



If the June 10 European Union election debacle signalled the end of the Tony Blair honeymoon, failure to secure the Northern Ireland settlement by the June 30 D-day deadline endangers, in time, the whole New Labour project.

Northern Ireland is the United Kingdom's main weak link and therefore a weak link in Blair's constitutional revolution. For nearly three decades Britain's inability to rule the Six Counties in the old way and the refusal of the nationalist masses to be ruled in the old way was a festering ulcer on the Elizabethan monarchy system. There is no longer a revolutionary situation, but the counterrevolutionary situation is precarious. Northern Ireland remains a province of crisis.

Fear of the malevolent uncertainties that would grow in abundance from a semi-permanent continuation of a deadlock ensured Blair's presence in Belfast, three days of negotiations in Stormont Castle and worried words from Bill Clinton in Washington. Possible failure to broker a deal between Sinn Féin and the Ulster Unionists, plus the parade commission's ruling banning the Orange march down Garvaghy Road for the second year in succession, instantly brought renewed threats of loyalist rioting and terrorism. The shadowy Orange Volunteers and Red Hand Defenders - linked to a string of recent pipe bomb attacks on Catholics - reportedly have "active service units" on stand-by. Drumcree is an explosion waiting to happen.

David Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party are under tremendous pressure. To compromise with Blair and agree to Sinn Féin ministers before IRA decommissioning would cleave its ranks. On the other hand a stalled peace process is a failure of leadership and programme. Either way a 'no' majority amongst the majority British-Irish is in the making.

Throughout this century the defining feature of unionism has been saying 'no' to equal rights for Catholics. As a labour aristocracy, working class Protestants have looked to the UK state to furnish them with privileges against and over Catholics. Partition post-1998 eschews gerrymandering and overt discrimination. More than that, Blair aims to win the consent, if not the active support, of the Catholic-nationalist population. Each concession given to, or wrested by, the minority produces alienation amongst the majority. Ireland's right to self-determination has again been denied and remains the central, unresolved, contradiction. But concomitantly old loyalism now finds itself adrift from the British state. The British-Irish Agreement redefines the union with Great Britain and necessitates a historical compromise with Irish nationalism ... the actuality of which is unpalatable.

The immediate beneficiary is sure to be Ian Paisley and his Democratic Unionist Party, which has been yapping and snapping at the peace process ever since Good Friday. Bourgeois loyalism is riven with stresses; plebeian loyalism is hardening. Those who dismissed the 'no' campaign of Paisley for the May 22 referendum in 1998 as the Neanderthal rantings of the isolated and doomed have been proved wrong.

There is little or no chance in the

Neither war nor peace

short to medium term of a full-scale return to the IRA guerrilla struggle against crown forces. The peace of the oppressors has overcome the violence of the oppressed. But Northern Ireland cannot smoothly and quickly be made good as a stable and uncontested part of the UK. That is what the British government and the official Ulster Unionists earnestly wish for. Not Sinn Féin-IRA. That explains why, much to the frustration of liberals like *The Guardian's* Hugo Young, it can afford to be "culpably calamitous" and so "unyielding" (June 29).

Sinn Féin backed the British-Irish Agreement. However, it steadfastly refused to formally recognise "the legitimacy of the Six County statelet" (*An Phoblacht* May 7 1998). To have done so would betray all those men and women who gave or risked their lives over the last 30 years. It would also have been a break with the tradition of militant republicanism dating back to the Fenians and the Easter rising of 1916. And for what? Sinn Féin is an all-Ireland party with all-Ireland ambitions. Its constituency in the north is limited to the size of the minority nationalist-Catholic population. In the south the élan of those who successfully resisted the might of Britain and kept their republican principles intact could well prove a massive vote-winner for reform in the not too distant future. Gerry Adams can have no particular desire to be minister of education in Northern Ireland. His sights are higher. Already in fashionable pro-Irish circles in Boston and New York he is feted as Ireland's Nelson Mandela.

So while the Adams-McGuinness leadership made a momentous turn on Good Friday 1998 by committing itself to an unarmed strategy, nevertheless the IRA will in all likelihood never hand over its considerable arsenal of weapons to general John de Chastelain. Demands for the IRA to disarm are "nonsense", said Gerry Adams a year ago, and would be "resisted" (*The Daily Telegraph* May 11 1998). He has never spoken a truer word. The IRA continues to operate as an unofficial police force in republican areas and stands threateningly in the background - an undefeated enemy of the British state. Put another way, the immediate prospect is one of neither an IRA war nor a Blairite peace. The Tory right is sure to ex-

plot such a situation to the maximum.

Many a reforming British prime minister has come unstuck over Ireland. As Gladstone, Asquith and Wilson found to their cost, Ulster can provide a focus for all manner of reactionaries, backwoods traditionalists and malcontents. There would then be a real beauty in Blairism running aground on Irish rocks. True, William Hague joined the chorus of praise when the British-Irish Agreement was signed. Needless to say, the shadow cabinet has gradually edged away from bipartisanship in practice. Faced with Blair's constitutional revolution which is about to abolish their inbuilt Lords majority at a stroke, institutionalised Labourite domination in Scotland and Wales, a 'federalist' Euroland and at least one more term of opposition, the Hague Tories are beginning to convert Northern Ireland into an anti-Blair weapon to be fielded alongside their Little England defence of the pound. Hague's programme takes shape.

Though they are an integral part of the British-Irish Agreement, the Tory leadership has raised constant and carping objections to prisoner releases prior to any IRA decommissioning. Patrick Magee - the heroic would-be assassin of Thatcher and her ministers - was the subject of calculated Tory outrage and lamentation. In point of fact the relevant passage in the text stipulates that decommissioning should be "completed" by May 2000. What passes for 'decommissioning' is a moot point of course. Sinn Féin, however, is not bound to ensure such an outcome, only encourage it. Prisoners for their part are being freed not by an across-the-board amnesty but in line with a fixed tariff reduction on sentences. Furthermore under the terms of the agreement Sinn Féin has an automatic claim to seats in a power sharing executive - given its electoral support.

Despite that the Tories and their auxiliaries in the media instinctively sided with Trimble when in the run-up to D-day he insisted that "a credible and verifiable beginning should be made to a process of decommissioning before Sinn Féin ministers are permitted to assume power over their fellow citizens" (*The Guardian* June 28). The very idea of Sinn Féin taking part in the province's government while the IRA remains fully armed is

condemned out of hand as "appeasement" by Michael Grove of *The Times* (June 29). *The Daily Telegraph* leader is no less rabid. Blair's willingness to have Sinn Féin ministers before decommissioning is "an evil thing, utterly opposed to true peace". Were such a situation to come about, it would apparently "undermine representative democracy in the United Kingdom and ... in the Republic of Ireland" (June 28). Ulster Unionists deserve establishment solidarity. Not abuse for ruining the peace process.

The Hague Tories have no concern for genuine democracy. They are enraged because Blair's constitutional revolution is destroying their divine right to govern the country through a minority vote at the polls and the unelected House of Lords. Ominously the *Telegraph* urges an "ermine revolt" to "uphold the constitution". All government legislation should be blocked using the Lords, crucially Blair's disenfranchisement of "several hundred of their number" - "one of the most autocratic bills in recent history" (June 29). Their putative aristocratic rebels could moreover yet find themselves a ready-made armed wing if the RUC were to be disbanded (ie, 'reformed') as part of some trade-off for token IRA decommissioning. Things are redolent with an impending constitutional crisis.

In anticipation it is therefore germane to recall that back in 1912-14 the Tories illegally conspired to scupper Irish home rule - firstly, in order to defend their landed interests in Ireland, and, secondly, to restore their political fortunes in Britain. They financed Sir Edward Carson's armed rebellion against the Liberal government and fermented mutiny in the officer corps. In that light it is worth noting that since New Labour came to office the biggest political demonstration by far has not come from the left - as would be expected - but the right. Only simpletons believe that the 250,000-strong Countryside Alliance march was merely about hunting foxes. It was, as we said at the time, "the Tory Party flexing its extra-parliamentary muscles".

A constitutional collision between the Hague Tories and New Labour should be our opportunity. Yet independent working class politics exists as no more than an abstraction. A problem made worse because it is

hardly recognised. Most leftists in Britain are hopelessly mired in economism (bourgeois politics of the working class). For these comrades the stuff of politics is routine trade unionism on the one hand and on the other a vanished or disembodied utopia. The actual means of social transition - ie, mastering high politics and ever deeper, ever wider democratic struggles - are ignored or downplayed. In practice the absence of a viable programmatic bridge results in auto-Labourism.

Thus, when it came to the peace process in Northern Ireland and the May 22 referendum, the bulk of the left meekly lined up behind Blair (and Trimble, Clinton and Ahern). The Socialist Workers Party, Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, the *Morning Star* and the Socialist Party in England and Wales piously hoped that at last Northern Ireland - with its revolutionary nationalist minority - would gradually ascend to the 'higher planes' of civilisation supposedly represented by British trade unionism (ie, the lowest, most primitive politics of a slave class). Such misplaced arrogance reveals both lack of elementary anti-imperialist principle and programmatic nullity.

In contrast the CPGB called for a boycott of the May 22 referendum. We communists did so not in the name of impotent absentism, but so as to highlight the necessity of a working class alternative. Where Blair remakes the constitutional monarchy from above, communists uphold the perspective of the working class remaking the constitution from below as a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales. As to Ireland, we are for unity, independence and democracy. There must be a freely elected all-Ireland constitutional assembly whereby the Irish people can decide their own future without Blair or Clinton setting the agenda. We advocate and fight for the fullest democracy. That means in Ireland the Protestant - British-Irish - minority having self-governing autonomy up to and including the right to separate.

Only through taking the road of revolutionary democracy can the workers make themselves a political, hegemonic, class, capable of its own self-liberation, and thus the liberation of humanity ●

Jack Conrad

Incredible

Workers Power - a small, left Trotskyist sect - has in the past been synonymous with cretinous auto-Labourism. It will therefore come as a surprise to many to read in the June issue of its paper that in the recent European Union elections it called on readers to "vote against Labour" (*Workers Power* June).

