



'Time bomb'

In politics, as in nature, everything produces its equal and opposite reaction. Tony Blair's constitutional revolution from above is no exception.

Initially the constitutional revolution elicited nothing much from the Tories - except idiotic prattle and dumb rage. The party of Thatcher which energetically smashed the once mighty NUM after a year-long civil war in the mining communities and pit villages, the party that systematically rolled back the welfare state and created a destitute generation, the party of endless privatisation, job insecurity and globalised capital crassly celebrated the static virtues of Britain's supposed 'uninterrupted' thousand years of constitutional history. (Ignoring the separate linguistic, cultural and royal histories in the British Isles, the 1066, 1642, 1688 and other revolutionary ruptures and the elementary fact that Britain was only united politically in the 18th century.)

Behind the Tory nonsense there was, of course, Tory sense. Abolition of hereditary peers, devolution, the Lab-Lib politics of coalition and the possibility of PR for Westminster elections effectively rob the Tories of their divine right to govern the whole country through a minority of votes and the unelected House of Lords. The spectre of permanent marginalisation haunts them.

The Tories could, and did, say 'no' to every innovation emanating from Downing Street - Scottish parliament, Welsh assembly, Lords reform, London mayor, etc. That hardly constitutes a viable strategy. In recognition, albeit driven more by blind instinct than grand vision, William Hague is beginning to hone a programme. However, what is noticeable is that the Tories are not so much readying themselves for government in 2001 or 2002. They are readying themselves to wreck Blair's constitutional revolution through a reactionary revolt. That might well mean another term in opposition, but New Labour will have been fatally wounded. In other words Hague's programme is negative, not hegemonic.

A number of often contradictory elements are being put together. Saving the pound and opposition to a federal European Union, English nationalism and fuelling resentment of Scotland and Wales, foxhunting and saving the House of Lords, siding with the Ulster Unionists and agitation for an intransigent plan B. Potentially a lethal parliamentary and extra-parliamentary arsenal.

Evidently the Tories' stance on Europe does not coincide with the long-term interests of the biggest and most dynamic sectors of capital. Fear

of the future does however resonate with the least competitive companies and, perhaps more to the point, a mass of atomised voters epitomised by the four million readers of *The Sun*.

Party and class never neatly nor automatically fit. New Labour is a complex hybrid. Politically it serves finance capital; sociologically it is staffed by middle class career politicians; electorally it relies on the proletariat in the ballot box. Trade union influence has shrunk qualitatively. The Tories appear to have abandoned their historic alignment with big capital in favour of an English version of Poujadism. Before our eyes they are metamorphosing from the preferred party of the bourgeoisie into a right-wing English nationalist party. Obviously such transformations, by New Labour and the Tories alike, are premised on the disappearance of the workers as a political class (albeit in Britain as the subaltern pole of Labourism). Today the working class exists as wage slaves, but not as the bearer of a social alternative to capitalism.

We in Britain are surely in the midst of something unequalled since the death of the great Liberal Party and the rise of Labour in the first quarter of the 20th century. Whether the present forms endure or quickly pass away is another matter entirely - the class struggle will decide.

Beating the English nationalist drum is Hague's answer to devolution in Scotland and Wales - since it was established as a statelet in 1920 Northern Ireland has caused no agonising over the so-called West Lothian question. There are 163 Tory MPs - all English seats. None in Scotland or Wales. Naturally Hague claims to be discouraging English nationalism. An opposite intention is transparent. He yearns for a bigoted English backlash. Hague's speech to the Centre for Policy Studies (see p8) was a bid to capture what he called "an emerging English consciousness" and fuel resentment against Scotland on the basis of per capita expenditure and the right of Scottish and Welsh MPs - he was silent on Northern Ireland - to vote on English matters. Hague's slogan is "English votes on English laws" (*The Guardian* July 16).

The fact that Wales and England share the same legal system is a minor detail. As is Hague's inability to take the logical step and advocate an English parliament within a federal monarchy system (a Liberal Democrat proposal). The cardinal point is the crude invocation of English nationalism in order to undo Blair's constitutional revolution.

Foxhunting is foxhunting is foxhunting ... for simpletons. Needless to say, the threat to countryside

liberties posed by ending hunting by dogs is a smokescreen. The real issue is the unelected House of Lords and the constitutional "time bomb" primed by Hague. Ominously *The Daily Telegraph* urges an "ermine revolt" in order to "uphold the constitution". All government legislation should be blocked using the Lords: crucially Blair's disenfranchisement of "several hundred of their number" - "one of the most autocratic bills in recent history" (June 29). The Tories explicitly link foxhunting and the House of Lords and have taken to the streets in huge numbers. Last year's 250,000-strong Countryside Alliance demonstration in London saw the government quickly back-track on foxhunting and then compromise on 90 hereditary peers.

Blair's promise on the BBC's July 8 'Question Time' to ban hunting with dogs "as soon as we possibly can" - ie, after the completion of the first stage of the House of Lords reform - is sure to provoke a parliamentary and extra-parliamentary storm. Hague will do his utmost to maximise the destructive impact of his *militant minority* (Journalists have foolishly interpreted Blair's move as an attempt to appease Labour's "traditional" core voters. In reality it is *hegemonic*. Seventy percent of the adult population, including traditional Tories, reportedly support a ban.)

Ulster is key to the success of any Tory revolt. Northern Ireland is the United Kingdom's main weak link and therefore the main weak link in Blair's constitutional revolution. For nearly three decades Britain's inability to rule the Six Counties in the old way and the refusal of the nationalist masses to be ruled in the old way was a festering ulcer on the Elizabethan monarchy system. There is no longer a revolutionary situation, but the counterrevolutionary situation is precarious. Northern Ireland remains a cockpit of crisis, as testified by Blair's inability to strike a deal on his June 30 deadline and the subsequent seriocomic collapse of the Northern Ireland assembly on July 15 - for a few surreal minutes the province had an exclusively nationalist executive.

If the June 10 European Union election debacle signalled the end of the Blair honeymoon, failure to put in place the Northern Ireland executive leaves the whole New Labour project vulnerable.

For all practical purposes the bipartisanship which for 30 years broadly characterised the relationship between the Tory and Labour front benches has been scuppered by Hague. The line of contradiction no longer runs between the British state and the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland. Now things in Britain

have bifurcated at the top. The Tories have moved against Blair's reformist solution in Northern Ireland. The opposition, like the devil, is in the detail.

Blair pushed for Sinn Féin ministers before IRA decommissioning (in their absence decommissioning is already undergoing a slippage away from May 2000). Hague and his media auxiliaries in contrast instinctively sided with Trimble - not as first minister, but as leader of the Ulster Unionists. Sinn Féin must "be excluded from the executive", Hague insisted, while the IRA remains "fully armed" (*The Daily Telegraph* July 5). Against the letter and the grain of the Good Friday deal he also agitates for an end to prisoner releases. *The Daily Telegraph* editorial recognises that under such circumstances it would be necessary to revert to solving the problem *vi et armis*: "Army patrols should be brought back, the emergency powers act restored in full" and "measures should be taken to facilitate the conviction of terrorist leaders, including forensic admission of telephone intercepts and the testimony of anonymous informers" (July 19).

Such a plan B is obviously unworkable as a consensus settlement. Neither the SDLP nor the Ahern government in Dublin could accept it. As to the IRA, it has proved beyond a shadow of doubt that it can withstand anything the British state can politically afford to throw against it - internment, SAS assassinations, criminalisation, etc. The Tory plan B is not an alternative to Blair's stalled plan A. Once more it is a cynical wrecking device.

The old Conservative and Unionist Party lives again in the alliance cemented between Hague and David Trimble. It should not be assumed, however, that there exists a deep-seated affinity between the two men. Hague is a grammar school Tory in the non-aristocratic mould of Heath and Thatcher. A conventional career politician from head to toe. Trimble is an Ulster zealot. He entered politics with the Vanguard party in 1973 - its firebrand leader, William Craig, notoriously told supporters that "our duty is to liquidate the enemy". Trimble himself was actively involved in the semi-insurrectionary 1974 Ulster workers' strike which brought down the Sunningdale power-sharing executive. Having joined the Ulster Unionist Party in 1977, he was elected leader 13 years later as a hardline replacement for the 'moderate' James Molyneux.

The English Tories have no love of Trimble's party, whose rasping talk of British citizenship, the queen and the union are simply codewords for the protestant ascendancy. Ulster's loyalty is loyalty to Ulster alone. But

in the search for a weapon Tory eyes naturally light upon the unionists. With unionist disloyalty the Tories hope to break New Labour.

Ireland's right to self-determination has again been denied and remains the central, unresolved, contradiction. But partition post-1998 eschews gerrymandering and overt discrimination. More than that, Blair aims to win the consent, if not the active support, of the catholic-nationalist population. Each concession given to, or wrested by, the minority increases the pressure on the majority. The Ulster Unionists find themselves with little room for manoeuvre. In front of them is the Paisleyite DUP, waiting to steal their base in the event of a 'surrender' to IRA gunmen. At their back is the British-Irish Agreement, which redefines the union with Great Britain and necessitates an historic compromise with Irish nationalism. Either way, a disloyal 'no' majority amongst the majority British-Irish is now in place. Perfect - for Hague.

Formal negotiations over the Northern Ireland executive have been delayed till October or even November. But the next big hurdle, and therefore the next Tory opportunity, is likely to be RUC reform under the auspices of a Blairised Chris Patten. The Hague Tories could yet find themselves a ready-made armed wing if the RUC were to be radically reformed (disbanded in unionist-speak) as part of the attempt to appease catholics. Mass resignations, passive mutiny, uniformed protest demonstrations are all on the cards.

A constitutional collision between the Hague Tories and New Labour ought to provide an opening for mass activity. With the right programme rapid advances can be made. Yet most comrades on the left are blissfully mired in economism (bourgeois politics of the working class). The constitution hardly exists for them as a serious political issue. Thankfully we communists hold to a different approach. Where Blair remakes the constitutional monarchy from above, the CPGB says the workers must fight to remake it from below as a federal republic (as advocated by Marx, Engels and Lenin). Not only must Scotland and Wales have sovereign parliaments, able to freely exercise the right of self-determination up to separation; England too should have its republican parliament. As to Ireland, we are for unity, independence and democracy with full rights for the protestant - British-Irish - minority, including the right to separate.

Without such a communist minimum programme there can be no working class political independence nor self-liberation ●

Jack Conrad

Cryptic SWP

A telling symptom of the crisis of the left's programmatic perspective is its increasingly erratic politics. New ventures, which seemingly overturn decades of consistently held theorised positions, are embarked on frivolously, in a piecemeal fashion and without any clear accounting with what the organisation was saying yesterday.

Over the past few years, we have seen the Socialist Party in England and Wales justify its open turn by the assertion (and it has been little else) that Labour is now "a bourgeois party". More recently, Workers Power seems to have dropped its electoral support to Labour, an auto-reflex that had characterised it since birth. The Labour Party looks set to limp on: the fate of WP is more in the balance, I would suggest. Now, we even have the Alliance for Workers' Liberty - once the most ferocious in their protective concern for Labour - actually standing against it in elections.

None of these important shifts can have taken place without debate and controversy within at least the leaderships of such organisations - assuming these are not composed of brain-dead dolts, of course. Yet, with the partial exception of the AWL, none of this has found expression in the open. To grasp what is going on, we have to subject articles to forensic investigation to uncover their true significance.

Recent issues of *Socialist Worker* provide examples. We have already commented that the SWP's myopically upbeat perspectives about this period have been 'tweaked'. Where once its staff writers would talk up the official strike figures, desperately trying to prove that the UK was indeed riven with industrial strife, now they baldly assert "the level of open struggle is fantastically low by any historical standard" (*Socialist Worker* July 10). An accurate observation, if woefully late.

This same article - 'What kind of alternative' by Paul McGarr - provides us with an interesting insight into current internal tensions, although it is written in the usual cryptic style of SWPers.

McGarr tells us that "some people" (who, where?) "conclude that" this low level of struggle "will continue indefinitely". He counters this silliness by citing the relatively sleepy periods that preceded the Chartist revolt, the events of 1968 and the French public sector strike in 1995. Personally, I am not aware of any left organisation that peddles the idea that we have seen the last of strikes and struggle. Obviously there is Tony Blair, New Labour and the trade union bureaucracy. But the main target of comrade McGarr is the 'electoralist' wing of the SWP leadership itself. He is articulating the views of the syndicalist majority in the leadership which - while it has been forced to recognise what class struggle has been screaming at it for a whole period - still urges the organisation to carry on as usual - albeit with a boycottist adaptation to the reality of New Labour.

This whole question of the level of the class struggle and the electoral tactic is a threat for the SWP. Its *raison d'être* is recruitment, routine activism and the provision of sustenance to its apparatus. Anything, such as testing its support through standing in election, that forces the SWP to objectively look at itself - above all its absence of roots in working class communities and society at large - endangers the integrity of the group. The rank and file *must* be kept flogging papers, recruiting and definitely *not* thinking.

McGarr warns his comrades on elections. He tells us that "... a good vote, or even getting a few candidates elected, is not the central way to win real change". The recent spate of electoral challenges to Blair are "welcome", but "hugely limited". Even a successful candidate like Tommy Sheridan "would acknowledge that little can be achieved in the parliament itself and that struggles outside are more important".

