

weekly worker

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300

Reaching the 300th issue of the *Weekly Worker* is a major achievement of our organisation. On behalf of the leadership of the Party, I send congratulations to the editorial team, the comrades in charge of the technical arrangements of its production, the regular contributors to its columns and to its coffers. Comrades, we have a paper we can all be very proud of, a publication that is indispensable reading for anyone who wants to really know the state of the revolutionary left in Britain today.

Our paper has carved out a political space for the politics of the Communist Party. Our opponents on the left grudgingly admit to regularly reading the *Weekly Worker* for the information it provides on other trends. Of course, when it comes to our reports of the developments in their own organisations, these same people lamely insist that it consists of nothing but "lies" and "gossip".

The point hardly needs to be made that if this journal filled its pages with "lies" and "gossip", no one would want or need to read it. Our circulation levels - which must make the *Weekly Worker* the most successful paper on the left relative to the size of the organisation that produces it - are sufficient proof against these slanders.

The revolutionary openness which characterises our press and for which it campaigns vigorously is not a political quirk or eccentricity. It is a direct product of the project we fight for, a reformed Communist Party united on the basis of a genuinely communist programme.

To reforge a real Communist Party - an organisation that will unite the advanced part of *our class itself* - we need openness. Lenin leaves no room for misinterpretation when he states that "there can be no mass party, no party of a class, without full clarity of essential shadings, an open struggle between various tendencies, without informing the masses as to which leaders ... are pursuing this or that line" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 13, Moscow 1977, p159).

Likewise, the open clash of ideas is the only environment in which the scientific ideas of Marxism - which al-

towards a Daily Worker

WEEKLY WORKER

10p

Steps Forward One Step Back

Introducing the
Weekly Worker

The movement is at a political impasse, reflected in its lower level of activity. This requires communists as the most clear-sighted and truthful section of the movement - to come forward with solutions.

We therefore need a basic weekly format, a larger paper with potential for more extensive articles, in-depth features and theoretical supplements.

The Party will still produce more frequent broadsheets to address specific disputes. But the *Weekly Worker* will be the basic Party publication for the time being.

The 'time being' qualification is important. That is why we are including the subheading "Towards a Daily Worker" on our new banner. Lenin told our Party back in the 1920s that if we were really serious about the revolution in this country, then we had to have a daily paper - even if it initially looked more like a 'leaflet' than a newspaper, he said.

Today, we still have the same basic task, but it cannot be achieved in a vacuum. The *Daily Worker* will be a genuine mass daily when the class struggle reaches new heights and when our Party is organised on a mass basis as a revolutionary party.

made gains since October. The government immediately ran for cover when the class began to mobilise. They were forced into retreat over the pit closure programme. They remain weak and vulnerable to attack on every front.

The class struggle remains rich with potential. The Fire Brigades Union are threatening action over the 1.5% pay 'restraint'. National and Local Government Officers (Nalge) members will meet on June 14 to discuss this same pit limit. Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) workers on the tubes are balloting next month for action. The bitter struggle at Timex is a warning to all employers of our potential strength and determination.

Change is still on the agenda. But at the moment there is no section with sufficient authority or weight in our class to take a definite lead or act as a focal mobilising point.

Previously, the miners played this role. But now many are taking redundancy: their fighting determination is dwindling. Since the miners were pivotal for the rest of the class, their retreat removes for the moment the possibility of mass action taking the form of a general strike.

egy of their leadership. The Aslef settlement and RMT's very narrowly accepted negotiated deal represented a crisis of the strategy of the NUM tops.

The perspective of uniting the struggles from above - through bureaucratic solidarity between Scargill, Knapp and Follick - was blown sky high.

The miners have taken a step back, but the new combative mood in the struggle that their stand inspired has not gone away.

RMT workers only voted for acceptance of management offers by a narrow majority. This illustrates the anger that still exists amongst workers. But the moves towards action are still very tentative. Our class is still carefully testing the water, slowly winning back confidence.

This confidence hasn't been destroyed. Ignore those hysterical 'camp followers' of the working class that might tell you that 'all is lost'. We have made gains. And the opportunity still exists for us as a class to take our struggle all the way. The government's problems are not getting any easier. Neither they nor their pale pink shadow in John Smith's Labour Party have any strategy, any programme, for the future.

Modest beginnings - the first, single-sheet issue in May 1993

most invariably start as the viewpoint of a minority, or even an individual - to struggle, conquer and find concrete expression in practice.

This is the task to which our paper and the organisation that sustains it are committed. So, as we reach this landmark, it is timely to survey where we are and where we come from.

The defining struggle of our organisation has been against the sectarianism that plagues the left. We originated in the factional struggle that tore the Communist Party of Great Britain apart in the 1980s. The core of today's Party leadership organised around the journal *The Leninist*, the only factional publication to be explicitly banned by the Eurocommunists. It raised the banner of principled, open struggle against the liquidationist cancer gobbling up our Party and - significantly - in issue number three printed a 'Call to all communists'.

This urged "all genuine communists

to join the Communist Party of Great Britain". The organisations we then targeted for this call underlined our origins on the left wing of the official world communist movement and now have little more than historical curiosity, but the method is the key. Despite our "many disagreements" with these organisations, we wanted "them all to orientate themselves to the Party" (*The Leninist* No3, September 1982). In other words, our defining project was not a politically narrow, exclusive one. We have always believed that the fight to recreate the CPGB required drawing fresh forces into its ranks from other traditions in the revolutionary left and - crucially - the advanced part of the working class itself.

By issue 100, *The Leninist* had been transformed from a quarterly theoretical journal into an influential fortnightly paper. The milestones in this qualitative development were, first, the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85,

when we leapt from the theoretical journal to a monthly newspaper to keep pace with events. While the heating up of the class struggle developed our organisation positively, it acted to accelerate the degeneration of the opportunist trends we fought in the Party.

Second, a new stage in our struggle came in November 1990 with the 5th Conference of the Leninists of the CPGB. It had one purpose. In the light of the Euro leadership's unanimous vote to rename their organisation, we were determined to preserve the name and idea of the CPGB. Even as we did so, we emphasised that "our main task remains *reforging* the CPGB. Although we have the name of the Party, the Party itself has been liquidated" (my emphasis *The Leninist* January 30 1991).

By taking on the name of the Party, however, we assumed some very heavy responsibilities. Lengthy discussions were held on how to transform our journal, how to intervene in day-to-day struggles, how to draw fresh forces from the class and the movement into the Party's ranks. *The Leninist* had a proud history, but it was essentially a *factional* journal and thus by definition had a narrower remit, one based on the extensive political *agreement* of the comrades involved.

The social explosions around the miners in 1992 transcended these debates. Immediately, we transformed the paper, changing its name from *The Leninist* to the *Daily Worker*. As the movement around the miners ebbed, we retreated to the production of the *Weekly Worker*, gradually expanding its size to carry more vital debate and polemic. Our stated aim was to preserve and enhance the best features of both *The Leninist* - its rigorous and extensive theoretical polemics - and the *Daily Worker* - its fresh, agitational and bold style.

Many things have changed since then, of course. The historically low level of the class struggle has shifted the emphasis of the *Weekly Worker* heavily in the direction of polemic and debate. Yet one thing has not altered. Characteristic of our publication in

all its manifestations has been its willingness to tell the truth, no matter who it upset. Whether it has been warning of the liquidationist crisis threatening the CPGB in the 1980s; the crippling limitations of Scargill's tactics in 1984-85 and again in 1992; the death agonies of bureaucratic socialism; the fatal illusions of so much of the left in the promise of a Labour government; the need for openness in our movement and exposing the crass infringements of elementary working class democracy by Scargill and Fisc in the SLP; the crude economism that passes for Marxist politics across large swathes of the left - this paper has told the truth.

As issue 300 of the *Weekly Worker* hits the streets, the left in this country presents a sorry picture. Mired as it is in sectarianism and befuddled by the crisis of its various programmes, the entire left now seems to be threatened by the liquidationism that totally sunk the CPGB by 1991 (the Democratic Left now wishes to change itself into a quiet and educational trust, possibly to be called the New Times Network: the liquidators liquidate).

One key factor that would facilitate a positive resolution of this crisis of the left would be the consolidation and growth of *this* organisation and the ideas it defends. As I have illustrated above, this is not a sectarian aim. It simply recognises that, in a world where the old is dying, the new has to struggle to be born.

Despite a committed and assured cadre, our organisation still exists as a school of thought on the revolutionary left rather than a coherent national organisation able to affect the political outcome of events by social weight, not simply by force of persuasion or argument. This is something we must strive to remedy.

The role of our newspaper will be essential in this. If you are a regular reader and accept the need for the type of workers' party it fights for, I urge you to make a commitment to help build it. We need readers of our press. But, more than that, this paper needs active partisans ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

London left unity

Around 30 comrades representing several left groups attended a meeting billed as a “relaunch London Socialist Alliance conference” on August 1. Called by Nick Long, coordinator of Lewisham Socialist Alliance, the conference aimed to begin the task of mounting a united left challenge in next year’s London mayoral and assembly elections.

The CPGB has always urged the left to stand as a united force in elections (see, for example, ‘Open letter to the left’ *Weekly Worker* October 22 1998). With the introduction of proportional representation a left intervention has been given fresh impetus. It was therefore heartening to see comrades from the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, Socialist Outlook, the Independent Labour Network and Workers Power in attendance. WP has now changed its tune and wants to join in - provided such an electoral bloc does not intend “presenting itself as an alliance - ie, an embryonic party” - that would be ‘unprincipled’ of course. WP has covered its line change by proclaiming any electoral challenge to be a “united front”.

Reflecting the Socialist Workers Party’s continued uncertainty over its participation in elections, once dubbed as ‘electoralism’, the SWP had just one representative, comrade Rob Hoverman. The CPGB sent two comrades because of the clash with our Communist University.

Hannah Sell of SPEW proposed the following motion to the meeting:

“Recent election results demonstrate the growing number of people disillusioned with New Labour. ‘Planet contentment’ has been exposed as a sham, as thousands of traditional Labour voters stayed away in the Euro elections in disgust. Tony Blair’s insults against public sector workers and clashes with the BMA are indicators of how more and more layers will feel betrayed.

