

# Socialist Alliances in crisis Unity crumbles before Scargill

**A**fter several months of tentative and hesitant moves aimed at presenting a united socialist slate for the European Union elections in London, the fragile Socialist Alliance has finally collapsed. In the North West too the SA has been abandoned by its largest participating organisations.

The last rites were performed in the capital at a meeting earlier this week. With the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Outlook already gone, three of the remaining organisations - the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the Independent Labour Network - decided to call it a day, with only the CPGB standing firm.

The socialist unity project, while clearly a desirable and positive development, was dogged from the start by the internal crises besetting its component organisations. While they were all reluctantly propelled towards unity by a combination of New Labour's continuing rightward march and the introduction of proportional representation, previous contradictions, hidden by decades of auto-Labourism and sectarian exclusivity, were soon brought to the surface.

The group most immediately affected was the SWP. Since the 1970s it had contended that to stand at the polls was in itself a form of unprincipled 'electoralism' - much better to concentrate on the 'real class' issues like wages and workplace conditions and leave elections to the Labour Party. Its 'intervention' was restricted to ritual calls to "vote Labour, but ..."

However, the de-Labourisation of Labour forced a change of course. Yet standing itself would surely expose the falsity of the SWP's propaganda that Labour's victory had provoked a crisis of expectations and that the working class was ready to move into mass action. Lindsey German says that a single big strike can destroy Blairism. Nevertheless one wing of the leadership thought that its participation in elections was 'premature'. When Arthur Scargill announced that he was to head the SLP's list in London, that served to exacerbate internal tensions. The SWP was paralysed

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for three weeks, unable to decide whether to stay in or pull out of the Alliance.

Finally it announced that Scargill's intervention meant that the SA was no longer 'credible'. Yet half of the SLP general secretary's London list is made up of supporters of the Stalin Society. Is the SLP slate more 'credible'?

The remaining organisations had to decide quickly what to do. At this week's meeting, attended by a representative from the CPGB, SPEW, AWL and two from the ILN, each group was asked to state its position. Richard Garside of the ILN struck a note which was to be echoed by the others: "Without the SWP we do not think there is anything viable." Not to worry, continued comrade Garside, there are always the elections for the Greater London Authority in 2000: "Let's put down what we've done to experience."

Nick Long, also of the ILN, seemed to be expressing a slightly different

viewpoint, claiming that, should the ILN receive a "fat cheque" or two that it was expecting from some rich supporters, it could yet stand. Marcus Larsen of the CPGB asked for clarification on this apparent contradiction: was the ILN withdrawing for political or financial reasons? Comrade Garside replied that it was because of both, although finance was "secondary". He went out of his way to assure the comrades, just as the SWP had the previous week, that "the ILN is not split". He added that the left could only move forward on a "broad unity", which at present did not exist.

Jill Mountford of the AWL seemed to be relieved to hear that the ILN was withdrawing. There had been a "long debate" in her organisation and she was angry that the SWP had pulled the plugs. In fact she proposed that the remaining groups write to the SWP to complain at its behaviour. It seems that the AWL had eventually decided on a 'wait and see' approach, whereby it would follow the lead of the other groups.

Comrade Larsen's intervention was in marked contrast. In reply to comrade Mountford, he said that it was pointless blaming the SWP alone. The other organisations were now showing that they too were not committed to the project. It now appeared that their attitude had long been ambivalent, to say the least. Nevertheless, he urged them all to reconsider: while New Labour was throwing itself into the Balkans war, should not the left be challenging Bomber Blair at the polls with its principled response? Or did the comrades think that this could be left to Scargill? He had to be exposed just as much as Blair had to be condemned. Surely it was insufficient to always look to other forces to provide a lead? When would the left have the confidence and self-belief to provide that lead itself?

Julie Donovan of SPEW stated that her organisation would not go ahead with what was left - ie, only the CPGB. She denied that SPEW was lacking in self-belief and repeated comrade Garside's sentiments that it would be another matter altogether next year, when it came to the London elections.

Comrade Larsen said he was not convinced. What would they do if Scargill announced he would stand as mayor?

Comrade Larsen stated that the CPGB would now have to seriously consider contesting the Euro-elections on its own platform, but he said that that did not necessarily preclude other comrades joining the 'Weekly Worker' list - a possibility in which comrade Long showed more than a little interest.

All the comrades wished the CPGB well if it decided to stand, but when comrade Larsen asked them whether we could expect critical support, not to say a recommendation to vote 'Weekly Worker', all were strangely reticent.

In the North West the SWP formal announcement of its withdrawal came a week later than in London. Previously comrade Suzanne Jeffrey had not held up the SLP or Scargill as its excuse, but the absence from the slate of what she dubbed "credible working class leaders", such as the sacked Liverpool dockers. At the April 8 organising meeting of the NWSA, comrade Jeffrey had delivered an ultimatum: either the other participating organisations quickly come up with a commitment to stand from a leading ex-docker, or some other figure of similar stature, or the SWP was off. A cynical device.

The following week, comrade Jeffrey pressed for a report on the matter. Cathy Wilson, for the ex-SPEW Merseyside Socialists, reported that, as demanded by the SWP, she had indeed spoken to ex-dockers' leader Jimmy Nolan, who is currently an inactive member of the SLP. Comrade Nolan had been unable to indicate his wish to join the Socialist Alliance slate.

Then came a moment of nervousness for our SWP representative. Martin Ralph of the International Socialist League, who is also chair of the Tameside Careworkers Support Group, announced that comrade Joan Ashton, one of the careworkers' leaders, who is a member of the SWP, had stated unequivocally that she would stand on the slate if she could secure financial sponsorship.

Comrade Jeffrey responded firmly. No, unless a dockers' leader like Jimmy Nolan was to stand, the slate was not credible, and the SWP would not sponsor candidates, whether of their own members or others. She graciously declared, however, that the SWP would support the NWSA's candidates in its press and distribute the alliance's leaflets. Very strange, since in London the SWP has all but committed itself to 'critical support' for Scargill's red-brown slate, while in the North West it wants us to believe it will shun the SLP.

The SWP's desertion was condemned in strong terms by representatives of the CPGB, the ISL, and the Merseyside Socialists. The comrades from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty were softer in tone. Whilst expressing disappointment at the SWP's action, the AWL was concerned as to whether the alliance was now a viable proposition.

Representatives were not present at the meeting from either the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance or the SPEW, the latter organisation having announced its withdrawal as a participant, for no better reason than pressures on resources, the previous week.

The remaining participating organisations reaffirmed that the alliance will continue with the project of building a united working class slate for the European elections. It will aim to finalise its electoral platform this week. A motion was carried which called upon comrade Dave Nellist, chair of the Socialist Alliance network, to take the initiative in drawing together representatives of the SA slates with Ken Coates MEP of the East Midlands-based Alternative Labour List slate and Mike Davies of the Yorkshire and Humberside Left Alliance slate, in order to attempt to achieve a single banner under which to prosecute the challenge to Blair. However, the AWL voted against the motion, stating it had already spoken to comrade Coates to this end, without success.

It remains to be seen whether any of the remaining left slates will actually get as far as the ballot paper ●

**Jim Blackstock and John Pearson**

## Crisis of perspectives

According to Lindsey German - one of the top leaders of the Socialist Workers Party - Blairism is beset with crisis "in every major area of government policy" (*International Socialism* No82, spring 1999, p3). This is no objective observation. It is the official line which is parroted no matter what the evidence to the contrary. Hence in response to polls showing Blair enjoying historically unprecedented ratings, Mark Steel feels duty-bound to turn reality onto its head: "Blair must be the most unpopular 'most popular person' ever," he insists (*The Guardian* April 14).

The real questions which require sober answers are blithely ignored. Why, in mid-term, does the government face so little opposition, and why has the Blair honeymoon taken on an air of permanence?

The gulf separating SWP theory from reality stems directly from Tony Cliff's 11th-hour reconversion to Trotsky's celebrated 1938 'Transitional programme'. Till recent times the SWP peddled dire pessimism. In 1985 Chris Harman described the miners' Great Strike as an "extreme" example of the "downturn". Misplaced pessimism has now given way to misplaced optimism.

Trotsky's basic proposition was that capitalism could not develop the productive forces. As a result the state could neither grant nor concede meaningful reforms. Indeed mere defence of economic gains would spontaneously produce an apocalyptic collision with the rule of capital. Trotsky was wrong. But, given the paucity of his organised forces and the ominous socio-economic conditions of the late 1930s, he can be excused.

Comrade Cliff long distinguished himself from doctrinaire Trotskyism. He emphasised the non-applicability of Trotsky's transitional demands. Only six years ago he wrote that Trotsky's programme "did not fit a non-revolutionary situation" (T Cliff *Trotsky: The darker the night, the brighter the star* London 1993, pp299-300). Now the claim is made that things have qualitatively altered: "Capitalism in the advanced countries," comrade Cliff writes, "is no longer expanding and so the words of the 1938 'Transitional programme' that 'there can be no discussion of systematic social reform and raising the masses' living standards' fits reality again" (T Cliff *Trotskyism after Trotsky* London 1999, pp81-2).

Suffice to say, capitalism in the advanced countries is still expanding - the USA recorded a growth rate of six percent last year. The global meltdown is regional: ie, so far it remains confined to the far east and Russia. As to reforms, they are primarily the by-product of class struggle, not capitalism's health. In the most difficult conditions, to save their system, the ruling class will enact the most far-reaching measures. As Rosa Luxemburg famously noted, in 1905 the workers in backward Russia "were, as regards the economic and social freedom of their movement, head and shoulders above the Germans" (R Luxemburg *The mass strike* London nd, p56).

The SWP is facing a crisis of perspectives. Blair's de-Labourisation of Labour undermines auto-Labourism. At the same time the absence of any serious mass movement from below has forced SWP theoreticians and propagandists to make the most

absurd and hyperbolic claims. It is more and more coming to resemble the old Workers Revolutionary Party under the raving and ranting Gerry Healy. In that sorry tradition comrade German seriously maintains that Britain can be pushed to the brink of revolution through a single economic struggle: "It is increasingly obvious that even one major national strike or an all-out strike in one city would lead to a rapid crisis of Blairism and Labourism as society polarised along class lines" (*International Socialism* No82, spring 1999, p35).