Ostensibly, McGarr's article is making points against the continuing electoralist illusions of Labour Party members as they become embittered against Blair. The important sub-text of his piece, however, is to reassure those members of the SWP who may be dismayed by its ignominious withdrawal from the Socialist Alliance electoral bloc prior to the EU elections and the poor results of its candidates in Wales and Scotland: 'Don't worry,' he tells them. 'It really doesn't matter. The struggle going on outside parliament is what counts.'

Which is where he impales himself on the horns of a dilemma. As comrade McGarr notes, "If an alternative to New Labour must be focused primarily on ... struggles, there is an immediate and very obvious problem in Britain today." Quite. Sanguine reassurances that "no-one predicted" big upsurges in the past or promissory notes for "enormous potential" in the future will not satisfy the thinking members in the ranks. What is called for as a matter of urgency is an honest and exacting reappraisal of perspectives, a democratic and open holding of the leadership to account by the organisation as a whole. We can now surely expect a growing unease from wide layers of cadre, a situation which is not without its irony. For, while McGarr and other leading apartheidists write of contemporary society as being characterised by "a calm on the surface but an undercurrent of ... discontent ...", his words might actually more accurately describe the situation in the SWP itself.

Roll on the day when SWP scribes write what they mean and mean what they write ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Anti-black Afa

When Mark Fischer says that the Anti-Fascist Alliance was "bruisingly effective in winning the battle for control of the streets", forcing the BNP to devise a new strategy by 1994, he is probably correct ('Learning from the fascists' *Weekly Worker* July 1).

What he glosses over is the level of near psychotic violence employed in order to achieve this end. As a member of Afa in the early 1990s I personally witnessed a relentlessly brutal beating dished out to more or less defenceless members of the far right during a rally at Kensington library which horrified far more than me. Repulsed, many - including female members of Class War - left the meeting clearly upset. For my part I, along with others, left the organisation, never to return.

The subsequent criminal trial collapsed amidst unexplained allegations by independent researcher Larry O'Hara of MI5 interference in the judicial process, and the ringleaders walked free.

Accompanying suspicions - particularly amongst anarchists - of some level of state involvement, there are long-term concerns of Afa being 'institutionally anti-women and anti-gay' made by, amongst others, Workers Power. Also aggression towards the left generally is more or less routine. Most recently Afa members in London are accused of seriously intimidating the organisers of a benefit for a Czechoslovakian anti-fascist. As I understand it, one member of the audience (who happens apparently to be of Asian appearance) was actually physically assaulted.

Now I see, judging from Mark Fischer's review, Afa intend adding 'anti-black' to their already formidably chauvinist CV.

Widely regarded as a pariah on the left, any genuinely leftwing organisation such as yourselves should be very wary of getting involved with these people on this or any other issue.

'Learning from the fascists'? All too well, in my experience.

Malcolm Keene
Hackney

Face facts

As a regular reader of both Afa's *Fighting Talk* and the *Weekly Worker*, I welcome the efforts of Mark Fischer to address what are important issues for the left around the question of race. However, Mark Fischer and the CPGB let themselves down on at least two points.

Firstly, just as Mark Fischer gets into the 'juicy bits' - ie, the potentially explosive issues raised around 'equal opportunities' in a post-Lawrence Britain - he appears to bottle it and signs off with a bland "What is needed is a movement of anti-racism from below, a working class-led fight for unity".

While Mark Fischer is quite correct, it is surely not too unfair to ask, how? Tackling this crucial question was surely not avoided because of lack of space, given that over two pages were devoted to the navel-gazing of 'Winning the peasantry' and 'Trotsky versus the left Trotskyists'. Instead I fear it had more to do with the orthodox left's inability to bridge the widening gap between theory and practice.

Secondly, despite the fact that he suggests the left should "learn a lesson from the fascists", Mark Fischer still feels the need to reassure his readers that the BNP is a "motley crew". The facts, however, paint an uncomfortable picture for the left and our 'own motley crews'.

Despite the UKIP taking 6.96% of the reactionary vote, despite the *Daily Mirror*'s 'Tyndall and the bomber' front page a few weeks before the election, and despite not being able to hold a single major public event in years, the BNP still gained 102,647 Euro votes to the SLP's 86,749. Take away Scotland and Wales, where the BNP did not stand, and the difference grows to 25,837, with the BNP finishing above the SLP in seven out of the nine English regions.

With so many on the left talking of Scargill's party being the 'last-chance saloon' a couple of years ago, it is time to face up to the facts and discuss how we move forward, before someone calls time and shuts the bar for good.

Colin Pearce
North London

Slave mentality

Alan McArthur's defence of the AWL's 'transitional' approach to their recent election campaign is a beautiful example of everything that is wrong with the 'transitional method' (Letters *Weekly Worker* July 15).

His division of revolutionaries' tasks into "two fundamental jobs" is a telling beginning. He argues that, while of course the AWL wants to make revolutionary propaganda by selling their literature and recruiting to the AWL, they "also need a policy for the whole class and movement, a programme of demands around which to organise activity". The trouble is, this time round at least, their "policy for the whole class" was reformist and they kept their revolutionary propaganda off the election address. The working class as a mass are fed economism, while revolutionary ideas are kept for internal consumption.

Alan says revolutionary demands are "abstract". Why? Doesn't the working class need revolutionary ideas in Blair's Britain in order to liberate itself? How are demands for a minimum wage of £5 or an injection of cash for the health service implicitly "demands to take our class from where we are towards where we want to be"? How does our class know where it wants to be?

The AWL appears to think that by telling people they need better services the transitional process will begin. The working class will - without even realising it - begin the mystical transitional journey. They don't know where they are going, but luckily the AWL does. How could they know? - you don't even use the word 'socialism' in your election material. You've kept that safely up your sleeve for later. All will be revealed when the AWL thinks the class is ready.

Alan informs us that the "working class will make socialism, not a handful of revolutionaries". But you are the ones treating the class as wage slaves who can't be told the truth just yet. You hide your political beliefs behind reformism when you stand in front of them in elections. It is you that behave as auto-sectarians.

Anne Murphy
London

Balance sheet

In the last issue of *Workers Power*, comrade Dave Stockton published a full-page article on 'Ten years of the LRCI'. I was hoping in vain to find some self-criticisms, or reports of WP's interventions in strikes and union/labour organisations or about its theoretical and programmatic changes and achievements.

Letters

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

However, the article concentrated on repeatedly attacking their former Bolivian, New Zealand and Peruvian sections who were guilty of "sectarian" and "Stalinophile" positions. It presented José Villa as the great villain who was the cause of so much trouble within the League for a revolutionary Communist International for many years. His name was mentioned more times than all the others put together!

However, the article did not explain any of the dissidents' positions. The fact that a balance sheet of an entire international tendency is based on this kind of report shows one of three possibilities: that it was not true when the LRCI claimed in previous years that its splits were not significant; that the LRCI's leadership is *obsessed* with the LCMRCI and its criticisms which they are incapable of answering in a real political way; or that the LRCI is not an organisation that has had any serious contributions to make in the workers' movement.

If the LRCI wants to continue to claim that it is an anti-Stalinist and democratic-centralist organisation, I demand it enters into a *public discussion* with me and the LCMRCI. They should give over a page in their paper and on their website for our reply, and we could do the same in our publications. We are willing to have a *public debate in any place they choose*. We should discuss the balance sheet of the same international organisation that we founded and the difference between our two currents.

While we were inside the LRCI we were not allowed to have our international tendency and, when we declared it, all of us were sanctioned, suspended or expelled. We had no right of appeal. The LRCI forbade their members to discuss with us. The LRCI leaders should now show that they are not bureaucratic cowards, afraid of open debate.

José Villa
LCMRCI

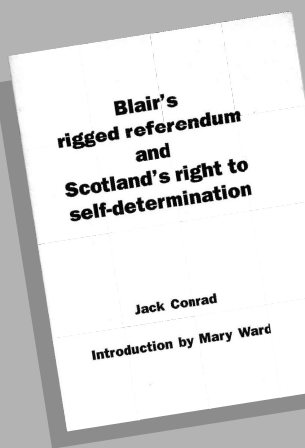
Louder and shriller

In the *Weekly Worker* (July 1) I showed that the political method of economism and that of revolutionary democracy were dialectical opposites.

This was the basic thesis of Lenin set out in *What is to be done?* Lenin urged revolutionaries "to be ahead of all in raising, accentuating, and solving every general democratic question" (VI Lenin *Selected Works* Vol 1, p156).

As an international trend, revolutionary (social) democracy had a clear attitude to bourgeois democratic demands and rights, despite the fact that in 1902 there was no bourgeois democracy in Russia. In bourgeois democratic countries the theory of economism produces practical politics that was and is at best demo-

Lessons of Blair's first referendum



In this pamphlet Jack Conrad offers a serious critique of the Scottish Socialist Alliance's (now Scottish Socialist Party) decision to support the call for a double 'yes' vote in the 1997 referendum.

He makes it clear why the SSA's leadership was unable to take up the challenge to lead the working class away from reformism towards revolutionary politics around the national question in Scotland.

£1, pp42, from the CPGB address

cratic reformist and at worst conservative.

In explaining this, I seemed to imply that (Russian) economists had a conservative or reformist attitude to extending existing bourgeois democracy! Obviously there was no existing bourgeois democracy in 1902 in Russia. Either the word “existing” should have been deleted or it should have been made clear that I was referring to economism as it is manifest in bourgeois democratic countries like the United Kingdom.

Tom Delargy (*Weekly Worker* July 8) was quick to point out that bourgeois democracy did not exist in Russia in 1902. Most people, including myself, are aware of that, but thanks to Tom for pointing it out in his usual polite and comradely fashion, so that I can make this corrective. It has to be said that this changes nothing of substance. If this is the best he can come up with it shows how weak his arguments have become. He is reduced to repeating ad nauseum the mantra ‘Kautskyist’, ‘Kautskyist’, ‘Kautskyist’, despite the fact that he has no facts to back it up. In fact as the debate continues and my opponents’ arguments get weaker, so the mantra becomes louder and ever shriller.

Tom Delargy does have one argument left. He notes that I refer to economists having “a wrong attitude to democracy in general and bourgeois democracy in particular”. Tom is very excited by this, because he thinks at last he has got some concrete proof of Kautskyism. After all he has not produced any concrete evidence so far, and has been reduced to the old Stalinist trick of inventing ideas which he then attributes to me.

So what is “democracy in general”? In the statement above, it is used as a collective term for bourgeois and proletarian democracy. Hence my statement means that economists have a wrong attitude to both bourgeois and proletarian democracy, but I wish to emphasise that it is wrong about bourgeois democracy in particular. There is nothing wrong with this argument, and there is nothing Kautskyist about it either.

Of course at a certain level of generality some democratic rights span both forms of democracy - the right to vote, the right to strike, freedom of expression, free speech and the right of nations to self-determination. In general, we support the right to vote under bourgeois democracy and under proletarian democracy. However, the right to vote in parliamentary elections applies only to bourgeois democracy. It is not a right which a soviet or workers’ republic recognises.

What about the right of nations to self-determination? This is often called a bourgeois democratic demand. Is it a right recognised by bourgeois democracy alone? In my view the right of nations to self-determination is a general democratic demand, applicable to both forms of class rule. It would be implemented by a workers’ republic, whereas the bourgeoisie only recognise it occasionally - and then hedged in by various restrictions.

By way of contrast Kautsky uses the concept of “pure democracy” “mendaciously”, because he wants to argue that bourgeois democracy is superior to proletarian democracy. “Pure democracy” is set against the “dictatorship” of the working class. In reply Lenin says that “proletarian democracy is a million times more democratic than any bourgeois democracy. Soviet power is a million times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois republic” (from the *Proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*). All revolutionary democratic communists agree with Lenin’s statement in riposte to Kautsky. The RDG and the CPGB have stated so “a million times”. But

since left Trotskyists are so determined to prove their false and entirely bogus thesis that we are Kautskyists they are either blind and deaf or thoroughly dishonest.

Kautsky was arguing for bourgeois democracy to replace workers’ democracy. He was for the bourgeois Constituent Assembly to replace or subordinate the soviets. Nobody, and certainly not myself, is arguing that non-existing British soviets should hand over power to a constituent assembly. We are arguing that a democratic republic should replace the constitutional monarchy. This political act should be carried out by the revolutionary democratic working class and not the counterrevolutionary and royalist bourgeoisie. Our opponents are shouting about ‘Kautskyism’ as a smokescreen to conceal the fact that they want or expect the royalist bourgeoisie to do the republican biz.

I have always made clear that I fully endorse Lenin’s exposure of the hypocrisy of Kautsky. I have never criticised the Bolsheviks’ decision to close the Constituent Assembly in 1918, as Phil Sharpe has done. I would appreciate it if Tom Delargy would desist in his practice of telling lies and slandering me as a Kautskyist for no other reason than the fact that I have argued consistently that abolishing the monarchy is in the interests of the working class, and that a democratic republic is in general more democratic than a constitutional monarchy. This basic Marxist thesis has been endorsed by the entire history of Marxism (see for example Lenin’s *State and revolution*) but not by anarchism and ultra-leftism, which are violently opposed to it.

Dave Craig
London

Stronger ‘ism’

I was mildly bemused by the actions of the IBT’s Gary Henson at my last National Union of Journalists branch meeting. The meeting, dominated as usual by the Socialist Workers Party, was a fairly run-of-the-mill affair - a workshop on Fairness at Work legislation followed by two motions.

