

Saturday July 17 sees the 'Democratic socialism into the 21st century' *Tribune*-sponsored national conference at the TUC's Great Russell Street headquarters. It is sure to be well attended, though perhaps not quite the "labour movement event of the year" (*Tribune* July 2). The Labour left is undergoing a minor resurgence, having been systematically marginalised since the mid-1980s. The proclamation of Tony Blair as leader and the parliamentary landslide on May 1 1997 was associated in the minds of many bourgeois commentators with the final end of the Labour left - Tony Benn's recent decision not to seek reselection was cited in a number of papers as confirmation (including *Socialist Worker*).

The obituaries are premature. The success of the Grassroots Alliance in NEC elections for the second year running testifies to an ability to articulate, and benefit from, *passive* discontent in the constituencies. More than that, the arrogance and heavy-handed authoritarianism of the Downing Street-Millbank Tower axis not only alienates wide swathes of constituency activists. Large numbers of backbenchers are not on-message either.

Organisationally the *Tribune* event is top-heavy with members of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The boast is of "over" 90 MPs in support (*Tribune* July 2). Input from the trade union movement is far more modest (*Tribune* editor Mark Seddon carries the flag for the Grassroots Alliance). So, while the listed participants include John Edmonds, GMB general secretary, and two other lesser trade union luminaries, there are 17 MPs set to debate Labour's future around the pregnant theme "Democratic socialism or 19th century liberalism".

Interestingly besides a hard core of Campaign Group MPs - Diane Abbott, Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Alan Simpson, Dennis Skinner - many others have been propelled into opposition. Not least that revolting creature, Frank Field. So there is a certain rapprochement going on. But around what? There exists no mass movement from below, a movement whose momentum and raw power sweeps timid leaders into political territory far beyond their mundane origins and ingrained prejudices. Obviously thwarted ambition is at work. There is also a growing frustration within the trade union bureaucracy at the government's perceived failure to cater for Labour's traditional paymasters. The minimum wage is extremely minimal. The Tories' anti-trade union laws remain intimidatingly on the statute book. Venture capitalists, not general secretaries, earn prime ministerial plaudits. However, though the likes of Edmonds and Field personify a shift to the left by a fragmented layer of rightists - that is a switch from loyalism to oppositionism *vis-à-vis* the Blair project - it is essential to grasp the nature of what today constitutes the Labour left.

Twenty or thirty years ago the Labour left - including the Militant Tendency of Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe - had a vision of state socialism. Basically the plan was to achieve something like the "actually existing socialism" of the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, only using different means. The top 100 or 200 monopolies were targeted for nationalisation.

Labourism or communism?

Capitalism would thereby be curbed, mastered and eventually transcended. What distinguished this British road? Socialism was to be realised primarily through the Labour Party and a parliamentary majority and would not dispense with, but radically reform and supplement, the established institutions of bourgeois democracy.

In the contemporary formulation of Benn the left had to win a Labour government so as to "transform capitalism by democracy into socialism" (T Benn *Arguments for socialism* Harmondsworth 1982, p218). Proletarian and bureaucratic revolution were both explicitly ruled out ... "These are not arguments for revolution," stated Benn (*ibid* p221). Other ideologues such as Michael Barratt Brown (*From Labourism to socialism* 1972), Eric Heffer (*The class struggle in parliament* 1973), Stuart Holland (*The socialist challenge* 1975) and Geoff Hodgson (*Socialism and parliamentary democracy* 1979) advocated a similar state socialist approach.

This left - associated with the name of its figurehead, Tony Benn - was sentimentally inclined to the christian socialism of Bruce Glasier and Robert Blatchford. But Bennism was no primitive throwback. Intellectually it shrouded itself with seemingly sophisticated neo-Ricardian theories of value and distribution, criticised the post-World War II consensus and promoted, albeit platonically, the class struggle. This last feature was crucial. Bennism acquired an enthusiastic following, in part because of the disillusionment and disgust generated by the imagined failure of the Wilson and Callaghan governments of the 1960s and 70s. Wage freezes and national decline, moral backing for the US in Vietnam and Barbara Castle's anti-trade union bill, economic stagnation and hyperinflation, the social contracts and sterling crises were also associated with a marked increase in working class combativity. Strike days in the 1970s reached levels unequalled since the 1926 general strike and the 1910-14, 1918-21 upsurges.

Bennism might have rendered Labour unelectable throughout the 1980s - given the domination of bourgeois ideas in society - but its utopian reformism was by the same measure largely responsible for Labour's continued hold over the mass of class conscious workers - whose horizons unfortunately by and large never rose above syndicalism.

In comparison to Bennism today's New Labour left is politically retrogressive and intellectually hollow. Instead of criticising Labour's past, it cel-

ebbrates Labour's past. The 'Declaration of the 44', which will "provide the backdrop to the July 17 conference", starts with a paean of praise for "past achievements": "The creation of the Labour Party at the turn of the century transformed British society and politics - for the first time working people and their families were represented by their own party committed to eradicating the evils of poverty and inequality through the redistribution of power and wealth. In partnership with the trade unions, the Labour Party has been the most important motor of social progress and civil liberties in 21st [sic] century Britain. Without it there would be no NHS, no comprehensive secondary education, no national minimum wage, no equal pay act, no sex or race discriminations acts and far fewer trade union rights" (*Tribune* July 2).

Contradictorily, and definitely out of sync with the triumphalist alibi, the second, and final, paragraph of the 'Declaration' admits: "At the turn of the millennium, poverty and gross inequality still disfigure our society and destroy the life 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."

With such a distorted view of the past it is perfectly logical for *Tribune's* editorial to express the hope that its conference will "begin the process of *reclaiming* Labour for democratic socialism" (my emphasis). In other words the Labour Party was throughout its history more or less committed to "democratic socialism", a 20th century soporific which *Tribune* earnestly wishes to see used into the next century.

From the aeroplane to the microchip, the 20th century witnessed enormous and awe-inspiring technical progress. The productive forces have grown in leaps and bounds, capitalism every day notching up achievements that dwarf the greatest wonders of pharaonic Egypt, classical Rome and imperial China. Capitalism is a mode of production that knows neither peace nor rest. It must constantly expand wealth for its own sake. Now there is an integrated world economy joining every continent into a single organism. However, within the system of surplus-value extraction there is not only a gulf between capitalistically rich and poor countries, but a permanent fight between labour and capital over the price and

conditions whereby labour power is bought and sold.

The struggle to improve subsistence levels is undoubtedly aided by the existence of trade unions. Nevertheless workers stay mere wages slaves. The producers neither control the immediate product of their own collective labour; nor do they control a world economy which moves, not smoothly upwards, scaling ever newer heights, but, on the contrary, through a series of devastating crashes and slumps which in the 20th century become inextricably linked with terrible wars. Tens of millions have been slaughtered. The era of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons poses point blank the choice of socialism or barbarism.

The only positive solution is for the great mass, the workers, to organise themselves as a revolutionary class which overthrows all existing states as the first necessary step in a worldwide transition to communism: ie, the fullest freedom for all. By liberating themselves and abolishing exploitation, the workers liberate the whole of humanity.

Tragically the 20th century has been a century of failure. The inability of the working class to organise itself as a *political* force that breaks free from capitalism by conquering capitalism where as an organism it operates - ie, at the level of the world economy - resulted in the twin punishments of Stalinism and Hitlerism. Perhaps the *main* factor pacifying the working class has been social democracy and its British variant, Labourism. In Germany social democracy sided with the kaiser-socialist state in 1914 and, when thrust into power in the Weimar republic, presided over the counterrevolutionary murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in 1919. Social democracy then acted to stabilise capitalist rule in the name of gradually reforming it into socialism.

The Labour Party was no different. It underwent its sudden clause four socialist conversion under the impact of the October Revolution in Russia, so as to divert workers here from dealing with their own capitalist state. By granting the reforms celebrated by *Tribune*, such as the NHS, Labourism attempted not to realise socialism, but put it off.

Labourism in terms of practice is not a break with liberalism. It is a continuation. Gladstone and Lloyd George had their pro-capitalist programmes of pro-working class social reform, including health and unemployment provisions. There was a sprinkling of trade union-sponsored

Lib-Lab MPs too. Nor should it be forgotten that the intellectual father of the NHS was Beveridge, a Liberal peer (who also got backing from the 'middle way' Tory, Harold Macmillan).

The organisational forms of Labourism are distinct. Trade unions and their block vote were constitutionally dominant from the beginning. Lenin therefore rightly defined the Labour Party as a bourgeois workers' party. The base was proletarian. Yet the politics were thoroughly bourgeois: ie, reactionary.

The ideological honesty of Blair is highly problematic for those who seriously believed the state socialist lies of Old Labourism. That also goes for the auto-Labourite sects who as an article of faith insisted that it was the supposed duty of revolutionaries to choose the 'lesser evil' in general and other elections, because that is what the majority of class conscious workers do. Old Labourism has gone and, having done so, has thrown the Old Labourite left - both internal and external - into profound crisis. The Old Labour left responds by reinventing itself simply as Old Labour, full stop - thereby constituting the New Labour left. As to the external Old Labour left - the SWP, *Morning Star*, Workers Power, NCP, *et al* - in all probability they face extinction.

Blairism represents both a continuation of 20th century Labourism and a return to 19th century liberalism. An acrobatic feat made possible entirely due to the fact that the working class (which found a *refracted* expression as the subaltern pole in Labourism) at present exists sociologically, as wage slaves and voting fodder. But nothing more. Blair can afford to be an ideologically honest Labourite: his social-ism is unashamedly capital-ism.

Needless to say, any serious analysis of the 20th century calls not for the resurrection of Old Labour. The 21st century should neither be about going back to 19th century liberalism nor reviving the corpse of Old Labourism. Our class cannot afford to relive the horrors of the 20th century. Quite the reverse: our class needs a political party designed not to reconcile us with, but to self-liberate us from, capital. Such a party must welcome into its ranks all partisans of socialism and human liberation and operate according to genuine democratic centralism - unity in action, factional rights and full freedom of criticism.

The scientific name of this party is the Communist Party ●

Jack Conrad

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

You name 'em

I don't know why Alan Fox and Eddie Ford want to paint such a black picture of the protests in the City on June 18. It was by no means an orgy of drunken, pilfering anarchism. In fact it was not an anarchist-organised event at all. Rather it was a hotchpotch of anarchist, environmentalist, socialist, anti-capitalist, etc. With the collapse of the organised labour movement - and in this period of 'special reaction' social and political formations are fluid - they may set into anarchist hogwash or they may not.

There was some spontaneous rioting, but it was not a spontaneous riot. As Alan Fox pointed out (*Weekly Worker* June 24), there was a considerable amount of strategic thinking - a mix of creative and disciplined tactics. Premises were attacked, but not to nick stereos, as Eddie thinks (*Letters*, July 8). For instance, the several Reed job shops. If you live half a mile away from the city in Hackney and you are on the dole you know all about Reed. In return for pre-election donations Alec Reed runs The New Deal in Hackney. Compulsory attendance at The New Deal Campus offers time in a 'gateway', time on a 'runway' and then lift-off into drudgery. This action was part of a two-year campaign against The New Deal.

Eddie Ford thinks that my logic assumes "the CPGB - and all other left organisations - should immediately liquidate themselves in order to follow and 'learn'". In last week's *Weekly Worker* (July 8) I learnt from six out of nine articles of the crisis of the left. You name 'em: they're struggling. For good reasons: auto-Labourism, chauvinism, and sectarian dogma. In this period of almost non-existent revolutionary consciousness it is premature to dump an emerging militant layer represented in the City protests into a lumpen dustbin. They showed a smouldering constituency, the bit that won't go away. It was part of the working class making itself.

Phil Rudge
Hackney

Full Marx

Obviously some of your correspondents have not cast off Stalinist ways of arguing: Eddie Ford, because the media said the June 18 demo was a riot, and because Marxist history and sociology define riots as "motivated by a personal desire for revenge", decides that this was all that was intended. He then brings in looters "desiring to liberate expensive goods from the nearest shops", and "drunkenness".

That sort of riot is a more or less spontaneous reaction to an immediate additional evil; this was a demo, fixed for a specific international event, with a place specifically chosen for its relevance, and with planning meetings advertised for over six months. Had people wanted to loot, the stockbroker-banking-insurance area of the City of London would hardly have been the place. Yes, some anarchists are to be seen drunk on demos, Marx also used to be; a pity, but not really proof that their philosophy is invalid.

Laurens Otter
Shropshire

Strange appeal

I find myself quite at odds with Socialist Appeal, having been influenced by the *Weekly Worker*! I went to a discussion meeting with Ted Grant - his main focus was on trade union struggle and economic crisis, and that students could not affect politics without being part of the workers' struggle.

I asked him if this was putting too much emphasis on the purely economic struggle, expecting some sort of clarification on his position on the

importance of bourgeois democracy, but he was simply evasive, which honestly surprised me. I have been arguing for more concrete positions on this sort of thing ever since, and also arguing against the pseudo-sectarian method of trying to build one's own tendency as the only conceivable working class party.

The war in the Balkans has been very telling for the left as a whole, and I find myself disagreeing with everyone, including Michael Malkin of the CPGB, on this issue. One thing that I find interesting is that both the CPGB and SA have a very similar *analysis* on the Balkans while taking two very different positions. Both say that the Milosevic regime has nothing to do with socialism and that the Kosovans are oppressed, but SA refuses to support any form of nationalism in the area and posits a socialist federation instead.