On May 1 1997 the SWP enthusiastically voted Labour. After two decades the slogan, 'Tories out' was realised. But not in the way the SWP hoped. Blair and his shadow cabinet, it should be stressed, had done everything to steer Labour to the right and lower popular expectations to the barest minimum. Those who turned out for Labour did so in the main because they thought it would be no worse than the Tories. Despite that, not least in order to excuse themselves, the SWP - along with the whole auto-Labourite left - did their utmost to talk things up. In the months following Blair's parliamentary landslide the SWP press carried daft articles on the theme that there existed a crisis of expectations. To state the obvious, there has been no explosion.

Important SWP leaders are opposed to the Cliff line. Claims of massive discontent are, they say, greatly exaggerated. The rearguard action by this faction accounts for the political committee's three-week paralysis over June's European Union elections. Eventually a narrow majority was won to pull out of the Socialist Alliance election bloc and not to test the mood for socialism by standing candidates. A factional compromise saw auto-Labourism go, but only to be replaced by a call to vote for Arthur Scargill's red-brown SLP - in London half of his candidates are members of the Stalin Society. Surely this will provoke rebellion amongst the more independent-minded SWP branch and district cadre.

Neither majority nor minority faction are able to offer anything much beyond economism (democratic questions are downplayed or even dismissed as a diversion from the trade union struggle). Confronted with Blair's constitutional revolution from above, the SWP's 'Action programme' is silent: nothing on the monarchy, Irish unity, Scottish and Welsh self-determination and abolition of the House of Lords.

Here comrade German can speak for both factions. She actually echoes "ruling class worries about the piecemeal way in which Blair is approaching reform", citing the "deal with the Tories over the hereditary peers" and how this has been done "without any real thought about the political or constitutional implications". In the opinion of the comrade: "Blair is casually restructuring the state in ways which can create all sorts of problems of coherence and coordination" (*ibid* No82, spring 1999, p19).

Evidently her organisation's inability to develop a programme which tackles politics at the level of the state is creating "all sorts of problems of coherence and coordination" for the SWP ●

Jack Conrad

## Year Zero?

For many years Arthur Scargill has been considered a good working class militant. The miners' strike of 84-85 pays testimony to that. However, since his break with the Labour Party, if not Labourism, he has exhibited strong authoritarian leadership in the SLP. The witch-hunting of communists, socialists and democrats is ample proof of that. The *Weekly Worker* has played a decisive role in exposing this 'Stalinist' method of organisation.

However, your description of Scargill is this time well wide of the mark. You claim: "His politics are little Englandism in the extreme - a mix of NUMism and Pol Potism" (April 15). While I do not object to the correct labelling of Scargill as a British chauvinist - ie, 'Little Englander' - and an NUMist - ie, trade union consciousness - I find the term "Pol Potism" baffling and bewildering. If "Pol Potism" is to be applicable to Scargill, it has become a term bereft of scientific meaning.

If you really believe Scargill has secret plans for a 'year zero' after he has pulled Britain out of Europe you are clearly allowing your critique to be coloured by the worst Kafkaesque nightmare.

James Frazer  
Shrewsbury

## Milosevic

You jeer at the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review's* analysis, misrepresenting it as "unconditional support" for the Milosevic regime. But you are incapable of providing any adequate explanation for this insane Nato barbarism. No "Pavlovian anti-imperialism" in support of "ersatz anti-imperialism" is needed to see that the last thing the west could care about is the 'democratic rights of Serbia's Albanian minority. You are throwing up the 'red-brown' smokescreen against the *EPSR* to cover up your own confusion.

You get things wrong because you are Pavlovian anti-Stalinists, and are too class-driven by petty-bourgeois moralising to grasp the *EPSR's* historically-scientific anti-Stalinism.

The tragic catastrophe for the Albanian minority is appalling suffering; and Serbian nationalism is ultimately degenerate reactionary nonsense - like all nationalism. But defeat for this conscious, deliberate act of Nato-imperialist warmongering is the *only* interest now from a world revolutionary point of view, via splits in this barbaric conspiracy, as it stubs its toe on riled Serbian nationalism. For the 100th time, when will you grasp that 'defeat for Nato' does *not* mean 'a victory for Milosevic', no more than Bolshevism's call for imperialist Russia's 'defeat' meant a call for imperialist Germany's 'victory'?

It is five years since the KLA decided to become Contra-like stooges for US imperialism's CIA advance-guard. It was the KLA which decided to challenge the Serbian state to a civil war, backed by US imperialism. To keep on trumpeting the irrelevant academic 'right to self-determination' in these circumstances can do little but help prolong the suffering, and raises the suspicion that you have no more real interest in the 'poor Albanian people' than the wretched Nato apologists.

Royston Bull

Former SLP vice-president

## Small step

Martin Blum claims that I derided Anne Murphy's vote in the Hackney Defoe by-election (*Letters Weekly Worker* April 15). I did no such thing. I simply argued that it was a disappointing result, in light of an improved programme and the extensive deliv-

ery of an election address, canvassing and public meetings organised by many comrades from different parties and groups, including myself.

Lewisham Socialist Alliance's vote in the recent Downham by-election was a more limited intervention. A local newsletter was delivered to most of the ward, with an attempt to lay down a marker and draw into our alliance new comrades and make contact with community activists.

The 54 votes gained by our candidate was the first intervention Lewisham SA had made into the ward, unlike the intervention by Ann Murphy which followed on from the previous May's borough election. The primary difference however is that our candidate's intervention peeled off a larger layer of the most militant and class conscious and helped depress the Labour vote by four percent. The intervention by Ann Murphy resulted in the Labour vote increasing and saw Labour snatch back the seat.

Our result in Lewisham has however strengthened the argument for targeting a ward and focusing limited resources on local community campaigning. The likely, regrettable, collapse of the London Socialist Alliance Euro intervention does allow us to build on the unity gained over the previous months and focus on joint work across boroughs for the assembly elections next year.

Nick Long  
South London

## Soviet untruth

Comrade Watson raises up an important point in his letter 'CPGB views' (*Weekly Worker* March 18). Quite correctly he points out the mistake attributed to Comrade Murphy in relation to the Party's approach to the USSR.

However, one is left feeling somewhat dissatisfied with such slapdash editing of material. This wholly incorrect statement should have carried an apology and correction by the editor. The Party "majority" is not the same as the Party *policy*. This is not simply a formal position. If indeed this was the policy of the CPGB, it would be incumbent on all members to argue for this political perspective. In reality those who hold counter views are not bound to argue this - false in my opinion - understanding the Soviet Union.

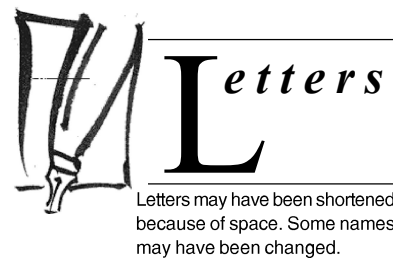
Political mischief and provocation are more likely factors that drove the editor to allow such flagrant untruths to appear in the *Weekly Worker*. To a section of the Party the Soviet Union as constituted 1917-1991 represented a form of socialism. The escalating denunciating of "Stalin and his cohorts" in public spheres, Party meetings and press almost match the high point of Trotskyite hysteria. The CPGB "majority" is in danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, in its scramble to distance itself from the Soviet model of socialism and its own past.

The CPGB has been the highest expression of class consciousness as historically constituted thus far in Britain. The Soviet Union is the highest expression of class consciousness internationally, despite all its deficiencies. I call on all those in the "majority" to inform the "minority" when, where and how its understanding of Soviet Marxism is incorrect and how exactly it ended up as a "slave society" after a workers' revolution. Come, comrades, don't just postulate a position - prove it!

Roger Harper  
Manchester

## Auto-Labourism

The April edition of *Socialist Outlook* contains a report by Ceri Evans



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

detailing the events inside New Labour in Wales.

Comrade Evans reaches the following conclusions: "The antics [of] Labour's leadership have led many people to consider abandoning the Party in disgust. Socialist Outlook supporters believe that this is premature ... This is why we call for a Labour vote in these elections - with the idea of giving a clear majority to ensure it can be held accountable for its actions in government."

Careful readers will have noted the thrust of the last paragraph. The dogma of auto-Labourism must be enshrined. There must be no leftwing electoral 'stunts' to ruin the bliss of a solid New Labour majority. In this situation expectations amongst the working class will rise. In other words, the same 'crisis of expectations' thesis utterly discredited by two years of New Labour hegemony.

Another piece by Dave Packer is broadly supportive of the London Socialist Alliance: "Today we must not only build broad-based united front campaigns in action, but we need to construct united electoral alliances that can have an impact, raise the banner of socialism and offer a real political alternative to the working class and its allies to the capitalist offensive continued by this 'New Labour' government".

The juxtaposition of these two articles illustrates perfectly the developing divisions over the thorny question of Labourism. The comrades in Wales are not alone in their opposition to the 'London' turn of their organisation. A resolution passed by Merseyside on April 11 notes the development of a left unity slate for the North West European elections, remarking that "the left groups involved in this electoral bloc are involved in an objectively sectarian campaign that amounts to little more than 'waving little red flags', and that this will not break workers from either adherence to the Labour Party, or a belief in reformism". The Merseyside comrades therefore argue that they need to maintain their "strategic orientation to the Labour Party".

Judging from the lack of editorial comment in this month's *Socialist Outlook*, we are presumably meant to believe that these opposing sides are coexisting quite happily with each other. However, they appear to be maturing into an inevitable faction fight.

July 1999 was provisionally set as the date for the national conference of the ISG. There are currently rumours afoot that those enthusiastic about the 'London turn' (around Alan Thornett) are seeking to postpone this to a later date. The perceived strategy behind this is focused on the ISG's fusion negotiations with two different groups: Workers Action and Socialist Perspectives. Workers Action have broadly the same perspective on New Labour as the auto-Labourites in the ISG. Socialist Perspectives on the other hand support the project of left unity slates against New Labour. The suspicion is that the conference is being stalled so that the relationship between the London comrades and Socialist Perspectives has time to bear fruit.