The second motion was for the branch to support the September ‘lobby’ of the Labour Party conference: a motion I supported though wished to amend. I moved that two clauses be deleted which I felt would remove the most Labourite aspects of the motion. One clause was: “The only way to achieve the things millions voted for in 1997 is to build a mass campaign, led by the trade unions, and pressure New Labour to deliver.”

As I needed a seconder, I thought it likely that comrade Henson would support me, knowing his organisation’s purported anti-Labourite politics. Alas, I was disappointed and needed to rely upon one of the sacked *West African* journalists to support me. As I expected, I lost the vote, with the SWP and other auto-Labourites opposing. Unfortunately, comrade Henson’s anti-CPGBism seems stronger than his anti-Labourism and he couldn’t bring himself to vote with me.

Marcus Larsen
South London

EPSR guru

Opportunities for serious debate about the crisis of capitalist society and the struggle for a socialist alternative have never looked better as increasing sections of the fake ‘left’ fall apart in turmoil.

The *EPSR* support is itself experiencing the same surge of doubt and new thinking, but cannot wait to drive home the advantages of such conflict, which fit exactly into the *EPSR*’s long-standing conviction that a revolutionary ferment of discussion -

about everything - will have to take place before the next serious great phase of anti-imperialist class war begins to make organised progress.

The fake ‘left’ 57 varieties are of course pushed into controversial discussion along with the rest of society, but disruption, collapse and closure are the noticeable pattern in this area, predictably because they have either never seriously entertained divisive polemics before, or else have harboured so much unthought-out political rubbish (as a result of not having really conflicting debate) that the new mood of inquiry and challenge into everything is totally demolishing their shoddy sectarian philosophical foundations to start with.

At the time of the astonishing CPSU self-liquidation and dismantling of the Soviet workers’ state in 1990, the *EPSR* explained - as a sideshow on the main event - the strange paradox that the Trotskyite 57 varieties of anti-communism would eventually be plunged into as much chaos by the disintegration of the USSR as all the revisionist CP groups around the world would be.

So it has proved, and the paralysing doubt crippling the Trot groups now arises because these crucial unresolved questions of *proletarian dictatorship* are creeping back onto the agenda as the crisis of free-market economics and of all capitalist society relentlessly deepens, and as the achievements of the Soviet workers’ state look more and more to be the only direction forwards.

The necessary combination with party-building limps along everywhere because post-Soviet theoretical chaos cannot even get a movement onto square one. It is pure cynicism, presumably born of getting nowhere, that sneers (Letters *Weekly Worker* July 15) that the theoretical workshop that the *EPSR* has been running on the SLP’s wretched failings is due to the editor’s “fit of pique after his shabby treatment by Scargill”.

The opportunity to remain vice-president of the SLP was there throughout and was urged by a surprising variety of different quarters (including a *Weekly Worker* representative who suggested, “Just withdraw your resignation offer” when Scargill’s ludicrous ‘disciplinary procedure’ first got stuck in the mud. At different stages of this whole farce, this advice took other forms, such as “Just tone it down for a while”, and even “Just pay your dues”, when Scargill’s hatred of theoretical struggle reached that degenerate level of pathetic back-stabbing.

But this problem facing the workers’ movement has nothing whatever to do with being or not being vice-president of the SLP. It remains exactly the same problem which the *EPSR* set out to grapple with when it was founded 20 years ago - the need to build and clarify the fight for revolutionary theory by the working class internationally before the fight for socialism can take off again.

Remaining vice-president of the SLP was precisely what Scargill was offering, not taking away. ‘Stay as vice-president, but either close down the *EPSR* or avoid mentioning the SLP’ was the deal.

And the response was immediate: ‘No, you can have your vice-presidential position back. What is vitally needed for the SLP and the working class is a full discussion about the role for revolutionary theory and polemic in the building of a successful party and the successful building of a socialist state’. Scargill’s answer was just to step up his dirty expulsion racket.

Cynicism about a non-existent “*EPSR* guru” is making the same philistine mistake as Scargill’s nonsense.

After Scargill’s assassination attempt on the *EPSR*, no one need be

in any doubt about the ability of ideas to have a decisive impact. Stalinist philistinism has had the last laugh inside the SLP, but it is welcome to it. The *collective* fight for revolutionary theory is the decisive battle, and as long as that fight is kept going, the ultimate struggle to build a triumphant mass new Bolshevik party is guaranteed success.

Royston Bull
Stockport

Left templates

The debate about the protest in the City (June 18) grows apace. Was it an orgy of lumpen behaviour or an incipiently revolutionary protest against the system? From my distant perspective, I would say it was both.

Much though they would like to, none of the left groups are really serving as a focus for protest against the system, and they seem a million miles from giving direction to the spontaneous outbursts that inevitably break out. And many people, especially at this point in history, react at the individual level.

Crudely class struggle behaviour has been present in many places and on many occasions in history, sometime intermingled with impulses towards drunkenness, bloodlust, looting and so on. Russia and Ukraine in 1917 provide examples. With the breakdown of tsarism, peasants, often drunk, moved against landowners in many places, frequently amid scenes of bloodshed. Landowners, and those associated with them and with authority, such as village policemen, would be killed with a variety of farming implements and their houses burnt down. Sometimes their families would be killed too. The outbreak of peasant anger would sometimes manifest itself in additional ways, say, with anti-Jewish pogroms.

This kind of thing expressed longstanding resentments - some class-based, some not - as well as the purely destructive impulses of individuals. It had little or nothing to do with the agitation of political groups. Yet it played its part in the destruction of the tsarist order.

The Russian civil war also saw a lot of behaviour that was both crudely class-conscious and highly brutal. A good description of the atmosphere of the period can be found in the novel by Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry*. Babel, a Jew, joined a Red Army cavalry unit and took part in the civil war and the Soviet-Polish war of 1920. He describes the brutality of the war and the casual violence practised by both reds and whites. Babel later died under arrest during the Stalinist period. He does not depict red cavalymen as civilised proponents of Hegelian dialectic, but, to hear much of the contemporary left talk and write, you would think that they were, rather than vodka-swilling illiterates, whose wantonly destructive impulses were only just about held in check by their commanders.

The class struggle takes forms that are out of place in the editorial offices of leftwing newspapers in Britain. It may not fit the templates laid down by small leftwing groups. We should understand that that is the case.

James Robertson
Linlithgow

Website

Our 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/

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday July 25, 5pm - ‘Is there a Marxist theory of crisis?’, using Simon Clarke’s *Marx’s theory of crisis* as a study guide.

Sunday August 15, 5pm - ‘Lenin on the dictatorship of the proletariat’, using Lenin’s *Two tactics of social democracy* and Hal Draper’s *The dictatorship of the proletariat from Marx to Lenin* as study guides. Call 0181-459 7146 details.

Manchester: Monday August 23, 7.30pm - ‘Imperialism’. Email: cpgb2@aol.com.

■ Party wills

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

■ Socialist Alliance (London region)

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

■ Greenwich SA

Public meeting - ‘Socialists, Labour and the working class’. Speaker from the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty. Monday July 26, 7.30pm. Charlton House, The Village, Charlton, London SE7. All welcome.

■ Support Tameside

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.

■ 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.

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Comrade 100%

Dave Craig looks at Trotsky on China

“We shall participate in the struggle under our slogans; above all, under the slogans of revolutionary and consistent (100%) democracy,” writes Trotsky in a letter to the Chinese Left Opposition in January 1931 (*Leon Trotsky on China* New York 1974, p497). I have already argued that Trotsky was a revolutionary democratic communist. So I accept that in the above statement Trotsky was not lying nor being a mendacious liberal Kautskyist. He was not a centrist nor an ultra-left, unlike some of his latter-day supporters. He was fighting on two fronts: against the centrists (ie, Stalinists) to the right, and

against the ultra-leftists within his own Left Opposition.

This does not mean that we agree with everything Trotsky said or did. There is plenty of scope for disagreement within the camp of revolutionary democracy. To illustrate the arguments, I have chosen one article on ‘The slogan of a National Assembly in China’, written in April 1930, and one important paragraph from an article ‘On the slogan of soviets in China’ written in April 1927. These show Trotsky’s thinking on the constituent assembly and dual power. I have made a series of comments in square brackets to emphasise or criticise important points ●

in July or August instead of October, the army at the front would have been less exhausted and weakened and the peace with the Hohenzollerns might have been more favourable to us. Even if we assume that the proletarian revolution would not have come a single day sooner because of the Constituent Assembly, the school of revolutionary parliamentarism would have left its mark on the political level of the masses, making our tasks the day after the October revolution much easier.

Is this type of variant possible in China? It is not excluded. To imagine and expect that the Chinese Communist Party can jump from the present conditions of the rule of the unbridled bourgeois-military cliques, the oppression and dismemberment of the working class, and the extraordinarily low ebb of the peasant movement to the seizure of power is to believe in miracles. [The same miracle that the SWP believe - they would have us leaping from Tony Blair’s constitutional monarchy to the seizure of power in one go.] In practice this leads to adventurist guerrilla activity [or other forms of pathetic SWP-style economism], which the Comintern is now covertly supporting. We must condemn this policy and guard the revolutionary workers from it. [Absolutely.]

The political mobilisation of the proletariat in leadership of the peasant masses is the first task that must be solved under the present circumstances - the circumstances of the military-bourgeois counterrevolution. The power of the suppressed masses is in their numbers. When they awaken they will strive to express their strength of numbers politically by means of universal suffrage. [There is no reason to assume that such political awakening would not take similar form in bourgeois democracies.] The handful of communists already know that universal suffrage is an instrument of bourgeois rule and that this rule can be liquidated only by means of the proletarian dictatorship. [Of course we do.] You can educate the proletarian vanguard in this spirit beforehand. But the millions of the toiling masses can be drawn to the dictatorship of the proletariat only on the basis of their own political experience, and the national assembly

would be a progressive step on this road. This is why we raise this slogan in conjunction with four other slogans of the democratic revolution: the transfer of the land to the peasant poor, the eight-hour working day, the independence of China, and the right of self-determination of the nationalities included in the territory of China.

It is understood that we cannot rule out the perspective - it is theoretically admissible - that the Chinese proletariat, leading the peasant masses and basing itself on soviets, will come to power before the achievement of a national assembly in one or another form. [Nothing can be ruled out.] But for the immediate period at any rate this is improbable, because it presupposes the existence of a powerful and centralised revolutionary party of the proletariat. In its absence, what other force will unite the revolutionary masses of your gigantic country? Meanwhile it is our misfortune that there is no strong centralised Communist Party in China; it has yet to be formed. The struggle for democracy is precisely the necessary condition for that. [This is an excellent point and relevant for those interested in building such a party in the UK.] The slogan of the national assembly [or federal republic in the UK] would bring together the scattered regional movements and uprisings, give them political unity, and create the basis for forging the Communist Party as the leader of the proletariat and all the toiling masses on a national scale.

That is why the slogan of the national assembly on the basis of universal, direct, equal, secret ballot must be raised as energetically as possible, and a courageous, resolute struggle developed around it [a real revolutionary democratic attitude, not found amongst our sterile British economists]. Sooner or later the sterility of the purely negative position of the Comintern and the official leadership of the Chinese Communist Party [and the economic British SWP] will be mercilessly exposed. The more decisively the communist Left Opposition initiates and develops its campaign for democratic slogans, the sooner this will happen. [Excellent.] The inevitable collapse of the Comintern policy will greatly strengthen the Left Opposition and help it to become the decisive force in the Chinese proletariat! ●

Trotsky 1930

It seems to me that our Chinese friends deal with the question of political slogans of democracy too metaphorically, even scholastically. The ‘intricacies’ begin with the name: constituent assembly or national assembly. In Russia until the revolution we used the slogan of a constituent assembly because it most clearly emphasised a break with the past. But you write that it is difficult to formulate this slogan in Chinese. If so, the slogan of a national assembly can be adopted.

In the consciousness of the masses, the slogan’s content will depend, firstly, on the implication revolutionary agitation gives it and, secondly, on events. [Similarly the content of the slogan of a federal republic will likewise depend on the same.] You ask, “Is it possible to carry on agitation for a constituent assembly while denying that it can be achieved?” But why should we decide in advance that it cannot be? Of course the masses will support the slogan only if they consider it feasible. Who will institute a constituent assembly [or a federal republic] and how will it function? Only suppositions are possible. [True.] In case of a further weakening of the military-Kuomintang regime and increasing discontent among the masses, particularly in the cities, it is possible that an attempt will be made by a part of the Kuomintang together with the ‘Third Party’, to convene something on the style of a national assembly. They will, of course, cut into the rights of the more oppressed classes and layers as much as they can.

Would we communists enter such a restricted and manipulated national assembly? If we are not strong enough to replace it - that is, to take power - we certainly would enter it. Such a stage would not at all weaken us. On the contrary, it would help us to gather together and develop the forces of the proletarian vanguard. Inside this spurious assembly, and particularly outside of it, we would carry on agitation for a new and more democratic assembly. If there were a revolutionary mass movement, we would simultaneously build soviets. [Trotsky is combining revolutionary agitation for bourgeois democratic demands with building soviets.] It is very possible that in such a case the petty bourgeois parties would con-

vene a relatively more democratic national assembly, as a dam against the soviets. [But this does not frighten Trotsky or force him to drop bourgeois democratic demands.] Would we participate in this kind of assembly? Of course we would participate; again, only if we were not strong enough to replace the assembly with a higher form of government: that is, soviets. Such a possibility, however, reveals itself only at the apex of revolutionary ascent. But at the present time we are far from there. [If we are not at this apex where the transfer of power to soviets is possible and practical, we will continue to fight on the terrain of the bourgeois democratic republic.]

