

No to bomber Blair!
No to Scargill!
Vote 'Weekly Worker'
on June 10

SLP wreckers fail in Coventry

The degeneration of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party is so far gone that on occasions it now performs the role of anti-working class wrecker.

A case in point is its antics in Coventry in the run-up to this month's local elections. Dave Nellist, former Labour MP for Coventry South East, is today a councillor for St Michael's ward in his old constituency. Hoping to build on comrade Nellist's personal following and reputation, his district of the Socialist Party in England and Wales stood six candidates, including in St Michael's ward, where SPEW was trying for a second councillor on May 6.

Comrade Karen McKay narrowly won the seat from New Labour with 1,356 votes (44.2%). But not before a spoiling intervention by the SLP. *The Socialist* reports: "At the last moment, the rump Socialist Labour Party decided to stand in St Michael's in a blatant attempt to split our vote and ensure that a socialist did not win the seat" (May 14). This appears to be completely accurate.

Since its formation the SLP, driven by Scargill's overwhelmingly egoistic ambition to head the workers' movement as its labour dictator, has refused point blank to even discuss electoral alliances. It is true that many informal arrangements have been arrived at. Local branches have seen the obvious logic in not dividing the left vote. But in Scargill's blinkered mind the rest of the left is irrelevant. He absurdly claims that his husk is Britain's "fourth biggest party".

In fact the SLP is continuing to shrink. It is now down to around 200 members - just one tenth of its high point in 1996-7. As a result, the most grotesque ultra-Stalinists are in control in key areas: women's section, youth section, London region, etc. They have encouraged Scargill to take his sectarianism to extremes: if Socialist Labour is going to sink into oblivion, then such elements will, it seems, do their damndest to sabotage any sign of left advance elsewhere.

Coventry SLP has just four activists - NEC member Sohan (Paul) Singh, Dave Ayrtton, Tim Logan and Ann Perkins. Comrades Singh and Ayrtton were prominent supporters of Royston Bull's homophobic *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, while comrade Logan is an Irish republican, who retains his membership only because of what he sees as the SLP's uncritical support for Sinn Féin. Comrade Perkins is an animal rights campaigner. With the *EPSR* to the fore, this strange quartet decided to contest three council seats. It just



SPEW leaders Dave Nellist (left), Hannah Sell and Peter Taaffe: only Nellist stands up to Scargill

so happened that SPEW had already targeted every one of them.

Like the Communist Party of Great Britain, SPEW is prevented from contesting any elections under its own name by the undemocratic ban imposed by the registrar of political parties. It therefore adopted the electoral title, 'Socialist Alternative'. In Coventry it added the suffix, '(Nellist)' - clearly demonstrating not only the influence of one former MP, but the growing distance of Nellist and his comrades from the disintegrating "small mass party" perspective of Peter Taaffe. Having lost Scotland to the petty nationalism of the Scottish Socialist Party, Liverpool to the localist Merseyside Socialists, we now hear that SPEW has also suffered a split in London, with a section defecting to the soft-Trotskyite Socialist Democracy Group.

The Nellistites contested in six out of Coventry's 18 wards. The Defend Coventry Council Housing Campaign, run by a handful of left groups and individuals, including several former SLP members, stood elsewhere after an agreement with SPEW. A third of the wards had no left candidate. In St Michael's SPEW approached both the SLP and the Green Party, asking them to stand down. The Greens agreed, but the SLP candidate, comrade Ayrtton, dismissed this approach contemptuously: "We want a piece of your action," he replied. Fortunately Ayrtton's 72 votes were not enough to prevent comrade McKay's victory. Comrade Perkins won 93 votes in

Foleshill, as against 104 for the Nellistite candidate, while comrade Logan could only manage 28 in Upper Stoke (71 for 'Nellist'). These two wards are outside Coventry South East and, as can be seen, real support for the Nellistites was restricted to their leader's former constituency. For example, in Binley and Willenhall, Lindsay Currie gained almost 20% of the return (567 votes). It was only here and in St Michael's where the results were above average for a left candidate.

The *EPSR*, previously known as the International Leninist Workers Party, has an unusual provenance. One of the most bizarre fragments of the Workers Revolutionary Party, which imploded in the 1980s, it eventually dumped Trotskyite dogmatism in favour of a peculiar form of ultra-Stalinism.

Bull's cut-and-paste weekly is famed for its breathless, ranting style, and its refusal to champion any democratic issues, calling instead for workers to forget about "single-issue campaigns" in the name of an abstract 'socialism' (as if revolution could be conjured up out of thin air, without challenging each and every violation of democracy). In the case of gay rights this refusal also reflects the *EPSR*'s backward prejudices.

For example, the *EPSR* has described "paedophilia, pederasty and lesbianism" as "emotional or sexual malfunctions". Regarding "malfunctioning sexual orientation", it reassuringly concluded that: "If society

eventually establishes that heterosexual procreation remains the basic evolutionary pattern for the species, then cleverly rationalised deviations from this by emotionally charged male or female homosexuals in a position to strongly influence the education of minors is clearly going to remain a potential problem, possibly requiring continued differentiation (or discrimination) within childcare and the teaching professions" (February 18 1997).

After comrade Bull was elected vice-president in November 1998 with Scargill's active connivance, the SLP's dictator felt that such tirades were ill advised. Scargill ordered his second-in-command to sever his connections with the *EPSR*. Bull refused. He was promptly put on trial for that heinous crime, "comment on the affairs of the SLP". Bull was 'lapsed' from membership for non-payment of dues earlier this year.

After the trial Bull dropped his previous grovelling before Scargill. He unleashed instead a stream of *EPSR* invective. The SLP general secretary was accused of "stifling censorship", condemned for his "disgraceful lies" and "meaningless gibberish" and, most cutting of all, "imbecility" (*EPSR* February 23 1999). But this about-turn has not stopped Royston's former lieutenants carrying on as if nothing has happened.

Singh and Ayrtton are now seen selling not the *EPSR*, not the SLP's official paper, *Socialist News*, but the journal of the Indian Workers Association, *Lalkar*, whose editor and chief

contributor is SLP NEC member Harpal Brar.

Comrade Brar's devotion to JV Stalin, the man and his deeds, is even greater than comrade Bull's admiration of the Berlin Wall and the KGB. For example, Brar told the CPGB's Communist University in 1998: "I regard Stalin as a great Leninist ... he had a genius for putting into effect the precepts of Marxism-Leninism ... Stalin's contribution ... was to hold the Party together by routing all the fractious elements" (*Weekly Worker* November 12 1998). Chilling stuff.

After Bull's demise Scargill turned to comrade Brar's tiny faction, based not only on the Indian Workers Association, but a secretive group called the Association of Communist Workers. Five of the 10 candidates on the SLP's London slate for the June 10 European Union elections are Brarites (including Harpal himself and daughter Joti). However, because the slate is headed by Scargill himself, the left bloc that had come together to contest the EU elections crumbled. The Socialist Alliance - consisting of SPEW, SWP, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Socialist Outlook, Independent Labour Network and CPGB - considered itself to be no longer "viable" compared to Scargill! All apart from the CPGB pulled out in both London and the North West of England regions.

Only in the West Midlands is the Socialist Alliance to stand. Comrade Nellist himself heads the list, which also contains three of his SPEW comrades, two SWPers, one AWL member and a leader of the Walsall-based Democratic Labour Party. Comrade Nellist, like Scargill, considers himself to be perfectly viable.

The *Weekly Worker* urges critical support for the Socialist Alliance slate in the West Midlands. However, in London and the North West, since the rest of the left has deserted the field, working class partisans have a choice between, on the one hand, a bunch of sectarian Stalinists and Scargillites, and, on the other, the candidates of the CPGB.

Unable to contest under our own name, we are fighting as the 'Weekly Worker' list. Although we are standing alone, our manifesto is based on the one agreed by ourselves, Hackney SWP, Hackney SLP and a Turkish community group (and supported by SPEW) in the January 1999 North Defoe council by-election.

Those who want to oppose not only the warmongering of bomber Blair, but the disastrous national socialism of the red-brown SLP will vote 'Weekly Worker' on June 10 ●

Jim Blackstock

Party notes

'Disappeared'

We invited Harpal Brar to present a session at this year's Communist University on 'The USSR: before and after Stalin'. Comrade Brar is on the Socialist Labour Party list for the Euro-election in London and is this country's leading apologist for Stalin. To the extent that his politics allow, the man is coherent, well argued and relatively sophisticated.

Unfortunately, he has verbally declined the offer, as he does not think it would be "useful". This is a pity, as many comrades found his introduction in last year's school very useful indeed. The comrade's defence of the contribution of Stalin prominently featured quotations from Trotsky and Isaac Deutscher, much to the discomfort of orthodox Trotskyist comrades in the audience, some of whom dismissed the whole session as "a waste of time".

Far from it. Their uneasiness spoke volumes. Our purpose in staging the exercise last year was not so much to expose the manifest absurdities in the world view of Stalinism. That would be a little like straining to highlight the anomalies in the evidence presented to the Salem witch trials - one hardly has to be Perry Mason. In this context, I heartily recommend comrade Brar's semi-surreal *Trotskyism or Leninism?* (London 1993 - £10 from the CPGB address).

In a lengthy regurgitation of the 'evidence' presented to the Moscow trials, comrade Brar employs the type of literary trick employed by US 'thriller' author Raymond Chandler. In pursuit of his dastardly plans, Yagoda for example turned to "a gang of specially trained murderers and poisoners" (p234). This shady company of hoods slip unheralded into the story in much the same way as an armed and dangerous stranger in a Chandler novel. They also perform the same essential function - to keep the fantasy moving along.

No, the point of the Brar session was to underline to our Trotskyist friends just how much common ground exists between them and those they regard as their mortal political enemies - the Stalinists.

Of course, by writing this I am in no way equating the two political tendencies historically. Stalinism has been in a position to do incomparably more harm to the international workers' movement, to waste the lives of millions of revolutionaries the world over. Trotskyism's struggle against the degeneration of 'official communism' was - despite its flawed politics - generally an honourable one.

Yet comrade Brar was not simply being mischievous in deploying (admittedly selective) Trotskyist quotes to bolster his Stalinist world view. However one characterises the USSR, it must be conceded that Trotsky's critique shares key concepts with that of Stalinism - the inherently progressive nature of nationalisation, the existence of 'planning' in the Soviet Union, the gains for the proletariat embodied in the five-year plans, and so on.

The external pressure exerted by an immensely more powerful enemy moulded the contours of Trotskyism in a way that actually came to replicate in miniature the very thing it was fighting. This, combined with important distortions introduced under the direct influence of the founder of the movement, has meant that the international Trotskyist movement has been characterised from its origins by sectarianism.