However, WP's new position sees it descend into sectarian incoherence and is an indication of a crisis of perspectives. In place of voting Labour, it put forward no national strategy at all. It suggests that voters should have supported Ken Coates's Alternative Labour List in East Midlands, the Socialist Alliance in West Midlands and the Scottish Socialist Party. These trends can be supported because they represent "credible anti-war candidates within the workers' movement" (my emphasis). In every other constituency - covering the vast bulk of the electorate - the comrades called for the spoiling of ballot papers by writing across them, "Nato out of the Balkans, independence for Kosova".

Explicitly, WP ruled out any vote to Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, since it is a "pro-Milosevic and therefore pro-ethnic cleansing" party. More interesting was the reason it gave for refusing to countenance a vote for the CPGB in London and the North West. The 'Weekly Worker' lists could not be supported, as they "represent nothing at all in the labour movement other than an irrelevant sect, the Communist Party of Great Britain". Space prevents full examination of this sectarianism, but a few points must be made.

In most constituencies around the country, WP advocated a weak propagandist gesture - spoiling votes in protest against the war. Yet in two of the most important areas, there were actually candidates standing on a manifesto whose central theme was opposition to the war - on *precisely* the slogans WP advocated! Every vote for the 'Weekly Worker' list was a vote for *these two exact slogans*. Other than malice, what stopped these comrades voting for us? I presume they would hang their objections on that delightfully vague word, "credible".

First, we must clarify exactly what the comrades are talking about. Do they mean *political* credibility? Surely there can be no argument about the fact that our manifesto represented a revolutionary platform, in contrast to the reformoid politics of the other lists WP supported? On the central question of the war, the slogans WP identify as key were prominent parts of our manifesto. How "credible" do you want it, comrades?

In fact, it appears that WP attempts to characterise trends as "credible" only if they are supposed to represent something with some social weight - an electoral base of some sort. However, with this criterion, they dig themselves even deeper into the hole.

The "credible" candidates WP recommended averaged 2.13% of the vote. Indeed, if you take away the relatively more successful SSP, you get 1.51% for the English lists. In other words, more or less the same sort of votes CPGB candidates have consistently scored over the years. For example, as recently as the 1998 local elections in London, all six communist candidates won over 2% of the vote. Apart from this year's EU elections, when our organisation was severely hampered by the last-minute collapse of the SA and by not being able to stand under its own name, our "irrelevant sect", as WP entertainingly dubs us, has consistently achieved at least the same level of results as WP's "credible" trends did.

Yet WP has never once offered even critical support to our candidates. Indeed, it has used the notion of being with the mass of workers - who retain illusions in Labour - to excuse its automatic electoral prostration. It specifically justified its enthusiastic vote for Blair in 1997 by assuring us that a 'crisis of expectations' would inevitably be precipitated by the Labour victory. Thus it dismisses the performances of the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the SLP on May 1 - "Both parties did abysmally" (*Workers Power* May 1997), we were snottily told by an organisation that has never had the guts to stand one candidate in the 20-plus years of its modest existence.

Instead, WP prided itself on being with what it calls "the mass" - that is, the millions of atomised individuals, the majority of whom were *sociologically* working class, who voted Labour. As leading WPer Mark Harrison put it (inexpertly for one who would no doubt claim to be a 'Leninist'), "We're not interested in the small number of advanced workers in [SPEW and the SLP]; we want to be with the mass" (cited in *Weekly Worker* May 15 1997).

Of course the word 'mass' has two key *political* meanings. The first simply refers to the majority. However, there is a second meaning. It also refers to those sections of the people or class that have been drawn into action.

In a quiet period mass actions can involve only very small numbers of people. As objective circumstances mature, mass movements swell until they become the "majority, and not simply a majority of the workers alone, but the majority of all the exploited" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 32, p475).

The sectarian dismissal of the "tiny" SPEW and SLP by the widely uninfluential Workers Power was a reflection of its own self-delusion that it was strategically placed to benefit from the 'crisis of expectations'. And this would happen "sooner rather than later", according to the organisation's perspectives document.

Now, without any attempt to explain where this predicted 'crisis' has vanished, WP urges a "vote against Labour", with no rational explanation, let alone theorisation, of *why*. We ask the comrades:

- What has changed since May 1997, when you dismissed the results of those elements of the left who fought Blair in the ballot box as 'abysmal'?
- What makes the West Midlands Socialist Alliance's 0.85% of the vote "credible" in your eyes, when you have previously sneered at similar (or better) votes won by the Communist Party?
- If "Blair's victory" in 1997 was "our victory" (editorial *WP* May 1997), what has changed exactly? Do workers no longer have illusions in Labour?
- Where is your crisis of expectations?
- Do you seriously believe that the Balkans war was somehow responsible for a qualitative change either in the Labour Party or in the nature of illusions in it? When has Labour not supported imperialist war? Is Labour's imperialist war in the Balkans not a continuation of its politics before and since May 1 1997?

Clearly, the pretensions of sects like Workers Power have been cruelly exposed by two years of New Labour. For some time now its leadership has - farcically - postured as a sort of small SWP, dismissing others of comparable size (or larger). Politics has a way of being ruthless with such silly poses. Workers Powers' plunge into sectarian gibberish over the European elections represents an important degenerative moment for it ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Prissy Marxism

After his article last week ('Riot no answer' *Weekly Worker* June 24) it's maybe time for Alan Fox to have a rest. With good cause the CPGB have characterised this period as one of 'special reaction', pointing to the fragmentation of the labour movement and the barely beating heart of working class consciousness. A vital time for communists to re-evaluate and discard tired categories and deterministic modes.

And yet a week after an admission that the CPGB was "beyond London and the North West virtually non-existent" (*Weekly Worker* June 17), we find Alan Fox delivering a prissy Marxist sermon.

To begin by saying the J18 protest "received almost sympathetic coverage in sections of the bourgeois press" is mind-numbing enough. But to then go on and deliver just such hack "almost sympathetic coverage" make his words appear as ash. Fox says that the protesters were not only 'alone'; they were also "disparate". There was "vandalism", they wore sandals, they were "declassified". Their mood was "abandoned" and of course they were drunk. What would Alan Fox make of being called a puritanical moralising philistine?

And it's the 'we Marxists know best' line - before, during and after anything, everything, anywhere. After all "assaults on symbols represent not the slightest threat to the bourgeois order", do they? What symbols? The state? The monarchy? Money? Language? Culture? I think Alan Fox thinks that at this moment of 'special reaction' only being a member of the provisional (symbolic) CPGB can represent a threat because only the CPGB can become the mass Communist Party. What we have with Alan Fox is an anarchy of time, size, theory and voluntarism.

For Fox is was *Thatcherite capitalism* (my emphasis) that has "created a permanent or semi-permanent mass completely alienated from" the system. A group that includes "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 9-5 world". These "constitute an embittered social stratum". No word of the failure of Labourism, or of Marxism, or specifically of the three-year-old New Labour government for that matter. And what of that list? You could add the over-25 unemployed, single mothers, disability allowance claimants. And if this lot are the 'drop-outs', the lumpen driven by blood-curdling anarchist feeling of revenge and destruction, a group outside the parameters of Marxist persuasion and science, then what are we left with? - those who don't reject the alienated world of 9-5 jobs, and the CPGB!

Either the CPGB engages, understands, tries to convert the most radical contemporary currents and learns, teaches, makes mistakes or it will die. Because what you've got isn't it. How could it be?

Phil Rudge
North London

Riot on

Riot no answer? That depends on the question! If you mean riot is no answer *in itself* to global capitalism, OK. But who said it was? However, as a feature of resistance to the system; as a demonstration that the state and its endeavour to create a stupefying illusion of complicity can be challenged - riots, like strikes and demonstrations, are fine.

It is a pity we could not have pulled off a well-organised riot against the recent war in Serbia, but, coming as it did right alongside Blair and Cook's self-congratulations, it could not have come at a better time.

Dave Douglass
Doncaster

Anarchism in Shrops

In your argument against anarchists you assume two fallacious points.

You make a lot of the fact that these were limited, partial actions, not involving the mass of the workers. You suggest that that is all anarchists want to see. It may have escaped your notice, but we are not in a revolutionary situation. Neither you nor we can conjure up a general strike out of thin air.

The question therefore is not in the first instance how you make a social revolution, nor even a major working class advance, but how you spread the idea of workers' self-liberation and the consciousness of the evils of class society. In that the demo was an imaginative illustration of how (even with low numbers) an impact can be made that illustrates the evils of class society. It achieved more than any Marxist group has done for a long time.

You talk as if the only reason anarchists do not want a workers' state is impatience to get to the end result. Certainly it may be that Bakunin was ultimistic and the reason a lot of Marxists initially turned to anarchism at the end of the 19th century was largely a matter of impatience. But the mainstreams of anarchism, whether syndicalist or anarcho-communist, have not argued that social transformation will be instantaneous.

No. We reject the concept of the transitional workers' state because we believe that the idea that socialism can arise from it is utopian and anti-scientific in the extreme.

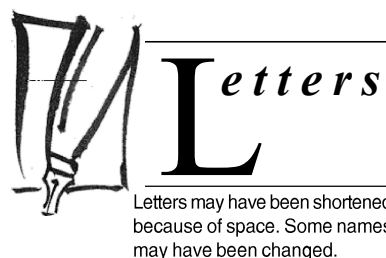
Marxists - whether reformist, Leninist or 'impossibilist' (SPGB), intend to put a body of people, drawn certainly (predominantly) from the working class, but by definition alienated from their class origins, into power. That means they are put in charge of what they agree initially is a capitalist society.

They first insist that those members study economics, philosophy and other subjects in great detail, so that inevitably they think they know better than the workers from whom they sprang how social change should be made. They then take on a role, which Marxists concede is designed to further capitalism. No doubt, at this stage, they will be sincere in believing that what they do is in the best interests of the workers. This is why Lenin, immediately on taking power, took major industries (petrol, the railways, iron) away from workers' control, vesting power in the state. Why he imposed one-man management on the rest of industry, drastically reducing the power of the soviets.

Once the state had power over the soviets there were people with an interest in the preservation of class divisions. Eventually this new elite forged for itself roots in the economic infrastructure, creating a new social system with new relationships to the mode of production.

Anarchists are not motivated by impatience. We just deny that the working class can ever afford to delegate power to a governmental minority, however honest and dedicated to the abolition of class society that minority may be.