Even if there were soviets in China, which is not the case, this in itself would not be a reason to abandon the slogan of a national assembly. [Precisely.] The majority in the soviets might be and in the beginning would certainly be in the hands of the conciliatory and centrist parties and organisations. [Here is the clue as to why we cannot simply leap over dual power.] We would be interested in exposing them in the open forum of the national assembly. In this way, the majority would be won over to our side more quickly and more certainly. When we succeeded in winning a majority, we would counterpose the programme of the soviets to the programme of the national assembly [when the political situation and political consciousness among the masses has matured], we would rally the majority of the country around the banner of the soviets, and this would enable us, in deed and not on paper, to replace the national assembly, this parliamentary-democratic institution, with soviets, the organ of the revolutionary class dictatorship. [Trotsky’s ideas are based on the dialectical interrelations between assembly and soviets, until the class struggle makes the soviets ready for power. Dual power is the period in which the revolution ripens and matures.]

In Russia the Constituent Assembly lasted only one day. Why? Because it made its appearance too late; the soviet power was already in existence and came into conflict with it. In this conflict, the Constituent Assembly represented the revolution’s yesterday. But let us suppose that the

bourgeois Provisional Government had been sufficiently decisive to convene the Constituent Assembly in March or April [1917]. Was that possible? Of course it was. The Cadets used every legal trick to drag out the convening of the Constituent Assembly in the hope that the revolutionary wave would subside. The Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries took their cue from the Cadets. If the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries had had a little more revolutionary drive, they could have convened the Constituent Assembly in a few weeks. Would we Bolsheviks have participated in the elections and in the assembly itself? Undoubtedly, for it was we who demanded all this time the speediest convening of the Constituent Assembly. [So much for the theory that the bourgeoisie (Cadets) or the petty bourgeoisie (Mensheviks and SRs) are the revolutionary democrats!]

Would the course of the revolution have changed to the disadvantage of the proletariat by an early convening of the assembly? Not at all. Perhaps you remember the representatives of the Russian propertied classes and, imitating them, also the conciliators were for postponing all the important questions of the revolution ‘until the constituent assembly’, meanwhile delaying its convening. This gave the landowners and capitalists a chance to mask to a certain degree their property interests in the agrarian question, industrial question, etc.

If the Constituent Assembly had been convened, let us say, in April 1917, then all the social questions would have confronted it. The propertied classes would have been compelled to show their cards; the treacherous role of the conciliators would have become apparent. The Bolshevik faction in the Constituent Assembly would have won the greatest popularity and this would have helped to elect a Bolshevik majority in the soviets. Under these circumstances the Constituent Assembly would have lasted not one day, but possibly several months. This would have enriched the political experience of the working masses and, rather than retard the proletarian revolution, would have accelerated it. [Again during dual power, the revolutionary political experience of the working class is developed.] This in itself would have been of the greatest significance. If the second revolution had occurred

Trotsky 1927

But wouldn’t soviets mean dual power for an indefinite period? On one side would be the national-revolutionary government (if, when thoroughly reorganised, it holds its own and experiences an upturn), and on the other side, the soviets. Yes, this means dual power or elements of dual power. [This is a republic with dual power.]

“But we were against dual power.” [Trotsky here is quoting his own left Trotskyist allies and soon gives his own answer.] We were against a dual-power regime insofar as we were striving to seize power ourselves as the proletarian party. We were for dual power, ie, a system of soviets - while there was a Provisional [ie, republican] Government insofar as soviets restricted any bourgeois pretensions to dictatorship. Dual power during the February revolution was progressive insofar as it contained new revolutionary possibilities. [Trotsky is recognis-

ing the contradictory and two-sided aspect of dual power.] But this progressiveness was only temporary. [Absolutely correct.] The way out of the contradiction was the proletarian dictatorship. [Obviously.] Dual power lasted only eight months in our case. In China this transitional regime [or transitional republic] under certain conditions could last considerably longer, and vary in different parts of the country. To call for and begin organising soviets means in fact to begin introducing in China elements of dual power. This is both necessary and healthy. [Barry Biddulph please note.] This alone will open up further prospects of a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. [Even after the *April thesis*!] Without this, all talk about this dictatorship [by left Trotskyists] is simply chatter, which the Chinese popular masses know nothing about” ●

Crisis around the LRCI

In its 'Ten years of the LRCI', *Workers Power* (July 1999) presented a balance sheet of its League for a Revolutionary Communist International, and included the statement that events in 1991-94 "condemned the LRCI to three years of ceaseless internal struggle".

In 1994-95, *Workers Power* claims, this conflict was resolved when the majority of the largest youth group (Austria), and later on the majority of the New Zealand section and all the Latin American comrades were pushed out of the League: "These losses were in part offset by the remarkable growth of our French section, recruiting young comrades and becoming the second strongest section ... At the same time we entered into and organised a series of discussions with an important leftward-moving Trotskyist organisation in Argentina, the PTS."

However, what WP has completely concealed is the fact that in 1999 around a third of the French section was expelled. The minority had challenged the LRCI's sectarian attitude towards the so-called Trotskyist electoral bloc (which achieved 5.5% in the EU elections) and also its method of attempting to recruit dissidents from that bloc. And now the PTS is openly attacking the LRCI as capitulating to Nato. None of these debates or developments have been reported at all in *Workers Power*, something that constitutes a lack of respect for its readers and a manipulative way of resolving differences behind the back of the class. Through this article we hope to inform *Workers Power's* readers and the left as a whole what is happening inside this international tendency.

The two issues that have produced this latest crisis (electoral tactics and the Balkans wars) also formed part of the debate during the struggle before 1995. At that time the left opposition inside the LRCI (constituted by the Latin American and New Zealand sections) were in favour of defending the Serbs against Nato bombing and advocated critical electoral vote for some far left candidates in France and Britain; while the LRCI leadership was advocating the defeat of the Serbs attacked by imperialism and campaigned for the reformists against the French Lutte Ouvrière and British socialist candidates like Dave Nellist or Tommy Sheridan.

In 1999 the LRCI inexplicably changed its positions, calling for military defence of Serbia against Nato, and for a vote for the LO-LCR alliance in France, and for Sheridan and Nellist. However, it did so in a very inconsistent way. WP's behaviour was erratic and unprincipled, reflecting the pressure of a faction fight in France and a bitter exchange with the Argentinean PTS.

Throughout its almost 25 years of existence WP's electoral 'method' has consisted of demanding a vote for the Labour Party in Britain and for mass bourgeois workers' parties in the rest of the world. It advocated that line even in circumstances where far left candidates competing against the reformists attracted significant workers' support. For WP revolutionaries must always stand alongside workers who vote for reformists and oppose any vote for centrist candidates, because the latter would apparently imply some form of political support.

In 1994 in a local election in Coventry Dave Nellist achieved more than 40% and only lost to New Labour by a very small margin. WP campaigned for the Blairites. In the 1997 general election WP called on workers not to

John Stone of the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International examines the contradictions in Workers Power's attitude to New Labour and the Balkans war

"The LRCI method is opportunist towards reformism and sectarian in relation to the far left"

vote for the SLP, Sheridan, Nellist or other SP candidates, but only to support Labour.

In 1995 France had been headed by socialist president François Mitterrand since 1981. He had launched attack after attack against immigrants, youth and workers, and sent French troops to several African countries and Bosnia. After 14 years it was logical to conclude that there were hundreds of thousands of advanced workers who would support an electoral class alternative against the government. If revolutionaries failed to form a working class opposition, racists or other bourgeois forces might well capitalise on discontent. However, the LRCI called for a vote for the communist and the socialist parties, and not for LO-LCR. That meant opposing the 1.6 million workers who voted for the only candidates that called themselves revolutionaries and Trotskyists and asking them to back the parties of the presidency that had been attacking them for 14 years. There is an argument that in the second round Marxists were obliged to vote for the reformist candidates of the workers' movement against the right, if this was the only choice, but in the first round the French system allows voters to support candidates that are closest to their political opinions.

The LRCI method is opportunist towards reformism and sectarian in relation to the far left. For thousands of Trotskyists and militant activists LRCI policies in France and Britain were a provocation.

In France several fractions had started to split from the left of LO and the LCR, accusing them of failing to build a mass revolutionary party. The LRCI tried to discuss with these groups. But the League's methods began to be called into question by many of its French members. The LRCI sees rapprochement discussions only as a way of recruiting people to its ranks. The only fusion that it accepts are the ones that happen around its policies and under its international leadership.

The LRCI does not allow any public debate and it sees factions and tendencies as a serious illness. They must be dissolved or ultimately forced out of the organisation. All the groups that came to the LRCI with a previous independent existence and tradition (such as those in New Zealand, the USA, Peru or Bolivia) were able to survive this atmosphere. Only groups

created as a result of the LRCI's factional struggle against other organisations (as in Europe) are prone to be absorbed.

The French opposition wanted to allow some public debate inside the section's paper and to move towards a regroupment with dissident factions from LO and the LCR in which there would be some level of disagreement. On the electoral question the French faction said that voting for reformists while they are rallying working class support in opposition to rightwing bourgeois forces could be a valid tactic. However, when reformists are in office a new tactic has to be developed. In such circumstances revolutionaries should prioritise the building of a militant electoral opposition to them amongst the working class. For that reason the minority challenged the LRCI's sectarian attitude towards the LO-LCR electoral bloc and posed the possibility of creating a new pole of attraction with its left dissidents.

The faction characterised the League as "sectarian" and "ultra-left". The LRCI described the faction as opportunists who were adapting to LO-LCR centrism and advocating a confused, multi-factional internal regime. They were not allowed to publish their positions in LRCI publications and were bureaucratically expelled without any mention in *Workers Power*.

A few months later the LRCI radically and abruptly changed its electoral policy. In June most of the LRCI sections were faced with a common European electoral process. You would think that an international organisation that almost every week produces a resolution on international questions from Rwanda to East Timor would be obliged to adopt a common manifesto regarding the EU elections. However, the LRCI did not do so.

In France it called for a vote against the CP and SP and for LO-LCR candidates, because "a significant faction of the working class electorate is moving from the traditional reformist parties towards supporting candidates of the extreme left" (*Pouvoir Ouvrier* No55, May-June). Slightly under one million people voted LO-LCR. But four years ago, when LO alone gained 600,000 more votes, the LRCI adopted exactly the opposite line: vote reformist and not far left.

Although the LRCI called for a vote against the CP and SP in France, and in Britain refused for the first time ever to back Labour, while also declining to support the Socialist Labour Party, it was a different story elsewhere: in Germany the LRCI voted PDS (sister organisation of the CP in France and the SLP), while in Sweden it supported both the pro-Nato social democrats and the United Left!

In the UK WP adopted a completely new line. In a very small article, hidden away in *Workers Power* (June), it wrote: "We call on readers to spoil their ballot papers by writing 'Nato out of the Balkans - independence for Kosova'."

It advocated a positive vote in only three of the 12 constituencies. It voted for Sheridan and Nellist, who achieved a smaller percentage of votes than in previous elections when WP voted New Labour against them. It had

a very contradictory line of voting for Ken Coates's Alternative Labour List in East Midlands but *against* the same force in Yorkshire and Humberside. WP refused to call for a vote for the CPGB (which was the only group presenting candidates with exactly the same demands that WP advised their supporters to write on the ballot paper), or for the SLP, whose position was much more anti-Nato than Coates, who called for a UN military intervention in Yugoslavia.

In 1995 when Nato bombed the Serbs, the LRCI refused to defend them and called on imperialism to send weapons and money to support its muslim and Croat allies who ethnically cleansed one million Serbs. The comrades from the semi-colonies denounced that line and were expelled. Immediately after that the LRCI struck up an opportunist deal with the PTS, a 500-strong Argentinean group, and launched a declaration calling for the creation of a new pole of attraction for international regroupment. Four years later the two organisations have only produced one joint declaration and they failed to produce any statement on the Balkans. In 1995 the LRCI refused to sign a joint resolution on Bosnia because it opposed calling for the defence of the Serbs against Nato.

In 1999 the LRCI inexplicably changed its position, but in a highly contradictory way. It called simultaneously for the defence of Serbia against Nato and for the support of the pro-Nato KLA against the Serbs! On the one hand for the LRCI the KLA "have the right to acquire arms and supplies from whoever is willing to give them - including imperialist and Islamic governments. They also have the right to take any military advantage they can from the Nato bombing" ('War in the Balkans', April 1999); "Apache helicopters to hit Serb artillery or an actual incursion by Nato ground troops into southern or western Kosova to set up 'safe havens' into which to herd the refugees - none of these in themselves would alter our basic support for Kosova resistance to Serb attacks" (LRCI statement, May 16).