The examples of bureaucratic centralist internal regimes among the Trotskyist sects are legion. It is incredible, but true, that today's Socialist Workers Party actually has less democracy in its ranks than the 1970/80s Communist Party under the Euro opportunists. Wherever you look among the ranks of these organisations, you see crass denials of members' democratic rights, politics treated as conspiracy, narrow-minded schisms and heresy hunts. In other words, precisely the same ugly traits that are meant to characterise a 'Stalinist' organisational culture.

There is even a rather uncomfortable parallel with the Soviet bureaucracy's crude rewriting of history. Purged communists in the 1930s were systematically expunged from party records, removed from the historical picture - literally in some famous cases of forgery.

In a letter to the *Weekly Worker* (March 18) Ian Mahoney wrote of the pronounced reticence of our erstwhile bloc partners in the Socialist Alliance to even mention our name, instead covering us with "and others". The Workers Power group simply chose to ignore our presence in the SA altogether, name-checking every single other organisation apart from ours.

As Ian writes, "This is outrageous behaviour for a workers' newspaper. It is wilful misreporting, a deliberate attempt to mislead its readers", a repulsive trick that "reveals a rather deeper political problem".

There is a circular historical neatness to the fact that the Trotskyists are now trying to 'disappear' the communists, but that makes it no more principled. Of course, WP's crude attempt to rewrite history is dwarfed by the monstrous lie machine available to Soviet state. Nevertheless, it underlines how low the culture of the British revolutionary left actually is, its offensive contempt for honesty and democracy.

For this reason - and for many others - it is a shame that comrade Brar will not be able to make it to this year's Communist University - although I dare say there are some comrades who will be breathing a sigh of relief.

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Ineffective left

I must say I was somewhat surprised by John Pearson's letter ('Post-Fordist' *Weekly Worker* May 13), which seems rather misdirected or points to some, as yet to be elucidated, criticism of the *Weekly Worker's* developing critique on proletarian versus bourgeois anti-racism.

Calling Eddie Ford a "left-basher" points not to the strength of comrade Pearson's position, but weakness. As far as I am aware, it is not only the position of comrade Ford, but also of the CPGB, that there can be no effective opposition to bourgeois hegemony by the left *as it is presently constituted*. I consider this ABC. Hence the importance we place on revolutionary rapprochement. Open ideological struggle is precisely intended to *reconstitute* the revolutionary left - it is not to cuddle up while things are bad. Comrade Pearson knows this as well as anyone else.

Far from comrade Ford adopting some 'humanist pure criticism', *à la* RCP-Living Marxism-LM, I believe that he holds to our collective project, that the working class is central to the liberation of humanity. LM has jettisoned the working class as useless to their petty bourgeois, individualist, libertarian mission.

Let us look at his concluding sentence in context: "Until the left even starts to grapple with the political-ideological realities of Britain and high politics, it is doomed to impotency - shouting anti-racist slogans from the sidelines, slogans which the ruling class are only too happy to incorporate into their own vision of an impeccably anti-racist and inclusive bourgeois Britain. This dovetailing makes it most unlikely that any effective opposition to Blairite ideology will come from the revolutionary left as it is presently constituted" (*Weekly Worker* May 6).

Our ongoing critique of bourgeois anti-racism seems to be the real source of comrade Pearson's attack. The left is stuck in the past and is reduced to a mere leftwing echo of the emerging anti-racism of the bourgeoisie, which is diametrically opposed to proletarian anti-racism. If there are differences on this, it is far better that they are developed in print and in debate without resorting to attacking the messenger.

Marcus Larsen
South London

Ill-thought

Has the head of Royston Bull being transplanted onto the body of comrade John Pearson? I say this after reading the comrade's uncharacteristically ill-thought out comments about my "left bashing" and presumably "non-Marxist" article(s).

Slightly tiresome though it is, I feel obliged to put the comrade's mind at rest. My article was an attempt - inadequate, I am sure - to critique the response of the left to the Colorado massacre and the London nail bombs. Instead of communist analysis we had (Pavlovian) economism and social-pacifism. More specifically, I argued that the left's anti-racism segues almost seamlessly into the bourgeoisie's. This poses the crucial question: bourgeois anti-racism or proletarian anti-racism?

It was in this context that I wrote: "*This dovetailing makes it most unlikely that any effective opposition to Blairite ideology will come from the revolutionary left as presently constituted*" (words in italics indicate the section omitted from comrade Pearson's quote). In other words, I pointed to the *danger* of forces from "outside the working class" - to use comrade Pearson's words - becoming the opposition to New Labourism if the revolutionary left fails to develop a coherent and scientific Marxist programme. The very opposite of RCP/LM-ism, which explicitly *rejects* the working class as an agency of human liberation. In fact, the LM-ists are anti-socialists who promulgate a libertarian individualism of the most vulgar sort.

Eddie Ford
Middlesex

Tippexed out

Comrades may have noticed that the Socialist Workers Organisation (South Africa) has disappeared from the list of the SWP's fraternal organisations which is carried in many of its publications. This is because the SWO has parted company with the SWP. This happened some time ago, although no announcements were made by either side (in typical fashion, the SWO was simply tippexed out).

The SWP interference, which was responsible for wrecking a fragile, but promising group of revolutionary socialists organised on a national basis, resulted in the SWO being restricted to Johannesburg, where membership fell to a handful. The SWP once claimed the SWO had more than 500 members and the loud-mouthed Julie Waterson of the SWP central committee claimed they had "more than 2,000 members".

Earlier this month, what was left of the SWO - seven comrades - joined the SACP and are campaigning for the ANC for the June 2 election.

The International Socialist Movement - the South African group expelled from the SWO in August 1994 on orders of the SWP, and publishers of *Revolutionary Socialist* - have issued a statement in which they say they are "saddened by what has happened".

The statement continues: "The collapse of any of the groups on the left is no cause for celebration. From our own experiences and through witnessing what has occurred with the SWO we have drawn some valuable, if painful lessons. The ultimate responsibility for what, overall, has been a minor tragedy for revolutionary socialism in South Africa lies with the central committee of the British SWP and its crass interference in South Africa. This central committee played an autocratic and manipulative role which was more in the traditions of Stalinism than in accord with the principles of international solidarity.

"The SWP, as much as any other group, needs to examine what happened and to learn the lessons, or it will simply continue, like so many sects in the past, to repeat its errors. The issue should not simply be buried. As Trotsky once noted, 'The inheritance of the past is interwoven with the shoots of the future.'

"We ignore our past at our peril."

Dick Rogerson
Cape Town

No guarantee

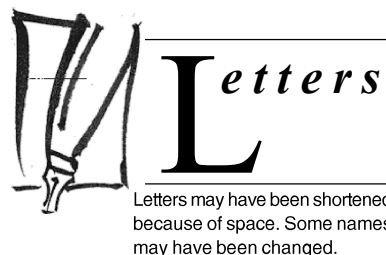
In reply to Sandy McBurney (*Weekly Worker* April 22), I did not write nor attempt to write a detailed report of the Glasgow Marxist Forum. I simply used the meeting as a device for critically explaining the three basic positions of Scottish communists, which I claimed were unionist, democrat and nationalist.

Sandy seems to be upset that I characterised his position as unionist-communist. So let me explain again my reasons for identifying Sandy's position as unionist, which Sandy says is "outlandish" and "ludicrous".

The union of England and Scotland is not a voluntary union. It was not formed democratically. Scotland is not a republic and therefore its people are not the sovereign authority with the right to decide for unity or secession. The Scottish people do not have a legal-constitutional right to self-determination.

All unionists argue that the Scottish people already have the right to self-determination. All they need to do is vote for it. But this is false. The absence of a legal right to self-determination is shown by the convoluted methods that must be used instead. First Scottish people must vote SNP in sufficiently large numbers. They have to align themselves with its anti-working class politics. They must hope that the British ruling class will not bribe the SNP or threaten violence, that it will simply stand aside. This is not the right to self-determination, but 'keep your fingers crossed and hope'.

The Bolsheviks did not leave self-de-



termination as an abstract principle. In their 'Theses on the national question' (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 19, Moscow 1977, p244) they spell it out as "the settlement of the question of such secession only on the basis of a universal, direct and equal vote of the population of the given territory by secret ballot". Later the Bolsheviks' central committee described self-determination as "the constitutional guarantee of an absolutely free and democratic method of deciding the question of secession" (*ibid* p429).

Self-determination means that the unity of Scotland and England is a voluntary union of sovereign peoples. That means a republic with the democratic constitutional means of peaceful separation. There is no "constitutional guarantee" of self-determination within the current constitution.

Scotland is a small nation tied constitutionally to a much larger nation. Without a "constitutional guarantee" there can be no meaningful political equality between the two. So when Sandy asks whether "the lack of a written constitution guaranteeing Scotland's right to self-determination is a form of national oppression", my answer, and that of the Bolsheviks, must be 'yes'.

On the question of the republic, I claimed that Sandy is soft. He is a liberal republican, not a revolutionary republican. A revolutionary republican is a militant anti-monarchist who is totally intolerant of the monarchy and is prepared to advocate mass action and force to rid society of this vile abomination.

I see no reason yet to change my characterisation of Sandy as a liberal republican. But I would welcome a statement from him to clarify his position. The roots of his liberal republicanism or, if you like, more tolerant view of the monarchy lie in spontaneity. Sandy thinks the working class is conservative. We could win them to socialism, but we will never persuade them to abolish the monarchy!

Dave Craig
South London

Subordinated

According to Phil Kent (*Weekly Worker* May 13), the slogan, 'Stop Nato bombing', is a "call for action by the working class". If that is not a demand on government, what does he have in mind - surface-to-air missiles launched off the channel ferry by a couple of militants working in the arms industry?

Apparently, the 'CPGB's' call on the workers to take a stand against inhumanity is the "reason why we cannot allow Nato to hijack the slogan, 'Stop ethnic cleansing'." But the Nato media machine has already done so, and *specifically* - to mean, 'Stop ethnic cleansing by the Yugoslav government'. That is the reason why the slogan cannot be *generalised* into a 'stand against inhumanity' at the present time. Or can we forget about such a stand when it comes to the KLA's appointment of Agim Ceku, a planner of Croatia's 'ethnic cleansing' of Serbs, as its new military commander, and still call for arming the KLA as an ally of Nato within Yugoslavia?

Phil Kent asserts that the 'CPGB' has not *described* either Iraq or Yugoslavia as imperialist states, but it doesn't have to. By absolutising the theory of 'revolutionary defeatism', it makes them so.

