they had a year ago and be in government.” Most unionists had previously been won to the position that IRA decommissioning need only have ‘begun’ before SF took up its executive seats.

In reality it may never happen fully at all. But the whole history of Irish republicanism is one of former rebels making their peace with imperialism and the Irish establishment and simply leaving their guns to rust.

Despite the scepticism of the pundits, the peace process continues to edge forward. It will no doubt encounter many more difficulties, but, as long as both Trimble and Adams can still persuade most of their supporters that their interests will be served in the long run, and rejectionists on both wings remain marginalised, imperialism looks set to achieve the stability it yearns for ●

Jim Blackstock

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday April 11, 5pm - ‘Plekhanov and other Russians’, using Hal Draper’s *The dictatorship of the proletariat from Marx to Lenin* as a study guide.

Manchester: Monday April 12, 7.30pm - ‘The genesis of the industrial capitalist’, 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.

■ Socialist Alliance (London region)

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

■ London Socialist Alliance election bloc

Trade union rally: Postponed until May 15 - details to follow.

■ March for Kosova

Organised by Workers’ Aid for Kosova and Kosova Crisis. Assemble 12 noon, Highbury Fields, Saturday April 10. March to Clerkenwell Green for rally. Details: 0113 262 2705

■ Glasgow Marxist Forum

Public meetings: ‘Crisis in the Balkans: what is the socialist response?’ - Monday April 12, 7.30pm. Speakers from the AWL and GMF.

‘Marxism and philosophy’ - Wednesday April 21, 7.30pm. Speaker - Steve Marriot.

Venue - Partick Burgh Halls (near Partick tube and rail stations).

■ 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 campaign 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

Public meeting - ‘Defend asylum-seekers’: Tuesday April 27, Dover Town Hall, 7.30pm. Supported by Kent National Union of Teachers, Refugee Link and Kent Socialist Alliance.

Speakers include Bill Martin (Dover RMT), Brian Debus (Hackney Union).

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.

■ March for jobs!

Prepare for the 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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Unionists, democrats and nationalists

In the *Weekly Worker* (March 11) Alan Ross provided some additional information to Tom Delargy's previous article on the Scottish Socialist Party conference (March 4). Tom had not reported the debate on the most important subject facing the SSP, namely the national question. It had been a quite lively argument and involved many of the SSP 'big guns', who directed their fire against the demand for a federal republic.

By neglecting this, Tom's report gave a misleading view. As it turns out, Tom was apparently absent from this part of the conference, which explains why he did not report it. He tried to get the missing information, but was unable to do so through no fault of his own. Fair enough. But Tom should have told readers that he was only reporting part of the conference. Alternatively he should have accepted comrade Ross's corrective as fair comment.

Unfortunately Tom cannot bring himself to do this. Instead he starts up a ruck against Nick Clarke and Mary Ward. His real purpose is to attack any campaigning for a federal republic, which he claims is a waste of time. He therefore gives aid and comfort to the SSP's nationalist 'big guns'.

He says that supporters of a federal republic won "a mere handful of votes". Yet the article by comrade Ross did not claim any different. What the article did say was that the SSP's aim of independence was the main debate of the conference, and that the call for a federal republic was the main point of contention in that debate. Tom says nothing to disprove this.

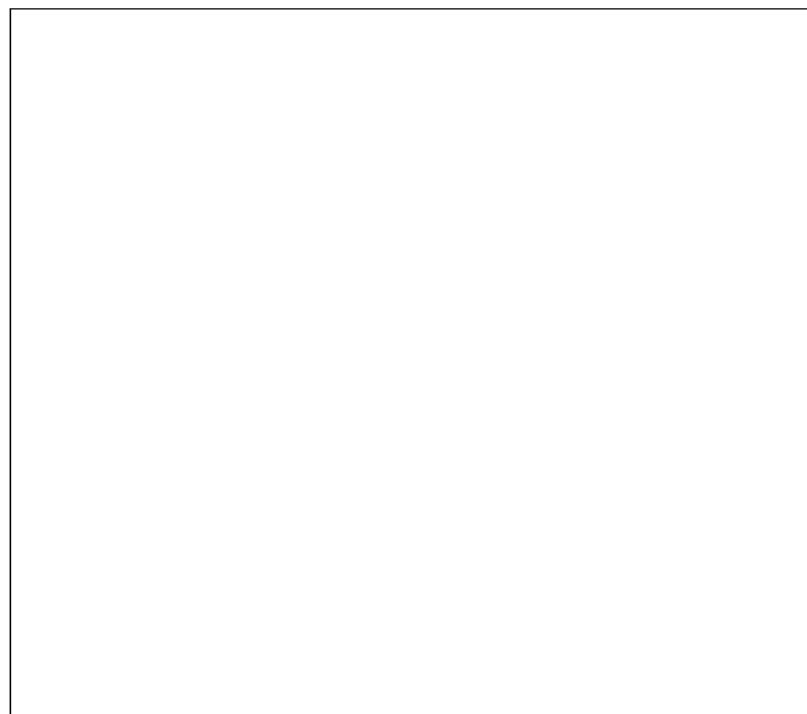
Tom gets a little carried away with his own importance, when he claims that he persuaded Nick and Mary eventually to join the SSP. This is simply not true. Nick and Mary held out against joining the SSP quite deliberately. They were encouraged in this by both the RDG and CPGB. They refused to join as long as politically possible. This refusal was directly connected to the contradiction between their position on a federal republic and the SSP's support for independence. The political logic of this was understood by, for example, Allan Armstrong and the Red Republicans, but not by Tom. He 'explains' the whole episode in terms of Nick and Mary being confused and his own powers of persuasion.

A combination of the federal republic and the open public resistance to joining by Nick and Mary indicates that they had the hardest line against nationalism, amongst those comrades previously in the Scottish Socialist Alliance. But as political realists their refusal to join was not absolute. They held out as long as possible and then did what was necessary.

When the question of Scottish independence was debated at the conference, it was the federal republican comrades who made the case against independence. Those like Tom who rushed to join the SSP as soon as possible, and months before Nick and Mary, did not have any motion on the question and did not even turn up for the debate.

Instead of proving the correctness of Tom's tactics, it proved the correctness of the argument made by both the RDG and the CPGB. There is

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group restates the case for a federal republic



Nick Clarke and Mary Ward: delayed joining SSP

.....