On the other hand in the same document the LRCI proposed an antagonistic position: "Workers worldwide would support Serbian resistance to an imperialist attack, whether this was solely an aerial attack or (which is highly unlikely) one involving US-EU ground forces. We oppose all Nato bombing and use of cruise missiles, whether in Kosova or in Serbia proper. We recognise the right of the Serbs to shoot down the Nato planes and missiles. We support national defence against any Nato attack on the territory of Serbia or Montenegro." "If Milosevic and the Serb forces in Kosova resisted the Nato drive, then revolutionaries would have to give their critical support to their military struggle against imperialism."

On the one hand it called for military defence of Yugoslavia against Nato, not only in Serbia and Montenegro, but also in Kosova. On the other hand it refused to call for the arming of Yugoslavia or for its military victory over imperialism. It called on imperialism to send weaponry to the KLA and announced its support

for the KLA even if Nato invaded Kosova. It advised the KLA to take its chances through collaboration with Nato to beat the Serbs whom Nato was bombing.

We believe that the Kosovars have the right of self-determination, but in the context of an imperialist attack against a non-imperialist country revolutionaries have to subordinate this principle to that of defending an oppressed nation (Yugoslavia) against the world's bosses. For that reason we called on Albanian, Serbian and all workers throughout the Balkans to unite in order to expel Nato arms in hands.

The PTS reacted furiously to the LRCI's statements. In its last three papers the PTS published articles condemning WP for "departing from a class and international point of view regarding the national question", "frankly talking crazy nonsense", "losing the aim of the proletarian revolution" and "dangerously sliding into the warmongering camp of some imperialist sectors" (*La Verdad Obrera* No49, May 26).

The PTS critique of Workers Power is centred around the KLA. The PTS is in favour of backing Kosovar self-determination and the right to armed self-defence against Serbia. However, it rejects the LRCI's characterisation that the KLA is an "independent" progressive guerrilla force which needs to be supported and armed: "How is it possible to define as an 'independent' force somebody who is backing Nato's bombardments and calling the Albanian Kosovar masses to trust in the imperialist powers as their defenders against the bloody ethnic cleansing of Milosevic?" "It is not a surprise that a Kosovar refugee reprimanded WP in London for not withdrawing the slogan against Nato bombings" (*ibid*). "'Critical support' for the KLA - a fanatical advocate of Nato's intervention which it criticised for 'not acting more resolutely' - led to the creation of illusions that a progressive solution of the war could come from a social or political force other than the working class. In supporting the KLA's openly pro-imperialist policies and petty bourgeois nationalist leadership they are slipping dangerously into the same militarist camp as Blair's government" (*La Verdad Obrera* No50, June 12).

The PTS position is also contradictory because it called for the defeat of Nato but *not* for victory for the state that was at war with it. Let us repeat to this party for the umpteenth time the question we have been asking over the last four years: why do you continue to talk of fusion with the League which you so strongly condemn?

The PTS-LRCI pact is unprincipled. It is used by both groups to show their supporters that they have comrades in the other continent. Harvey, who acted so autocratically in expelling the Latin American comrades, has used this relationship to try to give the impression that his 'international' is not based only in imperialist countries.

The LRCI is racked by the most bizarre contradictions and U-turns. It has never bothered to explain the ease with which it moved so radically and unexpectedly from one position to another or how it manages to argue for different positions within the same articles. But for the fact that it continually resorts to manoeuvre and refuses to allow public debate internal crises would have blown it apart.

We call on healthy militants within the LRCI to challenge these zigzags and to return to the methods once advocated by Dave Hughes ●

USSR and the power of ideology

Modest differences

I am sure comrades will forgive the lateness of this reply to Jack Conrad's critique of my article on the USSR and negative ideology (*Weekly Worker* October 15 1998).

The reason that I am publishing a counter-argument now is that I feel somewhat perturbed at the response to my recent review of Michael Cox's *Rethinking the Soviet collapse* (*Weekly Worker* June 24 1999). Whereas before I was accused of being a 'Stalinist', I am now apparently in full agreement with Jack Conrad on the question of the Soviet Union. It is quite obvious that agreement between myself and comrade Conrad exists. However, I thought the aforementioned book review would make quite clear where the differences remain. Unfortunately, certain comrades remain stuck in the lazy practice of casting around for this or that label, rather than in engaging with what people actually write.

In his reply to my 'Problematic of negative ideology' (*Weekly Worker* October 7 1998) Conrad questions whether in fact I am debating with him at all: "The gist of comrade Watson's non-argument with me is that ideology can under certain circumstances become ... a primary material force that must be situated within the complex of other forces ... Yes, in the Soviet Union official ideology 'actively moulded' certain specific realities of development." In other words, Conrad decries the charge of being a mechanical materialist. If this were to be the substantial foundation of Conrad's theory then we would indeed be indulging ourselves in a "non-argument". Unfortunately for those who like a happy resolution this is not the case at all.

Conrad frames his analysis of ideology with a set of generalised ontological statements. After acknowledging ideology as a material force and pointing to the fact that throughout history people have changed reality on the basis of ignorance and superstitious belief, Conrad asks the question: what is primary?: "Materialists say that nature, objective reality and its contradictory laws are in the last analysis primary." Just in case you thought Conrad was warming up with a little pre-critique banter, he rounds off the demolition with another ontological flourish: "The world constitutes a whole. But in the last analysis ideas are not and cannot be primary ... The real point of departure is not the idea, not the ideology of what should be: rather the actual state of things as they are." This is obviously where Conrad squares his own methodological circles, giving ideological determination specific weight in the cause of its ultimate refutation. What we have here is an excellent polemical method. Its theoretical viability is something we can test in more detail.

Conrad's usage of the reality/idea distinction is of course an ontological variation of the base/superstructure metaphor. That ideas and reality are indeed distinct is not disputed here. What is questioned is the rendering of these factors into primary and secondary spheres.

In his famous analysis in chapter one of *Capital*, Marx gives us an understanding of the contradictory nature of the commodity. A commodity is first of all considered as having a definite use-value. In Marx's own words it is "an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind" (K

Marx *Capital* Vol 1, London 1986, p125). Exchange-value on the other hand "appears first of all as the quantitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind" (*ibid* p126). The precise magnitude of a commodity's exchange-value is decided by the amount of labour-time "socially necessary for its production" (*ibid* p129).

This particular unity of opposites is no mere logical progression. Written into this relationship is a relational abstraction, or, to be more precise, an alienated effect. Marx illustrates clearly how this process becomes interwoven into the production and consumption of such objects through their conversion into exchange-value: "If ... we disregard the use-value of commodities, only one property remains - that of being products of labour. But even the product of labour has already been transformed in our hands. If we make an abstraction from its use-value [eg, in the form of exchange-value], we abstract also from the material constituents and forms which make it a use-value. It is no longer a table, a house, a piece of yarn or any other useful thing. All its sensuous characteristics are extinguished. Nor is it any longer the product of the labour of the joiner, the mason or the spinner, or of any other kind of productive labour. With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are all together reduced to the same kind of labour - human labour in the abstract" (*ibid* p128).

This has profound consequences for the communist project, concerned, as it should be, that the working class should be able to understand and appropriate the world in all its sensuous formation. Under capitalism and the rule of exchange-value such a process is circumvented by the consistent elaboration of the quantitative.

Marx moves on to explore the means by which differing exchange-values are mediated into the social totality. He works through a variety of value formations (the simple, isolated or accidental form; the total or expanded form) until he reaches the general form of value, which lays the necessary foundation for the money form. Marx shows how such a dynamic "expresses the values of the world of commodities through one single kind of commodity set apart from the rest ... linen for example, and thus represents the values of all commodities by means of their equality with linen" (*ibid* p158). Thus under capitalism it is the money form which becomes the universal equivalent, the one commodity which quantifies all others against itself. We have observed how through the machinations of exchange-value commodities become abstracted and alienated from their use-value. It is the money form which sets itself the task of arbiter.

Having reconstructed Marx's outline of the commodity we can now return to the question of whether Conrad's gradation of "ideas" and "objective reality" is useful in apprehending the nature of a particular historical determination.

We can observe that the dialectic is concerned with difference and its

distinct mediation into the whole. Within the structure of the commodity Marx shows the need to reach beyond its abstracted character in order to grasp the object - and the labour required to produce it - in all its profundity and sensuousness. Grasping the nature of historical events requires the expression of a similar methodology, in that difference is a basic epistemological means by which we comprehend the workings of history.

By seemingly admitting that ideology can, under certain circumstances, become a primary material force Conrad appears to be on the verge of grasping similar conclusions. However, in rounding off our "non-argument" he smothers this recognition in favour of a more 'orthodox' formulation: "Materialists say that nature, objective reality and its contradictory laws are in the last analysis primary." This forms the basis of Conrad's universal - methodological - equivalent. The functioning of Marxist ideology in the USSR can only be a 'secondary' phenomenon: as a social mediator it becomes effectively null and void. The whole gamut of historical events, determinations and outcomes must be expressed through the preconception "objective reality" first, "ideas" second. Comrade Conrad is a fine theoretician, but this really does reek of formalism. By polemicising in this fashion Conrad certainly reproduces *Capital*, but only in the form of the object of its critique. Just as exchange-value blunts our perception of social labour, Conrad's ontological rendering of the base/superstructure metaphor blunts our perception of the particular in favour of a universal abstract.

Marx writes: "Labour ... as the creator of use-values, as useful labour, is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself" (*ibid* p133). Labour and the creation of use-value is thus the starting point for any understanding of human societies throughout history. However, to construct an ontology around one dialectical pole - the necessity of labour - is a gross error. Marxism must also comprehend how *freedom* mediates necessity. To allow for this freedom, and then to negate it in the cause of ruling necessary labour as a universal "primary" phenomenon, is merely to mangle our concept of the particular beyond all recognition.

Georg Lukács pressed home a similar line of attack shortly before his death: "The challenge, as I see it, is to reject the language, values and categories of the exact sciences and to coin an intellectual vocabulary which would reflect the unique nature of man's manifold interactions with his history, his culture, his religion, his class, etc" (cited in G Urban, 'A conversation with Lukács' *Encounter* October 1971, p31). In order to meet this challenge we need to dispense with the irrational logic of the universal equivalent, methodological or otherwise.

Conrad makes use of the three concluding paragraphs from the first supplement of his 'Genesis of bureaucratic socialism' series in order to refute the charge that he dismisses the cause and effect of ideological structures. Conrad does this by advancing an understanding

of Soviet centrism: "To justify itself [the Soviet bureaucracy] a mystifying ideology was needed. By definition that could not be genuine Marxism nor could it be pro-capitalist reformism. Soviet centrism was invented. It justified adaptation to Russia's backwardness and legitimised the bureaucracy's monopoly of power. Soviet centrism stood between reform and revolution in its own particular way; that made it centrism *sui generis*."

It is in drawing a distinction between Soviet centrism and 'classical' centrism that Conrad appears to draw theoretically close to Phil Watson. As an ideology Soviet centrism "served a social stratum which gained its privileges to the detriment of socialism, yet at the same time owed those privileges to a socialist revolution - hence the contradictory ideology that denied the existence of an antagonistic bureaucracy and its privileges, and portrayed an imminent realisation of utopia ... despite its 'extreme poverty and even dishonesty', it reflected and actively moulded, as Herbert Marcuse pointed out, 'in various forms the realities of Soviet development'. This was because it was an ideology which both justified and served a caste, if not a class, that was running a world power ..."

In reality Conrad's outline of this ideological relationship stands some way apart from that of Phil Watson. Conrad predominantly considers Soviet ideology as adapted by a distinct bureaucratic need. Even his statement that Soviet ideology reflected and actively moulded Soviet development is immediately qualified by its functional relationship to the CPSU bureaucracy. Thus Conrad is infinitely stronger at identifying ideology as the reflection of material backwardness and bureaucratic control than in establishing its real contradictions. He certainly locates the legitimating function of ideology and the contradiction involved in bureaucratic denial, yet we have to go further and

draw the line not just within the structure of a pragmatic 'Marxism-Leninism', but between this formation and that of Marxism itself. It is this latter ideological pole that became divorced from its material base and manifested itself in a relatively independent manner.

Comrade Conrad is of course completely correct in establishing that 'Marxism-Leninism', as represented by the CPSU, was a significant deformation of the praxis of Marx, Engels and Lenin. However, as I have argued previously, such a dynamic was bolstered by the use and reproduction of Marxism (in its critical and liberatory sense) to bolster the Soviet ideological structure. The bureaucracy may not have been comfortable with this, but the legitimising function of Lenin's collected works could not be entirely dispensed with. Nevertheless, it should be understood that Marxism (as opposed to 'Marxism-Leninism') became negative and dysfunctional in that its practical role was heavily prescribed. The voluntaristic implications that such a practice involved were quite in accord with the manner in which various leaderships 'planned' and ruled society.

This ideological effect manifested itself with the USSR's collapse and the concurrent formation of a reactionary period in world politics. If this is accepted then it becomes clear that advanced sections of the working class thought of the Soviet Union as something other than a gigantic prison camp: the Soviet experience was residually linked to the workers' revolution of 1917, a development which the ruling bureaucracy were forced to dance half-heartedly around.