When I argued that the principle of self-determination has to be subordinated to the principle of *unconditional* opposition to global imperialism, I was referring to the case of Kosovo. However, Phil Kent is right in pointing out that self-determination is part of unconditional opposition to imperialism - *provided*, of course, that he is referring to self-determination for Yugoslavia.

Dave Norman
London

Kosova Liberation Army

SPEW's empty words

Critical support for the Kosova Liberation Army is gaining ground on the left, but the Socialist Party in England and Wales remains resolutely semi-detached.

This is a pity, because in many respects SPEW's position on the Serbian war is principled, its slogans and demands partially correct. Certainly, SPEW's attitude is superior to the banal bourgeois pacifism of the Socialist Workers Party, let alone the nauseating 'Yugoslav defensism' of the CPB, NCP and others. Nonetheless, SPEW's most glaring defect is its failure to get to grips with a number of fundamental questions concerning the KLA, particularly the complex dialectic of the KLA's political and military relationship with the Nato powers.

Readers of SPEW's pamphlet on the Serbian conflict (*End Nato's war* undated) will note that it advocates the right of all peoples to "armed self-defence" in the abstract, but they will have to wait until the last of its 20 pages for any substantive statement on the KLA. This is what they will find: "Socialists cannot endorse the policies of the leadership of the KLA ... The leadership of the KLA is nationalist, and politically they are closely tied to Kosova's landlord and business elite who aspire to rule their own capitalist state. Most of the KLA leaders, under intense pressure from the US, eventually agreed to collaborate with US proposals, accepting autonomous status within Serbia, the disarmament of the KLA, and a Nato peace-keeping force ... The KLA will only be able to lead an effective mass resistance struggle against the forces of the Serbian regime if they maintain independence from the western powers and link national liberation to a struggle for social change in the interests of the overwhelming majority of Kosovars."

Either this passage was written before the G8 meeting in Bonn on May 6, or SPEW's journalists do not read the bourgeois press. Leaders of the G8 countries, as is well known, reit-

erated their intention to disarm the KLA as part of a 'peace' settlement, whereby Kosova would be given the status of an 'autonomous' statelet within rump Yugoslavia. The prospect of disarmament was immediately and unequivocally *rejected* by the KLA, who denounced the decisions of the Bonn meeting (correctly) as an act of treachery towards the Kosovar nation.

SPEW's statement about the KLA's acceptance of the western powers' proposals is evidently a reference to the Rambouillet agreement, signed by Hashim Thaci, the leader of the KLA and one of the principal Kosovar negotiators. Thaci's tactical reasons for signing up to Rambouillet were not hard to discern. He and the rest of the KLA leadership knew that their acceptance, and the Milosevic regime's adamant rejection of the proposals, would precipitate military intervention by Nato. Did Thaci's action constitute a fatal compromise of the KLA's position, as SPEW implies? We do not think so. As we have consistently argued, the cause of Kosovar self-determination, their right to independent statehood, is a just one. The KLA has a right to obtain military help wherever it is to be found. In any event, Rambouillet, as everyone knows, is now a dead letter.

What of SPEW's other contentions about the politics of the KLA? Whilst it is true that the KLA's aspirations to independence are based on bourgeois nationalism, SPEW's claim that the KLA leadership is effectively a tool of Kosovar capitalism is unsubstantiated by any evidence. Again, the weakness of SPEW's approach is revealed in its tendency to view the KLA in an abstract, static way. Since the outbreak of hostilities, the KLA has evidently been undergoing almost constant change in reaction to the complex developing situation. Information about the internal political dynamics of the KLA is scant, but what is absolutely clear is that the KLA enjoys mass popular support among the Kosovar population. Its democratic credentials as the authentic focus of the Kosovars' struggle for independence are undeniable.

Although the pamphlet does not categorise the KLA as a mere cat's paw of imperialism, it does make disapproving reference to the fact that the KLA is receiving military support from Nato "through undercover channels". Insisting that the KLA must separate itself completely from the western powers is all very well, but in so doing SPEW demonstrates a truly astounding lack of realism, combined with a flight into abstraction. What, in the opinion of SPEW, should the Kosovars be doing in order to repel Serb genocide and repression in their country? The answer is similarly abstract and frankly utopian: "We support the organisation of Kosovar workers, labourers, peasants and small traders into democratic armed militias capable of defending their communities against Serbian forces, local warlords, and gangsters, and Nato forces."

How, we might ask, can such "militias" be "capable" of doing anything at all without weapons? Are they supposed to use their bare hands against Serb tanks and artillery? The pamphlet characteristically leaves this question unaddressed, because the answer is only too obvious - the KLA had and has no choice but to accept military assistance from the Nato powers. However, as the theo-

rists of SPEW would have it, such recourse to the west is unacceptable and renders the KLA's struggle ineligible for 'endorsement' by socialists.

SPEW's simplistic and ultimately sterile analysis, the outcome of its overwhelming need to preserve its ideological 'purity', renders the pamphlet's core arguments incoherent. The authors do not appear to have noticed that the relationship between Nato and the KLA is increasingly marked by tension and ambivalence. To those who maintain that the KLA is effectively a mere instrument in the hands of imperialism we would pose one question: if this is the case, how is it that Nato still steadfastly refuses to arm the KLA?

True, there is evidence that some Nato special forces (including the SAS) are cooperating with the KLA on the ground, providing training and perhaps some small quantities of light weaponry. Yet Nato has persistently declined to provide the KLA with the artillery and armoured support that would make them into an effective fighting force capable of confronting

the Serbs on an equal basis. Similarly, while *ad hoc* contacts between the KLA and Nato troops are certainly taking place at local level, Nato commanders are unwilling to establish any formal relationship with their counterparts on the KLA general staff.

We do not need to guess or speculate about why Nato has adopted this extremely cautious approach. As one Nato source put it recently, "We are acutely conscious that at some point, in enforcing a peace agreement, we may have to disarm the KLA and *even fight them*" (my emphasis *The Sunday Times* May 16). Indeed, given the KLA's determined refusal to countenance disarmament before they have won an independent Kosova, the latter possibility seems highly probable. Perhaps, if this happens, our Socialist Party comrades will find it possible to 'endorse' the KLA - but perhaps not.

Until SPEW is able to will the means as well as the end, its "support for the right of the Kosova people to self-determination and to their own independent state" will remain just empty words ●

Michael Malkin

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Fighting fund

Final sprint

A second successive poor week for donations to our fighting fund leaves us badly placed as we enter the home straight. With only £55 received in our weekly mailbag, we need a tremendous final sprint to take us over the finishing line. The total now stands at £227 towards our essential £400 target.

Special thanks to comrade JC,

whose £25 gift accounted for almost half this week's receipts. Thanks also to IS and TC (£10 each); and to PG and RE (£5).

Don't let us down, comrades. We need the full amount every month ● **Robbie Rix**

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

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday May 23, 5pm - 'Rosa Luxemburg's theory of underconsumption', using Simon Clarke's *Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide. Sunday May 30, 5pm - 'The International Debate on "dictatorship"', using Hal Draper's *The dictatorship of the proletariat from Marx to Lenin* as a study guide. Call 0181-459 7146 for details.

Manchester: Monday May 24, 7.30pm - Special seminar: 'Ideology in the Soviet Union'. Call 0161-226 6133 for details. E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.

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To paraphrase Lenin: 'No one can discredit Marxism as long as it does not discredit itself'. That maxim ought to be kept in mind when looking at the dispute that has been raging in the *Weekly Worker* over socialism and the battle for democracy.

The immediate issues at dispute are well known to regular readers: counterposing the democratic republic to the *socialist* republic; Nato's air war to 'liberate' Kosovo and the CPGB's call for Kosovo independence; Scotland and the programmatic demand for an England-Scotland-Wales federal republic; the CPGB's defence of the right of national self-determination as a generally applicable slogan.

We have already dealt with the seemingly radical rejection of the federal republic in the name of socialism in part one of this article (*Weekly Worker* May 13). Our terribly revolutionary critics haughtily demand a *socialist* republic. The only republic they countenance is a red one. Yet, far from being in the tradition of Marxism, we proved that on the contrary, such a pose is characteristic of economism: ie, the downplaying or belittling of the struggle for democracy under capitalism.

Economism is actually the modern Janus. One face is leftist. But the other is rightist. The *practical* conclusion of them all - from the *Morning Star* to the SWP - is that workers should concentrate on economic issues - wages, cuts, anti-trade union laws. High politics and constitutional reform are best left to Tony Blair and New Labour. That is the right face. The "socialist republic" in contradistinction to the "completely inadequate" minimum programme and the "Kautskyian" struggle for the democratic republic. That is the left face - as submitted by Tom Delargy in the *Weekly Worker* (April 15). Though there are details and nuances reflecting comrade Delargy's personality and political evolution, in effect he presented the thinking of the economists as a body.

Apparently unbeknown to comrade Delargy, Marxists such as Marx, Engels and Lenin (and to a considerable degree Trotsky) were revolutionary democrats who fully grasped the necessity of the working class taking the lead against every instance of oppression, every democratic deficit, every act of bureaucratic arbitrariness. In their day Marx and Engels not only chided their followers in Germany for not taking up the fight for a democratic republic against the kaiser state, but raised the perspective in the monarchist British Isles of a federal republic. Lenin approvingly cites this in *State and revolution*.

Those 'Marxists' - ie, economists - who arrogantly disparage or dismiss the fight for a democratic republic in the Britain of today are actually closer to anarchism - a trend which views democracy of any kind with contempt. We showed, using the arguments of comrade Delargy as a foil, that the economists mouth a hopelessly garbled Marxism when it comes to the United Kingdom monarchy system and the democratic republic. Evidently that is no one-off. The economists have a superficial loyalty to, and knowledge of, Marxism. That is why they can, and do, present themselves and their left-rightism to the public as Marxism. Unless such comrades undertake a serious rethink, they will have to be thoroughly exposed by way of unrelenting polemic. Either that or they will surely further discredit Marxism in the eyes of the broad masses of the working class.

Under the aegis of Marxism the economists have an equally non-Marxist approach to national self-determination. Recognition that the world as a whole is ripe for *socialism* and that Nato's air war against rump Yugoslavia is an *imperialist* war leads them to reductive conclusions that

Spontaneous economism and the challenge of revolutionary democracy - part two

Marxism and national self-determination

can best be described as puerile. For the economists 'socialism' and 'imperialism', answer all questions. Having memorised the words 'socialism' and 'imperialism', they deludedly rattle them out as half-digested solutions and theories, in the process repeating all the errors of the 'imperialist economists' whom Lenin famously crossed swords with in the early years of the 20th century.