"The union between England and Scotland was not a democratic union and that remains true today"

.....

a direct correlation with your speed of joining the SSP and your preparedness to challenge nationalism. This was shown at the SSP founding conference. If Nick and Mary are only firing peashooters at the enemy, they were at least on the battlefield in the front line trenches. Those peashooters can sting if you get hit in the eye. They are certainly more effective against the nationalist enemy than the 'big gun' of anti-nationalism that Tom is threatening to bring to the front line. Nobody has seen this big gun yet. I am absolutely sure it only fires blanks.

Let us put this argument in the wider context of Scottish politics. Marxists or communists in Scotland have only three basic positions. I will call these unionist-communist, democrat-communist and nationalist-communist. For simplicity, I will simply use the term unionist, democrat and nationalist. But we should not forget, at least

to begin with, that the advocates of each genuinely consider their line is communist and internationalist.

Unionism and monarchism are the historic form taken by British nationalism. The union fuses England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland under the crown. Loyalty, to use the Northern Irish term, means loyalty to both the union and the monarchy. The very term 'United Kingdom' captures the essence of both union and monarchy. From the various historic beginnings of unionism, it was not a voluntary union of peoples. It was imposed by English arms or by agreement between the ruling classes. This remains true today, although it is now hidden beneath centuries of conservatism, political apathy and ruling class interests. Modern British unionism has advanced a variety of solutions - from one central parliament (Tories) and devolved assemblies (Labour and Lib Dems) to a federal monarchy (Lib Dems). Each of these options rests on the two pillars of union and monarchy.

The right of nations to self-determination is a republican principle. It means that the people have the sovereign right to decide on unity or separation. Concretely this means a constitutional right for the people of a given national territory to hold a referendum, convene a constituent assembly, and for its result to be carried out in practice. Such a constitutional right to self-determination does not exist in the unionist constitution. The union between England and Scotland was not a democratic union and that remains true today.

The republican principle of self-determination can be achieved through independence or a federal republic. The latter means abolishing the monarchy and the union and reconstituting the state as a voluntary democratic union. A voluntary federal republic (but not the federal mon-

archy), including the constitutional right to a referendum, is the alternative form of self-determination to separatism.

In general, the democrats may advocate either a federal republic or an independent republic, as alternative forms of self-determination. Marx and Engels considered both these options, and various combinations of these options, in their writings on Ireland. However, democrat-communists begin from the working class internationalist principle of the maximum political unity of the working class. This may take the form of different nationalities cohabiting in a single state. Consequently a federal republic is a preferable option, unless state violence and repression demands a policy of separation. In the former Yugoslavia, for example, it is absolutely correct and necessary to demand independence for ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Nationalists also accept the right of nations to self-determination. But independence alone serves their interests. They therefore reject the federal republic. Democrats do not have an absolute opposition to independence, and consider each situation concretely. It is possible to be a mistaken democrat, who advocates independence at the wrong time, in the wrong place and in the wrong circumstances. This mistake is no minor matter. It is a serious departure from international democracy, because in practice it helps to promote nationalist sentiment within the working class. It simply helps the nationalist enemies of the working class.

A balance sheet of the three positions indicates what they have in common. Democrats and nationalists have in common the principle of self-determination. In some circumstances, both would advocate independence. Democrats and unionists have in common their opposition to separatism. For unionists this opposition is absolute and for democrats it is due to circumstances. Having said this, we must never lose sight of the fact that in the UK the main enemy is British nationalism, not Scottish nationalism.

Last month a public meeting was held by the Glasgow Marxist Forum. All three positions were defended. Mary Ward put the case of the democrats for a federal republic. Sandy McBurney put forward the unionist case and Allan Armstrong put the nationalist position.

Sandy had two main arguments. First he claimed that the unionist state incorporated the right to self-determination. He accepted that there was no constitutional right. He claimed that the ruling class were so honourable that as soon as a majority in Scotland voted for independence, they would accept the result and implement it. They would do so without carrying out any economic and political sabotage. This strained the credibility so much, that the audience almost gasped in shock. Even Sandy looked a bit sheepish, and we

were not sure he believed it himself. Is this the same perfidious Albion whose history of duplicity, sabotage and use of terror is renowned throughout the world?

Sandy's second argument was his defence of the monarchy. Of course as a communist Sandy obviously did not support the monarchy. He stated he wants to see it abolished. I have never heard a socialist say otherwise. But Sandy has absorbed the dominant culture of liberalism, which infects virtually the whole left. He has a liberal rather than a revolutionary attitude.

Liberals think the monarchy is tolerable. It is hardly worth getting rid of and certainly not by means of violent action. Revolutionaries want its immediate abolition, by violence if necessary. Revolutionaries want the masses to destroy the monarchy yesterday and certainly no later than tomorrow. Liberals think perhaps it will abolish itself sometime in the vague future. The liberal attitude is one of patience and tolerance. And which class will carry out this historic task? Every liberal prays it will be the bourgeoisie and not the working class.

When we hear Sandy, it is the voice of a liberal anti-monarchist not a revolutionary. He gives us a 'proletarian' rationale. The workers are not interested and cannot be mobilised. Sandy does not stop to consider whose political culture has encouraged the workers to tolerate the monarchy.

The nationalist-communist case was argued by Allan Armstrong. For many years Allan argued the case for a federal republic and was one of the comrades to first raise this slogan within the Marxist movement as far back as 1980. But he has been influenced by the growth of nationalism in Scotland. It is worth asking whether Allan should be seen as a mistaken democrat or a nationalist. The mistaken democrat recognises the validity of a federal republic, but considers that independence is the correct line. The nationalist rejects the federal republic as such.

Recent attacks on the federal republic by Allan in the *Weekly Worker* show that he has gone over to nationalism. He does not accept that it is a legitimate alternative to his own call for independence. He is now opposed to a federal republic as such, which he claims is unionist. His opposition to the slogan of 'international socialism' tends to confirm my worst fears. I would be only too pleased to find out that my old comrade was not in the nationalist camp. But political logic tells us otherwise.

So where is Tom Delargy with his anti-nationalist big gun? He rejects the democrat position of a federal republic. The whole thrust of his letter is an attack on the federal republic through attacking Nick and Mary. He also rejects the independence demand advocated by Allan Armstrong and Scottish Militant Labour. We must deduce from this that Tom's anti-nationalism is simply old fashioned unionism. This is why his big gun failed to fire during the founding conference of the SSP.

