

# Blair's province of crisis

The Good Friday British-Irish Agreement signalled the formal end of the IRA's protracted guerrilla war against British rule. It was not, however, the beginning of a normalised British peace. Since Easter 1998 the situation in the Six Counties is best characterised as an unstable counterrevolutionary situation. Neither war nor peace.

Mo Mowlam and the Northern Ireland office has sought to navigate the agreement between the ambitions of Sinn Féin/IRA and the intransigence of the unionists. The skills of Odysseus are not in evidence. In trying to avoid Scylla, they have fallen into Charybdis.

In July the Northern Ireland executive came unstuck. Beset by intractable internal divisions and with the Paisleyites snapping and biting at their heels, Trimble's Ulster Unionists pulled back. They could not take the final step. They would not, could not, countenance Sinn Féin ministers.

Blair solemnly pledged an "end to bombings, killings and beatings, claimed or unclaimed; an end to targeting and procurement of weapons; progressive abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures actively and directly promoting violence; full cooperation with the independent commission on decommissioning", etc. True, the IRA ceased military operations targeting the British state. Yet not one gun nor one bullet has been decommissioned. More to the point, under the terms of the Good Friday agreement the IRA considers it legitimate to execute informers like Charles Bennett and enforce its authority in nationalist-catholic areas - not least against those deemed "anti-social".

It is within Mowlam's remit, as secretary of state, to pronounce that the IRA had broken the ceasefire and thereby expel Sinn Féin from the peace process. To have done so would though surely have wrecked the entire Good Friday agreement and triggered all manner of unforeseeable consequences. Instead, after some prevarication, she announced, on the Thursday of last week, that although the IRA had "sailed close to the edge" the ceasefire held.

How did the IRA respond? Did it reel back in contrition? Did it start decommissioning? Did it promise to accept "purely peaceful and democratic means"? No, no and no. In a bold and cleverly calculated upping of the tempo the IRA carried out a series of punishment beatings in nationalist-catholic areas and ordered some half-dozen youths to leave Northern Ireland forthwith.

Dealing with petty criminals - joyriders, housebreakers, muggers - in such a brutal manner is obviously distasteful, but the IRA has little choice. It is a military-political movement, not a state. Two other factors must be stressed. Firstly, even its

bitterest enemies admit that the IRA's summary justice receives "support" from "local people who will often report crimes such as drug-taking and car theft to the local paramilitary leadership rather than the police" (*The Daily Telegraph* August 30). Secondly, most exiles "return home after a year or so" if, through an intermediary, they agree not to "transgress" what *The Guardian* stupidly dismisses as "terrorist law" (August 30).

Either way, the IRA was not covered by Mowlam, but encouraged. Hence, while keeping within the parameters of the ceasefire, as flexibly defined by the secretary of state herself, Brian Keenan and the IRA have established their right - almost *de jure* - to police nationalist-catholic areas. In other words, as long as the IRA does not kill RUC men, British soldiers, politicians or protestants, the ceasefire has "not broken down".

Predictably the unionists reacted with fury and a flood of crocodile tears. Trimble demanded the suspension of prisoner releases, publicly questioned Mowlam's competence and called for the delaying of next week's Mitchell review of the Good Friday agreement. Blair refused. Instead, through the Downing Street press office, he expressed full confidence in his "marvellous" secretary of state. The "breached" but not "broken" formulation concerning the ceasefire has the prime minister's imprimatur.

Picking up the baton, the Tory press savaged the whole peace process. Peter Hitchens attacks the Good Friday agreement as being "based on lies and betrayal". It is "a blot on our national history", he patriotically thunders (*The Express* August 30). In a similar vein the *Daily Mail* uses former IRA infiltrator Martin McGartland to lament the IRA "being officially allowed to police its own areas" (August 30). *The Times* also condemns the growth of IRA power under the Good Friday agreement: The IRA's "armalite evictions ... are a systematic flouting of state authority, a murderous form of gangsterism by which republicans seek to exert their illegal authority over 'their' areas" (editorial, August 30). The elected government is accused by *The Daily Telegraph* of "appeasement", of "planning to hand policing to terrorists", of "losing control of the province" and "actually planning to lose control" (editorial *The Daily Telegraph* August 31). Treason in short.