Laurens Otter
Shropshire



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

Attack on all

On Saturday June 19 DHKC (Revolutionary People's Liberation Front) supporters were distributing their weekly newspaper in London. They were confronted by PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) supporters and one of them snatched and stamped over the newspapers. The DHKC supporters protested and said, "What do you think you are doing? Your own martyrs are mentioned in this paper. You have no respect for your martyrs!"

The attackers said: "You are fascists, against our guerrillas", and attacked the DHKC supporters with sticks. They defended themselves and the attackers ran away.

The next day a public meeting was held, where it was underlined that this attack was not only targeting the DHKC, but all revolutionaries, democrats and patriots.

Only cowards try to censor newspapers, thought and conscience. The fascist regime in Turkey has already banned and censored our newspaper. As far as the fascist regime is concerned, this approach makes sense. But the same approach cannot be adopted by those who call themselves revolutionaries and patriots.

Our people have the ability and conscience to separate right and wrong. DHKC do not consider those who take the side of the people as enemies. DHKC considers them friends. But we will not tolerate attitudes and actions that serve the enemy. Those who insist on such actions will get what they deserve.
Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Cephesi (DHKC)
Devrimci Halk Gucleri, Britain
Revolutionary People's Forces

Icons

Michael Farmer is concerned that Marx and Lenin have been 'modernised' out from the Communist Party's website (Letters, June 24). Further, that the hammer and sickle was noticeably absent from our European election stickers. Perhaps Peter Mandelson is weaving his dark magic on 'old communism'?

True, many left organisations ditch symbols as they slide into opportunism and liquidationism. Keen to distance themselves from an - undoubtedly - unpleasant past, they dump soiled icons. And go on to repeat many of its mistakes - usually on a lower, more miserable, level.

However, history has shown that icons are not prophylactics. Nailing Marx's picture above the door does not keep you safe from vampires. Hammers and sickles do not protect from werewolves. And intoning the holy texts does not guarantee your place in heaven.

No, what matters is the strength of your politics. This is not to say that symbols are unimportant. But they do not have magical powers. Presumably, comrade Farmer, you have had sight of the Party's EU elections manifesto. No hammers, no sickles, nor pictures of Marx or Lenin. Yet infused from start to finish with Marxism, with Leninism and with *revolutionary politics*.

Beware pigs in pokes, comrade Farmer.
Andy Hannah
South London

Ocalan death penalty

Turkey's rulers split

Turkey's state security court has declared its judgement in the case of Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), and sentenced him to death on the grounds of treason.

The treason charge is known in Turkish legal jargon as "betraying the homeland". Leaving aside the irony of judging a Kurd, who was 'guilty' only of defending the concept of a homeland for the Kurds, on these grounds, the verdict was hardly unexpected. It simply rubber-stamped what the army, the state security forces and the political establishment had previously declared, and it had already been established in the mindset of society at large by the press and media frenzy.

For the state, it was a matter of saving face. For the last 15 years ministers, generals and senior special forces officers have been regularly announcing that 'PKK terror' would be finished off for good.

Helicopter operations following brutal aerial bombings and indiscriminate artillery barrages; depopulating villages by forced deportations into strategic hamlets, 'defended' by Kurds on the payroll of the state as irregular forces; cross-border incursions into northern Iraq under the guise of "hot pursuit" with the aim of establishing a *de facto* sovereignty over Iraqi Kurdistan; and all the well known brutal counter-insurgency tactics developed in the US under the name of 'low intensity warfare' went on and on with considerable losses. The Ocalan 'success' has given the state a sense of credibility, as if it had been the intended result of the 15-year military campaign from the beginning.

It was also a question of borrowing time. The creaking state apparatus, held together by the top echelons of the army on the basis of old-fash-

ioned nationalistic indoctrination of the young officer corps, was coming apart at the seams under the intense pressure of Turkey's numerous contradictions. The ruling class hopes to ride on the back of increased popular support as a result of the Ocalan trial in order to juggle with its problems.

The whole spectrum of the Turkish political establishment (to the extent it may be considered 'established') was hellbent on scoring political points on the basis of this trial and events leading to it. Let us not forget that even prime minister Ecevit owes his recent success at the elections, and in forming a coalition government with the infamous 'Grey Wolves' fascist party, to the capture of Abdullah Ocalan.

On the other hand the judgement has closed off other options that may have been available to the state to deal with the Kurds and their aspirations.

A long legal process must now be followed. A death sentence is automatically referred to the court of appeal. As the summer recess period is coming shortly, any further legal arguments in the case will not be heard before September.

If, as most observers expect, the court of appeal approves the judgement of the state security court, the case will be forwarded to parliament for approval. First it will be handled in a commission and then placed before the grand national assembly. As there are more than 500 death penalties awaiting parliamentary approval, the political establishment and the government coalition must find a way to bring forward the Ocalan case.

If parliamentary approval is obtained, then the case file will be sent to the president of the republic for final assent, before the execution of the sentence.

If the state and political establishment were to proceed at maximum

speed to complete this legal cycle, it would present a bloodthirsty image on the international arena. Hardly desirable, in view of Turkey's participation in the current beauty contest in front of the European Union and the international finance institutions such as the IMF for more credits and investment, not to mention recognition and acceptance into 'the gentlemen's club'. If, however, the process is delayed in an open-ended manner, or if Ecevit is seen to be backtracking in the face of international pressure, he will be viewed by wide sections of the population as refusing to implement the judgement of an 'independent' court and to follow the 'due process of law'.

So the hawks are pressing hard for implementation of the death penalty. The doves, however, those who are very much aware of the long-term adverse consequences of such a prominent execution, are advising caution. They can see possible ad-

vantages opening up by keeping Abdullah Ocalan in limbo.

For the Kurdish people of Turkey the trial and judgement is yet another reminder that their homeland remains under the occupation of a client state of imperialism, that the state is determined to hold on to its prize possession - if any reminder was necessary, since hundreds of Kurdish youth are killed every year without any ceremony whatsoever by the same state's forces.

For Turkey's communists the Ocalan affair is a reminder that the Kurdish national question is intrinsically linked to the struggle for genuine democracy. It also serves as an important reminder for the working class and communists across the world. Whenever the vital interests of the bourgeoisie are threatened, it will discard its democratic veneer and reveal its true face - the same face you see in Turkey today ●

Aziz Demir

Communist University '99

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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.

Fighting fund

Valiant failure

We have unfortunately failed to reach our £400 target for the second successive month. Despite valiant efforts from supporters in north London, who raised £45 on a street stall, the final post brought only £95 - leaving us with a June total of £365. Thanks also this week to AR (£25) and LP (£10).

Comrades, I know there are many demands placed upon you - not least the Party Summer Offensive -

but it cannot be stressed often enough that the regular £400 figure is the *minimum* we need just to bring out our paper in its present form.

We now have a £50 shortfall to make up in July. I know you won't let us down! ●

Robbie Rix

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



Summer Offensive '99 Liquid assets

As the official end of this year's Summer Offensive looms, the total received stands at close on £11,500, representing 75% of the pledges given at the beginning of our two-month fund drive. We are confident that all the pledges will be met and many surpassed - several of our comrades are now veterans of these campaigns and have had few problems with raising the extra funds.

However, the achievement of the total pledged (around £15,000) would leave us well short of our £25,000 target.

Our EU election campaign has left our funds at rock bottom. A failure to come near this target

would adversely affect our ability to influence events and limit our power to intervene.

We are appealing again to those supporters and sympathisers who have yet to contribute. Even if your assets are not particularly liquid just at present, we are prepared to accept IOUs before the end of the Offensive, on July 10. Please rush them to Centre by phone, fax or e-mail.

And speaking of liquidity, July 10 sees the celebratory event to mark the end of this year's campaign. Places are limited for the SO meal, so please contact us soon as possible ●

Mark Fischer

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: 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.

Sunday July 11, 5pm - 'The left-socialist revival of the 1930s', using Hal Draper's *The dictatorship of the proletariat from Marx to Lenin* 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.

■ 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'. Unwaged/unemployed - £1; waged - £3; delegates - £5.

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). Disability access.

■ 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.

■ Direct action

ISF meeting - Sunday July 4, 2pm, Conway Hall. Ex-Class War/Smash Hits comrades discuss lessons of Class War and direct action activity.

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/

Winning the peasantry

Phil Sharpe argues that the Bolsheviks were wrong to dissolve the Constituent Assembly

The Constituent Assembly was always an important part of the Russian Marxist programme for the bourgeois democratic republic. The Constituent Assembly was potentially considered to represent the popular will of the workers and peasants. One of its main aims would be to supervise land reform and ensure that the peasants would finally overcome the domination of feudalism.

In 1917 the workers, soldiers and sailors established soviets. Lenin recognised their revolutionary nature, and called for all power to the soviets. However, he did not drop the call for the Constituent Assembly and concentrate exclusively upon that revolutionary proletarian demand. Lenin recognised that the soviets expressed the revolutionary class content of the proletariat, and he acknowledged that the Constituent Assembly represented the bourgeois democratic content of the peasantry. The Constituent Assembly could have an important role in realising the peasants' aspirations for land.

The bourgeois provisional government was reluctant to hold elections to a Constituent Assembly and the Bolsheviks became known as the party that took the Constituent Assembly seriously, and wanted the elections to be called. Indeed Lenin remarked that if the Socialist Revolutionary Party got a majority, this would not necessarily lead to a rupture between the soviets and Constituent Assembly, because the peasants would have to learn by their own experience about the counter-revolutionary nature of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 26, Moscow 1977, p261). Hence Lenin's conception of socialist transition was based upon the consolidation of the proletariat and peasant alliance, and he put an emphasis upon the need for dialogue, consensus and a peaceful realisation of socialism. Lenin knew that if the Bolsheviks acted to dissolve the Constituent Assembly this could undermine the alliance and facilitate the conditions for civil war.

After the October revolution the Bolsheviks held elections for the Constituent Assembly, and a majority of the seats went to the right wing of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Lenin called upon the peasants to recall their deputies because they did not represent the will of the people after the October revolution. This call does not seem to have been successful, but this failure was offset by the left wing of the Socialist Revolutionary Party joining the Bolsheviks in a coalition government. This led the Bolsheviks to raise the possibility of new elections to the Constituent Assembly in order to express this new political development.