Of course, economism is no fleeting ailment, affecting a minority of socialist opinion. It is endemic. Economism has long been the dominant school of thought that passes itself off as Marxism in this country. Therefore in focusing in on Sandy McBurney's (often confused and contradictory) ideas on self-determination, we are not merely dealing with a freelance leftwinger - as an individual the comrade is a sincere and basically honest revolutionary. On the contrary we are dealing with almost the whole spectrum of left sects and publications. No doubt we shall return, again and again, to do battle with economism. It will not be easily beaten, but beat it we must.

So let us turn to comrade McBurney's stated belief that the demand for self-determination is to all intents and purposes outdated and that while it might once, ages ago, have been progressive, nowadays it is ubiquitously reactionary. In so doing we shall begin by making a slight detour into Russian history and the revolutionary democratic approach of the Bolsheviks.

1. Bolshevism and democracy

As I have indicated, comrade McBurney's ideas are rather confused. In the abstract he recognises that self-determination might be legitimate: "We recognise the right of national self-determination and do not support state measures taken against those advocating that right within oppressed communities," he claims (*Weekly Worker* April 29). Yet nowhere does our comrade apply self-determination. The demand might perhaps have been correct in the distant past; it might perhaps be correct sometime in the future. It is all hot air. Suffice to say, everywhere the CPGB concretely raises the demand - eg, the United Kingdom, Yugoslavia - comrade McBurney is there bitterly opposing us. Not surprisingly his reasoning universally rules out the demand. The negative criteria applied to our given examples reveals him to be a dogmatic opponent of self-determination in practice.

Comrade McBurney has discovered that the world has changed since 1916 when Lenin hurriedly penned his splendid pamphlet *A caricature of Marxism and imperialist economism*. In the late 20th century global capital "rules indirectly". The comrade is right, of course. But that elementary fact is no excuse, neither logically nor politically, for interning Marxism and the fight for democracy and resuscitating an always useless economism. Nevertheless that is exactly what our necromancer comrade McBurney would have us do.

The comrade lets slip at his general approach by quoting from Russian history: "A democratic slogan or de-

mand that in one period or situation is progressive can in another turn into its opposite. The demand for a constituent assembly pre-October 1917 in Russia - yes. Post-October 1917 - no" (*Weekly Worker* April 15).

Though it is not at first obvious, we have here a useful starting point from which to explore comrade McBurney's ideas. Every communist slogan has a past, but its essence points to a desired future. Prior to February 1917 the Bolshevik's main slogans were: overthrow of the tsar and the tsarist system, and for a constituent assembly born of revolution. Under the given conditions they fought for the fullest possible democracy, thereby facilitating working class hegemony over the peasant masses and their own self-liberation. In February 1917 tsarism collapsed like a house of cards. Naturally slogans relating to the overthrow of tsarism were now obsolete. Nevertheless the Bolsheviks remained centred on working class hegemony and the extension of democracy. They reconfigured their slogans: all power to the soviets and a constituent assembly.

Kerensky's provisional government was unelected and relied on the unwillingness of the timid Menshevik and Right Socialist Revolutionary majority in the soviets to complete the revolution. Discontent in every part of society steadily grew. In October (November) the Bolsheviks finally obtained a slim majority and in anticipation had launched their insurrection. The 2nd Congress of the Soviets solemnly proclaimed that all power has passed "into its own hands". Needless to say, the Bolsheviks did not drop the demand for a constituent assembly. They oversaw the elections themselves in the full expectation that they and their Left SR allies would gain a thumping victory. Due to the breakdown in communications in a chaotic Russia, the paucity of communist organisation in the countryside, the inability of the Left SRs to secure their candidates on the ballot lists, and numerous other accidental factors, the Right SRs won.

Either comrade McBurney is ignorant of these salient facts or he considers the Bolsheviks gravely mistaken. That they should have said "no" to elections for the constituent assembly. It can only be the latter. The comrade is no half-wit. However, in my opinion the Bolsheviks were not mistaken. They were ill-prepared. No matter how it was portrayed in retrospect, re-enacting Cromwell and Bonaparte from below was no sign of revolutionary prowess. With better planning and a slight delay of a couple of months a communist-Left SR majority was within reach. Such a constituent assembly would doubtlessly have legitimised - that is, constitutionalised - the rule of the workers and peasants through their soviets and then shut up shop. The likelihood of the Right SRs and right Mensheviks *actively* going over to the camp of counterrevolution would thereby at the very least have been greatly reduced. Certainly the white counterrevolution could not have donned the cap of democracy and the constituent assembly.

The key question, however, is not speculation about different historical

outcomes. No, it is whether or not the dispersal of the constituent assembly at the dead of night by a 'tired' red guard was principle or expedience. For this writer it was quite clearly no principle. In other words we should view it broadly in the same light as the banning of opposition parties, including soviet parties, Cheka terrorism, the forcible requisitioning of peasant produce, one-man management, and the substitution of the Communist Party for the working class and the soviets, etc, during the course of the ruinous civil war.

Having touched upon a chapter in the history of the Russian revolution where democracy had to be violated in the perceived interests of survival, we can usefully take the reader on to the Bolshevik's stand on self-determination. The 1st Congress of Soviets unconditionally "proclaimed the rights of the peoples of Russia to self-determination". This "inalienable right" was "confirmed" by the 2nd Congress - which it will be recalled had a Bolshevik majority. One of the first decrees issued by the newly formed Bolshevik-Left SR Soviet government stated that the peoples of Russia were now equal and that every nation had the right to self-determination "even to the point of separation and the formation of an independent state" The declaration was jointly undersigned by V Ulyanov (Lenin) and Djughashvili-Stalin.

As the US communist, John Reed, reported at the time, "immediately" the Central Rada at Kiev declared Ukraine an independent republic, as did the government of Finland "through the senate at Helsingfors". Independent governments also sprang up in Siberia and the Caucasus. "All these 'governments'," says Reed, "had two characteristics in common: they were controlled by the propertied classes, and they feared and detested Bolshevism" (J Reed *Ten day that shook the world* Harmondsworth 1970, p231).

As with proceeding with elections to the constituent assembly, we presume that comrade McBurney would, looking back from the lofty vantage point of 1999, consider the Bolshevik government wrong in its commitment to self-determination. And that is putting it mildly. Given the dire results, were not Ulyanov and Djughashvili criminally irresponsible? If comrade McBurney had been around in 1917 surely he would have vehemently argued for their removal from office ... or more. That is hardly being hyperbolic, because when we come to the contemporary world our dear comrade flatly rejects self-determination on three counts, two of which in actual fact apply to 1917 just as much as 1999.

2. Nature of the epoch

Firstly, self-determination is condemned as a diversion from his abstract socialism. Capitalism is dying and socialism just waiting to be born. Secondly, the leaderships of national movements are "gangsters": ie, those demanding secession are invariably reactionaries. Thirdly, the demand for self-determination has largely been realised in the post-colonial world. We will deal with these counts each in turn.

It is undoubtedly true that historically speaking we live in the epoch of capitalist decadence and the transition to communism. That has been the case at least since the dawn of imperialism, as a stage in the development of capitalism, during the close of the 19th century.

However, that *economic* truth does not lead us to reject the logical ordering of our *political* programme. First, the minimum section - which includes demands that are technically feasible under the socio-economic conditions of capitalism, but which actually takes us to the point of revolution (inevitably certain demands such as self-determination overlap). Second, the maximum programme, which comes into operation after the working class has organised itself as a ruling class and is in possession of state power. Here, not in the minimum programme, one finds mention of the *socialist* republic. To ask for the CPGB for raise that demand at this "moment" in time - ie, as an immediate aim - and not merely to uphold it in terms of propaganda value, as suggested by comrade McBurney, is to desert Marxism and for that matter common sense (*Weekly Worker* April 29). The minimum programme and the struggle for democracy cannot be skipped.

Comrade McBurney forgets a small detail. We are not in a revolutionary situation or in state power. The revolution has not just happened. The parties of the left are not setting up makeshift offices in Buckingham Palace, nor are the workers' councils using the chamber of the House of Commons as a convenient central meeting place. To counterpose the socialist republic and socialism to self-determination and democracy in the here and now is to substitute the wish for the means. This explains why the comrade is so incoherent when it comes to the political struggle in the present day. Why he is unable to distinguish the violence of the oppressed from the violence of the oppressors. Why he is confused (enraged) by the outbreak of national struggles, when the world supposedly has - or should have - left behind such primitivism. Why he segues so easily from denouncing to apologising for imperialism.

The workers make themselves into a ruling class, realise themselves, by mastering the gamut of questions and issues in society, whether it be capitalist or socialist. Alone the workers have "radical chains" (Marx). Out of their own long-term interest in freedom the working class must become the foremost champions of democracy. It is that, or remain in perpetuity a slave class. With us therefore the maximum programme is logically connected to the outcome of the minimum programme. Besides showing how the associated community of producers emerges positively as a mass movement out of the revolutionary democratic struggle conducted under capitalism, the programme announces that our overriding aim is the full development of individual and social creativity. The freedom of each being conditioned by the freedom of all.

To achieve freedom requires revolution. As we have said, not just any revolution though. The socialist revolution will have to be democratic, in

the sense that it is an act of self-liberation by the majority and aims to take the democratic state to its limits as a semi-state that is already passing away. Democracy and socialism should not be counterposed. The two are inexorably linked. Without socialism democracy is always formal and stops short of ending exploitation. Without democracy socialism is only post-capitalism: it is not *proletarian* socialism. The task of the working class is therefore to champion democracy, not leave it to the bourgeoisie. Existing democratic forms must be utilised, new forms developed - eg, soviets or workers' councils - and given a definite social or class content. The purpose is to extend democracy and control from below both before and after the qualitative break represented by revolution.

Comrade McBurney downplays the struggle for democracy. Capitalism has more or less done it all. Instead he wants the working class to concentrate on its "own" issues. In Scotland I take that to mean low pay, cuts and giving a Glasgow Marxist Forum coloration to strikes. Naturally we communists do not ignore or dismiss such matters. However, in and of themselves such spontaneous struggles take place entirely within the sphere of bourgeois economics. The workers remain a slave class. There is no bridge between the now and the future. That bridge is and can only be politics. The working class must be trained through *political* struggle to become a universal class. For that, theory and a Marxist programme are vital.