Jack Conrad, with his universal methodological equivalent ("ideas are not and cannot be primary"), is theoretically incapable of grasping hold of this conundrum. Modest these differences may be, but differences they remain ●

Phil Watson

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Spontaneity and the trap of Laborism

A member of the expelled minority of the Committee for a Workers International section in the USA slams the leadership of Peter Taaffe and Lynn Walsh

Comrades [in the CWI] will have received over the past week the material from the 10,000-strong wildcat strike of the carpenters in California. Big business recognised the importance of the strike, as it was covered on all the TV networks in their news programmes. The strikers elected as their leader John R, recently expelled member of the CWI and long-time carpenters' union activist. John R also appeared on the TV networks. Another expelled CWI member and member of the carpenters' union, RR, also played a leading role and was written up in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. And the former Oakland branch of the CWI was involved in the leadership of the strike throughout.

I would like to relate the success of the intervention, and our ability to make such an intervention, to the political struggles in the CWI which led to our expulsion.

One of the first issues of debate in the US section of the CWI was over the perspectives for the development of spontaneous struggles and the orientation of the section. We, the minority, argued that the spontaneous struggles would not go through the Labor Party; that they would express themselves in the unions, single-issue campaigns and neighbourhood organisations.

We explained that the leadership of the LP, which is a wing of the trade union leadership, would hog-tie this party and prevent it from becoming an arena of struggle which would attract the spontaneous movements. We argued that we should be part of the LP and take up a struggle within it for an alternative programme and policy to that of the leaders, but that we must be careful to avoid being trapped in LP work while the main struggles went on outside. We argued in particular that we should maintain and if possible step up the work of trying to build oppositions in the unions. To this approach was counterposed the position of the majority and the IS [international secretariat].

This was to concentrate the resources in the LP. The idea was that if the organisation worked correctly the LP leadership could be convinced to build a real, genuine mass-based party which would run candidates. All resources and policies were to be oriented to this end. Struggles that arose outside were to be pulled into the LP. Where such struggles threatened to bring the majority into conflict with the leadership of the LP then they were to be ignored or opposed.

Union work was to be dominated by this LP orientation and tactic. The programme of the organisation was watered down to make the organisation and the approach more acceptable to the LP/trade union leaders. Criticism of the role of the LP/trade union leaders was muted for the same reason. The opposition group we had begun to develop around the *AFSCME Activist* journal in the main

public sector union AFSCME was destroyed by the majority. The minority had to be kicked out of the organisation to allow the section to proceed with this wrong orientation and this opportunist trend. We, the minority, were "workerist sectarians", according to the majority.

Another area of debate which began to develop as the faction struggle unfolded were the perspectives for the economy. The expelled minority argued that the CWI - and we are all responsible to some extent for this - had underestimated the strength of the growth cycle in the 1990s. We argued that we had underestimated the growth and effect of new technology and underestimated also the degree to which US capitalism had managed to increase the rate of profit in the 1990s at the expense of the working class and from this increased investment. The majority with the backing of the IS refused to face up to these realities.

The IS have been basing themselves on the idea that there has been a depressionary period since 1973 and that the crash will soon come. How utterly inadequate this analysis has been. It has left the organisation disarmed in front of the actual development of events. Of course we do not deny the crisis of the capitalist system. But this is not sufficient to orient an organisation. The twists and turns of the cycles are very important and can shipwreck an organisation if not understood.

We, the minority, discussed the stronger than expected growth cycle. We recognised the boom in construction and the near full employment there and how this had increased the confidence of the workers and their anger that they were not getting their share. This allowed us to be prepared for and to lead the wildcat strike, something we could not have done if we had held the perspectives (if they can be called that) of the CWI: that is, that the depression has been here since 1973-75 and the crash will come any time now.

A proper recognition of the stronger than expected economic growth cycle also allowed us to conclude that any movement towards political independence on the part of the workers would find the going slower if it would exist at all. And as a result the LP development would be weakened.

After our expulsion from the CWI we still tried to maintain our presence in the LP. This was not easy because of the infrequent meetings and the domination of the LP by a wing of the AFL-CIO officialdom and their left supporters. Our main work was building our base in the unions where we had comrades, especially in the California Bay area. Along with this we sought to defend ourselves on the international front and demand our rights in the CWI's process of appeals. Contrary to the hopes and openly expressed view of the IS, we have not disappeared.

Carrying out tactics that we would have considered inappropriate 20 or 30 years ago, but are no longer so, given the gap that has opened up between the membership and the union leadership, we played a leading role in the invasion of the carpenters' regional council meeting. We moved from there when the mood was clear to lead the wildcat strike, and with the hard core of 150-plus activists that emerged, and with the backing of thousands of workers in the strike and the respecting of the picket lines by the other trades, we led this major battle.

We should not go too far in estimating our role. Our actual forces on the ground were very small. We need now to move to win and consolidate a layer of the activists for the battles that lie ahead. But with the authority of the wildcat behind us the task of building an opposition in the union with its own journal is now underway. And messages of support and congratulations are still coming from across the USA and Canada. A major step forward has been taken.

This success is a vindication of the perspectives and the orientation of the minority. We maintained our principled position within the unions, we recognised the construction boom and we saw the gap between the union leaders and the ranks; we saw the mood of anger as the boom continued and wages and conditions worsened, and we were prepared to take decisive and militant action.

Meanwhile the majority found themselves trapped in LP work. Inside the LP they are now on the right of all the left tendencies in that moribund organisation. The policies of the majority and their orientation has made it impossible for them to participate in the real movements of the working class other than as cheerleaders. This is exactly as we predicted.

Consider their position in relation to this strike. They should have taken up this wildcat strike in the LP, discussing it there and advocating support for it and criticising the union leadership for its opposition, for its role of refusing to recognise and to lead the strike, for its physical attack on the membership who went into the regional council meeting, for its threatening of the strikers with the cops, for calling the homes of strikers and threatening their families, for red-baiting the leaders of the strike, etc, etc. But to do so would lead immediately to a huge battle with the LP/trade union leaders. And the position of the majority is that they can convince the LP/trade union leaders to actually build a real LP and to this end they do not want confrontation with these leaders, especially on trade union issues, as these issues are guaranteed to evoke a ferocious and hostile response.

So this leads to the present position of the US section of the CWI. Their friendly relations with the LP/trade union bureaucracy and their left supporters come first, so the wildcat

strikers must be sacrificed. After all a movement that is hostile to the policies of the AFL-CIO leadership cannot be brought into the LP by the majority. This is the same process that led to our expulsion. There also friendly relations with the LP/trade union leaders and their left supporters came first. And this resulted in the conclusion that the minority had to be expelled because we would not go along with this opportunism.

Comrades will be familiar with the old detective story where the fact that the dog did not bark was seen as crucial evidence. We have the same situation here. The US section of the CWI did not participate in any shape or form in the carpenters' wildcat strike. The branch that the IS recruited in the California Bay area were not seen at any time during the struggle. Other left groups were on the picket lines with their papers. We, the minority, were in the leadership. But the CWI? Nowhere to be found. There were meetings every morning of the strike of hundreds of the hard-core activists/pickets; there were sites with workers walking off all over the North California area; there were the mobile picket squads going from site to site; but nowhere, nowhere did the CWI appear.

What is the significance of this evidence that the CWI did not bark or - to make it concrete - did not intervene? The significance is that what we are seeing now is the inevitable result of the false analysis and the opportunist policies of the majority, backed up by the CWI leadership. In another brilliant first for IS representative LW [Lynn Walsh], with the full support of the IS, the branch which has led this major wildcat was expelled and replaced with a branch which could not even get itself to the picket lines.

The CWI is in the process of break-up and political degeneration. We argued that our expulsion was part of a process which was rooted in the wrong perspectives of the past decade and a half and the inability of the internal life of the organisation, and especially the inability of the leadership of the organisation to face up to this and correct our perspectives, change the internal life and reorient the organisation. Unless the IS is challenged and a genuine open discussion and debate opened up in the CWI, then this downward spiral of crisis and disintegration will continue.

Nothing short of a complete shake-up in the CWI will allow this process to be cut across. The election of an IS prepared to face up to past mistakes and to genuinely seek the input of the membership is essential. Such an IS would also have to be convinced of the need for a real collective leadership and would have to accept that the IEC [international executive committee] is a more authoritative body than the IS. And it now seems clear that the location of the IS should be moved from London, where it is based, in a country which has suffered from some of the worst defeats of the working class over the past two decades. From this a genuine invitation to all those who have been expelled or who have resigned to participate in the discussions to re-orientate the organisation should be made.

To the IEC members we ask the fol-

lowing question: where will the process of decline, break-up and political degeneration end unless there is an open debate and discussion inside the organisation? The majority of the expulsions and resignations that have taken place would not have happened if there was an open debate and struggle, and an atmosphere for such within the CWI. We know of members of the IEC who are very concerned about what is going on, who do not accept the arguments of the IS, but who go along with them. This is a terrible policy. By keeping quiet and refusing to speak up they aid the process of resignation and expulsion. The IS sees it can get away with expulsions and so considers more, and those who resign do so mainly because they can see no significant opposition coming from the IEC.

Finally a word on the CWI and its perspectives for growth and development in the USA and Canada. Its two or three members in Canada have been prodded by the IS into attacking and slandering the organisation and leadership of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. And OCAP is one of the most respected, if not the most respected, fighting organisation in that country in the eyes of the activists. How is this little grouplet going to grow when its relations to OCAP are so unprincipled? The answer is that it will not.

Here now in the USA the carpenters' wildcat will be seen by the activists who know of it as the way to proceed. And here the CWI section is locked into a dirty slander campaign for the past years against the minority comrades who played the main leading role in this strike. The CWI's future in North America has become increasingly problematic in the past few weeks.

Imagine what could have been. The CWI could have put up a principled struggle in the LP and recruited the best members to its ranks. The opposition work in AFSCME, the largest public sector union in the USA, could have continued to develop and, given the terrible crisis in that union, especially in New York, *AFSCME Activist* could have by now put down serious roots and been the recognised opposition. Along with these successes the CWI would now have been on the threshold of leading another opposition force in another union, this time the most important of the construction unions. This would have left the CWI as the most important left group in the country.

And in Canada, instead of the collapse of the organisation, the exciting progress that was being made before the expulsions could have been built upon; and now, with the carpenters' union breakthrough, the membership of that union in Canada could have been opened up to the organisation.

There is no other conclusion to be drawn. The IS, led by its representative, LW, has done very serious damage to the developing of a genuine Marxist base in North America. The minority comrades are carrying on this work and will be an important part of the healthy international of the future ●

SO'T
(for the expelled members of the
CWI in North America)

Tories play English nationalist card

Stoking the fire

Patriotism is proverbially the last refuge of a scoundrel. Small wonder, therefore, that Tory leader William Hague - increasingly desperate to seize upon some stick with which to beat New Labour - should have decided to play the English nationalist card.

The move had long been mooted and finally took the form of 'Strengthening the union after devolution', a keynote speech delivered to the Centre for Policy Studies on July 15. Draping himself simultaneously in the union jack and the flag of St George, Hague gave a schizophrenic address: on the one hand, he sought to extol the virtues of the union; on the other, he treated his audience to a hypocritical jeremiad on the "ugly and dangerous" phenomenon of English nationalism.

Attacking Blair for his refusal to tackle the "unfair position of England" in the light of Scottish and Welsh devolution, Hague referred to the "sea of red and white flags and the painted faces at last year's world cup" as "just one sign of an emerging national consciousness ... Try to ignore this English consciousness or bottle it up and it will turn into a more dangerous English nationalism that can threaten the future of the United Kingdom ... recognise its value, and it actually strengthens our common British identity" (*Daily Mail* July 16). Hague maintained that the "the drums of English nationalism are already beating", that "doing nothing is not an option" and that anomalies created by New Labour's devolution represented a "ticking time bomb beneath the British constitution" that threatens to create an "an English nationalist backlash that could tear the union apart".

The slogan 'English votes on English laws' encapsulates the proximate cause of Hague's histrionics: in the aftermath of devolution, the situation

has arisen in which members of the House of Commons from Scottish and Welsh constituencies retain the right to vote on bills pertaining to England, whereas their English counterparts have no such right in relation to Scotland or Wales. They are even debarred from asking questions about Scottish and Welsh affairs.

To remedy this 'inequitable' situation, Hague outlined four possible solutions: first, strengthening English local government, something of which he is in favour, but which is "not enough"; secondly, reducing the number of Scottish MPs by bringing the size of Scottish constituencies into line with those in England - a move he also supports, but again one which does not deal with the fundamental problem; thirdly, the creation of a separate English parliament, something Hague claims he does not want, but which he warned could nonetheless happen; finally, his preferred solution, whereby Scots and Welsh MPs would be debarred from voting on measures relating exclusively to England, which would, according to Hague, "get the balance right".

Reactions to Hague's speech from the Labour front bench were entirely predictable. Leader of the Commons Margaret Beckett accused Hague of "playing an extremely dangerous and stupid game" and of being "crass, stupid and insensitive" to raise such issues in the light of the failed Ulster peace talks: "The Tories, for short-term political expediency, are seeking to pit the people of Britain against each other". Scottish secretary John Reid, an almost redundant figure since devolution, said that Hague was "fanning the flames of English nationalism" and "undermining the UK and Scottish ties to it".

Press reaction was mixed. From *The Daily Telegraph* there was a predictably encouraging response. *The*

Times gave the story little attention. With its characteristic complacent liberalism, *The Guardian*, organ of the metropolitan intelligentsia, simply brushed Hague aside, averring that we should "do things the British way; live with the anomalies that riddle our system and wave aside Mr Hague's silly talk of time bombs and drumbeats" (July 17).