Obviously this is not real politics and I point this out. I also state my belief that a socialist revolution would have to champion national rights. However, as there is little organised labour and even less politicised labour in the region, I think the CPGB (and even more the Alliance for Workers' Liberty) are championing nationalism without any working class content, which could take on a fascistic character. I'm much closer to the CPGB position though.

Andrew Cutting
St Andrews

Tiny Serbia

Michael Malkin's article (*Weekly Worker* July 1) berating the 'left' for not being sufficiently pro-KLA is a disgusting piece of pro-imperialist stoogery. There is nothing Marxist in it - just petty bourgeois moralising.

Malkin pretends that he knows "the main enemy is at home", but then gives as much fake 'democratic' and 'socialist' support he can to the west's *cause célèbre* for warmongering, the KLA's 'oppressed nation status' and the 'ethnic cleansing' directed against them by Serbia.

But imperialism playing on tribal and national disputes for its own fascist counterrevolutionary purposes is as old as the hills. Even the activist, anti-theory SWP can smell a rat here, and put in a few caveats in their rag about the reprehensible nature of the KLA, even as they opportunistically join in with western hysteria against the Milosevic regime.

Malkin, speaking for the CPGB, says: "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."

Come again? This unprecedented blitzkrieg by 19 imperialist countries to bomb tiny Serbia into the ground and impose its diktat has, as the issue at its *core*, "the democratic question of Kosova"? You're off your trolley, Malkin - and anyone else in the CPGB or 'left' who can't see the wood for the pot plant.

The west doesn't give a damn for anyone's democratic rights. It is going all out on Goebbels levels of propaganda manipulation, including stunted-up massacre stories to throw on top of the 'normal' horrors of a Balkans civil war - and to go along with this propaganda is to betray workers to imperialist warmongering.

The issue is not the issue of 'rights' versus 'evil dictators' - the issue is warning the working class that imperialism is turning to crisis, trade conflict and now shooting war. The "imperialist aim of the war" is warmongering itself, required to smash down rival production capacity (a big cen-

tral European bonfire at one end of the Rhine), vie for hegemony, and damage imperialist rivals.

Milosevic is just picked on as a convenient imperialist hate-figure and no one on the side of the working class would want to make that scapegoating even more convenient.

Malkin just displays his own anti-Marxist ignorance with his completely fatuous pretence that supporting the KLA has parallels with Marx and Lenin's support for the Irish liberation struggle or communist backing of the FLN of Algeria.

Which imperialist power are the KLA fighting? They are seizing their moment *beside* imperialism in an opportunist land grab for greater Albania, or - if you will not have that - staging round 57 of interminable Balkan strife (short of successful socialist federation, which really did prove its possibilities for peaceful development of the region as the old Yugoslavia, for all its faults).

Malkin does not seem to be trying to say that Serbia is an imperialist power (which would be equally stupid); so all his venting of spleen against the Belgrade regime is just petty bourgeois moralising.

As the *EPSR* has explained, quoting Lenin, the only Marxist position is to be very rigorous about whether the national fight one is considering actually damages monopoly capitalism's power in the world, not measuring how many bodies are piled up in one location or another.

Chris Barratt
London

Fit of pique

Oh dear, it looks like there's a spot of bother in *EPSR* land. Recent issues of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* have been at pains to suggest that Roy Bull's expulsion from the Socialist Labour Party represents a qualitative break in SLP politics. This has led Chris Barratt to argue that there is "no point in being in or around the SLP except to argue against this degeneracy ..." (*EPSR* July 7).

Reading between the lines, it seems that Bull has encountered dissent among his followers, some of whom have had the temerity to insist that the SLP has undergone no such fundamental change and remains no more or less wretched than it was before the 'fall of Roy'. Perhaps the *EPSR* guru is suffering a fit of pique after his shabby treatment by Scargill.

Steve Edwards
Ludlow

Transitional

The main point missed by Peter Manson in his stream-of-consciousness piece on the AWL standing Jill Mountford in the July 15 council by-election in Churchdown, Lewisham ('Sub-reformist' *Weekly Worker* July 8), is that it simply is not true that the *only* reason for revolutionaries to stand in elections is to make abstract propaganda for socialism and recruit directly, immediately to a revolutionary group.

Now, of course we wish to make revolutionary propaganda (by selling our literature, holding meetings, etc, during the campaign) and to recruit to the AWL - but revolutionaries have two fundamental jobs. One is, of course, the irreplaceable and absolutely necessary work of building a revolutionary organisation and attracting the militant minority in the working class to revolutionary ideas - but we *also* need a policy for the whole class and movement, a programme of demands around which to organise activity. The *working class* will make socialism, not a handful of revolutionaries.

The demands in Jill's election address (for taxing the rich, for free

healthcare and education, for working class political representation, etc) are of the latter type, a pole for the broader movement: they are demands to take our class from where we are towards where we want to be (transitional demands), to be taken up as a guide to action for the class and movement as a whole. We are not just advertising the AWL and saying that capitalism is bad and socialism is a good idea.

And, to be frank, had we decided to use this election to make abstract propaganda for socialist revolution, we would have formulated demands a damned sight better than those Peter lists. National self-determination for Wales and Scotland, LGB rights, etc are not revolutionary demands (or even specifically leftwing, or, to be honest, necessarily working class). Demanding free healthcare is 'reformist' - in fact, Peter, it is a reform demand being raised by revolutionaries in particular circumstances for particular reasons, which is an entirely different matter - but demanding the abolition of the monarchy isn't? If you are really making propaganda for revolution, shouldn't you at the least talk about setting up organs of direct workers' democracy such as soviets, of smashing rather than 'reforming' the state, etc? At least be consistent, comrades.

Finally, the Labour Party. Whether or not, in a particular set of circumstances, revolutionaries should or should not advocate a vote for Labour has never had much to do with Labour's programme (see Peter's opening paragraph, which says we no longer call for a Labour vote because Blair has pulled the party too far to the right) - but is based on Labour's (now decreasing) organic link to the organised labour movement.

We are not now selectively putting up candidates against Labour because we ever thought Labour was dead leftwing and now is not, or because we ever thought Labour would bring about socialism: we called for a Labour vote in the past because Labour was/is the political wing of the British labour movement, and had in its structures the capacity for the working class to assert itself politically. Blair is now severing those links. But that process is far from complete: in cases where there is not a socialist or labour movement candidate who can take the struggle forward in some way, we will continue to call for a Labour vote.

Of course we must break workers from Labourism and convince them of the need for revolution. Of course the Labour Party is and always has been a bourgeois party. But you can't break an entire labour movement from Labourism without engaging with it and intervening - as opposed to occasionally sticking leaflets through working class people's doors calling on them to smash the police.

Above all, alongside directly attracting those we can to revolutionary ideas, we need a programme of immediate activity and politics that can advance our class on all fronts of the class struggle.

Your alternative is a set of garbled demands and no orientation to working class organisations (including the trade unions) or working class communities. We are against "auto-Labourism". We are also against auto-sectarianism.

Alan McArthur
Alliance for Workers' Liberty

Soft underbelly

I see that Mark Sandell is busy exposing the soft underbelly of AWL politics once more in his rationale for the exclusion of political organisations from the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws (*Weekly Worker* July 8).

Sandell writes that "if the campaign is to be a real force, it needs to be based on basic class struggle organisations". One can only presume that the involvement of political parties will lead to UCRATUL becoming a thoroughly *surreal* force. The implicit reasoning behind Sandell's miserable formulation is that the AWL are somehow 'unviable' without the crutch of "basic class struggle organisations" (which can presumably include this week's AWL front).

The AWL's collapse before Scargill in the European elections becomes all too easy to fathom.

Sandell has a sneer at those from the 'Stalinist' tradition. However, it is precisely the organic, trade union militants of the CPGB - in opportunistic days gone past - who perfected the art of the relegation of politics inside the day-to-day running of the 'official' trade union movement. These are the negative lessons that Sandell and the AWL continue to repeat on a microscopic level.

Phil Watson
Liverpool

A bit dim

In his letter (*Weekly Worker* July 8), associating himself (unfairly in my opinion) with Dave Craig's "admirable" defence of Kautskyism, Danny Hammill posed as a possibility that he was, perhaps, being "a bit dim".

Well, Danny, I hate to have to be the one to break it to you, but you certainly are. You see, by advocating the "revolutionary [democratic] removal from below of the constitutional-monarchical system and its replacement by organs of workers' power", you are endorsing precisely the struggle for the workers' republic that I, Barry Biddulph and all Trotskyists support.

Whenever CPGB/RDG members refuse to define their federal republic in class terms, your Trotskyist critics are forced to conclude that you advocate a mere bourgeois republic, a state such as that of the US or Germany. In case it has escaped your notice, Danny, workers there have long since been liberated from a constitutional-monarchical system, but wage slaves they remain.

The CPGB never tires of reminding us that 'economists' in the British labour movement (by which is meant all socialists outside your own ranks) take wage slavery as a given and that we concern ourselves exclusively with negotiating the rate of workers' exploitation. Yet you, Danny, refuse to condemn Craig for not making explicit what you yourself, to your credit, do - ie, that you are fighting for a proletarian rather than a bourgeois republic. Self-evidently, what the CPGB/RDG have unanimously agreed upon is merely to salivate before a giant bowl of fudge.

Comrades, if there is to be any realistic prospect of our moving forwards together, we need clarity as to what are the real issues of contention between those who define ourselves as Trotskyists and 'revolutionary democrats'. I would quite like to play a part in helping us achieve it. But the situation is hardly helped by the *Weekly Worker*'s editor cutting out quotes from my last letter (July 8), taken from Lenin's post-April 1917 writings that prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the charge of Kautskyism against some of your members (although apparently not Danny) is 100% legitimate.

Tom Delargy
Paisley

Controversy at CPGB aggregate

action

Last weekend's aggregate meeting of the Communist Party of Great Britain saw heated debate around two controversial items.

The first major difference arose after comrade John Bridge's opening on the Irish peace process. Emphasising the importance of placing the latest 'deadlock' within the wider context of Blair's constitutional revolution from above, comrade Bridge underlined the necessity of developing a fully rounded analysis. Approaching Ireland as an issue in effect separate from other constitutional and class developments, as though it was somehow not an integral part of remaking the way we are ruled, is to indulge in vulgar empiricism. Yet that is precisely what most of the left does.

In Ireland, there is at present no significant proletarian force. Nonetheless it remains the main weak link in the United Kingdom. Likewise for Blair, Ireland and the peace process is the main weak link in New Labour's overall programme - not the minimum wage, the NHS or trade union laws, as so many on the economic left believe.

It is in this context that the Tories are desperately trying to revive themselves as some sort of credible opposition. In effect, the bipartisanship of the main bourgeois parties throughout 'the troubles' has been broken by Hague. The current deal, initially brokered by Major and being fast-tracked through parliament by Blair in the shape of the Northern Ireland Bill, is now opposed by the Tories. The devil, at the end of bipartisanship, is in the detail.

The establishment and survival of a power-sharing executive remains in doubt. Sinn Féin is insisting that it wants to keep to the letter of the agreement, and demands other parties do the same. Yet clearly it is positioning itself to take advantage of new opportunities it hopes will arise from the continuing 'neither war nor peace' impasse. Gerry Adams has ambitions - not to be a Northern Ireland minister, but on an all-Ireland level. Meanwhile, the Tories have forged an anti-Blair alliance with the besieged Ulster Unionists, in effect recreating the Conservative and Unionist Party of old.

Blair's pledge to ban fox-hunting adds another dimension to what could emerge as a constitutional crisis. *The Daily Telegraph* is urging an "ermine revolt" and for the Lords to block all government legislation. As the hereditary peers face extinction and the Tories the loss of their massive in-built majority, Hague may turn to more radical methods. The Countryside Alliance and the Ulster Unionists will enable Hague to fight back in and outside parliament. For the Tories to take such a road is a high-risk strategy ... but from the point of view of Smith Square the Tories face at least one more term in opposition.

Unfortunately, the old left approaches Blair's programme in a piecemeal and disconnected fashion. It fails to see, or ignores or belittles, the connections between devolution in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the remaking of the House of Lords, the London mayor and New Labour's strategy towards the EU and the euro. Only a revolutionary democratic mini-

.....

"Some comrades noted what they called a shift of emphasis ... others claimed that this was a complete about-turn and a capitulation to Tory-Ulster unionism"

.....

.....

mum programme can provide a coherent working class alternative. Our slogans for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales; a united Ireland, and an all-Ireland constitutional assembly; and a European Union constituent assembly are more relevant than ever.

In discussion of these perspectives, comrades raised questions specifically about the Jack Conrad article, 'Neither peace nor war' (*Weekly Worker* July 1). Some comrades noted what they called a shift of emphasis, particularly concerning the issue of democratic rights for protestants in a united Ireland. Others claimed that this was a complete about-turn and a capitulation to Tory-Ulster unionism. One comrade, John Pearson, supported the content of the letter printed in the *Weekly Worker* from Jim Baxter (*Weekly Worker* July 8) which attacked Conrad's 'new' position supposedly because it supports the protestant veto.

The relevant passage in the Conrad article was quoted: "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 and Clinton setting the agenda. We advocate and fight for the fullest democracy. That means in Ireland the protestant - British-Irish - minority having self-government autonomy up to and including the right to separate".

Comrade Anne Murphy denied that this was a new position and argued passionately that if we do not have an answer for the protestant population, we in effect condemn them all. Any revolutionary strategy must aim to split our opponents and win sections of the working class with reactionary ideas to our side. This is also the case in Ireland. Our demand for democratic rights for protestants is

in the context of our minimum demand of a united Ireland. We are not about demanding rights for Orangemen and unionists to oppress the republican minority in the Northern Ireland statelet. It is about providing a general programmatic answer.