“For large numbers of working class people, the disillusionment with Labour has meant a turning off from political parties altogether - the common refrain being, ‘What’s the point? They’re all the same.’ But the victory of the SSP in Scotland, Dave Nellist and Karen McKay for the Socialist Party in Coventry and, importantly for us, Ian Page for the Socialist Party in Lewisham show that where a credible candidate with a proven record stands, with a good campaign, a layer of people are prepared to vote for a socialist alternative.

“These victories will be a beacon and can be used to encourage others to also stand against Labour. We are likely to see more examples such as the Tameside careworkers, RASP campaigners in Killamarsh and victorious NHS campaigners in Kidderminster.

“These steps are all part of the process towards the building of a new workers’ party. Socialist Alliances, though at an early stage at the moment, are a part of that process.

“The relaunched London Socialist Alliance should therefore avoid any complicated structures or formal constitution. Rather, we need to ensure that the existing organised groups work together on areas where we can agree, to raise the banner of socialism in London.

“We propose the election of a chair and secretary to enable the day-to-day running of the alliance, with positions recallable at any time.

“The London Socialist Alliance should have as its focus preparation for the London assembly elections in 2000, to attempt to encourage a broad socialist challenge to Labour, including trade unionists, strikers, environmentalists and other campaigners and socialists.”

SPEW’s motion went down well with most comrades present. Personally I was left wondering why it was that the SA’s Euro challenge collapsed so dismally in view of workers’ “disgust” with Labour, especially when so many are “prepared to vote for a socialist alternative”. If it is correct to regard sacked strikers and NHS campaigners as “part of the process towards the building of

a new workers’ party”, then so must be the willingness of the left groups to join together in order to present a united challenge to Blair. Unfortunately, as the EU debacle proved, for all the left’s ‘official optimism’, self-belief is hardly its strong point.

The AWL put forward an amendment, which read: “1. That in any future election the Socialist Alliance will approach and work with trade union organisations to win support and attempt to get candidates from trade union and community bodies.

“2. That working class representation is a central plank in our platform.”

Both the motion and the amendment were passed overwhelmingly.

Despite the intentions of comrade Long, the “relaunched” LSA is a (temporary) election bloc with no connection to the national Socialist Alliance network apart from the name. This fact was epitomised by the welcome presence of comrade Hoverman. While the SWP’s commitment to electoral unity is by no means certain, it has no intention whatsoever of bringing its members into Dave Nellist’s network.

Although the SWP is the largest left group, in a sense, given the type of organisation it is, its size is also a weakness. Its internal culture is one where genuine debate is unknown, where the politically naive, constantly revolving membership must be protected from alien forces, particularly those to its left. So full participation in the SA is for it a high risk business. It may also expose its political frailty in another sense: if the working class is seething with frustration and open to socialist ideas, as *Socialist Worker* claims, then the SWP ought to expect large votes. Knowing this was not the reality, a section of its leadership was only too pleased to use the excuse of Arthur Scargill heading the SLP London list in June’s EU elections to pull out, provoking the collapse of the alliance.

For the politically fragile SWP criticism is not welcome. That is why, along with the ILN, it attempted to expel the CPGB from the EU elections SA bloc. In an apparent replay of his previous attempts at gagging criticism, he stated at this month’s meeting: “We must come together for unity, not bickering. We must not have any recurrence of what happened last time” - ie, open reporting and criticism of the SA in the *Weekly Worker*.

Adding to the sense of *déjà vu*, comrade Hoverman was backed by Pete Brown of the ILN, who said: “We can’t have people using their newspapers to attack other organisations” - that was “not on”. Any expression of difference was, for comrade Brown, the equivalent of “using our platforms to promote your own sectarian view”. In contrast WP correctly argued that each candidate should have the right to “argue for their own organisation’s programme”.

Will the SWP’s desire to ban criticism extend to the “trade unionists, strikers, environmentalists and other campaigners” the SA rightly wants to bring on board? Like Hannah Sell the SWP wants to achieve a new, genuinely mass workers’ party. How can such a party, the advanced *part* of the class, be built without the open clash of ideas?

Comrade Brown was defeated in the election for the post of secretary, gaining seven votes, as opposed to nine for Greg Tucker of Socialist Outlook, who was elected. Martin Thomas of the AWL won six votes. Comrade Long beat off a challenge from Julie Donovan for chair by a single vote - 11 to 10.

It is of course positive that the left appears to want to get down to serious preparations for next year’s contest, even though all the comrades present that an intervention by Ken Livingstone as an independent candidate for mayor would cause a rethink. If, however, Livingstone declines to make the break, then, as Pete Firmin of SO pointed out, it remains to be seen “whether the Socialist Party and the SWP *mean* they will build up a head of steam”. And whether the SWP/ILN alliance will succeed in silencing criticism ●

Peter Manson

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

WP censors

I am a member of the Swedish Socialist Party who visited the newly opened (and cancelled) website launched by Workers Power. It was supposed to be an open space for discussion, but these were the ‘democratic’ practices:

1. Cut, distort and delete messages that did not please the LRCI’s Stalinist leaders. I for one had that doubtful honour.
2. Show a complete inability to counter the simplest arguments. The overwhelming majority of the political criticisms have not been answered. When questions are raised the LRCI answers with abuse and wild accusations.

The LRCI also accused almost all the comrades that sent in critiques of being pseudonyms for the LRCI’s public enemy number one (ie, Villa). I only discovered the existence of the LCMRCI in that discussion and I do not agree with everything comrade Villa says, but you have to admit that he (and others like the *Weekly Worker*) has asked some intriguing questions.

In the end the LRCI erased all the messages and the entire discussion site. How can the LRCI lead the international revolution if it is so intolerant and incapable of debating on its own Internet space? How can they fight for socialist democracy with such horrendous Stalinist practices? The LRCI should be ashamed of this behaviour. In the long run it does not do any good: it just helps alienate possible comrades-to-be.

Fortunately, the LRCI is not the only revolutionary alternative available today. After this terrible experience I decided to set up an independent discussion site without censorship (<http://www.delphi.com/jonesy>) and I invite other comrades to join it.

Jonas Jonlund
Gothenburg

French correction

I want to make a critique of Dave Stockton’s ‘Ten Years of the LRCI’ in the last *Workers Power*, and also to John Stone’s response (‘Crisis around the LRCI’ *Weekly Worker* July 22).

I think that Stone made some wrong affirmations regarding what is happening in France. He is incorrect to say that “in France several fractions had started to split from the left of LO and the LCR”. In fact, VDT is not on the left of these organisations and the LCR’s and LO’s factions are still in their parties.

He does not represent very well what happened in the French section. He said that around a third of the French section has gone. In fact, almost half of the French members left the LRCI, including all the youth circles in Paris and Nantes. It is hard to see PO anywhere. They no longer intervene with the *sans papiers*, unemployed, students, and school struggles.

The French opposition was expelled not only because of differences on electoral tactics and regroupment, but also because the LCR characterised the Jospin, Blair and Schroeder governments as “bourgeois workers’ governments”. The faction said that they were bourgeois regimes.

Dave Stockton said that the best thing that happened with the LRCI after the rupture with the Latin American, New Zealand and Austrian oppositions was “the remarkable growth of our French section, recruiting young comrades and becoming the second strongest section.” He did not mention at all the expulsion of the French opposition.

Arlette
France

Uninhibited

I recently attended the Communist University in London and would like to congratulate comrades on a magnificent effort. It was refreshing to see such free and uninhibited debate. The entire left could learn a lot from the atmosphere which was free of the usual sectarian slanging matches that occur. It is only a shame that more of the far left decided not to attend. I think it would be a good idea if next year a few more groups made an effort to co-organise and promote the week.

The debate on Scargillism was particularly interesting. Whilst I personally disagree with comrade Osler’s line about a party of ‘recomposition’ being the way forward, I think both the CPGB and comrade Osler have realised that eternal sect building of the self-proclaimed vanguard party is not the way. This in itself shows tremendous progress. Socialists must have a relationship of

cooperation with each other whilst also having genuine connections with social movements and, most importantly, the working class. Whilst it is not my belief that an electoral alliance of all the small left groups such as the AWL and SPEW is a way forward or that a mesh encompassing left-talking greens and sectarians is a better idea than that, I think that both show a real desire to move forward and recognise the crisis that most of the left is in.

The left needs this kind of attitude, or it will gradually fade away in magnificent self-imposed isolation.

Matthew Willgress
Peterborough

Race card

Britain, according to an extensive survey, has “the most reactionary youth in Europe”, but does not (as yet) have a political party to reflect their opinions. So Anti-Fascist Action’s strategy of addressing the issue while the far-right are ‘small’ should with hindsight be acknowledged as the major factor in Britain, almost alone in Europe these days, remaining a ‘fascist-free zone’. A reality underlined, despite the low turnout, by the staggering 11.2 million votes received by the far right across Europe in the recent Euro elections.

Physical force, or as Malcolm Keane (Letters July 22) chose to describe it, “psychotic violence” is a legitimate tactic. Those who denounce physical force deny the legitimacy of anti-fascism itself. But then, given the increasingly confident attempts in bourgeois academia to suggest a symmetry between communism and fascism, perhaps that is the idea.

Labelling “anti-black” any questioning of the efficacy or motives of the establishment’s anti-racist strategies is as crude an attempt to stymie debate as racist abuse itself. For when the *Weekly Worker* itself attempted to open up the question of means and ends in regard to anti-racist strategies about eighteen months ago, it too if memory serves came in for similarly strident abuse. Slander, it increasingly appears, is the weapon of choice in defence of the status quo. “Race card”? Never leave home without it.

S Bould
London

State and confusion

In his article ‘The struggle for democracy’ (*Weekly Worker* July 29), Danny Hamill asserts that “History presents us with a choice between revolutionary democratic communism from below and state socialism from above”.

It is a fundamental of Marxist theory that the world revolutionary process necessitates a state form which is transitional between capitalism and the higher phase. Usually referred to as socialism, a successful struggle for the democratic development of this lower phase of communism concurs with the withering away of the state, until even the resultant state of democracy is transcended by the higher phase of communism. It is in this sense that communism is much more than democratic.

Describing the state form of the lower phase of communism as ‘state socialism’, Hamill incorrectly construes that the existence of a state, in itself, constitutes “socialism from above”. In substantiation, he duly produces a list of ‘socialism from above’ which include Mao’s China, Hoxha’s Albania, Pol Pot’s Cambodia and Sung’s North Korea.

