

# Riot no answer

## Anarchist protest struck a chord - with bourgeois liberals

Last Friday's 'Carnival against capitalism' riot in the City of London received almost sympathetic coverage in sections of the bourgeois press.

*The Observer*, for example, introduced its feature recalling the events of two days earlier in the following way: "Recruited through an obscure website, organised in cells, the eco-warriors without a chief have redefined anarchy" (June 20). Quite a claim for what was, after all, an event involving no more than 3,000 disparate individuals.

The author of the piece went on in scarcely veiled admiration: "Baffled police were yesterday grappling with a new phenomenon - the stealth protest." The "beauty of the operation", according to our breathless friend, was the fact that the leaders could not be identified, and the unannounced tactics on the day caused the authorities to be "taken by surprise". Through using the internet, the coordinators of the demonstration were able not only to retain their anonymity, but also to avoid any hint of cooperation with the police - a refusal which home secretary Jack Straw condemned as "wholly irresponsible".

The 'J18' (June 18 - the date of the event) website had published maps of the City, highlighting banks and other financial and legal institutions, which allowed protesters to "pick a site, picket and occupy". It was, concluded *The Observer*, "a brilliant strategy". Publicising the event anonymously using the latest information and communication technology was certainly innovative, but the handful of coordinators can hardly be said to have "redefined anarchy" in doing so.

The protest brought together campaigners against 'third world' debt, anti-arms pacifists, anti-GMO greens, the anti-car cyclists of Reclaim the Streets and anti-capitalist anarchists. Coinciding with the G7 summit in Cologne, the morning began good-naturedly with demonstrators in the City enjoying a 'carnival' atmosphere at this stage.

However, by mid-afternoon over 1,000 of the most single-minded participants were causing havoc in the City through partly coordinated, mostly spontaneous acts of vandalism directed against the symbols of capitalism, including banks, plush restaurants and expensive cars (although McDonalds and more humble vehicles were also damaged). A major confrontation occurred at the premises of the London International Finance, Futures and Options Exchange - a centre of global speculation - where protesters smashed

down the doors before eventually being repelled by police and security guards.

Pitched battles ensued, at times causing the police to beat a rapid retreat as their vans were attacked. There was a mood of abandoned celebration combined with audacious aggression - some of it enhanced by alcohol. There were repeated charges by mounted and foot police, using batons and backed up with water canons, and more than 50 demonstrators were taken to hospital. They included a woman who was run over by a police van which, moments before, she had been attempting to halt with a well timed, sandalled kick. There was severe disruption to public transport.

While some City types hid behind barricades, others, from the safety of the upper floors, shouted insults and taunted the demonstrators, flaunting the vulgar accoutrements of rat race wealth - Rolex watches, gold jewellery and exclusive credit cards. One buffoon took great delight in tearing up five-pound notes and scattering the pieces amongst the rioters below.

Others combined arrogance with hatred: "I loathe these people," one snob said, "but we must try to be cheerful. Yesterday I was at Royal Ascot and today I was at a riot. It's all part of the fun of working in the City."

Ironically, despite the rebellious violence and apparently irreconcilable opposition shown by the demonstrators towards capitalism, many of the causes they espouse are what passes for common sense amongst middle class liberals. Calls to cancel 'third world' debt, fear of unrestrained currency speculation, environmental catastrophe and Frankenstein foods even find an echo amongst conservative traditionalists. Apart from expressing grudging admiration at the protesters' use of the internet, some leading figures also recognised this contradiction.

The lord mayor of London, Peter Levine, was not untypical. He summed up the official ambivalence when he said: "These people, many with sincere points to make, allied themselves to a mob. The whole point they were trying to make has been lost." Well, not quite. Even *The Daily Telegraph*, which can always be relied upon for an open, straightforward defence of naked capitalism, commented: "The concerns of some of these groups are shared by many people who would not dream of subscribing to their terrorist tactics" (June 19).

However, the *Telegraph* editorial argued, "Those taking part in this demonstration, whether criminal or



The 'Carnival' protesters were not lacking in courage, but a programme for liberation

orderly, are the beneficiaries of capitalism. The bicycles of Reclaim the Streets and Critical Mass which are used to obstruct ordinary traffic are its products; the education of, and welfare payments to, yesterday's protesters are funded by it." A banal truism. But what the *Telegraph* refuses to recognise is that Thatcherite capitalism disgusted millions and created a permanent or semi-permanent mass completely alienated from, and often existing outside, the normal workings of the system. The young unemployed, the under-25s denied housing, the street dwellers, those in receipt of 'care in the community', the travellers, those who reject the soulless nine-to-five world, those who have embraced 'new age' romanticism constitute an embittered social stratum.

The *Telegraph* editorial would have it that "Bankers, traders and stockbrokers are the real working class - the drop-outs and activists obstructing them are all too often drawn from the middle classes."

That is of course a mixture of half-lie and blatant falsehood. Yes, banking institutions are necessary for capitalist production, but, as every Marxist knows, the *Telegraph's* "real working class" in the City perform labour which is entirely unproductive. All profits made by banking capital have a parasitical element about them - not least their vampire-like bleeding white of the 'third world' through onerous debt repayments.

However, the leader-writer has a point about last week's protesters. Drop-outs come from all classes, including the middle classes. Such a declassed social stratum can occasionally be pulled together in order to lash out in spontaneous frustration, but it can never overturn the state, let alone positively supersede the system. It is the product of decay under capitalism, not the bearer of a higher social order.

*The Observer* interviewed some of the rioters the following day. "I'm never going to forget yesterday," said one, as he proudly displayed the half-burnt jacket of a policeman who had abandoned it after it was set alight. His partner claimed that, despite the fact that "no-one is in charge", the methods of anarchism could succeed. She added: "There is no point in fighting little battles across the country. We have to be more ambitious, and attack the system itself." Like their hatred of capitalism and willingness to fight, such sentiments are admirable. Indeed many on the left who, unlike them, claim to be Marxists would actually do well to note that statement - if they could drag themselves away from their localist and economic concerns.

But of course last Friday's rioters have no sustainable or rational answers when it comes to what can and must replace the system of capitalist production. Assaults on symbols represent not the slightest threat to

the bourgeois order. Undisciplined and random destruction is an act of *revenge* against the alienation and inhumanity of capitalism, but it ignores the necessary and unavoidable task of making the working class into a ruling class - only this class can positively overthrow capitalism and liberate humanity.

In fact the problem with anarchist theory - although most anarchists are ignorant of it - is that it wants to destroy not just the capitalist state, but all attempts at a democratic working class alternative. As *The Daily Telegraph* pointed out, "Its supporters like to define anarchy as a harmonious condition of society, in which government is abolished as unnecessary." In opposition to last week's violent 'carnival', which the *Telegraph* claimed was an "exercise in oppression" - anarchy's true face - the paper stated that "capitalism is the embodiment of ... freedom".

Like the anarchists we know that such "freedom" is the freedom of a tiny minority. The vast majority are wage slaves. But, unlike the anarchists, we also know that all forms of "government" cannot instantly be "abolished". The working class semistate must continue until the exploiters - old or new - are permanently done away with and classes themselves have disappeared. Only then will the state wither away - the original meaning of anarchy ●

Alan Fox



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

# Party notes

## Hammer and tongs

With just one week of campaigning before the official end of this year's Summer Offensive, we stand at just under £10,000 towards our £25,000 target. We are confident that all comrades will meet the pledges they made at the beginning of May towards this annual two-month fundraising campaign. But this would only take us to £15,000 or so - still £10,000 shy of our overall target.

Bridging this shortfall will require a real gutsy effort on the last lap of the campaign. If comrades have money for the campaign, bang it into Centre as soon as possible so we can get an idea of where we stand and what still needs to be raised. Clearly however, we need to go at the task hammer and tongs to get near our collective target.

It is worthwhile thinking about this year's Offensive. Setting it in context of both our ongoing political work and other year's campaigns will tell us something about where our organisation stands in relation to its central task - reforging the Communist Party.

First, on continuity and maintenance.

For a number of years - in contrast to the blindly upbeat perspectives of groups like the Socialist Party in England and Wales or the Socialist Workers Party - we have underlined the reactionary nature of this period. Inevitably, this period has placed pressures on our organisation as we have struggled to make political headway. Thus, we have emphasised the collective task of continuity and maintenance in our organisation.

Of course, this does not mean that we are reduced to passivity, to simply tending a museum of the past organisational and political achievements of the Party. We can be justly proud of the fact that our group continues to act dynamically, to have a relatively impressive ability to put its politics into action. In fact, this is an important element of the 'continuity' we seek. Despite some hard times, there has been no appreciable dilution in the level of our politics or ability to intervene. Around the project of reforging the Party we have built a small core of seasoned cadre who are able to take the stresses and strains of the SO in their stride.

Second, there is the character of this year's campaign.

In a sense, there has been a certain reversion to features of the earlier Offensives. Essentially, most comrades have raised their targets through belt-tightening, altering patterns of personal consumption or just taking on more shifts at work. While this has meant that the SO has ticked along competently enough, the problem has been that comrades have to absent themselves from the Party and explicitly political work to achieve their personal targets. This is not a feature to get too worried about, but it not something to be pleased about either.

The SOs are always a measure of the level and intensity of the broader activity of the organisation. The scope of this has shrunk along with the movement we operate in. We therefore have a certain contradiction. We have never been more effective as a political trend: our press has never been more widely read or influential. The pond we are in, however, is contracting.

Third, there is the character of our periphery.

The SO and recent political campaigns suggest we have the glimmerings of an organisational breakthrough in terms of a sympathetic and *activated* periphery. The general level of donations we receive - day to day as well during the Summer Offensive - has improved considerably. Go back three years and our readership - while relatively big and well informed - was almost universally hostile. Today, it is clear that we have managed to take some of these comrades - often activists - with us through our political work towards similar sorts of conclusions. The variety of political sources of the donations to this year's SO reflects the reality that our arguments on Party, programme and the solutions to the crisis of the left are gaining some ground.

Fourth, the handling of our periphery is improving. The perennial problem of integrating newer comrades into high levels of Party work - especially when there have been few 'conventional' campaigning outlets for us - has certainly not gone away. However, we show some signs of getting on top of the problem rather than the other way around.