Of course you will read none of this in the pages of *Socialist Outlook*. Even when the editors see fit to publish two completely contradictory pieces they have to surreally pretend that everything is still-hunky dory in the ISG.

Stuart Jameson  
Liverpool

## Abolish the second chamber

# Abolish age of consent

Once again, the House of Lords has staged a reactionary revolt. And yet again it was over gay rights that they made their Custer-like stand. A cross-party coalition of peers voted by 222 to 146 against - for the second time - the government's Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill. This piece of legislation seeks to lower the age of consent for gay men from 18 to 16 years-old, as it is for heterosexuals.

Naturally, this was a purely symbolic displays of power by the Lords. Since the bill has already passed through the House of Commons, with the backing of all three main party leaders, it is certain to be re-introduced next year under the terms of the Parliament Act and hence carried despite the peers' opposition. This will only be the sixth time this legal-constitutional procedure has been used since 1988. However, all this of course is purely academic. By the time this stage comes around, the voting rights of the hereditary peers, barring some extraordinary political development, will themselves have been voted away - using the self-same Parliament Act if necessary. The Lords' rebellion has played into Blair's hand.

But for nine hours last Tuesday the lords and ladies had their day - the last roar of the dinosaur. Leading the revolting pack was, as always, Baroness Young of Falmouth. No one can deny that Baroness Young's politics has remained consistent. Just take a look at her CV. Former leader of the Lords, ex-Tory deputy chairperson, a director of NatWest and Marks and Spencers, and the first ever female chair of the Association of Tory Peers - an organisation that staunchly upholds the hereditary principle and a belief in the virtues of male primogeniture.

Interestingly, during last week's debate the good Baroness attempted a little piece of constitutional jiggery-pokery to justify the "unusual" behaviour of their lordships. It is very

rare indeed for the Lords to try to kill off a bill at its second reading, a tactic that has been used only twice since the 1949 Parliament Act. But Young argued that the bill itself was very unusual, as lowering the age of consent did not form part of Labour's general election manifesto and was therefore not subject to the Salisbury Convention, under which the Lords agree not to vote down bills deemed to have been sanctioned by the electorate. It is also worth noting that on the this issue of gay rights - like the death penalty or abortion - MPs and peers have a free vote since it is "a matter of conscience".

Baroness Young and her cohorts are fighting tooth and nail against the opening up the permissive and libertine floodgates. "Young boys", as she and her supporters call 16 to 17 year-olds, have to be "protected" from older "predatory adults" (what about 'young girls'?). Baroness Young thundered: "Sixteen-year-olds, still children much of the time, need protection, especially at a time when permissive social morals are dramatically undermining marriage and the family." She added: "I do not think there is a moral equivalence between heterosexuals and homosexuals."

For the fearful peers Jack Straw's bill represents the "thin edge of the wedge", as Baroness Young put it in less than original language. First you lower the age of consent to 16, then what? Then there are demands to lower the age of consent still further - just look at Peter Tatchell/Outrage's call for it to be lowered to 14. Then gay marriage will follow. Then fostering rights for gay couples. Then Western civilisation - and Judeo-Christianity - collapses.

The worst nightmares of the followers of Baroness Young must appear to be coming true. Last week Jack Straw signalled the possibility of a change in the law to allow transsexuals to marry. This was followed by an

announcement that Margaret Hodge, the employment minister, will change the Sex Discrimination Act to extend protection to transsexuals.

A working group will look at the issue of transsexuals' birth certificates. At the moment, a person's gender is legally defined by their birth certificate. Even if a man 'becomes' a woman that person is legally classified as a male - and hence cannot marry a man. But the law currently also means that a former male who has become a woman can marry another woman in a *de facto* same-sex marriage. A situation rich in absurdity - and prone to misery and suffering. An obvious solution - to allow state-sanctioned, same-sex marriage - is so far a non-starter for mainstream bourgeois opinion. New Labour seems wary of going just a bit too far for fear of upsetting and agitating that swathe of opinion represented by Baroness Young.

Communists on the other hand have no such hesitation. The CPGB's draft programme calls for the right to gay and lesbian marriage. But it does not end there. We call for the *abolition* of the age of consent, not its equalisation. This should form an essential part of any communist programme or platform, yet hardly a single voice on the 'sensible' British left can be heard making it. Individuals are not 'equal' in terms of their psycho-emotional sexual development. Consenting sexual activity should not be criminalised or policed by the state.

Disgracefully, this means that the few voices heard calling for abolition are normally found on the 'libertarian' wing of the bourgeoisie. The generally conservative writer and humourist, AN Wilson, is one such prominent advocate. Summing up nicely the mind-set of Young and co, Wilson writes: "Once you abandon the old idea that sex is wicked ... unless performed by monogamous married couples, it becomes logically very

difficult to distinguish between one form of the activity and another. We all know that some children have sexual experiences and it is hysterical nonsense to say that this will always 'scar them for life'. Some 11-year old fumbings would be far less likely to scar you for life than an unwise love affair aged 45 ... In those confused cases of consensual sex between those under or over an age limit, no useful purpose is served by bringing in the police and the newspapers" (*The Independent on Sunday* April 18).

In contrast to this progressive position expressed by an enlightened bourgeois, the neo-Blairite line adopted by the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the Socialist Workers Party, etc, holds that there is nothing odd or reactionary about 'age of consent' laws.

Similarly, with the House of Lords itself, the left has been quite prepared to leave it to New Labour. Such organisations, while occasionally paying lip service to the question, seem to believe that issues of democracy and the constitution are not really the concern of the working class.

Tragically this means that the field has been abandoned to Blair's constitutional revolution from above. He aims to abolish the 'hereditaries' only as a first move. It is more than possible that some form of elected second chamber will be introduced. This is all part of his plans to redraw the political landscape through proportional representation, state funding of political parties, devolution for Scotland and Wales - all under a rejuvenated, 'modernised' monarchy.

The question of how we are ruled cannot be left to Blair. We must fight to make it the priority of workers, as they strive to become a class for themselves - a ruling class. The second chamber and the monarchy must be swept away ●

Eddie Ford

## action

### ■ CPGB seminars

**London:** Sunday April 25, 5pm - 'Hilferding and disproportionality theory', using Simon Clarke's *Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide.

**Manchester:** Monday April 26, 7.30pm - 'The rise of the Soviet bureaucracy' - special seminar. 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.

### ■ Greenwich Socialist Alliance

Public meeting - 'What is socialism?' Monday April 26, Charlton House, Charlton village, London SE7.

Speaker - Peter Pierce. All welcome.

### ■ Mumia must live

*Solidarity evening:* Sunday April 25 - West Indian Cultural Centre, 9 Clarendon Road, London N8 (Turnpike Lane tube). Doors open 6pm. There will be comedy with Rob Newman and friends, speakers on Mumia's case and on racism in Britain - plus a bar, food, stalls, etc. For more details contact: Mumia must live!, BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX.

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 Debase (Hackney Union).

For details write to DRAR, PO Box 417, Folkestone, Kent CT19 4GT or e-mail dst@canterbury.u-net.com.

### ■ Support Tameside careworkers

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

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

### ■ May Day demonstration

Saturday May 1 1999 - assemble 12 noon at Clerkenwell Green, London. March leaves 1pm. Rally in Trafalgar Square 3pm.

Support the struggle to reclaim our rights, free the unions and repeal all the anti-union laws. Organised by the London May Day Organising Committee.

For more details contact the United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Trade Union laws, c/o John Hendy QC, secretary, United Campaign, PO Box 17556, London EC2Y 8PA. Call: 0171-638 7521; fax: 0171-638 7507.

### ■ 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.

# Republican communist network

On April 5 agreement was reached in Edinburgh to convene a founding conference of a republican communist network. A date has been set for Saturday July 3. Individuals and organisations will be invited to participate if they agree with the following slogans: republicanism; revolutionary democracy and culture; workers' power; world communism.

The proposed fifth slogan, 'international socialism', was not agreed. Some, including the Revolutionary Democratic Group and the Campaign for a Federal Republic supported the slogan. The Communist Tendency was strongly opposed. It was agreed that the platform should have the four agreed slogans plus an addendum which says: "The network is in the process of debating international socialism as a slogan."

The preliminary negotiations for this network began in January. They have involved representatives from the CFR, the RDG, the Red Republicans, the CT, the Scottish Republican Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook and some independents.

At the February meeting, the discussion over the platform threw up two main points of controversy - revolutionary democracy and international socialism. Two comrades, one associ-

ated with Socialist Outlook and an independent Trotskyist, opposed the slogan of revolutionary democracy. Reformist democracy was acceptable but revolutionary democracy was not. At the end of the meeting it was agreed by the majority, including the RDG, CT and CFR, that the slogan of revolutionary democracy was essential in any republican communist platform.

The slogan of international socialism proved to be more problematic. International socialism received five votes (two CFR, one RDG, one Socialist Outlook, plus one independent Trotskyist). There were four abstentions (Red Republicans) and one against (CT). An alternative proposal was 'internationalism, socialism and world communism'. Since 'world communism' was common to both, the real difference was between 'international socialism' and the alternative of 'internationalism, socialism'. There were six votes for the latter (four RRs, one CT, one Socialist Outlook). There were two votes against (one RDG, one CFR) and two abstentions (one CFR and one other). This attempt to hide our differences failed.

At the last meeting the CT proposed an alternative forum to the four agreed slogans, simply leaving out the question of international social-

ism. This was not acceptable to the RDG. We are opposed to simply liquidating the socialist slogan. This is exactly what Blair is trying to do - write socialism out of history. We must have a socialist slogan and we must defend it.

The third option was to decide the question by majority voting. This is the approach that has been taken. But we have agreed not to decide this at the first conference. In the first year of the network there will be a series of day schools to consider this and then at the second conference a majority decision will be taken. Therefore the slogan of international socialism is to be identified in the published platform as being debated for future decision.