Rather oddly, Hamill tops his sampler with “Labourite state socialism”, forgetting that the Labour Party has never got beyond welfare state capitalism. More importantly however, he leaves out Lenin’s Soviet Union, transferring the responsibility for the establishment of that ‘state socialism’ to Stalin. How neat.

In the absence of proletarian revolution in the imperialist countries and in the absence of working class majorities in the socialist states, the socialism of this century has been characterised by outstanding communist leaders ruling over firstly the party and then the state. It is ‘democracy from below’ within the party of the proletariat which is needed now, not Hammill’s implied notion of dispensing with the socialist state.

Dave Norman
London

The CPGB's annual Communist University was held in Uxbridge in the first week of August. Some 80 CPGB members, supporters and friends, as well as comrades from other political currents, debated a wide range of subjects in 20 intensive sessions.

Once again the school highlighted some sharp political differences within our organisation on a number of questions, and these were debated vigorously and on occasion heatedly. These arguments, however, formed part of a constructive and honest search for truth and clarity. Some of our political opponents, in contrast, argued dogmatically from fixed ideological positions which they were intent on defending, however bizarre the conclusions they led to.

Alan Thornett of *Socialist Outlook* provided an example of rigid dogmatic thinking in his debate with Anne Murphy on 'The left and Europe'. Comrade Murphy explained the CPGB position, that the convergence of European capitalist states into a unified superstate not only provides the working class with the opportunity to unite to fight this new state, but also makes it imperative to do so. For comrade Thornett, the EU is simply a reactionary institution, and must be opposed, and British withdrawal promoted. This leads *Socialist Outlook*, however unwillingly, into the same camp as rightwing nationalists who want to 'save the pound'.

Another example of the dire consequences of dogmatic thinking and mechanical logic was provided by the International Bolshevik Tendency, in their opening on 'The left and the Balkans war'. The IBT comrades tried to justify their position of unconditional defence of Slobodan Milosevic and his regime. For the IBT, any imperialism is worse than any non-imperialism, which, however undemocratic and anti-progressive, must be supported in a war between the two. The IBT accepted that the Milosevic government was a particularly reactionary regime oppressing the working class in Serbia itself and guilty of mass terror against the Kosovars. But they still supported Milosevic in the war and would have done all they could to help bring about a Serbian victory. The IBT appeared to understand that military defeat often provides the best conditions for revolution. Yet it dismissed this as unimportant compared to the dogmatic necessity of backing Serbia. The IBT also effectively stopped supporting the right of Kosova to self-determination. The democratic rights of the Kosovars, and even their right to live, took second place in IBT thinking.

Lenin said: "Whoever wants to reach socialism by any other path than that of political democracy will inevitably arrive at conclusions that are absurd and reactionary both in the economic and political sense" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol9, Moscow 1977, p29). The IBT provides a disturbing example of the accuracy of this statement.

The importance of consistent democracy was a main theme which emerged. From the discussion on GMOs, in which CPGB members agreed that what matters is democratic control of new technology by the working class, to the discussion of Peter Tatchell's opening on gay liberation, democracy was seen as crucial.

The speaker from Cymru Goch, Tim Richards, began with a brief history of Wales and the Welsh working class movement, and concluded that the national liberation of Wales can only be won by making it a socialist state. He claimed that, unlike Plaid Cymru, Cymru Goch is not nationalist, supports left unity, and is willing to co-operate with revolutionaries fighting in England. However, during the discussion, he declared that he did not understand what was meant by 'cen-

Communist University '99

Debate and controversy

tralising' the fight against Blair, or why it is needed. "We don't need more centralism," he said. "We need autonomy and equality." In reply Mark Fischer said the reformed CPGB, uniting and synthesising all specific struggles, is the best way forward in the fight for socialism in Britain. But this does not mean an autocratic central committee: it means relevant sections and committees having autonomy within the Party in order to most effectively take on the existing state. For example, as the EU takes on state form, we will need to build a Communist Party of the European Union. Our goal is to seek voluntary unity and centralisation of the working class on the British, European and world level.

Dave Osler, speaking on 'Scargillism', correctly characterised Arthur Scargill as a class fighter able to lead workers in struggle, but also a bureaucrat and "a Stalinist of the old school", advocating a reformist road to an authoritarian state. The party Scargill founded, the SLP, has reached a dead end and we need to look at where it went wrong. The SLP was marred by a lack of internal democracy, said comrade Osler; this was its fatal flaw.

However, he also claimed that the term 'democratic centralism' is "indisputably stained" in the eyes of progressive workers, and admitted that although the group he belongs to, the Socialist Democracy Group, uses centralism, it avoids the term. Comrade Osler said people advocating a Communist Party, rather than a broad left party of recomposition, are in a minority on the left, and "probably most of them are in this room".

In reply Jack Conrad said that we have all experienced groups which make a travesty of democratic centralism, and more recently, broad left formations such as the Network of Socialist Alliances which loudly claim to reject centralism in favour of broadness and openness, but actually use bureaucratic methods to exclude communists. He said that democratic centralism is not something alien to working class activity, but an easily understood concept for every striker or trade union militant - freedom of criticism, unity of action.

The completeness of the degeneration of the SLP is demonstrated by the fact that after all the other witch-hunters were themselves witch-hunted out of it, Scargill was left with Roy Bull as his vice-president. Bull spoke in a debate with Peter Tatchell on 'Gay liberation and single-issue campaigns'. Bull's homophobia is well known. When challenged by Bob Paul to reply to a letter he had published in the *Weekly Worker* which quoted Bull's homophobic statements, Bull was silent. Indeed he hardly mentioned gay liberation in his speech. He appeared, however, to have retreated from his previous position that campaigns around such issues are purely and simply 'diversions'. This is of course a completely wrong approach for Marxists. For us, support for all the oppressed now is a profoundly moral question, as well as a political one.

Marx's vision of human emancipation means far more than ending capitalism. It means freeing people to be themselves and live full lives on their own terms - something the non-Marxist Tatchell apparently understands better than the Stalinite Bull.

The profound moral dimension of Marxism was discussed in an inspiring talk by István Mészáros entitled 'Is communism a utopia?' His answer was an emphatic 'no'. We hope to publish the text of this and other speeches in future issues of the *Weekly Worker*.

Another theme which ran through the week concerned Ken Livingstone, and whether he will contest the election for mayor of London as an independent. Many guest speakers gave their opinion of how the left should react if this happens. Dave Osler was firmly against Livingstone. Bob Pitt, in contrast, thought that the prospect of a Livingstone-led breakaway in London would be an interesting one. Nevertheless, in his opening on 'The left and Labour' he defended the Blair government as being at least better than the Tories and looked for progressive elements in Blair's 'third way'.

The main disagreement within the ranks of the CPGB itself was on the national question. A number of comrades disagreed with Jack Conrad's view that in a united Ireland a protestant majority, three- or four-county 'national' entity should have self-governing autonomy up to and including the right to separate. This issue was vigorously debated following comrade Conrad's opening on 'The politics of the Northern Ireland peace process'. The opposition to Conrad more or less said that the protestants of Northern Ireland are in no sense a nation and have no right to self-determination, which apparently can mean only the right to continue to hate and oppress Catholics. For these comrades such a call amounted to "rights for loyalism" and British imperialism. In reply other comrades said that the task for communists is to win the protestants away from reaction and to support for a united Ireland and working-class self-liberation, through championing their rights.

This question was returned to during many of the sessions, especially the debate following comrade Mark Fischer's opening on 'The break-up of Yugoslavia'. It deepened and developed into a discussion of what constitutes a nation, and whether only 'classical' nations should have

the right to self-determination. Most comrades agreed that advocating *this* national right for units as small as a few villages is absurd and impracticable. The right to *national* self-determination is appropriate only for historically constituted peoples occupying a definite territory. But life is complex and fluid, and special cases such as Wales and Scotland, although not nations as scientifically defined, *politically* require the right to self-determination. Some comrades, including Dave Craig of the RDG, disagreed with this and said that logically you must either accept Scotland is a nation, as he does, or deny it the right to self-determination. This mechanical logic, which puts categories first and the complexities of real life second, is more typical of the dogmatic thinking exhibited by our 'Trotskyite' political opponents during the week.

Hillel Ticktin gave two openings on 'The decline of capitalism' and 'Why the collapse of the USSR was not foreseen'. The first opening was particularly interesting to CPGB comrades, who have been studying Marxist crisis theory in our seminars. At the end of the opening on the collapse of the USSR comrade Ticktin repeated his view that capitalism could not be restored in Russia, and that the west has no solution for the former USSR. The only way out of the present crisis was through working class revolution. As, according to Ticktin, no other long-term solution was possible, he was optimistic for the future.

All comrades enjoyed the school and found it stimulating and indeed inspiring. All the sessions were worthwhile and many provided material for future *Weekly Worker* articles ●

Mary Godwin.

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday August 22, 5pm - 'Marx and Engels on the limitations of trade unionism', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's Theory of revolution* vol II as a study guide.

Sunday August 29, 5pm - 'Engels's theory of crisis', using Simon Clarke's *Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide.

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.

■ Hackney SA

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

■ Brent SA

To get involved, contact Brent Socialist Alliance, 37 Walm Lane, London NW2 4QU, or ring Stan Kelsey 0181-451 0616.

■ Justice for Sarah

Sarah Thomas, a gifted young black woman, is dead following her arrest by officers from Stoke Newington police station. Her death is yet another on a long list. Stoke Newington police are well known for deaths in custody, police corruption, and violence against black people. Stop deaths in police custody. Picket Stoke Newington police station - Saturday August 21, 2.30pm. 33 Stoke Newington High Street, London N16. Organised and coordinated by Hackney Monitoring Group. For further information contact HMG on 0181 806 0742.

■ 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.

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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/

Taaffe loses Pak

The disintegration of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, along with its Committee for a Workers International, continues to accelerate. We reproduce statements which have recently come into our hands from the CWI's *Special International Bulletin* (October 1998): the first announcing the suspension from the CWI of the Labour Party Pakistan and the second an edited version of the LPP national committee's response

Statement from the international Secretariat - June 18 1998

Developments in Pakistan
At the meeting on May 30 of the national committee of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP), the Pakistan section of CWI, there was a decisive separation of the Revolutionary Marxist Tendency (RMT) from the party.