Unionists are British nationalists. Nobody will be fooled when British nationalists call themselves 'anti-nationalist' and 'internationalists' ●

Around the left

Sad but true

We appear to have upset the Spartacist League/Britain. How do I know this? Well, the latest issue of *Workers Hammer* (March-April) contains an article entitled, 'CPGB: anti-communist pimps for the racist British state'. A bit of a give-away. There are other clues. In the same issue we are described as "charlatans", "Labourite", "Stalinist", "slimy" - and we are also accused of speaking "horseshit" and "peddling the filthy lies" of the British ruling class. What has the CPGB done to deserve such opprobrium?

Our heinous crime - if that is what it is - lies in the fact that we have refused to genuflect before the report of Sir William Macpherson into the murder of Stephen Lawrence and its definition of so-called "institutionalised racism". It seems that the politically innocent SL/B is outraged by our lack of deference to liberal/official anti-racism and political correctness. Of course, in this respect, we understand the *source* of SL/B's fury. No problem. You do not have to be Albert Einstein or VI Lenin to work it out. The SL/B, for all its revolutionary hell-fire and leftist huff-and-puff, believes in and is a slave to the *same* dogmatic prejudice as the rest of the economistic left. That is, the SL/B is as convinced as the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party that capitalism and hence the whole apparatus of the British and every other capitalist state is inherently racist.

According to *Workers Hammer*, it is an "elemental truth that the capitalist state is necessarily racist" - presumably including ANC-governed South Africa. This mindless dogma tells the SL/B that when the bourgeoisie talks in the language of anti-racism - or even uses *its own state* to put out anti-racist propaganda - it must be engaging in some elaborate deception. It is utterly beyond the Sparts' comprehension that the bourgeoisie is capable of using an expropriated ideology - that of anti-racism, for example - to divide the working class.

Here is the simple moralistic faith of the SL/B - untouched by science or the need for empirical evidence. Something it shares with many other groups on the left. Sad but true. And, as its polemics against the CPGB and the *Weekly Worker* reveal, in the name of a revolutionary communist ideology the SL/B is quite prepared to defend and reproduce the most shallow anti-racist platitudes of the bourgeoisie and its tame media.

According to the wisdom of *Workers Hammer*, the CPGB has "bought into the liberal bourgeois hypocrisy about the 'anti-racism' of the status quo and the Labour government's illusions about a 'new era' in race relations". This presumably explains why the CPGB has responded to "the Lawrence inquiry's exposé of rampant police racism with a strident campaign that *the police and the British state*

Macpherson: left of the CPGB according to the Spartacist League

are anti-racist" (SL/B's emphasis). Even worse, the CPGB "pontificate that, under Labour, the British ruling class are integrating blacks and Asians into British society ... We'd like to see them explain that to an audience of the blacks and Asian descendants of immigrant workers who daily face the brutality of the capitalists' cops and their fascist auxiliaries."

Our reply to this is quite straightforward. It may or may not be true that New Labour has "illusions" about a new anti-racist dawn in Britain - presumably that is what our friends mean by "a 'new era' in race relations". Unforeseen and unpredictable circumstances could possibly ignite racist sentiments on a mass scale among some sections of the working class. After all, just take a look at the putrid local press in places like Dover. A near constant stream of muck-raking against asylum-seekers, which often goes beyond anti-outsider chauvinism.

However, this in no way occludes the fact that the *official* ideology of

the British state is now anti-racist to the core. More to the point, Tony Blair and the British state is rapidly developing an *inclusive* national chauvinistic ideology which incorporates blacks, Asians and whites - who are then supposed to approach the bourgeois state as rival ethnic supplicants. This is why we make, as *Workers Hammer* puts it, the "astounding claim that the capitalist state is now anti-racist". Because it is so obviously *true*. Why be afraid of the truth, members of the SL/B?

It is also self-evident that this corrosively anti-working class anti-racist ideology has gained almost complete hegemony over official society - and naturally the bourgeoisie wants its *own* ideology to gain mastery over the working class. Not that this worries or even occurs to the SL/B, seeing how it has "bought into" the left myth that the only ideological weapon open to the bourgeoisie is racism. Anti-racism, we have to believe, is the sole preserve of the pristine and sanctimonious left - if you believe *Workers Hammer*, *Socialist Worker*, *The Socialist*, *Socialist Outlook*, etc.

But this is twaddle. A pathetic self-delusion the left clings to for ideological comfort in a hostile anti-communist world. Blair rode to power partly thanks to the 'anti-racist' vote of blacks and Asians. Yet you would have to be slightly out of your mind to think that at this present political-social conjuncture, blacks and Asians - any more than whites - are moving to the left or towards communist conclusions. Bourgeois ideology is dominant. Amongst all sections of society.

So any rational observer should be able to conclude that it is very silly for the anonymous author of *Workers Hammer* to write that "the CPGB openly defends the racist state" and is an "outfit who are to the right of the Macpherson report and give anti-racist credentials to the racist capitalist class".

We are not worried by the SL/B's

insults. In fact, we take it as a sort of back-handed, and very cack-handed, compliment. The CPGB does not defend or give any "credentials" to the bourgeoisie. We are for the revolutionary democratic overthrow - or smashing - of the bourgeois state. However, as *Workers Hammer* has noticed, unlike the rest of the left our response to the Lawrence inquiry was *not* to attempt to out-Macpherson Macpherson - ie, go onto politically correct overdrive. From day one we pointed to the *dangers* of uncritically accepting the report and its definition of so-called "institutionalised racism". Why? Because Macpherson and co want the working class to bow before the bourgeois state's 'benign' anti-racism. The left's 'Macphersonism' robs the working class of an independent political voice. Astoundingly, we do not think this is a good or progressive idea.

It is hardly surprising that this is all way above the head of the politically unsophisticated SL/B. As an organisation it has been accused by its own international leadership of "malign neglect" of its victimised members (see 'Party notes', p2). It is crystal clear that the SL/B is also guilty of malign neglect when it comes to theory.