Communists who openly identify themselves as republicans are a minority within the communist movement. The vast majority remain wedded to economism. Why are republican communists trying to form a network? First, the initiative is coming from Scotland against the background of shifts and realignments taking place within Scottish politics. Second was a desire from some comrades to build organised links with republican communists in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The third motive was a desire to further the proc-

ess of communist rapprochement.

The SSP has lined itself up with Scottish nationalism, as a broad-based 'communist-Labour' party. On the right of the SSP, we have Hugh Kerr MEP and other Labourites. The centre ground is occupied by the CWI-Scotland (former Scottish Militant Labour). On the left we have the Red Republicans and the CFR as officially recognised platforms. The Red Republicans and the CFR have co-operated in the past in limited areas. They were offering rival perspectives for the SSP left.

Originally the Red Republicans claimed to stand to the left of the CFR. The slogans of a federal republic were set against the Red Republicans' central demand for a Scottish workers' republic. The argument was falsely presented as a difference between supporting a bourgeois republic versus a (Scottish) workers' republic. However, in December 1998 the CFR clarified its position and adopted the slogans for a federal republic, revolutionary democracy, workers' power, international socialism and world communism. These slogans are of course not unique to the CFR and are supported by the RDG and the CPGB ●

Dave Craig



# Self-determination

Sandy McBurney is wrong about self-determination, argues **Michael Malkin**

In last week's paper, comrade Sandy McBurney rebuked Michael Malkin and the CPGB for demanding Kosovar self-determination and independence (*Weekly Worker* April 15). In our reply, we should like to deal first with some specific questions raised by the comrade and then to look at the theoretical basis of our principled, communist approach to the subject of self-determination.

Comrade McBurney, as we shall see presently, commits what for a Marxist is a fundamental error: he confuses facts and values, mixes a concrete analysis of things as they are with reflections of how things ought to be. Even when he confines himself to the situation in the Balkans as it actually exists, the comrade makes serious mistakes.

First, he claims that the demand for Kosovar independence is one that "suits the present purpose of imperialism" in the region. Therefore, to support the KLA's struggle against Serb national chauvinist barbarism, to support the Kosovars' aspirations to independence, is nothing less than objectively to support the imperialists' war plan. This is not true.

Self-determination and independence for Kosova is *not* and *never has been* part of the six-nation Contact Group's or of Nato's strategic vision for the Balkans. The imperialists' central aim was to safeguard the stability of their southern flank. As always, they were concerned exclusively to uphold the sovereignty of existing state structures - ie, conveniently stable entities allowing the maximum possible exploitation. What concerns the imperialists, as always, is *lines on a map*, rather than the interests of *people* and the rights of nations to determine their own future. Bourgeois international law recognises the right of states, not nations, to self-determination.

Hence, independence was never on the table at Rambouillet. The draft interim accord envisioned a three-year period of purely notional "autonomy" for Kosova within the existing boundaries of the rump Yugoslav Federation - an "autonomy" that would have left the Kosovar 'government' with no control over its own foreign relations, defence arrangements or economic affairs. In other words, what Britain's 'ethical' foreign secretary, Robin Cook, had the impudence to call a blueprint for a "democratic, self-governing Kosovo" was nothing more than a sham edifice, an undemocratic pseudo-solution to the Kosovar crisis, preserving the formal rights of the Milosevic regime over Kosova, on the understanding that he would kindly agree not to go on killing and terrorising the Kosovar population.

Of course, following the disastrous outcome of Nato's air war against Yugoslavia, it may well be that the imperialists will themselves now call for an 'independent' Kosova, but it need hardly be said that this will be a mere slogan and that a restored Kosova will be nothing more than a protectorate, enjoying just as little real autonomy, in fact rather less, than that envisaged by Rambouillet.

Secondly, in his analysis of the current situation, comrade McBurney tells us that the KLA's goal is the creation of a "greater Albania". This is

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**There is not a single democratic demand which could not serve, and has not served, under certain conditions, as an instrument of the bourgeoisie for deceiving the workers'**

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misleading and anachronistic. There was a time, more than 20 years ago, when this might have been true: then, the KLA was a self-proclaimed 'Marxist-Leninist' force, combating 'Titoist revisionism' in Yugoslavia and aspiring to union with the 'Marxist motherland' of Albania under Enver Hoxha.

But now? The KLA's political complexion appears to be bourgeois-nationalist - though the possible impact of more socialist, even revolutionary elements within its ranks should not be underestimated. In its desperation to fend off Milosevic's genocidal assault on the entire Kosovar nation, the KLA is prepared to seek assistance from the imperialists. Nonetheless, the stubborn fact remains that the KLA is fighting a just struggle against Serbia; it enjoys mass popular support among the ethnic Albanian population of Kosova, support that can only have intensified following the attempt by Milosevic to destroy them or drive them into exile.

Viewing the situation with Olympian detachment, comrade McBurney is content to dismiss the KLA's struggle for self-determination on the grounds that it lacks a "progressive dynamic", that the KLA itself has "no progressive policies". In our view the demand for nations to have the right to self-determination is democratic. If for no other reason, those actually fighting to exercise that right, in general, should be viewed as having a "progressive dynamic" to their politics. Communists have a choice to make: do we follow the likes of McBurney and condemn the KLA because they do not conform to the pattern of what freedom fighters *should* be like - ie, they do not have a programme for socialism - or do we give recognition and *critical* support to the democratic, not to mention the ethical, validity of the KLA's leading role in the Kosovars' resistance to Serb nationalist genocide? As regards the comrade's attitude to a "greater Albania", should we, as communists, reject this out of hand? Certainly not. If it were the democratic desire of the Kosovars not only to gain their independence, but thereafter to merge with Albania, that is their right.

Thirdly, comrade McBurney describes the entire tragedy of the Balkans over the last decade as "the fruits of the demand for self-determination": first the German imperialists' demand that their traditional client in the region, Croatia, should be given independence; then the US government's support for an independent Bosnia; now the Kosovars' demand

for independence - which he wrongly attributes to more imperialist scheming. All these are lumped indiscriminately together, and by implication we are led to believe that, had it not been for such demands, then the "tragic fracturing of the Yugoslav working class" would not have taken place, that somehow the old 'former workers' state' of Yugoslavia could have remained viable.

There is more than a whiff of 'Yugoslav defencism' in this position, which is profoundly unhistorical. The south Slav nation(s) have long existed as the objects, not the subjects of history, continually a prey to the machinations of the big powers. Nevertheless after World War II they were *bureaucratically* united in a self-proclaimed socialist republic led by the Yugoslav League of Communists. For some 45 years - partly by efficient policing, partly through bureaucratically balancing one republic against another, but mainly through the rule of one man, Tito - the Yugoslav state remained in existence.

Tito's Yugoslavia certainly had progressive and positive characteristics: the bourgeoisie and big landowners were expropriated, factories were nationalised and nominally run by workers' councils, a culture of allegiance to Yugoslavia was inculcated in the masses and the idea was propounded that Tito's version of socialism could effectively surmount centuries of division based on ethnic or religious background.

Tito's attempt to replace the inter-ethnic divisions and hatreds of history with loyalty to a socialist Yugoslavia was laudable - to the extent that it was progressive - but with hindsight we can see that it was doomed. Unity cannot be imposed permanently from above by means of suppression, however well-intentioned. Unity has to arise organically and democratically from below. The fate of Yugoslavia after Tito's death in 1980 is a classic case. Old ethnic and historically shaped antagonisms were reasserted, or simply invented by a miscellany of bourgeois restorationist, reactionary, petty nationalist and bureaucratic strongmen, leading to bloody civil wars and the disintegration of the federation into its component and sub-component parts. Milosevic led the way by whipping up Serb nationalism. As large numbers of Serbs lived outside Serbia this necessarily meant a denial of rights for others. The Kosovars were among the first victims. Milosevic launched a nationalist-chauvinist coup against Kosova's status as an autonomous entity and incorporated it into a 'greater Serbia'.

The Kosovars' struggle against Serb chauvinism has been going on for over a decade. At first it was purely peaceful, but since March 1998 it has been pursued by means of armed struggle led by the KLA. Unlike the 'Bosnians' (a non-nation), the Kosovars are a historically constituted people who share a common culture, language and territory. Hence, they have a straightforward right to determine their own future. As communists and internationalists, we advocate at all times the maximum real and voluntary unity among peoples and nations. As democrats, however, we accept the Kosovars' justified demand for independence in the face of massive violence and coercion aimed at creating a 'unity' that would be totally false and involuntary.

Having looked at some of comrade McBurney's mistakes about the *facts*

of the concrete situation in Serbia and Kosova, what about his mixing of facts and values, of what is and what ought to be? Here we encounter a familiar line to the effect that "only the project of a united socialist federation of the Balkans offers a way out of this bloody conflict" - the only means he can see of securing his holy grail, "the promotion of working class unity". This maximalist pose is common across the economic left. The Socialist Party in England and Wales is typical: "Socialists advocate a socialist Kosova, as part of a socialist confederation of Balkan states on a free, equal, and voluntary basis (*The Socialist* October 9 1998).

This position is right - as an aspiration, or as an abstraction - but without a bridge linking it with today's conditions - that is, a minimum programme - it becomes no more than a pious slogan, a statement worthy of Pontius Pilate. In effect comrade McBurney is saying to the KLA and the Kosovars: 'Look here, you people are not even socialists, and even if you were, your call for self-determination at the present juncture can only make matters worse. You must wait for socialism and in the meantime desist from fighting to save yourselves from annihilation.' To the Serbian working class he is saying: 'Look here, you people should be socialists, and then you would realise that you are killing your brothers and sisters in Kosova.'

In the face of mass slaughter and deportations, rape and arson, it is frankly obscene, in the name of 'Marxism', to demand that the KLA and the Kosovars should 'wait for socialism' or 'become socialists before we give you our support'. In any event, it is incorrect as well as facile to pose a socialist federation as an immediate demand - socialism belongs to the maximum, not to the minimum programme. In other words the key question is how we *get* to socialism. Leninists insist that the revolutionary fight for democracy is the only road - eg, championing national self-determination. Comrade McBurney, in contrast, considers such questions secondary at best, a dangerous diversion at worse.