Comrades of the RMT had declared the formation of a tendency in opposition to the EC majority at the EC meeting on April 22. After only two hours of the meeting, eight national committee members walked out or the meeting because of the refusal of the majority to lift the suspensions of four leading minority comrades in order to allow a democratic, unprejudiced debate on serious differences over political, organisational and financial issues. The comrades of the RMT concluded that there was no longer any possibility of conducting a democratic debate within the Labour Party, which is now completely dominated by NGO (non-government organisation) projects.

These projects, which now receive between US\$70-100,000 a year, have not been democratically accountable to the party and have pushed the leadership more and more in the direction of opportunist policies. Moreover the complement of about 40 project employees placed extensive, unaccountable powers of patronage in the hands of the EC majority.

Although a minority on the NC (the vote was 14 to 8), the RMT has the overwhelming support of the party's genuine activists and its trade union cadres in Lahore and Punjab province.

In this situation, the IS had to act urgently and suspend the LPP as a section of CWI. There was no longer any possibility in our view of simply continuing a debate on political and organisational differences in the hope that they could be resolved through democratic procedures within the LPP and CWI.

The situation had reached a decisive crisis point. For a number of reasons:

- (i) the suspensions and sackings of members and sympathisers of the opposition tendency demonstrated that the EC majority was not prepared to allow a democratic debate over differences within the LPP;
- (ii) the increasingly opportunist policies of the EC majority (for instance, contesting the recent local body elections on a non-political basis, making unprincipled alliances with rightwing trade union leaders in the Workers Confederation, and diluting the political content of the weekly paper following the sacking of the editor and other staff) were more and more discrediting the LPP among TU militants and left activists and were also threatening to discredit the CWI; and
- (iii) the sharpening perception among TU militants and left activists of the LPP as an organisation dominated by NGO projects, afflicted by all the worse characteristics of NGOs (bureaucratic management of projects, non-accountability of funds, patronage and favouritism through the disposal of project jobs, subsidies, etc, and the promotion of a non-political/reformist image to impress local sponsors and overseas donors), had reached a critical level and was beginning to discredit all the Marxist cad-

res within LPP, as well as raising doubts about the credentials of CWI as an international revolutionary organisation.

Faced with the intransigent refusal of the EC majority and the NC majority to lift the suspensions and sackings to allow a democratic debate, comrades of the RMT concluded that there was no possibility of reversing the political degeneration of LPP. The IS agreed with their assessment. To have continued a futile battle within the undemocratic structure of LPP would have meant risking the loss of an invaluable core of genuine Marxist activists and also allowing the complete discrediting of CWI among the left in Pakistan.

Given the effective split in the LPP, and on the basis of our agreement with the political position of the opposition tendency, the IS decided that it was necessary to suspend the LPP and recognise the Revolutionary Marxist Tendency as a sympathising group of the CWI and also to declare our support for the RMT's steps to launch a new revolutionary socialist party in Pakistan ...

The crisis in LPP was not a sudden or unexpected event. A series of sharp differences developed within the party over the last year and a half on trade union work, the national question, party building (especially the lack of internal political life, cadre development, etc), the increasingly dominant influence of the NGO projects over the party's politics and organisational methods, and the increasingly opportunist direction of the EC majority leadership. The IS has attempted over a long period to debate these issues with the LPP representative (Farooq Tariq) on the international executive committee and with the LPP NC ...

Within a few days, even before any public announcement, the separation of the Marxists from the Labour Party was warmly welcomed by a wide variety of leading trade union militants and left activists. The Labour Party has unfortunately become discredited as an organisation dominated by NGO projects and business activities, and is now seen by many trade union activists as a 'dummy party' which organises 'show business events', such as demonstrations and press conferences, primarily in order to gain press publicity and impress foreign sponsors and local NGO leaders. In the few days after the split, in discussions with the IS representative and leading comrades of RMT, leaders of the All-Pakistan Trade Union Federation - Punjab and TU militants attending a meeting of over 150 activists in the Model Town area of Lahore (at which the IS representative was the main speaker) welcomed the formation of a genuine revolutionary Marxist party in Pakistan strongly linked to the CWI (which has never been given a high profile by the Labour Party leadership).

LPP national committee meeting, May 30-31

The RMT comrades presented a number of political statements and resolutions to the meeting. The statements outlined the position of the EC minority on perspectives, the trade unions, the national question, party building, etc, as well as giving details of the distortion of party organisation and activity due to the NGO projects ...

The RMT comrades wanted to debate all the issues. However, they could not accept the political debate being reduced to a disciplinary issue: that is, whether or not the suspensions or sackings should be upheld or not. The EC majority insisted on presenting the debate as an 'appeal', when the suspensions had been imposed by the EC majority on the basis of a pretext (that is, their allegations about what took place at the Education Foundation board meeting on March 20) before any debate on the real political and organisational issues. The RMT comrades therefore moved resolutions at the beginning of the meeting calling for the suspensions and sackings to be lifted in order to allow a democratic debate without organisational sanctions hanging over their heads.

Clearly, it would have been open to the NC to propose disciplinary action following a debate. However, the NC voted 14 to eight against lifting the suspensions and sackings. The eight comrades supporting the RMT concluded that in the light of this decision, together with their previous experience of the EC majority's bureaucratic conduct, there was no further possibility of democratic debate within the Labour Party. It was noteworthy that apart from the five majority EC members (five of whom are full-timers, while another receives a project sinecure), the others (with two exceptions) are either project employees or (as in the case of Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkor) are receiving monthly subsidies.

There was a very strong feeling amongst the RMT comrades that any further activity within the Labour Party would be futile. For a long time the activists have been in conflict with a leadership that is not interested in debating ideas or organisational issues, but is defending a material interest: its control of NGO projects, involving substantial sums of money, salaries and expenses, and extensive patronage, involving project jobs for their relatives and personal favourites. Efforts to activate branch units and develop Marxist education were obstructed by EC members, who denounced these party-building efforts as 'factional activity'. At the same time, party activists were becoming increasingly affected by criticisms, raised by leading trade union activists, of the Labour Party's opportunistic 'campaigns' and business activities. The priority of RMT comrades is to build a genuine revolutionary organisation, developing cadres, building strong links with rank-and-file trade union activists, consistently supporting workers in struggle, and developing campaigns based on clear Marxist policies.

NGO projects

Four comrades supporting the RMT were suspended by the EC on the grounds that they raised issues about the running of the projects at a meeting on March 20 of the board of the Education Foundation, the body which nominally controls all the projects, in the presence of two representatives of the Swedish donor organisations (though one of the suspended comrades, EC member Khalid B, was not present at the board meeting). Comrades raised concerns at this meeting as a last resort, because all previous calls for proper accountability of the projects and demands for regular meetings of the Education Foundation board had been ignored.

Project funding, mainly from two Swedish trade unions and from the Olaf Palme Institute in Stockholm, has grown considerably in the last few years, and probably now amounts to between US\$70,000 and \$100,000 a year. Comrades, including IS representatives, repeatedly asked for a full list or all current and projected projects, with details of their funding and the use of their funds for project and party activities. These details have never been provided (moreover, at an EC meeting in January Shoaib B said that the IS had no right to access to such details) ...

There is a widespread view that the Labour Party/Education Foundation projects are no different from any other NGOs, which are seen as a political device of international capitalist agencies for diverting and corrupting labour leaders. The EC majority have tried to present the Education Foundation board meeting as a public forum, whereas in reality it was a closed meeting between the board members and two representatives of the Swedish sponsor organisation. There is now a general perception among trade union leaders and activists, left intellectuals, advocates, journalists, etc that the Labour Party is primarily an NGO, operating behind the facade of a 'dummy' political party. This reached such an extent that it was seriously discrediting the genuine Marxist activists in our organisation.

Sackings

NGO project finance accounted for at least 80% of the organisation's financial resources. Through their control of the projects, which were not democratically accountable to the organisation, the EC majority - outside the framework of the EC and NC - decisively controlled the full-time staff of the organisation. Appointment of jobs was dominated by political favouritism and family patronage ... The EC majority's reliance on patronage was confirmed by the fact that as soon as they were challenged politically they resorted to sackings of any full-time comrades and project workers they considered to be in opposition or 'unreliable'.

The sackings have been justified by the EC majority by a catalogue of false allegations and character assassinations ...

Some of the eight employees who were sacked were not party members or active supporters of RMT; but they had all clashed with members of the EC majority over the running of the projects and were arbitrarily sacked without any proper procedure ... While nine workers have been sacked, other workers who supported the EC majority were given pay increases and others have been offered jobs and other favours.

Balance of forces

The Revolutionary Marxist Tendency, which was formed as an opposition Tendency inside the LPP on May 7, now has the support of the overwhelming majority of party activists in Lahore. The tendency meeting for Lahore comrades held on May 23 was attended (despite the hot weather - 47C/117F) by 52 party members, with apologies from 20 other comrades ... All the comrades present support the political position of the EC minority: the claim from Farooq that most of those present were sent by the EC majority is ridiculous and insulting to the comrades attending.

At an earlier meeting called by the EC majority there were 44 attending.

Pakistan

The breakdown of those attending was as follows: four were supporters of the EC minority; two were children, non-party members; 16 were project employees; five consisted of the EC majority members; and there were also 20 rank-and-file party members (plus Simon K) ...

Outside the Labour Party, there are several groups and individual activists who are hostile to the opportunist politics and NGO methods of the EC majority, who have expressed support for the RMT activists and are interested in the formation of a new working class, Marxist organisation.

CWI

Most of the political activists who joined the Labour Party Pakistan in the recent period joined because of its connection to the CWI and in spite of reservations about the leadership's political methods. The EC majority, however, has never tried to raise the public profile of the international in Pakistan. Very little information about debates and developments in CWI were transmitted to the rank-and-file membership. Comrades of the RMT, on the other hand, believe that full participation in CWI is the key to building a revolutionary organisation in Pakistan. In recent discussions with SK and LW from the IS, a number of left trade union organisations and political activists have expressed their interest in joining CWI through participation in a new, genuinely revolutionary organisation in Pakistan.