But new elections were never called, even though Lenin's 'Theses on the Constituent Assembly' demands new elections if the soviets and Constituent Assembly are to exist in harmony rather than discord (*ibid* pp379-383). The call was not raised in a consistent manner. Instead Lenin increasingly supported the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly because it represented a counterrevolutionary alternative to the rule of soviet power. Its rightwing composition meant the Constituent Assembly did not recog-

.....
 "To let the Constituent Assembly exist would be to enable the workers and peasants to learn by their own experience that the SRs are counter-revolutionary..."

nise the legitimacy and necessity of soviet power, and was instead acting in a counterrevolutionary manner. The only basis upon which the Constituent Assembly could continue to exist was if it recognised the political hegemony of the soviets, but, given the reactionary nature of the Constituent Assembly, this was unlikely to happen (*ibid* pp423-425). The possibility of conflict between the soviets and Constituent Assembly became ever more likely.

Lenin theoretically justified his confrontational stance by replacing his original conception of socialist transition with a new one. The peaceful development of socialism was now replaced with the perspective that socialism is realised through the intensification of class struggle. The old ruling class intensifies its opposition to socialism the nearer the possibility of socialism becomes apparent, so the soviets, as the expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat, have to apply coercion against the old ruling class in order to ensure the successful transition to socialism (*ibid* pp400-403).

Thus the proletariat learns through struggle and practice how to develop socialism: theory is secondary in the context of realising socialism through civil war. Hence socialism is now the outcome of antagonism rather than proletarian hegemony in the alliance of the proletariat and peasantry. The role of plurality, dialogue and consensus becomes the expression of the passive emphasis upon theory and the idealist illusions of the intelligentsia. In contrast the destructive content of civil war is the basis to defeat counterrevolution. What Lenin does not question in relation to justifying this new conception of socialist transition are the problems it creates for upholding the proletarian and peasant alliance. Coercion becomes applied to the peasantry in the period of civil war and only when the New Economic Policy is introduced does

the conception of consensus start to re-emerge as the basis for proletarian and peasant relations.

The draft decree of the soviets abolishing the Constituent Assembly said this was necessary because of its counterrevolutionary and rightwing nature (*ibid* pp434-436). There was a constant power struggle. Hence the need to ensure the domination of the soviets led to the abolition of the Constituent Assembly. But there was no mention of why new elections could not have taken place in order to ensure a more representative Constituent Assembly that acknowledged the unity between the Left Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks.

Lenin's speech to the central executive committee of the soviets made it clearer why the Constituent Assembly had been dissolved (*ibid* pp437-441). This action was a matter of class principles: the soviets cannot coexist with a counterrevolutionary bourgeois organisation. The development of the dictatorship of the proletariat on the basis of the creativity of the soviets showed how outdated the Constituent Assembly had become. It was a correct demand for the Kerensky period, but now had no more relevance, and to allow the Constituent Assembly to exist could lead to an ending of soviet power. Hence the Constituent Assembly is dissolved even if this leads to civil war.

Lenin is now emphatic that reform of the Constituent Assembly, and even the demand that it recognise the power of the soviets, is not sufficient to keep the Constituent Assembly going. For just as the soviets expressed the revolutionary class content of the proletariat, so the Constituent Assembly represents the counterrevolutionary power of the bourgeoisie. Just as the class antagonism between the proletariat and bourgeoisie is irreconcilable, so the differences between the Constituent Assembly and the soviets are also irreconcilable. The soviets have no other choice than to dissolve the Constituent Assembly.

Lenin's approach has changed a lot since he promised the peasants that he would accept their electoral support for the Socialist Revolutionary Party. His argument that it was not possible for the soviets and Constituent Assembly to coexist is not absolutely untrue, and it was necessary to show the workers and peasants that the Constituent Assembly was counterrevolutionary. But this was not done, because the Constituent Assembly was dissolved after a few days of its existence.

Lenin maintains that the Right Socialist Revolutionary majority in the Constituent Assembly was counterrevolutionary, but it was still important to establish a dialogue with the Right SRs, because they had the majority support of the peasants. To close down the Constituent Assembly after a few days was to undermine the alliance of the workers and peasants. The peasants wanted the SR assembly deputies to act on their behalf, and this meant they probably believed that the closing down of the Constituent Assembly was a measure taken against them. The best way to really undermine the counterrevolutionary majority in the Constituent Assembly would be to let it exist, and this would enable the workers and peasants to learn by their own experience that the SRs are counterrevolutionary, and the possibility would be created for the Bolsheviks to win an electoral majority.

Lenin claimed that the Constituent Assembly was a bourgeois political agency that was attempting to undermine the soviets. But it was not as powerful as Lenin claims. It was not a rival to the soviets, and was instead a propaganda body for the bourgeoisie, which meant there was not a political imperative to dissolve the Constituent Assembly. Rather it was necessary that the peasantry understood how reactionary it was. But because the assembly was dissolved so early the peasantry still had illusions it, and this premature action undermined the workers' and peasant alliance. Hence the dictatorship of the proletariat became conceived in the harsh terms of war communism.

Despite the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly Lenin believed that the peasants were increasingly on the side of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs, and the bourgeoisie were aligned with the Right SRs. Socialism cannot be imposed by force on the peasantry, but the peasantry also know that the dictatorship of the proletariat has no other choice than suppression of the exploiters through civil war. Socialism cannot be achieved through the Constituent Assembly - this is a bourgeois democratic myth (*ibid* p460). The establishment of a Red Army and the help of international revolution will make the Soviet Republic invincible. In contrast, if the soviets were to put measures, such as nationalising the banks, to the Constituent Assembly, this would amount to getting the permission of the bourgeoisie for the actions of the soviets, and this represented the rejection of socialism (*ibid* pp455-472).

Lenin argues that the bourgeois democracy of the Constituent Assembly upholds the exploitation of the workers by the bourgeoisie, and now the soviets are in power the bourgeois democratic revolution has been transcended. The Constituent Assembly was a demand that was relevant during the struggle to establish bourgeois democracy, but now the soviets express the political representation of the workers and peasants (*ibid* pp473-477).

It is true that the Constituent Assembly represents bourgeois democracy and the soviets express proletarian democracy. This different class content would seem to suggest that the soviets were acting on behalf of the masses when they dissolved the Constituent Assembly. However, the problem with this action was that it may have had the support of the workers, but the peasants were not convinced. To argue that the peasants were on the side of the soviets, and that they supported the use of force in the interests of socialism, was possibly wishful thinking by Lenin.

In actuality the response of the peasants to the dissolving of the Constituent Assembly was very complex. They did not like the suppression of the Right SRs, but were prepared to continue to give support to the soviets, which had carried out land reform. In the last analysis the peasants gave support to the Bolsheviks in the civil war because the forces of reaction threatened to reverse the process of land reform. To argue that the soviets were the exclusive form of political democracy for the dictatorship of the proletariat while the Constituent Assembly was for the antagonistic system of bourgeois democracy is formally true, but what was absent from this analysis was that the peasantry represented the mass class basis of bourgeois democracy. Hence to dissolve the Constituent Assem-

bly because it was the expression of a system that was hostile to the dictatorship of the proletariat was still an action that disenfranchised the peasantry, and made them a potential force for counterrevolution.

Lenin argues that increasingly the mass of the peasants and workers supported the soviets and were in conflict with the Constituent Assembly. This class polarisation is expressed by the Left SRs coming over to the side of socialism, whilst the rich peasants and Right SRs are for all power to the Constituent Assembly. The interests of the revolution are dominant, and so if the Constituent Assembly goes against the soviets then it will be suppressed.

Lenin is even more explicit about the incompatibility of the soviets and Constituent Assembly in his speech to the railworkers' congress (*ibid* pp497-500). Lenin contends that neither a referendum nor new elections could overcome the problems. The Constituent Assembly tries to unite the workers and peasants with the bourgeoisie, but the soviets express the real class interests of the workers. Hence on the basis of antagonistic class interests the Constituent Assembly cannot be reformed by new elections, for even if these were held it would retain its reactionary bourgeois character. The only possible thing to do is to dissolve the Constituent Assembly, thereby developing the power of the soviets, and prepare for civil war against the bourgeoisie - no longer able to use the Constituent Assembly for the purposes of counterrevolution.

But even if we accept that Lenin is correct and the Constituent Assembly is nothing more than the expression of counterrevolution, the changing of the balance of class forces in favour of proletarian dictatorship and against the potential for bourgeois restoration is not helped by dissolution. On the contrary to allow the Constituent Assembly to exist is to unfavourably contrast this parliamentary body with the soviets: the actions of the soviets on behalf of the workers and peasants will show in concrete reality that the Constituent Assembly is for the exploiters. This will discredit and isolate the Constituent Assembly, and allow the Bolsheviks to be elected as a majority. This will create the basis for the convergence between the soviets and the Constituent Assembly.

In *The Proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky* Lenin summarises the Constituent Assembly experience. Lenin argues that while the soviets are the basis of the transition to socialism, the Constituent Assembly has a petty bourgeois and bourgeois class content. In contrast Kautsky tries to deny the class content of the Constituent Assembly. He is against the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly because he is against class struggle in opposition to the bourgeoisie. But Lenin insists it is the soviets which show more accurately the move to the left by the workers and peasants, and they have rejected the petty bourgeois leadership of the Mensheviks and Right SRs (*ibid* pp264-272).

Lenin now explicitly accepts that the peasantry (the petty bourgeoisie) have voted for the SRs, but the importance of this is rejected because what counts is the elections to the soviets. In absolute terms Lenin rejects the necessity of the Constituent Assembly, and instead is only for soviet democracy within the dictatorship of the proletariat ●

Unison witch hunt

The leadership of Unison has launched a concerted attack on the SWP in the aftermath of the Campaign for a Living Wage demo in Newcastle on April 10. Two SWP-dominated branches, Birmingham City Council and Sheffield, have been suspended. Dozens of individual members face disciplinary action, including Candy Udwin and Dave Carr, prominent SWP members and secretary and chair of University College Hospital London branch.

Socialist Worker recently printed a letter from Unison general secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe complaining about "the behaviour of your members and supporters" (June 19). He feigned concern that the SWP had actually dared to turn up on April 10: "Political parties and their newspapers did not receive an invitation." According to Bickerstaffe, the Newcastle demonstration was "intended for ordinary trade union members and the wider community". Patronisingly he imagines (or hopes) that "ordinary trade union members", etc do not join or support political parties - except

New Labour, that is.