Comrade McBurney is not blind to the fact that the rump Yugoslav Federation is a state that contains oppressor and oppressed nations. He says that "of course, communists in Serbia must oppose the Serbian state's oppression of the Kosovar people". Indeed, but the problem is that the voice of communists in Serbia is silent; the Serbian working class, as far as we can judge, has no feelings of socialist solidarity with their fellow 'Yugoslavs' in the south and has evidently been bombed by Nato into supporting Milosevic. Perhaps comrade McBurney knows differently? If so, he will no doubt give us his evidence, but in the meantime we can see nothing to suggest that the KLA's struggle for independence is in some way damaging the prospects for what would otherwise be a potential 'socialist' solution to their plight, a solution based on working class unity and solidarity across the ethnic divide.

As we have already observed, "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" (original emphasis *Weekly Worker* April 8).

Comrade McBurney evidently believes that nothing good, no "positive dynamic", can come from the Serbian war. His weeping and gnashing of teeth about the "fruits" of the demand for self-determination suggest that he shares the negative, passive approach of the wretched social-pacifists who dominate the SWP's coverage of the conflict. They are wrong. Of course, we too condemn imperialism's war against Serbia; of course, we recognise the obvious fact that this war has brought about a human catastrophe on a truly monumental scale. But there is more to it than that. The present conflict, including the part played in it by Kosova's demand for self-determination, raises real possibilities for profound, perhaps even revolutionary, political and social changes in Yugoslavia.

The Milosevic regime is far from stable. Some comrades seem to have forgotten that only two years ago it was tottering. Under the leadership of extreme nationalists hundreds of thousands took to the streets of Belgrade. On that occasion Milosevic was able to buy off the opposition, but now there is war.

The task of communists is to take the working class beyond mere economic struggle to the high planes of politics - that is why scientific theory and a fully rounded communist programme are vital. The working class must oust the brown nationalists from the leadership of the democratic, anti-Milosevic movement.

Nato bombing has already reduced many state enterprises to rubble. Whole sectors of the economy, such as oil, petrochemicals, motors and heavy goods, have been decimated, putting many thousands of workers out of a job. With Nato set to intensify its aerial bombardment of Serbia and extend its targets across the whole Serbian economy, the damage to the Serbian working class's basic interests might soon be manifest in war-weariness and social unrest. Class issues will again be on the agenda - not merely economic problems, but centrally with the intervention of communists issues of democracy and accountability. In such circumstances, things that now appear to be remote will become reality, including the resurgence of a genuinely socialist, democratic movement among the Serbian working class.

If, as seems likely, Nato eventually launches a ground offensive against Serbia, the whole Balkans and beyond could be ignited; given the weak links in its organisation - France, Italy, Greece, Germany and Spain are all, to a greater or lesser extent, ambivalent about a ground war - Nato itself could fall apart, with potentially disastrous political consequences for imperialism. Even if Nato does succeed in putting together the troops and ma-

# and Kosova

terial necessary for a ground offensive, the alliance will face heavy military losses and a period of acute political tension and instability. A European war would lead to seismic shifts in the current political landscape. Let us not forget that it was war which ushered in some of the essential preconditions for the success of the October Revolution. Does this mean that we communists of the CPGB are 'warmongers', eager to see a European conflagration? Of course not. But the duty of all communists and socialists at this time is to be prepared for a radical change in the political climate that could galvanise the now passive and atomised working class.

Against such a background, theory assumes an overwhelming importance, and it is to the Marxist theory in relation to the question of self-determination that we must now turn, with a particular eye on the problems raised by comrade McBurney.

With its emphasis on the negative "fruits" of the demand for self-determination and its contention that the Serbian crisis can only be solved under a socialist confederation, comrade McBurney's thesis smacks of a sort of half-hearted, half-articulated Luxemburgism.

Rosa Luxemburg is often the starting point for any theoretical discussion of leftwing opposition to self-determination. Her views are well known and can be briefly summarised. According to the iron logic of this implacable opponent of an independent Poland and stern critic of the Bolsheviks' programmatic commitment to self-determination, because oppression of all kinds is intrinsic to the rule of capital, only the destruction of capitalism and the advent of socialism can solve the problem of oppressed nations. Socialism, by definition, will remove every kind of oppression. To struggle for self-determination under capitalism is consequently a waste of time and harms the workers' movement by undermining proletarian internationalism.

Luxemburg's view was that the concept of self-determination was derived from bourgeois nationalist ideology and could not be reconciled with Marxism. According to her doctrinaire account of Marx's teaching, both the 'nation' (viz, an integrated social whole) and 'national' aspirations to self-determination (transcending society's intrinsic class divisions) are theoretical absurdities and simply cannot exist. In short, the idea of a 'right to self-determination', suggesting that every 'nation' has an equal right to decide its own future, is no more than an idle petty bourgeois phrase and humbug. The natural tendency of history is for small nations to be swallowed up by bigger ones. To try and reverse this inevitable historical process is reactionary and utopian.

Under the influence of Luxemburg's ideas, the Polish adherents of the Zimmerwald Left, specifically Karl Radek, produced in 1915 their *Theses on imperialism and national oppression*, which can be summarised as follows: first, the self-determination of nations is *impossible* under imperialism, because imperialism inevitably intensifies the oppression of weak nations - hence this oppression can only be abolished by abolishing imperialism itself - ie, by the socialist revolution. Secondly, the self-determination of nations would in any event be *harmful* - to set up "new frontier posts" would constitute an ob-

stacle to the development of the united struggle of the masses across national frontiers. Thirdly, national self-determination is *unnecessary* - the socialist revolution will abolish all frontiers and all forms of oppression (see VI Lenin *Selected Works* Moscow 1936, Vol 5, p379).

Self-determination was also rejected by the Bolsheviks Pyatakov and Bukharin, whose own theses on the question, entitled *The slogan of the right of nations to self-determination*, also appeared in 1915. Bukharin writes: "We do not under any circumstances support the government of the great power that suppresses the rebellion or the outburst of indignation of an oppressed nation; but, at the same time, we ourselves do not mobilise the proletarian forces under the slogan 'right of nations to self-determination'. In such a case, our task is to mobilise the forces of the proletariat of both [oppressed and oppressing] nations ... under the slogan 'civil class war for socialism' and conduct propaganda *against* the mobilisation of forces under the slogan 'right of nations to self-determination'" (my emphasis *ibid* pp379-80).

The positions adopted by Radek, Bukharin, Pyatakov and others (including Trotsky) all ran counter to a specific programmatic commitment to self-determination adopted by the RSDLP at its second congress in 1903. Point nine of the RSDLP's programme ('For the right of all nations in the state to self-determination') was itself based on a resolution of the Second International adopted at its London congress in 1896. Over a long period, Lenin fought consistently against all those who sought to nullify or dilute this commitment. Considerations of space oblige us to examine only a few of his articles in summary form. Their relevance to comrade McBurney's approach to the question will be readily apparent.

In an article entitled 'On the right of nations to self-determination', written in 1914 as a riposte to Rosa Luxemburg's article 'The national question and autonomy', Lenin writes that self-determination of nations means "the right to separate state existence" (*Selected Works* Vol 4, p251). Luxemburg's contention that fighting for self-determination objectively constitutes siding with the bourgeoisie is emphatically rejected: "The policy of the proletariat in the national question ... supports the bourgeoisie only in a definite direction; it never coincides with the policy of the bourgeoisie ... the working class supports the bourgeoisie only ... for the sake of equal rights, for the sake of creating better conditions for the class struggle ... To the extent that the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation struggles against the oppressing one, *to that extent*, we are always, in every case, and more resolutely than anyone else, for it, because we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression" (*ibid* pp264, 266). In general, Lenin writes, "the bourgeois nationalism of every oppressed nation has a general democratic content which is directed *against* oppression, and it is this content that we *absolutely* support, strictly distinguishing it from the tendency to one's own national exclusiveness" (original emphasis *ibid* p267).

Let those who condemn the aspirations of the KLA and the Kosovars to self-determination, and refuse to support them on the grounds that they are 'bourgeois nationalist' take

note. Nobody can surely maintain that their struggle does not have a "general democratic content"; nor can they deny that it is directed against Serbian oppression in the form of genocide and mass terror. Likewise, these comrades should bear in mind Lenin's warning that Luxemburg, by denying the right of secession to oppressed Poles and other oppressed nations, was "in fact assisting the Great Russian Black Hundreds" - ie, counterrevolutionary reaction (*ibid* p266). Cannot the same be said of those whose 'ideological purity' prevents them from backing the KLA and the Kosovars? While they wring their hands and agonise about the 'bourgeois nationalist' content of the struggle of Kosova against Serbia, they objectively assist the red-brown Milosevic.

Lenin's position was consistent with the resolution on self-determination adopted by the London congress of the Second International. It reads as follows: "The Congress declares that it upholds the full right of self-determination of all nations and expresses its sympathy for the workers of every country now suffering under the yoke of military, national and other despotism; the congress calls on the workers of all these countries to join the ranks of the class conscious workers of the whole world in order to fight together with them for the defeat of international capitalism and for the aims of international social democracy" (*ibid* p269).

As Lenin points out in his article, the opponents of self-determination merely ignored the first sentence of the resolution and fastened on the declaratory sentiments of the second. In essence, the same can be said of comrade McBurney: he rejects the "demand for self-determination in the context of the Balkans", pointing to its baleful "fruits" and its purported lack of a "progressive dynamic". Yet he is content to make pious, empty declarations, calling for a "united socialist federation of the Balkans". The point is that *both* aspects of the resolution - "the absolutely direct, unambiguous recognition of the full right of nations to self-determination" and "the equally unambiguous appeal to workers for international unity in their class struggle" (*ibid* p271) - represent the only principled approach to the question. The two propositions are not contradictory, but complementary.

Perhaps the clearest and most concise exposition of Lenin's standpoint on the question is contained in his article, 'The socialist revolution and the right of nations to self-determination', consisting of nine theses directed against those of Radek and the Polish left Zimmerwaldists (*Selected Works* Vol 5, Moscow 1936, pp267-281). From the outset, Lenin defines self-determination as "the right to free political secession from the oppressing nation ... the logical expression of the struggle against national oppression in any form" (*ibid* p270).