The leadership and Party cells should use any respite at the end of this year's Summer Offensive to conduct a thoroughgoing review of our organisation, its culture and methods of work. It is clear that, as the crisis of the rest of the left deepens, we are faced with the task of building *this* organisation as the positive solution. This implies no sect-narrowness, no self-serving political myopia. We remain committed to building an inclusive part of the class, not another sterile mono-idea sect. But without giving our political and theoretical answers more solid and viable organisational form, that solution will be nothing but an abstraction.

The celebratory meal to mark the end of the Offensive - entertainingly dubbed "the Offensive meal" in previous years' publicity - is scheduled for Saturday July 10. Please contact Centre as soon as possible as places are limited ●

**Mark Fischer**  
national organiser

## Kautskyite

In my remarks about Lenin and Kautsky (*Weekly Worker* June 10), I made the important point, which was accidentally edited out, that Lenin returned to Hegel in 1914. In some important respects of methodology and dialectics Lenin could not return to Marx. Many of the writings which are today crucial for establishing Marxist method were deliberately locked up in the vaults of German social democracy. For instance the *Economic and philosophical notebooks* and the *Grundrisse*, the notebooks for capital, were not available to Lenin.

When Lenin read Hegel's *Great logic* in the Bern Library it was a theoretical inspiration. He was not exaggerating when he said Marxists (including himself) had not understood Marx because they had failed to understand Hegel. In the context of my polemic, Lenin was able to develop the points made by Pannekoek in his debate with Kautsky in 1911. Pannekoek, on the left of German social democracy, had broken through the theoretical framework of German social democracy by arguing that a new type of workers' state was needed. Kautsky had a revisionist position on the state. Lenin did not understand this until 1914. He did not support the left against Kautsky, who he regarded as the chief revolutionary of German social democracy.

Kautsky's perspective on Russia in 1906 were at one with his orthodox view of the state. There would be a long period of uninterrupted revolution - or what he described on a number of occasions as permanent revolution. By this he meant the democratic transformation of the capitalist state and the working class. Lenin cited Kautsky's views as authority for his slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry (see VI Lenin *CW* Vol 11, Moscow 1972, p411).

Pannekoek's main point against Kautsky was that he made a cult of formal structures. In modern terms we can understand this point by looking at the RDG's concept of the dual power republic or the CPGB's slogan of the federal republic. If *The Observer* calls for the federal republic, that's bourgeois, but if the CPGB calls for it, it becomes proletarian. The political form can be bourgeois or proletarian. This is the method of Kautsky.

**Barry Biddulph**  
South London

## Hearts and minds

I think Dave Norman reads the *Weekly Worker* looking in the mirror, because everything I say comes out subtly reversed (Letters, June 10). I am not calling on Nato to arm the Kosovars. I am calling on the working class - including those living in Yugoslavia - to support the Kosovars' right to arm themselves - from wherever they can - so they have the option of following policies independent of Nato.

Dave wishes to force the Albanians into the Nato camp. They are not members of Nato and have a different agenda, which includes democratic demands such as the right for self-determination and the ability to live in their own homes in safety. The working class needs to champion all democratic and human rights, not the interests of petty, anti-human dictators who just happen to upset the world order.

Revolutionary politics is the battle for the hearts and minds of people, not a matter of military alliances with states.

**Phil Kent**  
London

## Done a bunk

On Monday the staff who work for Light-house Services, the firm providing catering services on Northern Spirit Transpennine Express trains found the offices padlocked shut along with all the onboard trolleys. They then discovered that the firm that had only just got the contract three months ago - having taken it away from the old ex-BR firm Rail Gourmet, along with the offices, equipment and

staff - had gone bust and had filed for bankruptcy. The managing directors had done a bunk from their Leeds offices over the weekend.

The staff have been left without any wages and are out of work. They have been told they will have to register with the receiver as creditors with little hope of recovering what is owed. Northern Spirit has washed its hands of them and has put the contract back out to tender. No doubt another fly-by-night company will take it up, having reduced the already pathetic pay and conditions of its staff.

This of course is the brave new world of rail privatisation and is in the full spirit of Labour's new love of flexible working practices. Also in the spirit of Labour Party practice it is rumoured that one of the top managers of Northern Spirit is a 'silent' partner in Lighthouse. Now surely that had nothing to do with them getting the contract in the first place?

**Aslef member**  
Chesterfield

## Courts and juries

John Walsh's article 'Defend the jury' (*Weekly Worker* May 27 1999) was all well and good in some respects. Most of the questions that comrade Walsh raises, however, will have to be dealt with at greater length later. But a few points should be made now.

Trial by jury in the crown court is mandatory for the most serious offences, including murder, rape and arson. Some offences of moderate seriousness can be dealt with in the magistrates' court, which anyway processes all cases in the first instance. At the moment, defendants can decide to take their case to the crown court, but are only permitted to be tried in a magistrates' court if the magistrates think their powers of punishment (a maximum of six months' imprisonment) following a guilty verdict would be sufficient. So a defendant might want to keep his or her case in the lower court for very good reason (viz, to limit a custodial sentence or where a local bench has a liberal reputation compared to the crown court). Home secretary Jack Straw is proposing to remove the defendant's right of election of trial at the crown court for those moderately serious cases.

Unfortunately for comrade Walsh - who claims that "the CPGB in ... its draft programme, has declared in favour of the jury system" - in our party's *Draft programme* there is no mention of juries or jury trials whatsoever. Although there were extensive discussions before it was produced, including on the criminal justice system, the *Draft programme* itself deals with Britain's criminal justice system only briefly, and then is mostly concerned with demands concerning prisons and prisoners. Its only reference to the criminal courts appears within subsection 3.15 (Crime and prison), where it states: "Crime can only be understood in relationship to society. In a class society crime is the product of alienation, want, or resistance. Under capitalism the criminal [justice] system is an anti-working class, anti-popular system." The subsection then makes, in its first two points only, demands relating to the courts:

"Against this communists demand: 1. All judges and magistrates be subject to election and recall. 2. Fines must be proportionate to income."

At the moment, the vast majority (over 95%) of criminal cases are dealt with by magistrates' courts. Were they all to be dealt with by a jury system, therefore, and the current level of cases proceeded with on that basis, something like a 10- or 11-fold increase in persons called for jury service would be required. Most comments I hear from past jurors suggest this might be a social duty many are not too convinced about.

Our minimum programme demands concerning the criminal justice system are at present too sketchy and require a good deal more discussion.

**Tom Ball**  
London

## Machiavellian

I wish to congratulate the CPGB for its courageous decision to stand candidates in the Euro elections. This bold action has shown up the rest of the so-called revolutionary Marxist left as just a lot of hot air. I am however concerned at the apparent 'modernisation' that has taken place with the organisation. I noticed that:

● The 'vote Weekly Worker' stickers around Rochdale had the hammer and sickle symbol missing.

● The *Weekly Worker* no longer has the legend 'paper of the CPGB' on its masthead.

● The newly revamped website has dropped the photos of Marx and Lenin.

I notice from reading the 'quality' papers that Peter Mandelson, that arch moderniser and Machiavellian spin doctor, is back at work after a forced absence. I have to pose the question, working for whom? - the Labour Party or the CPGB!

**Michael Farmer**  
Rochdale

## Stink bombs

It is with great interest that I read the report concerning the CPGB's debate over electoral support for the SLP (*Weekly Worker* June 17). It is however incumbent on us to understand the causes of this dispute.

We should not be surprised that a 'minority' of comrades have expressed themselves against Mark Fischer's correct formulation of "extremely critical support" for the SLP. Scargill's party still has an organic relationship to the crisis of Labourism. Ideologically and organisationally brittle the SLP may have become, but Scargill is still in a position to dictate to the poor, 'unviable' souls of the revolutionary left and hence define the contours of any short-term working class opposition to Blairism. Why then do our comrades come out with such a peculiar position?

The answer is a simple one. This tactic of not offering electoral support to the SLP is a direct reflection of the muddle-headed hysteria which the *Weekly Worker* has on occasions recently woven around the SLP. For example, Scargill's outfit has been dubbed 'Pol-Potist'. Obviously comrades might be a bit reticent to advocate a vote for a mass murderer, particularly if they are fond of wearing spectacles.

This current bout of sixth-form provocation has built itself on a similar wave of revulsion that leading comrades succeeded in whipping up against the Soviet Union, Cuba, etc last year. Again, our friends in the 'minority' may have understandable misgivings about voting for a party that defends the evil slave-masters of the USSR. Yes, we can all be critical of Harpal Brar's adulation of Stalin, but his position on the Labour Party puts those of many Trotskyites to shame.

The blunt fact of the matter is that a disorientated, one-sided analysis is in the end a recipe for the confused and emotional politics that comrades are currently expressing on Scargill and the SLP. Certain *Weekly Worker* writers really ought to content themselves with stink bombs and fart spray.

**William Phillips**  
Liverpool

## Curious

I am curious as to why you have opened a debate with the AWL? Of all the groups they have to be one of the most degenerate, re their position on Ireland, etc. It seems a bit strange for you to approach that particular grouping for discussions when in practice you seem to work closer with groups such as Workers Power, etc.

Still your paper is informative.

**Damien Green**  
London

Balkans war

# Calling the tune

**M**ilosevic must go. That is Nato's unequivocal message to the Serbian people. So long as the president remains in office, no money will be forthcoming for the reconstruction of Serbia's shattered economy. Demanding that people remove their elected government and backing up this call with what amounts to economic blackmail represents a significant development for the New World Order and its imposition of *pax Americana* around the globe.

From Blair, the message came in the form of a repulsively sanctimonious sermon, which just stopped short of accusing the entire Serb population of complicity in the crimes of Milosevic's army and special services: "Let no one think that Serbia can regain a place among the civilised nations while it is led by an indicted war criminal." The Serbs have a "responsibility to make sure they send a clear message to their own government and their own regime" (*The Times* June 22). Clinton was more laconic: "I don't think we should help. Not a bit, not a penny" (*ibid*). He has no need to worry. If recent reports are correct, it will be the European Union that must pay the lion's share of the costs of Nato's war and the ensuing peace.