He goes on to assert that the SWP attempted to hijack the demonstration. People were "intimidated and bullied to the extent that they did not feel they could support such an event in future should your paper and party be involved". In fact members of Unison - all active trade unionists for that matter - expect the SWP (and members of other left groups) to turn up on pickets, demonstrations and such events. A few grump ... but nothing more. Given that it is unlikely that Bickerstaffe has actually received a flood of complaints from rank and file members, it is quite clear that the SWP - along with the left as a whole - is the target for a renewed bout of witch-hunting.

So Bickerstaffe announces: "Your paper and party are not welcome on Unison demonstrations, as you have proved time and time again that you are only concerned with your own message as opposed to that which Unison is trying to achieve."

Chris Harman replies that Bickerstaffe is selective in his ban on

political papers. He raises no objection for instance to the presence on the demo of the *Morning Star*, to which the Unison leadership has made donations.

While *Socialist Worker* says that the leadership's "attacks on democracy within the union and their witch hunt against the left suffered some significant reverses" at the annual conference two weeks ago, closer inspection shows otherwise (June 26). The SWP were unable to get the branch suspensions discussed on conference floor and, although the leadership "were forced to promise a deal to lift the suspension of Birmingham branch", SWP members in that branch are still facing disciplinary action. All suspensions remain in place. In spite of criticism from some delegates, the Unison leadership *de facto* succeeded in getting the majority to side against the SWP.

In an unusually sober assessment *Socialist Worker* puts the mood of the delegates down to the fact that "the low level of strikes and struggle outside the hall meant that much of the



Candy Udwin: broke down

conference felt very subdued". Reporter Paul McGarr even said that "the low level of struggle, the union leaders' verbal shift left to match their members' dismay with New Labour, and a lack of rank and file confidence" meant that the feeling of anger at the confer-

ence failed to be translated "into action". Clearly the experience of leading SWP cadre is forcing an about-turn on the "it's never been a better time to be a socialist" line. Proving the opposite, Candy Udwin actually broke down at the rostrum during the debate in the final session of the conference. The strains of pretending that we are living through a period of working class upsurge are clearly beginning to show.

Nevertheless, the SWP did manage to get some national executive members along to a fringe meeting organised to oppose the witch hunt. Jean Geldart, Doug Thorpe, Roger Bannister and Jean Thorpe spoke to an audience of 430 in a well attended and successful meeting. Geoff Martin, convenor of London region, argued that while he has "massive political differences with the Socialist Workers Party ... if you have differences you discuss it, you have it out in a meeting, you come to a position and you go forward".

Quite right ●

Anne Murphy

Learning from the fascists

Fighting Talk Anti-Fascist Action, April 21 1999

This issue of *Fighting Talk* is thought-provoking, intelligent and well worth reading, especially in the context of our ongoing discussions around the supposed 'institutional racism' of the British state and its effects on our class.

There is a useful history of Afa, detailing its origins in the fighting squads around the Socialist Workers Party-led Anti-Nazi League of the 1970s, its formal launch in 1985 and the recognition by its more astute representatives that "for the moment militant anti-fascism has been out-flanked" (p8).

Afa was bruisingly effective in winning the battle for the streets with the fascists. By 1994 or so, the British National Party had had more than enough, and was forced to devise a new strategy, encapsulated in the slogan, 'No more meetings, marches or punch-ups'. Essentially, the BNP has consciously avoided the damaging physical confrontations with Afa that were regularly culling its cadre. Instead, it has shifted towards an electoral model, attempting to replicate the winning ways of its supposed European counterparts. Britain is more or less unique in Europe in not having a rightwing populist political movement. The BNP seriously thinks of itself as a candidate for the job.

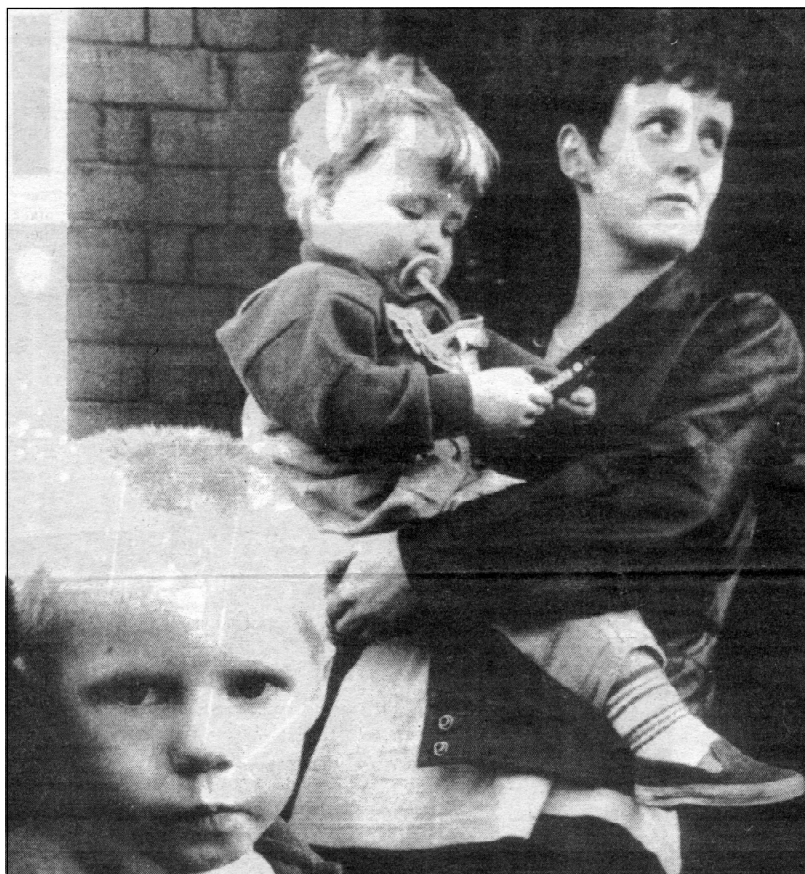
But it is highly debatable whether it actually is a viable vehicle for such a reactionary breakthrough. The European election results underlined that, a few semi-respectable votes in a couple of regions notwithstanding, the BNP is not poised to make an electoral breakthrough. With just 1.13% of the vote across the 11 British constituencies, it was easily beaten in the reactionary anti-EU stakes by the UK Independence Party. The UKIP gained 6.96% and had three MEPs elected. As *Fighting Talk* points out, "We probably have to be thankful that [the BNP's] past is such a burden to them" (p6). Similarly, leading

fascist Nick Griffin is quoted in the lead-up to the European elections: "Realistically, the media demonisation of the BNP as 'neo-Nazi' is still so effective"; and the ultra-right still so politically fragmented that the party is "unlikely to win a seat" (p6).

That is not really the point, however. As *Fighting Talk* notes, "Mainstream success is dependent not so much on their ability to painstakingly create an audience, but to draw instead from the vast reservoir of reaction whose existence is acknowledged ... but is so far largely untapped" (p8). Implied in this is the simple fact that a reactionary alternative which starts from a position of the mainstream rather than having to fight its way into it and is unencumbered by a thoroughly unBritish Nazi past could quickly become a mass movement. In this sense, the UKIP is a rather better example of the potential of 'tapping' that reservoir of reaction in British society.

Despite this, the BNP's European election campaign should be instructive for the left. First, because of its scale and ambition. Millions of pieces of fascist propaganda found their way into working class homes. Hundreds of thousands of potentially receptive people have seen the party's national election broadcast. If they were not blinded by narrow sectarian concerns, organisations like the SWP should learn a lesson from the fascists. They are making a play for the political space created by the explicit abandonment of even the pretence of representing the working class by the Labour Party. Instead, most of the left - which should have a universal project, which should be able to represent the *whole* of the class, not just the white section of it - has collapsed so ignominiously.

Second, the BNP's electoral successes are not key. The "vast reservoir of reaction" *Fighting Talk* correctly identifies could easily be tapped by far more viable reactionary



Uniform access to power for all whites?

elements than Tyndall's motley crew. In this sense, the relatively good UKIP results could encourage others.

For some, the most controversial articles in this publication will be those in which the Afa comrades discuss their alternative.

Concretely, the launch of the Civil Rights Movement on March 28 has "forced the pace" (p9). Afa is part of this new grouping, although it has a far more critical relationship to it than most other sections of the left. The CRM was initiated by Mike Mansfield QC in the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence enquiry and - illustrating the extent to which it operates simply on

a more 'radical' version of the agenda set by the establishment - has very narrow racial focus. Correctly, *Fighting Talk* warns against the "excluding of the white working class" (p4) through the false assumption "that there is a uniform access to power by all whites and uniform denial of access to power to all blacks" (p10).

This is the ethos of "current equal opportunities practice", "the race relations industry", "Labour councils" and "legislation" - both impending and currently on the statute book. In other words, it is the dominant ideology of the *institutional anti-racism* which motivates the present-day

state at *every* level, from Blair downwards.

Using concrete examples, *Fighting Talk* effectively illustrates how Labour councils in London have "quite deliberately racialised" (p7) the competition for increasingly scarce resources and - "in the name of anti-racism, presumably" - have "pitted communities against each other" (p8). This consequent "racialisation of working class community problems" provides a potentially rich vein of chauvinism and the plebeian racism which fringe organisations like the BNP can tap into.

In the absence of a hegemonic class project, *Fighting Talk* correctly notes that "a policy of redistributing the limited resources available to working class communities on ethnic grounds can only set the most impoverished against each other" (p10).

In specific areas, under specific circumstances, the BNP *can* make gains. However, *Fighting Talk's* analysis carries a weakness. It lacks an understanding that rightwing populism-fascism need not come in a specifically racist form. An extreme reactionary movement in Britain will of course be chauvinist - it will be exclusivist, define itself against the 'outsider' - but not necessarily racist. Indeed, given the specifics of British history in the second half of this century, it will almost inevitably come draped in anti-Nazi and 'anti-racist' robes.