The majority of the Labour Party EC have declared an international minority faction to fight the alleged 'degeneration' of the IS, but at the same time

they have already taken steps to set up a new NGO, a South Asia Study Institute, comprising the Labour Party Pakistan, NSSP (expelled from CWI in 1989) in Sri Lanka, and the CPI (ML) - 'Liberation' in India, under the auspices of the Australian Democratic Socialist Party's Asia-Pacific network organisation. This plan was publicly announced in the DSP's *Green Left Weekly*, following the Asia-Pacific Forum in May. The plan, however, has never been discussed with the IS or with the CWI sections in Sri Lanka and India, and was not discussed with the IS representative who attended the Asia-Pacific Forum.

A new revolutionary party

The comrades of the RMT are now urgently discussing plans for a new revolutionary party, to be launched as soon as possible. Following the LPP NC on May 30, RMT comrades met to elect an organising committee and a finance committee to prepare for the setting up of a new revolutionary party, with a launching conference to be within a few months. The discussion has started on a new party name, which should reflect its commitment to socialism and to the revolutionary unity of Pakistan's different nationalities and ethnic minorities. The comrades have acquired an office ... and are preparing to produce a monthly paper. A financial appeal to members and sympathisers is already underway, and the comrades (learning from the bad example of the Labour Party Pakistan) are emphasising the need for a rigorous approach to the collection of subs and fighting fund ... ●

Protest against the suspension of the Labour Party from CWI - July 10 1998

The International Secretariat of CWI has suspended the affiliation of the Labour Party Pakistan, the Pakistan Section of CWI. The reasons given for this one-sided, undemocratic action are that the Labour Party is involved in projects which are undemocratically run and have reduced the revolutionary identity of the party; that it has suspended and removed the leading comrades without democratic debates; that it has stopped democratic discussions on differences of perspectives in the sections. We reject the allegations. This is just one-sided propaganda against the largest section of CWI in a colonial country.

We would like the comrades of this international to read our point of view and then make up your mind. The IS have printed selected correspondence between the two sections and proportionally it has printed 10 times more propaganda material to strengthen its position.

Even before a discussion on the IEC on the suspension of the Labour Party, it has created and recognised the Marxist Workers Tendency as its affiliated group in Pakistan. This is in violation of the CWI constitution.

Projects

Labour Party supporters had a political discussion in 1994, if we should start some community-based projects that will give us a chance to prove in practice that we are different and that we can run and manage things better than others. In the last three years, we have organised four projects.

The projects have given us an opportunity to do some community work and they have given us a special re-

ferent issues with the present IS goes a long way. The IS ignored the differences in the last few years, but the vote on America was too much for the international.

IS visit to Pakistan

Comrade Farooq abstained from voting at the IEC in November 96, and voted against the IS in November 97. During this period comrades from the IS made conscious efforts to have a base in Pakistan apart from the section.

Comrade Simon and Siritunga from Sri Lanka came to Pakistan in January 97, a few days before the general elections, where three of the leading comrades were participating in the elections. Both comrades attended some of our public meetings and were inspired by the support of the party among the working class, particularly among the railway workers. They did not say anything of difference before election day. Just after the election, in the EC meeting, comrade Siri and Simon attacked comrade Farooq for not predicting the actual results and tried to show to the EC that the Pakistan section has an ideologically very weak leadership.

This was the first incident where the IS consciously started to find and investigate the weaknesses of the leadership.

In the meantime, comrade Simon developed his personal and political relationship with Khalid Bhatti, who had only a year before joined the organisation. Simon remained in Pakistan for four months. In that period, we held our national conference in May 97. It was our suggestions and not of the IS, but Simon agreed about the proposal. Before the conference, we had disagreements about the role of the Pakistan Workers Confederation and our work in the trade unions. Simon raised it in the EC and in the NC before the conference and he also wanted to raise the differences in the conference. We did not want to go to the conference with a difference of opinion as this would have very bad effects on the newer comrades who had never been in the socialist movement. Simon agreed to this after a strong hesitation, only after we agreed that we take back the section on the working class from our conference. So the show of differences at the conference was avoided with that agreement.

On the name debate, the IS proposed that we should name ourselves the Justice Party or something similar. But the overwhelming majority of the comrades were in favour of naming ourselves the Labour Party. That is nothing to do with the betrayals of the Labour Party in Europe, but purely due to the objective realities in Pakistan, where this name was never used, was easy and a class-based name. It was agreed by all the comrades that the objective conditions in Pakistan do not allow us to use the words 'socialist', 'Marxist' or 'revolutionary'. It is ironic that the supporters of the IS who agreed with full enthusiasm on the above proposals have now called themselves the Marxist Workers Tendency.

On the name change, the IS document in Pakistan was translated in Urdu and was distributed among all the comrades of the party. It was printed in the internal bulletin. Not a single comrade voted for the IS document so with a unanimous decision at the June 97 NC the new party was named the Labour Party. The IS did not accept this and did not print in any of the publications of the CWI even eight months after we had named the party. This was their Stalinist attitude to censor opposite ideas. When the Scottish comrades interviewed comrade Farooq and they printed the name of the party it was a big problem for the British section.

The second visit of the IS was not even consulted with the section. They were told a day before that they are

landing. In this visit, Simon came only twice to the centre and Lynn three times. It was mainly to inform us about their position and not to discuss with us. They used the second visit to form the group and discussed with every single comrade they could find in Lahore. They went around in the trade unions to explain their position and to say that the CWI is not with the Labour Party. Trade union leaders listened to them with patience as we had built the respect of the IS and CWI, and later came to us in surprise, asking why the IS is trying to divide the section.

Why expulsions?

The organisation set up a registered non-government organisation to run the projects. In 1994, members of the NC were to become board members of the Education Foundation ... It was decided by our conference constitution that the NC members would be the board members of this organisation ... These six and some of the trade unions leaders were normally invited to attend the meeting whenever the donor unions were coming to Pakistan. It was agreed that the projects would be run not by this board, but by the project committee, which is elected by the NC and responsible to the EC and NC.

In March 98, there was a visit from a donor trade union. We called the board meeting to welcome the guests. In the meeting, the supporters of the IS levelled charges of corruption and of undemocratic behaviour. They told the guests that we don't know how many projects we are running, they were never asked to attend the meetings and so on. These were complete lies. It was clear that in the presence of the donor union these comrades raised these issues only with one intention: that they should stop the donations to us.

They had every chance to raise these issues within the organisation. Comrade Khalid had raised the issue in the EC meeting and it was agreed that we should discuss these issues in the national committee. So without raising it in the organisation they tried to reach a solution by raising it outside the organisation. It was a clear violation of party discipline. It was an effort to cut the economic lifeline of the organisation. It was the worst sort of betrayal against the organisation. The EC issued a statement on the subject and sent it to all the NC members for their recommendations. We also asked the comrades who had raised these allegations that they should come and check the finances of the projects to clarify the position. We also said if we are not guilty, they should accept the mistake. But these comrades had made their minds to separate themselves from the party on the instruction of the IS, so they refused any of our offers. Comrade Khalid refused several times to check the finances and he wanted to take the project proposals and the finance reports out of the office, which we refused. After three weeks, when it was clear that these comrades did not want to remain in the organisation, the EC decided to suspend the comrades.

The IS supporters formed a minority faction and moved a resolution to call an NC meeting. We called the meeting on May 30. The minority comrades alongside with Lynn came to the meeting. They wanted the NC to decide on the suspensions before the discussion started, which was rejected by 14 to eight. Lynn Walsh made a provocative statement, announcing the suspension of the Labour Party and telling us that we are finished and then boycotted the meeting. One of the eight has now announced his support for Labour Party.

It is clear from all the circumstances that the IS had decided in advance to split the section and to form a group of loyal comrades in Pakistan. They have done so, but the proposed 'split' could not take place, as only a hand-

ful of comrades have left the organisation. The Labour Party has remained intact. It is not a "dummy" party, as the IS has tried to label us. The 'dummies' are the most active left activists in Pakistan whose number is growing every day. The 'dummies' have won most of the trade union leaders to their ranks and, apart from one, not a single trade union comrade has gone with them.

Political differences

The IS tried to create some political differences. These differences are mainly on tactics in the field of trade unions, the national question, fundamentalism and on projects.

In the trade union field, we think the main priority of the organisation should be to bring all organised workers to one platform. For that we have been practically active for the last few years. In 1993, on our suggestions, most of the unions in Pakistan got together in one platform called the Pakistan Trade Unions Action Committee. We were the only political group on the executive body of this committee ... In 1995, seven large trade union federations who were part of the committee decided to form a different platform called the Pakistan Workers Confederation. We gave critical support to this platform. The confederation is not exactly like the British Trade Union Congress. But it is a step towards that. This constitutes the unity of the organised workers although they are in a small numbers ... We do not give any concession to any trade union leader, particularly to the left leaders. But our criticism is not like criticising them as our class enemies. This has been turned into our 'concessions' to the leaders.

Every year one section

Comrade Lynn Walsh on behalf of the IS has butchered every year one section in the last few years. India, America and now Pakistan. He is now trying in his own section in Britain. He has brought a very peculiar approach to CWI. The present IS have failed to make progress internationally. They have a twist and turn policy on every aspect. Growth in Pakistan does not owe much to the international, but the 'split' has been seen by every single member of our party and our sympathisers as brilliant work done by the IS of CWI. We had built CWI and will do so in future, but also we will expose the wrong methods of the present IS. Section after section is facing crisis because of the unwanted interventions of the IS.

The members of CWI should take action. They should protest the suspension of the Labour Party from CWI and of comrade Farooq as IEC member ... Lynn Walsh and co are finished as genuine Marxists. They have become conspirators, manoeuvrers and all the other illnesses of degenerated socialists. They have forgotten to grow. Growth is something alien for them now. In the colonial world they wanted small groups who would be heavily dependent on them financially and politically. They don't want equal partners: they want submissive leadership. We have refused to become like that, so we are 'finished revolutionaries'.

They don't have any strategy for those sections that are not growing, but they have good strategies of stopping and dividing the growing sections.

We declare that we will fight these illnesses within the CWI. The IS is now claiming that recent recruits to the Labour Party joined because of the authority of the CWI. It is not the angels who have built the respect of the CWI in Pakistan. It is the hard, self-sacrificing work of the Labour Party comrades. Now the IS wants to enjoy the fruits of our hard labour by creating a new group, thus splitting the tiny forces of Marxism in Pakistan. They will not go very far.