What should we, as communists, make of the business? The first thing which must be said is that it is Blair himself - with his plan to remould the British constitution from above - who has forced the Tories to react and created the preconditions for Hague's attempt to conjure up the forces of English nationalism. Through devolution, reform of the Lords, proportional representation, etc, Blair is attempting to redraw the political map of the United Kingdom. He is seeking a new consensus for the more efficient operation of capital under which New Labour will be centre stage and the Tories consigned to permanent opposition.

In these circumstances, the silence of the left is positively deafening. Leaving aside the occasional pious nod in the direction of devolution's supposed extension of 'democracy' to Scotland and Wales - in reality a Blairite sop intended to buy off the legitimate national aspirations of the Scots and Welsh (the CPGB called for parliaments with full powers: nothing less), the left press has left the whole question unaddressed.

Let us be clear. Far from speaking out against the "drum" of nationalism, Hague is assiduously beating it himself. We should, however, not blind ourselves to the fact that his appeal to the most basic kind of English nationalism could achieve some resonance among the English working class. Of course, his project is regressive and to a large extent incoherent; of course, in reality the

Tories have no workable alternative vision for society. But it should be obvious to anybody that, given the failure of 'official communism' and socialism's headlong ideological retreat in the ensuing period of reaction, the allure of national pride and national resentment retain a power that only a fool would disregard.

If we want to understand the possible ramifications of this fact for our class, we need to look not at the broadsheets, but at *The Sun*, for whose anti-European, little-Englander politics Hague's diatribe was a gift from the gods. Witness its columnist Richard Littlejohn, the paper's interpreter of *vox populi* - since many of our readers are unlikely to have seen the article in question, we shall quote at some length:

"Let's get one thing straight. The Scots and Welsh voted for devolution. The English weren't even consulted, let alone given a chance to vote in a referendum on such an important constitutional matter ... Nevertheless the vast majority of us have gone along with it ... There hasn't even been much bridle at the fact that the English have to keep picking up billions of pounds worth of bills for substantially higher public spending in Scotland and Wales ... You might have thought that Scottish and Welsh politicians would be happy ... but they're not content ... They want to run England too ... They want to interfere in schools, transport, health and suchlike. Frankly, none of this is any of their damn business any more. They opted out, not us ... And slowly but surely the English are beginning to stir. Frankly we are beginning to tire of the racist abuse and 'extremist' jibes being levelled at us. And the fact that English taxpayers are seen as mug punters north and west of the border" (July 16).

Easy though it may be to dismiss these remarks as reactionary garbage,

we need to take account of them, if only to clarify in our own minds the fact that English nationalism is not just "silly talk", but a potentially important factor in the politics that lie ahead. How soon, for example, will it be before *The Sun* mounts the bandwagon of support for an English parliament within the UK's constitutional monarchy system? Here again, much of the left has simply ignored the question. Hague claims not to want it - under conditions of proportional representation it is highly unlikely that the Tories would emerge with an absolute majority. But what do we, as communists think about the problem?

There is, of course, a difference in the content of the demands for Scottish and Welsh parliaments with full powers, compared with a call for an English parliament. Under the UK constitutional monarchy the Scots and Welsh have no right to self-determination. The same cannot be said for the English - the overriding majority. Nevertheless our call for the abolition of the monarchy system and a *federal* republic includes a parliament for England too. Communists in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have a duty to champion republicanism and democracy for the English.

Communists are certainly not anti-English. The English have a long and proud history of class struggle. The peasant revolt of 1381, the Lollards of the 15th century, the Levellers of the Commonwealth revolution, the London Correspondence Society, the world's first working class party - the Chartists, Owenite communism, mass trade unionism and the Tolpuddle martyrs.

It is our task to educate today's generation in that combative and internationalist spirit and consign all nationalism to the scrapheap of history ●

Michael Malkin

Iran's students demand democracy

A semblance of calm has returned to the streets of Iran's cities after a week of violence, demonstration and counter-demonstration in the wake of the death of at least three student protestors.

The students were demanding the acceleration and increase of reforms started with the election of the 'moderate' president Mohammed Khatami in 1997. The protests, originally centred at Tehran University, were sparked by the banning of the liberal *Salam* newspaper and the introduction of new laws to further curb Iran's press. The demonstrations were violently broken up by Islamic fundamentalist vigilante groups, supported by the police.

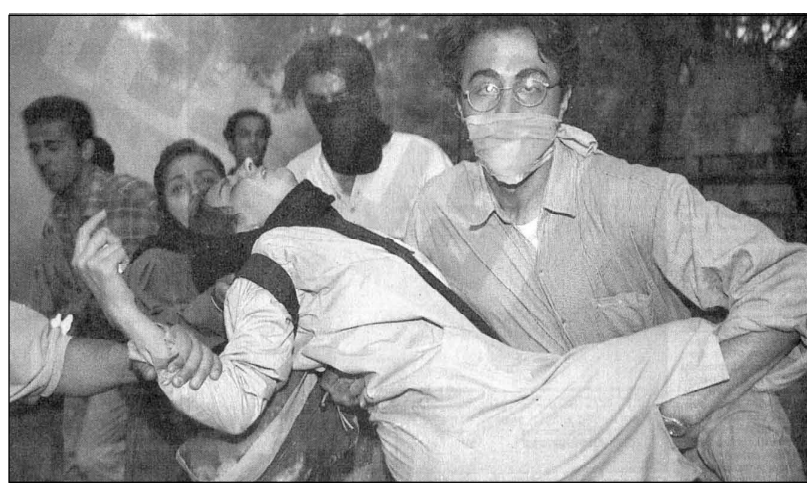
Yet this calm belies political crisis brewing at the top of society as well as below. Student leaders have called off further demonstrations - some for fear of provoking further attacks; some for fear that more unrest may force the hand of the 'hardliners' and undermine president Khatami. Yet there is a mood to press home their demands for reform.

While moderate student leaders aim to contain the protests and restrict

themselves within the confines of the Islamic republic, others are espousing secularism and the need to overthrow the counterrevolutionary regime. Either way, a growing minority refuses to support one set of reactionary mullahs versus another.

It is clear that this democratic upsurge - the most important since the ayatollahs butchered the Iranian revolution of 1979-81 - goes much further than mere posturing in the lead-up to elections in February, as Liberal Democrat MEP Emma Nicholson suggests. In typical liberal fashion she has expressed her fear that the students might go 'too far'. Her project is to reform the *Islamic* republic.

Needless to say, advocating consistent democracy is always to go 'too far' in Iran. Ministers and clerics are already baying for 'rioters' to face the death penalty. However, taking into account the blood-soaked history of the Islamic regime, so far the demonstrators have been treated relatively leniently, with Khatami expressing muted 'understanding' of their concerns. This is not just down to the students being the children of the elite, as no doubt many are. Division at the



Students flee tear gas attack in Tehran

top of society is real, and it is this division which has allowed movement from below to find expression.

In the past few days, secret correspondence between the president and senior officers printed in the Iranian press shows the growing fault lines. According to the BBC, "In a letter to president Khatami, the military leaders say his reformist policies have led

to chaos and they warn that their patience is running out." Twenty-four senior officers signed the letter, including the commanders of Iran's land, sea and air forces. Overall commander general Yahya Rahim Safavi was not a signatory. But his views are known to be equally hardline.

What is the basis of the split at the top? Crippled by war with Iraq and

shunned by the west, the Iranian economy has only of late felt the reviving breath of trade with the United States and Europe, a development no doubt aided by the election of Khatami. However, moves to a more open society, both in terms of trade and politics, threaten the conservative and reactionary social base of the fundamentalists. The mercantile bazaar bourgeoisie, which dominates internal trade and credit, has a vested interest in a closed Iranian society. Its strong links with the mosque and a reliance on the limits of the domestic economy have been a pillar of the Islamic counterrevolution.

The regime's main support at the bottom of society has been from among the declassed urban poor. In origin this was the consequence of the depeasantisation of the peasants. However, more than 50% of Iran's population was born under the ayatollahs. So the social dislocation that was exploited by the mullahs - with their promises of an anti-modern utopia - has given way to normalisation and therefore other possibilities ●

Marcus Larsen

AWL faces both ways

Need for programme

As I reported in a previous article, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty has begun to break from auto-Labourism and to contest elections against Blair's party (*Weekly Worker* July 8).

This welcome move is vitiated in no small way by the dismal platform of sub-reformist demands the AWL is putting before the electorate. Jill Mountford, the organisation's candidate in the July 15 council by-election in Churchdown, Lewisham, issued an election address which restricted itself to calls for increased spending on the NHS and education, an end to privatisations, the renationalisation of some industries, a minimum wage of "at least" £5 an hour, "full trade union rights" and "an end to racism and discrimination". This programme was to be paid for by "taking back the tens of billions of pounds given away to the rich and big business by the Tories in tax cuts kept in place by New Labour".

The platform amounted to a call for "a return to old Labour governments, like those of Wilson and Callaghan", as I pointed out. Despite this (or perhaps because of it), and despite the reasonably favourable circumstances I reported, comrade Mountford won just 66 votes (3.5%) - a figure well within the normal range for left candidates contesting local elections in recent years, including those standing on an openly revolutionary programme.

The AWL's Alan McArthur attempted to justify his organisation's stance in a letter published in last week's *Weekly Worker* (July 15). According to comrade McArthur, the reason for the absence of any mention of the word 'socialism' - or indeed a global vision of any kind - from the election address is explained by the need to place "a programme of demands around which to organise activity" before the working class. But he did not respond to my criticism that there was no call for workers' own *self*-activity. There was no hint that workers themselves should *do* anything. Without such a call the AWL's platform is little different qualitatively from those put out by the Labour Party in the past. It too appealed to the narrow self-interest of voters - promising to work for a series of piecemeal changes that will in some small way improve people's lives.

Rather pathetically comrade McArthur describes the AWL's own shopping list as "transitional demands" - presumably "where we want to be" is firmly on the territory of old Labour (he did not dispute my remark that *any* Labour politician, left or right, would have had a pretty similar set of "transitional" policies 20 years ago).

But this is precisely the problem with the AWL. As the comrade himself makes clear, his organisation's attachment not only to Labourism, but to the Labour Party itself appears almost as strong as ever. He writes: "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."

Undoubtedly this new position of facing both ways is to some extent a reflection of the differences within the AWL's own membership: on the one

hand, there are those who want to pretend that nothing much has changed within Blair's party; these comrades would prefer to carry on as before, advocating "a massive injection of cash" for the NHS in their local Labour branch, and planning the latest left counterstroke for the next party conference. On the other hand, there are those who can no longer stomach a vote for a party that has abandoned even the pretence of being a vehicle for working class advance, instead embracing the neo-liberal, neo-Thatcherite consensus. A similar contradiction was expressed by the SWP's slogan for the May 1997 general election: 'Vote Labour or socialist'.

According to comrade McArthur, advocating a Labour vote "never had much to do with Labour's programme". We must apparently vote for the Blairites not because we think doing so will advance our cause in any way, but simply because Labour "was/is [?] the political wing of the labour movement". Needless to say, scientifically the Labour Party was from its origins a bourgeois workers' party. Organisationally it is based upon the working class, above all the trade unions, but politically its practice serves finance capital. World War I proved that the dominant pole of Labourism is bourgeois; the subaltern pole is proletarian. Something also proved by every subsequent Labour government from MacDonald to Blair. In other words, the fact that the trade unions (complete with rightwing leadership and policies) still provide funding and retain some representation and voting rights does not mean that the working class is able to "assert itself politically".

Politics, not organisation, is primary. After all the US Democratic Party also receives some funding from trade unions, who exert a modicum of influence on it. To take a more extreme example, in Franco's Spain communists - correctly in my view - worked within the fascist-sponsored trade unions. Did this union link therefore oblige the left to recommend a vote for Franco's corporatist party? If voting Labour "never had much to do with Labour's programme", logically the answer is 'yes'. The Labour Party is no more the political wing of the *working class* than the Democrats or the Falangists. The question has *everything* to do with programme and thus practice.

The Leninist tactic of supporting the Labour Party "like the rope supports the hanged man" was adopted by the fledgling CPGB because large sections of the working class had *socialist* illusions in Labour. They believed its new *programme* would lead to socialism. It is arguable whether such a blanket tactic was ever again useful after the 1920s, when such illusions had subsided. Yet for comrade McArthur a failure at any time during the last 75 years to duly deliver the working class vote to Labour would in itself have constituted an example of "auto-sectarianism". This peculiar, twisted view, whereby any attempt to break workers from the self-serving Labourite misleadership is condemned in such terms, would permanently tie our class to the bourgeois workers' party.

Similarly, like voting for the Labour Party, working inside it ought to be viewed as a tactic that could be useful under certain circumstances. There is nothing inherently unprincipled with rejecting the same tactic. Unfortunately, however, much of the left transformed the tactic into a princi-

ple, forgetting that its overriding strategic aim was - or ought to have been - to *break* our class from this so-called "political wing of the British labour movement". They forget too that long-term working class political interests can genuinely be advanced only by organising the advanced part of the class into a revolutionary party.

