



Quake hits workers

Last week's earthquake hit the industrial heartland of Turkey - the most urbanised part of the country. An important section of the working class, together with poor migrants from the countryside, who came looking for employment, live in the affected region.

One fifth of the entire population is concentrated here. Practically the whole auto industry, great portions of the petrochemical industry and durable consumer goods production and many other branches are located in this region. Levels of trade union organisation are highest.

This region played no small part in the magnificent struggle to throw off the state-controlled, 'yellow' trade unions in the 60s and 70s. It was in the forefront of establishing independent, left-oriented trade unions and their confederation, DISK (Revolutionary Trade Unions Confederation). Here too the communist movement has traditionally been highly developed organisationally.

One of the most important US spying and monitoring centres was based in the area, before it was forced out of the country following a determined struggle of the left and the peace movement (changing technology played a role too).

At least 35,000 are dead and almost the same number seriously injured. Thousands of houses collapsed, 250,000 people became homeless, the basic services were crippled and the infrastructure is in chaos. Many factories were damaged to such an extent that they will have to be demolished.

The narrow coastal strip on the southern shores of the Bay of Izmit on the Marmara Sea was a popular resort for the Istanbul middle class. However, as well as homes for retired civil servants, it also contained flats built by cooperatives financed by the savings of workers from state enterprises. Most of them lie in ruins. In one of them, the former president of the Turk-Is, the largest and oldest trade union confederation, and his family died.

In a country where there has been a serious earthquake almost every second year, this was the first in the recent period to strike at such an important urbanised and industrialised area. Apart from the very high number of deaths and huge destruction, it will cripple the economy and impact on the whole of society for years to come.

The earthquake has exposed contradictory aspects of the nature of Turkey as a medium-developed capitalist country. It displayed all the shortcomings and inadequacies related to underdevelopment.

Every schoolchild in Turkey knows that the country is situated on the intersection of geological fault lines, where earthquakes are liable to occur. Those involved in the building trade know that there are certain regulations that must be followed in order to ensure earthquake-resistant structures. There are many state and municipal employees whose statutory duty is to check buildings from planning to construction and to ensure implementation. As the saying goes, it is the buildings, not the earthquakes, that are dangerous.

In fact sub-standard housing kills many poor and low-income families every year. In a period of massive internal migration to the cities the building contractors were king. Hand in hand with politicians at local and national level, they agreed regional or city plans and rapidly constructed hundreds of high-rise buildings. Not only did they get rich; they oiled the wheels of the political parties. This went on in every city, along with illegal housing, the so-called *gecekond* ('built overnight') slum areas. No public authority controlled or regulated them.

Get-rich-quick merchants also won contracts for public buildings and became notorious for their sub-standard construction and plundering of state resources. Consequently after the earthquake there was hardly a public building left standing. Even military buildings, which were supposedly subjected to better quality

control, collapsed. The jewel in the crown - the motorway network around Istanbul - was wrecked. Many viaducts and bridges fell to the ground, preventing road transportation. Public telecom company buildings also crumbled, bringing down the entire telecommunication network.

You need look no further than the current president of Turkey, Suleyman Demirel. Before he entered politics he was a civil engineering contractor. One of the buildings he was responsible for was a hospital in one of the eastern provinces. It collapsed years ago in an earlier earthquake, killing many and depriving the survivors of basic medical assistance. Of course nobody asked any questions or held him responsible.

However, based on this and similar primitive accumulation, finance capital grew and became dominant in Turkey. Parallel to this some contractors became 'developers' with international clout. They are now building all around the Middle East, Africa and the countries of the former Soviet Union.

The cooperation of finance capital with transnational companies and its integration with global finance capital forced modernisation on certain aspects of the state. In the areas where industrial development took place, working class struggle forced an improvement in living conditions. Compared to other parts of Turkey, these areas were highly developed and state organisation became more sophisticated.

Therefore, after the initial shock of the earthquake, the dynamic aspects of the state pulled the creaking old machinery into action. Here better organisation and the ability to employ substantial resources, not available to most of the underdeveloped world, became evident.

The availability of doctors and medicine, use of heavy construction machinery, manpower, rapid restoration of power, communication and transportation - these were indicators of the advanced side of medium-level development.

The promotion of primitive accumulation and capitalist development was one of the most important aspects of the modern Turkish state's public image. Any opposition to this plunder was condemned as an attack on the free market economy and crushed by state attacks on public associations, political parties and trade unions.

Another important aspect of the state was its all-pervasive nature, which does not allow any public or civil initiative apart from capitalist enterprise. This created a myth of a state benevolently granting favours and providing services to an appreciative population.

As the state became the most important provider of employment, basic services and social facilities, and as it controlled finance and resources, excluding the ordinary working people from decision-making, many came to expect it to solve all problems.

The earthquake shattered such illusions. For those who faced extreme danger, those who attempted with few resources to rescue their loved ones from the rubble, it became obvious - if only fleetingly - that the main purpose of this state is to oppress.

The army was not sent to help civilians until it had put its own house in order: that is, putting in place preparations to quell any rebellion from the disgusted population. About 50,000 troops were eventually sent into the quake zone, and there were calls for the declaration of a state of emergency or martial law. The large but creaking state machinery, unable to act quickly and decisively (unless of course it is faced by a political emergency caused by working class revolt), only started to function after the third day in assisting the public.

However, the nature of the strange alliance in the shaky coalition government did not make things easy. For example, the fascist minister of health committed every possible stupidity, such as attempting to refuse medical help and blood donations from Armenia and Greece as they do not fit into his ideal of pure Turkish blood.

He also asked many foreign search and rescue teams to leave too early. However, when the US navy's hospital ships arrived a week after the quake, he became like a lapdog.

An old song of the working class of Turkey says: "Eyes that look at fire long enough will not cry." The day-to-day existence of workers in Turkey is a life and death struggle. Now our class must try to recover from this death and destruction, as it has in the past from the onslaught of the class enemy.

It has lost many experienced trade unionists, local leaders and communists this time. However, the working class will look positively to the future. It will rebuild its livelihood despite the prospect of unemployment and homelessness. It cannot expect anything positive from the state. It will develop its informal self-help organisations. They need concrete international solidarity.

But we must keep in mind that the Turkish state does not even allow the independent collection of donations for workers. In Turkey to collect donations needs permission from the council of ministers! They force all international aid to pass through them.

It is vital that European communists do not fall into the liberal 'aid trap'. Any aid through the state or its non-governmental channels will not reach those for whom it is intended: the working class and urban poor, now devastated and homeless. This 'aid' will replenish the coffers of the state and line the pockets of contractors and financiers who have already planned the next phases of development for the region.

European communists must strive to compel the trade union movement to act to provide assistance directly to their respective counterparts in Turkey.

Not a penny from working class collections should be passed to the Turkish state. All efforts must be based on direct solidarity with the workers and their unions ●

Aziz Demir

Ireland and the British-Irish

Draft discussion theses presented by Jack Conrad

1. The majority of protestants in Northern Ireland have throughout the 20th century constituted a labour aristocracy (a politico-economic category). They sought to preserve meagre privileges at the expense of catholics, on the one hand by initiating and buttressing sectarian discrimination and on the other by appealing to the Northern Ireland and British states. However, protestants are not simply a labour aristocracy. There is an undeniable historically established religious, ethnic and cultural dimension.

2. The British-Irish have inhabited what is now Northern Ireland since the 17th century. They were planted - from England, but mainly Scotland - to pacify the most rebellious parts of Ireland and hence "assure it to the crown". Inevitably the settlers quickly diverged from their origins and formed another - hybrid - Irish identity. They stopped being Scottish or English. Yet in general they kept themselves against and apart from the Irish catholic majority. The million-strong British-Irish are therefore an historically constituted and distinct community of people.

3. The British-Irish were deliberately given special privileges over and against the native Irish. The catholic majority was subject to constant persecution as catholics and denied elementary rights. As a result the Irish national question and British domination both took the form of religion. This has undergone constant change. The politics of the Cromwellian plantations are not those of modern Paisleyism. Nor are the politics of the Land League those of Sinn Féin.

4. In 17th century Ireland British-Irish protestantism represented not a progressive alternative to catholic obscurantism, but British colonial domination. Nevertheless historically there is a progressive side to the protestant tradition in Ireland. Inspired by the ideals of revolutionary democracy, protestants like Theobald Wolfe Tone and Feargus O'Connor fought against British domination and for Irish freedom. There have been more recent manifestations of protestant-catholic unity, but due to the unresolved national question they proved fleeting: eg, the 1932 unemployed struggle in Belfast and the early stages of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s.

5. Protestant loyalism is fundamentally not loyalism to Britain and the British crown. It is loyalism to the privileges of the protestants. In 1912-14 Edward Carson threatened to seek an alliance with Germany if the Liberals granted home rule to Ireland. Similar warnings issued forth from other loyalist leaders. In 1945 the Northern Ireland cabinet - needlessly worried by the newly elected Labour government and its social democratic promises - discussed a constitutional break with Britain. In 1974 the Ulster Workers' Council general strike wrecked British government plans for a Northern Ireland settlement. In 1980 its main leader, Andy Tyrrie, advocated Ulster independence.

6. Communists do not invent or exacerbate national or ethnic questions. Our aim is to overcome such conflicts and antagonisms according to the principles of consistent

democracy so as to bring forward and heighten the class struggle. For us the key practical task is not defining nations against a lifeless check list. The British-Irish do not constitute a nation according to strict scientific criteria. But neither are they merely a religion or a population of rootless colonialists who, by implication, should return from whence they came. The British-Irish have a common history, territory and culture. That calls for a definite political solution.

7. There can be no right of present-day Northern Ireland to self-determination. The six-county statelet was founded in 1921 on the cynical basis of permanently institutionalising the oppression of the catholic-nationalist minority. We do not, and cannot, support the right of the British-Irish majority in the north to oppress the catholic-nationalist minority.

8. The British-Irish do not constitute a single reactionary mass. They are divided - above all by class. The task of communists is to split British-Irish workers from their misleaders and win them to the side of revolution and communism. There are no irredeemably reactionary peoples who should be denied rights. Such ideas are alien to the spirit of Marxism and human liberation.