Long live socialist revolutionaries internationally! ●

Europe and the politics of the offensive

For establishment politics in Britain the European Union represents a fundamental fault line. This is hardly surprising. The EU is a continental-wide superstate in the making. Cherished identities, borders, beliefs and symbols are being destroyed or have declining use-value and therefore engender ideological crisis. There are also narrow, sectional business and party interests at stake.

European integration has advanced qualitatively since the Treaty of Rome was signed between Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands in 1957. The customs union - born of the Cold War - has become a single giant embracing 350 million people and 15 counties with free trade and movement of labour. Economically it is the world's biggest home market. It has a combined GDP of about \$6 trillion - as compared with \$5 trillion for the US and \$3 trillion for Japan.

Politically, however, the EU resembles something like the creaking Austro-Hungarian empire which straddled 19th century middle Europe. The EU is an amalgam of unevenly developed state units. But the direction is clear. Wider, in the form of candidates like Poland and the Czech Republic. Deeper, in the form of politico-legal institutions. The EU has a council of ministers, the European Commission, an elected parliament and a European Court of Justice.

With the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties the tempo of integration increased. In January 11 EU countries subsumed their national currencies into the euro - overseen by a powerful central bank. Economic discipline is enforced by a stability pact which limits government borrowing to three percent of GDP. A social chapter has also been put in place to facilitate convergence along with provisions for common foreign and military policies. Chris Patten, commissioner responsible for external relations, recently argued for a coordinated arms procurement policy and predicted that a Eurocorps could be operational "in the not too distant future" (*The Guardian* August 17).

Behind integration lies a blood-drenched past. Twice in the 20th century Europe has been the storm-centre of world war. Both times Europe was left devastated, exhausted and much reduced. World War I saw the collapse of the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian autocracies. The main focus of world economic activity shifted from Europe to the Atlantic and from there to the Pacific. Twenty-five years later, under the terms of the Yalta agreement, half the continent was incorporated into the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and through bureaucratic revolution 'Sovietised'. As to western Europe, it was shorn of the glories - and booty - of empire. Humiliatingly it had to crouch under the US nuclear umbrella against the much exaggerated threat from beyond the iron curtain. The need to avoid another internecine conflict, and the creation of a bulwark against bureaucratic socialism, drove the states of western Europe, in particular Federal Germany and France, towards an historic compromise.

There is, however, another, more important, factor at work. Inter-imperialist rivalry. Europe has to compete with the US and Japan. They might have marginally smaller markets. Nevertheless due to an historically constituted nationality and an economically centralised territory they are blessed with a single working class and a single political and business elite. Like every other commodity, labour power can easily move, and therefore be brought and sold, anywhere in the US or Japan. Europe is not only divided by history, but culture. Commodities circulate without let or hindrance. But not the special commodity, labour power. Language is a material barrier, except for those

with higher education (worst paid labour being a partial exception). A multinational, and therefore fragmented, political and business elite constitutes a similar handicap for Europe. To successfully compete the EU must as a minimum forge a federal superstate from where its radically reorganised transnationals can reach their tentacles out to every corner of the planet. Survival necessitates political integration and overcoming the division of Europe into antagonistic national capitals.

In Britain this ongoing process precipitated well known hesitations and frustrations. The residues of empire arrogance clouded the brain. Britain applied late and suffered the ignominy of rejection. Barred from the Common Market in 1963 by de Gaulle's veto, the British ruling class tried to maintain its quasi-empire, along with the 'special relationship' with the US and a foot in Europe through Efta. But neither the Commonwealth nor the conceit of being Greece to the new Rome added up to a viable strategy. Britain eventually entered the EEC in 1973 under Heath's Tory government (along with its Danish and Irish Efta allies).

Apart from its extreme rightwing around Roy Jenkins, the Labour Party was highly critical of the terms and conditions. Nonetheless in 1975 Harold Wilson's government successfully fought a referendum on the issue of continued membership. The main opposition came from a Tony Benn-Enoch Powell patriotic front. The Labour Party remained officially uneasy with European integration till the leadership of John Smith and then the government of Tony Blair. A parallel shift occurred in the TUC with the appointment of John Monks. New Labour and its coterie of middle class career politicians loyally and openly serves the interests of the most competitive, most internationalised sections of British capital. The subaltern working class pole of Labourism is today a marginalised appendage and is treated with barely concealed contempt. So it was not TUC opposition which stopped Britain entering the euro during round one, but treasury worries and *Sun*-informed public opinion polls.

It is the Tories who are organically divided. While Lady Thatcher calls for a "fundamental renegotiation" of Britain's relationship with the EU, an embattled Heseltine-Clarke wing joins the Lab-Lib pact in order to fight the forthcoming referendum on the euro. These pro-big business traditionalists will operate within the Britain in Europe campaign under Blair. Smith Square and the Tory front bench for their part articulate the interests of the least competitive sections of capital and bang the drum of English xenophobia. The Tory Party goes into the next general election pledged not to join the euro for at least one parliamentary term. The Hague Tories constitute little more than the politics of fear.

What of our own movement? If the British ruling class has been irresolute and narrow-minded, the groups, factions and sects of the left have manifestly proved utterly incapable of providing anything like a serious working class alternative.

The reformist and national socialist left adhere to backward-looking and parochial positions on the EU. They instinctively recognise that Eu-

ropean integration makes a mockery of their utopian British road to socialism. In terms of rhetoric and immediate programme, the Bennite rump in New Labour, the SLP Scargillites and the official communists of the *Morning Star* are virtually indistinguishable from Thatcher and the UK Independence Party. Together they want to preserve the pound sterling and restore the halcyon days of British sovereignty. Naturally with the likes of Benn, Scargill and Griffiths, it is excused in the name of socialism ... but surely this is the socialism of the criminally insane. The best these benign 'liberators' could achieve in reality is a British version of Stalinism, Kim Il Sungism or Pol Pottism - ie, state slavery - and that imposed onto a capitalistically advanced country fully integrated into the world economy. What in the past cost the lives of millions could only but be repeated many times over as a still greater tragedy in the future. On all criteria civilisation would not be advanced an inch but thrown back miles.

Proletarian socialism - as the first stage or phase of communism - is international or it is nothing. There can be no socialism - transition to communism - in one country because capital, as an exploitative social relationship, resides not within a single national state but internationally in the realm of the global economy. Due to isolation bureaucratic or national socialism just brings back all the old capitalist crap, albeit in different forms. That is why as long ago as 1845 Marx and Engels emphatically rejected all localist schemes and insisted on the contrary that: "Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples 'all at once' and simultaneously" (*MECW* Vol 5, Moscow 1976, p49).

As gurus, Peter Taaffe and Lynn Walsh of the Socialist Party in England and Wales have proved their real worth over the EU. They rashly staked their reputations as seers on the 'Marxist' prediction that European integration and the euro were impossible. Such bluster says everything about them as self-serving charlatans and nothing about Marxism. A seemingly more sophisticated 'Marxist' position has been advanced by the so-called Fourth International and its *Socialist Outlook* group in Britain. Unfortunately its internationalism is not the genuine article *Socialist Outlook*'s demand for British withdrawal is a slavish echo of the national socialism of the Labour left, SLP and CPB. Yet because it is done in the language of internationalism this opportunist tailing of national socialism is all the more insidious and dangerous.

Writing in *Socialist Outlook*'s pamphlet *Even more unemployment: the case against Emu*, Alan Thornett admits he will be in league with the reformist left and the Tory right in trying to secure a 'no' vote in the euro referendum. Naturally comrade Thornett calls for a "progressive 'no' campaign". He does not actually want to share a platform with Thatcher, the UK Independence Party or the BNP. Nevertheless, when stripped of the internationalist veneer, *Socialist Outlook* has in actuality the very same conservative-progressive programme as the reformist left (which logically leads it organisationally into the most dubious company): "We are for the dissolution of the EU or Britain's with-

drawal from it. It is a capitalist club designed to organise the restructuring and concentration of capital to the advantage of the bosses. But our aim is not a capitalist Britain outside the capitalist EU. We want a socialist Britain in a socialist Europe" (p11).

The shallowness of comrade Thornett's internationalism can be neatly illustrated if we apply his method to Britain itself. It is a well established "capitalist club" designed to "organise the restructuring and concentration of capital to the advantage of the bosses". Should we call for the "dissolution" of Britain, as do Welsh and Scottish nationalists, or even a working class "withdrawal from it"? The suggestion is simply too stupid.

Interestingly before the October Revolution of 1917 Lenin and the Bolsheviks confronted similar manifestations of national socialism. The tsarist empire was a vast prison house of nations. While fighting for national self-determination up to and including the right to secession, the overriding, central strategy aimed at the highest and most extensive workers' unity throughout the tsarist empire - in order to overthrow the tsarist empire.

Unwittingly comrade Thornett places himself outside the international communist tradition. A tradition represented by his claimed mentors Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. Unflattering though it is, comrade Thornett stands in the camp of Joseph Pilsudski and his Polish Socialist Party. Formed in 1892 it adopted a national socialist programme for the reconstitution of an independent Poland out of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empire (which between them all but partitioned it out of existence at the 1815 Congress of Vienna). Rosa Luxemburg and Julian Marchlewski split with the PSP in 1893 over this perspective. Objective conditions, they rightly said, demanded the unity of workers - Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Georgians, Latts, etc, against tsarism.

In defence of the past, in particular the welfare state and the post-World War II social democratic settlement, comrade Thornett presents a programme that would at best weaken the EU. It would, however, also severely weaken the European working class movement if its strongest detachment forced upon their capitalists a withdrawal - a road that would lead not to a national socialist paradise but the hell of increased national exploitation and eventually national counterrevolution.

Marxism does not look fondly upon an anti-working class past (the welfare state) or seek to preserve the status quo. Our programme emphasises the massive advantages of the workers being organised into the largest, most centralised states. All the better to make revolution and begin the advance to communism. The working class can only but suffer one cruel defeat after another if it confines itself to defence. Communists stand for the politics of the offensive. Hence we say, to the extent that the EU becomes a superstate, so must the advanced part of the working class organise itself into a single revolutionary party to overthrow it.