The political pressure on Milosevic is already considerable and set to intensify. Serbian opposition groups have formed an umbrella organisation - Alliance for Change - that has begun a campaign for early elections. As their spokesman, Milan Protic, put it, "There will be no money, there are three million jobless people, there is a flow of Kosovo Serb refugees, and there is internal discontent within the security forces over yet another lost war. The ballot box is the only peaceful way out of all that" (*The Independent* June 22).

For Milosevic, the 50,000 Serb refugees who fled Kosova in the days immediately after the end of the war are a particular embarrassment. They give the lie to his specious claims of a Serb 'victory' and have hence been treated like pariahs, and dubbed *pobegulje* ('deserters'). At the weekend around 2,000 were forced back over the border on orders from Belgrade. An anti-Milosevic demonstration in Belgrade by some 200 Serb refugees on June 21 was dispersed by the police. Social unrest among the refugees, as well as among the unemployed and disaffected elements in the military, looks likely to grow. However, even if Milosevic is unseated by elections, there is no guarantee that his successor will be acceptable to the imperialists. Vuk Draskovic has the makings of a pliable imperialist client, but he is unpredictable, to say the least. Vojislav Seselj is even more of a pathological national chauvinist than Milosevic

.....  
 "With Milosevic in a very precarious position, Nato has high hopes of seeing a more amenable regime installed"  
 .....

himself. Nevertheless, with Milosevic in a very precarious position, Nato has high hopes of seeing a more amenable regime installed.

In Kosova too, things appear to be going imperialism's way. Nato governments and their compliant hacks in the bourgeois press are crowing about the fact that Hashim Thaci, leader of the KLA, and his chief of staff, general Agim Thecu, have agreed to the disarmament and demilitarisation of the KLA over the next 90 days. This is portrayed as yet another Nato victory, but the truth is more complex. The KLA's *de facto* role as Kosova's army and police force is to be regularised: newly civilianised KLA fighters will join the police force in large numbers. In addition, the agreement formally accepts the "formation of an army in Kosova along the lines of the US National Guard ... as part of a political process designed to determine Kosova's future status" (*The Independent* June 22). The force will consist of some 4,000 regulars, plus reservists. Thaci has thus already achieved one of the KLA's main stated objectives - the creation of a Kosovar army.

The political future of Kosova remains as nebulous as ever. James Rubin, the US state department envoy who played a key role in brokering the KLA agreement, and who was in touch with Thaci throughout the war, told reporters that "we do not support independence for Kosova and Mr Thaci knows this, but nor are we here to take anybody's dreams away" (*The Daily Telegraph* June 22). Make of this Delphic utterance what you will, but UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, was more explicit in stating that the UN's administration of Kosova would last "at least several years" and that the future status of the territory will be "neither independence nor partition, but autonomy" (*The Times* June 22). In the present context, "autonomy" can only mean that the imperialists intend, as they always have done, that Kosova should formally remain part of the Yugoslav Republic. This represents no viable long-term solution. At some stage elections must be held, and their outcome looks pretty certain: a democratically elected KLA government with a mandate to pursue the Kosovars' aspirations to independent statehood.

With the war over, it is time to reflect on how the British left acquitted

itself. The picture is not a happy one. Nato's offensive against Serbia confirmed the existence of a profound theoretical crisis. With a few honourable exceptions, many on the left, while correctly condemning the imperialists' air war, were either unwilling or unable to recognise the absolute centrality of the *democratic* question raised by Kosova's demand for self-determination and independence.

The CPB, NCP and SLP, the Spartacists and the IBT were all locked into a necrophiliac attachment to an 'official communist' world view that is long gone and discredited. Their blind and stubborn allegiance to this view obliged them to support, in the regime of Slobodan Milosevic, a government that is mired in a deeply reactionary national chauvinism totally alien to Marxism. By default, these groups also became apologists for Belgrade's reign of terror in Kosova.

As the largest group on the left, the SWP had a particular responsibility, which it failed miserably to discharge. Instead of a principled, Marxist approach to the democratic question, in *Socialist Worker* we got page after page of warmed-up bourgeois pacifism disguising itself as theory. Word has it that comrade Alex Callinicos, who in April denounced support for the Kosovars and the KLA, recently spoke in favour of Kosovar self-determination. If this is true, then we welcome the comrade's belated conversion. Better late than never, but we have yet to see any reflection of this new view in the SWP's paper. Its special issue devoted to the war (June 12) contained one short article about Kosova, which merely reported that the Kosovars' hopes for independence looked like being dashed. There was no demand, no slogan formulated around the democratic right of the Kosovars to authentic, independent statehood. So what is the

SWP's position on the question - does anyone know?

The Socialist Party in England and Wales - a group in the advanced stages of theoretical and organisational meltdown - at least recognised the Kosovars' claims, but it did so in a purely formal, abstract way, acknowledging it merely in principle, but staking everything, as usual, on maximalist calls for the establishment of *socialist* republics in Kosova and throughout the Balkans.

Again and again we must come back to democracy, which for communists and revolutionary socialists has historically been the area where there has been the greatest divergence between theory and practice, words and deeds. Without democracy, the truth perishes. The result is not just a crisis of theory but one of morality. How, for example, will our comrades, the 'Yugoslav defencists', approach the question of wide-scale Serb atrocities during the war, crimes for which there is abundant and growing evidence? If they have the guts to tackle the question at all - which we doubt - they will almost certainly attempt to draw an equation between Milosevic's armed forces and the KLA, along the lines of 'the Serbs may have carried out killings, but the KLA are just as bad'.

It may well be that the Kosovars achieve their independence, but on the imperialists' terms. No doubt the Yugoslav apologists will then claim to have been right all along - that the KLA was nothing but a tool of imperialism all along. However, the possibility remains that an imposed settlement will not succeed in meeting the Kosovars' aspirations, in which case the KLA, or a split from it, could well take up arms again - this time against Nato 'peacekeepers'.

Either way, we support the right of Kosova to independence and, crucially, its right to fight for it - against Milosevic or against imperialism. ●  
**Michael Malkin**

## action

### ■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday June 27, 5pm - 'Anatomy of the proletariat', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's Theory of revolution* Vol 2 as a study guide.

Sunday July 4, 5pm - 'The reformulation of Marxist crisis theory in the 1970s', using Simon Clarke's *Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide. Call 0181-459 7146 details.

Manchester: Monday July 5, 7.30pm - 'The falling rate of profit and the tendency to crisis' in the series on theories of crisis  
 E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.

### ■ Party wills

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

### ■ Socialist Alliance (London region)

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

### ■ Greenwich Socialist Alliance

Public meeting - 'Socialism at the millennium'. Charlton House, Charlton village, London SE7, Monday June 28, 7.30pm. Speaker: Onay Kasab (Socialist Party). All welcome.

### ■ Support Tameside careworkers

Support Group meets every Monday, 7pm, at the Station pub, Warrington Street, Ashton under Lyne. Donations and solidarity to Tameside Strike Support (Hardship) Fund, 15 Springvale Close, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancs.

### ■ Defend Public Services

Conference - Saturday July 10, 11am - 4pm, Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester.

Called by the six Tameside sacked careworkers who stood in the local election as 'Defend Public Services'. Cost: unwaged/unemployed £1; waged £3; delegates £5. Disability access.

For details and to book creche places (by July 3 please) contact: Margaret Manning (0161-861 8390), Martin Ralph (0161-707 1584), Liz Taylor (tel/fax 0161-339 2467).

### ■ Human rights

Independence Day rally outside the US embassy - 12 noon, Sunday July 4, Grosvenor Square, London W1 (nearest tube Bond Street).

Event Sponsors: Chile Committee Against Impunity (El Piquete de Londres).

For more details contact Andy Higginbottom of the International Committee against Disappearances on 0181-801 4113.

### ■ Glasgow Marxist Forum

Public meeting, Wednesday June 30, 7.30pm - 'What kind of organisation for the left?'

Patrick Burgh Halls. All welcome. Speaker: Dave Spencer (Coventry Socialist Alliance)

### ■ Just peace

Consequences of peace in the Balkans - international conference, Saturday June 26, 10am - 5pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by the Committee for Peace in the Balkans.

Speakers: Tony Benn MP and Alice Mahon MP, with speakers from the international anti-war movement.

## Communist University '99

A full week of debate, argument and political controversy at the CPGB's annual school  
 Saturday July 31 to  
 Saturday August 7

Sessions and speakers include: **Jack Conrad** on the politics of the Balkans war \* **István Mészáros** on communism \* **Bob Pitt** on supporting the Labour Party under Blairism \* **Sean Matgamna** of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty on the USSR and the doctrine of class \* the **Green Party** on saving the world \* **Peter Tatchell** and former SLP vice-president **Royston Bull** on single-issue campaigns \* **Hillel Ticktin** on the decline of capitalism \* **Phil Sharpe** on Marxism and prediction \* **Cymru Goch** on the Welsh road to socialism \* **Mark Fischer** on the fragmentation of Yugoslavia \* **Dave Craig** on the bourgeois revolution \* **Marion Haldane** on GMOs \* **Peter Manson** on 'institutional racism' \* **Dave Osler** on Scargillism \* **Michael Malkin** on Livingstoneism

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

## Website

Our newly revamped website carries a comprehensive archive section including extensive background reports on the SLP's degeneration.  
[www.duntone.demon.co.uk/CPGB/](http://www.duntone.demon.co.uk/CPGB/)

**“The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language ...”** (K Marx *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*).

It is with great regret that we produce this document. We all joined the SLP because we believed it was a party of a new type, led by the most principled and astute British working class leader since the General Strike, unfettered by any dogma and open to new ideas and influences, which made the building of a mass socialist party viable.

While we have been aware that factions were active in the party and that sectarian disputes were taking place, we thought that the worst of those had been resolved by the 1997 congress. It is with great concern therefore that we have seen events unravel both before and as a result of the 1998 special congress. Hitherto we have avoided any involvement in internal polemics, considering such activity diversionary and divisive. But we now find that we have left the field open to the spread of opinions which we regard with abhorrence, and consider to be entirely at variance with the SLP we joined. We believe that the growth of undisguised Stalinist elements in the party constitutes the greatest threat to the future of the SLP and must be challenged.