Much of the left tails establishment anti-racism, thus effectively contributing to the terrible fragmentation of some of the very poorest working class communities. Clearly, what is needed is a movement of anti-racism from below, a working class-led fight for unity. Despite the many political differences between ourselves and the writers of *Fighting Talk*, their recognition of this basic task, and rejection of the divisive anti-racism of the institutions of the modern-day state, is to be warmly welcomed ●

Mark Fischer

In *What is to be done?* Lenin explained the basic theory of revolutionary (social) democracy against its opposite, economism. He contrasts the 'tribune of the people', able to react to every violation of democracy, with the trade union branch secretary engaged in the struggle for better terms and conditions on which to sell labour power. The economists downgraded or simply failed to understand the importance of the revolutionary political struggle for democracy. In practice they had a conservative attitude to the existing bourgeois democracy, and at best were reformist democrats. The essence of their politics was a fundamentally false, mistaken and simply wrong attitude to democracy in general and bourgeois democracy in particular.

In 1916 Lenin wrote 'The nascent trend of imperialist economism' (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 23, p13). Here he identifies two apparently different forms of economism. On the one hand, there is right economism, otherwise known as centrism. On the other hand, we have left economism or ultra-leftism. Both see only the absolute opposition of bourgeois and proletarian democracy based on workers' councils or soviets, and not a dialectical interrelationship arising from class struggle.

Our main concern in this debate is with left economism, which crudely opposes the present state with the democratic workers' state. The only answer is a workers' state or workers' republic. In Russia it was Parvus who coined the slogan 'No tsar but a workers state'. The Stalinists later attributed this to Trotsky, claiming it as an example of his ultra-left adventurism. Trotsky says: "At no time and in no place did I ever write or utter or propose such a slogan" (*Permanent revolution* New York 1974, p222). In fact Trotsky says that he published leaflets in 1905 under the title 'Neither tsar nor *zemsti* [local councils] but the people!' (*ibid* p223). This was a republican slogan, not a call for soviet power.

In 1928 Stalin and Radek proclaimed the only answer for the Chinese revolution was an armed uprising and soviets. Trotsky opposes the ultra-leftism of the Stalinist 6th Congress of the International. He says the congress "condemned democratic slogans as impermissible (constituent assembly, universal suffrage, freedom of speech and of the press) and hereby completely disarmed the Chinese Communist Party in the face of the dictatorship of the military oligarchy" (*ibid* p140).

Trotsky explains that "for every person not entirely devoid of political sense and tempered with revolutionary experience, this resolution constituted an example of the most revolting and most irresponsible adventurism" (*ibid* p272). The Stalinists crudely counterposed soviets against bourgeois democracy when the movement was at a low ebb. They took a position of hard, 'no compromise' leftism.

Trotsky's answer was to propose "a course towards the mobilisation of Chinese workers under democratic slogans, including the slogan of a constituent assembly for China". But here the ill-starred trio (Radek, Preobrazhensky and Stalin) fell into ultra-leftism; that was cheap and committed them to nothing. Democratic slogans? Never: "This is a gross mistake on Trotsky's part". "Only soviets for China - not a farthing less!" "It is hard," says Trotsky, "to conceive of anything more senseless than this - the slogan of soviets for an epoch of bourgeois reaction is a baby's rattle; ie, a mockery of soviets. But even in the epoch of revolution - that is, in the epoch of building soviets - we did not withdraw democratic slogans" (*ibid* p273).

Trotsky then summed up the lessons of how the Bolsheviks combined democratic and soviet slogans: "For

Trotsky versus the left Trotskyists

The RDG and the CPGB have joined forces in defence of revolutionary democracy, argues Dave Craig

a long number of years, the Russian Bolsheviks had mobilised the workers and peasants around democratic slogans. Democratic slogans played a big role in 1917. Only after soviet power had actually come into existence and clashed politically with the constituent assembly [in 1918], irrevocably and in full view of the entire people, did the party liquidate the institutions and slogans of formal - that is, bourgeois - democracy, in favour of real soviet democracy - that is, proletarian democracy" (*ibid* p140).

Trotsky was very clear on the need to take up bourgeois democratic demands - and not only in China. He argued this in his writings on Britain in the 1920s and Spain in 1930 where he called for a constituent assembly and the building of soviets. His programme for France in 1934 also contains important democratic demands.

The debate in recent issues of the *Weekly Worker* has been between the revolutionary democratic approach to politics and left economism. Comrades Phil Sharpe and Barry Biddulph argue a version of this, that I will call left Trotskyism. This has very little to do with the kind of politics advocated by Trotsky himself. Rather it is a product of monarchist culture in the UK, which has rotted the brains of most Trotskyists and made them frightened of republican slogans.

Let us begin by restating three basic propositions of modern revolutionary democratic communist politics. The first proposition is that revolutionary mass struggle is the best means to extend democracy. The second is that the democratic revolution is the highest form of that struggle. The third is that the revolutionary

democratic dictatorship of the proletariat is the highest form of the democratic revolution.

One of the important practical consequences of these propositions is that bourgeois democratic slogans and demands - for example the republic, constituent assembly, the right of nations to self-determination, people's militia; and equal rights for women, ethnic minorities, gays and disabled people, etc - are a legitimate and essential part of the political struggle for world communism.

We adopt these slogans in a revolutionary, militant and vanguard fashion. We are not in any sense dependent on their adoption by bourgeois democrats. We do not follow them, but recognise the working class as the vanguard fighter for democracy and the party as the vanguard of that class.

The three propositions recognise the class distinction between bourgeois and proletarian democracy. However, they are not based on a simplistic and crude opposition of parliament to soviets, as proposed by the centrists and ultra-lefts. There is a dialectical relationship between the two forms of democracy. Democratic slogans and soviet slogans must to be combined correctly.

The Bolsheviks supported these three basic propositions with two important amendments. Their first amendment was that the democratic revolution (proposition 2) was defined to mean bourgeois democratic revolution. They fell out with the Mensheviks as to what this meant. Their second amendment was to replace the dictatorship of the proletariat (proposition 3) with the revolutionary demo-

cratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

How do revolutionary democrats interpret the experience of Bolshevism? In 1905 Lenin, Trotsky and Kautsky were revolutionary democrats. By 1914 Kautsky had become a centrist or right economist. He supported bourgeois democracy against workers' democracy. Lenin and Trotsky remained revolutionary democrats before and after April 1917. The differences between Lenin and Trotsky were nuances within the same revolutionary democratic communist camp.

Lenin's *April Thesis* in 1917 is obviously an important event. But what was its significance? In essence the experience of the Russian Revolution wrecked the Bolshevik 'amendments'. Lenin recognised that the democratic revolution could not and should not be confined to bourgeois limits. The democratic revolution should be consummated by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Trotsky summed this up in his theory of permanent revolution. He says: "The victory of the democratic revolution is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat" (*ibid* p277). He says: "The democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry is only conceivable as a dictatorship of the proletariat that leads the peasant masses behind it."

These statements overturn only the old Bolshevik amendments. By stripping these away, the revolutionary democratic baby is saved and the rancid bathwater is drained away. Modern revolutionary democracy is alive and well, free from the bourgeois limits of the democratic revolution and the peasantry.

What interpretation do the left Trotskyists put on this? According to comrade Biddulph, revolutionary democracy equals Kautskyism. Consequently Lenin was a Kautskyist until April 1917, when he became a Trotskyist! Apparently Lenin ditched all the basic ideas of revolutionary democracy, and not simply the obsolete 'amendments'. This of course is completely untrue. Not only did Lenin *not* abandon the revolutionary struggle for democracy, but neither did Trotsky, as his argument against the Stalinists over China in 1928 prove.

In 1918 Kautsky confirmed his position as a centrist or right economist by attacking the Soviet state. Lenin replied in a polemic entitled *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*. Kautsky contrasted "democracy" to "dictatorship". He tried to undermine the revolution by urging workers to oppose "dictatorship" and support "democracy", by which he meant bourgeois democracy. Lenin destroyed the nonsense about 'democracy versus dictatorship'. Every Marxist knows that all states, even the most democratic, are class dictatorships.

Let us take an analogy. Suppose that in 1998 the UK had become a workers' state. Suppose also that the RDG and CPGB came forward and condemned this as 'dictatorship' and called for 'democracy'. We then advocated a return to a federal republic on democratic grounds. We would justly be accused of being 'Kautskyists' and anti-working class renegades.

If anybody thinks this is where we are now, they must be living in a different part of the country to me. Perhaps when Barry goes to work he sees the red flag flying above his workplace. On arrival perhaps he is greeted by the workers' militia who direct him to the daily meeting of the workplace council to discuss which manager to sack. Naturally when he hears that the CPGB and RDG are arguing for a federal republic to undermine all this, he is furious and writes off to the *Weekly Worker* to warn of the dangers of Kautskyism.

This shows the false, ahistorical method of the left Trotskyists. A debate in 1918 in and about an actually existing workers' state against returning to bourgeois democracy is not relevant to the British constitutional monarchy in 1999. In case anybody had not noticed, the workers are not in power and our prime task is not to prevent us 'returning' to a federal republic.

Phil Sharpe is also wearing the mantle of left Trotskyism. He is another 'hardline' believer in soviets and against bourgeois democratic demands. Yet he exposes himself as a bourgeois democrat. Phil gives us his analysis as to what went wrong with the Russian Revolution (*Weekly Worker* May 27 and page 4 of this issue). He does not even mention Kronstadt. Not a single word about the workers, peasants and sailors who at the end of the civil war rose up demanding the rebuilding of the soviets. Instead Phil is crying into his beer about the closure of the Constituent Assembly in early 1918. This was the very thing that Kautsky was complaining about!

Barry Biddulph's shouting about Kautskyism is a lot of nonsense. What

Was Trotsky a Kautskyist?

In 1934 Trotsky wrote a programme for French Marxists called 'A programme of action for France' (L Trotsky *Whither France?* London 1974). Section 16, entitled 'For a single assembly', sets out Trotsky's attitude to French bourgeois democracy.

The aim of this programme is for a workers' and peasants' proletarian state. But unlike our left Trotskyists, he took a clear position on the French constitution.

Section 16 says: "We are thus firm partisans of a workers' and peasants' state, which will take power from the exploiters. To win the majority of our working class allies to this programme is our primary aim."