But even the SL/B should be aware of the political axiom that if you are in a hole then stop digging. Yet *Workers Hammer* continues furiously in best Stakhanovite style, writing: "The CPGB shares a fundamental premise with the Labourite left whom they polemicise against, which is that racism can be addressed within the framework of the capitalist state. The SWP and SP argue that by pressuring the Labour government to reform the cops, the state can become less racist, while the CPGB maintains that the state is already anti-racist. All of them *rule out* mobilising the proletariat behind a revolutionary programme and party to smash racist and fascist terror, which is a necessary part of the programme for socialist revolution. But this requires mobilising the working masses *against* the existing Labourite misleadership, a perspective these organisations necessarily reject because they capitulate to Labourism and the bourgeois state" (original emphasis).

A wealth of misinformation. You could quite easily fill up an entire edition of the *Weekly Worker* just by chronicling the inaccuracies, distortions and lies generated by a single issue of *Workers Hammer*. The CPGB, in its draft (revolutionary) *minimum* programme, in countless articles and in all its publications, in its election material, etc, has constantly made the propaganda call for workers' militias. And for doing so we have been repeatedly attacked by the auto-Labourite Trotskyite left. Instead they offer up their dismal economistic shopping list - always proudly announcing this to be evidence of the vastly superior method of the 'transitional programme'. Yes, SL/B members, the SP, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Socialist Outlook, etc do indeed "capitulate to Labourism and the bourgeois state". Their 'critical support' for the Macpherson report amply demonstrates this ... and it seems that the SL/B, to put it mildly, also has an uneasy and ambiguous relationship with Sir William Macpherson and his liberal-reactionary definition of "institutionalised racism".

Frankly, when it comes to polemics, the SL/B favours the kangaroo court approach - with the faceless hacks of *Workers Hammer* doubling up as amateur Vyshinskys. The CPGB *must* be found guilty of being slimy, Labourite pimps for the "racist" British state. In its endeavours to prove its 'case', the SL/B polemics resort to comical clumsiness, seasoned with extreme cynicism.

In true Spart style, the CPGB is accused of "filthy lawyering" for Le Pen. On what basis is this charge made? Here it is: "As for Le Pen's 'opinion' that the holocaust was a 'detail' of World War II, the CPGB actually *con-curs*: 'In one sense the mass murder of six million Jews is a "detail" of the carnage which costs the lives of 50 million people' (*Weekly Worker* October 29 1998) ... To justify their outrageous stance, the slimy CPGB cites as 'evidence' the fact that the holocaust is not what the imperialists fought World War II over: 'Although the death camps were obviously of major significance, World War II was not fought over the Nazi's policy of exterminating Jews. It was primarily fought over the relative position of Germany in a world imperialist struggle'" (original emphasis).

Is the SL/B suggesting that the democratic imperialist powers who fought Nazi Germany in World War II did it for noble anti-Nazi sentiments? Perhaps the SL/B have "bought into" the anti-fascist propaganda surrounding World War II? No, of course not. As *Workers Hammer* says: "World War II was inter-imperialist carnage fought to redivide the booty of capitalist profits. Revolutionaries were for the *defeat* not only of fascist Germany but of all the blood-drenched imperialist 'democracies', including Britain, through proletarian revolution" (original emphasis).

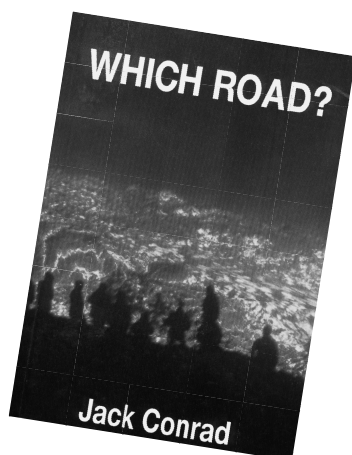
This is of course exactly the position of the CPGB/*Weekly Worker*. Not that *Workers Hammer* can admit this to its deliberately and criminally misinformed membership. But it gets worse. The paper also takes us to task for pointing out that "it is seldom possible to destroy an argument by suppressing it. Only when it is brought into the light of day through mass discussion can the argument be shown to be fallacious."

Workers Hammer bellows: "The question of fascism has nothing whatsoever to do with 'free speech' and democratic 'rights'." When the bourgeoisie resorts to counterrevolutionary fascism it will attempt to win over large sections of the population, including millions of workers, using all kinds of false arguments based on widely held prejudices. This was certainly the case with Nazi Germany. Does the SL/B really believe that communists should not try to expose wrong ideas if they happen to be propagated by fascists? Apparently it does. Just as it appears to support the German bourgeoisie's ban on disputing the six-million holocaust figure - the original "argument" we saw no harm in airing.

Everybody in the workers' movement knows who and what the SL/B are. They are renowned for falsifying their opponents' positions in order to protect their own followers from alternative ideas. Despite that, it would be edifying if the SL/B could somehow, god knows how, muster up a *serious* reply ●

Don Preston

Which road?



Jack Conrad provides a sustained critique of the 'revolutionary' reformist programmes of the Eurocommunist CPGB, the CPB and the Militant Tendency (now the Socialist Party of England and Wales). It is the preliminary groundwork for our draft programme around which the struggle to reforge the CPGB is focused. (pp267, £6.95 - available from the CPGB address).

The debate on the national minimum wage is far from new. Seventy-two years ago Ranjani Palme Dutt's book of the same title as this article discussed the question. In fact during this period a minimum wage was implemented in a variety of countries and in Britain boards were introduced that guaranteed minimum wages for people in the 'depressed trades' - industries such as catering and farming where the degree of trade union organisation was so weak that the government decided to act itself to alleviate the very worst examples of low pay and long hours.

Actually from 1945 to the mid-1970s a combination of full employment and trade union strength maintained wages. It was Thatcher who abolished the wages boards. However, since World War II a number of measures have been in place that themselves are very much like the outdoor relief of the 1820s. Working family income supplement is the latest of these, though in many respects housing benefit has been the most important in maintaining standards of living.

Looking at wages in 1927, we would find that a miner in Britain would receive about £2 per week, in the USA £6, and in India five shillings (25p). It is very difficult to translate these figures into modern terms, because inflation is uneven in its effects on different classes, income levels, countries and cultures. In addition many products necessary for a normal life today are completely different from what was needed then. However, as a very rough approximation, these wages were the equivalent of around £80, £240 and £10 per week in present-day terms.

These figures represented the *cost of labour*. There is a similar ratio amongst the same countries today, though we might replace India by Indonesia. It must be understood, however, that this is the *price* of labour power, not its value. In the case of the USA there was an acute shortage of labour, particularly of skilled labour; on top of this, there was a booming economy and thus the price of labour power was well above the cost of its replacement.