The character of the SLP has been clearly defined in the constitution, the founding policy statements, the election manifesto and numerous speeches by comrade Arthur Scargill. It is a party which aims “to abolish capitalism and replace it with a socialist system” (clause IV (3)), not by simply proclaiming ourselves as a revolutionary party and exhorting people to join, but by striving for the implementation of a practical, detailed programme of reforms to transform the lot of workers and other oppressed people. We pursue this policy not only via the electoral system, but, as far as our resources allow, by supporting in a non-sectarian way all workers and other oppressed and discontented people who come into conflict with the capitalist system as it affects their lives.

The establishment of the SLP was greeted with enthusiasm and interest by thousands of people because it promised something entirely new. It represented, in the words of comrade Scargill, “the birth of a new idea”. A break from the old, tired out, dull, unimaginative and failed left. A left which had generally shown itself unresponsive to the needs of working people and to the impact of profound social, economic, political and cultural changes, which have accompanied the victories of the new right’s neo-liberal global agenda. A left which has failed to take on board the rate of unprecedented technological and environmental changes over the past generation. A left whose universe - whether founded on Labourite reformism, sycophantic adulation of Stalinist states, or Fourth Internationalist attempts to resurrect an idealised and obsolete version of Bolshevism - has been shaken to its roots by recent history.

Only those with no grasp of history, no empathy with people’s real daily lives, or understanding of what is happening to the world as a whole, can continue to pursue socialism along roads which, at best, have proved barren cul-de-sacs and, at worst, have been washed out by

# Fisc manifesto

This document, sent anonymously to the *Weekly Worker*, is said to have been adopted by an SLP branch and sent to the NEC for discussion. It has all the hallmarks of the politics of Arthur Scargill’s former courtiers-in-chief, the Fourth International Supporters Caucus, most of whom have now left the party. The comrades call for the banning of “controversial” material - except, of course, their own

blood. But, instead of reappraisal and criticism, some have only clung more desperately to their discredited beliefs, like sacrificial victims embracing totemic idols. They continue to mechanically impose on reality the dead dogma of a past era. Consequently, outmoded ideas, expressed in esoteric language, do not resonate with the experience of oppressed people. Political practice is incapable of measuring up to actuality. Like World War I generals, the left fights today’s battles with yesterday’s weapons and tactics.

The substitution of infallible dogma for critical understanding, and of repeated liturgy for analysis and explanation, inevitably spawns that other bane of the left - sectarianism. Anyone who does not embrace the dogma and recite the creed is regarded as treacherous and hostile. This perpetuates in some degree, in most left organisations, deeply engrained modes of behaviour, characterised by suspicion, intolerance, bitterness and, on occasions, verbal and physical violence. No doubt, under certain circumstances, there may be a need to respond vigorously to disruptive elements within organisations. Polemic, often passionate, is also inevitable and necessary if ideas are to develop and clarify. But there is no need for the vindictiveness, anger and vituperation which some ‘socialists’ employ against those who disagree with their opinions. More vehemence is routinely expressed against fellow socialists than against the class enemy.

It is evident that what the dogmatist claims as scientific, revolutionary consciousness rests ultimately on nothing more substantial than moral superiority based on subjective faith. The vast living wealth of human thought and experience - which, to remain relevant, needs to be constantly re-examined and refined in the light of changed material circumstances - becomes reduced to a positivist creed of immutable laws. The dogmatists arrogantly refuse to engage in a dialogue with people involved in living struggles against capitalism; they refuse to learn from the experiences of the oppressed. Instead they set themselves up as teachers, the guardians of the laws, the interpreters of the sacred texts and holders of the only key to the revolution. Those dogmatists who claim to be Marxists-Leninists negate the very philosophy of Marxism, transforming it into holy writ, as lifeless and empty as the embalmed body of Lenin and as monolithic and immobile as the Marx monument at Highgate.

These defeated and bankrupt concepts of socialism and methods of operating reflect the dominance of capitalism - of the old society’s continued grip on those who try to fight against it. A new, genuine socialist society cannot be created by an organisation and individuals who carry within them and replicate all the old forms of oppression. Socialism must be truly revolutionary. It must create new relationships between people, free of all the negative egotism, aggression, hatred, intimidation, manipulation and deceit which characterises the old political parties. If we are to have a party of a new type, which inspires people to join

and makes them feel proud to belong, we have to free it of such destructive behaviour and foster real comradeship. At least a glimmer of the new society has to be seen in the values of the party and the conduct of people within it, expressed in tolerance, compassion and mutual respect. This is vital if a party like the SLP, born out of a “diversity of experiences and traditions”, is to survive (*Policy statements* August 1996).

For socialism to have meaning in the lives of ordinary people it has to be accepted as a liberating force. It has not only to offer material improvement, but also express the higher hopes and aspirations of humanity. How can socialists claim to lead a liberation struggle when they repress others within their own ranks and smother critical thought? How can they be liberators, who are themselves not free of the mire of past mistakes and defeats? Unfortunately, the dictum of Marx that “the traditions of past generations weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living” is only too true of many on the left, including in the SLP.

The party has been permeated by a specific breed of dogmatists, who are not in sympathy with the constitution, principles, policies, spirit or ethos of the party as originally conceived. They are more concerned with fighting the battles of the 1920s and 1930s in an attempt to turn the SLP into a Marxist-Leninist - ie, Stalinist-type - party. Though few, they are energetic, vocal and intent on extending their influence through gaining office. Energies and resources which should be turned outwards to building the party, supporting campaigns and propagating socialism among the working class are frittered away on internal ‘Trotskyist’ hunts - ‘Trotskyist’ or ‘anti-communist’ being code words for socialists who do not subscribe to their world view.

Literature venerating the cult of Stalin is currently being circulated by members both within and, perhaps more dangerously, outside the party. Lies which have long since been categorically refuted continue to be peddled as history and, worse still, portrayed as the SLP’s vision of a socialist society. How can the SLP win any credibility among the working class if it becomes associated, in any way whatsoever, with one of the world’s most repressive state terrorists, whose crimes overshadow those of Pinochet, Saddam Hussein, Suharto and Pol Pot put together? Stalin’s deeds are now so well documented that it is amazing that, at the close of the 20th century, ostensibly intelligent people can still revere this butcher as an icon of socialism.

A brief summary does not do justice to Stalin’s victims, and statistics, imprecise in their magnitude, do not begin to convey the enormity of the horror he inflicted. But it is necessary to draw up an indictment which must be answered in clear conscience by the Stalin apologists if they can.

Around five million peasants died as a result of famine and deportation during forced collectivisation; countless millions of workers killed by firing squads, hunger, cold and ill-treatment in concentration camps and slave labour camps; all levels of the Communist Party’s cadres, includ-

ing veteran Bolsheviks, Lenin’s former comrades, decimated; 40,000 officers of the Red Army executed or disappeared into gulags; the leading members of several European communist parties executed or imprisoned; tens of thousands of revolutionaries in China, Spain and Greece, and opponents of fascism in Germany, the most advanced working class militants of a generation, cynically betrayed in opportunistic twists and turns of policy; hundreds of thousands of members of national minorities killed or deported - Chechens, Ingush, Tartars, Kurds ...

All this justified, now as then, in the name of building socialism. But the reality was the destruction of socialism. Instead of the withering away of the state under soviet democracy, as envisaged by Lenin, the all-pervasive rule of a privileged bureaucracy was consolidated, creating dictatorship over the proletariat and exploitation under a new ruling class. Those progressive characteristics which ‘Soviet’ society retained represent the surviving achievements of the revolution, on the ruins of which Stalin built his regime of terror. So too with the Great Patriotic War against fascism, on which Stalin’s reputation as a world leader was founded. This was won by the terrible sacrifices of the Russian people in spite of Stalin, whose policies of purging the Red Army and rapprochement with the Nazis so nearly led to disaster.

The Bolshevik revolution was once, and could still remain, stripped of its mythology and distortions, a beacon for the world’s peoples suffering under imperialism. It is sad that today, even in the SLP, there are some people so dazzled by the glare of this beacon, they cannot see the atrocities committed in its shadow.

This inevitably carries over into the interpretation of the Stalinist successor states today, which are portrayed, despite the vast amount of evidence to the contrary, as some sort of workers’ paradise. Like Jehovah’s Witnesses, who regard the bible as infallible and dismiss any evidence to the contrary as falsehoods planted by Satan, the Stalin worshippers attempt to discredit criticism of the former Soviet Union, or contemporary China, North Korea and even Yugoslavia, as the work of CIA agents and provocateurs. Hence we have had the ludicrous claim, printed in *Socialist News*, that Tianamen Square was the scene of “brutal violence against the Chinese state” and a massacre of civilians never happened. The same article describes the takeover of Hong Kong by China as a victory for socialism, when it is apparent to anyone on this planet that China has long since turned right off the capitalist road, on to a capitalist multi-lane highway!

How can such reactionary clap-trap be reconciled with a “socialist system whose institutions represent and are democratically controlled by and accountable to the people as a whole” (SLP constitution, clause IV (3))? Is our socialism measured in terms of the promotion of the “political, social and economic emancipation of the people as a whole” (clause IV (16)), or by columns of troops with fixed bayonets? Do we aim at socialism based on “common/social ownership

of the means of production”, or a state-run economy, controlled by an unaccountable, authoritarian bureaucracy?

We owe it to our supporters to be clear and honest about our concept of socialism. Do we seek the genuine liberation of the working class and the advance of humanity, or is this a Machiavellian deceit to establish a gulag ‘socialism’, which justifies any barbarity in the name of the revolution? We cannot advocate two diametrically opposed visions of socialism at the same time. Fortunately, it is abundantly evident that it is the Stalinist concept of socialism which does not accord with that enshrined in the main plank of our party’s constitution, clause IV.

The knee-jerk response would be to call for members who do not believe in the constitution to be removed from office and expelled. Not only would this be damaging to the party, but it would also mean resorting to the very methods of denunciation which we are deprecating here. We uphold the right of members to have differing views of socialism, and how to achieve it, and even to be critical of the constitution, so long as they abide by it.

However, the issue of factionalism needs to be urgently addressed before it tears the SLP apart. Formal and informal sects in the party are, in practice, behaving as if they belonged to a federal organisation, with their own journals and other literature, caucus meetings and electoral slates. The greatest danger to the soul, the credibility and the future of the SLP as a mass party comes, we believe, from groups that want to create a Bolshevik, or Marxist-Leninist (Stalinist) party. If their redundant and discredited ideology sinks roots in the party and they gain actual, or even perceived, influence on our policies and socialist objective, we are doomed to become yet another of those bickering sects with which our movement is sadly littered, unable and unworthy to promote the liberation of humanity. Maybe these are just the inevitable growing pains of an infant party, but, untreated, they may doom the whole project.