9. We note that the newly-founded Soviet Republic included a Don Republic. The Soviet Republic was established as a "voluntary union of the peoples of Russia" - something Lenin thought "should fully reassure the Cossacks" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 36, Moscow 1977, p472). The 1st Congress of the Soviets of the Don Republic, held over April 9-12 1918, "regarded the Don Republic as part of the RSFSR" and declared the "working Soviet power" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 42, Moscow 1977, p509n). The Cossacks were historically a privileged caste who provided the counterrevolutionary terror troops of tsarism.

10. The CPGB is for the immediate abolition of the United Kingdom, not expelling Northern Ireland from the union. We are for the immediate - ie, unconditional - withdrawal of the British state and British troops from Northern Ireland. The CPGB fights for a federal republic in Britain of England, Scotland and Wales and a united Ireland.

11. In a united Ireland communists are for the maximisation of democracy and therefore working class leadership. There must be no discrimination against protestants. They must be at liberty to practice their religion and encouraged to freely develop the progressive side of their culture. Concurrently there must be the right to make atheistic propaganda. Communists are for secularism and against denominational schools, colleges and other such institutions.

12. We note that in the early 1970s Sinn Féin adopted a programme, *Eire Nua*, which advocated a "federal Ireland". This ignored the living cultural/ethnic divisions in contemporary Ireland, but sought to revive the "four historic provinces" - Connacht, Munster, Leinster and a nine-county Ulster. This singularly fails to address the objective British-Irish question in a democratic manner.

13. In general communists are for the organisation of the working

class in the biggest, most centralised states. That by no means contradicts far-reaching measures of local autonomy. As a transitional measure, however, we are prepared to accept or advocate federalism as a step towards the unity of people, in particular the unity of the working class.

14. In order to overcome present-day divisions in Ireland it is necessary to seriously address the British-Irish question and the legitimate fears of the protestant community. This can only be done through consistent democracy. A united Ireland established through a "voluntary union" of its peoples should "fully reassure" the British-Irish.

15. Communists must include in their programme for Ireland the demand for a federal solution whereby the area containing a clear British-Irish majority has the right of self-determination up to and including secession. This area forms a geographically coherent whole and includes county Antrim, north Tyrone, south Derry, north Armagh and north Down: ie, one county and four half-counties (there are catholic majorities in Fermanagh, south Tyrone, south Armagh, north Derry and south Down: ie, again one county and four half-counties). West Belfast also has 100,000 catholic-nationalists. In a united Ireland a federal solution would require new federal borders.

16. We note that in February 1918 Lenin and Stalin, the commissar for nationalities, argued that the "geographical boundaries" of the Don Republic "must be fixed by agreement with the population of the neighbouring zone and the autonomous republic of the Donets Basin" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 36, Moscow 1977, p483). A similar approach ought to be adopted in Ireland when it comes to exact borders. Today we must concern ourselves with principles, not details.

17. There would, of course, still be a catholic-nationalist minority in the British-Irish part of the country. There would likewise be a British-Irish minority elsewhere in the Irish republic. We do not advocate a movement of population or ethnically 'pure' counties or half-counties. Whatever the religio-ethnic community, there must be full democratic rights for all citizens.

18. Are we for self-determination up to and including the right to secede for orangeism? No. Are we for such a right *vis-à-vis* Irish protestants. No. Orangeism is a deeply reactionary and sectarian movement. Protestantism in Northern Ireland is an ethno-politico-religious category.

19. There can be no right of secession for political movements or religions as such. Suggestions to the contrary have more in common with anarchism than Marxism. National rights have to be attached to a distinct, significant and historically established territorial dimension.

20. Communists support the right of a British-Irish one county - four half-counties entity in a united Irish republic to self-determination, but argue against exercising that right in favour of secession. We favour voluntary unity and the growing together of the two traditions in Ireland on the basis of a common struggle for international socialism and world communism ●

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

Dialogue

As an older comrade than many, who used to be in the original CPGB from the 1940s up to the 1970s, when the Party changed for the worse, leading to decline by the 1980s, I would like to put forward some communist views of mine, which you can debate or even agree on.

Firstly, your CPGB group spends too much time and energy dealing with fellow small sects/groups. If you are wanting to 'rebuild' the CPGB, then you must aim for recruiting new younger members from the student/unemployed class layer of society. Also the trade union movement hold important activists, whether shop stewards at branch level or a few national leaders, who can extend your leadership of the Party, and regain the lost credibility of the CPGB.

The CPGB still has to make contact with the fellow communist parties in Britain for 'communist unity'. The only way to unity in the future is to keep the avenues for communist dialogue open, even if nothing or very little is gained at the present.

John Logan
London

Right conclusion

In the latest (August 19) issue of your organ Jack Conrad writes: "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?"

And fails to draw the right conclusions. The answer to the above is of course, yes: if we are going to be logically consistent, then socialists should oppose all capitalist clubs - even Welsh or Scottish ones.

Workers have no country. Workers of the world, unite!

Bill Martin
SPGB

Unfair

I was interested to read the section of Mary Godwin's article last week dealing with the debate with the IBT on the war in the Balkans. Firstly, I am not a member of the IBT and have no intention of becoming a member of their group in the future. I also have problems with their line on the war. However, I felt the article concerning the debate was unfair.

Mary does not mention the important debate that took place on the character of the KLA. The position of the CPGB comrades in the debate was that the KLA was a 'progressive' and 'democratic' force. What is 'progressive' about being the 'eyes and ears' of Nato? What is 'democratic' about the KLA? Its internal regime is based on manipulation and fear, with the 'disappearance' of Hoxhaite elements within the party (see Nick Braums, 'Kosova and the KLA' *What Next?* No13). One of its main military commanders is the man who helped orchestrate the cleansing of Serbs within Croatia.

It is therefore no surprise that hundreds of thousands of Serbs and Romany gypsies are fleeing Kosova and pensioners and children have been killed by 'progressive' and 'democratic' KLA supporters.

During the conflict the KLA was ostensibly fighting for self-determination but was in fact fighting for a Nato protectorate. Socialists should fight for a multi-ethnic socialist federation without Milosevic, Nato or the KLA. Only on the basis of breaking Serb nationalist illusions within the working class can Kosova be granted the self-determination it desires.

Ian Hamilton
Cambridgeshire

Chemical diet

As legendary American writer and merry prankster Ken Kesey honked out 'Home on the range' on a harmonica at a late 60s anti-Vietnam war mass meeting, between chords, he told the leftwing crowd, "You're playing their game ... just turn your back and say fuck it." Drug culture was making its first inroads into politics.

The problems faced by the left in this country at present are more deeply rooted than by a bourgeoisification of working class consciousness, a lack of solidarity or a passive trade union bureaucracy.

Eg, 1991 could have been a potentially revolutionary year in Britain: after the poll tax riots in London in 1990, small pockets of rioting occurred in the west end of Newcastle, the Meadowell estate in North Shields, Bristol and even the heartlands of historic Oxford saw social disorder.

In the preceding years of the late 80s, pitched battles were fought on industrial estates in various towns, including Blackburn, with the local constabulary.

These were spontaneous events; there were no trade unions or party leaders to direct this discontent, no propaganda. This was Lenin's spontaneous working class action in progress.

"Rave was very anti-establishment. It was like the working classes coming through saying, 'This is our thing. You're not taking it off us.' We felt very militant about it" (DJ Storm *Altered states* Serpent's Tail, 1997).

But now the party is over. Its innocence is gone. The time has come in the cold light of these come-down years to face up to our responsibility to fight for a future worth living. A communist future.

J Tait
Lancashire

Support Iranian students

Reports from Iran suggest that the Islamic authorities are planning another bloodbath in the country's prisons. Recent comments by ayatollah Yazdi and other senior judiciary officials, and leader columnists in the newspapers linked to the security forces, leave little doubt that the regime is planning a large-scale execution of political prisoners, especially those arrested following recent students protests.

It is not the first time that religious despots in Iran have used mass execution of political prisoners to confront popular opposition. Indeed the atmosphere today is reminiscent of the weeks preceding the massacres of 1981-83 and again of 1988 after Khomeini submitted to a ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war. The students' protests of July, supported by other social groups, have challenged the legitimacy and authority of the regime at a level comparable with the defeat in the war with Iraq. It is not difficult to see the regime's urgent need to launch a bloodbath in order to assert its authority and to confront the spreading protest movement. However, given the current internal and international climate, serious efforts at stopping such a massacre are likely to be effective. Under these circumstances we can be optimistic that an urgent, united reaction will deter the Islamic regime from such a crime.

It is with this conviction that we express our solidarity with the democratic, anti-dictatorial movement of the Iranian people, evident in last July's student protest movement.

Please send your support by email to web@etehadchap.com

International campaign in defence of Iranian students
London

action

Livingstone and London Independent Labour

Communists and left splits

Within a couple of months the Labour Party's short list of candidates for next year's mayoral elections in London will be finalised. On current evidence, it seems probable that the Millbank machine will not allow Ken Livingstone's name to appear on the list. The question will then arise as to whether Livingstone, as he and his friends have darkly hinted, will go it alone and stand as the 'London Independent Labour' candidate, triggering his expulsion and possibly inaugurating a new nationwide leftwing project. In any event, it could well create a powerful focus for dissent among Labour activists.

For communists and revolutionary socialists in the capital and beyond, such a move would represent a significant qualitative development. Speculation along the lines of 'will he or won't he?' is an amusing diversion, but what should concern us now, as a matter of the first importance, is to orient ourselves to the possibility that an independent Livingstone candidacy could serve as the catalyst for a split in the Labour Party. Even though the programme and composition, the strategy and tactics, the disposition of political forces for and against such a formation cannot at present be determined with any accuracy, the CPGB has set about the task of defining our position on the principles involved.

Hence, the question was discussed at various times during our Communist University '99, particularly in the final session, when a presentation on Livingstone and the left initiated a lively and constructive debate. One visiting comrade from south Wales raised two questions of fundamental relevance to the CPGB's position.