Refuting Radek's contention that self-determination is "impossible" and "illusory" so long as imperialism exists, Lenin points to the fact that "not only the right of nations to self-determination, but all the fundamental demands of political democracy are 'possible of achievement' under imperialism, only incompletely, in a mutilated form ... This does not mean simply, however, that social democracy must refrain from conducting an immediate and determined struggle for all these demands ... not in a reformist, but in a revolutionary way ... wid-

ening and fomenting the struggle for every kind of fundamental, democratic demand right up to and including the direct onslaught of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie: ie, to the socialist revolution" (*ibid* p269).

To those who then (and now) would maintain that the demand for self-determination is reactionary and harmful, in that it leads to the creation of new frontier posts and "fractures" the unity of the working class (McBurney), Lenin replies that what matters is the *democratic* content of the demand for self-determination and the implicit "complete freedom to carry on agitation in favour of secession".

In concrete circumstances, the demand for self-determination need *not*, in fact, be identical with the demand for secession: "The more closely the democratic system of state approximates to complete freedom of secession, the rarer and weaker will the striving for secession be in practice; for the advantages of large states, both from the point of view of economic progress and from the point of view of the interests of the masses, are beyond doubt." In short, the aim of socialism, in calling for the right to self-determination, is not to bring about the creation of small states. On the contrary, socialism aims "to abolish the present division of mankind into small states ... not only to bring the nations closer together, but also to merge them". The point, however, is that this can only be done on a democratic and free basis: "Just as mankind can achieve the abolition of classes only by passing through the transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations - ie, their freedom to secede" (*ibid* pp270-271).

As Lenin points out in another article against Radek's theses ('The revolutionary proletariat and the right of nations to self-determination'), "We demand the freedom of self-determination - ie, independence; ie, the freedom of secession for the oppressed nations - not because we cherish the ideal of small states, but, on the contrary, because we are in favour of large states and of the closer unity and even the fusion of nations, but on a truly democratic, truly international basis which is *inconsistent* without the freedom of secession" (original emphasis *ibid* p289).

Dealing with the contention (voiced now as well as then) that supporting the right to self-determination can objectively mean serving the interests of imperialism - for example, comrade McBurney's claim that support for Kosovar self-determination

plays an "anti-working class role" - Lenin states: "There is not a single democratic demand which could not serve, and has not served, under certain conditions, as an instrument of the bourgeoisie for deceiving the workers." Nevertheless, "the fact that the struggle for national liberation against one imperialist power may, under certain circumstances, be utilised by another 'great power' in its equally imperialist interests should have no more weight in inducing social democracy to renounce its recognition of the right of nations to self-determination than the numerous cases of the bourgeoisie utilising republican slogans for the purpose of political deception" (*ibid* pp272-3).

Comrade McBurney asks: "Why should communists give this project [Kosovar self-determination] any credibility? By now, the answer should be apparent, but here is another reason: to teach the *Serbian* working class some practical lessons about what it means for the proletariat to fight for the complete and all-sided achievement of all just, democratic demands, rather than merely exhorting them (as comrade McBurney does) to be good socialists.

In this connection, Lenin draws our attention to the reasons why Marx himself demanded the separation of Ireland from Great Britain: "He demanded it not from the standpoint of the petty bourgeois utopia of a peaceful capitalism, not from considerations of 'justice for Ireland', but from the standpoint of the proletariat of the *oppressing* - ie, the English - nation against capitalism. The freedom of that nation was cramped and mutilated by the fact that it oppressed another nation. The internationalism of the English proletariat would remain a hypocritical phrase if it did not demand the secession of Ireland ... Marx never was in favour of small states, or of splitting up states ... he considered the secession of an oppressed nation to be a step towards federation; consequently not towards the splitting of nations, but towards concentration ... concentration on the basis of democracy" (original emphasis *ibid* p285).

If this is not clear enough, then there is little else we can do to help the comrade understand the theoretical basis of Lenin's and our commitment, both in theory and practice, to the principle of self-determination for all oppressed nations. In the case of Kosova, quite apart from considerations of justice, it should be apparent to all that Kosovar independence from 'Yugoslavia' (ie, freedom from the yoke of barbaric Serb national chauvinism) is an essential precondition for future voluntary unity on the basis of peace, equality and democracy ●

## Politics of the Balkans war

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# Balkans war unites internationalists

**T**he realities of the Balkans war put many of the abstract positions of the left to the test. The longer this war goes on, the clearer it will be to masses of people that imperialism has no democratic solution to the crisis in the Balkans. It is essential therefore for the left to unite around a consistently democratic and revolutionary position.

As revolutionaries operating in one of the main imperialist states, we must also take action beyond propaganda. This matter is doubly urgent, given that the largest group on the left, the Socialist Workers Party, has collapsed into social-pacifism.

In a promising development, a number of groups met in London on Friday April 16 to begin to coordinate joint activity around the slogans, 'Stop the Nato bombing', 'Nato out of the Balkans', 'Stop the ethnic cleansing', 'Self-determination for the Kosovars' and 'Open the borders to the Kosova refugees'. The organisations present were: the CPGB, Workers Power, Socialist Outlook, Workers International (organisers of Workers Aid for Kosova), Workers Action, Socialist Democracy, Workers Party for Socialism (Argentina) and the Communist Party of Iraq. The Socialist Party and the Communist League were absent despite being invited. Nevertheless, a process unifying internationalist forces in Britain around principled slogans has begun.

Practical unity began to develop at the first large demonstration against the war on Sunday April 11 called by the Committee for Peace in the Balkans. While this committee's pacifist approach is primary exemplified by the SWP's "War leads to catastrophe" slogan it also has a significant 'red-brown' pro-Serbian component. This has meant that Serb nationalist elements are prominent at meetings and demonstrations. Significantly, no Kosovar speakers were allowed at the rally on April 11 in Trafalgar Square.

Comrades marching under the slogans, 'Self-determination for the Kosovars' and 'Nato out of the Balkans', were subject to abuse. Some of this - allegedly from 'Chetniks' - took the form of threats of violence. Spontaneously, a number of comrades from the Communist League, Socialist Outlook and others joined forces behind the Workers Power banner, for reasons of collective security as well as political unity.

Last Friday's meeting gathered with the aim of transforming this spontaneous solidarity into conscious political action. It was called by Socialist Outlook, with concrete proposals moved by Workers Power. What this points to is the need to form an Internationalist Committee with a public face. While the April 16 meeting took no decision to form such a body, it has done so *de facto*. The CPGB will be urging comrades from the other organisations to take the further step of formalising the committee.

The meeting agreed to approach the Committee for Peace in the Balkans, asking them to ensure that supporters of the national rights of

the Kosovars be given a platform at all meetings. It is expected that any response will be equivocal and this will hopefully push the more hesitant internationalist forces to declare for the formation of an Internationalist Committee. The Committee for Peace in the Balkans, made up of Tam Dalyell, Tony Benn and other MPs, meets in parliament. The SWP has opportunistically adopted the pacifist line, hungry for acceptance - while the parliamentarians have been eager to use the SWP and prevent them forming a rival campaign.

In addition to uniting on the three slogans above, the organisations fighting for a principled response to the war have come together with a view to: "(i) act as a contingent on demonstrations, coordinate security on pickets or at meetings; ... (ii) coordinate our efforts to get resolutions with an anti-Nato, anti-ethnic cleansing position through trade unions and other labour movement bodies; and (iii) try to get speakers from the platform or the floor at all the meetings or the demos called by the Committee for Peace in the Balkans or other local bodies".

The meeting also agreed to organise a public meeting in London on May 4 around the agreed slogans.

There was also debate and a vote taken on whether to include 'Arm the KLA' as one of the slogans around which to unite. The main argument against this was, typically, based around appeasing phantom rightwing elements who would not accept this position. Apart from the Communist Party of Iraq - which does not seem to recognise the right to self-determination of the Kosovars - all organisations present claimed to support the slogan, 'Arm the KLA'. Indeed, most groups already include it in their own propaganda.

Comrade Simon DeVille of Socialist Outlook raised the absent Socialist Party as his excuse for urging a vote against the slogan: "They may not support it." Comrade Dave Stockton of Workers Power emphasised the need to have broad appeal - he voted against 'Arm the KLA' despite it being included in Workers Power's own material.

Only the CPGB and Workers International voted for 'Arm the KLA'. Socialist Outlook, Workers Power, the Communist Party of Iraq, Socialist Democracy and Workers Action voted against.

A tendency to rightwing conciliationism is not the only political problem an Internationalist Committee would face. While we can and must unite around the principled slogans, we must use the opportunity of close practical unity for discussing broader politics. A united front against the war cannot be a pact of 'live and let live'. Discussion of differences, alongside effective practical action, should be welcomed and be seen as normal political culture.

Workers Power, for one, have a mass of contradictions to deal with. In order to fit reality to their dogmatic stand that rump-Yugoslavia is a 'moribund workers' state', Workers Power have decided that

there are "two wars" in the Balkans. They call for arming the KLA and military defence of Yugoslavia - oh, except for the bit that is Kosova. Just how they would direct any military units they had on the ground is anyone's guess. Workers Power's other problem, its residual auto-Labourism, is leading it to actually vote for the war while campaigning against it. For the Scottish and Welsh elections, the comrades (except in Glasgow) are backing New Labour and the candidates chosen by Bomber Blair.

Another possible, though currently hidden, problem is a tendency to anti-Serbism. Our approach must start from the position that the main enemy is at home. Yes, the Yugoslav government is thoroughly reactionary - we say there is nothing to defend in Milosevic's regime. Yet to go overboard and say the *main* enemy is in Belgrade is untenable for consistent revolutionary internationalists fighting for peace through revolution in the UK. While this has not emerged as a political feature of the current internationalist bloc, the impulse to equate the Bosnian conflict of 1991-95 with the present war - from Workers International Press in particular - is worrying.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty has taken this to extremes. According to Sean Matgamna, writing on the AWL's website, "If Nato troop landings put a stop to the Serbs' genocidal drive against the Kosovars, we will be glad of it" (April 2).