Comrade Roger Harper characterised the protestant population as reactionary. During the debate, this was likened to the 'one settler, one bullet' slogan of the Pan-Africanist Congress in South Africa. His approach - what effectively amounts to the denial of rights for protestants - is an abandonment of a revolutionary democratic strategy for Ireland.

In response to comrade Harper's suggestion that Conrad's position amounted to "going soft on the Alliance for Workers' Liberty", other comrades responded that our approach was different. We openly side with the violence of the oppressed against the violence of the oppressor and unconditionally support everything that is democratic and progressive in the programmes of Sinn Féin and the IRA. Within an Irish constituent assembly communists would fight for protestant rights, including autonomy and the right for separation, an outcome which, if exercised, would be the least satisfactory for the protestant - British-Irish - community. Unless the working class unites around a revolutionary democratic programme, then there can be no universal solution for the Irish question.

The second controversial item was contained in a motion from Manchester to change the subheading of the *Weekly Worker* from 'Towards the Daily Worker' to 'Paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain'. Speaking to the motion, comrade Pearson argued that the reasons for this were to "reaffirm" the primacy of our fight to reforge the CPGB - particularly in view of our banning by the registrar of political parties; to "rewind" the "reputation" of the *Weekly Worker*'s openness "at a qualitatively higher level"; and to assist members and supporters "to keep their eyes on the ball" while we are engaged in broader work in the Socialist Alliances and the rapprochement process. This argument won wide support.

Speaking against the motion, comrade John Bridge argued that all was not as it seemed, that this was not merely a technical motion. What actually lay behind it was a number of different issues which some comrades from Manchester had taken up, including in letters to the *Weekly Worker*. He urged comrades to argue about these substantive issues rather than focus on a symbolic issue such as the paper's masthead. The issues he suggested were to be seen in a letter concerning the position in several *Weekly Worker* articles on 'institutionalised racism' and the establishment's anti-racism; last Communist University's debate on the nature of the USSR; Manchester comrades' concern over the PCC giving the *Weekly Worker* financial autonomy. Far from being innocuous, the motion clearly pointed to concerns that the PCC was tending towards a liquidationist direction vis-à-vis the Socialist Alliances. As to the suggestion that the reputation

of the *Weekly Worker* needed to be "rewon" - it was baseless.

Comrade Bridge argued that all previous changes to the form of our central publication were for concrete political reasons. Going with the Manchester turn would not help our campaign against the registrar of political parties one iota. He said that such a move ought either to be connected with an initiative to take the organisation forward or reflect a change of direction, perhaps after a dispute over strategy.

Some comrades from Manchester insisted that the motion was as it stood and that nothing more lay behind it. Others backed the proposed change, though for different reasons, saying that 'Towards the Daily Worker' was no longer as relevant in today's conditions, while 'Paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain' was indeed an accurate description.

This had the effect of clouding the issues behind the motion which needed to come to the light of day. Comrade Marcus Larsen argued that it was not our method to erect a smokescreen, but to fight for political openness.

Comrades urging a vote for the motion suggested that comrades Bridge and Larsen were making a big deal over nothing - creating an opposition when there was no opposition. This was until comrade Harper admitted that for him, at least, there were issues behind the motion. He listed these as: difficulties for the organisation in elections arising from the name ban; the loss of our Scottish committee; the resignation of a 'key' Party member; the Conrad analysis of the USSR; and a demand for centralisation against autonomy.

This led many comrades who had supported the motion to state that this was not why they had urged a change to the masthead. Comrade Bridge welcomed the fact that the real politics were at last out in the open. Eventually the motion was withdrawn and national organiser Mark Fischer, who had argued in support of it, said that he would bring up the suggested change on the Provisional Central Committee in the context of a more rounded package of initiatives concerned with taking the organisation forward. Comrade Fischer's proposal was supported by the Manchester comrades.

It was reported that a total of £14,186 had been received towards the Party's 1999 Summer Offensive, which had just ended. The final total was expected to be over £16,000 when all monies were in.

Marcus Larsen

Website

Our newly revamped website carries a comprehensive archive section including articles on the Kosova war, Socialist Alliances and the SLP's degeneration.
www.duntone.demon.co.uk/CPGB/

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday July 18, 5pm - 'Trade unions and class', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* Vol 2 as a study guide. Sunday July 25, 5pm - 'Is there a Marxist theory of crisis?', using Simon Clarke's *Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide. Call 0181-459 7146 details.

Manchester: Monday July 19, 7.30pm - 'The falling rate of profit and the tendency to crisis' - part 2, 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.

■ Seminar

The Armenian and Kurdish genocides: threads of continuity and change, 1915-1999. Saturday July 17, 2-5pm, council chambers, Camden town hall, Judd Street, NW1 (opposite King's Cross station).

■ Glasgow Marxist Forum

Public meeting and discussion: Trotskyist deputies in the European parliament. What lessons for the British left? Speaker from Lutte Ouvrière. Thursday August 12, 7.30pm, Partick Burgh Hall (near Partick tube and rail station). All welcome.

Where to get your Weekly Worker

■ London

Bookmarks Bloomsbury Street, WC1
Centre Prize Bookshop 136-138 Kingsland High Street, E8 2NS
Compendium Books 234 Camden High Street, NW1 8QS
Dillons Bookshop Queen Mary College, 329 Mile End Road, E1
Housemans 5 Caledonian Road, N1 9DX
Index Books 16 Electric Avenue, SW9
New Beacon Books 76 Stroud Green Road, N4 3EN

■ Bristol

Greenleaf 82 Colston Street, BS1 5BB

■ Cardiff

Rebecca Books 131 Crwys Road, CF2 4NH

■ Edinburgh

Word Power 43 West Nicolson Street, EH8

■ Glasgow

Barrett Newsagents 263 Byres Road

■ Hull

Page One Books 9 Princes Avenue

■ Leicester

Little Thorn 73 Humberstone Gate, LE1 1WB

■ Liverpool

News from Nowhere 98 Bold Street, L1 4HY

■ Manchester

Frontline Books 255 Wilmslow Road, M14

■ Nottingham

Mushroom Books 12 Heathcote Street, NG1 3AA

■ Southampton

October Books 4 Onslow Road, SO2 0JB

The International Bolshevik Tendency's attacks on me go from the sub-political to the illogical. On the question of the Socialist Alliances, they write: "Many ostensible Trotskyists in Britain believe there is no role for a small group except as an entry inside some larger formation. It became apparent that one MB comrade, Ian Donovan, was uncomfortable with the developing consensus that the best means of propagating the programme necessary for socialist revolution was through reconstituting a British section of the IBT."

"... As the *Marxist Bulletin* comrades prepared to depart from the SLP, he began to express an intense desire to participate in the newly-revived Socialist Alliance. The other comrades did not share this enthusiasm, and tended to view the Socialist Alliance, in both conception and execution, as a propaganda bloc between a variety of ostensibly socialist formations 'united' on the basis of a lowest-common-denominator programme somewhat to the right of most of its components. In short: a swamp" (1917 No21, June 1999).

Sorry, comrades, but really any idiot can see that it would be perfectly possible to participate in the Socialist Alliances and re-establish a public political presence for an openly Marxist organisation. The IBT's accusations of liquidationism here really show the substratum of sectarian brainlessness that underlies their politics, despite their attempts to project a more user-friendly image than the Spartacists. The leading role played by the comrades of the CPGB in the Socialist Alliance, which did not detract one iota from their ability to wage a principled, courageous and openly communist election campaign in the June Euro-elections when their bloc partners in the Alliance capitulated to Scargill, is proof positive that the project of involvement in the Socialist Alliance was in no way counterposed to the re-establishment of an open IBT organisation.

The IBT refuses to play any initiating role in struggles to fill the evident massive political vacuum on the left in British politics with a revolutionary programme, preferring to let the left reformists have it all their own way in this field - in favour of seeking to pressure the minuscule, hated and irrelevant Spartacists by being the 'best builders' of the campaign to free Mumia Abu-Jamal. While this is of course a worthy cause that revolutionaries should and do support, making it the main activity of a revolutionary group as against a wider project to address the working class 'at home' is hardly a sign of a proletarian perspective! And of course the IBT was too bound up with giving "military support" to Milosevic's genocidal drive against the KLA to consider giving any support to the CPGB's campaign. Which ironically came to mean that the IBT's position on the elections (abstention) was similar to some of the softer and more reformist-inclined elements in and around ... the Socialist Alliance. I for one was proud to have been a supporter of this election campaign.

The IBT admit, however, that my criticisms of their 'tradition' inside their organisation constituted an 'internal opposition'. And they are also forced to admit that they sought to prevent a full discussion of my criticisms: "The IBT leadership proposed that ... a substantive discussion could be postponed until the next pre-conference period [in an organisation that holds conferences on average about every four years! - ID]. Comrade Donovan found this to be unacceptable and promptly left the IBT ..."

This is a somewhat damaging admission since they had earlier pooh-poohed my accusation that they attempted to stop political discussion with the smear that "Readers of *Revo-*

Robertson's loyal opposition, part two

Degenerate

Ian Donovan concludes his discussion of the International Bolshevik Tendency and the 'Spartacist tradition'

.....
 " ... the IBT have a strange symbiotic relationship with the Spartacists"

lution and Truth are perhaps entitled to hope that the journal's fact-checker will play a more active role in the future" (*Marxist Bulletin* January 1999), which to anyone who can read the English language constitutes an accusation of lying. No oppositionist with any backbone in any organisation could 'accept' a situation where their differences cannot be discussed in public, and a proper debate cannot take place in private through regular organisational channels either, thus creating a situation where the dissident view has no means of expression whatsoever!

This kind of micro-totalitarianism has nothing to do with Leninism, but it unfortunately is only too common in the IBT's 'tradition' of so-called 'anti-revisionist Trotskyism'. This tradition has produced such miniature Stalin-style bureaucratic monsters as Gerry Healy, Pierre Lambert, James Robertson and now their latest imitators, the IBT of Bill Logan and Adaire Hannah, who served their apprenticeship running a characteristically odious regime in the Spartacist League of Australia/New Zealand in the 1970s to lavish praise from Robertson (until he began to fear that they were too successful in this and a threat to his status as Spartacist guru, whereupon he arranged a miniature Stalin-style show-trial to get rid of them).

The truth is that any organisation that is arrogant enough to gag its members from publicly expressing their opinions on general political questions will sooner or later take the next logical step and begin to attack their right to fight for such opinions in a non-public manner also. The history and evolution of the IBT, as well as its more illustrious and successful forebears, is unfortunately a perfect illustration of this. And as the individual on the British left who has most seriously fought for the best aspects of this tradition, and its often very plausible claims to embody the continuity of the Bolshevik tradition, going through two organisations that both 'embodied' this same tradition, I think I am well qualified to draw these lessons. After all, no one can accuse me of not being prepared to give 'anti-revisionist Trotskyism' a fair crack of the whip.

The truth is that Trotsky himself in the 1930s, while fighting a heroic and progressive struggle against Stalinism and its betrayal of the October revolution, made the mistake in 1938

of declaring that the small international organisation of his followers constituted the 'Fourth International', the 'world party of socialist revolution', without having succeeded in winning over the vanguard of the world proletariat to its banner. An 'international' that does not have a mass base in the advanced elements of the proletariat is not really an international at all - its claim to be the reborn workers' international is a pretence. This error was magnified by Trotsky adopting for the FI a rigid caricature of the 'democratic centralism' of the old Bolshevik Party in which centralism in pursuit of agreed party actions was extended to general political positions (which was not true in Lenin's party - witness for instance the highly public exchanges between Lenin and the 'imperialist economists' - Pyatakov, Radek, Bukharin, etc - on the national question in the Bolshevik press right in the middle of the World War I!).

The errors of a great revolutionary can be all the more dangerous because of the authority that can be brought to bear to perpetuate such errors, particularly in circumstances like in the 1930s when unfortunately Trotsky had virtually no peers who could correct him. The errors of Rosa Luxemburg, also a great revolutionary, were considerable on the national question and the Party question, but had less crippling consequences since they could be corrected by those on a similar political level.

The legacy to Trotsky's successors of his potent combination of errors has been a tendency to either opportunism or sectarian messianism, which is what has persistently dogged the partisans of the 'Fourth International' since World War II, with one wing (typified by the United Secretariat) continually trying to make the leap to the mass influence that they believe that their 'international' should have by riding on the back of other forces (dissident Stalinists, petty bourgeois nationalists: you name it); while the other wing, the 'anti-revisionists', seeking earnestly to re-create Trotsky's 'pure' Fourth International, have instead created nothing but a series of bizarre despotic sects that repeatedly come to resemble unsavoury religious cults. And of course another sad legacy of this concoction is split after split after tragic and wasteful split, the fragmentation that cripples the left today.

The IBT's use of personal attacks to fend off political criticism reaches a new low when they attempt to use the incident that took place on the Bloody Sunday march in January 1999 as a means to dismiss my criticisms. There was an extensive, fully documented workers' inquiry into the background and specifics of the violent confrontation between myself and a leading member of the Spartacist League/Britain on that demonstration, whose conclusions and relevant evidence are available to the public on line at 'www.revplat.demon.co.uk'.