In the first place, he suggested that, heedless of principle and desperate to escape the political wilderness, the CPGB was simply looking for a bandwagon on which to jump. He could not have been more wrong. Our approach to the matter is shaped by the strategic objectives which animate all our work: at all times - but especially in the current period of reaction, characterised by theoretical crisis among many groups on the left and by the atomisation and passivity of the working class - we support every initiative that offers the prospect of greater unity and cohesion of anti-Blairite forces, with the ultimate aim of creating a new mass workers' party; we grasp every opportunity to engage with leftwing activists (including those in the Labour Party) and with the class as a whole.

We do so on the basis that the *sine qua non* of all such efforts must be the greatest possible openness and democracy, including the elementary right to criticise the platforms adopted during the course of development. In this respect, the stance taken by some comrades at the recent 'relaunch London Socialist Alliance conference' on August 1 - an event specifically aimed at ultimately mounting a united left challenge in the London mayoral and assembly elections - should set the alarm bells ringing. Comrades Rob Hoveman (SWP) and Pete Brown (ILN) were adamant that gagging orders should take effect from the start - criticism in our press was "not on", as it constitutes "bickering" (*Weekly Worker* August 19). Evidently the SWP is still licking its wounds after the exposure of its theoretical poverty and political timidity over the June 10 European elections, when the mere prospect of Scargill's candidacy was enough to send it running for cover, and led to the disintegration of the last attempt to consolidate a united left alliance.

Secondly, the visiting comrade at CU '99 claimed that any putative Livingstone party would be an "SLP mark II", but, whereas Scargill was "the most significant working class politician since World War II", who had launched an attack on the whole

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capitalist system, Livingstone was just another opportunist and careerist, driven only by ambition and lacking any kind of coherent socialist programme. Again, we believe the comrade was mistaken, certainly so far as Scargill is concerned. There is no doubting the fact that he was a major figure in the trade union and working class movement. Nor would we deny the man's personal courage during the great miners' strike of 1984-5, though even during that historic battle he made some serious mistakes, as *The Leninist* - forerunner of the *Weekly Worker* - did not hesitate to point out at the time.

But, from the very inception of the Socialist Labour Party, Scargill the politician has been an unmitigated disaster. Locked into the undemocratic, reformist and economic politics of his upbringing in an opportunist-dominated Young Communist League, Scargill the would-be labour dictator ran the SLP as if it were his own private property. The consequences were predictable and, faced with the stinking corpse that constitutes the SLP today, we are left to wonder about what might have been. In comparison with Scargill, Livingstone appears astute. To begin with, he is far more intelligent and is an accomplished communicator, with the born populist's chameleon-like instinct that makes him capable of garnering support, not just from the left wing of social democracy represented by Labour Party activists disillusioned with Blair, but from a wide range of social forces.

Does this mean that we have any illusions in Livingstone, that we are blind to his cynicism and ambition? Certainly not, but to focus on these factors alone and ignore the objective potential of a mass, Livingstone-led split from Labour is to adopt a position that is essentially philistine

and doctrinaire - the sort of approach taken, for example, by comrades from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Readers may recall that earlier this year the *Weekly Worker* published an article by comrade Mark Osborn of the AWL, a polemic against Workers Fight, in which the AWL set out its reasons for rejecting any suggestion of giving support to Livingstone in the mayoral elections.

The comrade pointed out that Livingstone, though "superficially plausible, is not what he seems"; that his leftwing, radical socialist credentials are to a large extent illusory; that his record as leader of the GLC is mythological rather than substantial; that for a long period he had a questionable relationship with the WRP; and finally that he has a record of accusing political opponents like Sean Matgamna (and the CPGB for that matter) of being in the pay of the security services (*Weekly Worker* January 7).

This indictment contains much truth and more charges could be added, not least Livingstone's recent public support for Nato's bombing of Serbia - not, despite appearances, an obsequious attempt to demonstrate his loyalism to Blair, but an idiosyncratic position that he has held for some years. It is this, which, if reports are correct, has led the SWP to abandon its earlier enthusiastic backing for Livingstone's candidacy as mayor, though - as befits an organisation currently beset by profound internal tension and dissent at the highest level - the SWP has made no public statement on the question, choosing instead to keep its options open by dallying with comrade Nick Long's relaunch of the LSA election bloc.

Comrades will no doubt ask how the CPGB can contemplate giving even the most critical support to Livingstone in the event that he does break organisationally from Labour. It has to be said, in the first place, that the 'holier than thou', 'clean hands' approach to Livingstone taken by the AWL, for example, is incoherent and

contradictory. After all, back in May 1997 the same organisation, deluding itself about the supposed gains to be derived from a post-electoral 'crisis of expectations', was happy to tell the working class to vote for Blair's New Labour, including Ken Livingstone in Brent East. The same applies, for that matter, to the SWP and its consistent auto-Labourism. If there were a general election next year, as opposed to an election for a London mayor and a Greater London Authority, what position would the AWL and the SWP take towards the Labour Party?

The CPGB's approach is dictated neither by an opportunistic search for a potential 'bandwagon' on the one hand, nor by a dogmatic purism that is averse to having any truck with a dubious, leftish social democrat on the other. We focus instead on the genuine potential opened up by a possible split from Blair's Labour Party under the leadership of Livingstone: among the Labour Party's membership is a small army of leftwing activists, thousands of potential recruits for socialism, constituting the embryo of a mass political movement that could in time, through joint work and frank and open debate, be won over to revolutionary politics.

In such circumstances, can there be any doubt that it is the duty of communists and revolutionary socialists not just to engage with such a movement from outside, but to struggle within it? ●

Michael Malkin

Website

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

Fighting fund

Good news, bad news

After my absence from these pages last week I have good news and bad news. First the good: July's total exceeded my expectations with a last-minute flurry of gifts which took us over our £400 monthly target. Donations included £25 from BH and £20 from PI, taking our July total to £445. A fine achievement.

Now the bad news: our two-week summer break appears to have

caused many comrades to forget our need for regular cash. With less than a week to go money received is languishing at £228. So please, comrades, let's have a repeat of last month.

Special thanks this week to TH (£30), EC (£20) and PL (£10) ●

Robbie Rix

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

CPGB seminars

London: Sunday August 29, 5pm - 'Trotsky and the dictatorship of the proletariat', using Hal Draper's *The dictatorship of the proletariat from Marx to Lenin* as a study guide.

Sunday September 5, 5pm - 'Engels's theory of crisis', using Simon Clarke's *Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide. Call 0181-459 7146 for details.

Manchester: Monday September 6, 7.30 pm - 'Beyond capital', in the series on theories of crisis. E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.

Party wills

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

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.

Support Tameside careworkers

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

New recruit

Heather Downs and Peter Morton are pleased to announce the birth on August 7 of a little comrade - Nancy-Violet Jacqueline Downs. Congratulations!

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Could Steve Hedley

The decision in June 1999 of Steve Hedley to accept a full-time development officer's job with the building workers' union Ucatt must have marked the end of the campaign to force GTRM to reinstate him to his track maintenance job from which he was dismissed in July 1998.

To all intents and purposes the struggle ended on Monday August 3 at the height of a strike by over 100 maintenance workers when Hedley, RMT (Rail Maritime Transport) shop steward at Euston station and the RMT Harlesden branch secretary, preferred to rely on the bureaucracy of the RMT and its acolytes in 'the British left' rather than rank and file railworkers who he had already inspired to take action. By doing so Steve Hedley turned his back on his closest supporters and now he has clearly decided that 'if you can't beat them [the bureaucracy] then join them'.

Until July 1998 Steve Hedley was employed by GTRM (GEC-Tarmac Rail Maintenance) and had worked on the railway for 10 years. He was dismissed in the middle of a national pay dispute. One year later he was appointed to a full-time development officer's post in Ucatt. He is now a part of the trade union bureaucracy he once recognised as a barrier to workers' struggles: "Rank and file workers who are prepared to act independently of trade union bureaucracies can take on their employers and win" (S Hedley *A case for trade union rank and file resistance* Colin Roach Centre, 1995, p46).

It will be no surprise to anyone who has studied the history of the trade union movement that Steve Hedley has taken such a job. There are numerous examples of militants who have been critical of the trade union bureaucracy, but sooner or later become a part of it. As a result of their personal improvements in pay, working conditions and status they cut themselves off from the people they once represented. Steve Hedley had recognised this: "The history of so-called leftwingers being elected and then moving rightwards is such a long one that the policy of so-called broad lefts must finally be scrapped" (Harlesden RMT branch leaflet, 1995).

In Steve Hedley's case because of his sacking it could and probably will be argued that he has 'no other place to go'; or 'who else would give him a job?' Others will argue that he 'fought a good fight' and should not be blamed for looking after his personal interests. Certainly Steve Hedley has much greater standing than most people, but nevertheless he is not perfect and it is my view that he did have 'some other place to go'. It is the aim of this article to demonstrate that this was the case and that GTRM could have been forced to 'give him back his job'.

I argue this after having had the privilege of working with Steve Hedley between 1995 and 1998 with the aim of defending and improving the pay and working conditions of railworkers which, it was recognised, required raising political consciousness. I did this through our joint involvement in the Colin Roach Centre, based in Hackney. Despite the ongoing capitalist offensive continuing to destroy workers' pay, conditions and rights, it was still possible in this period to carry out activities which were incredibly successful. These helped to increase the self-confidence of some railworkers to challenge management's plans to restructure their

In July 1998 over 100 maintenance workers took strike action in defence of sacked RMT shop steward Steve Hedley. The strike was defeated and Hedley remained sacked. With trade union struggles at an all-time low and strike figures at the lowest level ever recorded, it would seem that, at the moment, the employers are 'too strong'. The case of Steve Hedley would appear to back such views. But did it? Mark Metcalf gives his opinion

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..... industry. Steve was the key man in this.

These actions included opposing arrogant managers, some of whom were quickly moved to different jobs, organising unofficial walk-outs in defence of threatened workers and secretly working with papers such as *The Mirror*, resulting in two major articles on rail track safety which forced debates in the House of Commons and statements from government ministers. There were also attempts made to establish a Railworkers Rank and File Group which floundered.

During the period 1995-98 the political profile of Steve Hedley himself was increased, giving him an important leadership role amongst railworkers, who would also have been aware of his expressed contempt for the RMT bureaucracy whose fear before the anti-trade union laws and the employers' powers can be demonstrated:

"If there's one thing that the recent catalogue of disasters have shown is that railworkers cannot rely on Aslef or RMT executives to fight the employers" (Harlesden RMT branch and Colin Roach Centre, joint leaflet, 1996).