"Meanwhile, as long as the majority of the working class continues on the basis of bourgeois democracy, we are ready to defend it with all our forces against violent attacks from the Bonapartist and fascist bourgeoisie. However, we demand from our class brothers who adhere to 'democratic' socialism

that they be faithful to their ideas, that they draw inspiration from the ideas and methods not of the Third Republic, but of the Convention of 1793.

- Down with the Senate, which is elected by limited suffrage and which renders the power of universal suffrage a mere illusion!

- Down with the presidency of the republic, which serves as a hidden point of concentration for the forces of militarism and reaction!

- A single assembly must combine legislative and executive powers. Members should be elected for two years, by universal suffrage at 18 years of age, with no discrimination of sex or nationality. Deputies would be elected on the basis of local assemblies, constantly revocable by their constituents, and would receive the salary of a skilled worker.

"This is the only measure that would lead the masses forward instead of pushing them back. A more generous democracy would facilitate the struggle for workers' power."

It is worth pointing out that this part of Trotsky's programme is completely consistent with the political method of revolutionary working class democracy advocated by the CPGB and RDG. Like us, his declared aim is "workers' power" or a workers' republic. But he puts forward immediate democratic demands for radical constitutional change which in and of themselves are in the framework of bourgeois democracy. Trotsky connects these ideas with the French revolutionary democratic tradition of 1793.

In his writings on Britain he connects with Cromwell and English republicanism.

In the UK a federal republic is our equivalent to a French republic with a single assembly. A federal republic would also be "a more generous democracy", that would "facilitate the struggle for workers' power".

So was Trotsky a Kautskyite? Of course not. He was a revolutionary democrat, 17 years after the *April thesis* ●

is he frightened of? The political choice according to him is either the constitutional monarchy or a workers' state. Under the constitutional monarchy, the bosses are in charge, so we know where we stand. In a workers' republic the capitalists have been defeated and the workers are in charge. If you want stability these are the only options for you. It avoids all the messy business in between.

But the Russian Revolution showed very clearly that between tsarism and the workers' republic was a transitional or dual power republic. The dual power republic was not invented by the RDG: it is merely a description of the nature of the state in that transitional period. This was not a non-class state. It is a form of bourgeois republic, in which the power of the bourgeoisie is under direct challenge from workers' councils. It was a special type of republic. We could call this special republic by a variety of names: 'dual power', 'transitional' or even a 'civil war' republic.

The 'civil war republic' between February and October 1917 was, according to Lenin, the most democratic in the whole of Europe. But it was not some utopia. It was a republic of intensifying class struggle. Society was being polarised between military dictatorship and workers' power. In *State and revolution* (VI Lenin *Selected Works* Vol 2, p289) Lenin refers to "a fundamental idea that runs through all of Marx's works: namely, that the democratic republic is the nearest approach to the dictatorship of the proletariat".

This quote makes no sense if Lenin is referring to any normal democratic republic. Is the American republic "the nearest approach" to the dictatorship of the proletariat? But it makes perfect sense if he is referring to a special type of democratic republic as existed in Russia in April 1917.

Lenin continues: "For such a [dual power] republic, without in the least abolishing the rule of capital, and, therefore, the oppression of the masses and the class struggle, inevitably leads to such an extension, development, unfolding and intensification of this struggle that, as soon as it becomes possible to meet the fundamental interests of the oppressed, this possibility is realised inevitably and solely through the dictatorship of the proletariat, through the leadership of the masses by the proletariat." Exactly. This is the transitional republic.

Barry quotes Lenin saying, "The more highly developed a democracy is, the more imminent are pogroms and civil war in connection with any profound divergence which is dangerous to the bourgeoisie" (VI Lenin *The renegade Kautsky* Peking, p23). This sums up quite neatly the circumstances of a dual power republic. But Barry has his blinkers on. He condemns the civil war republic as an RDG invention. In his letter (*Weekly Worker* June 24) he dismisses it as the "cult of formal structures".

Barry hates the thought of something that would upset stable life. He does not like the RDG for suggesting it. So he calls us "Kautskyist" to make himself feel better. He sees the only political option as a constitutional monarchy or a workers' state. Whilst we see a dual power republic as an opportunity, he sees it only as a threat. He is like someone who wants to cross a river to get to the promised land. But he rejects the only possible means of transport. So it's back to 'Star Trek'.

Beam me up, Scotty, and magic me to that other safe place! ●

Labour after the elections

For the first time, Tony Blair is almost beginning to look like the prime minister of a mid-term British government. Almost. The fixed smiles are cracking; the teflon is wearing thin - even though New Labour's popularity remains unusually high.

This week 44 MPs - including junior minister Peter Hain - openly challenged Tony Blair by signing a declaration that Labour must remain a "democratic socialist party" and reject a centre-left coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Senior trade unionists are also to be heard calling for the government not to ignore its 'traditional working class support' - ie, give recognition and due weight to the opinions of the TUC bureaucracy. With the rise of the SNP and Plaid Cymru, the threat of an 'ermine revolt' in the Lords and the Irish peace process spawning new contradictions, major problems are now beginning to trouble the Blair government.

This shift was marked by Labour's poor showing at the European elections and its defeat at the hands of the Tories. New Labour's honeymoon is now just a fond memory. 'Normal' government is becoming the reality. The Tories, dubbed a "dead parrot" by *The Sun* just a few months ago, smell blood over Blair's wavering on Europe and the sinking fortunes of the single currency. The Tories also see chinks in the armour over Ireland. They have effectively broken from bipartisanship over the Good Friday agreement by calling for the halting of prisoner releases until guns start being handed in - clearly outside the terms of the peace deal.

The government's spin doctors have been trying to paint the European election results as a side issue - of no significance except to amateur psephologists. The low turnout reflects a complacent satisfaction with government policies, they say. Eight percent support for the Tories from the total electorate against 6.5% for Labour will hardly be of significance, claim the spinmeisters, once the punters come out to actually choose who governs.

And while they may have a point, the spin has very poor flight. While the low turnout was clearly significant, it was more a case of what *The Guardian's* Larry Elliot calls a "sullen indifference" than the 'seething anger' that many on the left insist on seeing at every turn. Yet the poor results are causing doubts from within New Labour's own ranks. If this was coming from the usual suspects - Benn, Livingstone or Seddon - then it would not worry Blair too much. However, loyal 'modernisers' and true believers of the New Labour credo have bent under the pressure.

John Monks, the very New Labour general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, has accused Blair of treating Labour's loyal core voters like "embarrassing elderly relatives". He was backed up soon after by the leader of the GMB union, John Edmonds, who said: "I think there's a feeling among many Labour voters that they have somehow been left out of the government's strategy. Activists need policies to boast about."

Given the control-freakery of the Millbank regime and the rigid loyalty demanded from Blair, such a statement from the until now Dalek-like Monks must be seen as a very public

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“Blair - with his close allies - has not shown the slightest sign of compromise”

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rubbing of salt into the wounds of Labour's European defeat. 'On-message' TUC general secretaries are just not meant to act like that.

Blair - with his close allies - has not shown the slightest sign of compromise. At this week's annual conference of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union, general secretary Ken Jackson attacked the recent comments from his 'brothers'. Recently knighted Sir Ken accused Blair's critics of "sneering at Labour's successes", arguing that the "more you carp from the sidelines, the more you conspire in your own decline". He clearly sees the role of organised labour as supporting Her Majesty's government and selling paltry crumbs to the membership with a view to ensuring they vote the right way at election time.

Before becoming embroiled in the D-day negotiations over Ireland, the prime minister re-emphasised the New Labour message. He said: "While I am leader of my party and prime minister of this country, I will never again have Britain forced to choose between a Labour Party that ignored the importance of business and ambition and a rightwing Conservative Party which ignored the need for justice and compassion."

His party would remain "100% proof" New Labour. Blair warns that there is to be no U-turn. This man is not for turning. Former trade and industry secretary Peter Mandelson is being rehabilitated. Mandy is now cutting a much more public figure. Speaking at the AEEU conference, he insisted that Labour must retain its new supporters and avoid retreating to the party's traditional core vote bunker. Holding out an olive branch of some sort to the union bureaucracy, Mandelson also pressed for "a new partnership between the party and trade unions, aimed at getting the message of Labour's strategy and achievements across to union members and working people". It is now not a question of if Mandelson will be back in government, but when.

While Monks and Edmonds, de-

spite their comments, remain firmly with the New Labour project, a new labour left is now cohering. Mark Seddon and Liz Davies - just re-elected to Labour's national executive - are proof of it. Likewise the statement from 44 MPs published in this week's *Tribune*. It will be launched at a 'Keeping the party Labour' conference called for July 17 in London. More than 90 Labour MPs have already pledged support. Extending the Grassroots Alliance into a broad coalition of traditionalists, old Labourites and left reformists is their core strategy.

After the announcement of last week's results of the NEC elections for the constituency section, Millbank claimed some satisfaction at having pared back the Grassroots Alliance from four to three out of six. After a low-key campaign deliberately brought forward from the autumn so as not to overshadow the annual conference, turnout dropped by five percent to 30%. However, the Labour left grows in influence. In spite of losing a seat on the NEC the Grassroots Alliance's share of the vote actually went up from 45% to 47%.

It is clear that Blair's de-Labourisation of Labour is creating a space on the left - both inside the Labour Party, but also, crucially, outside it. A vacuum exists.

Yet the party leader is not too worried. Blair believes in himself. That is both his strength and his weakness. He believes that socialism is dead and that Labour as a representative party of the workers is a finished project to be shed as the new millennium is born. While his third way has all the hallmarks of a re-invented 19th century liberalism, it has a concrete basis in both the national and international defeats that the working class has suffered. Blairism, like Gladstoneism before it, gains strength from an atomised and passive working class. A class with no self-awareness which does not exist at all in the active-political sense. While we as a class remain weak, Blair is strong.

The declaration of the 44 appears to have a strong grasp of history. Yet while criticising Blair for wanting to go back to liberalism, it - equally forlornly - proposes to go back to Labourism. It states: "At the turn of the millennium, poverty and gross inequality still disfigure our society and destroy the life chances of millions across the globe. That challenge cannot be met by a reversion to 19th century Liberalism, out of whose failure Labour was born. Labour's future will be as a forward-looking, internationalist and democratic socialist party fighting for social justice into the 21st century."

However, re-inventing a failed social democracy - whether pursued inside the Labour Party, as *Tribune* intends, or outside, as some recently decamped Trotskyites want - cannot provide answers for our class.