In India the reverse situation probably prevailed insofar as the labour used was unskilled and mineworkers were not being replaced from amongst themselves, but were simply being recruited from the surplus population generated in the countryside. In all underdeveloped countries a condition exists where the towns' population is constantly being supplemented in this way. This is obvious even in places like South Africa, where disease, crime and social disruption make it highly difficult for the urban population to maintain itself.

The arguments put forward about the inability to provide an income that would enable the replacement of the population to take place were also put forward in Palme Dutt's day. That is, it would make Britain (or nowadays Europe perhaps) uncompetitive and cannot be afforded. However, when the Communist Party puts forward a demand for a minimum income of £300 per week per adult, it does not do so on the basis that this is what the bourgeoisie can afford.

We make such a demand because this amount of money is required under current conditions as a minimum to reproduce ourselves at a biological and cultural level necessary for the modern world. This is taken in a situation where the current tax laws exist, and there is a largely free health and basic education service. Obviously if circumstances changed, such as with the provision of, for example, free nursery education or conversely the abolition of the NHS, then the necessary minimum would also change. Either way, it is self-evident that the government's £3.60 per hour is far below what is necessary. So too is the SWP's £4.60 as *advocated* in its much

Fight for what we need

The living wage and socialism

What the system can afford is not the concern of communists, writes **John Walsh**. The demand for £300 per week minimum income must be part of a revolutionary programme

vaunted 'Action programme'. SPEW is better. It calls for £7.00 per hour, but is prone to water down this minimum in face of the practical requirements of its members in the upper echelons of the trade union bureaucracy. Again, however, SPEW's method is wrong - its figure is derived from the EU's decency threshold - not working class needs.

It is never possible to talk about a minimum wage without also taking into account the number of hours worked and the conditions of employment, because the standard of living is partly determined by what free time individuals have at their disposal. That is why the CPGB demands not only a minimum £300 weekly wage but a 35-hour maximum working week. One of the most crushing effects of long hours before the introduction of the eight-hour day in Britain was the consequent neglect of children, not only in terms of their education and general health, but also their diet and hygiene. This is why the Communist Party not only puts forward demands for the limitation of the working day, but also for special protection for nursing mothers and people involved in dangerous and arduous work.

The question arises as to what is a living income. In 1994 the *Weekly Worker* produced an analysis which suggested that an adult's income (person over the age of 16) needed to be in the order of a minimum of £250 per

week in order to produce and reproduce human beings at our level of culture. This analysis was coincidentally confirmed by two university studies published separately within months of our publication (if anything, our figures were shown to be on the conservative side).

Our table shows that a working class family, consisting of two adults and two children, requires over £600 per week - or £300 per adult. Of course we are not talking about what is necessary just for *survival* - clearly a much lower figure would apply if that were the case. We are discussing an income level that enables the individual to begin to operate in a manner that fulfils the social role they occupy in society - and allows for the upbringing of children at a level which prepares them culturally for a similar full role.

In actuality, the working class does not depend entirely on earned income or benefit for its survival and reproduction. A young couple's parents or relatives contribute to the cost of bringing up children - by providing money, baby-sitting or help with domestic work. Parents leave money or housing to their children on their death. Clothes and other necessities for a new baby are often given by grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Taking all these things into account, the cost of reproduction for the working class is one way or another borne by the working class as a whole

- and not just through individuals receiving help from friends and family. Much of it is borne by the provision of education, school dinners, medical facilities and a host of other things which are transferred from one section of the working class to another by way of taxes on our wages.

In 1927, the anti-communist Australian Labor Party was actually arguing against a minimum wage on the grounds that it would boost the income of single people in comparison to that of families. According to Labor in Australia, family allowance would be a better method of raising the minimum income, as it would be directed to those in the process of raising children. I assume it is not necessary to draw comparisons with the same type of argument we face today. Indeed, Blair specifically proposes a lower minimum wage for persons under 21, irrespective of their marital status.

Still the question of what is necessary remains. Were people prepared to live at four to a room, and have a diet consisting mainly of oats and kale, they could manage to live and biologically reproduce on probably less than £20 per week per person, even at current prices and with no extra subsidies. If this is doubted then a quick look at the Scots' rural diet in the 19th century will show that it was possible not only to reproduce, but to reproduce healthier specimens than were often being produced by

the working class in the cities at that time.

The problem with attempting to survive on next to no money is that you need immense amounts of time and skill to get the cheapest cuts of meat, or vegetables from the market at closing time, and to do household repairs yourself. It not only requires time, but also equipment and a particular cultural background. In other words to live cheaply actually requires resources and education. It goes without saying that people who do survive on an extremely low income are by and large unfit for any useful social role.

Advanced capitalism requires the mass of workers to attain a cultural level that enables them not only to read and write, but to drive cars, use computers and absorb huge masses of technical information. Children who do not reach such a level will usually end up as worst paid labour, thus ensuring that the condition is inherited by the next generation when their own offspring are unable to break out of the circle.

In my view, the falling birth rate can at least partly be explained by the high cost of raising children. The rate required for reproduction of the population - allowing for infant mortality, etc - is around 2.2 children per woman. In 1996, only two countries in Europe - Sweden and Iceland - had a birth rate greater than replacement level. Britain's was 1.8, while Spain's was 1.2.

The production of 'high quality' people in terms of education is not determined just by their individual standard of living, but also by a cultural level of society as a whole. This requires that a high standard of living is maintained over a long period of time. If a class or section of a class experiences a relatively short period of poverty or disruption it does not necessarily damage their social usefulness, but if it persists a negative culture - not only from the point of view of capitalism's requirements, but ironically also from the point of view of the working class - is liable to develop.

We must demand a living income that is not only sufficient to sustain us biologically and culturally, but sufficient to reproduce ourselves at a higher cultural level. We must certainly be aware that if capitalist governments introduce a minimum wage on their terms it could in reality act as a *maximum* for many workers.