As a result of the activities organised between 1995 and 1998 management clearly decided that Steve Hedley must be got rid of and there was a constant round of attacks on him for carrying out his functions as a shop steward and safety representative. All of these were defeated.

However, GTRM finally got its way when it sacked him on July 29 1998. The dismissal arose from an incident on the picket line at Euston station on July 2, when a contractor's van was driven at striking rail maintenance workers.

The picket was in support of a national pay dispute, taken after a ballot under the anti-trade union laws, and backed by the RMT. The fact that there was a strike at all cannot be solely attributed to Steve Hedley, as there were certainly major grievances amongst maintenance staff, but he

was a major driving force in getting action to take place. It would not be stretching the issue to argue that his speech at a special conference in Doncaster in March 1998 won over reluctant activists to strike action, which was to involve coming out for two, three or four days at selected times and dates.

On July 3 1998, a contractor picked out Steve as the person who had damaged a wing mirror on the van which had been driven at pickets the day before. The contractor described the person who broke the mirror as wearing a bomber jacket, faded blue jeans and brown boots. Steve Hedley was able to provide photographic evidence, in the form of a colour picture from the previous day's picket which had appeared in the *Newsline* daily paper. This showed him wearing a blue jumper, dark blue jeans and black shoes. He was not wearing a jacket. Management did not have a case.

At the disciplinary hearing on July 29 management ignored the evidence and in less than one hour he was sacked. With the police 'pursuing their inquiries' and the officer in charge on holiday for three weeks, management were asked to wait until the completion of any criminal case, but they refused. Subsequently Steve Hedley was to be charged, but the case against him was dismissed when it came to court. There are obvious parallels with the cases of hundreds of miners who lost their jobs during the 1984-5 dispute. Originally Steve Hedley had been suspended from work, but he was quickly reinstated when a large number of maintenance staff took strike action in sympathy. He was then suspended again despite promises that he could work at the Willesden depot whilst they made inquiries. Workers at his depot at Euston remained on strike, but others returned to work, leading Steve himself to suggest to Euston workers that they return to work and await the outcome of any disciplinary hearings before taking further action.

The RMT promised Steve "full support" in any fight to get his job back and the assistant general secretary Bob Crow agreed to represent him at any disciplinary hearings. What transpired, however, was very far from "full support". With Steve facing a possible criminal prosecution, he needed a solicitor, especially as management were intent on using the police investigation as an excuse to have him sacked. Furthermore, statements from witnesses needed collecting. In fact, it took the RMT three weeks to get Steve a lawyer. There never was the evidence to charge Steve with criminal damage. But the threat of a conviction gave management enough leverage to sack him. If the union had appointed a solicitor immediately it is likely that the police would not have pursued the matter.

With Bob Crow agreeing to represent Steve Hedley, it appeared that he would get properly represented at any disciplinary hearings. Chance would be a fine thing. Bob Crow did not meet Steve to discuss the case in the two weeks after his suspension. He agreed

to see him on the afternoon of July 28, one day before the disciplinary hearing. Witness statements which should have been taken were not. When Steve Hedley, in the company of Graham Smith, turned up, Bob Crow was in a meeting and, frustrated at being forced to wait, Steve Hedley knocked on the door to ask when it would be finished. He was told to "get out" and, desperate for assistance, he was taken to see a solicitor who gave him what advice he could. Only later did Bob Crow see him.

In the weeks between his suspension and dismissal the RMT made no attempt to get any press or TV coverage about the case. No press release was issued and the union did not, it would appear, send a circular to branch secretaries or stewards. The Colin Roach Centre did send out a press release which gained coverage in leftwing newspapers as well as a couple of local newspapers.

Throughout his period of suspension Steve was not inactive in pursuing the struggle for improved conditions for railworkers, and on the evening of July 25-26 he organised a picket at Hither Green in south London, where contractors employed by Balfour Beatty were breaking an overtime ban amongst rail maintenance staff. Although the local shop steward, a member of the revolutionary group which sells the *American Militant*, failed to honour her promise to turn up, this did not prevent the pickets from turning away all potential strikebreakers. This, in spite of a police presence! Jobs in and around the London Bridge area were cancelled. Balfour Beatty lost hundreds of thousands of pounds in penalties for lost work.

As a leaflet produced after the event said, "The lessons from this are clear - where waverers are confronted and talked to directly they can be convinced to stay on strike ... and the need for effective picketing has never been more apparent: it is the key to winning this dispute." Steve Hedley was the co-author of the leaflet. As events were to prove, a more accurate statement could not have been made.

As it was expected that GTRM would sack Steve Hedley on July 29, a meeting was arranged for the following evening in Willesden to discuss what support railworkers could offer in any fight for reinstatement. Steve was joined on the platform by RMT executive members from the West Midlands and Scotland, as well as Brian Higgins from the Building Worker Group, with whom a close working relationship had been forged over a number of years and who was to give an inspiring speech about the need to fight the employers whilst not expecting the full-time officials of any union to do the same. Brian Higgins is a Ucatt member who has been victimised and blacklisted by the building employers. He has also faced constant attacks from the officials of Ucatt, including the general secretary, George Brumwell.

It was Brumwell who effectively appointed Hedley to the development officer's post in Ucatt. This was

a major slap in the face for Brian Higgins and the Building Worker Group, who have been passionately opposed for 25 years to the bureaucratisation of Ucatt, which includes appointment of officials rather than their election by members. Brian Higgins was, at the time of the meeting, being defended by trade unionists in Britain and overseas against an attack on him by Dominic Hehir, a full-time Ucatt official who had taken out a high court writ for libel against Higgins for daring to criticise him for refusing to support or represent Ucatt shop steward and safety representative John Jones.

Jones and plumber Terry Mason were sacked in October 1995 after refusing to accept a transfer from Southwark council's direct labour organisation to a private building contractor, Botes. When they mounted a picket line no DLO workers would cross and only after reaching an agreement that a mass meeting would take place was the picket lifted. This promise was broken and so the picket was reinstated. DLO workers still refused to cross but the intervention of Ucatt convenor steward Tony O'Brien helped force them across.

The Socialist Workers Party publicly backed the convenor's scabbing and were chucked off the picket line after telling those on it it wasn't one! The group of Workers Revolutionary Party members based around *Workers Press*, now no longer in existence, then attacked Jones and Mason, even allowing O'Brien its middle two pages on December 9 to boast of "leading" the workers across the picket line. O'Brien then tried to get Ucatt to discipline Jones and Brian Higgins but failed.

Years later two separate industrial tribunals decided that both workers were unfairly dismissed and they received compensation; making a nonsense of those 'leftwingers' who have lined up with the bosses and the bureaucrats against them. Their actions then have obvious parallels with how they acted during the struggle against GTRM and the RMT bureaucracy during the defence of Steve Hedley.

Brian Higgins, in his struggle with Hehir, stated that he would go to jail rather than surrender the freedom to criticise trade union officials, when this was justified. Hehir had two choices - either take Brian to court or back off. In 1999 he backed down. Steve Hedley had been fully involved in the campaign to defend Brian Higgins and played a progressive role throughout that period. This makes it all the more disappointing that Steve Hedley has agreed to accept an appointed position within Ucatt. It is insulting, offensive and insensitive, to say the least.

At the meeting on July 29 it was agreed it would be foolish to wait until the RMT organised any action. (The RMT's official support centred on the claim that it would not resolve their pay dispute until Steve was reinstated. In fact if the pay claim had been resolved it would have been illegal for the RMT to continue to organise any action on behalf of Steve

have kept his job?

Hedley without a ballot.) The outcome of an appeal hearing or, worse, an industrial tribunal was many months away.

The RMT did not issue a press release or seek to publicise Steve Hedley's dismissal. Neither did any of the 'leftwing' members on the RMT executive committee - such as Pat Sikorski, Greg Tucker, Bob North or Bob Crow - ask to get involved in any actions which fell outside of the anti-trade union laws. They were not, at this stage willing to denounce workers who might break the law, but neither were they willing to personally involve themselves in organising such action.

At the meeting in Willesden it was agreed to build on the actions of Euston RMT members who had continually demonstrated a willingness to defend their union steward. The plan was to hold a picket at Euston station of maintenance workers on August 3, move quickly on to other maintenance workers at Willesden, then Stonebridge Park and up to Watford. If successful, over 100 maintenance workers would be on strike and then there would be a chance to expand on the numbers by organising flying pickets nationwide.

With the news, received later that week, that those signalworkers starting at 2pm at Euston station 'would not cross a picket line', there was a real chance to smash management's and the government's plans to make railworkers pay for the catastrophe of privatisation: whilst management can draft in scabs to replace maintenance workers, they have much more difficulty in replacing signalworkers, without whom no trains can move.

Armed with leaflets and a burning sense of injustice, pickets assembled at Euston station early on August 3 and, after making sure that no-one crossed, moved off quickly to Willesden Junction, where SWP member Billy Ashcroft was a shop steward. Ashcroft had been dismissed only weeks earlier, but a wildcat strike by other maintenance workers, organised by Steve Hedley and others from Euston, forced management to reinstate him.

Pickets were left at Willesden Junction. We had missed some of the early shift who had gone to work. It was later reported that of the workers represented by Ashcroft only one person had gone on strike. Whether Ashcroft was on strike is not clear: he was not at work, but he could have been on holiday as he was due to go the following day. When we arrived at Stonebridge Park, maintenance workers were just getting ready to go on the tracks and the management who were around tried to prevent us talking with them. A quick meeting, the distribution of the leaflets and the support of the shop steward produced a fantastic response and an immediate walkout.

Some of the strikers then joined with us and off we went to Watford, where our arrival was announced by the display of a large and impressive banner, stating 'Reinstate Steve Hedley'. We were joined by pickets from Euston and Willesden junction. It was clear that there was a reluctance to take any action, as the view was that the recent strikes had not resulted in any concessions from management. Some of the workers were on the track and not due back until much later. It was agreed to wait for them to return to the depot before asking them to go on strike. Pickets stood at the gate, just outside the

main entrance to Watford station. The weather was not too pleasant, and some supporters because of work commitments drifted off.