Here we have the grounds for a Tory coup. Ominously the *Telegraph* has already urged an "ermine revolt" to "uphold the constitution" (June 29).

There has been much clubroom chatter in Park Lane and The Mall about a plan B: ie, solving the Northern Ireland problem *vi et armis*. But a return to army patrols, special police powers, informers and no-jury convictions is obviously unworkable as a constitutional settlement. Neither the SDLP nor Washington nor Dublin could accept it. As to the IRA, it has proved beyond a shadow of doubt that it can withstand anything the British state can politically afford to throw against it - internment, SAS assassinations, criminalisation, etc.

Nevertheless there is a recognition in high Tory circles that Blairism - unassailable in the House of Commons - can be undermined in Ireland. Northern Ireland is the UK's main weak link and the main weak link in Blair's constitutional revolution. Certainly a stalled Good Friday agreement leaves the whole New Labour project vulnerable. The Tory Party therefore breaks with 30 years of bipartisanship and embraces the unionists.

It is not that the Tories have any particular affinity with the unionists. Their rasping talk of British citizenship, the queen and the union are but synonyms for the protestant ascendancy. Ulster's loyalty is loyalty to Ulster alone. But in the search for a weapon with which to hit Blair Tory eyes naturally light upon the unionists. With unionist disloyalty the Tories hope to break New Labour. Hague once joined the chorus of praise for the Good Friday agreement. Now he writes of how Blair "has betrayed Ulster" (*The Daily Telegraph* September 1). Faced with Blair's constitutional revolution which is about to abolish their inbuilt Lords majority at a stroke, a 'federalist' Euroland and at least one more term of opposition, the Hague Tories are wielding Northern Ireland alongside their Little England defence of the pound. Hague's programme takes shape. It is then surely worth noting that since New Labour came to office the biggest political demonstration by far has not come from the left - as would be expected - but the right. Only simpletons believe that the 250,000-strong Countryside Alliance march was mainly about hunting foxes. It was, as we said at the time, "the Tory Party flexing its extra-parliamentary muscles".

Blair and Mowlam have little room for manoeuvre. They are impaled on the horns of a dilemma: both nationalists and unionists sincerely desire peace, but each wants a different peace and neither wants the peace that goes with the Good Friday agreement.

On the one hand Sinn Féin/IRA have no interest in seeing Northern Ireland work as a residual outpost of the United Kingdom. Even though it backed the Good Friday agreement Sinn Féin steadfastly refused to recognise "the legitimacy of the Six County statelet" (*An Phoblacht* May 7 1998). The republican movement is committed to a united Ireland ... and Gerry Adams has all the makings of its first leader. In the south the élan of those who successfully resist the might of Britain and keep their republican principles intact could well prove a massive vote winner. That in no small part explains why the IRA can afford to be so unaccommodating, aggressive and provocative.

On the other hand Trimble is under tremendous pressure. The Ulster Unionists found it impossible to abide by the letter of the Good Friday agreement. To have done so would have had Trimble, as first minister, sitting alongside Sinn Féiners in cabinet all the while with the IRA fully armed and operational. Such an acceptance of Sinn Féin ministers before IRA decommissioning would have cleaved the ranks of the Ulster Unionists and immeasurably strengthened the hand of Paisley and his Democratic Unionist Party. All in all a 'no' majority amongst the majority British-Irish now effectively exists.

Of course, the fundamental problem is not some inherent Irish cussedness, unreasonableness and propensity to violence. It is the division forced upon Ireland in 1920-21. Northern Ireland was established not to meet some protestant British-Irish yearning for self-determination, but to secure for Britain the largest possible territory around the, then strategically important, Belfast industrial conurbation. Something by its very nature that was not only unjust, but ultimately unworkable. Northern Ireland meant the national oppression of a large catholic-nationalist minority and the renewal of the protestant ascendancy.