Our demand for a minimum wage which genuinely meets the basic reproduction needs of the working class has nothing to do with socialism in a direct sense. However, the fight for such a minimum, if fought for *politically* by the whole class as part of a revolutionary minimum-maximum programme, can lead to a developing challenge to the rule of the bourgeoisie. The demand for a minimum income is not just in the interests of individual workers; it is also necessary for society as a whole. The production of labour power is like every other product: it depends on a certain amount of in-

What we need

Weekly expenditure for two adults and two children (£s)

Food ⁽¹⁾	80	Personal goods and services ⁽⁵⁾	40
Alcohol and tobacco ⁽²⁾	30	Clothing and footwear	50
Housing ⁽³⁾	100	Transport ⁽⁶⁾	60
Fuel and light ⁽⁴⁾	35	Leisure and holidays	70
Household goods, furniture and tools	50	Miscellaneous ⁽⁷⁾	50
Household services	45	Total	610

Notes

The relationship between the above items of expenditure does not exactly replicate the weightings given by official Department of Employment figures, and this is deliberate. I have assumed a working class family of two children and two parents, which is not representative of society as a whole. The reason for choosing this model is explained in the article.

(1) Of course it is always possible to live more cheaply (or more expensively), but the figure given here presupposes that some meals are taken out; that the family shops at big supermarkets (and therefore has a car); and that, because of constraints of time, they do not necessarily choose the cheapest items or those which take a great deal of preparation.

(2) The figure is complicated by the fact that the working class poor tend to smoke and drink more than the more prosperous sections of the population.

(3) This is the most varied of all expenditure. For the purposes of this table, the figure of £100 assumes the purchase of a £50,000 house on a 25-year mortgage, with the householders being capable of doing most of the minor repairs, but paying insurance, council tax, etc.

(4) A family with more than two children will spend proportionately more than the population as a whole.

(5) This figure includes not only such items as toiletries, etc, but also library charges, membership fees, etc.

(6) This figure assumes a £5,000 car, depreciated over 10 years, used for work, holidays, etc (200 miles per week), and includes road tax and insurance with major repairs only carried out at a garage. No parking or garage facilities are assumed.

(7) Expenses here include household and life insurance, newspapers, stationery, telephone bills, postal expenses, the cost of credit, and 101 other items which arise regularly or occasionally (eg, dental bills, prescription charges, etc).

put. Society needs not only to ensure its workers have the necessary cultural level, but also to prepare children for active adult life.

In the past only a tiny proportion of the population would have a wide social, scientific and cultural education. Today high capitalism needs not just a few hundred such individuals, but hundreds of thousands, if not millions. And mass production, not least of such people, has always proved cheaper in the long run. Nevertheless what is happening at the moment is that bourgeois society is also mass-producing a lot of individuals who are simply unable or unwilling to fit in with its social requirements. The most advanced capitalist country, the USA, has built prisons for two million people - mainly black. That might ensure huge profits for the 'security' industry, but is neither efficient nor morally acceptable.

This production of a lumpen proletariat is alien to the interests of the working class. There is no room for labour aristocratic disdain. The advanced part of our class - which politically defines and makes itself - must fight for the whole, and that in no small part means winning the minimum wage necessary for any decent sort of life.

There still remains the question of whether the demand for £300 per week per individual is 'possible'. It is worth quoting *The New Leader* of January 8 1926:

"If we talk of a living wage of £8 or £12 for every worker, the agricultural labourer would most justly laugh at us. Nor would it be much more honest at this stage to talk of a wage of £4 for every worker. The whole wealth produced in this country today, however ruthlessly you divided it, would not yield such a wage all round. Ours is a poor country under present management. Until industry has been drastically reorganised, it cannot pay a genuine living wage. Any figure which we could honestly promise at once would mean a big gain in basic wages only to men and women in the more depressed trades."

These arguments will no doubt be familiar to *Weekly Worker* readers. At that time, it was not true that the system could not provide a minimum of £4 per week (modern equivalent - £160). In fact the level of underconsumption resulting from an average wage for a male worker of one pound, 15 shillings (£1.75) was one of the factors which led to industry producing 13% less than in 1913, even though productivity of labour had increased by 37%.

This led John Maynard Keynes to argue for budget deficits to finance spending. He faced opposition from the Tories, and for that matter Labour too, who claimed that sterling was under threat. A 'strong pound' was necessary for Britain's economic recovery, they said. More familiar arguments.

There are no real estimates of how much under-utilisation of productive capacity really exists at the present time, but it must be at least 20%. The underemployment of labour itself cannot be less than the equivalent of six million adults (25% of the employed labour force). Despite this the actual *per capita* production in Britain at the moment is already way above the figure required to finance £300 per week per adult. Such a figure would consume around 75% of the gross national product.

But concern for what the capitalists can afford is hardly uppermost in our minds. We demand what our class needs - not a penny less ●

Fight this Blairite ban

Support is growing for the fight against the decision of the registrar of political parties to ban the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Socialist Party in England and Wales and others from standing under their own names in the forthcoming European elections. Originally, the Registration of Political Parties Act - the legislation on which the ban is based - was introduced to exclude overt 'spoiling' candidates, using such descriptions as 'Literal Democrats'. This was a Tory-inspired stunt that cost the Liberal Democrats a seat in the 1997 general election by deliberately causing confusion through the name.

However, provisions of the act are now being used to debar serious political organisations like the CPGB and SP with long records of electoral contest. It is an outrageous restriction of the democratic right of the electorate to choose their political representatives and of organisations to pick names which embody their politics. A faceless bureaucrat in Companies House, Cardiff - after 'advice' from a parliamentary committee with a Blairite majority - has deemed that the electorate will be confused by more than one 'Communist Party'. Thus, the pro-Labour Communist Party of Britain is being 'franchised', not the revolutionary CPGB.

We say that people should be treated as adults. Every organisation has a right to stand under its own name and to explain the difference between its politics and those of its rivals to the voters.

The Communist Party is campaigning against this outrageous ban. Along with the Socialist Party, we are collecting signatures and support. We have also incurred heavy legal costs in challenging Blair's exclusion of communists. We urgently need donations for our legal fund. For copies of the petition against the ban, contact the CPGB at BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX.