Socialism is no more than a means to an end. Comrade McBurney appears to forget that socialism is not what we are aiming for. The project of Marxism is not about simply ending capitalism and bringing about the socialist republic - through which the workers supposedly gain their freedom. As stated above, post-capitalism without democracy is just another form of slavery (I know comrade McBurney agrees). That is why our stress is on working class power and self-activity, rather than some dystopian model. Socialism is not a party dictatorship over the proletariat, nationalisation of capital, or 'liberating' the productive forces by removing the profit motive fetter. We should leave such reactionary blueprints for the future to Stalinists, Taaffites and Scargillites.

The purpose of the minimum programme is, in the first place, to arm the workers against its main enemy, the state of the ruling class, and thereby step by step to prepare in *practice* the subjective conditions for revolution. Without the struggle for democracy revolution is impossible, a mere hollow phrase. Certainly preaching that socialism is the answer to all problems is more than useless. It is a hindrance.

Hence when it comes to Yugoslavia comrade McBurney has his instant, but lifeless solution. "The only way out" of the quagmire, is, he insists, "through the mobilisation of the working class fighting for its class interests around a socialist programme" (*Weekly Worker* April 29). Brilliant! That the working class in Yugoslavia exists merely as an atomised object, not a united subject, that it is politically formless without exception in every national fragment, does not appear to impinge unduly on comrade McBurney's consciousness. Such awkward facts can be banished simply by endlessly repeating the mantra 'socialism, socialism, socialism'.

If the working class was in power in Serbia, Bulgaria and Slovenia, or on the verge of taking power, then the comrade's *immediate* demand for "a socialist federation of the Balkans" would make perfect sense. Unfortunately our friend is blind to reality. Serbia is not socialist nor is it fighting an anti-imperialist war. It is fight-

ing for its sacred right to oppress the Kosovars - to the point of driving the entire population from their homeland. For any democrat it follows that the resistance of the Kosovars is just. The KLA is not Marxist but its struggle has a vital democratic content. Namely, the right for the Kosovars to live in Kosovo and to be able to freely determine their own future. Communists - above all in the oppressor country Serbia - must champion these elementary rights. If they do not, effectively they pass into the camp of Milosevic and his Socialist Party regime. Pitifully some Trotskyites in the west proudly boast of their *military* defence of Serbia - not that they have sent a penny or a man to the Yugoslav army.

3. National liberation movements

Comrade McBurney does not have a liking for those who lead the "new" national liberation movements. He says that nowadays these movements "are ethnically defined, anti-democratic and pro-finance capital, and thus pro-imperialist". Moreover such movements "utilise (and for their own ends often consciously seek to exacerbate) national disadvantage or oppression where it exists. They violently crush any dissent within their 'own' communities and suppress any attempt at working class self-activity" (*Weekly Worker* April 29).

Let us take the KLA and compare and contrast it with an 'old' liberation movement: the liberation movement that dominated Irish politics for much of the 19th and 20th centuries. It has had many names - United Irishman, Boys of Wexford, Fenian Brotherhood, Land League and Parnellism, Nationalist Party and Sinn Fein.

Did not the leaders of these organisations ethnically define themselves and their enemy? That is, the Irish and the British. Surely they did. The "new" KLA is no different. Nor by definition is any other *national* liberation movement.

Did the 'old' Irish liberation movement have within its ranks anti-democratic elements? That is, elements that dreamt of returning a mythical Irish golden age of brave warriors, fair maids and wise chiefs? Elements who instinctively considered universal male suffrage an anathema, that could have had no thought of women's sexual or social equality? Obviously. After the rise of Orangeism and Carsonism was there no blind hatred of the protestant minority from within the catholic majority? Of course there was. Kosovars who have been driven from their towns and villages, who have been raped or robbed and systematically humiliated by Serbs, are surely similar.

Was the 'old' Irish liberation movement overwhelmingly anti-capitalist? No, for the most part they were pro-Irish peasant and pro-Irish capitalist. Despite its 'Marxist-Leninist' and Enverist past the "new" KLA is of the same petty bourgeois stripe.

Did not the Irish turn in their hour of need to the enemy of its main enemy? Yes, aid was sought from France on countless occasions. And in both World War I and World War II prominent members of the 'old' Irish liberation movement contacted Germany in the hope of obtaining weapons and political pledges. The "new" KLA is to all intents and purposes doing likewise with Nato. Who does comrade McBurney expect them to turn to in face of the Serb terror machine? Russia? Greece? The SWP?

Do we think the KLA is well advised in calling upon Nato to liberate them? No. But that does not lead us to abandon democracy and defence of Kosovar rights to imperialism (which plans for Kosovo to become a Nato protectorate). In the same spirit we recall James Connolly's *preference* for a victory of a "superior" Ger-

many over the "inferior" British monster in 1914. A jealous Britain, he said, had unjustly launched a "war upon the German nation" (J Connolly *Selected Writings* London 1988, p244).

What of working class self-activity? Sinn Fein denounced the TGWU Dublin general strike of 1913 in defence of hard-pressed Irish capitalists. The IRA later suppressed workers' strikes and peasant land occupations. The "new" KLA would certainly do the same if there was any working class self-activity in Kosovo.

Communists criticise all shortcomings in the programmes of national liberation movements - where they strive for purely sectional class gains or national privileges, we condemn them. We have no need to paint such forces in the colours of communism. However, that does not lead us to ignore the democratic content of their struggles. Nor does it mean we gloss over the fundamental difference between an oppressed nation and an oppressing nation.

In the British Isles Ireland was the oppressed nation and Britain the oppressing nation. That is why Marx and Engels spared no effort in getting British workers to side with the Irish liberation movement. They did not sympathise with the British state or blame the Irish for exacerbating "national disadvantage or oppression" with their boycotts, terrorism and non-cooperation.

In the Balkans Kosovo is an oppressed nation. Serbia is the oppressor nation. That is why the CPGB calls upon Serbian workers to take the side of the Kosovo liberation movement. We do not blame the Kosovars for their oppression. In terms of the Yugoslav 'socialist' state that began with Tito - Kosovo was denied the status of a republic. But this democratic deficit became brutal oppression under Milosevic's Serbian chauvinism. Not only were Albanian universities and the Kosovo parliament closed, but in 1999 he launched his version of the 'final solution'. Sickeningly comrade McBurney implies that the KLA has connived at this horror.

We could supply countless other examples both 'old' and "new". But that would be to miss the point. Communists do not for one moment imagine that liberation movements are vehicles for socialism and universal human liberation - be they the 'old' Congress in India, Mao's Peoples Liberation Army, the NLF in Vietnam, or the "new" KLA in Kosovo, the ELF in Eritrea, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. No, our primary concern is with the working class, in particular in the oppressing country.

Only if workers in the USA sided against their government in Vietnam could they begin to free themselves. The black civil rights movement is a testament to that truth. Those leftist in the USA who pointed out that the 'Marxism' of Ho Chi Minh was of the Stalinite variety were doubtless right. But if they went on to argue in the name of an abstract socialism that US workers should refuse point blank to side with the NLF against the US army, that both sides were equally reactionary because Vietnam got weapons and other help from a 'state capitalist' or 'bureaucratic collectivist' USSR, then quite frankly they would earn and deserve our contempt.

Perhaps in desperation comrade McBurney scrapes the bottom of his polemical barrel. He maintains that by refusing to drop the principled demand for Kosovo independence the CPGB "essentially" merges "with the media campaign against the significant anti-war feeling at home" (*Weekly Worker* April 29). This stinks. As well as Kosovar independence, our slogans are well known and perfectly clear: No to the Nato air war, imperialism out of the Balkans. Besides joining and building for mass

demonstrations and backing local anti-war committees, on June 10 the CPGB is fielding slates of candidates against bomber Blair in the Euro elections on these very slogans. Our actions speak louder against Nato than comrade McBurney's refusal to side with the oppressed against their oppressors.

4. Imperialism has already done it all

Comrade McBurney is an admirer of imperialism. Touchingly he tells us that self-determination is an irrelevance because it has already been realised under imperialism. "Since Lenin's time," he tells us, "the old European empires have gone and national self-determination for the countries of the third world has been achieved" (*Weekly Worker* April 29).

The same goes for his native Scotland. He assures us that "the people of Scotland already have that right". If the Scots want independence or a parliament with full powers, "they can vote for it". Not that the UK state would stand in their way or threaten violence. Heaven forbid. The British government has presumably mended its way since it put Ireland upon the dissecting table. No attempt then to hive off north eastern Scotland and keep the North Sea oil. Rest assured. Nor would there be any procrastination. No, the British government would never dream of requiring a 50% majority of the entire population, or some such other sneaky formulation or breathing space. As tried and tested democrats the UK state will instantly accept a simple and straightforward Scottish parliamentary or referendum majority. "All the bourgeois parties have said they accept the right of the Scots to obtain independence," our comrade announces (*Weekly Worker* May 6). Comrade McBurney is a naive. His faith in UK politicians is truly remarkable. As we all know from experience, one should always trust what bourgeois politicians say. Their word is their bond. Come off it, comrade McBurney.

The comrade has arrived at the fantastic conclusion that democracy is fully developed under capitalism. To all intents and purposes it can go no further. Yet for me capitalist democracy in the UK is flawed, limited or virtually non-existent in every area of social, cultural, political and economic life.

There is a hereditary monarchy and an unelected second chamber. Neither Scotland nor Wales have the right to self-determination. There is no provision for independence in the constitution. In that sense Scotland and Wales are oppressed. Women still occupy a subordinate position. Youth suffer under a bureaucratic dictatorship in secondary schools and higher education. Migrant workers are denied basic citizenship rights. Trade unions are crushed by draconian restrictions. The European Union is run by an unaccountable coterie of corrupt bureaucrats. Millions remain unemployed and are subject to threat and intimidation from petty state officials. Pensioners are forced to retire and then eke out a miserable living.

Everywhere this writer looks, he sees how democracy could be enormously extended under capitalism. Not comrade McBurney. (Though for reasons that escape me in terms of logic he does call for a European constituent assembly and an annual parliament. Then again, no one is demonstrating or fighting in the streets for such demands. And maybe even if they were such slogans would be "used" by the labour bureaucracy in an "attempt to blunt proletarian self-activity". And to employ comrade McBurney's own words once more, if people "want" such measures they can "vote" for them. And surely our comrade

should anyway be counterposing to them a *socialist* Europe and a *socialist* annual parliament. It is all a complete mess.)

Faced with a growing national movement in Scotland which has put Alex Salmond's SNP into second place in the Holyrood parliament comrade McBurney answers with economic struggles now and socialism in the future. Wages on the one hand, expropriation of the bourgeoisie on the other. He cannot bring himself to seriously consider our demand for a federal republic, simply because it does not abolish class exploitation.