The EU is undoubtedly a reactionary, anti-working class institution. Amongst consenting Marxists that

hardly needs proving with statistics concerning spending limits and welfare cuts. The real question is what attitude we adopt to it. The CPGB advocates consistent democracy. Concretely that means fighting for the maximum democracy in the EU: eg, abolition of the council of ministers and the unelected commissioners, a constituent assembly, an armed working class and substantive equality for all citizens. Without such an approach talk of socialism in Britain or a socialist Europe is but empty chatter.

As to the euro versus the pound sterling referendum we refuse to take sides. Essentially the 'yes' camp argues that workers will be better off if we are exploited by European capital; the 'no' campaign with equal cynicism says we will be better off if we are exploited by British capitalists.

Our approach is to stress working class independence and the communist horizon. We can draw useful lessons from the writings of Marx and Engels on the bitter contest between free trade and protectionism in their day. In June 1847 Engels wrote in the *Deutsche-Brüsseler Zeitung* that, whichever system "held sway", the "worker will receive no bigger wage for his labour than will suffice for his scantiest maintenance". Nevertheless in spite of the subjective intentions of the bourgeoisie free trade tended to clear the way for the "last decisive battle" between the "propertied and the propertyless, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat" (*MECW* Vol 6, Moscow 1976, p94).

Marx reasoned along exactly the same lines in the second half of September 1847, and for flavour added a touch of irony:

"If they [the protectionists] speak consciously about the working class, then they summarise their philanthropy in the following words: it is better to be exploited by one's fellow-countrymen than by foreigners."

"I do not think the working class will for ever be satisfied with this solution, which, it must be confessed, is indeed very patriotic, but nonetheless a little too ascetic and spiritual for people whose only occupation consists in the production of riches, of material wealth."

"But the protectionists will say: 'So when all is said and done we at least preserve the present state of society. Good or bad, we guarantee the labourer work of his hands, and prevent his being thrown on to the street by foreign competition.' I shall not dispute this statement; I accept it. The preservation, the conservation of the present state of affairs is accordingly the best result the protectionists can achieve in the most favourable circumstances. Good, but the problem for the working class is not to preserve the present state of affairs, but to transform it into its opposite."

"The protectionists have one last refuge. They say that their system makes no claim to be a means of social reform, but that it is nonetheless necessary to begin with social reforms in one's own country, before one embarks on economic reforms internationally. After the protective system has first been reactionary, then conservative, it finally becomes conservative-progressive. It will suffice to point out the contradiction lurking in this theory, which at first sight appears to have something seductive, practical and rational to it. A strange

contradiction! The system of protective tariffs places in the hands of capital of one country the weapons which enable it to defy the capital of other countries; it increases the strength of this capital in opposition to foreign capital and at the same time it deludes itself that the very same means will make that same capital small and weak in opposition to the working class. In the last analysis that would mean appealing to the philanthropy of capital, as though capital as such could be a philanthropist. In general, social reforms can never be brought about by the weakness of the strong; they must be brought about by the strength of the weak" (*MECW* Vol 6, Moscow 1976, pp280-1).

A short while later Marx received a request to address the free trade congress at Brussels. After paraphrasing the above argument in his, non-delivered, speech, he made the following telling point - as reported by *The Northern Star's* German correspondent (Engels) - "We are for free trade, because by free trade all economical laws, with their most astounding contradictions, will act upon a larger scale, upon a greater extent of territory, upon the territory of the whole earth; and because from the uniting of all these contradictions into a single group, where they stand face to face, will result the struggle which will itself eventuate the emancipation of the proletariat" (*MECW* Vol 6, Moscow 1976, p290).

The same message was propounded before the Brussels Democratic Association at a public meeting in January 1848. After attacking the hypocrisy of free traders in Britain - Bowring, Bright and co - Marx concluded with these words:

"Do not imagine, gentlemen, that in criticising freedom of commerce we have the least intention of defending protection.

"One may be opposed to constitutionalism without being in favour of absolutism.

"Moreover, the protective system is nothing but a means of establishing manufacture upon a large scale in any given country: that is to say, of making it dependent upon the market of the world; and from the moment its dependence upon the market of the world is established, there is more or less dependence upon free trade too. Besides this, the protective system helps to develop free competition within a nation. Hence we see that in countries where the bourgeoisie is beginning to make itself felt as a class, in Germany for example, it makes great efforts to obtain protective duties. They serve the bourgeois as weapons against feudalism and absolute monarchy, as a means for the concentration of its powers for the realisation of free trade within the country.

"But, generally speaking, the protective system in these days is conservative, while the free trade system works destructively. It breaks up old nationalities and carries antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the uttermost point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. In this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, I am in favour of free trade" (*MECW* Vol 6, Moscow 1976, p465).

In the same spirit we can conclude that European integration and the euro objectively unite the working class on a larger scale and across a huge territory and thus prepares the "struggle which will itself eventuate the emancipation of the proletariat". In this revolutionary sense alone, we in the CPGB are in favour of the EU ●

Jack Conrad

The right to think

Democratic questions sometimes arise in unexpected contexts. On Monday of this week, an appeal by sex video distributors was upheld against the British Board of Film Classification, a decision with considerable ramifications.

For the last 15 years, the BBFC has had responsibility for the legally binding classification of retail and rental videos in the UK, ever since the 'video nasty' scare of the early 1980s; it operates as an arms-length state agency for this purpose. In that time, BBFC management policy has been based on the assumed fecklessness of parents - working class parents in particular - in not policing their children's viewing of videos satisfactorily. *In loco parentis*, therefore, the BBFC has had to the job in their stead.

An amendment to the recent Criminal Justice Act permitted the BBFC to make its 'parental' role more codified, with a test of suitability for viewing in the home put in place. The exact nature of this test and the considerations to be used by the board day to day in its further restriction of videos - whether by raising their category *vis-à-vis* theatrical exhibition (ie, the film version shown in cinemas) or calling for cuts for the video version of works - was left largely to the BBFC. Although David Alton's attempt to dumb down all available video to the PG level through amendments to the CJA was defeated, the censorious constituency of which he is part has clearly been noted by the BBFC.

However, two soft porn video distribution companies, Sheptonhurst and Prime Time, were dissatisfied with the treatment their product received at the hands of the BBFC and decided to appeal against its decisions. Legislation giving the BBFC its role over videos also includes an appeal procedure, via a video appeals committee. Although Sheptonhurst and Prime Time expect their product to be available only through registered sex shops under the BBFC's 'R18' category for such material, they were not prepared to accept arguably damaging cuts demanded by the BBFC which were allegedly to protect children who might nevertheless see it.

Despite the fact that a majority of households in the UK contain no children, the BBFC has persisted in its mantra that it has a role in protecting children who might otherwise see material deemed unsuitable for them; and, since parents are perceived as incapable or unwilling to do it, the BBFC arrogates the job to itself. Its president Andreas Whittam Smith and general secretary Robin Duval, have been determined to continue with this policy until now. The video appeals committee thinks otherwise.

In its judgement, the VAC (by a majority of four to one) accepted "the argument that we do not, in general, prevent adults having access to material just because it might be harmful to children if it fell into their hands. We might have taken a different view if there was evidence that the effects were affecting more than a small minority of children or were devastating if this did happen." Clearly, the devastation was felt by the BBFC's honchos, who issued a press release immediately the result was public, in which they cavilled: "Since the seven videos were clearly in breach of the board's published classification guidelines for 'R18', the VAC decision also has serious implications for those guidelines ... In the light of the video appeal committee's decision, the board is considering how it should now proceed."

The implications are important and potentially wide-ranging. No doubt

.....
" ... this throws the BBFC's previous stance out of the window and downgrades whatever moral authority it might have sought"
.....

the competition from satellite television on video distribution is having its effect. But, be that as it may, the current restrictions on what we can buy or rent from video stores has been shown by this successful appeal to be based on no generally agreed consensus even amongst those charged with oversight of our viewing.

This decision by the VAC opens up the whole question of state censorship once again. It is not only a question of the pornographic 'R18' material, available only in sex shops, but of the audiences for '12', '15', and '18' category videos. Video works,

mainstream or experimental, have been treated harshly by the BBFC, which operates the most stringent video classification system in Europe, apart from Ireland. The BBFC often upgrades cinema film categories (eg '15' films raised to '18' when transferred to video), precisely using the 'suitability for home viewing' test that this appeal failed to accept as legitimate. Quite apart from cuts to 'R18' material, adult, '18' category mainstream films are cut to save us from ourselves. Young people of 16 and 17, of course, are not legally able to buy or rent '18' videos (let alone 'R18' material, despite being able legally to carry out the sex acts most depict), even if married or living independently of their parents. Similar concerns apply to restrictions that the BBFC applies to what those below 15 are allowed to rent or buy, whatever their parents' views. The appeal decision throws the BBFC's previous stance out of the window and downgrades whatever moral authority it might have sought.

This decision by the VAC raises questions about the purpose of the legally enforced classification system: whether it is designed to protect minors, as its defenders claim; or whether it exists to carry the state's authority into the cultural sphere - with the object of extending its control over what we are allowed to think ●

Jim Gilbert

System failure

Wachowski Brothers *The Matrix*
USA 1999, general release

This is a mainstream Hollywood film. This is no proof of quality of course, though 'arthouse' or 'intellectual' films are not necessarily better. Like many of the mass forms of entertainment, however, it has food for the mind as well as for the inner schoolboy/girl.

Here are the basics: Mr Anderson (Keanu Reeves) is a humble computer software employee who is arrested one day by agent Smith (Hugo Weaving) and his FBI-like organisation. Anderson is told that he is leading a double life: by day he is an office worker, but at night he is engaging in virtually every computer crime in the book. In particular, he has tried to contact Orpheus (Larry Fishburne), described by Smith as a "terrorist". After Anderson gives Smith the finger in response to the agent's call upon him to turn informer, a bug is planted on him in a nightmarish scene. Anderson then wakes up - apparently it was only a nightmare.

Afterwards, Anderson is contacted by Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) who takes him to see Orpheus after disposing of the bug. Orpheus offers him a choice of pills: if he takes a blue pill, he will be able to go back to his old life. If he takes the red pill, the painful truth will be revealed to him. Anderson, now

renamed Neo, takes the red pill. (Incidentally, the choice of colour might be significant.)