We therefore call upon the NEC to ensure:

1. That the circulation by members of controversial material inside, or outside, the party be halted, “controversial” being defined as material which fundamentally contradicts clause IV of the constitution, or resurrects and perpetuates irrelevant Bolshevik factional disputes, particularly the sterile Stalinist vendetta against Trotskyism.
2. That when these historical issues are raised in the party, it is in the context of an open and informed process of debate, aimed at educating members, and conducted in an objective, comradely atmosphere free of invective and accusation.

We fully realise that this document itself could be considered as controversial and fuelling factionalism. And so it is. Hopefully our suggestions will be adopted and, in future, the NEC will ensure that time and mental energy which could more usefully be devoted to supporting people in struggle and promoting socialism is not wasted on such tiresome arguments ●

# Understanding the Soviet Union

Michael Cox (ed) **Rethinking the Soviet collapse: Sovietology, the death of communism and the new Russia** Pinter 1998, pp294, £15.99

.....  
 "The superficial investigations of western mainstream theorists follow exactly the same course as those who had socialist illusions in the USSR"  
 .....

.....  
 role of such factors was "comparable to that of the elements of 'planning' in the capitalist economy: they modify, but do not abolish the fundamental social characteristics of the economy". Thus for Mandel, Soviet planning was "real planning" because the means of production were nationalised and regulated by the state (E Mandel *Marxist economic theory* London 1971, p561).  
 In classical 'orthodox' fashion Mandel goes on to locate the major contradiction between a "non-capitalist mode of production" and its "bourgeois norms of distribution" (*ibid* p571). Even where Mandel stumbles on production reports of waste and unsaleable stocks (pp571-572), he is unable to appreciate that the bureaucratic plan did not in fact represent an accumulation of 'use-values', but of 'plan-values'. Such values, stripped of democratic working class content, had but a tenuous relationship to use-value. The paucity of Mandel's method means that he ends up by giving a critical blessing to those he is apparently in opposition to.  
 We therefore end up with conservatives, Stalinists and Trotskyites all fostering illusions in the USSR and its long-term viability. What unites these various schools of thought is their formalism - something that precludes anything other than skimming the surface of Soviet reality.  
 The major exception to this rule was the work of Hillel Ticktin - and the journal *Critique* (founded in 1973) - who consistently pointed out that the Soviet Union was historically unviable. Using the method of Marxism, Ticktin broke free of Trotsky's formalistic shackles to grasp the atomised nature of Soviet society, whereby the bureaucracy's plan was unable to control either the 'command' economy or an alienated working class. Ticktin saw in the USSR's

waste and inefficiency a prophecy of its decline and fall. As Ticktin himself makes clear in this volume, *Critique* existed at the left pole of Sovietology, "barely tolerated at times by those in the academic mainstream" or by Trotsky's epigones (p75).  
 Perhaps the most disappointing part of this work is its failure to provide the materials for a rounded theory of Soviet ideology. Michael Cox points out that the USSR's passing "has effectively destroyed the credibility of the socialist left", even going so far as to erode vacuous ideas of 'progress' (pp13-14). Understanding the Soviet Union's ideological impact on the world is thus a key means by which we appropriate the current period of reaction and the varied dimensions of the Soviet collapse.  
 Terry McNeill provides us with a short synopsis of the varied ways in which Sovietologists sought to comprehend Marxism-Leninism (pp59-60). Writers such as Daniel Bell denied that ideology motivated the actions of the CPSU: pragmatism was the focal point of its political control. In contrast Solzhenitsyn saw it as one of the fundamental motors of the Soviet experience. Hans Morgenthau circumvented this essentialist view by arguing that Marxism-Leninism provided a key source of the regime's legitimacy. The social theorist, Barrington Moore, took a more subtle standpoint. Ideology did perform a role in the formation of Soviet politics, but not in an unmediated manner: the political usage of Marxism-Leninism tended to mould its particular ideological contours.  
 All of these various theories contain an element of the truth. The task then is to proceed toward a generalised analysis that can properly explain the origins and development of Marxism (and 'Marxism-Leninism') inside the Soviet Union.  
 In the USSR, production clearly did not take place under the democratic control of the working class: the political control of the economy was usurped by a distinct bureaucratic caste that steadily developed its own political and material interests. In contradiction to this the Soviet bureaucracy owed its legitimacy, and hence its privileged position, to the October 1917 revolution. Its ideological symbols were those of Leninism, working class revolution and the soviets. It is this paradox - between a material process that negates the proletarian revolution and an ideological one that affirms it - that explains why Marxism became a negative, dysfunctional ideology, only fleetingly related to practices beyond its material remit.  
 The fundamental causes of this prostration were lodged in the very foundations of bureaucratic socialism. Jack Conrad has argued that "the Soviet system had no social lever which consumers could use in order to impose their will on producers. Under capitalism the consumer's refusal to purchase useless products means, sooner rather than later, the producer will either improve the product or go out of business. With real

socialism the transparency and direct control provided by mass participatory democracy will ensure that producers satisfy the needs of consumers. In the Soviet Union the absence of both the law of value and democracy robbed its products of quality and allowed the production of non-use values ..." (J Conrad *Towards a general theory of the USSR* unpublished 1995, p24).  
 Therefore bureaucratic production, initiated by the first five-year plan, became defined by its extreme voluntarism - a surreal world of irrational plan targets, command allocation and prodigious amounts of waste: "The bureaucracy might have been in the driving seat, but the economy had no brakes, no lights, no steering wheel" (*ibid* p27). It is precisely this voluntaristic outlook, rooted in the emergence and codification of bureaucratic socialism, that came to define its ideological, artistic and scientific spheres (we can note here the pseudo-science of Lysenko).  
 We can identify a further contradiction within the structure of Soviet ideology. Boris Kagarlitsky argues that under Stalin Marxism became shrouded by "a set of ideological dogmas" that were designed to neuter its critical and emancipatory core in favour of an adjustment to the realities of bureaucratic rule (B Kagarlitsky *The thinking reed: intellectuals and the Soviet state from 1917 to the present* London 1988, p95). Kagarlitsky qualifies this observation with an admission of the contradictory nature of this ideological formation: "Although in the schools and institutes they still teach, in the guise of Marxism, the dogmatic utopia of 'state socialism' and barracks-communism ... they have not yet forbidden people to read *The German ideology*, or to study *The economic and philosophical manuscripts* of 1844, or to become acquainted with Gramsci's *Prison notebooks* ..." (*ibid* pp96-97).  
 We can therefore see how the Soviet bureaucracy was enmeshed in a web of ideological contradiction. The politics of genuine Marxism had no material base on which to stand, resulting in the rigidifications of so-called 'Marxism-Leninism'. However, the effective legitimacy of the USSR's rulers was best served by their usurpation of the traditions of Marxism in their entirety. The fact that much of that legacy was to be alien to the daily 'pragmatism' required by the bureaucracy was not necessarily out of step with the voluntaristic premises by which Soviet society was 'planned' and run.  
 Such contradictions proved to be problematic for the Soviet bureaucracy. Rolf Hecker provides an interesting illustration of this ideological process in a *Critique* article on the publication of Marx and Engels after World War II. Undertaken by Berlin and Moscow educational institutes, these projects were in effect receiving state patronage. However, as Hecker notes, there was always a degree of disapproval emanating from the ruling elite. In particular, the goals of authenticity and completeness

posed particular difficulties to the "aim of finding support in Marx for the political and economic decisions of the party leadership". These tensions found their way into the completed editions, which according to Hecker functioned somewhere between science and dogma (R Hecker, 'The MEGA project: an edition between a scientific claim and the dogmas of Marxism-Leninism' *Critique* 30-31, p193). This sums up very well the bureaucracy's fraught relationship with Marxism: its instinctive reaction is to neuter and circumvent, something partly prescribed by its need for historical legitimacy.  
 The residual emancipatory core of Marxism that the Soviet leaders were obliged to tolerate was no obstacle to the collapse of the USSR in 1991, precisely because of its negative character. 'Marxism-Leninism' on the other hand became the vehicle from which Gorbachev and his ideologues proclaimed the market as the potential saviour of socialism. The destruction of the Soviet Union merely confirmed the dysfunctional character of Marxism in relation to the system as a whole.  
 Understanding the nature of the present period and its ideological connection with the collapse of the USSR is something that has thus far escaped the pen of Hillel Ticktin. In a recent article on contemporary crisis he blandly reasons that, "whereas the end of Stalinism has meant that some sections of the working class and peasantry, particularly in the third world, regard the end of Stalinism as the defeat of socialism, the removal of the controls associated with it has made and will make an enormous difference to consciousness" (H Ticktin, 'Where are we going today? The nature of contemporary crisis' *Critique* 30-31, p45).  
 Ticktin gives us a grudging admission that the Soviet Union was intellectually related with 'socialism'. However, his comments on consciousness beggar belief. It is certainly correct that the departure of 'official communism' from the political scene represents the objective potential for working class advance. Nevertheless, the disappearance of Stalinism has ushered in a period of widespread political reaction for the proletariat: advances in consciousness have been negligible, if not non-existent. This is precisely because the ideological effect of Stalinism simply cannot be squared with the brutality of bureaucratic control.  
*Rethinking the Soviet collapse* is something of an object lesson for those wishing to understand the historical phenomenon of the USSR. This is particularly true for Marxist thinkers. This 'Marxist' school has been seen to serve up either the theoretical abominations of the Trotskyite/Stalinist variety or the relatively creative developments of Hillel Ticktin and *Critique*. It is with this contradiction in mind that the next wave of Marxist thinkers will deepen their understanding of the Soviet Union and its rather brutal fall from grace ●

# Livingstone for mayor?

Call him what you like - an opportunist, a carpetbagger, most recently a social chauvinist and a shameless apologist for Nato's bombing of Yugoslavia - but Ken Livingstone has never been called a racist. Not until last week, when Trevor Phillips, his rival in the fight to win nomination as Labour's candidate in next year's elections for mayor of London, charged Livingstone with treating him in a racist fashion.