Needless to say, throughout this century the defining feature of unionism has been saying 'no' to equal rights for catholics. As a labour aris-

ocracy working class protestants have looked to the UK state to furnish them with privileges against and over catholics. Partition post-1998 eschews gerrymandering and overt discrimination. More than that, Blair aims to win the consent, if not the active support, of the catholic-nationalist population. Each concession given to, or wrested by, the minority produces an equal and opposite alienation amongst the majority. Ireland's right to self-determination has again been denied and remains the central, unresolved, contradiction. But as a concomitant old loyalism now finds itself adrift from the British state. The Good Friday agreement redefines the union with Great Britain and necessitates an historic compromise with Irish nationalism ... the actuality of which is beyond the pale.

In all probability the next big storm will be the reform of the RUC under the auspices of Chris Patten. His commission's report has already been heavily leaked. In actuality the recommendations might well be toned down in order to render them less objectionable to Tory-unionist opinion. Nevertheless if a renamed RUC is shorn of its special branch, cut by 75% in terms of personnel and policing is devolved to local authorities, the Hague Tories could yet find themselves with an unofficial armed wing. Mass resignations, passive mutiny, uniformed protest demonstrations are all far from impossible.

Such a constitutional crisis ought to be our opportunity. Yet independent working class politics exists as no more than an abstraction. A predicament made worse because it is hardly recognised. Most leftists in Britain are hopelessly mired in economism (bourgeois politics of the working class). A Tory-unionist challenge in Northern Ireland would see the old left line up with Blair in the name of 'peace' and the 'lesser evil'. Auto-Labourism and social pacifism is a stubborn thing.

Communists hold to a different approach. Where Blair remakes the constitutional monarchy from above, the CPGB says the workers can take the lead in remaking Britain from below as a federal republic (as advocated by Marx, Engels and Lenin). As to Ireland, we are for an immediate British withdrawal and reunification. Communists advocate the most extensive and deepest democracy. That means full citizenship rights for both religio-ethnic communities in Ireland and a negotiated arrangement whereby a one-county, four-half-county British-Irish federal entity can exercise self-governing autonomy up to and including the right to separate.

Without such a communist minimum programme there can be no voluntary unity of Ireland, let alone working class liberation ●

Jack Conrad

## Recruit and integrate

In the *Weekly Worker* of August 19, I wrote this about our current stage of development as a group: "Despite our committed and assured cadre, our organisation still exists as a school of thought on the revolutionary left rather than a coherent national organisation able to affect the political outcome of events by social weight, not simply by force of argument. This is something we must strive to remedy."

This is a recognition of two things. First, it underlines the seriousness with which we approach the Party project. Seeing it through will not consist in having clumped together a few hundred members, supporters and sympathisers, re-designing your headed notepaper and declaring yourself to be the Party. I also emphasised this when I quoted from our November 1990 conference. Even as we took the banner of the Party, we wrote that "our main task remains *reforging* the CPGB. Although we have the name of the Party, the Party itself has been liquidated" (my emphasis *The Leninist* January 30 1991).

Second, it is an implicit condemnation of the profoundly philistine culture of the left. Even as a school of thought, this organisation has been able to punch way above its weight for many years now. This should tell our opponents something about the robust nature of the ideas we defend and have fought so pugnaciously for. On second thoughts, perhaps they have taken note, as most organisations have preferred to circuit the ring squeaking rather than stand and fight.

It is clear that the numerical growth of this organisation and the commensurately wider dissemination of the ideas we defend will be an important factor in the positive resolution of the programmatic crisis that is sucking much of the left under.

The question is how, of course. Over the years, this column has consistently referred to the problems we have had with "recruitment". In hindsight, it is clear that this has given a slightly misleading impression of the difficulties we face. In fact, our problems start not with people applying to *join* our organisation, but in *integrating* them into viable local organisations and in establishing organic relations between these embryonic Party 'cells' and the Party as a whole.