It was a couple of hours before word got round to workers on the track that something was happening back at the depot, but when they did return a meeting was arranged. Steve was clearly under pressure from Billy Ashcroft to prevent either Terry Dunn, an ex-miner sacked and imprisoned during the 1984-5 national miners' strike, or myself from joining him in speaking to the workers. We allowed ourselves to be excluded. What was also becoming a problem was the length of time it was taking to persuade the men at the Watford depot to come out on strike. There was a real fear that we would miss the 2pm signalworkers at Euston station.

After what seemed forever the meeting ended with the great news that the workers had agreed to down tools, but - and it was a very big but - they had made clear that they would only agree to stay out on strike if they got official support from the RMT. It has never been possible to find out whether the workers had put forward this argument themselves or whether Ashcroft had put the idea forward first and the workers had latched on to this in desperation - or in the certainty that the union would not give such support, as was to be proved.

To make matters worse Ashcroft had set up a meeting at the RMT headquarters, Unity House, to 'get official support' at 2pm in the main hall, where we were told members of the executive committee would meet strikers and their supporters. This was the very time when we were due to picket out the signalworkers at Euston - disaster, we still had the chance to go to see the signalworkers, but it was obvious that the strikers had been persuaded to look to the bureaucracy for direction, when, in fact, they had already shown they had the power to take on management. About 40 of the 120 on strike went to Unity House.

All the lessons learned at Hither Green and throughout August 3 were to be ignored. It should be recorded that history has shown that workers very rarely, if at all, make official support a condition of spontaneously downing tools. These questions always come up and are raised after such actions by the fainthearts and those of a bureaucratic persuasion looking for a way out.

No-one from the Watford depot came to Unity House, where strikers and a large body of supporters were met by North and Tucker. They made clear, at the very start, that they were not representing the executive committee. The best they could promise was to take the strikers' case to "the exec" when it met the following day, but - as they honestly put it - "don't hold your breath". The implication was clear: the union would not support unofficial action. The strikers, who had been persuaded by Ashcroft that they could only win the dispute by getting official support, sat almost silently and most looked thoroughly despondent. There were some who did attempt to argue with North and Tucker, but the pair had the typical argument of left bureaucrats that 'if it was up to them ...' But of course it wasn't!

When North and Tucker - a member of Socialist Outlook, which on paper professes to be a revolutionary socialist organisation - were asked what they would be prepared to do apart from putting the strikers'

case to "the exec", there was an audible silence. It was put to them that they should be willing to come on the picket line and argue for workers to take unofficial action. Would they be willing to appeal to workers who elected them? Would they put their names to leaflets calling for secondary action? Well, "if it was up to them", but, of course, they had to be bound by the democratic wishes of "the exec" who we already knew would not support the action taken, never mind sanction any more.

By their actions both showed that at periods when major events in the class struggle occur the subordination of the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy to the right wing is pronounced. As long as they have no practical obligations they can remain left and even use socialist rhetoric, but once the need for action arises these leftwing leaders concede leadership to the right wing or centre.

The argument was put to the strikers that they had been conned into coming to the meeting and plans should be organised for stepping up the picketing for the following day. In fact, the strikers drifted off to the pub. Morale and confidence had disappeared. Basically they had been persuaded to trust the bureaucracy, or rather the 'left' side of it, and now that they knew this trust was misplaced, they could not stomach much more. At this crucial point only Steve Hedley could possibly have repaired the damage already done, but he himself was not willing or able to put forward arguments for stepping up the picketing. When others did so he remained silent.

As events were to prove, the next morning was crucial. In fact, what happened was that the 20 strikers at Euston remained on strike, Jamie from Willesden stayed out, Stonebridge Park strikers were met by the police and management and forced back to work and at Watford the disarray had a demoralising effect - not least on Steve, who was unable to tell workers whether he was asking for strike action or not.

Some workers stopped their cars and asked, "Steve, what's up? Are we on strike?" He honestly did not know what to tell them. Billy Ashcroft went on two weeks holiday to Greece, thus leaving the man who had been responsible for him having the money in his pocket to go on holiday in the shit. Meanwhile the RMT issued a statement repudiating the workers' actions of the previous day.

It was clear that Steve Hedley had lost his job and there was now no possibility of him getting it back. Steve himself said so to those closest to him. Statements by the RMT that their dispute over wages would not end until he was reinstated turned reality on its head. If management could sack the leading militant then which workers were going to be willing to put their heads on the chopping block and actually take part in action which would force management to concede to demands for proper wages and conditions? The answer was no-one. Steve proposed to the Euston strikers that they go back to work whilst attempts were made to try and get people back out at a future date. Sadly, we will all be dead before such a date arises.

After this a support group for Steve Hedley was established which on paper had the aim of seeing him reinstated, although its actions almost exclusively concentrated on lobbies and protests outside various rail com-

pany and government buildings, leafleting and flyposting, the passing of resolutions at trade union branch meetings, collections and gaining press coverage. The support group would not, could not, did not commit themselves to organising those actions which had temporarily threatened management's 'right to manage', brought out over 100 workers in defiance of the anti-trade union laws and threatened to inspire thousands more, and caused such outright fear amongst the RMT bureaucracy that the union's executive committee had been forced to send a letter of repudiation to all the strikers and denounce them in public in order to protect themselves from being sued by the rail companies under the anti-trade union laws.

"However, the other side of the affair is the manner in which the Aslef executive, followed hours later by the RMT executive, capitulated to the courts. Rather than telling them to 'get stuffed' it was time to express disappointment and dismay. If the unions had been formed by the likes of such people, there would never have been unions!" (S Hedley, RMT Harlesden branch and Colin Roach Centre, joint leaflet, 1995).

Despite the RMT executive demonstrating their treachery, the support group refused to bar members of them from the group, and members from a range of far left organisations waxed lyrical about the need to "put pressure on the bureaucracy" and of "forcing them to fight". Weeks later posters bearing the picture of Steve appeared in and around Euston. They had been put there by the SWP. Meanwhile Ashcroft remains a member of this organisation - no finer example of how it has degenerated could possibly be found. The SWP was not excluded from the support group even though the role of one of their members was a disgrace.

We now have the nauseating spectacle of the Steve Hedley Support Group establishing the Strike Support Group and a major article in *The Big Issue*, in which Steve as the spokesperson attacks those who "want to talk about dead Russians" - which, bearing in mind that those who set the group up are either self-expressed Stalinists or Trotskyists, is a little strange - and "sectarians", which I can only assume is a defensive reaction to anyone who may want to discuss the role of the bureaucracy in industrial disputes such as his own, as well as once self-proclaimed industrial militants who decide to join them.

There are many lessons which can be learned from the experiences I have described. Perhaps the most important are the following:

- Management attacks on trade union militants are continuing and increasing and are designed to reduce workers' ability to resist changes in working practices and cuts in pay.
- Management are willing to sack people and take a chance on losing an industrial tribunal, as it is a cheap way of getting rid of decent shop stewards.
- The key to winning any industrial dispute is organising flying pickets and going directly to workers in their workplaces. The employers will attempt to prevent this by sending in the bureaucrats - sadly, so will 'the left' as well. It is my sincere belief that if, instead of going to Unity House on August 3, we had gone to the signal box at Euston we could have dealt a major blow not only to GTRM, but

also to Railtrack and a whole host of private train companies. (It is ironic that privatisation has split the rail network into a whole host of small companies, many of whom are vulnerable to strikes.)

The following day it would have been possible to have moved on to Milton Keynes and Northampton and picket out workers there, with whom contacts had already been established. I have also discovered that workers in other parts of England and Scotland were waiting to take action. It is vital that pickets keep moving and do not lose momentum during any dispute. "We cannot expect the bureaucrats to link up the disputes across the country, as this will be illegal. But there is nothing to stop a rank and file organisation doing this, ignoring the bosses, courts and bureaucrats" - Steve in 1995.

- Workers in struggle (and before it preferably) need to adopt a policy of organisation and action independent of the full-time union officials.
- There is an urgent need to see established a rank and file railworkers' organisation which can and will operate independently of the full-time officials.
- When workers are on strike they need to ensure they have access to legal advice and, if arrested, sympathetic solicitors.
- The outlook of 'far left' organisations during trade union disputes is to spread illusions in trade union officials by directing those on strike into 'pressurising officials to act' rather than developing the workers' ability to act without reference to the officials.
- When major events in the class struggle occur, the subordination of the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy to the right wing is pronounced.

Amongst those being sent copies of this article are Steve Hedley, Greg Tucker, Billy Ashcroft, the Strike Support Group and the Steve Hedley Support Group. It will also be made available to railworkers, as ultimately it is their views which are the most important. All five of those listed above and the organisations they represent are invited to defend themselves either in print and/or by engaging in public debate.

I would propose that any replies to this article are sent to the *Weekly Worker* for publication. Finally I would challenge Steve and the Strike Support Group to debate the contents of this article with myself and Brian Higgins of the Building Worker Group at a public meeting later this year.

Update

Since this article was completed the following has taken place:

1. The RMT did not take Steve's case to an industrial tribunal on the basis that GTRM had a video of someone like Steve crossing the track without permission. This is a criminal offence. However, this was not the reason he was sacked, so the decision not to take the case to the tribunal cannot be justified.
2. The maintenance companies have made a pay offer and the RMT is recommending acceptance. Formally the union's position remains that until Steve and another steward are reinstated the dispute will continue.
3. The Strike Support Group has agreed to discuss the contents of this document and decide whether to reply in print and/or at a public meeting ●

'Official communists'

Something very strange is happening in the world of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, the 'official communist' split from the CPGB in 1988. The spring issue of its normally paralytically dull journal, *Communist Review*, is actually an interesting read. Despite our continued profound disagreements with much of its political content, we can only applaud a willingness to challenge - even implicitly - some of the sleepy orthodoxy that previously constituted CPB 'thought'.