He then learns that humanity is being used as battery packs by a race of machines who have conquered them. They are not allowed to learn of their slavery, however, because the machines have built a vast computer programme called the Matrix which constructs a false reality for humans to 'live'. Orpheus leads a small group of humans who are trying to fight the Matrix and who are constantly in danger of being hunted down and destroyed.

To reveal more would do a disservice - however, it is clear to me that the film can be interpreted as a parable of false consciousness. It would be wrong to paint the film too red, but the Wachowski brothers made some attempt at social criticism in their earlier film *Bound* (1997). The two main characters in that film are women who rip off the mafia - the first woman (Jennifer Tilly) is the mistress of a mafioso who rebels against him and takes up with Corky (Gina Gershon), an ex-con who had been jailed for 'wealth redistribution'.

Marxists should enjoy *The Matrix*. Look forward to 'System Failure'! ●

James Robertson

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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Yeltsin's last throw

Few things in Russia are as they seem. First, constitutional democracy is a fig-leaf for autocratic rule by a sclerotic and unstable president. The levers of power are manipulated not by elected politicians, but by a coterie of thieves and swindlers at the court of Tsar Boris. Russia has only one mass political party - the Communist Party of the Russian Federation; 'communist' only in name: in truth the voice of a nauseating red-brown national chauvinism that, under the cover of "anti-Zionism", grotesquely blames international Jewry for the plight of Russia.

The other main political forces in Russia consist not of organised parties, but of shifting movements and coalitions, two of which stand out: the Fatherland movement of Yury Luzhkov, mayor of Moscow, and the All Russia front of regional governors. The merger of these two groups into a potentially powerful bloc capable of capturing both the government and the presidency is what lies at the heart of the present crisis.

Secondly, economic 'reform' has led not to the restoration of a capitalist market economy, but has instead produced a primitive and freakish form of capital accumulation, characterised by plunder, fraud, parasitism and reckless self-enrichment on the part of a narrow stratum of elite business and financial oligarchs. The supposed economic recovery of the last 12 months is for the most part an illusion created by a massive devaluation of the rouble. Little, if anything, has changed since the dark days of August 1998, when Russia stood on the brink of an economic and political abyss, and when the *Financial Times* wrote that "only a miracle" could save Russia (August 27 1998). Chronic political instability and an economic decline that can only be described as catastrophic are the reality.

It is against this background that we must assess the latest heightening of political tension caused by the sudden dismissal of Sergei Vadimovich Stepashin from the post of prime minister, an office he held for just 82 days, and the appointment of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin as Russia's fifth premier in only 17 months. Writing in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Stepashin claimed: "They threw me out because I am not for sale," and that his removal was brought about by his refusal to "service the interests of a certain group" (August 13). There is undoubtedly much truth in this allegation.

The "group" in question is, of course, the so-called 'family' of Yeltsin: courtiers and apparatchiks headed by his daughter Tatyana Dyachenko, for whom the prospect of presidential elections in 10 months time poses an acute dilemma of self-preservation. For these people, failure to consolidate support around a Yeltsinite candidate will mean not just political defeat, but the real prospect of criminal proceedings. Small won-



Sclerotic and unstable

der, therefore, that Stepashin's credible refusal to put a stop to investigations of Kremlin corruption played a major part in his downfall. Equally disastrous, from the Yeltsinite point of view, was Stepashin's failure to use his prime ministerial authority and patronage in order to stem the tide of defections by regional governors from Yeltsin's camp to that of Luzhkov. The newly formed All Russia is My Fatherland bloc represents a powerful focus of opposition and a credible alternative, especially now that it has secured the support of Yevgeny Primakov, the popular prime minister whom Stepashin replaced in May this year.

Hence, for the Yeltsinites, the ejection of Stepashin became a political necessity. His replacement by Putin represents Yeltsin's last throw of the dice in an attempt to secure a stable 'succession' and protect himself and his entourage from the consequences of their criminal misrule.

Attention has rightly been drawn to the fact that Putin (like his two immediate predecessors) has a background in the security organs. For the last year he has been head of the Federal Security Service (FSB), Russia's internal secret police, whose support the Yeltsinites rightly regard as critical to their chances of survival. Putin's background in intelligence is of crucial significance so far as the Yeltsinites are concerned: he knows (literally in some cases) where the bodies are buried and it is no coincidence that one of his last acts as head of the FSB was to instigate investigations into the business activities of Yury Luzhkov's wife.

Perhaps more important is the fact that for the last three years Putin has worked at the heart of the Kremlin administration, where he proved himself a staunch Yeltsin loyalist, particularly as a tough head of the Control

Department, coordinating the Kremlin's delicate relations with Russia's 89 regional governors. One of his first tasks will be to use his inside knowledge and networks of contacts in order to damage the cohesiveness of the Luzhkov oppositionist bloc.

It came as no surprise that the duma gave its approval to Putin's nomination as prime minister. The last thing the CPRF-dominated parliament wants in the run-up to the December 19 parliamentary elections is to find itself in confrontation with Yeltsin, for there is still a strong feeling that the president, if need be, will use his power to declare a state of emergency as a way of suspending 'democracy' and prolonging his tenure of office.

In his first speech to the duma Putin predictably sought to appease the CPRF and other nationalists by pledging to quash the current Islamic fundamentalist incursion into Dagestan, and to protect the rights of ethnic Russians in all former republics of the USSR: "Russia's territorial integrity cannot be an object of discussion, much less bargaining or blackmail" (*The Independent* August 17). It would appear, rather pathetically, that the Kremlin counterparts of Millbank are intent on packaging Putin as a new Yury Andropov, at least that is the impression which they presumably sought to create by having him place repeated emphasis on the need for "more discipline". On the economy, Putin had little to say, except that he intends to continue the process of reform (whatever that may mean) and that the government must do more to protect the poor from the consequences of devaluation.

If we turn, with some relief, from the Byzantine power struggles of current Russian politics to the economy, we find a picture of unrelieved gloom, indeed an impending collapse.

In 1997 GNP was a little over half

the 1989 figure. Industrial production was down by 52%, agricultural production by 36%. Since the Yeltsin counterrevolution there has been a steep decline in investment as a proportion of GNP: in 1991 it was 23%, in 1997 a mere 8%, and still falling. Means of production are ageing rapidly: in 1995 only 10% of industrial plant was less than five years old.

It is, however, in the sphere of agriculture where the situation is most acute, with declines almost commensurate with those experienced during the 1930s campaign of collectivisation. In the period from 1990 to 1996 we find the following figures: grain down 40%; eggs down 34%; cows down 21%; beef cattle down 41%; sheep and goats down 59%; pigs down 49% (statistics derived from research published in *International Socialism* No81, winter 1998-99). The only area of foodstuff production that has shown any increase is potatoes, no longer simply a staple food, but practically the only means of survival for the mass of the population, leaving aside what they can scrape together from their private plots and dacha gardens.

A historical comparison is telling: whereas at the end of the 1918-21 civil war in Russia industrial and agricultural production dropped by 15% and 60% respectively from 1913 levels, by 1926, eight years after the start of the civil war, most 1913 levels had been regained or surpassed. Contrast this with the fact that again eight years after the implosion of the USSR there is still no sign of revival.

Even the leader writers of the house journal of international capitalism, while talking up prospects for "positive output growth this year", acknowledge that this resurgence in the Russian economy is part illusory, part fortuitous: the 70% devaluation of the rouble over the last year has obviously made Russian exports competitive and the doubling of the oil price has served - for the time being - to rescue Russia from financial collapse (*Financial Times* August 17). Of course, the same commentators omit to mention the effect of devaluation on the already severely depressed living standards of Russian workers, millions of whom now live in abject poverty.

On the financial front the picture is equally ominous. Only the latest \$4.5 billion IMF loan has enabled Russia to escape another default on debt repayment that could have triggered a systemic banking crisis. Finally the western capitalists have learned their lesson, so that not one cent of the money will actually go to Russia and be swallowed up in the voracious bellies of the oligarchy. Instead, the funds will merely be used to pay off some small portion of existing loans. As the *Financial Times* concedes, the export of capital out of Russia continues unabated: in the five years from 1993 some \$136 billion found its way abroad - much of it was plunder from privatisation racketeering or money si-

phoned off from earlier IMF and World Bank aid programmes by the financial oligarchs and their placemen in the Yeltsin regime. This capital has to a large extent been invested in foreign stock markets, used to buy real estate, hoarded in foreign bank accounts or squandered on consumption by the ruling elite. In the meantime, as the paper again acknowledges, "much of the [Russian] banking system is bankrupt" (August 17 and August 10).

One is left to wonder in amazement, given the circumstances, how any informed commentator can claim that post-Soviet Russia is a capitalist state, when some 75% of all exchange takes place in the form of barter, and when *real* wage labour and anything resembling authentic capital accumulation through production represent a negligible percentage of the economy. As Hillel Ticktin pointed out in his lecture to our Communist University '99, the course of events in post-Soviet Russia represents "a world historical failure of capitalism".

What of the Russian working class? There is at present no viable revolutionary party capable of articulating the interests of the Russian proletariat. Isolated strikes break out and are often brutally repressed, including by regional and local authorities under the control of the CPRF. Attempts at forging an all-Russian congress of strike committees are still embryonic and tend to founder because of ideological arguments and simple lack of financial support. Anecdotal evidence suggests a universal cynicism towards all politicians and an understandable preoccupation with the problem of survival against the odds.

It is hardly surprising, given the conditions under which they are condemned to live, that many Russians look with fond nostalgia to the 'golden age' of the Soviet past. Early this month, an opinion poll indicated that 85% of Russians regretted the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the highest figure since its collapse in 1991. In another poll, Russians said that not Lenin, not even Stalin, but Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1966-82, was the best Kremlin leader of the 20th century (*The Times* August 2). A fascinating test of the political strength of such nostalgia will come next month, when Leonid Ilyich's grandson, Andrei Brezhnev, leader of one of the many splinter groups from the CPSU, contests the post of governor of Sverdlovsk.

Clearly, a return to the past is not and can never be the answer to the problems of the Russian working class. Sooner rather than later, they will realise that the only real answer is to take power into their own hands, that only the working class can emancipate itself from its slavery. In that lies our ultimate optimism that Russia has a truly revolutionary, socialist and democratic future. ●

Michael Malkin