The argument is interesting in itself and also brings back into the foreground some important questions: How is New Labour going to solve its dilemma over the Livingstone candidacy? What is Livingstone himself up to? What approach is the left taking to the problem of finding a socialist candidate to contest the mayoral elections?

First, however, what were the grounds of Phillips's extraordinary accusation? Basically, the fact that Livingstone, in an open letter to Blair in *The Guardian* on January 29, had the temerity to offer him a job, suggesting that Phillips would make an ideal deputy in a ticket for the London election. Phillips's silence on the matter for almost six months is odd. A "friend" assures us that, "He would always have made these comments if anybody had asked him" (*The Daily Telegraph* June 17). That may be so, but Phillips's remarks were almost certainly prompted by the advice of the "former Millbank spin-doctor", whom he appointed recently to run his campaign. The spin-doctor in question clearly believes, along with the bourgeois broadsheets, that "Mr Phillips's criticism will give his profile a much-needed boost" (*ibid*).

Most people would have found nothing surprising or controversial about Livingstone's 'job offer'. To Phillips, however, it was purportedly not just an "arrogant and patronising" personal affront, but also an act of 'racist' condescension towards the entire ethnic minority population of the capital: "All of us who come from ethnic minority communities get rather used to, and fed up of, any time we emerge on the public scene, people treating us as apprentices ... If he wants to be leader of a city where a third of the people are from ethnic minorities, I think he's going to have to be a little more sensitive, isn't he?" (*The Independent* June 17). Phillips was magnanimously prepared to give his rival "the benefit of the doubt" over this appalling lack of 'sensitivity', and accept that Livingstone had "made a mistake" (*ibid*).

To set the record straight as far as his own vast abilities are concerned, Phillips explained in his interview with the BBC's Online website that "I have done a great many things in my life. I've worked in the private sector for most of it. I've been an executive in a FTSE 100 company. I've got my own business. So I really don't have to take lessons from anybody on how to run an organisation or how to lead. So I found it a bit patronising" (*ibid*).

What are we to make of Mr Phillips and his wounded feelings? In the first place, to put it bluntly, he is behaving in a 'racist' fashion himself: ie, he is attempting to use his own ethnic background as a political weapon. The implicit message is that Livingstone, by virtue of being a white man, is necessarily arrogant, patronising and insensitive towards the ethnic minorities; Phillips, however, simply by virtue of the colour of his skin, is *ipso facto* a natural spokesman and representative of "minority communities".

Phillips has, of course, a perfect

.....

His fight to become mayor is motivated not by a desire to lead the capital's working class in a fight against Blairism, but by his own political ambition

.....

right to try and 'play the ethnic card' himself - he is hardly the first black politician to adopt this tactic - but in so doing, while at the same time accusing somebody else of being 'racist', simply for offering a political partnership - ie, deputy mayor - he lays himself open to the charge of gross inconsistency and hypocrisy. Even a paper like *The Evening Standard*, not notable for its affection towards Livingstone, called Phillips's action "an error of judgement" and urged him to desist (June 17).

In any event, Phillips's implied claim to represent the ethnic minorities of the capital is ludicrous. What does this well-off, trendy, bourgeois broadcaster and Blairite really know about, for example, the lives of the black working class in London? What does this company director and petty capitalist actually know about the alienation of London's black and Asian youth, for many of whom getting a decent job is about as likely as winning the jackpot in the national lottery? Nothing at all, so far as we can tell, unless being black himself somehow endows him with a mystical gift.

Ken Livingstone's reaction to Phillips's attack was completely in character: "I hope Trevor's feeling better soon. I'm reminded of that wonderful saying of the Masai warriors, 'The elephant never notices when the gnat bites its bum'" (*The Independent* June 17).

So much for the attempts of this "gnat" to raise his public profile. But what about the Labour leadership's approach to the whole question of London's mayor and how the party should go about selecting its candidate? At every level it is characterised by that authoritarianism and total contempt for democracy which have become the hallmarks of Tony Blair's leadership of the party and the country.

Readers of the white paper on the proposed new Greater London Au-

thority are told: "There needs to be a new style of politics, a style which is ... above all democratic and accountable. Our aim is to increase public confidence in the democratic process ..." These fine words are nothing but cant, as Labour's actual handling of the candidacy question makes abundantly clear. Under the original rules agreed at last year's conference, anybody nominated by 10 constituency parties would automatically have become a contender in a democratic ballot of the 69,000 Labour Party members in London. It is probable that Livingstone would have emerged as the victor in such a contest and would have thus become Labour's official candidate for the mayoralty.

Hence the decision by the party's Greater London management board last November to move the goalposts by instituting a new procedure, whereby anyone seeking nomination as Labour's candidate must face a scrutiny committee appointed by the NEC, a body in which Blairites have an overwhelming majority. The 12-person scrutiny committee will obviously be packed with Blair sycophants, and will, if called upon, do its duty and ensure that its short list excludes Livingstone. It is unclear whether the eventual candidate will merely be 'appointed' by the party machine, or whether the faithful will be asked to vote on it. In essence, the result is the same - democracy in words, autocracy in deeds.

It is clear then that Blair has the means to lock Livingstone out of the race for mayor. But if he uses these means to achieve his end, then he will have to pay a political price. Were he not apparently deaf to reason, the lessons of Wales should be ringing in Blair's ears: no overall majority in the Welsh Assembly; massive defections from Labour's bedrock support, involving swings of more than 35% in the Rhondda and Islwyn; an increasingly embittered Welsh working class, prepared in large numbers to vote Plaid Cymru. All this because, in his arrogance and presumptuousness, Blair thought that he could foist Alun Michael on the Welsh electorate.

Adding to Blair's difficulties is the failure of Labour to come up with a half-decent candidate capable of winning the mayoral election. Phillips - reportedly Blair's current favourite for the job - has done himself no favours with his grotesque charges of racism. Understandably, no politician of cabinet rank has shown any interest - resigning ministerial office and your safe seat is not an attractive proposition when the outcome could spell the end of your political career.

Though the metropolitan intelligentsia's snobbery and myopia has led it to depict Jeffrey Archer as unelectable, the facts suggest otherwise. His manifesto, with its emphasis on a commitment to public transport, tackling racism in the police force and combating unemployment and deprivation in the inner city, is practically the same as Livingstone's. As Livingstone himself observes, "Archer has placed himself perfectly to exploit any public backlash about Millbank control freakery if I am barred from seeking the Labour nomination" (*The Independent* June 3). Livingstone obviously wants to use the threat of a Tory victory - after the EU elections more than just a faint possibility - in his own battle to get his way, but it would be foolish to dismiss the reality of Archer's prospects, especially given the fact that the contest will be under PR.

The choice before Blair is a diffi-

cult one. Allowing Livingstone to stand would create a potentially powerful symbol and focus for Labour's dissidents, who sense, in the wake of the party's European debacle, that their time might at last be coming. Even if a locked-out Livingstone were content (indulging the probably forlorn hope of a ministerial reward) to back Blair's choice, there would still be the possibility of a humiliating electoral backlash, even a defeat. Finally, there is (as we estimate it) an outside chance that a lockout would provoke Livingstone into standing as an independent, a step which could lead to humiliation of another kind for New Labour.

Livingstone's own actions and utterances have been typically ambivalent and contradictory. On the one hand, profuse, almost obsequious, protestations of loyalty to Blair: "I want to give you a categorical assurance that if Londoners voted for me to be their first elected mayor, I would work with your government, not against it ... There is simply no question of my seeking to use the mayoralty as a platform to wage political warfare against this government" (*The Guardian* January 29). He promises: "I'm not going to give up the party I've devoted my life to" (*The Daily Telegraph* magazine, May 22). And he claims he has "made clear again and again that I have no intention of leaving the Labour Party" (*The Independent* June 3).

His most notable recent parliamentary intervention, summarised in the April issue of *Socialist Campaign Group News*, was a nauseating, opportunistic expression of outright support for Nato's bombing offensive against Serbia: "It is the duty of the nations that have the military power to protect individual communities from systematic genocide by evil regimes. Where the west has the power and uses it wisely, I will support that intervention." Here we have somebody who claims to be a 'socialist' (in reality a social-chauvinist of the most disgusting type) impudently backing imperialism in fulfilling its "duty" to that totally spurious entity known as 'the international community'. No doubt this piece of treachery was meant to reassure the prime minister that Livingstone really is 'on message' when it counts.

On the other hand, in a ploy evidently designed to put pressure on Downing Street, Livingstone allowed "friends" of his to inform the press that "he will stand as an independent candidate if Tony Blair prevents him from seeking the Labour nomination" (*The Sunday Times* May 30). In the meantime Livingstone continues to project his favourite inscrutable persona, in one breath intimating that he is confident of success; in the next, apparently accepting that "nine people on the 12-person panel will do as Blair says" (*The Daily Telegraph* magazine, May 22). The tactics are familiar to anybody who knows their Ken. The fact is that nobody, perhaps not even Livingstone himself, actually knows what he will do. For what it is worth, this writer believes that Livingstone has not finally abandoned all hopes of ministerial office and that he may still even have eyes on the leadership. However unrealistic such ambitions appear, Livingstone knows that to stand as an independent would mean his automatic expulsion from the party and that there would be no easy or quick way back.

Whatever the outcome, it is essential for the left to prepare itself to fight for an authentic socialist mayor of

London. So far, the positions taken by some organisations have been depressingly predictable. The Socialist Workers Party, for example, has, for all practical purposes, adopted a posture of supine acquiescence in furthering the 'Let Ken Stand' campaign ... in the hope of stealing his base for Paul Foot (before his illness). Admittedly, the SWP chided him for his crawling open letter and urged him courteously to say, right at the outset, that he would pursue their demands. This was before Livingstone and the SWP found themselves supporting opposite sides in the Balkans war. Be that as it may, the slogan 'Bring back Fares Fair' characterises the SWP's wilful blindness to the fact that quite a few things have changed since the 'glory days' of 1981.

Whoever drafted its pro-Livingstone leaflet cannot have taken the trouble to read the Greater London Authority Bill now before parliament. Clause 27, to cite one example, stipulates that "The secretary of state may by order make provision for preventing [the mayor] from doing anything ... which is specified in the order." In other words, central government will retain the right, enforceable in the courts, to thwart any GLA policy or proposal that is unpalatable to them. This legal sanction, when taken together with the derisory budgetary provision for the new authority, will severely curtail the scope for meaningful initiatives open to the new mayor, be it Livingstone or anybody else.