Comrade McArthur is clearly bewildered by our stress on what I called "the real *political* questions under capitalism that our class must adopt as its own if it is to free itself". But, there again, a grasp of the politics of revolutionary democracy is hardly the left's strong point. I mentioned in particular "self-determination for Ireland, Scotland and Wales; abolition of the monarchy and the second chamber". It also seemed to me that workers, if they are to aspire to be a ruling class, ought to have taken a stand on Nato's bombing of Yugoslavia and on Kosovar independence. Yet the AWL's election address was silent on all these issues, just as it was on the environment, and rights for women and gays.

Instead of coming clean and admitting these omissions, comrade McArthur describes such questions as a "set of garbled demands" with no "orientation to working class organisations ... and working class communities". Perhaps the working class communities comrade McArthur is acquainted with have been lobotomised. Perhaps they are incapable of understanding anything other than the size of their pay packet or the quality of their healthcare. Certainly, it seems, questions of *how we are ruled* are totally beyond comrade McArthur.

Comrade McArthur is quite right: abolition of the monarchy, like the provision of free healthcare, would be a "reform" under capitalism. But neither demands are *reformist* - if and when they are part of a revolutionary programme. In the context of the AWL's platform, a "massive injection of cash" for the NHS was totally and exclusively reformist (if not sub-reformist). The election address was explicit in calling for pre-Thatcher taxation in order to fund it. It was just a little more radical than the policy of the Liberal Democrats.

Of course it is necessary to include in our programme demands relating to the workplace, and to workers' health, education and welfare. But they must be seen as a call to *action*. They

must centre on what workers *need*, not on what seems 'realistic'. In this area too the AWL is sadly lacking: for example, its demand for "a minimum wage of at least £5 an hour" does not even match up to what European Union bureaucrats consider to be basic levels of 'decency', let alone what is actually necessary for workers to reproduce themselves culturally. As comrade McArthur is fully aware, only the ending of capitalism through workers' own action can deliver a full life on a permanent basis. Our demands must be brought together in a single unity - the revolutionary programme - so as to lead workers to that logical conclusion.

But crucial to our minimum programme must be the question of the state. Our demands for democracy and control from below challenge the ruling class politically. Without such a perspective we do not even begin to show how a road to a new, communist, society can be opened up. The fight for workers' liberty under that new society must be linked to the democratic destruction of everything that infringes it under capitalism. Viewed in that light, the abolition of the monarchy is not just another 'reform' - one among many. No, a successful fight to smash the constitutional monarchy *system* would not only send the ruling class into crisis: it would place on the immediate agenda our own working class alternative.

And comrade McArthur is right in another respect: if that fight is to be conducted along revolutionary lines, we must not shy away from pointing out that, in order to achieve it, it will be necessary to establish "organs of direct workers' democracy such as soviets". Of course, it would be impossible to organise such bodies in present circumstances, when the working class hardly exists in the political sense. However, propaganda calls for "workers' defence" and the right of our class to arm itself were indeed present in the 'Weekly Worker' EU election manifesto (see *Weekly Worker* June 3).

Such calls would, as he says, be mere "abstract propaganda for socialist revolution" - if they were not intrinsically linked to the central political question of the day: Blair's constitutional revolution from above, and the need for a rounded working class response ●

Peter Manson

Fighting fund

Falling behind

Still no sign of the big guns! Last week I remarked that just a couple of fat cheques would not only provide a welcome boost to our July total, but also help make up for the deficit of the last two months.

Unfortunately they have not arrived yet (I am sure they are on the way). So, with only £56 received in this week's postbag, we are in danger of falling behind for a third consecutive month.

Comrades, the *Weekly Worker*

will not fold. But cashflow problems will put at risk our ability to expand, such as through the 10-pagers of the last two weeks.

Thanks this week to HF (£15) and to RD and NB (£10 each). Our July total stands at £248, with less than 10 days to go to break through our £400 target ●

Robbie Rix

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

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Alliance or party?

My last article was intended as a contribution to a political discussion on the future of the left in the aftermath of the Euro elections ('A nod and a wink' *Weekly Worker* June 17). The reply from the West Midlands Socialist Alliance (WMSA) avoids any political analysis of the results and seems intent only on self-justification and blaming Christine Oddy for their lost deposit (*Weekly Worker* July 8).

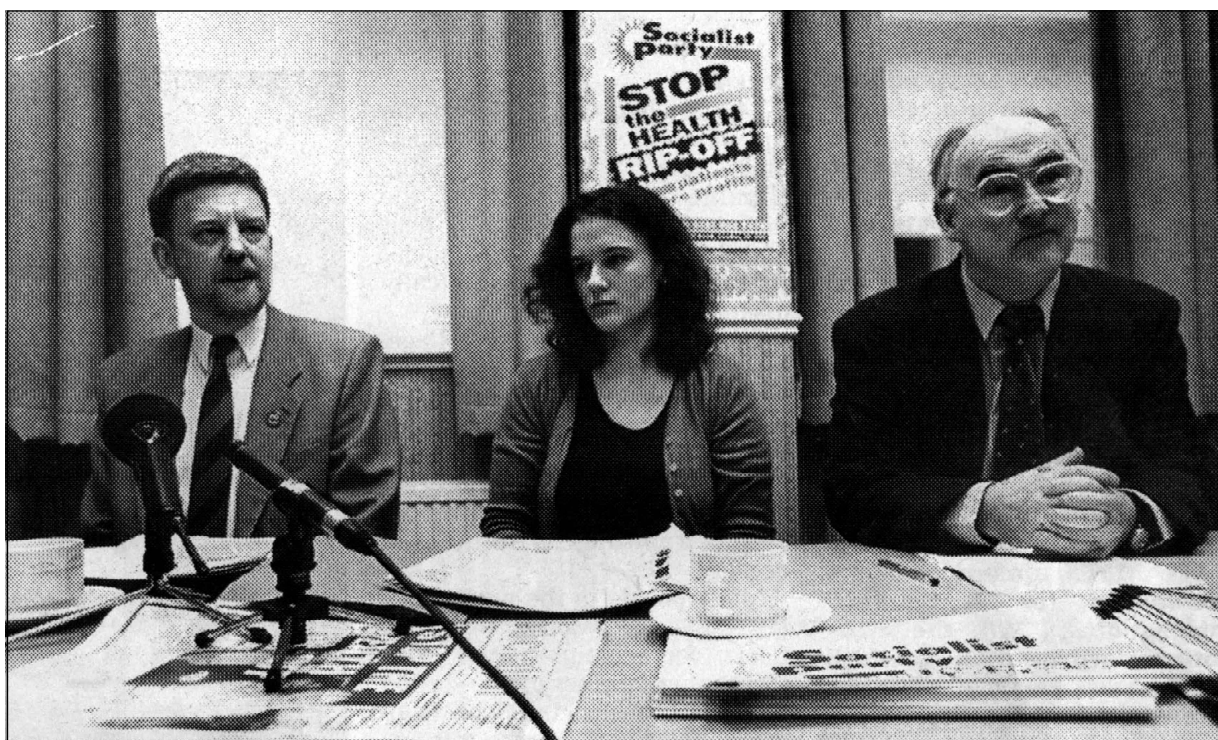
The impetus for me writing the article was the particular experience in Coventry where the local alliance, the Coventry and Warwickshire Socialist Alliance (CAWSA), was divided into two rival campaigns - one for the WMSA slate; the other for Christine Oddy MEP, standing as independent Labour. Furthermore the supporters of Christine Oddy were prevented by WMSA supporters from even mentioning their existence in three sentences in the CAWSA's monthly bulletin. Thus the bulletin went out in the name of six committee members, calling for a vote for the WMSA slate, when three of those committee members were supporting Christine Oddy.

This experience raises the question of whether the Socialist Alliance is indeed an alliance of various strands and tendencies - or a political party with a hierarchical structure of national, regional and local bodies with democratic decisions on strategy and tactics and some binding discipline. Personally I would be in favour of the latter option, as in the 'Scottish turn', as I understand it, whereby the Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA) transformed itself into the Scottish Socialist Party, with Scottish Militant Labour withdrawing the boundaries of their organisation in order to fuse with smaller groups and independent socialists. However, the three Coventry comrades who signed the July 8 WMSA response have always favoured the former option with a liaison and networking role for the Socialist Alliance.

It is ironic therefore that the WMSA statement reads as though the SA is a political party, when clearly it is not and these comrades do not want it to be. For example, what is the West Midlands Socialist Alliance? In the WMSA statement you would be forgiven for thinking that WMSA was a regional organisation of a party, intermediate between local and national bodies. Thus we have the WMSA officers "unanimously endorsing the CAWSA sub-committee decision to post their June newsletter without any reference to Christine Oddy's campaign".

Leaving aside the "facts" that the sub-committee was split three against three and that the Coventry censors were also WMSA officers, what right do WMSA officers have to endorse anything to do with the CAWSA or even pay the postage of their bulletin? In a political party - certainly; but in an alliance? The political reality and

Dave Spencer continues the debate on divisions that arose over the West Midlands European elections, and discusses the future of the Socialist Alliance



Dave Nellist (left) with SPEW comrades Hannah Sell and Peter Taaffe: wrong strategy

"The WMSA five think they can beat people over the head, put them in their place and then shout, 'business as usual'"

context behind the WMSA 'fact sheet' was an electoral pact between various left groups, some of whom - notably the Socialist Workers Party - do not otherwise participate in the SA project.

The name 'Socialist Alliance' was accidental: it could have been 'Socialist Unity', 'Socialist Alternative', or whatever the groups decided. Therefore the decision as to whether a WMSA slate would stand in the Euro elections was not made democratically in the SA at national, re-

gional or local level, but was made in the national committees of the left groups involved in the pact. If the SWP or Socialist Party had decided to pull out in the West Midlands, as they did in London and the North West, there would have been no WMSA slate and no WMSA.

We can only speculate as to why the SWP supported the Socialist Labour Party in London, but stood candidates in a slate against the SLP in the West Midlands, and why the SP thought it worthwhile to have a go in the West Midlands, but not elsewhere. I say we can only speculate because we do not know the bases of their decisions: they were made in secret, but we still had to stand around waiting for them. This is what I meant in my article by the lateness of the WMSA declaration.

One explanation for the mess which was the Socialist Alliance efforts in the Euro elections is what Allan Green of the former SSA called the *hybrid nature* of the SA. It is composed, on the one hand, of national left groups with their own agendas and democratic centralist methods of organisation and, on the other hand, of local groups, composed of independent socialists and campaigning groups. The only way to overcome the distrust and misunderstandings is for the left groups to democratise their own proceedings and then to unite under one organisation.

My view, and that of other inde-

pendent socialists, was: 'The left groups will make the decision on whether to stand or not. They must know what they are doing. They will take into account the money involved. They will each produce their own separate leaflets and propaganda, and their members will be out recruiting to their own organisations. Let them get on with it.' It is unfortunate, but I cannot see any other realistic way of looking at the situation while we have a hybrid organisation.

Another example from the WMSA statement which reinforces my argument is the start of the second paragraph, which reads: "The Socialist Alliance agreed to start considering standing Euro election candidates at a national conference in March 1998." What they do not say is that at that very same conference Spencer Fitzgibbon of the Green Party made an impassioned plea for the alliance to support the Greens in the 1999 Euro election. He reported that the Greens already had their slates of candidates elected and were well on the way to raising by campaigns and collections the £20,000 needed in each region for deposits and leaflets.

Notice the difference in approach. One year before the election the Greens are well organised while the SA nationally "agreed to start considering standing". Later the WMSA statement tells us that three days before nominations closed, and one month before the actual election,

£9,000 had been committed to the printers for leaflets and £5,000 was needed for the deposit, but that money had not yet been collected. This is not a serious way of running an election campaign.

As I stated in my article, on the day in May 1997 when New Labour was elected we all knew that proportional representation would be used in some elections and would give the left an opening. We also knew that the Euro elections would come at Blair's mid-term. Arthur Scargill started the SLP on this basis in spring 1996. The SSA made their transformation into the SSP so that they could campaign with credibility in the assembly and Euro elections.

And what about the SA? They "agreed to start considering standing" one year into Blair's government and one year before the actual election. This can only be a lack of strategy or a wrong strategy, stemming from the left groups and from the SA Liaison Committee - in particular from the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

The WMSA statement fails to mention political strategy and tactics at all, or any lessons learnt from the election experience. Furthermore they fail to address what went wrong with their predictions. In the SA national bulletin Pete McLaren predicted that WMSA would not lose their deposit, that Dave Nellist would be an MEP and that Christine Oddy would take just a few votes.

Incidentally it is fairly obvious from these predictions what the WMSA attitude to Christine Oddy was, whatever they say in their statement. They would not have wanted her at number one on the slate. Certainly the left groups, the SP and the SWP, wanted Dave Nellist as number one. That is why they agreed the slate in the West Midlands and pulled out in London and the North West. But what happened to the predictions which were clearly wrong? The WMSA statement does not even begin to give any answers.

In this context the last sentence is pathetic: "We hope we can all move forward together in building the Socialist Alliance project now the elections are over." The point is that the elections have raised the question, 'What exactly is the Socialist Alliance project?' Is it censoring comrades you do not agree with and then getting others to endorse censorship when they have no right to? Is it waiting around while self-important, undemocratic left groups make up their mind what is in their short-term interest?

The WMSA five think they can beat people over the head, put them in their place and then shout, 'business as usual'. It is just not good enough. We need to know what they mean by "the Socialist Alliance project", what their strategy is and how they intend to change their behaviour.