The IBT state: "We have a long history of defending any leftist, includ-

ing members of the Spartacist tendency, against such physical attacks"; and in an earlier statement on the same incident they wrote: "We are certainly prepared to defend Eibhlín (or any other leftist) from similar attacks in future"; and "McDonald's denunciation of Donovan as an RUC supporter, particularly at a 'Bloody Sunday' march, was provocative and unprincipled. Yet the SL's abuses of workers' democracy cannot be used to excuse Donovan's violent assault."

This was of course an unfortunate incident, and the physical response made by myself to McDonald's provocative slander was a serious individual error, the product of repeated provocations against me by someone who had previously engaged in "gross abuse" (the IBT's words, not mine) of myself when I was a member of the Spartacist League. The fact is that this incident was the result of the kind of fingerings that are regularly engaged in by the Spartacists, and which have resulted in physically violent confrontations between the Spartacists and virtually every major current on the international left (and quite a few of the minor ones as well).

The IBT's statement about defending the Spartacists "or any other leftist" are belied by the fact that "any other leftist" would not falsely accuse someone of being a supporter of the Royal Ulster Constabulary on a march organised by the Irish republican movement. I would argue that the Spartacists do not have the 'democratic right' to make such false accusations, that are deliberately meant to endanger the safety of their political opponents, and that the left should take organised, collective action to stamp out such provocations.

After all, why would an "RUC supporter" be on a republican march anyway? The only purpose of such a person being there would be a sinister one, and republican militants have at times dealt with police and army provocateurs in a summary manner. One only has to remember the execution of two British army servicemen by Irish republicans after they 'strayed' into a republican funeral procession in the Six Counties in 1988. Would the IBT support the Spartacists' 'democratic right' to make a similar false accusation against an opponent on a march in Belfast or Derry, knowing that such an allegation could lead to their opponent being targeted for attack by men with guns?

This is not the first time that the Spartacists have used slanders that are aimed at fooling larger leftist or nationalist guerrilla-type forces into 'dealing with' the critics of the Spartacists. An earlier case was in 1982 when the Spartacists falsely accused Ulrich Sandhaus (Sandler), a former leading member of their then German section, the Trotskyist League of Germany (TLD), of being an anti-Turkish racist and a "proto-fascist". The forerunners of the German IBT section, the Gruppe IV Internationale, defended Sandhaus against these

slanders, and were thus branded by the Spartacists as "Nazi-lovers".

According to a report published by the IBT's North American forerunners, "First came the accusation to Turkish leftists in Germany that [former leading TLD member] Uli Sandler was a proto-fascist. Much more recently, in October 1983, during an attempted Nazi pogrom against the Turkish quarter in Kreuzberg in Berlin, the TLD provocatively accused members of the Gruppe IV Internationale (mostly former TLDers) of being indistinguishable from the Nazis and having swastika helmets at home. In each incident serious injury and even death could have resulted to the victims of iSt [ie, Spartacist] slander" (*External Tendency Bulletin* No2, January 1984).

Given the widespread use of violent methods on the largely Stalinist/Guevarist-influenced Turkish left in 'resolving' political differences even among each other (let alone with 'fascists'), the murderous intention of the Spartacists in making these slanderous accusations is obvious.

The IBT's willingness to 'defend' the Spartacists ("or any other leftist") who engages in this kind of behaviour from responses in kind amounts to 'unconditional defence' of the right of the Spartacists to violate other people's democratic rights, or even to endanger their lives. This has nothing to do with any principled defence of workers' democracy by the IBT, but is rather a product of their political orientation and perspectives, the fact that fundamentally they are still an 'external tendency' of the Spartacists, and that their political universe is really confined to the orbit of the ICL. This is exposed by the fact that, breaking with the tradition and actions of Trotsky (and even the early Spartacists!) on such matters, the IBT opposed the setting up of a workers' movement inquiry into the background of the Bloody Sunday incident, for its own petty factional reasons.

Thus the IBT wrote to the commission of inquiry: "In general we do not think a commission of enquiry such as you propose is a useful way to proceed. In circumstances where the facts of the incident are not in question and the perpetrator initially apologised for his actions, it becomes a process of seeking an excuse or explanation for inadmissible violence. We particularly do not think a public enquiry into this incident should be set up by the body of which Ian Donovan is the chair" (letter from IBT to London Socialist Alliance commission, March 8 1999).

The slanderous inference in this statement (unpublished by the IBT) is that the commission of inquiry was somehow rigged by the broad inclusive body that provided the organisational vehicle to set it up. The fact is that representatives of four different left tendencies (not all of whom even supported the Alliance) took part in the commission, and the idea that the fact that I held the post of

cults

chair of the Alliance when the incident took place should affect the views of the members of the commission is preposterous - again the quite finely balanced conclusions of the commission are available to the public on the commission website (www.revplat.demon.co.uk).

The IBT's position was, in the words of the national organiser of the CPGB, "... thoroughly untenable and anti-democratic. The notion that, in circumstances where the facts of a particular incident are not in dispute, then any investigation can only be a feeble attempt to scabble together 'an excuse ... for inadmissible violence' (IBT statement, March 8) is profoundly foolish. More than that, it is implicitly reactionary. Apply this logic to the proceedings in bourgeois law and you might as well do away with the right to trial in a large number of the most sensitive and complex of cases. After all, many battered wives that have turned on their abusers have not disputed the bald facts of the charges against them, but the trial has had the purpose of understanding the extenuating circumstances that have led them to commit the crime.

"The International Bolshevik Tendency appears to be positioning itself slightly to the right of the British judicial system on this one. According to your line of thought, once the 'facts' of the case were established - 'she stuck a breadknife in him, m'lord' - we can all go home. All apart from the condemned, of course" (letter from Mark Fischer to IBT, March 10 1999).

Since the IBT now admit that I was subjected to "gross abuse" by McDonald and others when I was in the Spartacist League, one can only assume from their opposition to and attempts to discredit this LSA commission of enquiry, that their view is that such "gross abuse" is no business of the wider workers' movement. In other words the IBT were trying to protect their 'tradition' from discredit, and in this case this meant acting to politically protect their political parents, the Spartacists, from examination by a workers' inquiry.

This is similar to their conduct in the Uli Sandler case, when, pursuing their 'orientation' as an 'external tendency' of the Spartacist milieu and desperate to remain respectable in this milieu, they confined their criticisms of the conduct of the Spartacists to the private domain, when in fact this was an extremely serious and vile matter that should have been the subject of a fully-fledged workers' movement inquiry! In other words, keep it in the (Spartacist) family! The contrast between the IBT's attitude to such matters and that of the IBT's ostensible mentor, Leon Trotsky, is striking, as shown by this call for an inquiry into the revenge killing of an Italian Stalinist by a victim of the Stalinist frame-up system:

"The duty of workers' organisations, without any regard for political banners, lies in one thing: in shedding the greatest possible light on this case, and thereby, insofar as is possible, to prevent the repetition of gunplay in revolutionary circles.

"... Naturally the interests of the case would be best served if the representatives of *L'Humanité* and of the central committee of the Italian CP

were to take part in this committee. But we may safely predict that they will most certainly refuse: these politicians stand only to lose from an impartial investigation, and much more than would appear on the surface. But the investigation ought not to be wrecked by their refusal to participate. Every honest participant in the labour movement is deeply interested in seeing to it that this abscess is opened which can otherwise lead to gangrene. The tragic case of Montanari-Beiso must be brought before a labour jury" ('A case for a labour jury' - against all types of gangsterism in the working class movement; on the murder of the Italian Stalinist Montanari', quoted in 'Oust Healy! - an open letter to other supporters of the IC [International Committee of the Fourth International], in *Spartacist* No9, January-February 1967).

The similarity of the behaviour of the Spartacists (and to a lesser extent also the IBT) with that of the French and Italian Stalinists is striking. And there is another great irony here as well: while the 'orthodox' Trotskyists behave like treacherous Stalinists, the impetus for creating a "labour jury"-type body, similar to that advocated by Trotsky, came from the CPGB, a revolutionary current that emerged from Stalinism during the later period of its death agony. The fact that the CPGB have more in common with the progressive attitude of the revolutionary movement of Trotsky's time to questions of proletarian justice and morality than the most 'orthodox' proclaimed Trotskyists of today speaks volumes about the sectarian degeneration of much of the contemporary 'Trotskyist' left.

As many have observed, the IBT have a strange symbiotic relationship with the Spartacists, and a great concern not to be seen as 'beyond the pale' by them. This is despite an incredible torrent of abuse and slander about them that has poured out of the Spartacists over the last couple of decades. It is strange that a grouping polemicising against the ICL should describe them as "disagreeable sectarians" (see *1917* No21, June 1999). This really misses something - rather like calling Jack the Ripper a 'naughty boy'. The ICL are not just "disagreeable" - they are dangerous, and quite prepared to seek to enlist the aid of enemies, even deadly enemies, of the workers' movement to witch-hunt and suppress other leftists.

When I was in the IBT in 1995, we became aware of an incident in which the Spartacists had approached a capitalist newspaper in New Zealand to try to get them to run a slanderous story about the New Zealand IBT group. The IBT leadership initially took a decision not to publicise this crossing of the class line by the Spartacists - only a good six months later, after considerable pushing by myself, was it eventually mentioned in an IBT pamphlet:

"In September 1995 ... three members of the Spartacist League of Australia, including Bonnie Bradley, editor of *Australasian Spartacist*, visited Wellington, New Zealand. While there, they arranged an appointment with a reporter from the liberal bourgeois weekly *City Voice* (CV). Their ostensible purpose was to discuss the

Partisan Defence Committee's work in the campaign to free Mumia Abu-Jamal. The CV reporter informed them that there were already people campaigning for Mumia locally and offered to put them in touch with our New Zealand comrades. In response the PDC/SL representatives whipped out copies of the ICL's internal bulletins slandering Bill Logan (a leading member of the IBT in New Zealand) and suggested that *City Voice* consider running a piece based on them. The paper turned down the Robertsonites, but this attempt to feed a capitalist publication material with which to smear a rival leftist group can only be characterised as a provocation" (*ICL v IBT* 1996).

The League for the Fourth International (LFI), the tendency led by Jan Norden, for 23 years the editor of the Spartacists' American paper *Workers Vanguard*, whose supporters were brutally purged from the Spartacists in 1995, reported a similar but even worse incident in Brazil, regarding a Spartacist hate-campaign against the Nordenites' Brazilian co-thinkers, a group of Trotskyist trade union militants who were facing persecution by the capitalist courts and brutal repression by police, working apparently with an alleged anti-union provocateur, one Artur Fernandes:

"... in its frenzy to dig up dirt against our comrades the ICL has engaged in grossly irresponsible behaviour. Thus there were at least two calls last May-June seeking to speak with authoritative spokesmen in the civil court in Volta Redonda, and on at least one occasion someone spoke with a judge. What did they talk about? In addition, Fernandes' lawyer says she received 'several' calls from 'journalists' for a US paper during the same period asking for information about cases involving Geraldo Ribeiro [a leading supporter of the LFI's Brazilian group]. This is the same lawyer who has now launched the ominous court suit against the CLC [Class Struggle Caucus], which the ICL [ie, the Spartacists] refuses to defend and whose defence it denounces as a 'sham'. What was said in those conversations? The lawyer said she told her callers to speak with Geraldo [Ribeiro] himself. But the ICL never talked to Ribeiro" (*The Internationalist* No5, April-May 1998).

The Nordenites' description of the ICL's crossing the class line, appealing to the death squad-ridden Brazilian state to provide them with "dirt", as "irresponsible", like the IBT's description of the ICL as "disagreeable", reflects similar softness and concern not to become too alienated from the Spart milieu. A better description of this would be criminal, sinister, provocateur-like behaviour, the kind of thing that used to be associated with Stalin's GPU. But this is too terrible a thing to say about one's political parents - after all, 'If they are really like that, then what are we?' the Loganites and Nordenites must reason. 'We carry their political DNA!'

Sooner or later the Robertsonites' provocations are going to succeed in getting somebody killed - but the IBT and LFI do not want to think about that.

For all of these neo-Robertsonite cultist and semi-cultist formations, something important has been lost from the heroic period of the Trotskyist movement, which, despite its mistakes, represented in its time the only unambiguously revolutionary current emerging from the degeneration of the Comintern. Despite their frequent ritual repetition of the phrase, what these epigones of Trotsky cannot do is *say what is* - above all about their own movement.

When push comes to shove, whatever the IBT's criticisms of the Spartacists, they will go so far and no further. They are not a revolutionary alternative to the ICL, but merely lackeys - Robertson's loyal opposition ●

CPGB draft programme and criminal justice

Communist response

Tom Ball (Letters, June 24) corrects me on a mistake I made in the article, 'Defend the jury' (*Weekly Worker* May 27). He is right to point out that, contrary to my statement, the CPGB's draft programme does not mention juries and therefore does not explicitly declare "in favour of the jury system", as I wrote. Nevertheless, the continued existence of juries is implied.

The truth of the matter is that such mistakes do not detract from the main points of my argument. Again I repeat that in 40 years in the communist movement I have seen very little debate on criminal trial procedures, on what we felt the law should be on a number of issues or for that matter on the role of law in the socialist state.

Do we need law to run a socialist state (we certainly will have a state in the early stages of socialism)? Lenin made the point that workers require trade unions to protect them from their own state and we certainly need law to protect us from our own authorities. More importantly, as the bourgeoisie have learned, you cannot maintain order unless the rules and procedures of that order are fully understood by the population - and for the bourgeois state that requires their passive acceptance. For us it requires an active intervention of the working class in the administration of law and its development.