Comrade McBurney might just as well object to divorce or homosexual equality. Every Marxist knows that democracy under capitalism is limited, partial and subverted. Yet democracy and the struggle to extend it trains the workers and brings to the fore the class contradiction between labour and capital. That is the crux of the matter. Far from being a diversion, demanding *immediately* that Scotland and Wales have the constitutionally enshrined right to self-determination within a federal republic is crucial. Without training the workers in the spirit of consistent democracy there is no struggle for revolution.

What then of the post-colonial world? Given the deeply reactionary nature of most independent states, I fear that comrade McBurney might regret with hindsight that the great European empires were dismantled. "The fruits" of independence are indeed obvious. Numerous petty and not so petty wars, suppression of working class self-activity by a selfish aidocracy, and kow-towing to the IMF and transnational capital, which leeches the lifeblood from the masses. Economistic logic surely "shows" that demands for independence played directly into the hands of "elites" who were seeking to "carve out new states in order to achieve power for themselves and a more lucrative direct relationship with finance capital" (*Weekly Worker* April 29). Comrade McBurney and the economists should think about where such one sided logic takes them.

As our subject matter is national self-determination, it ought to be finally emphasised to comrade McBurney that nations rarely correspond to states. In imperialism's post-colonial world so admired by our comrade, it is states which have political independence, not nations which have self-determination. The difference is crucial. Within almost every post-independence state there exist nations and national questions. India is a patchwork of over 100 distinct peoples, none of which can freely secede. Africa's *fixed* state borders - drawn by the colonialists - cut across its real nationalities and proto-nationalities.

In that respect the 'third world' mirrors the 'second world' (and some parts of the 'first world': eg, the UK). Marxists do not want, nor do we sow, disunity. Quite the reverse. The CPGB is for the closest *voluntary* union of people and their merging and assimilation. We are therefore the most dangerous opponents of nationalism. Far from playing into the hands of nationalism our programme positively resolves national questions under the leadership of the working class.

Comrade McBurney and the economists just ignore the national question, or side with the oppressor state in dismissing national grievances as little more than "middle class" greed or pure invention. These are the politics which really fuel nationalism. Which lead millions who are questioning the established constitutional order to conclude that the Marxists have nothing to offer them. That is the unintended upshot of economism. ●

Jack Conrad

Exposing the fault lines

Perry Anderson **The origins of postmodernity** Verso 1998, pp143, £11

Frederic Jameson **The cultural turn: selected writings on the postmodern 1983-1998** Verso 1998, pp206, £11

The belief that western culture has now entered a 'postmodern' phase has been central to academic work for over 20 years. It is generally regarded as a byword for political pessimism. Many of the leading theorists of postmodernity, Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard in France, are disillusioned ex-Marxists who have used their work on contemporary culture to pronounce the death rites on the political hopes of their youth.

But others have taken a more sanguine view. Most observers would agree that the leading figure in postmodern studies is the American critic, Frederic Jameson, who remains a committed Marxist. One of the symptoms of his growing influence is the recent publication of *The cultural turn* and *The origins of postmodernity*, which should henceforth serve as the starting points for anyone interested in his work. The first book is a collection of papers, each of them building on the panoramic insights contained in Jameson's early essay, *Post modernism - the cultural logic of late capitalism* (1984).

The second, written by a former editor of *New Left Review*, is a brief history of postmodern studies which aims to relate Jameson's work to the wider tradition of 'western Marxism'.

The great virtue of Anderson's book is that he neatly subsumes

Jameson's highly digressive work under five headings. In the first place, he argues, Jameson is important because he has theorised postmodernity as the cultural expression of what he chooses to call "late capitalism" (the phrase is borrowed from Ernest Mandel). There is no systematic description of late capitalism in Jameson's work, but its outline is clear enough. Its central characteristic is a global structure more far-reaching than any which existed in the past, even during the age of high imperialism at the beginning of the 20th century. Driven by the needs of multinational corporations and a deregulated financial sector, late capitalism has created a "world system". The relationship between the global and the local is mediated by electronic media whose chief effect is to reduce everyday life to a confusing blur of rapidly changing images. The ensuing sense of radical impermanence is reinforced by the structure of modern consumerism, with its emphasis on planned obsolescence and market segmentation.

But what precisely are the cultural changes which this new form of capitalism has helped to create? At the heart of Jameson's work - here we come to Anderson's second heading - are a series of lugubrious reflections on the nature of everyday conscious-

ness. The impression they convey is of a populace thrown into confusion by the haemorrhaging of its emotional capacities and by a transformed relationship to both space and time.

Jameson's starting point is what he regards as the extreme superficiality of modern experience. In a society dominated by the manic rhythms of consumerism and the media, most of us direct our attention only towards the surfaces of the external world. Yet because real emotion is fundamentally "cognitive" in its origins, arising from genuine knowledge of what people and things are actually like, it follows that the characteristic postmodern attitude is one of extreme indifference to everything that exists. Insofar as consumer society also puts a premium on "intense" states of feeling, this should be seen less as a sign of emotional health than as a hysterical act of overcompensation. Jameson describes the continuous alternation between emotional extremes as a symptom of mass schizophrenia.

The same air of gloom pervades his remarks on perceptions of time and space. Whereas early bourgeois culture, with its roots in the industrial and French revolutions, was predicated on the expectation of continuous social change, Jameson contends that postmodern culture inhabits a "permanent present" in which a thoroughgoing challenge to the existing system is dismissed as impossible. The paradoxical source of this historical defeatism is the rapid rate of change in our everyday lives, which obliges us to take refuge in comforting fantasies of social stability. At the same time, however, postmodern culture has also succeeded in distorting our understanding of the past. The result is a society which seems instinctively to believe that history embodies a process of decline from some remote period of social harmony.

Pessimism about historical change also explains Jameson's conviction that postmodern societies are oriented more towards space than towards time. The nub of his argument, elaborated in a famous passage on the architecture of the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles, is that globalisation has made it impossible to fix an accurate picture of the spaces in which capitalism now operates. When we gaze out at a system which has slowly expanded across six continents, our only impression is one of unyielding complexity. Jameson's rather startling assumption is that disorientation at the global level has compromised our ability to deal with space at the local level. Instead of moving easily through a world whose "spatial coordinates" are familiar, we find instead that we are uncertain of our surroundings and stunted in our movements. Space has given way to "hyperspace".

The third aspect of Jameson's work which Anderson singles out is the arts. In a virtuoso display of compressed paraphrasing (pp57-62), he identifies the principles that underscore Jameson's account of contemporary architecture, cinema and literature. The most important of these is the assumption that the distinction between "high" and "popular" culture is now being progressively eroded. Not only is ours a society in which people are nervous of saying that John Keats is better than Bob Dylan; it is also one in which hitherto

elite forms are regularly enjoyed by a vast public. Although this has, on the one hand, led to a measure of reconciliation between artists and the wider market system, it has also dealt a fatal blow to most of the forms of cultural elitism which have traditionally been used to justify inequality.

The explanation for this sort of cultural levelling must be sought in the fourth aspect of Jameson's work, which Anderson broadly defines as the analysis of the "social bases" of postmodernity. The central argument here is that advanced capitalism has recently undergone a dramatic process of "plebeianisation", characterised by the expansion of the working class, to the point where it constitutes a sort of immovable presence at the core of contemporary awareness.

At first sight, this idea might seem inconsistent with prevailing assumptions about post-war changes to the class structure. And it is certainly true, Jameson concedes, that it has largely been the middle class which has expanded to historically unprecedented proportions in the heartlands of late capitalism. But this is to miss the point. The novel factor in contemporary perceptions of class is that globalisation has dragged the third world proletariat into the frame of western consciousness, with the result that the effects of "embourgeoisement" at home are powerfully offset by those of rapid industrialisation in the developing countries. It is this, more than anything else, which accounts for our deep suspicion of the cultural hierarchies of the past.

The outline of Jameson's theory should now be clear. The final aspect of his work, though praised for its originality by Anderson, has less to do with describing postmodernity than with specifying the correct attitude which the radical left should take towards it. Unlike the majority of his fellow theorists, whose pessimism has already been noted, Jameson believes that we should resist the temptation to simply denounce post-modern culture for its "complicity" with the existing order. Our goal instead should be to inhabit the postmodern sensibility as fully as possible, with a view to exposing its fault lines and identifying the forms of collective action which can bring about its demise.

In a valuable final chapter to *The origins of postmodernity*, Anderson examines some of the ways in which Jameson's work has been contested and expanded by subsequent writers. Among his most important critics are British Marxists such as David Harvey (*The condition of post modernity*), Terry Eagleton (*The illusions of postmodernism*) and Alex Callinicos (*Against postmodernism*). Yet Jameson remains the starting point for a non-reductive Marxism which sees the analysis of contemporary culture as an integral part of revolutionary politics. Anderson has done us all a service by imposing a graspable structure on one of the most important theoretical interventions of the late 20th century ●

Philip Bounds

Enriched pit culture

Paul Cox **The Foreigner** Citron Press, £6.99

It says something for the impact of coalmining on British society that the volume of literature is still being added to, despite the current microscopic size of the industry.

This book adds a dramatic contribution to a wealth of historic novels set among the pit communities, deriving their strength from intimate knowledge of pits and pit folk. It adds something new and special, a perspective long absent from the volumes of miners' stories. It deals with the emigrant miners of eastern Europe, the refugees, the political victims and outcasts, continuing their trade in the British mines or being drafted into them.

The book focuses on Milos, a young German boy driven from his native Sudetenland by Czech partisans. He ends up in a foreign work camp to be allocated work by the state employer. The story drifts back and forth through the social divisions of the Nottingham coalfield and the struggles for and against the union in the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time it drifts back and forth through the social and ethnic divisions of Sudetenland. The mixed community belonging and not belonging; then the German occupation: unwelcome liberation which further divided them.

More by supplement than by contrast, we see Milos's attraction to militancy; the reluctant militancy of the Notts coalfield in 1969 and then in the 1970s the flying pick-

ets: "He stood back and watched as small groups of men received their instructions and drove away. Some of them were laughing and joking; most were serious; others looked as though they were a little bit scared. But every one of them more alert than when he saw them at work. There was an atmosphere like that he had witnessed when at school, where boys were together and there is something to do. Only this time he felt part of it and it no longer seemed so cold."

By the advent of the 1984-85 strike the divisions of his entire life, his foreignness, were evident again: "And there was just Milos, and maybe half a dozen others who supported the union and were out on strike. The whole village, just about, was working or supporting those miners who worked." The whole village, it seemed, fought the pickets who came down from Scotland, Yorkshire and Wales.