In fact, people are constantly applying to join the Communist Party - some 20 alone in the quiet month of August. Fundamentally, it is the weakness of our national *cadre* structure that has produced our inability to take more of them into our ranks.

This is exacerbated by the nature of these recruits and how they come into contact with the Party in the first place. The majority tend to be quite politically isolated, even if they happen to find themselves in other left organisations when they first contact us. A significant number of the comrades are young, still politically raw and - our key problem - passive. Communist politics is a bit of a spectator sport for them. Their identification with the politics of communism is sincere and enormously positive. Quite how they as individuals will be able to fit in to the project of the Party as expressed weekly in the pages of our paper is another matter.

This is also because they come to us from a standing start - from reading the paper, from the internet and even from the telephone directory. These comrades do not gravitate towards communism as a results of the impetus of a mass movement, nor from the campaigning work that the Party currently undertakes. Again, as I wrote on August 19, "The historically low level of the class struggle has shifted the emphasis of the *Weekly Worker* heavily in the direction of polemic and debate." This "polemic and debate" takes place with a left largely characterised by sectarian inertia and decline. It is not, in other words, a place where potential recruits drop out of the trees, no matter how hard we shake them. Our new Party contacts come almost exclusively from outside the realm of today's organised left.

Although this is encouraging, it also underlines just how philistine the cadre of other groups are when they denounce the 'elitism' of the *Weekly Worker*. This alleged insular approach apparently renders it unreadable by that mythical category, "ordinary people", or young comrades new to politics. A quick rummage through our weekly postbag and the relatively healthy numbers of people applying for membership of our organisation belies that patronising nonsense.

Yet it lands us with the problem outlined above - how to integrate these comrades, how to make them full members of the Party? It is not a difficulty we would prefer to be without - it is better that people are trying to join us than not - but nevertheless it is a frustration.

When we look around at the rest of the left for ideas on how to handle this, there are certainly plenty of lessons. Almost all of them negative, unfortunately.

First, there are organisations such as Workers Power, the Socialist Party or the Socialist Workers Party. Such groups' ludicrously 'upbeat' perspectives about the nature of the period are contradicted repeatedly by their organisational stagnation or actual decline. Every week, *Socialist Worker* will feature a box telling us how many people have "joined" this week (in truth, how many have filled out membership cards). The paper never carries an honest appraisal of its organisational fortunes, its problems as well as the successes. This renders its regular assessments worthless.

Similarly Peter Taaffe's "red 90s" are yet to materialise. They have just another four months left to turn up. Yet the sober realities of class struggle, and the dramatic decline this has precipitated in the membership and influence of the Socialist Party in England and Wales is not considered worthy of honest, open examination. Its turgid weekly paper therefore largely consists of low-level agitation puff and 'feel good' items about the organisation's fortunes. SPEW comrades tell us that the new recruits *The Socialist* occasionally reports tend to evaporate as quickly as they materialise. Having recruited them on a low level, SPEW almost inevitably loses them on a low level as well.

Workers Power is something else. Some time ago, it circulated a readers' questionnaire which - incredibly - asked subscribers whether they would like to see a letters page in their monthly paper. I think we can safely assume that WP does not receive floods of letters every month but then decides to spike them because of the current format of its paper. Obviously this little group does not get any letters: it produces a *press that is dead*, a paper that tiny numbers read and no-one responds to. (Why would you? The deeply sectarian WP has no consistent record of printing seriously critical letters.)

There is a world of difference between attempting to impart some momentum and enthusiasm into the work of your organisation and its recruitment and simply telling yourself and your audience lies. We are clear that the fight to build our organisation takes place in the context of a profound period of world reaction and this reflects itself in the number and nature of the people who gravitate towards us. While we think these levels are healthy, all things considered, we are not in the business of trying to fool anyone.