Yet in reality there has been no underlying debate about the functions of law or the philosophical foundation for any jurisprudence system. That is particularly unfortunate today, when there is increasing pressure in almost all common law countries to vary the standard of proof of guilt or to move the law in directions that infringe the rights of defendants.

Let me start on this question: over the last few weeks there have been moves to change the standard of proof in rape cases. The proposals essentially say that alleged rapists who plead consent must prove that this was the case. This is against the general tradition of common law that it is up to the prosecuting authorities to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt.

In a recent Canadian case a supreme court judge ruled that it was not possible to give implied consent to sexual intercourse, and there have been similar cases in the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Now in all other spheres of activity it is assumed under bourgeois law that consent can be implied, be it on the question of buying or selling, or people passing over a landowner's property. Yet in sexual matters, where often few words are exchanged - still less an agreement given in writing - it is proposed that consent must be explicit.

Clearly such propositions could lead to greater injustice than the situation that bourgeois liberals propose to eradicate - ie, the fact

that a high proportion of rape cases lead to acquittals.

Increasingly there has been a tendency to introduce absolute offences not requiring either knowledge of what is going on or guilty intent. For example, the owner of premises where cannabis is found can be held liable even if they did not know how their property was being used. On a most trivial level local authorities are empowered to issue arbitrary parking fines or confiscate vehicles without due process.

There have also been changes to prosecution procedure, such as eroding the right to silence. Even more importantly changes to the legal system will virtually eliminate juries from any judgement in fraud and libel cases or the like.

Linked to these questions is the attempt on the part of government to develop a 'cost-efficient' justice system. In fact, our comrade Tom Ball suggests that it would be most inconvenient to try all criminal cases by jury, as 95% of them are dealt with by the magistrate's court. What he is implying is that it is unnecessary to thoroughly investigate accusations or be certain of the alleged offender's guilt. Such establishment concerns over expense lead to the iniquitous practice of plea-bargaining. It is less costly, it secures more convictions, it does not involve the populace and, above all, it does not require proof on the part of the state. Incidentally, in Scotland there must be a review of the evidence before a guilty plea can be accepted: that is, corroborated evidence is required.

Comrade Ball correctly points out that our draft programme calls for the election of judges. Now I am well aware of the US system of the election of judges and the reasons for its introduction. Nevertheless you only have to see some of the consequences that flow from it. If you have to have a criminal system, in my view you need experts in criminal law. Some of these experts serve in a position known as judge and, in order to contain these judges, we require juries.

This throws light on one of the problems of the draft programme. Although essentially correct in its propositions, some are defined too prescriptively, rather than laying down general principles. The application of such principles ought to be the subject of further thorough discussion.

Another example is the suggestion that fines should be proportionate to income. But one-40th of Bill Gates' income per year has less effect on him than a fine of one-100th of the income of someone living on the breadline. In this case I would take the viewpoint that fines are an inappropriate method of punishing people.

It has to be accepted that we need more debate on this whole area ●

John Walsh

The means or the end?

Phil Sharpe contrasts Dave Craig's views on revolutionary democracy with those of Trotsky

In his recent article (*Weekly Worker* July 1) Dave Craig alleges that I ignore the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion as an expression of the degeneration of the Soviet regime. I could also ask him why he ignores the significance of the ruthless suppression of the peasant rebellions of 1921.

These rebellions were calling for an end to war communism in the immediate period after the civil war. However, the peasantry are of no significance to Dave Craig, unless they are sailors based in Kronstadt. If comrade Dave has read my previous articles closely he will find that I explain how war communism was an important expression of the development of bureaucratic utopian socialism, and it indicated the start of illusions about the building of socialism in one country.

The introduction of the New Economic Policy partially changed the ideological situation introduced by war communism because Lenin came increasingly aware of the need to tackle the domination of bureaucracy. But the solutions proposed by Lenin were ultimately limited because they were not based upon the development of inner-party democracy, and instead Lenin advocated and achieved the banning of party factions. This situation represented the defensive politics of a transitional regime that was a rapidly degenerating workers' state, and contained definite tendencies towards establishing new class rule. However, this regressive tendency was not fully realised in 1921, and was only definitely completed between 1928 and 1929.

It is this context of unfinished degeneration that is the basis of analysing the Kronstadt rebellion as a counterrevolutionary action that protests against the not yet realised bureaucratic regression of the Soviet regime. As the Kronstadt sailors did not want to negotiate in a meaningful manner, and effectively demanded the overthrow of the Soviet regime, compromise seemed to be impossible. Thus the choice was between anti-Bolshevik counterrevolution and a declining Soviet regime. The Kronstadt sailors wanted soviets without Bolsheviks and effectively they were for political domination by the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionary Party.

In contrast the various peasant revolts wanted an end to war communism, which suggested an aspiration to introduce NEP, and these demands did not amount to a call to overthrow the Bolsheviks. Yet Dave Craig's neglect of, and silence about, the aspirations of the peasantry suggests he has little sympathy for them, even though they were suppressed in 1921 in a harsher manner than the Kronstadt rebellion.

Obviously to Dave Craig democracy applies to the urban centres of Russia, but is not applicable to the peasant masses. Democracy is a selective concept to the Bolsheviks, Kronstadt sailors, bourgeois democrats and Dave Craig, because the peasantry remain a reactionary mass who are useful for constructing revolutionary alliances, but have no active role after the revolution, and so become the dominated instrument of the urban party. But the proletariat should not be indifferent to this pro-

cess, because the domination of the peasantry is connected to the exploitation of the proletariat. If the proletariat is truly to be the leading revolutionary force, then democracy should apply to all, and not the self-selecting few.

If the proletarian and peasant alliance had been built on consistent democratic principles between 1918 and 1921 then it may have been possible to counteract some of the tendencies towards bureaucratic degeneration. This is because the dictatorship of the proletariat would have been stronger, and expressed a balance of class forces in favour of the Soviet regime. Instead the Soviet regime was externally and internally isolated in 1921 and was already degenerating. The absence of a strong proletarian and peasant alliance meant Kautsky was proved correct: the revolution was premature and had become regressive, and the party was being transformed into a Bonapartist instrument of new class rule.

Does the above analysis mean that Dave Craig is ultimately correct about Kronstadt? The suppression of Kronstadt was an expression of the increasing domination of bureaucratic tendencies within the Bolsheviks, but they had no choice about their course of action because they were not going to voluntarily surrender power to an expression of bourgeois and petty bourgeois counterrevolution. But if rebellion had occurred under Stalin, then the Kronstadt call to redevelop soviets without Bolsheviks may (a matter for debate) have become progressive, especially as Trotsky before 1934-35 only had a reformist programme to transform and rejuvenate the soviets of a degenerated workers' state. Hence because the Kronstadt rebellion occurred in 1921 - a time of transition and flux - it was still premature to support a virtual insurrection against the declining Soviet regime.

Dave Craig also refers to Trotsky's analysis of France in order to justify his conception of revolutionary democracy, but he does not refer to the historical context of Trotsky's call to defend bourgeois democracy. Trotsky calls for measures to strengthen bourgeois democracy, not as a distinct stage in the process of socialist transition (Dave Craig's 'dual power republic' expresses this stageism), but as an expression of the concrete historical conditions in France: the need to defeat fascist counterrevolution and oppose the Bonapartist concentration of political power.

In his *Programme of action for France* (New York 1974, pp21-32) Trotsky explains that capitalism in decline means the "suppression of the democratic regime" (p21). The stabilisation of capitalism has been temporary, but this period has been used by the ruling class to resort to fascism as the answer to the threat of the proletariat: "Benefiting from the reverses in its revolutionary march towards socialism, the world bourgeoisie is using its last resort, fascism, by means of which it is making desperate efforts to clear the organised working class from its road" (pp21-22). Trotsky combines historical confidence in the proletariat making inevitable and predetermined revolution with a more concrete un-

derstanding of the immediate significance of the potential for fascist counterrevolution. In order to oppose this threat of counterrevolution Trotsky does not defend an abstract democratic programme, but instead combines an economic and political analysis as the basis to mobilise opposition to political reaction.

Trotsky develops a strategic perspective based around transitional demands. He calls for the abolition of business secrets, for workers' control of industry, for a 40-hour week and increased wages, and equal pay for equal work between men and women. Trotsky also demands nationalisation of the banks and big monopolies on the basis of workers' planned production. These demands, despite their strategic importance, are not just meant to be economic and limited to the working class, but rather they are part of the political struggle that is required by the workers and peasants for hegemony within French society. The battle for democracy within French society cannot be limited to the proletariat and its struggle for workers' control of production: instead it is necessary to enlarge and expand the conception of democracy and include the peasantry. On this basis the peasantry can become an ally of the proletariat rather than the bulwark of reaction.

Trotsky has learnt the lessons from the Russian Revolution and Stalinist degeneration, and he calls for an alliance between the workers and peasants that is based upon equality. He argues that collectivisation should not be forced, and expropriation should be limited to large-scale farms: "We affirm that our final aim, as a higher form of progress, is the collectivisation of agriculture as well as of industry. But the proletariat cannot force this aim on the peasantry. It can only facilitate the evolution towards this goal. The proletariat can only make proposals in this direction, which must then be completed, corrected and broadened through the common experience of the two classes equally oppressed by the capitalist exploiters. We must first secure for the peasants a real opportunity to determine their own fate, to decide the use of their forces and their property, to express their preferences in methods of farming, to choose by their own judgement the moment of passing from private to collective farming" (p26).

Thus Trotsky is outlining a principled policy for the relations between the workers and peasantry based upon consultation, consensus, diversity and pluralism, and opposing coercion. The peasants are being given the economic and political freedom of choice in relation to the forms of economic activity, and this means participatory economic democracy is not limited to the workers.

In political terms the workers' and peasant alliance is also very important. The bourgeoisie is suppressing democracy and the revolutionary alternative is to replace the capitalist state with a workers' and peasants' government, as the basis of a proletarian state. This means the unity of the workers and peasantry is required as the democratic basis to overthrow capitalism and achieve the success of proletarian revolution: "Reaction tries to frighten the peasants with the

spectre of a proletarian dictatorship that subjugates the peasants to the workers. But in reality the proletarian state cannot be achieved as long as the proletariat is isolated from the peasantry" (p29).

The peasantry are presently atomised and scattered, and they require unity with the proletariat in order to gain a sense of their own political power and capacity to transform society in economic and political terms. So the hegemony of the proletariat, in unity with the peasantry, helps to realise the democratic capacity of the peasants, who can then act to oppose capitalism in a revolutionary manner. In concrete terms this means committees of struggle can be established in working class and peasant areas, and these can become organs of struggle against fascist counterrevolution. This defensive struggle for democracy against fascism has the mass potential to become a revolutionary struggle for the workers' and peasants' commune state. Thus the peasantry are crucial in relation to the task of changing the balance of class forces in favour of realising proletarian participatory democracy and establishing that state.

Trotsky does not seem to separate the question of the peasants and democracy from his traditional demands. The unity of the workers and peasants is considered necessary in relation to the perspective of realising the United Socialist states of Europe: "Against the politics of the imperialist blocs, against the pacifist lie of the League of Nations, against the secret diplomacy of the war and the madness of armaments! Throughout the aged European continent - divided, militarised, bloodstained, threatened with total destruction by a new war - we raise the only banner of liberation, that of the workers' and peasants' United States of Europe, the fraternal federation of Soviet States!" (p28).

What then of Trotsky's conception of revolutionary democracy which Dave Craig believes is the expression of a transitional call for a dual power republic? In general strategic terms Trotsky calls for the formation of workers' militia in order to oppose the threat of a coup and fascist reaction, and the arming of the workers and poor peasants can achieve the overthrow of counterrevolution and bring about the defeat of the bourgeoisie.

In more immediate terms the workers still have illusions in bourgeois democracy, and so it is necessary to

defend bourgeois democracy against Bonapartism and fascism. But this requires the establishment of a radical bourgeois democracy that is based upon the radical traditions of 1793. This involves the abolition of senate and presidency, the establishment of universal suffrage at the age of 18, and the right of recall of deputies. Dave Craig will agree: so far, so good. This is the radical bourgeois democratic republic that he aspires to in the attempt to realise the dual power republic.

However, contrary to Dave Craig, Trotsky is not content with this form of bourgeois republic. To Trotsky this type of bourgeois state is only satisfactory to the extent that it is able to express opposition to fascism. In other words, could it be possible that a bourgeois republic can be influenced by mass pressure to oppose fascism? Thus Trotsky states: "Workers adhering to democracy must further understand that it is not enough to defend democracy: democracy must be regained" (pp31-32).

Trotsky does not oppose a defensive struggle at the level of bourgeois democracy, but it is not enough to oppose reaction: it is necessary to establish the organs of mass participatory democracy that can express offensive struggle against counterrevolution, and then overthrow capitalism. But with Dave Craig's approach a radical conception of bourgeois democracy is a sufficient basis for class struggle, and so he ends up essentially defining revolutionary class struggle as economic, and this contrasts with the political terrain of the struggle to achieve a radical form of the bourgeois republic.

Trotsky does argue: "A more generous democracy would facilitate the struggle for workers' power" (p31). But this is not a call for a dual power republic: rather Trotsky is arguing that winning the battle for democracy is crucial for the struggle for socialism. This involves many different forms, from establishing workers' and peasant unity to reforming bourgeois democracy, but Trotsky's strategic aim remains the same - to smash the bourgeois state through proletarian revolution.