We welcome and will do everything we can to encourage this. However, we must sound a note of caution. This process of waking up, of starting to actually think, will inevitably precipitate arguments, fierce polemics and differences. Yet the whole culture of the group - which now has less than 250 paid-up members - militates against this. If there are comrades who are now contemplating a revolution in some of their key ideas, they should perhaps include the CPB's version of 'democratic centralism', in reality bureaucratic socialism.

For without the fullest democracy, without public debate and the right to form open factions on the basis of wide-ranging platforms, the looming political tussle threatens to bust the CPB into numerous fragments. Again, despite our fierce opposition to its current orientation, we see nothing to be gained from the even further dispersal of working class militants that an implosion of the CPB would entail.

And make no mistake, comrades of the CPB: the logic of the politics being hinted at in the latest issue of *Communist Review* would represent an about-turn in your world view. Given your years of theoretical and political stagnation, what could this entail?

The 'socialist' countries

The highly combustible nature of the differences now smouldering in the CPB can be confirmed if we look at the article on China by Ken Fuller, a member of the newly expanded *CR* editorial board.

Fuller begins his piece by warning against "an uncritical approach to societies which proclaim themselves socialist: when things go badly wrong, as happened with the Soviet Union, disorientation and disillusionment is the result" (p6). Specifically, the comrade is vigorously taking to task Frank Williamson, who penned an article entitled 'China's road to socialism' in *CR* autumn/winter 1997 as well as a more recent series in the *Morning Star* earlier this year. Comrade Fuller does a pretty effective job of debunking the inanely positive interpretations his opponent forces onto events such as the cultural revolution, but takes particular exception to the concluding paragraph, where Williamson light-mindedly muses:

"... what are the real risks in their policy of 'market-socialism'? ... After all, if a socialist government encourages a market philosophy, if it boosts a positive 'free-for-all' ... how can it at the same time move towards the more responsible attitudes which socialism should foster? We await further enlightenment from our Chinese comrades."

The last sentence in particular stings Fuller to reply that "this is precisely what we cannot afford to do unless we are to risk the disorientation and disillusionment referred to earlier" (p7). It is "clear", he states,

Will Robert Griffiths be the death of the CPB?

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"While the controversy has not yet broken out openly, we can see the storm clouds gathering"

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that economic reform in China "has little to do with socialist regeneration" and "is overwhelmingly nationalist and bourgeois" (p10). He is scathing of the method of "[clutching] at straws" and "[hoping] that the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party may, after all, still maintain a socialist perspective", explicitly criticising in this context "the last in a series of articles which appeared in the *Morning Star* in 1997, around the 15th Congress of the CCP" (pp10-11).

In fact, "China has embarked on the road of rapid capitalist development." The notion - or rather "fancy" - that "if the CCP can maintain its monopoly of political power ... the time will come when ... the 'socialist' superstructure will be able to transform the capitalist base" is just "wishful thinking". In fact, whatever the "socialist" protestations of the CCP, Fuller starkly ends by telling the likes of Williamson that "we must bring the same kind of thorough-going analysis on societies claiming to be socialist as we would on our own" (p11).

Of course, for readers of this paper the views outlined here are not in any way controversial. Yet, for the political tendency that the CPB represents - Stalinist, centrist, historically uncritical of the Soviet Union and "living socialism" - these opinions are dynamite. Fuller is not simply saying that an uncritical attitude to the present-day leaders of what remains of the purported 'socialist' countries is wrong (although even this would be too much to stomach for many CPBers). No, in his very first paragraph he explicitly links his rejection of "uncritical" approaches to societies which "proclaim themselves socialist" to the experience of the USSR itself.

And if the more conservative-minded sections of the CPB were not already beside themselves with apoplectic rage, there is the article by Mike Squires, a labour historian, who concludes his review of a biography of JT Murphy with these explosive thoughts about the collapse of the USSR and eastern Europe:

"Are we to believe that without a whimper the working class of the socialist countries gave up their property, the means of production, distribution and exchange and handed them over to private investors. That workers who had previously controlled the places at which they worked gave up that power to unelected managers. It seems an un-

likely scenario. Yet socialism and working class power are interlinked.

"Without democracy there can be no socialism. If the workers were not in control can a society be described as socialist?" (p30).

Heresy

For a section of the CPB - Andrew Murray, Nick Wright, John Haylett *et al* - such views will be little short of heresy. Holding them privately would be bad enough, but voicing them in the "theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party", as the *Communist Review* bills itself, will surely be beyond the pale.

Perhaps such comrades now have a certain sense of *déjà vu*, a sinking 'here we go again' feeling in the pit of their stomachs? After all, one of the cardinal sins of these comrades' *bête noire* in the Communist Party of yore - the *Marxism Today* journal - was its anti-Sovietism, its willingness to raise what were timid criticisms of the 'socialist countries'. These comrades will not be comforted by editor Mary Davis's rather bland reassurance that the expansion of the editorial board "does not betoken any change in political aims" (p2). Clearly, the current issue contains material that would never have found its way into previous issues of *CR* - something is going on.

While the controversy has not yet broken out openly, we can see the storm clouds gathering if we look at some of the more recent issues of the *Morning Star*.

Apart from Frank Williamson's foolish series on China, we have had Paul White's 'China diary' (*Morning Star* August 8). Here - incredibly - the recent crackdown by the Chinese authorities on the falun gong sect is cooed over as perhaps "just what the party needs to purge its ranks of the corrupt and the superstitious and restore its revolutionary prestige, which has been on the wane since the decade of the cultural revolution from 1966".

In case readers are confused, this is the self-same cultural revolution described by his comrade Ken Fuller as "in essence an attack by Mao upon the CCP itself, using politically immature students ... [characterised by] the absence of a class outlook, nationalism, the dearth of Marxist-Leninist work, the lack of inner-party democracy ..." (p9).

White essentially defends the suppression of falun gong against charges in "the western press" that it is an "overreaction by a party that fears political challenges". Not at all, he informs us, as "the list of Chinese dynasties overthrown by mass uprisings led by dervish cults ... is a long one". They are right to be paranoid and to have responded with heavy-handed oppression, in other words.

Thus, within the political entity that constitutes the CPB, we have trends represented by the likes of Williamson and White who are explicit in their support for the current regime in place in China, viewing it as some sort of socialism. Not only that, they are generally supportive of the repressive measures this monstrosity takes to maintain itself in power over the working people of that country and to manipulate society for that end. In a passage not explicitly polemicalised with by Fuller, Williamson crassly writes that:

"All socialists should study carefully the two great contributions which the Chinese are making to political theory - the socialist market economy and the *voluntary* one-child policy. Both are equally revolutionary" (my emphasis *Morning Star* July 14).

On the other hand, we have the trend represented by Ken Fuller who explicitly rejects the notion that events such as Tiananmen represented "a socialist state attempting to prevent its overthrow" (p10) and who are dismissive of those who take the 'socialist' protestations of the Chinese leadership seriously as guilty of "wishful thinking".

How long before these political currents clash openly? And once they do, what is to stop the entire fabric of the CPB's world view unravelling? For example, Kate Hudson's article on the recent war against rump Yugoslavia in *CR* assumes as its conceptual framework a bipolar world - on the one side, the forces of imperialism; on the other, those of socialism. That is, the staple theoretical fare of the 'official communist' world view since at least 1928. The west's attack on what was "a progressive and open socialist society" (p19) - which only in its later stages took the form of direct military intervention - is thus presented as the sole motor of the disintegration of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. World imperialism - for reasons best known to itself - believes that places like ex-Yugoslavia and the USSR are best reduced to "easily dominated pieces". It was all a dastardly plot, after all.

(As an aside, the discovery by 'official communism' that ex-Yugoslavia was a place that deserved to be "held in high regard for its struggles for freedom and independence" will probably come as a bit of a jolt to some comrades in the ranks who will recall denouncing Titoism as a brand of fascism).

In fact, the tendency to fragmentation of the FRY - while certainly exacerbated by certain actions of imperialism, not least the IMF - is explained by its internal dynamic, by the bureaucratic way its 'socialism' was established and by its intrinsic lack of viability as a society.

Those in the CPB who are starting to edge towards radical conclusions on the nature of the USSR and eastern Europe are perhaps at the beginnings of a journey that could help them start to make real sense of the 20th century.

Our comrades?

Fuller is scathing about the potential of "healthy forces" in the CCP. He writes that "for at least 30 years, the ideological training conducted by the CCP has not resembled that which would justify the description 'Marxist'. Many Marxist-Leninists have simply died, while others were killed during the cultural revolution" (p10).

Now we would no doubt have a dispute with comrade Fuller over the 'Marxist-Leninist' credentials of the forces he refers to, but his observation does raise another uncomfortable question for the CPB. Bereft as it is of 'Marxist-Leninist' forces, or even trends which might 'resemble' such, what price the CPB *fraternal relationship* with such a party?

The same question is posed - even more starkly - by the CPB's relationship with the Communist Party of the

Russian Federation. In the article cited above on ex-Yugoslavia, it is intriguing that Hudson writes of the opposition to the war coming "primarily from communist and former communist parties and other left forces", first amongst which she lists - "the Russian Communist Party" (p21).

This being the same Russian Communist Party - a fraternal organisation of the CPB - that is effectively denounced in this same issue of *CR* for not simply harbouring individual anti-semite, but actually conniving in the propagation of this foul, counterrevolutionary filth *at the highest levels of the party*. An article by Steve Silver - co-editor of the anti-fascist journal *Searchlight* - quotes chauvinist remarks by Zyuganov, the chair of the central committee, to the effect that Jews have to decide where their loyalties lie - with Zionist Israel or Mother Russia. To rub salt into the wound, an impeccably 'official communist' source is then cited - Gus Hall of the Communist Party of the United States - who characterises the remarks as "unmistakably anti-semitic". Silver adds his own evaluation to the effect that statements such as Zyuganov's have "real implications for the international communist movement" (such as whether it is an "international communist movement" at all, we might suggest). "Something", he tells us, is "seriously wrong".

Indeed, he suggests that anti-semitism is not simply a contemporary aberration amongst those who call themselves 'communists' in this part of the world and he cites shameful incidents from not only the Stalin era, but later. In conclusion he underlines the importance of an analysis of the reasons for the collapse of the USSR that will reveal how "ideas that can clearly be seen to have been created to undermine communism, and are alien to Marxism, can be incorporated by communists ... They are the politics of the enemy camp and have to be ruthlessly exposed as such" (p5).