The role of the *Weekly Worker* will be key in transforming the relatively substantial layer of supporters, sympathisers and partisan readers we have around us into new members for the Party. We intend to start featuring more regular reports of our work with contacts in these pages, offering comrades more of a chance to feed their opinions and experiences of Party work into their paper.

This has been a neglected Party task. Yet it is clear that - given the current stage of our development - it is important area of work in which we can make real progress ●

**Mark Fischer**  
national organiser

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

## 79 years

The Communist Party of Turkey was formed on September 10 1920, reflecting the ethnic mixture of the working class. Since its founding days it contained workers from all Balkan and Caucasian nationalities, Arab and Kurdish workers, alongside Turkish workers. The CPT learned from its own experience the necessity of organising on the basis of proletarian internationalism.

In the past 10 years, which we call the New Era, we have witnessed extraordinary changes and shifts in the balance of forces throughout the world. We have lived through almost bloodless counterrevolutions culminating in the re-establishment of capitalism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. Thus world imperialism and more specifically the USA rid itself of the force it regarded as a threat to its existence for 70 years. Furthermore the world acquired a monocentric structure and imperialism entered a phase of unbounded aggression. The US started dictating its political and economic intents onto the peoples of the world. International laws and agreements were never trampled upon as they have been for the past 10 years.

As Fidel Castro pointed out, this situation, bar one or two countries with specific circumstances, has prohibited armed propaganda as the primary strategy of struggle throughout the world. Under these circumstances, a communist party which has gained the active, and even armed, support of the masses has to calculate how to resist imperialism's armed intervention in order to make political revolution. Imperialism will invariably take its place alongside the bourgeoisie of the country reflecting its interests. The strangulation of revolutions is not a new feature as such. What is new today is the fact that it has become the rule regardless.

Given the present state of affairs, a communist party which has as its mission the opening of a path to the classless society through achieving revolution in its own country has to develop its strategy according to the demands of the new situation, and struggle for the strengthening of the international communist movement. To struggle against imperialism solely within our own borders can only mean defeat from the word go.

Turkey is also affected by the new conditions as well as the internal dynamics of the country. A serious economic crisis (recession) took hold in 1993. The crisis culminated in the worst economic decline for 50 years. Per capita income fell from \$3,004 in 1993 to \$2,193 in 1994. This in turn resulted in a severe political crisis. The unity of purpose of the bourgeoisie fell to pieces. The bourgeoisie lost its ability to govern. The people openly confronted the government, took to the streets. Turkey lived through a most successful May Day rally and the Gazi uprising (a working class district of Istanbul). There was a revolutionary situation.

A new economic revival started from the second quarter of 1995. The economy expanded at an average pace of seven percent through the three years 1995-1997. The economy continued to grow at a pace of 4.5% through 1998, despite world economic recession and reduced demand from Russia.

The prevailing circumstances removed all three prerequisites of the revolutionary situation. On the other hand, the existing economic and political circumstances in the country put Turkey on a knife edge. The balance could easily shift and rapidly give rise to a political crisis.

We are witnessing important developments in the Kurdish question, which is a topic carefully followed by all fraternal parties and revolutionaries in the world. The death sentence passed on Abdullah Ocalan is an attempt to continue the Turkish bourgeoisie's 70-year-long policy of denial. Unfortunately, Ocalan's stand in the court helped them enormously.

During the trial, Ocalan continuously attacked the European countries, but he never criticised the USA, even though it was the USA which delivered him to the Turkish oligarchy. Maybe this was because the Kurdish question is developing according to a US 'solution', and the trial and testimony of Ocalan helped create public support for this. The aim is to destroy the revolutionary dynamic and to restore stability.

The 'leader country of the region' idea, which is put forward by Ocalan and the presidential council of the PKK, is part of this 'solution'. They are offering Turkey the possibility of opening out into the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Balkans. The PKK's talk about "reaching out" is, in fact, an appeal to the USA. The PKK knows very well that Turkey is the subcontractor of the USA in the regions listed.