In contrast, for Dave Craig the means become the end, and the end is reduced to the means. Thus the dual power republic seems to be the means and end, and the end of achieving the proletarian and peasants' state becomes superfluous ●

Fighting fund

Every little helps

This week's post of £84 was characterised by the unusually large number of donations. Most were small - for example, FR admitted being "stretched" to come up with £5, while AC apologised for being able to manage just £3.

Nevertheless, every little helps and, added together, these gifts have pushed up our July total to a respectable figure. But our monthly

need is for £400, and May and June saw a worrying deficit, reaching £50. Over to you, the big guns! A couple of fat cheques would really set us on the right road.

July's total now stands at £192 ●

Robbie Rix

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

Downhill to Kautsky

The spirit of the moderate Bolsheviks, in 1917, whose real political cause was republican anti-tsarism, is alive and well and lives on in the mind of Dave Craig (*Weekly Worker* July 19). It is a highly dogmatic spirit, compressing history into the neat, abstract shapes of democracy in general.

Even Lenin's *State and revolution* is claimed to express the "fundamental idea that runs through all of Marx's work: namely that the democratic republic is the nearest approach to the dictatorship of the proletariat". This assertion of a fundamental idea at this level of generality, free of concrete political and historical circumstances, is vulgar Marxism worthy of the Second International. Marx did not believe in the linear progress throughout the world and across social systems of a simple substance called 'democratic republic'.

But the comrade does not mean a class and historically conditioned democratic republic. He is referring to his own invention of a democratic republic, which salvages the democratic minimum programme of old Bolshevism from its shipwreck in the Russian Revolution. But he only saves the democratic minimum programme by taking the bourgeois republic out of history. Dave simply superimposes the abstraction of a democratic republic onto the historical situation of dual power in Russia in 1917. The baby of the democratic minimum programme can be saved from the bathwater of centrism and reformism by subjectively redefining the democratic republic to enclose all the features of socialist revolution including soviets.

The comrade then crudely projects

.....
 "Comrade Craig thinks that because we are in a period of reaction, and the red flag does not fly above my workplace, we must subject ourselves to a bourgeois democratic limitation"

his own invention of 'dual power republic' on Lenin. But dual power is not a republic. It is the struggle of hostile classes for domination. For Lenin in April 1917 the workers had power within their grasp, but were not fully aware of their power. Dual power was a political miscarriage. The aim is not dual power, but *power*. As Lenin

explained, insufficient class consciousness and organisation prevented the seizure of power until October 1917. Historically, factually there was no dual power republic in Russia in 1917 or anywhere else. Nor is there likely to be. It is merely a fantasy of Dave Craig.

Dave mangles and twists Marxist words and concepts, obscuring the fact that his concept of democratic revolution is a modern refinement of the moderate Bolshevik, two-stage view of the revolution, shared by Mensheviks and Stalinists. So the minimum democratic programme becomes a transitional programme which takes the workers from a pre-revolutionary period to the dual power republic! In other words the anti-monarchy republicanism of the RDG is the first bourgeois democratic stage.

Even Lenin's creative energy was trapped for a period in two-stages theory, as *Two tactics in the democratic revolution* shows. In 1905 Lenin still shared Kautsky's view that the road to socialism ran through a special bourgeois state. When Bukharin argued before 1917 that Marxists were anti-state, Lenin called him childish and refused to publish his views. But in 1917 he acknowledged Bukharin had been right against Kautsky. Comrade Craig is still a believer in the special bourgeois democratic state as a step to socialism.

Dave Craig dismisses Lenin's criticism of formal democracy in the *Renegade Kautsky*. He rants that a "debate in 1918 about an actually existing workers' state against returning to bourgeois democracy is not relevant for British constitutional de-

mocracy in 1999". But the debate was about the *establishment* of a workers' state in 1917. Lenin's assessment was that the institutions of bourgeois democracy, however democratic, fundamentally clashed with the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. This does have relevance for 1999. It shows there is no bourgeois federal republican stage to socialism.

Comrade Craig thinks that because we are in a period of reaction, and the red flag does not fly above my workplace and the pale pink flag of democratic revolution does not fly above his university, we must subject ourselves to a bourgeois democratic limitation. Looking at Dave's metaphors, he views socialism as a remote land in the tradition of the Second International. There are usually two land masses separated by a very large river. One land mass is the present society, the other on the far side is the classless society. In between is the island of the democratic republic. Lenin's metaphor of revolution is more appropriate. We act in a revolutionary way and, if we fail, that is a dress rehearsal.

Because Trotsky advocated bourgeois democratic demands in China in 1927-28 Dave imagines he has recruited him to the RDG cause. But Trotsky, like all communists, is not opposed to bourgeois democratic demands in some circumstances, provided they are part of the programme for workers' power and not integrated into a democratic first stage for socialism. What is objectionable is comrade Craig's blending of democratic slogans from semi-colonial China with modern bourgeois democracy in Britain in his iron logic of democratic revolution. Trotsky advocated democratic

demands after the Stalinist utopian struggle for revolutionary democracy ended in the world historic defeat and crushing of the workers' movement and the Chinese Communist Party in 1926.

Whether Trotsky's formulation of democratic demands in Spain 1930-31 was correct or adequate is debatable. But Spain in this period cannot be compared with a long-established bourgeois democratic state like Britain. In countries of semi-feudal or extreme economic backwardness, bourgeois democratic demands play a larger role. In any event the Spanish workers and peasants skipped the democratic stage and seized the factories and land in 1936. There would have been a proletarian revolution and soviets had the Communist International and the Communist Party not limited themselves to democracy and republicanism as the first step to socialism.

A critical attitude to Bolshevism is crucial to develop Marxism. The idea that we are with Lenin and Trotsky on everything or we become Trotskyists or Leninists against Lenin and Trotsky is laughable. Marxists who have assimilated the lessons of October 1917 start from Lenin's *The renegade Kautsky* and Lenin's thesis of proletarian and bourgeois democracy in 1919.

But Dave Craig starts from *Two tactics* in 1905 or the old Bolshevik minimum democratic programme. To radicalise the Bolshevik Party and break it from the aim of a democratic republic was an uphill struggle. Dave Craig wants to take us downhill again to Karl Kautsky, a man who shared his passion for pedantic logic ●

Barry Biddulph

Left unity forum launched

The founding conference of the Republican Communist Network took place on July 3 in Edinburgh.

The majority of those present were Scottish Socialist Party members who are supporters of the Red Republicans and the Campaign for a Federal Republic; representatives of the Communist Tendency and the Revolutionary Democratic Group also attended. The CPGB and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty sent comrades as observers, who contributed fully throughout the conference. Apologies and comradely greetings were received from the Workers' Republican Forum in England and a member of the Glasgow Marxist Forum.

The conference marked a small but significant step for communist organisation and agitation in Scotland. The establishment of the network was all the more significant because, far from aiming to exist as a purely Scottish entity, or solely as a faction within the SSP, the founding members seek to make this network operational in Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland and at various levels within a number of different organisations. No accusations of narrow nationalism can be aimed at this organisation even though a number (but not all) of its members call for a Scottish workers' republic. It is *de facto* a site for communist rapprochement, not only at a theoretical level, but crucially at the level of practice.

The main players to date have been

the Red Republicans, who advocate the break-up of the UK state as part of the fight for socialism; and the Campaign for a Federal Republic, who advocate the fight for a federal republic as a mechanism for uniting the working class across Britain and defeating nationalism. On this basis, it is difficult at first to see how this can be more than a marriage of convenience or at best a united front against a common enemy. However, when put to the test, for example over Ireland or during the war in Kosova, then unity has been shown to be much deeper than any 'paper' position would suggest.

The founding of the RCN came about not as the result of a whim or the grand design of one organisation hoping to grab a few more members, but developed as part of a process. The experience and comparative success of the Scottish Socialist Alliance led to groups and individuals being brought together who were significantly to the left of the SSA leadership. As both groups acted as a republican united front and a temporary alliance of a tactical nature, so other people came to caucus meetings and found themselves in support of the positions being taken in challenging the SSA leadership. Through practice, there grew a culture of trust, tolerance and respect which has been the hallmark of this organisation.

The formula proposed by the SSA leadership for turning the SSA into

the SSP was opposed by both organisations. We had seen the pull of the right wing on Scottish Militant Labour (now CWI Scotland). They were more concerned with courting the right than in creating a revolutionary party, although this fact eluded some of its own members, who were convinced that the SSP would be a revolutionary organisation! We felt therefore that it was of crucial importance that republican communists create a coherent challenge to the right and to SML, and work towards providing a revolutionary alternative for the working class as a whole. There was a need to win comrades within the SSP to revolutionary politics and to attract revolutionaries to the SSP.

It was this set of factors which prompted comrades from the Campaign for a Federal Republic to propose the creation of an ideological bloc - ie, principled unity around common slogans - to a meeting of republicans within the SSP. After a debate over a number of months, the platform was put to the founding conference. Despite differences on a number of issues, most sharply on the national question, this platform was unanimously endorsed. One amendment was added setting up a quarterly magazine with a three-person editorial team.

Our emphasis on republicanism is no mistake, as we see the fight for republicanism as integral to our fight for world communism. There is a

strong commitment to education and debate - particularly around the slogans - and, rather than trying to bury our differences, we are determined to debate them out in a fraternal manner during the course of the coming year.

'Revolutionary democracy' seemed to be misunderstood by some comrades who attended preliminary meetings of the network, but this was discussed at organising meetings and then the debate continued through the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. The debate around the slogan of 'international socialism' took off during the conference, forcing comrades to clarify their own thinking on the nature of socialism and communism.

The liveliest debate of the day was when Alan Armstrong of the CT opened a discussion on 'Blair's strengthening of the union'. He spoke to a section of the political programme and reopened the argument of 'A Scottish workers' republic versus the fight for a federal republic'. Alan would not be pinned down on the question of whether the advocacy of a federal republic was ever acceptable, whereas an independent monarchical Scotland appeared to be.

During the discussion over how to

take the network forward in England and Wales, comrades from England stressed the importance of bringing the national question to left organisations south of the border in an effort to make the issue of self-determination for the people of Scotland a real question for them and the working class throughout Britain. Given the abysmal state of socialist unity projects in England, there was also a hope that the network could provide an example of how socialist unity can work in practice.

In this period of reaction in which we live, the Republican Communist Network is an exciting and positive development. The risks of sectarianism and slipping into a sect mentality are always present amongst organisations on the revolutionary left. But the network's commitment to openness and the combination of a high level of theoretical discussion with revolutionary practice should help to guard against this at least to some degree. Within the network, there exists an optimism and vision born not out of naivety, but of years of combined experience, struggle and determination not to make the same mistakes again ●

Mary Ward

To contact the Republican Communist Network, write to: RCN, c/o Review Discussion Group, PO Box 512, SWDO, 4 Falcon Rd West, Edinburgh EH10 4AB

The knot tightens

"Milosevic is history: it is just that he does not realise it yet."

This confident assertion by Goran Svilanovic, leader of the Civic Alliance of Serbia and a prominent member of the opposition umbrella group, Alliance for Change, sounds somewhat premature (*The Times* July 9). Certainly, the Milosevic regime is under serious and growing pressure, both from without and from within, but the immediate future appears to hold little prospect of decisive change.

The external threat to Milosevic is both political and economic. Politically he is a pariah, an indicted war criminal with a \$5 million bounty on his head and no place to hide - unconfirmed reports suggest that Russia, China, Libya and South Africa have all rebuffed tentative approaches for political asylum (*The Times* July 12). Economically, the imperialists have made it clear that so long as Milosevic remains in power, "not one red cent" of capital investment will be forthcoming to assist Serbia in making good the estimated \$30 billion of damage sustained by its infrastructure during the Nato bombing offensive. Belgrade's coffers are already so depleted that the government does not even have the cash to pay the wage arrears of the troops who fought Milosevic's bloody war in Kosova, let alone provide social security to the scores of thousands of Serbs who are now jobless as a result of the conflict. In short, Milosevic's Socialist Party has nothing to offer the Serbian people.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising to learn that Milosevic has opted for his favourite diversionary tactic of stirring up yet another potential war - this time, in Montenegro (the only other remaining constituent republic of the rump Yugoslav federation), which took a pro-western stance during the Nato campaign. The Belgrade regime has begun a recruitment drive to reinforce its armed police militia in Montenegro, an ideal fifth column capable of working alongside the still formidable regular Yugoslav army and Serbian nationalists in the republic. In this case, the *casus belli* will inevitably be Montenegrin president Milo Djukanovic's demand for independence, due to be tested in a plebiscite by the end of this year. As the arch Serb-chauvinist Vojislav Seselj remarked to western journalists, "[secession] cannot happen without war, because the Montenegrins are Serbs" (*The Independent on Sunday* July 11). For Milosevic, the risks raised by yet another internecine conflict are clearly high, but he has nothing to lose.

Another possible diversionary scenario is presented by the northern Serbian region of Vojvodina, with a population comprising some 350,000 ethnic Hungarians (around 20% of the inhabitants). As a recent recruit to Nato and a key salient in the imperialists' new eastern front, Hungary has now demanded full autonomy for Vojvodina, an autonomy to be enforced, if necessary, by western military intervention. It is understandable that Hungary should wish to benefit from Milosevic's isolation and growing unpopularity, but attempting to whip up a political and diplomatic crisis over Vojvodina at this juncture might be a serious mistake. Not only could the Hungarian (and the Montenegrin) demands give some comfort to Milosevic; they also place the Serbian opposition in an acutely embarrassing position: even in war-weary Serbia, the flames of nationalism and chauvinism can still easily be

Michael Malkin discusses the growing threat to the Milosevic regime in Serbia

rekindled; no putative successor to Milosevic - from either the fragmented bureaucratic elite or the proto-bourgeoisie - however committed on paper to 'democracy', can afford to countenance the possibility of allowing either territory to secede.