Again, the logic of what is being said here needs to be drawn out.

Silver characterises modern anti-semitism as "the ideology of the counterrevolution" (p5), an ideology that communists must fight because it is "not only the enemy of the Jewish people but of the revolution itself" (p4). He then cites not simply instances of contemporary anti-semitic statements from those who call themselves communists in today's Russia, but finds this "ideology of counterrevolution" in the statements of the Soviet party under Khrushchev and Brezhnev. He leaves us with the rather tantalising thought that an explanatory component of our understanding of the death of the USSR must demonstrate how ideas that were the mortal enemy of real communism came to be absorbed and utilised by people who claimed the mantle of Marx and Lenin.

Silver certainly takes his critique further and deeper than a mealy-mouthed *Morning Star* editorial of May 22, which simply chides the CPRF for "[failing] to recognise that there are some areas of potential support that must be rejected by a progressive movement ... [since the toleration of anti-semitism] weakens the party's ability to pose as a progressive alternative to the Yeltsin regime". The piece essentially alibis the CPRF. It declares with a heavy heart that "in its attempts to build a patriotic alliance in opposition to the sell-out by the Yeltsin regime of Russian interests to imperialism, it has fallen short of communism's international-

open up

ist roots by not cutting itself adrift from the purveyors of racial and national hatred".

In fact, as Silver's article makes clear, the leaders of the CPRF are a part of an organic trend which absorbed counterrevolutionary ideology - only one strand of which was in fact anti-semitism - while claiming to be communists. Surely there are some rather large question marks over the CPB's fraternal comrades in today's Russia for many in the party? And what are the implications for the past generations of Soviet leaders who so shamelessly mobilised anti-semitic sentiments in their society? What does that tell us about their politics? And if this holds true for them, what of the rest of the so-called "international communist movement" the CPB declares itself proud to be part of, in reality the fragments of the official 'world communist movement'?

So many questions, comrades.

Straw men

Clearly, the key articles in the current issue of *Communist Review* represent the attempt by some sections to break from now patently absurd 'official communist' orthodoxy. However, this cannot be done properly except by digging to the roots of the problem. When Ken Fuller blasts the likes of Williamson for "the tendency to clutch at straws" by seizing on "isolated quotes" to justify the 'socialist' credentials of the Chinese leadership, he is - consciously or not - denouncing the entire methodological approach of the CPB itself to what it once called the "socialist bloc".

Thus, while Williamson's breathless credulity at the policy statements of the Chinese bureaucracy make an easy target, we wonder if comrade Fuller will follow the logic of his argument. After all, the whole of the CPB leadership - past and present - were guilty of exactly the same methodology when it came to Gorbachev and his reassurances that he was "restructuring" bureaucratic socialism to give power to the "working people" in the USSR. What does comrade Fuller make of this passage on developments in the USSR from the CPB's 1989 version of the *BRS*?

"... the restructuring of the economy and society is proceeding in conditions of fuller socialist democracy and openness, and there is a determined effort to decentralise decision-making in every area of life to promote the initiative and genuine involvement of all working people" (quoted in J Conrad *Which Road?* p149).

Isn't it clear that comrade Williamson is applying exactly the same method to the present-day leadership of the CCP - a method that has been the *defining characteristic* of the CPB's approach? If leading sections of the organisation are now breaking from this, we welcome their conversion to the real world. It is long overdue, comrades.

However, the question does need to be posed, why now? On one level, disturbances in the basic belief system of the CPB are not advisable. This is an organisation characterised by a pronounced theoretical and political fragility. It has survived thus far in a sort of semi-vegetative state, much like that other centrist split, the New Communist Party. Its stable 'theory' has been in inverse proportion to the worth of its mental activity. This profound inertia was a positive advantage to it as an organisation: it prevented it from stirring its brittle-boned frame. Crucially, it stopped it

from *thinking*, a dangerous thing for a political organisation so thoroughly compromised by history.

One particular blank in its collective memory relates to the very origins of its programme, the *BRS*, which I have already quoted from. As an organisation, the CPB was established as a split from the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1988 ostensibly on the basis of defending all editions of the Party's programme - the *British road to socialism* - up to and including the 1978 version against opportunist dilution by the then Nina Temple-Martin Jacques Eurocommunist leadership. The irony of this stance was pointed out at the time by comrades organised in *The Leninist* faction - probably the majority of the rank and file comrades who went with this split actively *opposed* and *organised against* the 1978 programme when it appeared in draft form in 1977.

Thus at its formation, we pointed out that the CPB carried from its birth all the ideological differences that the 'official' CPGB contained when it last debated the *BRS* in 1977, along with a host of 'left' proto-factions and 'left' proto-splits. (For a fuller examination of the programmatic absurdities attending the birth of the CPB, see *Which road?* pp133-162). Fundamentally, the CPB's version of the *BRS* perpetuated the key absurdities contained in earlier versions, which in the world of the late 1980s and early 90s had come to appear manifestly false.

First, the document claimed that there had been a "a shift in the balance of forces against imperialism" (quoted in *ibid* p145). Historically the notion that the "world balance of forces" had shifted decisively in favour of socialism and the forces of progress had been the justification for claiming that *peaceful* working class "revolutions" were now possible. Second, the CPB's *BRS* still saw the Labour Party as the primary vehicle for socialist change in Britain, albeit harried and cajoled by a "broad democratic alliance" centrally motivated by communists.

For some time now, the CPB has thus existed programmatically as a version of the Amish sect. It has attempted to 'freeze' its world outlook, to turn its back on developments in the outside world. However, the election of Robert Griffiths as general secretary has clearly opened it up. The combination of financial problems looming over the prize asset - the turgid *Morning Star* - and the ominous political fault lines that now are clearly appearing could prove fatal.

The falling 'Star'

The election of Robert Griffiths to the post of CPB general secretary over the weekend of January 10-11 1998 resulted from a bitterly contested palace coup. He replaced the deeply conservative and torpid Mike Hicks, print union bureaucrat and incumbent who had held to that position by the skin of his teeth for the previous two years.

Immediately, we predicted trouble for the CPB. First, because the Mike Hicks-Mary Rosser clique retained control over the *Morning Star* and were likely to retaliate. As indeed they soon did, suspending John Haylett from the position of editor and provoking a five-week-long strike by the journalists (see *Weekly Worker* January 22-April 16 1998). The current financial spat at the PPPS seems bound to be connected with the fallout from that bitter factional dispute, concealed as it was behind the smokescreen of an industrial dispute.

Secondly - and more importantly in many ways - because the relative dynamism of the new leader threatened the unity of the sleepy and inactive CPB membership:

"Those who doze peacefully together in blissful ignorance of each other's politics may suffer a rude awakening if stirred into activity or thought, and may find it impossible to stomach each other in the cold light of day" (*Weekly Worker* January 22 1998).

Comrade Griffiths has a very different background to your average CPB apparatchik. His origins are in the esoteric world of Welsh revolutionary nationalism. Once a Plaid Cymru research officer, he published, with Gareth Miles, *Sosialaeth I'r Cymry* (*Socialism for the Welsh people*) in July 1979, and the following January founded the Welsh Socialist Republican Movement. This actively identified with the republican movement in Ireland and soon its activities attracted attention. Griffiths and others were arrested and tried on bomb-related charges. He served time on remand, but unlike quite a few others from the Welsh revolutionary nationalist milieu, he was found not guilty.

As the *Morning Star* rebellion broke in the mid-1980s, Griffiths took the positive step away from Welsh nationalism and joined the CPGB. He did not become a Labour-loyal reformist overnight, however. Indeed, he wrote to the forerunner of this paper, *The Leninist* in 1985, telling us that "a number of comrades in south Wales subscribe to your paper and largely agree with a number of positions put forward by it. In particular, your treatment of the women's question, Ireland, the Labour Party has been excellent ..." We "rightly [op-

pose] the British nationalism that infests the working class movement and, to some degree, all sections of the Communist Party - and which we see in some of the arguments about import controls, the EEC, Ireland, etc" (*The Leninist* June 1985).

Always a dynamic and ambitious politician, he had soon gathered a small following of critically-minded comrades around himself. It was this group that produced *The south Wales discussion papers*, republished by *The Leninist* in 1987. This was a highly critical evaluation of the *BRS* from the left (see *Weekly Worker* March 19 1998 for an edited version).

Yet, the critique of Griffiths and the other south Wales comrades remained partial, one-sided and in danger of slipping into apologia. Centrally, they failed to go to the core of the opportunist cancer eating away at 'official communism' in Britain and internationally - the pernicious influence of the Soviet party on the world movement after it became dominated by opportunism in the mid-1920s. This was something that these comrades - Griffiths included - fought shy of even considering at the time.

Perhaps it is being considered only now - after the ignominious collapse of 'official' world communism; after the deep period of reaction this has precipitated; after the disappearance of the working class as an independent political factor of any sort; and after the reflection we see of these profoundly negative developments in the evolution of Blair's Labour away from even a nominal relationship with the working class.

Better late than never, comrades. But there is - however - still some way to go ●

Mark Fischer

Politics and money

Number 3 Ardleigh Road, N1, the *Morning Star* building - which also houses the offices of the CPB - is up for sale, if you are interested. A genuine bargain too, by all accounts, although you'll have to be sharp as it is already under offer after being available for just four weeks.

According to the estate agents handling the deal, Copping Joyce, the asking price is just £650,000. This compares very favourably with its balance sheet valuation at December 31 1998 of £992,000, especially given the current buoyant state of the London property market. This underlines that the sale is being forced on the Peoples Press Printing Society - the cooperative that owns the *Morning Star* - by a major creditor who is demanding money. This creditor was in the position to put the PPPS into liquidation, so something pretty drastic had to be done.

This is a challenge for the new secretary of the PPPS, Richard Maybin, chairperson of the CPB. Clearly, Maybin's appointment was part of the ongoing factional crisis, a crisis that saw the editor suspended, a five-week strike by *Star* journalists last year, the reinstatement of the editor and disciplinary action against the losing side. Undaunted, the CPB still assures itself that there were "no political differences", that it was purely a "trade union dispute".