Ocalan is trying to present his proposals under the title of 'The manifesto of the 21st century', which he formulated as a "democratic republic". This proposal would not scare the Turkish state, because it legitimises it. This is the 'solution to the Turkish question' proposed by imperialism.

This trial will take its place in Kurdish history as a sorry episode. It opens the door unilaterally to the worst sort of 'peace' and 'reconciliation'. The Turkish state used the trial of Ocalan to condemn the Kurdish nation. It is the Turkish state that denies the existence of the Kurdish nation, that robs them of their national rights. In the last 15 years, over 20,000 Kurdish people have been murdered and almost five million of them have been forced to evacuate their homes at gunpoint.

If there is to be an honourable peace for the Kurdish people, it can only be based on an unconditional recognition of the rights of the Kurdish nation. The real emancipation of the Kurdish people can only be achieved through a struggle in unity with the Turkish working class and people against Turkish imperialism.

In the face of this new state of affairs, which has become clearly evident in the last few years, our party has already taken the steps necessary to adjust its organisational work to the new circumstances. Our 10th Congress, assembled a couple of months ago, following its conclusions about the existing nature of things, decided that the present-day concept of organisation should fall within the framework of the following guidelines.

Our party, which adheres to the principle of democratic centralism, will further promote the democratic aspect in this period. In accordance with this, the party organs will elect their own secretariats. Freedom of speech for different views will be enhanced in the party organs. Party organisations have been given the right to publish local publications.

Open democratic work will be carried out in all available platforms and new bodies will be established in areas deemed necessary. While doing this, however, it is vitally important not to fall into the trap of legalism.

The new period will be the era where new ideas and new theoretical solutions will come to the forefront. It is vitally important to carry out organisational work around the books and publications we are going to publish on this basis.

**Communist Party of Turkey**

## Sikorski victim

Further to the article by Simon Harvey (*Weekly Worker* August 28), I was one of those voided from SLP membership by Pat Sikorski, so I cannot grieve deeply about his fate in the RMT. As someone who hoped that the foundation of the SLP was an attempt to unite the left, I had subscribed before the constitution was written, writing to the SLP telling them that I was an anarchist. I was voided for not having signed the (unwritten) constitution.

**Laurens Otter**  
Shropshire

## Unhinged

In December of last year, I wrote a short letter on the relative number of visitors to websites of the CPGB and Workers Power (*Weekly Worker* December 10 1998). While both had been up for comparable periods of time, the CPGB's 13,000 hits dwarfed the measly 400 on the WP site.

This alone effectively popped WP's pretensions of size and influence. Clearly, someone in WP thought so too and resolved that something had to be done about it.

So, in the 10 months since I wrote my original letter, the counter prominently displayed on the CPGB site tells us our score has gone up to 26,000. I suspect WP's counter might have told us a rather more modest story, but now we will never know.

It has simply been removed. Clearly, even being open about the number of people visiting (or rather *not* visiting) their site was too much for this self-obsessed sect. Maintaining the fiction of its importance is clearly a strain, especially when your website screams something very different at you every time you open it. Rather than confront its true face, WP prefers to live in a world without mirrors. It is in the process of becoming slightly unhinged, if you ask me.

**Paul Williams**  
Sheffield

Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance

# Break Nicholson's stranglehold

**A** belated annual general meeting of the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance will take place on September 11. It would not be stretching things to suggest that this could be make or break time for the GMSA, particularly in a period where the national network of Socialist Alliances appears to be stumbling without direction.

It has been the actions of the small clique which perpetuates itself as the 'leadership' of the GMSA that has been one of the flies in Dave Nellist's ointment. Ably marshalled by GMSA's mercurial convenor, John Nicholson (who was unfortunately supported - to varying degrees of explicitness - by the various Trotskyites present), last May's AGM saw GMSA reverse a commitment whereby its affiliates had an automatic right to a place on its steering committee. In the voting that followed, all affiliates bar the CPGB and the Campaign for a Democratic Socialist Labour Party retained their seats on the committee. This represented nothing more than a 'democratic' coup to remove the CPGB and its perceived allies. The 'unity' project of GMSA became premised on the suppression of minorities.