At least Milosevic may be able to take some small crumbs of comfort from another aspect of the external threat, namely reports to the effect that president Clinton has authorised the CIA to remove him. The record of the agency is not exactly glittering when it comes to disposing of clients who are of no further use to Washington. According to *Time* magazine (July 12), the CIA is to engage in bizarre cyber warfare against Milosevic with the aim of hacking into his many foreign bank accounts and stealing his money. In addition, Langley is to step up its funding and recruitment of Serb opposition figures and dissident elements in the armed forces - a recipe for allowing Milosevic to claim that his political enemies are traitors in the pay of foreign intelligence.

Turning to the internal political situation in Serbia, those who wish to see a democratic end to Milosevic's black reactionary nationalism and bloodlust have some grounds for hope, but as always the main problem is the fact that the opposition is in the main dominated by conservative and liberal hucksters who cannot even put aside their personal rivalries and hatreds. Historically this has been Milosevic's greatest asset. He has used it skilfully and will no doubt try to do so again.

Perhaps the most encouraging portent on the domestic front is the fact that the series of protest rallies and demonstrations that have taken place in the Serbian provinces over the last 10 days are drawing the masses themselves into politics. Not only the Alliance for Change, representing some 30 parties, but the trade union movement, the Serbian orthodox church, and the limited but important free press in the form of the *Blic* tabloid are all supporting the demand for Milosevic's resignation voiced by municipal authorities, workers, army reservists and other broad sections of the population. Unlike the large-scale demonstrations that took place in the winter of 1996 under the aegis of the official opposition's Zadejno ('together') movement, the current wave of protest is driven to a significant extent by momentum from below, in a spontaneous manner that has actually caught the official Serbian opposition unawares.

Two examples will suffice. First, the remarkable case of the TV technician Ivan Novkovic in the so-called 'red town' of Leskovac. In the middle of a sports transmission on local television, Novkovic broadcast a home-made tape appealing to the citizens of Leskovac to take to the streets demanding the removal of the city's Socialist Party boss, Zivojin Stefanovic. Some 20,000 spontaneously answered his call, and as a result Novkovic was sentenced to 30 days in prison on a charge of organising a demonstration "without previously informing the authorities" (*The Independent* July 8). The paltry charge and derisory sentence in themselves say much about the irresolution of the SP-dominated authorities. Interestingly, Novkovic's imprisonment served to intensify lo-

cal protest, with a demonstration on July 5 of some 30,000 citizens. The number may sound small, but it represents around one in eight of the town's inhabitants - the equivalent in London of a spontaneous gathering of about one million people.

Perhaps an even more significant event occurred in Prokuplje on the evening of July 8. In an effort to replicate the sort of internecine violence that served Milosevic so well in 1996, the local Socialist Party organisation declared that it would stage a counter-demonstration to one planned by the Alliance for Change. In the event, however, the SP stalwarts were overwhelmed by their opponents and left their half-erected platform in disarray. This was undoubtedly a profound humiliation. For a time, when the local SP boss fired pistol shots at the crowd from the balcony of his villa, it seemed that violence might yet ensue, but the demonstration continued peacefully, with renewed calls for Milosevic to step down.

A growing boldness and confidence characterise the general tenor of recent activities by broad-based opposition forces. This is evident, for example, in the burgeoning petition campaign and in the determination of some key regional and local authorities to move openly against Milosevic. 'Many reasons - but one demand: resignation' is the slogan at the top of petition forms signed by many thousands. Petitioners give not only their names but their ID numbers, a sign that the climate of fear and repression is changing radically. Of course, just as one would expect, the grounds given by people for supporting the opposition movement are wide-ranging: some condemn Milosevic for starting the Kosova war; others for losing it. Most seem motivated by economic discontent, either because they have no jobs as a result of the war, or because they have not been paid for doing the job they are lucky enough to have.

It may come as a surprise to some readers, as it did to me, to learn that some 90% of Serbian municipalities are actually under the control of opposition parties (*ibid*). It would therefore be a mistake to imagine that Milosevic can automatically rely on support from key levels of local government. The city council in Novi Sad, the northern industrial hub which suffered considerably from Nato bombing, was the first to pass a motion calling on him to resign. In another important Danube regional centre, the city of Nis, the council has appealed direct to the European Union for economic aid.

Although relatively few Serbs are regular churchgoers, the influence of the Serbian orthodox church under patriarch Pavle must not be underestimated. Not only has the patriarch called for Milosevic's resignation, but also his trial as a war criminal. He even went so far as to instruct all orthodox parish priests to denounce Milosevic for his atrocities against the Kosovars from their pulpits on Sunday July 4. One wonders what the 'Yugoslav defencists', who have placed such stress on orthodoxy and Slav brotherhood, will make of Pavle's intervention on the side of truth?

In general, though as yet only in embryo, there is a palpable feeling that

the Serb masses are increasingly no longer prepared to tolerate being ruled in the old way; the weakened and demoralised Socialist Party apparatus, at least in the provinces - as is proven by Prokuplje - seems unable to rule in the old way too. At present the widely diverse streams of opposition support among the working people are searching for a figurehead capable of uniting and leading them. To draw a historical parallel, we are in the pre-Father Gapon phase of a pre-revolutionary situation.

Neither of the main contenders for misleadership has an unblemished record or inspires much trust in the population at large. Zoran Djindjic, whose Democratic Party has come to dominate the Alliance for Change, fled Serbia in the early days of the war and exiled himself in pro-western Montenegro. Technically, he could be arrested at any time - a development that would no doubt serve his cause, and one which Milosevic is therefore unlikely to pursue. Since his return to Belgrade on July 4, Djindjic has been at the forefront of the protest movement, calling for a general strike by Serb workers and denouncing Milosevic as a criminal: "Nobody in Serb history has done so much evil in so short a time" (*The Independent* July 7). He has also taken the bold step, for a Serb politician, of specifically denouncing Serb violence against the Kosovars, stating: "It is clear innocent people were killed. It is no justification that Albanian extremists also killed. They are individuals. Here it is the state" (*The Independent* July 6).

The other principal contender for the succession to Milosevic is the mercurial pet of the western media, Vuk Draskovic, leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement. In the eyes of many Serbs, Draskovic has been discredited by his closeness to the

Milosevic regime. In February this year he accepted the post of prime minister, only to be sacked in April for his ambivalent attitude to the Kosova war. As recently as last week, Draskovic was characteristically trying to keep all his options open by steadfastly refusing to cooperate with the Alliance for change or come out with an outright call for Milosevic to resign. This latter stance he excused on legalistic grounds - when the Belgrade city council proposed a resolution calling on Milosevic to go, Draskovic withheld the support of the Serbian Renewal Movement by claiming that the motion was in contravention of the council's statutes.

Over last weekend, however, Draskovic finally decided to come out in favour of opposition, but *not* by combining his forces with those of Djindjic and the Alliance for Change. Instead, he has promised a "parallel campaign", one that will be "completely different" and will fill the programmatic vacuum which he claims characterises the approach of the Alliance for Change (*The Times* July 12). Boastful as always, Draskovic threatens that he is "ready to paralyse all life in Serbia" through street protests (*ibid*). It is, however, interesting to note that when Serbian Renewal Movement activists tried to jump on the Leskovac bandwagon set rolling by Ivan Novkovic, they were rebuffed by the people.

Against this background of suspicion and the mutual antagonisms and ambitions of leading figures in the opposition camp, it is sad to note the complete absence of any consistent, principled working class politics. This may, in part, be a result of our reliance on the bourgeois media, but one suspects that a viable socialist alternative organisation, capable of galvanising the Serb masses, simply does not, as yet, exist. It remains clear, however, that only healthy socialist forces, committed to winning working class hegemony over the struggle for democracy, offer any prospect of a progressive solution to the country's mounting political and social crisis ●

Communist University '99

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

Saturday July 31 to
Saturday August 7

Sessions and speakers include: Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran on the the student revolt * Jack Conrad on the Northern Ireland peace process * International Bolshevik Tendency on Nato and Yugoslavia * Mark Fischer on the fragmentation of Yugoslavia * István Mészáros on communism * Bob Pitt on supporting the Labour Party under Blairism * Sean Matgamna of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty on the USSR and the doctrine of class * the Green Party on saving the world * Peter Tatchell and former SLP vice-president Royston Bull on single-issue campaigns * Hillel Ticktin on the decline of capitalism * Phil Sharpe on Marxism and prediction * Cymru Goch on the Welsh road to socialism * Dave Craig on the bourgeois revolution * Marion Haldane on GMOs * Peter Manson on 'institutional racism' * Dave Osler on Scargillism * Michael Malkin on Livingstoneism * Nick Long on building left unity

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.

Lessons of Iran Slogans combined

The pendulum of class struggle appears to be swinging in a democratic direction in capitalist Iran. Ever since the Islamic fundamentalist counterrevolution, the struggle for democracy has made very slow progress. There has been growing popular opposition to the old regime and struggle within the bourgeoisie between conservative fundamentalists and more progressive liberals. The latter secured the election in 1997 of president Mohammed Khatami promising democratic reform.

The conservatives fought back using their control of parliament and the state apparatus. Last week about 500 students demonstrated against a new restrictive press law. In response, militant Islamic fascists of the Ansar-e Hizbollah broke into Tehran University and beat the students. At least three were killed and 300 hospitalised. But, far from intimidating the students, this violence produced mass demonstrations.

Over 10,000 students staged a pro-democracy sit-in at Tehran University. The students demanded the resignation of the country's parliament. The minister of education resigned. Mass action threatened not only the position of the conservatives, but also the liberal presidency of Khatami. "We are taking action because change is not occurring fast enough," said a student spokesperson (*The Observer* July 11). Khatami is now openly criticised for not controlling the police who assisted the fascist attack. Latest reports from Tehran indicate major street battles between students and the police, assisted by the Islamic fascist gangs. Khatami was forced to take sides and naturally supported the police. The counterrevolutionary role of liberalism was exposed for all to see.

The struggle for democracy has left narrow, legal-constitutional and peaceful channels and become a mass, revolutionary, extra-parliamentary struggle. Whether this will develop into a full blown democratic revolution only time will tell. But it is clear that the masses have intervened directly and by mass revolutionary action have shifted the struggle onto a new level. Now the workers of Iran must come to the aid of the students. The students must appeal to workers.

How does the theory of revolutionary democratic communism relate to this situation? In the *Weekly Worker* (May 13 and July 1) I put forward three basic propositions:

1. Revolutionary mass struggle is the best means to extend democracy.
2. The democratic revolution is the highest form of that struggle.
3. The revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat is the highest form of democratic revolution.

The Iranian students have already shown the validity of the first point. But what strategic line of advance leads towards the democratic revolution? The theory says that the party of the working class must become the political vanguard of the democratic movement. The party must put forward a combination of democratic demands and slogans. First there must be agitation for the overthrow of the Islamic republic and in favour of a democratic secular republic. Second this requires that the students and workers unite and set up councils of action, or soviets, in the universities, factories and oilfields, and do so now. The aim must be to prepare the ground for a provisional revolutionary democratic government.

Such a government would need to take immediate action to suppress the reactionaries and convene a constituent assembly. The future of democracy in Iran must pass into the hands of the people, led by the working class. Of course without a party this remains pure theory.

This programme of action combines democratic demands which are both bourgeois and proletarian in nature. It would need to include other democratic demands such as women's rights and the right of nations to self-determination. If this programme were fully implemented, it would not take Iran beyond a dual power democratic republic. The demands for a democratic republic and the building of soviets, or workers' and students' councils, are not demands for the distant future. They are immediate demands for now.

For the sake of exposition, I will call this type of programme which contains both bourgeois democratic and proletarian democratic demands, a 'combination programme'. If this was the maximum programme, it would be consistent with centrism or Kautskyism, whose maximum is bourgeois democracy. But the combination programme is a minimum programme guiding us on the first steps of the permanent revolution. Unfortunately the left Trotskyist ignoramuses are incapable of understanding this, despite having had it explained to them time after time.

The rotten and false theory of stageism divided revolutions into two types: bourgeois democratic and national socialist, for which there were corresponding minimum and maximum programmes. According to this, bourgeois democratic demands belong in the minimum, and soviets - or workers' councils - belong to the maximum programme. The combination programme breaks down the artificial and false barrier between the old minimum and maximum. It combines what was correct about the old Bolshevik minimum with the lessons of the Russian Revolution, including Lenin's *April thesis* of 1917. The combination minimum programme is the post-*April thesis* minimum, not the old pre-April minimum. This type of programme could also justifiably be called a transitional programme.

These ideas are rooted in the experience of Bolshevism. We can locate them in the ideological division between revolutionary democratic communism and economist-communism. Economism manifests itself in centrism and ultra-leftism, which are based on an incorrect attitude to bourgeois democracy and proletarian democracy. The Centrists support the extension of bourgeois democracy and oppose proletarian (or soviet) democracy. The ultra-lefts oppose the extension of bourgeois democracy and crudely counterpose workers' democracy to it.