Those supporting the lifting of the ban so far include (all officers of organisations have signed in a personal capacity): Tony Benn MP, Hugh Kerr MEP, Ken Coates MEP, Michael Hindley MEP, Dave Nellist (SP councillor, Coventry), Roger Banister (Unison NEC), Jean Thorpe (Unison NEC), Jean Geldhart (Unison NEC), Kevin Brien (Unison NEC), James Erquart (Unison NEC), Doug Wright (Unison NEC), Helen Jenner (Unison NEC), Mike Tucker (Unison NEC), 15 NUT NEC members, Andrew Price (Natfhe), two MSF NEC members, five MSF National Craft Committee members, RMT London region transport committee, Jeff Martin (London region convenor, Unison), Denise Williams (London Region Unison deputy convenor), Glen Kelly (secretary, CFDU), Will Reese (president, Coventry NUT), Stewart Richardson, Carol Martin (Birmingham NUT), Tony Brown (secretary, Barking and Dagenham Unison), John Rogers (secretary, Lambeth Unison), Dan Gillman (St Mungo T&G convenor), Brian Woolgar (Nova Ouvertures T&G convenor), Richard Henley (father of GMPU chapel), S Dakin (chair of Hackney Tenants Association), D Martin (coordinator, Forest of Dean Unemployment Centre), Socialist Party, Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party of Great

Britain, John Nicholson (Manchester Socialist Alliance), Pete McClaren (Liaison Group/Socialist Alliance), Dave Church (leader Democratic Labour Party), Scottish Socialist Party, *Red Pepper* magazine, John Rothery and Steph Peart (Democratic Labour Party), North West Socialist Alliance,

Mike Davies, Malcolm Christie and Celia Foote (officers, Leeds Left Alliance), Tam Dean Burn (actor). Thanks go to all comrades who have donated to the Party's legal fund so far, especially AP (£600), RW (£50), AC (£50), IS (£10), GS (£10) and JB (£5) ●

Communist University '99

A full week of debate, argument and political controversy at the CPGB's annual school

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Brunel University, Cleveland Road, Uxbridge, west London - 15 minutes walk from Uxbridge tube. Limited residential spaces available - send £20 to secure your place. Full cost of week: £75, (£85 after May) including self-catering accommodation. Non-residential - £30 for the week (£40 after May), or £5 per session on the door.

Fighting fund

Sound logic

"Congratulations on busting your target again last month," writes JL from Wolverhampton. She adds: "I missed out in March so, to make up for it, here's double what I planned to send." Your £40 donation is more than welcome, comrade.

And of course her logic is sound. We need to break through the £400 barrier not just for one or two months, but regularly throughout the year - if we are to provide the

kind of service the revolutionary movement needs and deserves.

Also helping us off to a good start in April are comrades TS (£10), FC (£10) and PI (£5). The new total stands at £65. Who else will follow JL's example? ●

Robert Rix

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

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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For revolutionary defeatism

After two weeks of war, imperialism's drive to impose its New World Order in Serbia has run into serious trouble. Nato's strategy is in disarray and stands exposed as an ill-conceived, poorly planned adventure, founded on a combination of poor intelligence and fateful political misjudgement, an operation fraught with dangerous consequences, not only for the Balkans, but also for the world as a whole.

From the outset the campaign has been marked by confusion and ambivalence, even in relation to its most fundamental objectives. As the first cruise missiles hit their targets, Clinton told the world that the air offensive against Serbia was in effect a *warning*, intended to show Nato's opposition to Serb aggression; to deter the Milosevic regime from carrying out further attacks on the ethnic Albanian population of Kosova and to "degrade" Serbia's military potential. Nato general secretary Solana depicted the operation as a *punishment* for Serbia's refusal to sign the Rambouillet accord, which would have granted Kosova a limited autonomy, enforced by Nato troops on the ground.

Evidently the alliance's thinking was based on the assumption, indeed the certainty, that a short campaign of aerial bombardment would be sufficient to force Milosevic into suing for peace and accepting a negotiated settlement. This triumph of political wishful thinking and arrogance over sound military doctrine and justified scepticism was doomed from the start. As any saloon bar strategist could have foretold, the consequence of Nato's limited offensive has been to unite the Serbs behind Milosevic and effectively hand him the initiative. While Nato spokesperson boasted about the devastating effect of their attacks on Serbian air defences, Milosevic lost no time in sending his army and special forces into Kosova to carry out an accelerated programme of ethnic cleansing, aimed at terrorising the ethnic Albanian population into fleeing their homeland. In this he has had considerable success. Current estimates suggest that around one million Kosovars have crossed the borders. Within the next two weeks, if events maintain their present momentum, Kosova could be virtually depopulated.

Faced with the abject failure of its initial plan, the alliance has now declared a widening and intensification of the air war, clearly hoping that the ensuing devastation will bring about the collapse of the Serbian government, Milosevic's removal and his replacement by a regime prepared to negotiate. This approach *may* work, but the balance of probability, not to mention the experience of 'Desert Fox' against the regime of Saddam Hussein, seem to be against it. In the event of another failure, the military case for the deployment of ground forces - Clinton's and Blair's nightmare sce-

nario - would then become compelling. To be sure, the *military* defeat of Nato by the Serbs is inconceivable, but a protracted and debilitating ground war, fought against a background of potentially heavy allied casualties and fragile popular support at home, would threaten Nato with a *political* disaster and perhaps even lead to the collapse of the alliance.

What has been the reaction of the left to the Serbian war thus far? Frankly, a totally inadequate and superficial kind of knee-jerk anti-imperialism, and a tendency in some quarters to call for the unconditional support of the Serbs. This curious stance, seemingly rooted in the belief that rump Yugoslavia must be defended because it was *once* a "workers' state", is exemplified by comrade James Paris of the Trotskyite Marxist Workers' Group (USA) in his letter to this paper (*Weekly Worker* April 1). The same approach has been taken by the Stalinite *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* and its editor Royston Bull, the SLP's former vice-president.

Comrade Paris argues that "when the conflict between Belgrade and the Kosovo Albanians began, it *appeared* to be a case of an oppressed minority fighting for the right of self-determination" (my italics). "Appeared"? It *was* a struggle for self-determination, a struggle led by the Kosova Liberation Army and supported by many on the left in Britain, including the CPGB. The comrade tells us that the imperialists' intervention in Serbia has changed everything: "At the moment that the KLA and other Albanian forces formed an unholy alliance with imperialism, the struggle ceased to be a question of self-determination", and the KLA was "transformed from a guerrilla force of 'liberation' into a proxy force for imperialism, with the goal of the continued break-up of the country". On the basis of this logic, the comrade maintains that continued support for the aim of Kosovar independence and self-determination constitutes "back-handed support to imperialism".