"He cuilda go away, ye know? Cuilda taken the blood money the Coal Board w's offer'n and gone. In fact after the third vote against I said to 'm, 'Milos, why do you no go hame? The miners dinnae want tae defend their own fack'n industry. An ye know what he said? He said, 'This's hame. There is naewhere else' ..."

This is a great story, brilliantly told. Too close, too real and too poignant to be anything but true, doubtless of a thousand Miloses in a half dozen coalfields ●

Dave Douglass

Juxtaposition

Courtney Pine Band Liverpool Philharmonic

Courtney Pine has been touring with this particular formation for a couple of years now.

Remarkably, Pine appears to be carrying his audience along with him. Those winning saxophone runs are now being fleshed out by spare hip-hop beats and scratches. Some of this success appears to flow from the persona of the man himself. Pine may now be decked out in combat clothing, but he exudes not a hint of arrogance, combining a didactic purpose with a sense of charm and engagement with the crowd.

Before introducing DJ Pogo for a solo slot, Pine recalled the low regard in which the saxophone had been considered at the turn of the 20th century. On the verge of the 21st, the turntable is being disparaged in a similar fashion. Watching Pogo cutting the vocal hook from Eminem's 'My name is' before an audience predominantly composed of middle-aged jazz buffs is one of the more bizarre cultural experiences to be presently had. Stranger still to report that they liked it.

Juxtaposition is clearly the aim of this performance. Hearing Pine's saxophone and Pogo's scratching weaving elegant, improvised, threads around one another heightens our consciousness of both elements considerably. The trick was repeated on a lovely version of Billie Holiday's 'Don't explain', begun in a conventional jazz manner, only to be elaborated further

with some pounding sampled beats.

Attempts at a 'fusion' of jazz with hip-hop ('jazz-rap') in the past have largely foundered on either having to fill a commercial niche or from the fact that a mere 'fusion' of two styles will usually lead to artistic incoherence. Pine's experiment shows that sharp counterposition is a better method of musical composition, in that our awareness of genre and sound is pushed to a higher plateau. Some of the best hip-hop artists have used jazz samples 'unconsciously', in order to augment and expand a syncopated sound. Pine's achievement is to work this revolution consciously.

The Courtney Pine Band also provide a partial solution to our reading of jazz music which has all too often denigrated into naturalism. Jazz has been indelibly associated with the universal themes of human freedom and expression. The incursion of hip-hop onto its cultural space profoundly alters this understanding. Hip-hop places a technical division (the turntable) between 'real' music and the sampled sound, stripping the artistic process of creative mysticism. It is an intensely 'fictive' musical narrative and thus has the unfettered ability to historicise the universalistic impulses of jazz.

For a genuine and hugely entertaining illustration of this process, Courtney Pine deserves nothing but unblemished praise ●

Phil Watson

Dr Who socialism

Delphi replies to Royston Bull, former vice-president of the Socialist Labour Party

Delphi's brain cells, which had begun to heal after reading files of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, have suffered a relapse as a result of Royston Bull's attack (*Weekly Worker* May 6). Now this will be seen by Royston as further confirmation of SLP "philistinism ... backwardness [and] anti-theory" in the face of irrefutable Marxist-Leninist science. In fact it is a result of trying to make sense of a series of propositions strung together in convoluted sentences without any logical argument. This effort is compounded by the subjectivism of Bull's attack which attributes to Delphi positions not actually taken. Bull has got it into his head that Delphi is a "Trot" and a "Fiscite" and therefore knows what Delphi means better than Delphi does.

Delphi has chosen anonymity in order not to be painted into a factional corner and with the hope that the ideas will be treated objectively on their own merit. I must reiterate that I am not, nor ever have been a supporter of "Fisc" (The computer spell-check at this point suggests the word 'fiasco', which also sums up the writer's own view). Nor is Delphi a "Trot", despite an apprenticeship in the WRP at the time Bull was a leading *Workers Press* journalist and devoted Healyite. I reassert that the only label pinned on SLPers by the *Weekly Worker* which is appropriate to Delphi is NUMist and Scargillite - and certainly not a disillusioned one. These terms best encapsulate the historical origin of the SLP and reflect its political character. Delphi is proud to be associated with these positive tendencies in the labour movement. However, they do not adequately express Delphi's Marxism or socialist world view.

Bull begins the attack with what he believes is a damning indictment - Delphi's "anti-Leninism". This, he claims, is expressed in the invention of a "false irreconcilable contradiction" between revolutionary theory and "solidarity action with workers". Since Bull reveals in the first sentence that he has totally misunderstood Delphi's argument, it does not bode well for the remainder of his polemic, which rapidly degenerates into a vitriolic attack on the internal regime of the SLP.

Delphi is not an "anti-Leninist". This implies a total rejection of Lenin and Leninism *in toto*. Instead Delphi believes in a critical reappraisal of Lenin to distinguish which aspects of what Lenin said, wrote and did are relevant to the world today and what is only applicable to circumstances in tsarist Russia. This is not anti-Leninism. Indeed, it is the canonisation of Lenin which is anti-Leninist, reducing Lenin's theory to a set of formulae divorced from the material conditions which gave birth to those ideas.

Delphi has certainly not asserted that there is an "irreconcilable contradiction" between revolutionary theory and workers' struggles. This was the very criticism I aimed at Bull, who has no concept of practical action. Establishing the unity of theory and practice has proved the elusive holy grail of the British left. How do we make socialism appear relevant to working class and other oppressed

people? How do we mobilise people towards its achievement?

Bull actually makes a virtue of his lack of dialogue with working class people in struggle. Delphi's claim that the *EPSR* proposes no practical action other than "evangelising Marxist-Leninist science" is triumphantly greeted with "Absolutely correct ..." Supporting workers in practical ways is dismissed as a pastime for "Trots". The only logic of Bull's position is for socialists to say to those workers in struggle, who request support for demonstrations or pickets, 'Sorry. No. Can't support you. It would only be patronising of us. Get on with it yourself. However, if you want a visiting lecturer on Marxist-Leninist science ... 'If this is not "dumbed-down head-patting", I don't know what is. (In fact I am not sure what dumbing-down really is at all.)

It is Bull's approach which denies a dialectical interaction between theory and practice, between propagating socialist ideas and promoting the struggles of the exploited and oppressed. If he will not take on board what Delphi says about learning from workers and starting from their real life experiences, perhaps he will heed Lenin. Lenin in fact, like a "patronising Trot", "academic" (after all, he was only in direct contact with Russian proletarians for less than five years), actually visited workers and wrote leaflets for them about workplace conditions. Nadezhda Krupskaya describes how in 1894 she went disguised into the workers' barracks of the Thornton worsted factory to gather material for such a leaflet. Lenin himself records grilling a worker on "every aspect" of a factory for one of his exposures of conditions.

"Vladimir Ilyich", Krupskaya remembered, "was interested in the minutest detail describing the conditions and life of the workers. Taking the features separately, he endeavoured to grasp the life of the worker as a whole - he tried to find what one could seize upon in order better to approach the worker with revolutionary propaganda. Most of the intellectuals of those days badly understood the workers ... Vladimir Ilyich read with the workers from Marx's *Capital* and explained it to them. The second half of the studies was devoted to the workers' questions about their work and labour conditions. He showed them how their life was linked with the entire structure of society and told them in what manner the existing order could be transformed. *The combination of theory with practice was the particular feature of Vladimir Ilyich's work in the circles*" (Delphi's emphasis).

Krupskaya continues: "The method of agitation on the basis of the workers' everyday needs became deeply rooted in our Party work" (N Krupskaya *Memories of Lenin* London 1970, p21). Clearly, Lenin did not think it "patronising" to talk to workers about their day-to-day lives and use this as the starting point for revolutionary propaganda and agitation. Lenin well knew that you do not win workers to socialism by declaiming theory, but only by patient work which relates to their practical experience. Bull on the other hand repre-

sents the modern manifestation of those 1890s Russian intellectuals who "badly understood the workers".

Lenin also refutes Bull on what the latter contemptuously dismisses as "single-issue campaigns": that is, responses by particular sections of the population to specific and concrete forms of oppression and exploitation: "The question arises, what should political education consist in? Can it be confined to the propaganda of working class hostility to the autocracy? Of course not. It is not enough *to explain* to the workers that they are politically oppressed (any more than it is *to explain* to them that their interests are antagonistic to the interests of the employers). Agitation must be conducted with regard to every concrete example of this oppression ... Inasmuch as *this* oppression affects the most diverse classes of society, inasmuch as it manifests itself in the most varied spheres of life and activity - vocational, civic, personal, family, religious, scientific, etc, etc ... In order to carry on agitation round concrete instances of oppression, these instances must be exposed (as it is necessary to expose factory abuses in order to carry on economic agitation)" (original emphasis, VI Lenin 'What is to be done' *SW* Vol 1, p135).

He goes on to stress: "Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence and abuse, no matter what class is affected - unless they are trained, moreover, to respond from a social democratic point of view and no other" (*ibid* p145).

He considers the ideal revolutionary to be a "*tribune of the people*", who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects ..." (*ibid* pp153-154).

It could not be any clearer. Revolutionary socialists must respond to those concrete forms of oppression which exist in a modern bourgeois democracy, as Lenin exhorted them to do in absolutist, bureaucratic, semi-feudal Russia. This means if black, gay, disabled, women, Irish, white collar workers, manual workers, tenants, environmentalists, or whoever, are conducting a campaign against some abuse or discrimination, we have a duty to support them in whatever way possible. To intervene in a specific campaign with the belief (even if unuttered) that they are only perpetuating illusions about the reformability of capitalism would be cynical and condescending in the extreme. But of course Bull does not have this problem, because he does not get involved in practical action, preferring to maintain his Olympian superiority wreathed in the pure clouds of Marxist-Leninist science.

As Lenin showed, praxis requires the rigorous analysis of the empirical facts of a situation, whether it is wages and conditions in a factory, or the nature of global imperialism. Where does Bull's Marxist-Leninist theory lead him? Certainly not to the analysis of reality. To qualify as a science, a theory has to be verifiable by experiment and its results have to be reproduceable. Bull tells us that "Marxism-Leninism guided the only successful revolutionary overthrows

of imperialist states [sic] that there have ever been ..." What imperialist state - let alone the plural - has been overthrown? Russia was imperialist in a pre-capitalist sense, but certainly not in Leninist terms of "the highest stage of capitalism".