Whether this will be the end of the *Star*, only time will tell. The PPPS management committee is faced with the cost of finding new premises and moving. The prob-

lems of the *Star* are obviously dire. Instructively, one comrade has commented ironically "perhaps Bill Morris will rally round".

This comment has a history to it. During the 1980s, during the vicious faction fight between the Eurocommunists and the PPPS management committee, the financial fortunes of the *Star* continued to decline. Then, on the eve of the 38th Congress on October 29 1983, Mary Rosser - the functionary who was then PPPS secretary - was given a full page to announce a "survival plan". She informed readers that a new printing press was needed, a piece of equipment valued at £800,000 to £1 million. Incredibly, for that amount of money we were getting a "miracle", she told us. It was a Goss machine, and "these have an important advantage. They do not depreciate in value".

Machinery that could not depreciate in value - a "miracle" indeed. Not only would such a machine defy the iron laws of the capitalist economy: it would thumb its nose at the physical laws of the universe.

Rosser's imbecility and the fact that the Goss machine and the old *Morning Star* building in Farringdon Road was sold at a knock-down price to porn merchant David Sullivan is not the important point to note here. The *Star* was to be saved by "printing our way out of trouble". In other words, a fundamentally technical solution to what was essentially a political problem ●

MF

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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Simon Harvey of the SLP

Sikorski witch-hunted

Patrick Sikorski, Socialist Labour's first general secretary and subsequently SLP vice-president, has finally left Arthur Scargill's party.

Comrade Sikorski is the last of those associated with the Fourth International Supporters Caucus to abandon Britain's 'party of recomposition'. His two co-thinkers, Carolyn Sikorski and Brian Heron, were 'lapsed' in April after failing to pay their dues since the beginning of the year, to be followed by all their supporters, who drifted quietly away. The Fiscites were once Scargill's most loyal courtiers - indeed they had been involved in discussions with him from 1995 and occupied the highest positions on the leadership after the party's foundation in May 1996.

One of the reasons for comrade Sikorski's decision to quit was undoubtedly Scargill's failure to support - if not outright opposition to - his bid to become assistant general secretary of the RMT transport union earlier this year. When comrade Sikorski issued his proposals to clip Scargill's wings in the shape of an SLP discussion document entitled 'Renewing our sense of purpose' last summer, the Scargill-Fisc alliance was abruptly ended. The SLP general secretary saw to it that comrade Sikorski was voted out from the party vice-presidency at the November 1998 special congress and replaced by the buffoon, Royston Bull.

This split was reflected on the outgoing RMT executive. Sikorski, secretary of the London Underground regional council, could rely on the support of Mick Atherton and Bobby Law, two prominent signatories of Fisc's 'Appeal for a special conference', distributed within the SLP a year ago. However, two other SLP members, Jimmy Connolly and Danny Birmingham, were closer to Scargill. When nominations were announced for one of the two assistant general secretary (AGS) posts, RMT militants were dismayed to learn that both comrades Sikorski and Connolly were contesting. The third candidate was the sitting rightwinger, Vernon Hince.

Bob Crow, the other assistant general secretary and an SLP NEC member, tried to act as honest broker, but it seems that comrade Connolly had Scargill's backing. The single transferable vote system meant that this split on the left, negative though it was, was not completely disastrous, and Sikorski won around 45% after Connolly was eliminated in the first count. This close call for the right wing, and the events surrounding the conduct of the election, were to spark off the subsequent witch-hunting of comrade Sikorski.

When ballot papers were sent out for the first time, they were accompanied by instructions to place '1' alongside the name of members' preferred candidate. The instructions did not go on to point out that voters



Persona non grata - Sikorski falls foul of the bureaucracy

could indicate their second and subsequent preferences. As a result many voters expressed only one preference - a factor which clearly favoured the single rightwing candidate, while the left vote was divided.

Amazingly, when this obvious mistake was pointed out, the union leadership under general secretary Jimmy Knapp announced that the election was perfectly valid and should proceed. This decision was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that a parallel election was taking place - Knapp himself was being challenged by comrade Greg Tucker of Socialist Outlook. As the officer ultimately responsible for overseeing the AGS election, Knapp did not want his incompetence to be exposed - and certainly not during his own campaign.

However, following the advice of the Electoral Reform Society, the body charged with conducting the elections, the leadership had no option but to announce fresh balloting - once Knapp was safely returned to office. It appears that a decision was taken at this point to punish comrade Sikorski, who had been threatening legal proceedings. Even while the AGS election rerun was taking place, the leadership was making 'enquiries' into an alleged infringement of the rules by comrade Sikorski.

As in so many unions 'canvassing' is not permitted. For the union bureaucracies a full exchange of ideas and attempts to persuade the membership why your own ideas ought to be supported are considered 'undemocratic' - except for the leadership's own ideas of course, which are given full prominence in official jour-

nals and circulars as a matter of course. Election addresses are distributed, but that represents the limit of officially permitted campaigning. There is of course nothing to stop candidates writing 'private' letters to individuals asking for support. When branch secretaries receive these, they often copy them for distribution to their members. That was what occurred in comrade Sikorski's case.

The executive decided that he be "suspended from holding any office in the union for five years - implementation to be suspended for a three-year period". In addition it announced the withdrawal of all union benefits for six months. Leading SLPers were split, with Connolly and Birmingham disgracefully backing the right wing. Comrade Crow maintained a discreet silence - after all he had his own re-election (now in the nomination stage) to think about.

Comrade Sikorski and his supporters vehemently protested at this travesty of a procedure. There was no notice of charges, no right to be heard or make representations, no notification of sentence and no right of appeal.

For many this sham served as a reminder. The early period of the SLP was marked by the arbitrary expulsion of 'undesirable' members. In a practice that became widely known as 'voiding', comrades alleged to be "members or supporters" of other organisations had their SLP membership declared null and void at the stroke of a pen. There was no notice of charges, no right to be heard or make representations, no notification of sentence and no right of appeal. The witch-hunter in chief was com-

rade Pat Sikorski, the SLP's first general secretary.

When the action of the RMT EC came up for ratification at the June AGM (annual conference), the 50 or so delegates were deeply divided. Speakers in the debate overwhelmingly opposed the sanctions, but the silent majority narrowly voted to back the leadership. In the SLP too a tendency to give the leadership the 'benefit of the doubt' and a reluctance to object to curbs on democracy and membership rights allowed Scargill, Sikorski and co to wreck the project through their ham-fisted bureaucracy. In spite of that I still have no hesitation in saying: 'Defend Pat Sikorski'.

Eccentric musings

The latest *Socialist News* (No19, August-September) has hit the streets at last. The No18 issue of our 'monthly' appeared in May. With the Fiscites and supporters of Roy Bull's *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* now completely expurgated, there is even less of interest than previously. Almost the entire contents consist either of local reports or the disjointed musings of the often eccentric contributors.

The two exceptions are the articles from Joe Marino and Arthur Scargill himself. Comrade Marino, an NEC member and general secretary of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, reviews the TUC's *British trade unionism - the millennial challenge*. Needless to say, it is easy to tear apart the latest form of 'new unionism' and comrade Marino makes some valid points. But he concentrates his fire on the TUC's call for bigger unions.

He writes: "In this case big is not beautiful ... The truth is that, in general, smaller, specialist unions [like the Bakers Union, obviously] have a deeper penetration of membership - and power." Sounds like the sectional call of a union bureaucrat to me. Size *per se* is not the issue. Workers' unity demands one industry, one union. Only in that way can the trade union "solidarity" comrade Marino craves be effectively organised. All the better if such unions take the lead from a revolutionary working class party.

Comrade Scargill looks back at the SLP's performance in the EU elections. In what must be a first for our general secretary he actually admits that Socialist Labour's results were "a disappointment". Usually Arthur deludes himself into believing that the SLP is marching uninterruptedly onwards, although the statistics he throws at you to back up his claims are always dubious, to say the least. In this case his faulty mathematics leads him to understate the SLP's moderate achievement (86,749 votes won equal 0.87%, not "0.16%"). It does, however, say a lot about the decline in the party's fortunes when even Scargill is unable to paint a glowing picture.

Another first is his referring to a left organisation other than the SLP by name. He states: "It has been suggested [by the *Weekly Worker* amongst others] that in Scotland the factor that reduced our vote was the election on May 6 of a Scottish Socialist Party candidate to the Scottish parliament." (Note that Scargill cannot bring himself to actually mention the words 'Tommy Sheridan'). But he rejects this proposition, citing "the drop in our percentage vote in Wales" - where there was no equivalent of the SSP - as compared to the previous month's Welsh assembly elections.

The only theory Scargill is able to come up with is the much reduced turnout. Apparently this hit the SLP much harder than, for example, the SSP. This was because Socialist Labour failed to turn "our supporters out in the constituencies where we are strongest". Hardly surprising in view of the fact that the party's entire structure has all but disappeared.

Scargill notes the relative success of the "anti-Common Market UK Independence Party", but it does not dawn on him that the results of the UKIP and the SLP might be connected. The SLP's campaign did not even attempt to fill the political vacuum on the left, concentrating everything on Scargill's inane call to 'pull out of Europe'. Why vote for a pale version of the UKIP when you can vote for the real thing?

Nevertheless Scargill manages to end on an optimistic note: "The SLP's performance was the best by any left party on a nationwide basis since the (old) Labour Party began to make its breakthrough in the 1920s." So the Labour Party never won more than 0.86% before 1920 then?

Information lacking

With information for members in the shape of membership bulletins and circulars sadly lacking, some comrades might turn to the party's website - assuming of course they know of its existence.

Set up to promote our EU elections campaign, the website seems to have been abandoned since then. When I checked it the other day I found it had last been updated on July 16. Clicking on the 'What's new' button, I was able to read a single bare sentence: "July 1999 - congress resolutions and nominations close." The information on the 'Socialist News' page, however, is just as meagre: "Issue 19 - orders to SLP national office." The pages on 'International', 'Trade unions' and 'Women for Socialism' all bore the same message: "Currently under construction."

Still, the home page does carry a fetching picture of Arthur, and you can still read extracts from the constitution and the EU election manifesto. Not surprisingly our website has had fewer than 900 visits in almost six months ●