The position adopted by the CPGB is qualitatively different. We support Livingstone's democratic right to seek nomination and stand for Labour against the Tories, if that is what the Labour membership in London wants. They alone must decide the matter, not some committee of Blairite stooges. However, supporting Livingstone's right to stand in no way constitutes an unconditional willingness to vote for him as mayor. Unlike some on the left, who seem impervious to the facts regarding Livingstone's patchy record as a 'principled' critic of the Blair government, we see Livingstone not as a true socialist, but as, at best, a leftish social democrat; at worst a vulgar careerist, whose fight to become mayor is motivated not by a desire to lead the capital's working class in a fight against Blairism, but by his own political ambition.

Three main scenarios present themselves. In the unlikely event that Blair bites the bullet and allows Livingstone to contest the election as Labour's official candidate, we argue it is the duty of the left to fight for a socialist mayoral candidate: ie, a candidate endorsed by a united front of socialist organisations, campaigning on a (very spare) platform along with a slate of assembly candidates chosen by various left and working class organisations. The same applies if Livingstone's ministerial ambitions lead him to pull out and support the Labour candidate.

In the even more unlikely event that Livingstone breaks from the Labour Party and stands as an independent, a new and tantalising situation would arise. Even if only 20% of Labour's London membership chose to follow Livingstone, they would constitute a 14,000-strong force that could rally many more thousands, not just in London, but across Britain. In such circumstances, we believe that it would be the duty of communists and revolutionary socialists not just to engage polemically with such a new grouping, but to struggle within it ●

Maurice Bernal

# After the elections

**John Stone** of the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International looks at the lessons of June 10

The socialist group lost around 30 seats in the European parliament and ceased to be the largest force in the only international body elected by universal suffrage. Most of the media concluded that the elections produced a shift to the right. We will argue that this is a partial and false picture and that there was also an increase in the vote of some radical formations which could allow the possibility of building left socialist electoral alliances.

If we examine carefully the results, we see that European social democracy's big losses are mainly in Germany and Britain, the two countries with the largest number of MEPs. A few days before the elections Blair and Schröder launched a manifesto for a 'third way' new centre. In an even more rightwing turn they pushed social democracy towards a new form of liberalism. The 'centre-left' ruling parties that recently replaced long-term conservative administrations were expecting to maintain similar levels of support. However, in Germany the SPD (and even its Green allies) lost more than 10% and the Christian Democrats achieved almost 50% of the total vote.

In Britain New Labour's share of the vote went down from 44% in the 1997 general election to less than 27%, and the Tories, who had previously suffered their worst electoral defeat this century, managed to win the European elections with almost 10% more votes.

Blair and Schröder have never tried to challenge the huge reactionary counter-reforms introduced by Thatcher and Kohl. They have abandoned traditional social democracy welfare state measures and endorsed the new right policy of privatisation, cuts and attack on social security and immigrants. New Labour adopted a hawkish, militarist stance in the Balkans. All of this demoralised their followers. Many did not want to mobilise for the party that was betraying them and some voted for parties which promised more radical policies. The rightwing parties benefited through being able to actively mobilise their supporters against the government.

New electoral advances were made by the Greens and the radical nationalist parties. These forces are not politically based on the working class. However, due to Labour's increasing

rightward shift, they appeared to be more radical - not only over environmental issues, but on many social and democratic questions. They also capitalised on the limited opposition towards Nato's adventure in Kosova. In Scotland and Wales the so-called 'socialist' SNP and Plaid Cymru were closer than ever to displacing Labour as the main force. The parties associated with the most socially rooted EU armed struggles (the pro-ETA EH and pro-IRA Sinn Féin) doubled their votes compared to the last European elections. EH obtained one MEP and SF was only 2,000 votes short of winning one.

The Greens did well, particularly in Britain and France. They increased their MEPs by one third. In Germany the Party of Democratic Socialism saw its vote rise to 5.5%. A party which had found itself an outcast because of its previous links with the ruling Stalinist party in the GDR degenerated workers' state came close to becoming the third force. It is represented in the European parliament for the first time with six MEPs. Paradoxically, its sister organisation in Spain, the United Left, decreased its representation from nine to four MEPs. The fact that social democracy was in opposition in Spain and was the main recipient of the anti-government vote made a difference. In addition IU's demarcation from the socialists was not so strong.

Trotskyite forces in France and Scotland also made a big impact. Lutte Ouvrière and the LCR obtained 5.5% in France (nearly as much as Le Pen and little bit less than the Communist Party). For the first time they have reached the European parliament with five MEPs. In Scotland the SSP won more than four percent.

Candidates to the left of Labour won in total 200,818 votes (more than two percent) in Britain. However, the main far left party (the SWP) did not stand anywhere (apart from its representation on the Socialist Party-led Socialist Alliance list in the West Midlands), and the second largest far left grouping only stood in Scotland and the West Midlands. There was no coordinated, all-British campaign for a united non-Labour left. In some places there were three competing lists of candidates to the left of Labour.

Socialist Labour was the only party which stood in all 11 British constituencies, but only managed to achieve 86,749 votes (0.87%). When Scargill launched his project it could have been a big success if he had championed a united socialist left and built a

broader, anti-Blairite workers' opposition. However, the SLP's Stalinist, cult-like and sectarian policies and its little England nationalism disappointed many. The SLP obtained less than half of the votes gained by the non-Labour left and Scargill got six or seven times fewer votes than the Greens, whose support he wanted to contest.

The socialist forces to the left of Labour have to understand that the basis exists for constructing a new front for the next elections in opposition to Blair's cuts and military attacks. During the Tories' 17-year rule it was important to be with the workers, fighting with them to expel the Conservatives and to push their reformist party, which had historically had their support, into power. Now that New Labour is in Downing Street attacking students, youth, the disabled, unemployed, workers, immigrants, asylum-seekers and many other oppressed layers, the task of Marxists is to organise the working class opposition. This must also be expressed in an attempt to build an electoral class front.

If we do not do that the opposition against Labour and other social democrats could be seized by radical bourgeois forces (nationalists or greens) or even by the right. In the June 10 elections not only the Tories, but also the UKIP and BNP did well. The first obtained around seven percent and the Nazis obtained one percent, surpassing the SLP.

Some of the most 'orthodox' Trotskyists believe that it was important to continue to vote Labour because it remains the main workers' party and revolutionaries have to be with their class. Some left groups even oppose PR on the grounds that it will weaken Labour. In fact, the introduction of PR creates better perspectives for the left to free itself from the Labour right and presents better possibilities for class struggle candidates to influence and be represented in the party. Tailing Labour means betraying the discontent of those looking for new alternatives and condemning the opposition to be dominated by radical or rightwing bourgeois forces.

A left electoral alliance is not a rotten propaganda bloc. It is, like a united left front in a union election, an electoral agreement around a platform against Nato and cuts in welfare and education, for full employment and better wages, etc. Every party could participate in such an alliance with its own programme and positions.

## Thatcherite emptiness

Notting Hill general release

*Notting Hill* is a gentle comedy about love, romance and the difficulties involved when people of different lifestyles try to form a relationship.

Julia Roberts plays Anna Scott - the most famous actress in the world, a person more familiar and comfortable with Beverley Hills than London. Hugh Grant plays the owner of a travel bookshop who has had little adventure in his life - and then he meets Anna Scott. Their on-off relationship is connected to Anna Scott's indecision and ambiguity. She has the fame and fortune, and so is the dominant person in the relationship. Thus Grant's shopowner can only passively wait for Anna Scott to make up her mind about their romance, and eventually tries to rebel against her decision. But even then he is putty in her hands.

This means the film starts to veer towards a happy ending, but this is not made possible by the usual active romancing of the male character: instead it is the female who ultimately takes the decisions, and is able to exert her will because of the unequal economic status of the two main characters. Hugh Grant's insipid and deferential character is an expression of the inequality within the romantic partnership. We pity Hugh Grant's character, but we do not have empathy with him because he never really loses his pathetic quality.

This film is also about the angst and alienation of the traditional middle class of England - what is portrayed most vividly is the mundane existence of various characters. The stockbrokers, lawyers and shopowners, who are the social background for this film, seem to have no satisfaction at work or play, and instead gain transitory enjoyment through trying to help other people find romance. The fact that this film is essentially a comedy, and has some very funny moments, does not overcome the sense of a lack of purpose and emptiness of the traditional middle class. They may be better off than most people, but nothing seems to make them enjoy life.

So how good a film is *Notting Hill*? The acting is generally excellent, and Julia Roberts is superb as the actress who has many complex decisions to make. Hugh Grant is satisfactory at once more playing Hugh Grant, but this film was made for his performance. In political terms the film was very contradictory. An attempt was made to get the audience to like 1990s London, but all we could think of was how depressing everyone seemed to be about living in London.

The film represents the Thatcherite dream turning sour for the traditional middle class - this is the theme that bubbles along under the surface of its genteel exterior.

Phil Sharpe

## Fighting fund

## Welcome boost

"In order to show my support for the *Weekly Worker*," writes comrade MJ, "perhaps you could send a standing order form, so I can make contributions to funds." Thanks, comrade. It's on its way.

In fact regular contributions are starting to help our monthly fund rise noticeably. For example, HG's quarterly £50 has certainly boosted June's total, which also saw £20

donations from comrades KI and PQ. Thanks also to BB, CD, AJ and TR.

June's fund now stands at £270, leaving us less than a week to break through the £400 barrier - and make up last month's £13 shortfall.

Robbie Rix

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

## What we fight for

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

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

I want to be a **Communist Party Supporter**. Send me details

I wish to subscribe to the **Weekly Worker**.

WW subscription £ \_\_\_\_\_ € \_\_\_\_\_

Donation £ \_\_\_\_\_ € \_\_\_\_\_

Cheques and postal orders should be payable to 'Weekly Worker'.