The AWL did not attend, despite being aware of the meeting. It is not clear whether the organisers, Socialist Outlook, declined to invite the AWL (there is an ongoing gripe over the Welfare State Network) or if the latter decided not to attend. As the war unfolds, there is a danger of the AWL collapsing into a 'first camp' position. The general approach of the CPGB towards this and other imperialist wars is that of revolutionary defeatism - the main enemy is at home. In reply to this, the AWL's Mark Osborne told me: "That is not the case for this war." Comrade Osborne's justification for this appeared to be based on moralistic 'politics by numbers'. He said that Nato bombs have only killed tens or hundreds of Serbs, whereas thousands - if not more - of Kosovars have been killed and raped by Serbs, with hundreds of thousands forcibly exiled.

Comrade Osborne was not too disappointed by the AWL's absence from the April 16 meeting. If Nato sent in ground troops, he expected that the AWL position would diverge from the rest of the left. In view of comrade Matgamna's position that would certainly seem to be the case - unless you include Ken Livingstone in your definition of the left.

Any move away from revolutionary defeatism can only be a capitulation to imperialism. This tendency must be resisted. Organisations and individuals standing on internationalist principle must unite for practical action against the reactionary war ●

Marcus Larsen

SWP social-pacifism

## Peace or class war

**T**here is as yet little sign of mass opposition among the British working class to Nato attacks on Serbia, while among the ruling class patriotic support for the war remains almost unanimous despite reservations. *The Independent* described the "tiny minority opposed to the war" in the House of Commons as "a strange alliance of isolationist Conservatives like Alan Clark and quasi-pacifists like Tony Benn" (April 19).

The second group in this alliance, the social-pacifist MPs and a few of their friends such as ex-CND leader Bruce Kent, have constituted themselves the Committee for Peace in the Balkans. Leading members of the Socialist Workers Party attend as observers with speaking, but not voting rights. This cooperation between an ostensibly revolutionary party and the social-pacifist fringe of Labourism is both a division of labour and a meeting of minds. The membership of the SWP provides the MPs with the footsoldiers they lack. The SWP press also carries their message that "war leads to catastrophe" (*Socialist Worker* April 10), and the cost of "one bomb could provide seeds and tools for 50,000 peasants in the Third World to grow their own food for a year." (SWP *Stop the War* London 1999, p25).

For the SWP the war comes at a convenient time. With the political committee recently split over the 'electoral turn' the anti-war campaign has finally allowed both sides to retreat under cover of 'more pressing matters'.

The SWP leadership clearly hopes that if Nato sends in ground troops to occupy Serbia and topple Slobodan Milosevic, and British soldiers are killed, public opposition to the war will grow and working class disillusionment with Blair's government will at last become a reality.

Such a rise in popular discontent is possible, but not inevitable. Nato is working hard to present its intervention as 'ethical' and designed to stop the atrocities Milosevic and his forces perpetrate on the innocent Albanian population of Kosova. The same politicians who in their youth wore CND badges unashamedly welcome Nato attacks on Serbia, pretending to have humanitarian, as opposed to imperialist, motives. They are opposed by the likes of Tony Benn, who holds that it is acceptable for the state to use violence within its borders, if it is legal and carefully controlled. This 'principle' can be extended to advocating a system of international law, including the use of violence against 'rogue' states such as Serbia, so long as it is under the auspices of the United Nations or some other international body. Of course, Blair and Clinton, like all warmongers, say they want 'peace' too and claim that Nato's air raids are fully in accord with the spirit of UN resolutions.

Apart from the Bennites, Nato's actions are also opposed by some Tories, who maintain that Britain should only get involved in wars where its own national interests are directly threatened. But the more far-sighted imperialists view 'national interests' in a much broader sense, requiring global stability for the operation of

British capital. In this way it is not only a 'humanitarian' war, but one which does indeed serve those interests.

The SWP is also concerned with 'stability' - but from a social-pacifist angle. Alex Callinicos worries that "An Albanian nationalist army, hardened by war and enjoying mass support in refugee camps throughout the Balkans, could threaten the integrity of half a dozen states throughout the region" (*Socialist Worker* April 10).

In the 1930s SWP-type pacifism was a mass movement in Britain, and millions signed the pledge of the Peace Pledge Union: "We renounce war and never again, directly or indirectly, will we sanction another." Eleven million people took part in the peace ballot sponsored by the League of Nations, the overwhelming majority voting against war and for peaceful methods of settling conflicts between states. However, when Italy, under Mussolini, invaded Abyssinia in October 1935, the British Labour Party rejected pacifism, and after a conference coup "Labour reaffirmed that the needs of national defence stood as a priority above the class divisions in British society" (G Foote *The Labour Party's political thought* p162). In the name of this they fell in behind the national government, which argued that League of Nations sanctions would stem the aggression.

Like the 1930s pacifist movement, the left-Labourite pacifism now being pimped for by the SWP is clearly utopian. Because pacifism denies the need for revolutionary class struggle, which inevitably includes violent struggle to overthrow the capitalist state, it is in the final analysis a tool of the bourgeoisie. As Lenin rightly states: "Pacifism, the preaching of peace in the abstract, is one of the means of duping the working class. Under capitalism, particularly in its imperialist stage, wars are inevitable" (*CW* Vol 21, Moscow, p162). The working class must therefore rid itself of all pacifist illusions before it can fulfil its historic mission to liberate humankind from exploitation and war.

As Marxists we deplore the misery and waste caused by war, and share the pacifists' condemnation of both Nato and the brutal Milosevic regime. But we do not agree with their view that all wars are morally wrong. We support the right of the Kosovar people to fight a war of national liberation against Serbia. For us, war and peace should be looked at, not as simply two opposites, but as opposites within a national, historical and class unity.

If humanity is to rid itself of the curse of war, the working class must single-mindedly fight for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism - in other words, civil war. War is the continuation of class politics by other (violent) means, and peace is the continuation of class politics by other (nonviolent) means. War, and defeat in war, can lead to conditions of social fluidity and instability which provide opportunities for the advance of progressive forces. Wars produce crises which can lead to socialist revolution ●

Mary Godwin

# Social-pacifists and peaceniks unite

Around 300 attended the launch rally, on April 13, of Manchester Against War in the Balkans - a Socialist Workers Party-led collaboration with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, following the pattern last used as "Manchester Coalition Against War in the Gulf" in February 1998.

Bruce Kent, the former leader of CND, opened the proceedings with a speech which was, unsurprisingly, entirely devoid of any socialist or working class content. It nevertheless contained the only call made from this platform for any kind of militant action to confront the United Kingdom state. Nato's military action in Yugoslavia is illegal - in breach of the United Nations charter - Kent insisted, and armed services personnel are under no obligation to obey illegal orders. The anti-war movement should be calling on them to disobey orders, he urged.

Whilst the key issue was to stop the Nato bombing, he continued, it is also important to put forward demands for real action on the humanitarian issue. The intervention of the British government, far from helping the Kosovar people, has turned hundreds of thousands of them into refugees. We must demand of Blair that they be admitted to Britain and welcomed here for as long as they themselves feel it necessary to stay, he said.

It was when he turned to the issue of addressing the political crisis in the Balkans that Kent showed his vacuity. He described graphically the terror and murder being inflicted by Blair and Clinton, but then identified the chief victim as - *the United Nations*. Whilst a Kofi Anan intervention was Kent's favoured way forward, he was prepared to consider that UN credibility might not be rebuildable in this instance, and the mantle might have to pass to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Kent's political emptiness was as nothing compared to that exhibited by the next speaker, former Salford Labour MP, and spokesperson for Labour Action for Peace, Frank Allaun. Comrade Allaun described his deep shame that a British Labour government was conducting a murderous bombing campaign against another country. He expressed his fears of a return to the Cold War. All the marvellous armaments reduction progress initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev was now seriously prejudiced, he pronounced.

But his calls for action were rather pathetic - along with a campaign of letters to the press, we should *appreciate* Tony Benn's efforts in parliament to stop the war; we should *repeat* Winston Churchill's one-time opportunity maxim, "jaw, jaw is better than war, war"; we should *recall* the words of an unnamed poet: "We are the people of England, and we have not spoken yet".

John Nicholson, convenor of Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance, saw the central problem facing the anti-war movement as the need to grapple with the view, "we have to do something" (about ethnic cleansing of the Kosovars). His suggested line of argument was that "this should not mean that we have to do something that is wrong". Bombing does not bring peace and reconciliation, he perorated.

The rest of the comrade's speech concentrated on instancing the hy-

pocrisy of our rulers. Their heart-breaking speeches on the plight of refugees are accompanied by a refusal to offer any meaningful aid and refuge, together with a winding to new heights of the British state's persecution of asylum-seekers in the 1999 Asylum Bill. Brown's budgetary prudence is suddenly of no consequence when it comes to spending billions of pounds, without any parliamentary approval, on war-mongering. And Blair's branding of life-long anti-fascist fighters within the anti-war movement as "appeasers of fascism" was particularly sickening, comrade Nicholson stated. Where was Blair whenever we were fighting the British fascists?, he asked.

Moving only briefly to address the question of how to conduct the fightback, comrade Nicholson observed that the cause of modern wars is capitalism, and that the answer is socialism. Then came a hint of a plan of action. Local council and European elections are looming, comrade Nicholson reminded the audience. These could be used to good effect. Had there been a shift by Nicholson/GMSA towards favouring the Socialist Alliance electoral challenges? No, there had not. We should "challenge candidates on where they stand on the war", he climaxed. Thus did a second socialist speaker publicly eschew any serious challenge to Blair or the power of the capitalist state.

Norma Wilson, spokesperson for Greater Manchester CND, focused on that organisation's core concerns. Already the Nato action had seriously set back progress on nuclear disarmament, with both the Belarus and Ukrainian governments now rescinding their repudiation of nuclear weaponry. More ominously, Russia had suspended the latest round of strategic arms reduction talks. Ms Wilson went on to describe in detail the dangers of the depleted uranium shells being relied upon by the Nato forces. She ended by echoing the emphasis by her former leader upon the need to reassert the authority of the UN and the OSCE. Working class power is clearly a more horrifying prospect than the H-bomb to the liberals and the sprinkling of ex-'official communists' in the CND.