The key to comrade Paris's position lies in his reference elsewhere in his letter to the "break-up of the former workers' state [Yugoslavia] along ethnic and national lines" as a goal of imperialism, an "ongoing effort" by the imperialists that must be resisted. Where has comrade Paris been? Yugoslavia has *already* been broken up along ethnic and national lines. All that is left of "Yugoslavia" is a rump state, comprising Serbia and an increasingly disaffected Montenegro.

And what is the nature of this "former workers' state"? Does it contain one iota of adherence to or respect for the values of socialism and internationalism? No, it does not. On the contrary, the Milosevic regime stands for the worst kind of chauvinism and nationalism. On what grounds, therefore, can socialists be expected to support the Serbs? Objectively, the comrade's case relies on a bizarre kind of nostalgia coupled with the dubious adage that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend".

This is not only an incoherent position, but an unprincipled one. The only *moral* basis on which we as communists could support the slogan of "Yugoslav" unity would be if the Serbian working class had been actively, consistently and boldly championing the rights of the Kosovar population - up to and including independence - on a mass scale. Then the call for unity - perhaps in a federal republic - could be countenanced. This would be a precondition for a *democratic* unity of this "former workers' state" under *socialism*. If the Serb working class were acting as the foremost defenders of democratic and socialist values *against* the reactionary petty bourgeois nationalism and chauvinist demagoguery of Milosevic, then of course we would support unity with them. But there is no sign yet of any such development. Given this situation, our support for an independent Kosova, for the right of the Kosovar people to self-determination, must remain unaltered.

We agree with comrade Paris that "it is the duty of Marxists to bring the truth to the light of day", and this includes the truth about Serbia's campaign of repression and terror in Kosova. The comrade warns us that "the imperialists are again bandying about the buzzword of 'ethnic cleansing'... Milosevic is this month's 'Hitler'... The bosses and their representatives in the US and western European governments are attempting to resurrect the 'Serb fascist'" (my italics). According to comrade Paris, "many of the charges of 'ethnic cleansing'... are questionable at best". He cites the Racak massacre in January as a case in point, alleging that it was in fact a KLA deception.

Comrade Paris is an eloquent apologist for Serbian violence, but, as he remarks, "facts are stubborn things", and the *facts* about what has happened in Kosova during the last fortnight are incontestable: Serb forces have been engaged in systematic terror, murder, rape, arson and looting on a grand scale; hundreds

of thousands of ethnic Albanians have fled their country in fear of their lives. Are we to believe that this exodus was a KLA stunt or an outbreak of irrational mass hysteria? Obviously not. What we are witnessing is human catastrophe on a monumental scale. To ask whether the imperialists' bombing of Serbia has created the necessary preconditions for this catastrophe, or merely exacerbated it, is to engage in a sterile argument. What is beyond question is that Milosevic and his security forces have committed war crimes against the Kosovar population, crimes motivated by nationalism and ethnic chauvinism.

Comrade Paris will undoubtedly argue that our critique of his position amounts to support for Nato, and that we are being "soft on imperialism". Nothing of the kind. As communists, *of course* we are anti-imperialists. But we criticise the Pavlovian anti-imperialism that amounts to little more than crude anti-American, anti-western *sentiment* - the kind of anti-imperialism that led many on the left to make a hero of Saddam Hussein and leads them now to make a hero of Slobodan Milosevic. Rational, scientific anti-imperialism is *not* founded on unconditional - 'military' or political - support for states or their leaders merely because they happen to be in conflict with the imperialist powers. First and foremost, it is founded on support for the historic mission of the *working class* and the *revolutionary movement* in their struggles, whether those struggles be against the imperialists or against their own domestic despots and dictators, like Hussein and Milosevic.

Theoretical clarity on this question is of cardinal importance, not least because of the possibility that the Serbian war may spread across the entire Balkan peninsular and that Russia, the "former workers' state" *par excellence*, may become embroiled in the conflict.

Thus far, Russia's conduct has been marked by bellicose rhetoric but cautious action. Significantly, however, prime minister (and *de facto* acting president) Yevgeni Primakov took a high-ranking delegation of intelligence and military officers to Belgrade on his recent 'peace mission'. The dispatch of the Russian reconnaissance vessel, the Liman, to the Adriatic on an intelligence-gathering mission seems more than a merely symbolic gesture - in response to questions, the Russian ambassador to the UN, Sergei Lavrov, confirmed that "the exchange of information" between Russia and Serbia was within

international law and was already taking place.

These indicators may only be straws in the wind, but there can be no doubt that a Nato ground offensive against Serbia, especially if it led to a wider conflagration in the region, would lead to an intensification of Russian-Serb cooperation. Commentators comfort their readers and listeners and themselves by assuring us that, although some deputies in the 'communist'-dominated *duma* have called for volunteers to go to Yugoslavia and for Russia to break the arms embargo on Belgrade, the *duma* has passed no resolution to this effect; that Russia's military leadership has also made clear it does not want to be sucked into a war in the Balkans.

The media, like our politicians, seem able to concentrate only on one issue at a time. They appear to have forgotten that Russia is undergoing an acute political, economic and financial crisis, for which the term 'meltdown' is no hyperbole. Nato's attack on Serbia, preceded only a few days before by the enlargement of the alliance to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, by reviving *understandable* fears of imperialist encirclement, has succeeded in creating a temporarily united front among the disparate, mutually hostile forces that are vying for control of the Russian state. The resentment, humiliation, sense of injustice and paranoia provoked by the imperialists' policy towards Russia, particularly its disregard for what Russia sees as its national and security interests in the 'near abroad', have all found a powerful, potentially explosive focus in the Serb question. Unsurprisingly, every leading contender in next year's presidential elections (assuming Yeltsin lasts that long) has voiced support for arming the Serbs against Nato.

In the event that Russia, contrary to the soothing assurances of media journalists, does enter the war, will comrade Paris and his like expect us to offer unconditional support to the coterie of counterrevolutionary criminals, thieves and speculators that constitutes the current regime in Moscow, simply because Russia was once a "workers' state"? To do so would be totally irresponsible and an action unworthy of a true communist and anti-imperialist.

To comrade Paris and those who share his mistaken views we say that the only principled anti-imperialist position is to call for an independent Kosova, for the end of Serb aggression in Kosova and for the immediate cessation of Nato's war against the rump Yugoslavia. Our position is one of revolutionary defeatism. For us the main enemy is at home - the imperialist UK state. But we also call for the defeat of Milosevic's ultra-chauvinism. The working class must not take sides with either camp, but pursue its own independent interests ●

Michael Malkin