	6 m	1yr	Inst.
Britain & Ireland	£15/€21	£30/€42	£55/€77
Europe Rest of World	£20/€28	£40/€56	£70/€98
	£28/€40	£55/€77	£80/€112

Special offer to new subscribers: 3 months for £5/€7

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

TEL \_\_\_\_\_

Return to: Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX.  
Tel: 0181-459 7146  
Fax: 0181-830 1639  
Email: CPGB1@aol.com

# Unholy alliance

Just what is it that can unite Tony Blair, the archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the World Bank and the Socialist Workers Party? What is it that has thrown together christian and atheist, Labour and Tory, rich and poor, socialist and capitalist?

Championed by *The Guardian*, the problem of 'third world' debt has moved from being a "backroom issue for number-crunching officials to becoming a mainstream campaign which has succeeded in capturing the public's imagination" (June 16). As the paper so aptly puts it, "For more than a decade, an extraordinary alliance which ranges from financiers to leftwing campaigners has recognised the urgency of dealing with debt. The alliance spans political divides: Kenneth Clarke and John Major were among the first to call for concerted international action."

The latest manifestation of this campaign is Jubilee 2000 - a coalition of church groups, trade unions and community organisations. It attracted more than 30,000 in London to pressurise last weekend's G7 summit in Cologne. And it appears that the campaign has achieved some success. One of the central agenda items at the 25th G7 economic summit, attended by the world's seven largest economies, plus Russia and the president of the European Commission, was the issue of relieving the burden of debt from the world's poorest countries.

A package worth more than \$100 billion (£63 billion) was agreed. While this sum goes only a small way to removing the mountain of debt owed by the world's developing economies - sub-Saharan Africa owes \$226 billion alone - it will remove two thirds of the amount owed by what are termed the 'heavily indebted poorer countries' (HIPCs); a total of 36 states.

The announcement by the G7 received a qualified welcome by Ann Pettifor, co-founder of Jubilee 2000, who said it "showed the power of the debt-relief movement". Jubilee 2000 estimates that Laos, Zambia and Rwanda will see debt payments fall by at least a half. Yet Oxfam estimates that for Tanzania, payments will be lowered by just \$10 million, leaving the country paying \$200 million a year to western creditors - seven times what it spends on healthcare. While debt campaigners agree the Cologne debt initiative does not lay the basis for solving the crisis, they all say it is a step forward.

Clearly, this is a long way from the goals of the popular front-type movement organising to force the western governments and banks to 'drop the debt' by 2000. It is also less than the stated goals of the IMF, the World Bank and the G7. The agreed aim of the 'international community' (read imperialism) is to cut world poverty 'in half' by 2015. Of course much of

.....  
"With no clear programme and rudderless in Blair's Britain, the SWP are jumping on whatever bandwagon moves"  
.....

.....  
the huff and puff from the summit is just that. More than \$20 billion of the debt relief is merely writing off bad debts which are not being paid and never will be. In other words the debts will be paid by nationalising them or edging up general interest rates.

It is critical to put the issue in context. In the post-Soviet New World Order, the 'third way' generation of western politicians hold sway - Blair, Clinton and Schröder. Liberal capitalism rules by overwhelming consent, and presents a human(itarian) face.

Speaking in Chicago in April, just before Nato's 50th anniversary activities in Washington DC, Tony Blair unveiled his much vaunted, though intellectually vapid, 'third way' approach to foreign policy. This 'Chicago doctrine' emphasises the 'international community' as the main guiding principle for foreign policy - stressing what Blair calls international moral and humanitarian issues as well as strategic political and economic questions. First on Blair's list in April was global financial reform. Second was the bombing of Serbia.

On cue, Oxfam made a direct link between the war against Kosovo and the 'third world' loans crisis, demanding that the \$5 billion to be spent every year on peacekeeping in Kosovo be matched with investment in debt relief for sub-Saharan Africa.

Writing in *The Guardian* (June 15), archbishop of Canterbury George Carey and World Bank president James Wolfensohn joined the chorus, arguing that "we are for the very first time working together as a world community on development issues". And further: "It is important to establish at the outset that we both firmly believe that debt is a moral issue."

Besides pandering to humanitarian sentiments the bourgeoisie has a real

interest in moulding public - ie, taxpayer - opinions on debt relief.

Behind the not inconsequential ideological facade of the moral claims there lie important economic issues. What really unites the liberals and the banks is a desire to institute normal - real - capitalism in the 'third world' so as to sustain the further growth of the world economy. The intervention of Carey and Wolfensohn is revealing. They write: "Sometimes the passion all of us bring to this issue has created the perception that 'creditors' ... stand on one side of a great divide, with dedicated churches and NGOs [non-government organisations] squarely on the other. In reality, we share the same dream: to eliminate poverty." This is qualified by a list of shared principles which include: "Relief must be provided only when there is common agreement that freed resources will, and can, be used wisely and productively."

And here is the nub. The capitalists themselves understand the benefits that would accrue to the core economies of Europe, the US and Japan if economic growth could be triggered in what is now the periphery of the world economy. The overwhelming bulk of profits for transnational corporations are made in the core economies. Profit, though not nearly as much, is also there for the taking in intermediate countries such as Argentina, Turkey and the Asian tigers. But the poor states of Asia, Africa and Latin America are worth little. Sub-Saharan Africa is an economic black hole.

This is why debt relief and even its removal - as long as it is linked to economic and political 'reform' - is a pressing issue for the big capitalist powers. The very poor countries, far from being 'super-exploited', are almost *unexploitable* in a capitalist sense. In such countries there is little indigenous capital, a small, unskilled, unhealthy working class, and a large peasantry and declassed urban poor. Surplus extraction is done in an absolute sense. Natural resources are stripped, bribes are expected and given, but the rich vein of relative surplus value - brought about by machinery, technology and high-skill workers - of mature capitalist economies is not only untapped: it is unavailable.

The UK and Germany have been at the forefront of the debt initiatives. Clare Short - the most vociferous advocate of the Chicago doctrine in cabinet - and Gordon Brown well understand the needs and interests of imperialism. Robert Chote, economics editor of the *Financial Times* reports that "the UK has suggested individuals and multinational companies should contribute [to Gordon Brown's debt relief package]. *The latter have an interest in lifting the burden of debt from countries that are potential markets and production*

*locations*" (June 21, emphasis added).

According to the Cologne debt initiative, it is not only corporations, banks and the international financial institutions (IFIs) which are to foot the debt relief bill. Western governments will also be digging into their coffers. In the lead-up to the Cologne summit, the UK government pledged \$100 million to the G7 initiative and proposed a Millennium Trust Fund for poor nations, neatly dovetailing with the spirit of Jubilee 2000 and the hypocritical pleas of the aidocracy which rules so many states in sub-Saharan Africa.

This represents a *de facto* nationalisation of 'third world' debt in the imperialist countries. As the debt is trimmed to manageable levels, the IFIs such as the IMF and World Bank will set their reform targets - social as well as economic - for debtor countries. What is crucial is the development of structures that will allow real capitalist exploitation of the resources and population of the 'third world'. This intent is clear in the texts of the communiqués emanating from Cologne over the weekend.

The statement *Deepening the development partnership* says: "While international assistance and debt relief are clearly important, their positive effects depend on sound national efforts towards economic and structural reform and good governance, where the private sector and civil society are able to play productive roles." In other words, no debt relief to tin-pot dictators who do not do what they are told.

"The strategy for the debt initiative for the HIPCs," states the G7's *Plan of debt forgiveness 1999*, "is based on the approach that debt relief is linked to structural and social reforms aimed at, for instance, developing primary healthcare and an efficient education system - as well as the necessary economic adjustments."

This strategy has punitive adjuncts. The *Plan of debt forgiveness states*: "All attempts to bring about a sustainable improvement in the living standards of people in the poorest countries through debt relief will fail if they come up against an unstable political environment. Every initiative must therefore be embedded in a comprehensive strategy for conflict prevention."

Clearly, the debt relief initiative is far from empty hypocrisy. There is concrete self-interest for imperialism.

And what of the left? One of the most eager champions of the Jubilee 2000 cause has been the Socialist Workers Party. It has uncritically supported this oh-so-respectable campaign of christian do-gooders and imperialist moralists.

Desperate to fire up their carry on campaigning approach to politics, the SWP has been reduced to dressing

Jubilee 2000 in red garb, when it is far more likely to sport fashionable gabardine or chino. Charlie Kimber writes in *Socialist Worker* (June 16) about the "wonderful Cancel the Debt demonstration" where "over 30,000 people, many under 20, took part in five hours of activities to show that they hate the way the financial system sentences millions of people to illness and death." He finishes off saying: "Media pundits and the acolytes of New Labour take great delight in reminding the left that the level of strikes is now the lowest since the Stone Age, or at least 1891. But among those who linked arms last weekend there is anger against injustice and against a system which destroys the planet while it wrecks lives. Under the surface there is a thirst for justice that Tony Blair does not even begin to satisfy."

This worship of, and subordination to, anything and everything that can be used to recruit the gullible is reaching new lows for the SWP. On the debt issue it has led them to tail the liberal wing of the imperialist bourgeoisie. With no clear programme and rudderless in Blair's Britain, the SWP are jumping on whatever bandwagon moves.

I take no pleasure at all in reminding SWP comrades that we are still in an ideological period of reaction. But when the comrades wilfully ignore reality and turn a liberal, charity-mongering rally into a substitute for working class *economic* struggles, it only proves the point.

Evidently the SWP is hooked on a type of politics that limits the working class to narrow trade unionism. During the bombing of rump Yugoslavia, the central slogan of the SWP was 'welfare not warfare'. This social-pacifist approach - that every pound spent on a bomb is a pound not spent on a hospital bed - falls into a socialist nationalism. Appealing to workers' narrow interests is no substitute for a global approach. To apply the same logic would lead to some such slogan as 'doctors, not debt relief'.

Unless our class masters high politics and becomes the universal class it is doomed to be nothing more than the extreme left of bourgeois society. Thus the SWP finds itself uncritically and deeply buried in a front so broad that it ranges from "mild liberalism to revolutionary Marxism ... from 'progressive' bankers and Peter Mandelson to people who would gladly string up anyone even thinking of running a bank" (Charlie Kimber, *Socialist Worker* June 16).

The debt must go, but it needs to be abolished by the masses themselves actively fighting in the 'third world' and through working class power in the west. Not 'cancelled' in the way the G7, Jubilee 2000 - or, it seems, the SWP - are suggesting ●

Marcus Larsen