The 20th century is ending as it started, the SWP's Julie Waterson began. Capitalist powers are again embarking upon warfare in pursuit of their greater dominance of the world. Whenever you hear them talk about "humanity" substitute "hypocrisy", she suggested. These same imperialist 'humanitarians' continue relentlessly to kill 6,000 children a month in Iraq with their anti-human sanctions, she instanced, although she pointedly failed to hurl back at her liberal pacifist co-speakers that the anti-Iraqi sanctions are precisely UN-mandated.

Comrade Waterson went on to debunk the 'Milosevic equals Hitler' propaganda of Blair's media cheerleaders. It is an insult to our intelligence that we should be invited to equate the threat posed by a rump nation of 10 million people, which was virtually defenceless against the military might of imperialism, with the actions of the century's second biggest economic and military power. It was also ridiculous to put on a par the Nazi holocaust and the Serbian state's pogroms and mass deportations against the Kosovars, she said.

Whilst correctly identifying the working class as the only possible bearer of a solution to the crisis of the Balkans and to imperialist warmongering generally, the comrade refrained from advocating the need for the working class to champion the right of the Kosovars to self-determination and to an independent state. The working class had been the very force which had shaken Milosevic in 1988, when they had launched mass strikes and demonstrations demanding real socialism, she asserted. The Nato bombing was now deliberately destroying that force.

Our enemy is at home, comrade Waterson concluded. But where was the SWP's programme to defeat that enemy? We waited in vain. "Build the anti-war movement", support demonstrations, and "lobby" election candidates, MPs, and Blair's ministers, was the clarion call.

Remarkably, comrade Waterson resumed her seat just seconds before the SWP chairperson announced that the hall booking had expired and we were to leave immediately. No contributions from the floor were permitted. A rally held in Liverpool a few days earlier had followed an identical format.

The *Weekly Worker* has recently featured the behaviour of the SWP in withdrawing from the Socialist Alliance slates for the forthcoming European elections. The latter project can provide a highly effective means of taking a working class anti-war fight onto Blair's territory. But participation in an active alliance of revolutionaries forces the SWP to fight for its politics. It also exposes their passive rank and file to the dangers of being drawn into real political debate, and in particular to be challenged on the question of programme.

The alternative model of organisation that is preferred by the conservatives who currently have the upper hand in the SWP's leadership faction fight is undoubtedly that which has once again manifested itself in the infant Manchester Against War in the Balkans, and in similar bodies in other regions. This is a much less risky ven-

ture. Leadership of a potential mass movement is seized by means of linking with bourgeois pacifists to create a 'critical mass' which then sucks in the smaller left groups. The SWP ensures its dominance through its numerical supremacy and through bureaucratic suppression of debate. It easily finds fig leaves on offer from the likes of comrade Nicholson, whose 80%-20% approach to united front work neatly dovetails with SWP hegemony.

It is in the anti-war movement where, at the present time, communists will have to confront the dead-hand politics of the SWP and its junior partners. We will have to take on the battle to show that, whilst the working class is indeed the only force which can overcome capitalism and its warmongering, it can be forged as a class for itself only in the context of a struggle to win the battle of democracy. In that struggle the questions, 'How are we ruled?', 'Who rules?' and 'Whose democracy?' must be constantly pushed to the fore.

The ruling class of the future will certainly not be made through the cooing and gagging that we saw at the Manchester rally. The old, entrenched political methods of the SWP betray an approach to socialism and to the working class that is not that much apart from the 'great leader' approach of Arthur Scargill. It is small wonder that, under its presently dominant leadership faction, the SWP has defected from the side of revolutionary unity to that of support for their supposed 'credible' working class icon, Scargill.

These are not the politics of the struggle for the revolutionary seizure of class power ●

Derek Hunter

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# Livingstone faces both ways

**"L**ivingstone ready to stand as independent," announced *The Guardian's* front-page headline last weekend (April 17).

Enough to get sections of the left rubbing their hands in anticipation. *Socialist Outlook* for example has been calling not only for Ken Livingstone to have the right to contest the Labour nomination for the first mayor of London, but actually wants the former leader of the Greater London Council to be adopted as the working class candidate in the 2000 elections.

However, a closer examination of the article below the headline, and of the extracts from *Guardian* journalist John Carvel's new biography of Livingstone published on an inside page, reveals that things are not quite so simple. The only indication we are given that the Brent East MP is even contemplating going it alone is a passage from Carvel which quotes unnamed "political friends". According to them, "he has already made the 'psychological leap' towards accepting the possibility of a future outside the Labour Party".

No doubt, as the canny opportunist he is, Livingstone long ago accepted that "possibility". But to suggest that in present circumstances he is positively considering forming some breakaway grouping is sheer fantasy. The *Evening Standard* reported on Tuesday a flat denial. Not surprising in this game of bluff and double bluff. The room to advance his political career significantly within New Labour remains far from negligible. A ministerial position even in the short term is not ruled out. The same extracts quote "a senior No10 spokesman" in "an authorised interview" with Carvel talking of Blair's "hopes" of bringing Livingstone "on board".

According to this "Downing Street source", immediately after the May 1997 general election, "Nothing specific was offered, but there were discussions." He went on to claim that "Tony likes him. They can have an amiable chat ... He will always have regard for somebody who is a good communicator. He feels it is a terrible waste. He is rather depressed about it."

So what is going on? Well, first of all *The Guardian* is more than a little keen to publicise the biography (publishers - Guardian Culture Shop). But Livingstone himself is also happy to go along with it all - so much so that he is signing all copies of *Turn again Livingstone* ordered through *The Guardian* before next week.

Clearly he is playing the London

mayor card for all it is worth - *The Guardian's* misleading headline is all grist to the mill. Livingstone's pulling power in London is widely recognised. It is not only the soft left who want to claim him as their own. Many Labour Party members have fond memories of Red Ken taking on Margaret Thatcher during the days of the GLC.

However, Blair is fully aware of his personal ambitions. He knows too that, if it suited Livingstone's purposes, the latter would not hesitate to use his position as the capital's elected leader to further those ambitions - whether or not his actions were in the interests of New Labour. That is why, from Blair's point of view, Livingstone must be kept out of the mayor's post at all costs. But there would be a price to pay should Blair decide to go ahead with bureaucratic proposals to prevent Livingstone's nomination in the party's selection process.

According to *The Guardian*, Downing Street has weighed all this up. The spokesperson admitted to Carvel: "No one underestimates the fallout. It's not just the party. Ken is more popular among the public than in the party." This was borne out by the reaction Livingstone has generated with his 'Let Ken stand' campaign. His February 15 Central Hall rally was packed out, with the 1,000-strong audience according him two enthusiastic standing ovations. Since then there have been other events, like the 'comics for Ken' show at the Hackney Empire. His February advertisements appealing for funds are said to have netted him £25,000 within days.

But Livingstone is cleverly playing it both ways. While allowing *The Guardian* to run stories of a possible split, he is simultaneously professing ultra-loyalty to New Labour. In his 'open letter' to Tony Blair early in the year he poured scorn on the suggestion that he would use the position of London mayor to undermine the government: "I want to put such absurdities to rest once and for all and give you a categorical assurance that, if Londoners voted for me to be their first elected mayor, I would work with your government, not against it" (*The Guardian* January 29).

Livingstone added: "I do not find myself in a position of ideological conflict with my government." Indeed, "Your administration has the potential to be a great reforming government on a par with those of 1906 and 1945." He assured Blair that the reforms he was proposing for London "could be delivered within the government's current financial constraints". Furthermore, he also agreed

to allow the official party machine total control of the electoral campaign and offered to run alongside a Blairite as candidate for deputy mayor.

It is true that Livingstone has attacked Gordon Brown's handling of the economy. He also described Peter Mandelson as "the sewer, not the sewage", and slammed Robin Cook for "running along behind America like a demented poodle". But that was last year, before Kosova. This year, not so red Ken has shown he can howl and yap with the best of them. Now he is all in favour of imperialist air attacks. He told the Commons earlier this month: "It is the duty of the nations that have the military power to protect individual communities from systematic genocide by evil regimes. Where the west has the power and uses it wisely, I will support that intervention."

Previously the CPGB did not rule out completely the possibility of giving Livingstone critical support in the unlikely event of his name being on the ballot form for mayor next year. But we said: "The left should consider backing him only if he breaks with Blair and stands as a socialist" (my emphasis *Weekly Worker* February 18). Having now placed himself well and truly in the camp of social-imperialism however, Livingstone has ruled himself out as a candidate that any socialist, democrat or anti-imperialist could even think of supporting.

Clearly Ken Livingstone is driven by one thing: an overwhelming ambition to advance his career. At present the space is there on Labour's left wing, and he could yet head a future revival. That would be the conventional route to the top. However, the introduction of proportional representation also leaves open another possibility. Livingstone could lead a viable new party, given the right circumstances. The ideological position of such a political formation is impossible to determine in advance - except to say that Ken will be its dictator. At present the man combines a left image with capitalist common sense (he is pro-EU). It should not be forgotten that both Mussolini and Mosley originated as socialists. Livingstone for his part has the ability and the burning ambition which could make a mass-based red-brown party in Britain.

No doubt Livingstone has considered all his options. But for now the Labour Party itself still looks the best bet. His own miniature canine imitations in relation to Nato's bombing of Yugoslavia must have encouraged Blair to think about buying him off in more positive terms.

Surely now the non-Labour left will



All in favour of imperialist attacks

abandon its tailing of Livingstone? I would not count on it. Despite all their moralistic huff-and-puff about New Labour's unpopularity, groups like the SWP, Socialist Party, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Socialist Outlook have shown by their actions in the Socialist Alliance electoral bloc that they have not the slightest confidence in their own ability to provide working class leadership. In London

the confirmation that Arthur Scargill was to head the SLP Euro-election list threw the SWP into crisis and caused the Alliance to splinter.

For as long as the left is unable to contemplate giving a lead itself - not least in elections - then would-be labour dictators like Scargill and Livingstone will continue to steal the initiative ●

Alan Fox

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