No imperialist state has been overthrown by Marxism-Leninism - on this planet at least. On the planet Bull is living on perhaps! Of those states which were overthrown the result was not socialism, but the rise of a bureaucratic collectivist class whose historic role was to carry out the rapid industrialisation of previously imperialist-dominated economies. And while these societies had major progressive features and did in some cases form a counter-balance to imperialism, the irrefutable historical fact is they have failed, they have been defeated, they are no more. Despite this, Bull continues to try and nail them back on the perch. To ascribe the collapse of the Stalinist state-bureaucratic societies to "shallow temporary mass opinion in central Europe" is a statement of almost unbelievable fatuousness. Is this pronouncement the result of the application of "Marxist-Leninist science"? Or is it the result of a sclerotic ideology which refuses to recognise reality?

One other notorious example of this inability to keep his feet on political *terra firma* was published in *Socialist News* No13. While Sikorski was sulking in his tent and not issuing statements about developments in Ireland, Bull was handed the opportunity to describe the Good Friday peace agreement as a "national liberation triumph in Ireland... a colossal boost for workers [and] a tremendous victory for the working class". Delphi has always considered Ireland to be the acid test of the British left's understanding of imperialism. The only explanation is Bull was himself 'on acid' when he wrote this bizarre flight of fancy.

Bull reveals himself constantly as an out-and-out idealist, whose reality reflects the unfolding of his own 'absolute idea' - the inevitable and imminent collapse of imperialism and the dawn of socialism. Unfortunately his socialism is not even utopian, but dystopian, as he envisages a nightmare dictatorship of the high-priesthood of the sacred science. It is a cross between Saint-Simonism and the Daleks.

Delphi does not need the BBC (that is, the *Cold War* series, not *Dr Who*) to reveal the true barbaric and repressive nature of Stalinism. Delphi's own rigorous Marxist analysis is sufficient, but fears that the brain cells and the patience of the reader has already been strained too much to elaborate further at this stage.

As almost half of Bull's rant is devoted to attacking the SLP, this issue should also be addressed. But it is enough to say that Bull is being disingenuous in claiming he did not know what the score was when he stood as vice-president. He had no objections to the block vote and voiding of members when it was used to ban the black section and rout the "Trots". And as for the claim that "the *EPSR* rejects factionalising too, then and now" - the palpable sectarian bitterness with which he attacks the supposed "Trot" Delphi and "Mafia-like" Scargillism speaks for itself ●

What we fight for

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

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Shadowing Blair

It is a truism that bullies are really cowards. You could say the same sort of thing about some left groups. Like the lion from *The Wizard of Oz*, plenty of militant tough-talk and bravado. Yet when it comes to real politics and actual practice we see utter timidity.

So it is with the Socialist Workers Party. We have had a shameful display of its cowardice recently when it pulled out of the Socialist Alliance electoral bloc in London. But, as we all know, this desertion of the electoral field was a manifestation of the SWP's current existentialist crisis. Who are we? Why are we here? What is the point?

It could so easily be very different, of course. For all its vastly exaggerated membership, the SWP is by far the largest organisation on the left. If the SWP possessed even a modicum of self-belief it could exercise near total organisational hegemony over the left, and make a significant impact on wider society. But its anti-Blair yapping is fiercer than its bite. The SWP is desperate to be all things to all people.

Take, for example, *Socialist Worker's* approach to the debate over so-called 'institutionalised racism', and in particular its coverage of the London nail bombs. After the Soho explosion we plainly saw the genuine revulsion felt by all sections of society. David Copeland's one-man campaign represented a murderous challenge to the inclusive project of New Labour and official society in general. Hence the neo-Churchillian and eminently successful effort by New Labour politicians to rally the masses around the national flag of anti-racism - and a patriotic defence of the 'British' values of multi-cultural diversity and tolerance.

Naturally, this posed a problem for the SWP - as it does for all the rest of the dogmatic left. Every good leftwinger has known since they were knee-high to a grasshopper that capitalism and the bourgeois state is inherently racist. It is the height of naivety to think anything else. After all, even Sir William Macpherson had to admit to this in his report on the Stephen Lawrence murder. No further thought needed. So how does the SWP explain the anti-racist verities of the ruling class?

The SWP is compelled to argue that the establishment does not really mean it when it denounces racism - it must all be an elaborate ruse. The only leftwing solution is to raise the emotive anti-racist stakes and to assume the moral high ground. In terms of practical propaganda this means that poor old *Socialist Worker* has to try to be even more outraged than the bourgeoisie about the nail bombs and "the Nazis".

The fruits of this futile and ultimately backward task are most apparent in the post-Soho edition of

Socialist Worker. Tailor-made for consumption on the (mainly SWP-led) protests following the bomb, the paper promotes itself as the implacable enemy of "the Nazis" and the hater of all things evil. Politics is reduced to a simple Manichean struggle between "the socialists" and "the Nazis".

Underneath the demo-friendly headline, "Horrific price of Nazi hate", the anonymous author of the back-page article breathlessly states: "Metropolitan police chief Sir Paul Condon and a string of politicians lined up last week to claim they are determined to tackle

would want Britain to model itself on Germany and adopt anti-free speech laws.

Readers would at the same time pick up the idea that official society in general is soft on "the Nazis", if not in actual collusion with them. Thus we are told that "the media has gone along with the idea that there are 'respectable Nazi' organisations like the Nazi BNP who wanted nothing to do with the bombing. Twice last week Radio Four allowed BNP leader John Tyndall to state that the bombs had nothing to do with his organisation."

racist backbone.

As we read in *Socialist Worker*, Tony Blair is pushing through the "racist" Asylum Bill - therefore he cannot be an anti-Nazi. The police? Forget it. We are presented with a quote in the post-Soho *Socialist Worker* from a 1978 edition of the *Police Review*: "The National Front preach 'Britain for the British'. All of their meetings are well run and orderly. NF supporters have been described as the type of person who lives on a decent council estate, or in his own small home which he has saved hard to buy, who

jects Ken Livingstone's recent call in *The Independent* to ban the BNP, writing: "Those who hesitate at the idea of giving police wider powers are right ... If the police had increased powers today they would target groups such as the Nation of Islam and still allow Nazis to get away." Comrade Mahamdallie concludes: "We should not give [the police] ammunition by giving them more powers."

Not such a palatable view, but perfectly correct. Therefore it runs the danger of invoking hostility. Even debate, god forbid.

However, consistency is not the SWP's game. In the following issue of *Socialist Worker* (May 15) comrade Mahamdallie has retreated from this principled position into anti-democratism. The comrade celebrates "the anti-racist mood that has swept the country in the wake of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry" - failing to add that this "anti-racist mood" has been initiated and encouraged by the New Labourites and their followers in the media.

Comrade Mahamdallie goes on to state: "In truth the politicians, local and national, missed a brilliant opportunity when they allowed the anti-Nazi mood to slip by unorganised. For instead of taking advantage of the inspiring solidarity they acted to limit the response." Evidence? The fact that "postal workers are to be forced to shove 15 million Nazi Euro election leaflets through letter boxes next month", and that "the Nazis are to be allowed to pollute our screens with a free TV broadcast". And the fact that the editor of *The Guardian* "gave letter space to BNP 'publicity officer' Michael Newland last week", where he "was allowed to state unchallenged that the BNP condemned the bombs".

It is alarming to think that the SWP does not believe that *The Guardian* should give "letter space" to fringe groups - such as the SWP? It is also fascinating to discover that our TV screens are not already 'polluted' by the election broadcasts of New Labour, the Tories, the Liberal Democrats and the UK Independence Party, etc, nor by mass consumer advertising.

Naturally, it may seem like a smart move to tail spontaneous liberal anti-racist/fascist sentiment. But the truth is that today the bourgeois class regard the fascist and neo-Nazi fringe as an utterly alien and unpatriotic excrescence: an unpleasant fly in its anti-racist ointment. Having no Marxist programme, the SWP clumsily attempts to act as official anti-racism's left conscience - the conscience of the bourgeoisie.

The SWP, and the left as a whole, needs to wake up from its intellectual slumber - and soon. It must stop shadowing the bourgeoisie over 'institutionalised racism' and "the Nazis". Our class needs proletarian, not bourgeois anti-racism ●

Comrade Hassan Mahamdallie re-

Eddie Ford



Taking to the streets, but disarmed by dogma

the Nazis. But why, then, do the authorities continue to insist that postal workers deliver Nazi election leaflets? Why do they continue to insist the Nazis have a right to election broadcasts like every other political party? Above all, why do the police continue to protect Nazi demonstrations? Why have hundreds been arrested for trying to stop the Nazis from marching and putting out their disgusting propaganda in recent years? The Nazis deserve only one thing - to be driven from every workplace and community across the country" (May 6).

The ineluctable inference from this passage is that the bourgeois state should crack down on "the Nazis". Perhaps ban the British National Party. A message that many who took part in the protests would want to hear. The implication is further reinforced by an examination of pages 14 and 15. Many looking at the contents of these two very excited pages would come away with the distinct impression that the SWP would not oppose the state's (anti-democratic) banning of the BNP - or at least the abolition of its right to have a free TV broadcast. Perhaps readers would also think that the SWP

The article sententiously adds: "Violence and hatred are part of the history of all the Nazi parties in Britain."

I do not know which Radio Four presenters *Socialist Worker* writers listen to, but the BBC of the real world heaps nothing but condemnation and odium onto the heads of the BNP. The organisation is held up to ridicule on the very few occasions it is allowed time on the bourgeoisie's precious media. In other words, *Socialist Worker* is cynically painting a false picture.

It is instructive how the SWP tries to find the BNP guilty (by association) of placing the London nail bombs. It wants to implant the subliminal notion that the BNP are in reality responsible - even if this is so obviously not the case. Message: the BNP is allowed to appear on Radio Four and the post office distributes its election material. Ergo the BBC and the post office - not to mention the bourgeois state as a whole - must be 'institutionally racist'. Result: left dogma has been salvaged and its shibboleths protected. At the very least - for the left - official society has to be castigated for having no anti-

sees coloured people taking over the area in which he lives." Presumably this matter-of-fact summary from 20 years ago is meant to act as conclusive proof that the police were and are 'institutionally racist', if not pro-NF/BNP.

This leads on to the most pressing and urgent political question. Does the SWP think that the "racist" and pro-NF/BNP police force - and the bourgeois state - should accrue more powers in order to suppress "the Nazis"? That could be problematic, to put it mildly. Racists persecuting racists?

In fact *Socialist Worker* does not like the idea of the bourgeois state assuming more draconian powers. After all, the SWP is formally committed to revolution and socialism. So it is against any anti-BNP ban ... sort of. The truth is that the SWP does not want to alienate liberal and reformist opinion. It loves to imagine that *Socialist Worker* articulates such thoughts and takes them on to Cliffite conclusions. Stuck in an awkward situation, the SWP pulls a fast one and gives another angle ... on page eight of the same issue.