The Bolsheviks, or revolutionary democrats, understood from a working class perspective not the simple opposition of one form of democracy to the other, but also their interrelationship through class struggle and the processes of transition from one to the other. Consequently, by understanding the class struggle and the consciousness of the masses, the slogans of bourgeois democracy and workers' democracy can and must be combined in certain circumstances. The dual power republic of 1917 showed exactly the interplay of both types of democratic demands and the

class struggle. It is then a tactical question of which slogans should be emphasised at what moment. In general a lower level of class struggle puts more emphasis on bourgeois democratic demands and at a higher level the soviets have more prominence.

Modern revolutionary democracy must base itself on the combination politics of 1917 and not the old-style, purely bourgeois democratic, pre-1917 minimum programme. During 1917 the Bolsheviks practised combination politics by advocating the building and strengthening of soviets, side by side with agitation for the convening of a parliamentary Constituent Assembly. The lessons of this were burned into the political psychology of Trotsky. Consequently Trotsky's views on future revolutions can be seen from a certain angle as an application of the combination programme.

From 1926 Trotsky wrote a series of letters and articles on the situation facing Chinese communists (see *Leon Trotsky on China* New York 1976). The Stalinists adopted the theory of bourgeois democratic revolution in the manner of the Mensheviks. They believed that the Chinese bourgeoisie was the only class that could lead the democratic revolution. As a result they followed a policy of joining the bourgeois nationalist Kuomintang. Trotsky opposed the dangerous policy of remaining inside the Kuomintang. He urged the Communist Party to organise independently and promote the building and spreading of soviets or workers' and peasants' councils. He also argued, especially after the crushing of the communist movement in Shanghai in 1927, for the bourgeois democratic slogan of a constituent assembly ●

Dave Craig (RDG)

Trotsky on China, 1928

I have already received several telegrams [from left Trotskyists] raising objections to ... the democratic demand for popular representation ... I must say, some of the objections in the telegrams did seem quite incredible to me. For example, two comrades say that the call for a constituent assembly is "not a class demand," and that, therefore, they reject it. Such an understanding of the class character of demands has an anarcho-

syndicalist, and not a Marxist character ...

... the class interests of the proletariat, correctly understood, require "democratic slogans to be carried out to the fullest extent". Don't forget that in 1912 the Bolsheviks in the legal press called themselves "consistent democrats". This pseudonym to pass the censors expressed all the same a very important tendency of the party's work at that time ●

International campaign to defend Iranian students

On this 20th anniversary of the foundation of the Islamic Republic in Iran, the struggle against religious despotism has reached unprecedented dimensions. As millions of Iranians confront the regime, students have taken a central role. Over the last few months protests on university campuses have highlighted sweeping changes in Iran and the students' slogan, 'Death to dictatorship', has dramatically and irreversibly transformed the political scene.

Those in power have decided to confront these protests with increased repression and the creation of an atmosphere of terror. They have tried to suppress the political actions of the students, tried to break the students' movement. Armed thugs of hezbollah, supported by the security forces, have repeatedly invaded the campus of Tehran University and many other universities to break up demonstrations, stop speeches and arrest and recently kidnap student activists and leaders of student organisations. The government is also forcing universities to expel student activists and the lecturers who support them. We, the signatories of this statement:

1. Express our solidarity with the pro-democracy movement of Iranian students and support their call for political freedom and democratic

rights in Iran and support their call for freedom of all political prisoners in Iran.

2. Condemn the use of armed violence against students and staff in universities and demand the unconditional release of all arrested students and lecturers and the reinstatement of students and staff expelled for their political beliefs.

3. Hold the authorities of the IRI responsible for the increasing violence against students and academics in Iran.

4. Call on individuals, human rights organisations and movements, and especially students organisations and academic organisations, throughout the world to support Iranian students and condemn their repression. We call on international human rights organisations to intervene and demand an end to these attacks.

We have no doubt that, in alliance with the movement of Iranian workers, in alliance with the women's movement and the protests of writers and journalists, and with international solidarity, Iran's students and lecturers will paralyse the rule of terror and dictatorship and will pave the way for political, social and civil emancipation of Iranian society ●

Noam Chomsky, Khalil Hindi, Ben Fine, Suzi Weissman, Yassamine Mather, and many others

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WW subscription £ _____ € _____

Donation £ _____ € _____

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

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

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

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TEL _____

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

More resignations

The ongoing degeneration of the Socialist Party continues unabated this week, as the confirmation of the resignations from the organisation of long-term cadres Margaret Manning and national committee member Morag Allen filter through from Manchester.

This latest manifestation of our party's decline is yet more bad news, not just for party rank and file, but also for an increasingly troubled leadership. Possibly though, the most depressing aspect of the steady exodus marking the party's downward trajectory is the apparent absence of any kind of split along *revolutionary* lines. From Liverpool to Scotland, from Pakistan to Manchester, the trend is liquidationist.

Does this mean that the leadership's espousal of "our organisation as a clear, distinct, revolutionary organisation" (*Members Bulletin* No16, March 18 1996) is simply too much for comrades unable to grasp the nature of the period? Has the 'revolutionary cutting edge' of our party "become blurred in the minds of some comrades" (*ibid*)? Ironically, while this is a factor, and notwithstanding the leadership's revolutionary posturing, a large section of comrades are demoralised and disorientated precisely *because* of the absence of a clear, distinct revolutionary *programme*.

Whilst the 40-year entryist project and its accompanying siege mentality engendered a cohesion and unity amongst the rank and file, it has clearly rendered us unfit for life in the real world. Failed predictions - year in, year out - of imminent capitalist collapse, and assurances that this would somehow, magically, translate into "big opportunities for our forces in the coming period" (P Taaffe, speech to the March 1993 conference of Militant Labour), could be ignored while the Labour Party Young Socialists continued to provide a steady influx of new recruits. Besides, the sheer amount of time and energy involved in capturing and retaining 'positions' left little time for detailed politics.

The sneers of other lefts regarding our "parliamentary cretinism" and "reformist" programme were smugly dismissed. All that nonsense about an "enabling bill" and "peaceful transformation" were only a ruse, you know! Riding high on the success of Liverpool city council and the poll tax struggle, such details were rudely forced into the background.

However, the political schizophrenia required to face in two opposite directions at the same time produced political fault lines which today are manifesting themselves as organisational earthquakes. Lying to Labour Party bureaucrats was one thing; lying to ourselves and the class was

quite another. For that reason enthusiasm and a palpable sense of relief greeted the decision to embark upon the 'open turn'. Here at last was an opportunity to confound our critics who dismissed us as "reformists". Here at last was an opportunity "to raise the independent, revolutionary character of our organisation more clearly in the eyes of workers" (*ibid*). After all, we really were a revolutionary organisation - weren't we?

It was perhaps inevitable that away from the womb-like security of the Labour Party reality would set in. And so it has proved. It must now be apparent to all but the blind and the wilfully stupid that all the chickens now coming home to roost are not the fault of this or that mistaken 'tactic' or 'turn', but are a direct result of a fundamental weakness of politics and programme.

This point is glaringly illustrated by the 'open turn mark II' - ie, the name change to 'Socialist Party'. Not only was any remaining revolutionary programmatic content effectively abandoned; its justification that revolutionary ideas and an openly Marxist programme is "too far ahead of consciousness at the present time", and that it would "frighten" workers - to use the oft-repeated phrases of many a full-timer - is nauseating. Patronising on the one hand; blatantly dishonest on the other.

And so, from the "red 90s" to the "crisis of expectations" - theorising and liquidating ourselves in order to tail-end an "existing low level of consciousness" - we stagger on. A punch-drunk prize fighter, reeling from one blow after another. Such are the consequences of opportunism and an absence of a revolutionary - dare I say it? - a *communist* programme.

However, criticism, particularly with the benefit of hindsight, is easy. Can we effect a change, or are we content to bemoan the decline and fall on the sidelines? Are we self-critical, scientific socialists, or a bunch of Taaffe clones, fit only for cheerleading the leadership's crass, opportunist blunders? If the former is the case a small - and I emphasise small - glimmer of hope may be perceived in the form of the forthcoming one-day special conference to ratify a constitution.

Unremarkably the constitution, at least in draft form, allows no formal provision for factions. Instead we have the following (from clause 4, part 4, 'Democratic unity', section A): "Based on the ideas of democratic unity, we believe that after full discussion we then agree to act collectively. All members of the Socialist Party are entitled to express their opinions and campaign for their views within party structures, whilst making every effort to arrive at common agreement. Every member agrees to

work to implement current decisions of the governing bodies of the party" ('Draft constitution' *Members Bulletin* No24, November 1997).

This obvious bureaucratic sleight of hand, intended to side-step genuine debate about such fundamentals as faction rights and democratic centralism, at least provides a platform, however small, to campaign for a genuine revolutionary programme. If this seems like an organisational solution to a political problem, allow me to conclude with a quote from a clearly perceptive communist that illustrates the reasoning:

"We see democratic centralism as a *process*, rather than a set of formal operating procedures and relationships between higher and lower bodies, etc. The essence of the process is *the struggle to win and maintain unity around a revolutionary programme*. Thus, at the heart of democratic centralism is the question of *politics*, of the organisation being the form of mediation between theory (ideas embodied in the programme) and practice. The fight for democratic centralism not only means fighting for openness in the organisation as a precondition for fighting for scientific truth; it also means fighting for revolutionary politics, not any old sect perspective. The two - a revolutionary programme and democratic centralism - are actually *inseparable*" ●

It is with a sense of regret and weariness that I feel compelled to write a reply to the article by Dave Nellist (*Weekly Worker* July 8). The sequence of events detailed in that article and the contents of the fact sheet are not accurate. It would be possible to give a detailed account of what aspects I disagree with, but that would be tedious to the reader and would divert attention from the real issues, which are why the left did so badly in the recent European elections and what steps can be taken to ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated in local elections and the next general election.

I shall restrict my comments to a few points. The treasurer of the Coventry and Warwickshire Socialist Alliance did not ask me to go on the Socialist Alliance list in October. He spoke to me briefly on September 25, as a friend, in an unofficial, unrepresentative capacity, and said some people were suggesting I should go on the Socialist Alliance list and that would help out with the £5,000 deposit. This was only four days after I had learned that I had been effectively deselected and was in the process of asking for an appeal and alternatively preparing a legal challenge.

Labour Party members in my Euro constituency have not behaved in such a supine manner as in other areas and have put up a spirited campaign in my defence, including

Approach too late

Former Labour MEP Christine Oddy responds to West Midlands Socialist Alliance claims that she had rejected unity moves

picketing Labour Party Euro conference and a meeting of the NEC at Millbank Tower. Most constituencies have passed resolutions of support and a few passed resolutions withdrawing their labour from election campaign work. While Labour Party members were prepared to give me clear backing, it was right and proper to remain loyal to them.

After the April 28 Workers Memorial Day commemoration I had a coffee with Dave Nellist. As a courtesy to me he wanted to inform me that there would be a Socialist Alliance list and gave me details of the candidates. I felt this was a *fait accompli* and knew there had been a democratic selection conference to arrange the list. If only the Labour Party had been so democratic! He asked me what I would be doing in the future and how often MEPs went to Brussels. As I was aware that there was a sizeable public protest emerging to spoil ballot papers by writing Christine Oddy on them and as I had

been advised that this would probably be counted as a valid Labour vote, I knew I had to withdraw from the Labour list to allow the public to give vent to their fury by spoiling their ballot papers. I told Dave this in confidence but in the event the Labour Party suspended me first on May 6 on the derisory grounds that I had not been working hard enough.

On May 10 it was announced on national radio that I was standing as an independent. Dave left a message with my PA on May 12 asking me to go on the Socialist Alliance list so that we could pool resources, but by that date I was publicly committed to standing as an independent.

Instead of a squabble between people who have worked well together in the past in the same city it would be better to look at why the overall result for the left was so poor. People are rapidly becoming disenchanted with New Labour, but returned to the Conservatives or opted for the UK Independence Party or the British

National Party rather than turning to the leftwing alternatives. A worrying trend is that the combined vote of Socialist Alliance and Socialist Labour in the West Midlands was less than that of the BNP.

My vote was the best in the country after parties which actually won seats with 36,849 votes and 4.34% of the vote. I achieved 24.86% in Coventry North West, 24.05% in Coventry North East and 22.56% in Coventry South. In constituencies which I had only represented for five years I was achieving scores of 12.31% in Nuneaton, 11.45% in North Warwickshire and 10.78% in Rugby and Kenilworth. In Coventry North West only 207 votes separated Labour, Conservatives and myself and Geoffrey Robinson MP would have lost his seat if it had been a general election. In Coventry South I was only 54 votes behind Labour and Jim Cunningham MP would have lost his seat.

So how did I achieve such a good result? Partly because I campaigned

against the election system itself which is oppressive, undemocratic, treats the public as morons, incapable of distinguishing between the relative merits of candidates, and shifts accountability of the elected representative from the voter to the political party. Further, the counting method gives a disproportionate advantage to the larger political parties. The *Birmingham Post* ran an article after the election to show that, instead of the distribution of seats being four Conservative, three Labour, one Lib Dem, if a different method been used the distribution would have been three Conservative, two Labour, one Lib Dem, one Green, one UK Independent. The system was clearly chosen to maximise the entrenchment of the large political parties in the British system and is unfair to the electorate.

Further, I campaigned on my record as a hard working constituency MEP (as Dave did in 1992). Over the 10 years that I have been an MEP I have put working with constituents before working with the party and have tried to look outwards, working with community groups, voluntary organisations, international and development bodies, pensioners, disabled people, trade unions and Coventry Trade Union Council. I do not wish to see the left fragment in Britain.

We need to have a constructive discussion to see how we can reach out to more people ●