The challenge for the left is not to recreate such a servile creature, which in its original form could always be relied upon to serve the interests of imperialism and capitalism, but to build a mass revolutionary party. We do not need to go through the horrors, disappointments and betrayals of Labourism yet again. The working class deserves better ●

Marcus Larsen

What we fight for

● Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.

● The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers' movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.

● Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.

● We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.

● The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single Party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.

● Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs: ie, communism.

● We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.

● Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.

● War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world's problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

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

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Blind to the truth

The map in front of me speaks for itself. Each skull, of which there are dozens, marks a town or village in Kosova where Milosevic's armed forces butchered ethnic Albanians. The victims were shot or burned alive in a systematic attempt to extirpate the Kosovar nation.

As the full extent of Serb war crimes emerges, the attitude of left groups to these acts of barbarism assumes great importance, for it serves as a yardstick by which the principles that underlie their politics should be judged. Sad to say, the approach taken by some groups betokens not just the theoretical impoverishment and crisis which characterises the current period; it also reveals a distressing moral atrocity rooted in a chronic inability or unwillingness to face the truth.

The most abject example of this phenomenon can be found in the pages of the *Morning Star*. Last week, I asked how the left, particularly the 'Yugoslav defencists', would handle the question of wide-scale Serb atrocities during the war. I wrote: "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 made some mistakes, but the KLA are just as bad'" (*Weekly Worker* June 24). As we shall see, I was right in some cases, but not in that of the wretched *Morning Star*.

The paper makes no attempt to justify the Serbs' actions by setting up some kind of moral equivalence. Just a deafening silence. Scan every column inch and you will find not a single reference to 'ethnic cleansing' by the Serbs. What you have instead are allegations of atrocities committed by Kosovars in the wake of Nato's victory. Under lurid headlines such as "KLA gangs wage war against Serbs", we read that "Tens of thousands of Serbs have fled Kosovo in the face of advancing KLA forces which have indiscriminately shot Serbs who they consider to be collaborators and ransacked Serb villages" (June 22).

This putrid one-sidedness should come as no surprise. Throughout the conflict, the *Morning Star* functioned as little more than the voice of Belgrade. Little wonder, therefore, that it should print a thank-you letter from professor Dr Vladimir Stambuk, international secretary of the Yugoslav Left. The professor speaks of his "high hopes that UN forces (K-for) will do their best to disarm uncontrolled Albanian terrorists". This 'socialist' stooge of Milosevic's regime has the gall to contend that "the Yugoslav left urges respect for the human rights of members of all national communities ... it seeks equality and equity in everyday life, which will lead to the establishment of substantial autonomy in the province of Kosovo" (June 26).

The reference to "Albanian terror-



The KLA in Pristina - just like the Serb army?

ists" should remind us that the *Morning Star*, sycophantically echoing Tanjug, has consistently sought to portray the KLA as mere "terrorists". Back in April, the paper printed an article by Brian Denny entitled 'Trafficking to the west' - a classic smear, which aimed to 'prove' that the KLA were not simply terrorists, but also at the centre of an international drug-dealing conspiracy involving the German and US secret services. Any intelligent reader must have seen at once that Denny's hysterical allegations about the so-called "Kosovo-Albanian cartel" were nothing more than a crude fabrication.

When it comes to theoretical analysis of the current situation in Kosova, all the *Morning Star* has to offer is a couple of articles by Kenny Coyle - international secretary of the CPB. In his so-called "war analysis", comrade Coyle begins by sneering at "the photogenic woman soldier, captain Vicki Wentworth, pictured poignantly, head in hands, in front of an alleged 'massacre site'" (June 22).

His argument, if such it can be called, is one that we find deployed elsewhere on the left: namely that "it was the air forces of [Nato] which are primarily responsible" for the Kosova tragedy.

In accord with the paper's general line on the post-war situation, Coyle devotes all his attention to the plight of the Serb population of Kosova. Quoting figures supposedly provided by the United Nations commissioner for refugees, Coyle tells us that 9,000 Serbs fled Kosova for Serbia and Montenegro in the first days after the suspension of hostilities - this was, according to his highly dubious figures, more than twice the number of ethnic Albanians who left their homeland in the first few days after the onset of Nato's air offensive on March 24.

Hence, according to Coyle's twisted logic, the Serbs are suffering more than the Kosovars did. It is the

Serbs, not the Kosovars, who have been the victim of pogroms.

The nearest the *Morning Star* comes to the forbidden territory of actually admitting that Serbian armed forces were involved in *any* form of violence against ethnic Albanians comes in a reprinted article by Kartik Rai of the *People's Democracy* newspaper of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Comrade Rai tells us even-handedly that "It is a tragic fact that wars of secession are always bloody while the protagonists on all sides perpetrate acts which can be labelled as 'ethnic cleansing'" (June 26). Therefore no opposition to the violence of the oppressors and no support for the violence of the oppressed.

While the *Morning Star's* coverage continues to be characterised by blatant falsification, *Socialist Worker's* position is shot through with weasel-worded equivocation. The Socialist Workers Party, in the person of Charlie Kimber, at least has the decency to admit that "the Serbian government and security forces are responsible for the massacre of hundreds and probably thousands". But then comrade Kimber begins to haggle about the numbers. "They [Nato] throw out widely varying figures of those dead, reports of torture and rumours of atrocities with no regard for the truth. Over the last two weeks we have heard claims of 100,000 dead, 30,000 dead, 10,000 dead and then figures rising again ... It is a ghoully bidding war designed to divert attention from what really happened and to hide Nato's role in the whole process" (June 26).

The SWP's central thesis is that Nato made an admittedly bad situation much worse: "Nato ... played a crucial role in accelerating the terror faced by Kosovan Albanians ... The scale of killings and ethnic cleansing soared after March 24, the day the Nato bombing began ... There were killings before March 24, but they

were on a relatively small scale, similar to those which, disgracefully, go on every day in regimes throughout the world. Nato created the climate in which murder and torture became a hundred times more likely" (my emphasis). In other words, had it not been for Nato's air offensive, Milosevic would have limited himself to killing only "relatively small" numbers of Kosovars. This would have been "disgraceful", to be sure, but it would have been better thus. In its fatuity, the SWP's argument is akin to suggesting that the Nazi holocaust was actually the fault of the RAF, without whose intervention Adolf Hitler would have contented himself with exterminating only a "relatively small" number of Jews.

This abhorrent position directly results from the SWP's failure to address the central democratic question about the Kosova conflict - the legitimate demand of the Kosovars to self-determination. It was this failure at the level of basic principle and theory that led the SWP to adopt a stance of hand-wringing, bourgeois social-pacifism, bemoaning the "catastrophe" and "horror" of the Balkans war - chastising the Milosevic regime, but placing the blame for Serbian 'ethnic cleansing' firmly on Nato and imperialism. To make a bad argument even worse, Kimber enunciates precisely that notion of 'moral equivalence' which we predicted. He states: "Today Nato intervention has given local control to the Kosovo Liberation Army in many areas ... The KLA is now carrying out its own atrocities" (*ibid*).

Something of the SWP's theoretical disarray on the whole Kosova question can be seen in an article by Chris Harman in the latest number of the party's theoretical journal, *Socialist Review* (July-August). On the one hand, Harman concedes that Milosevic's campaign of terror against Kosova was "a crime against humanity, which you couldn't defend"; echoing a recent reported statement by Alex Callinicos, he even accepts that the Kosovars' democratic demand for self-determination is "legitimate". Yet Harman goes on to argue that, notwithstanding these facts, the left has somehow missed the point in its approach to the war. Stressing the "absolute intellectual confusion of the far left" [among whom he would doubtless include the CPGB and the *Weekly Worker*], Harman claims that we have "not understood the tradition of opposition to imperialist war ... We have to remember who our main enemy is ..."

Comrade Harman is wrong - at least so far as the CPGB is concerned. We are quite clear that our *main* enemy is at home. For the last 13 weeks we have argued with absolute consistency against Nato bombing. We unreservedly condemn imperialist war aims, wherever they manifest themselves. But our principled position has been

founded on the logic of the *democratic* question at the crux of the whole Kosova issue. As Harman himself points out, in reference to an earlier case, "The best sections of the French left did not merely support the right of Algeria to self-determination during the French war with Algeria, but identified with the FLN." Quite so. And we, unlike the SWP, have chosen, on the basis of Leninist principle and a commitment to democracy, to 'identify' with the KLA.

We have not done this blindly. Just as Marx, Engels and Lenin - seizing on the Irish question as a weak link in British imperialism - supported Irish self-determination *despite* the petty bourgeois nationalism of the Fenians and the Irish republican movement, so we have supported the KLA, *despite* their comparable politics. We know that the KLA are not angels, but they do represent the interests, and enjoy the mass support, of Kosova's ethnic Albanians.

This leads naturally to the question of the CPGB's attitude to "atrocities" supposedly or actually carried out by the KLA. Let nobody misunderstand or misconstrue our position: as consistent democrats, we are categorically opposed to *any* acts of 'ethnic cleansing' or anti-Serb terror carried out by the KLA or other ethnic Albanians on their own account. We *comprehend* (who cannot?) why, in the aftermath of three months of horrific slaughter, some Kosovars have evidently taken the opportunity to exact retribution on some of the local Serb population, but we do not *condone* these acts of vengeance.

The KLA leadership has, understandably, denied that their forces have been responsible for the crimes in question. It is not improbable that many of the essentially isolated incidents, however reprehensible, have been the work of individual Kosovars, returning from enforced exile to find their relatives murdered and their homes destroyed or occupied by Serbs. At this stage, there is no way of knowing whether the KLA leaders are telling the truth or not. What is clear to any objective observer, however, is that the scale of such largely spontaneous violence bears no comparison with the planned and systematic campaign of mass terror instigated by Milosevic with the aim of exterminating the Kosovar nation.

The necrophiliacs of the CPB (and their counterparts in the NCP, the SLP and other organisations) are evidently beyond redemption. They cannot claim ignorance as a defence, since their whole position is founded on the conscious propagation of lies intended to bolster the authority of Milosevic and his "former workers' state". But other forces on the left can and must take a stand on the future of Kosova, a stand determined by rigorous analysis and a firm regard for the truth ●

Michael Malkin