Although comrade Nicholson and his trusted lieutenants were victorious on the day, GMSA (and by that token the national network) suffered a distinct loss of credibility. Comrades from the International Socialist League and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who were prepared to tolerate Nicholson's leadership of the GMSA, have reacted to his contempt for democracy with embarrassment, and of late, verbal opposition. Nicholson has further besmirched his reputation by the removal of known CPGB supporters from 'his' mailing list, despite that fact we remain a paid-up affiliate of GMSA.

As we predicted last year, comrade Nicholson's bureaucratic clique have been unable to build anything concrete in the working class movement. This was shown in the aborted negotiations for a united socialist slate in the north west European elections. The likes of Nicholson and Margaret Manning used a mixture of tactics during discussions, ranging from fudged promises to moralistic support for the backsliding SWP and verbal suggestions from Nicholson that the whole project should be ditched.

Comrade Nicholson has of late seen his bloc on the steering committee unravel. Increasingly, he tends to rely on an 'inner sanctum' of individuals such as treasurer Declan O'Neill, Chris Jones (Manchester's last remaining *Socialist Outlook* supporter) and comrade Manning (until recently a member of the Socialist Party in England and Wales). Nicholson can no longer rely on the likes of the ISL and the AWL after hitching the GMSA bandwagon to Manchester's Campaign Against War in the Balkans. The fact that he was prepared to front a profoundly anti-democratic, pro-Serbian cartel and openly do the bidding of the SWP was obviously deeply abhorrent to the AWL. Even comrade Nicholson's prize sycophant, Chris Jones, was forced into a tentative assertion of the right of the Kosovars to self-determination at a North West

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Socialist Alliance forum on the Balkans War.

On the back of these sobering experiences, Nicholson's clique have obviously decided that the steering committee as presently constituted cannot be relied upon. Hence the AGM will be presented with a series of constitutional amendments from comrade Nicholson himself. When Manchester CPGB received a copy of these amendments it is fair to say that we were not disappointed. John Nicholson continues to be to democracy what Basil Fawlty is to gourmet nights. Indeed if 1998's AGM was a tragedy, then that of 1999 threatens to be one huge constitutional farce.

GMSA's current constitution states that it is "a broad, open, inclusive and flexible organisation, based on voluntary participation. GMSA is politically pluralistic and encourages all individuals, organisations and groups to participate fully in our vision of a socialist society and our way of working as an alliance." Now obviously the inclusivist thrust of this clause has taken a bit of a battering following the exclusion of the CPGB in May 1998, but it is infinitely preferable to comrade Nicholson's proposed amendment, which reads: "GMSA encourages individuals, groups and organisations who agree with this statement [that adopted at the March 1999 national founding conference of the SA] and who agree to work together with others in the anti-sectarian approach involved in this statement, to apply for membership of GMSA" (my emphasis).

It is interesting that one can never quite gather from its proposers what "anti-sectarian" means. In the practical experience of Manchester CPGB sectarians are defined by Nicholson and co as those who step outside and argue against the green/ethical pap espoused by soft left Labourite exiles. This amendment is therefore nothing more than an attempt to close down the already truncated avenues of debate inside GMSA in favour of lowest-common-denominator platitude. It is also a clause just waiting to be utilised by witch-hunters. GMSA adopts such an amendment at its own peril.

The 'implementation of policy and

new activities' and the organisation of conferences is, in theory at least, currently undertaken by the (exclusivist) steering committee, which includes the five elected officers and 10 members elected by the AGM. Nicholson proposes that this should now be "the responsibility of the elected officers". In plain English, the steering committee is to be scrapped. What Nicholson is trying to do here is to formalise an existing arrangement whereby he relies upon selected 'loyalists' to run GMSA. It is also an admission that comrade Nicholson sees the likes of the AWL and the ISL as suspect bloc partners - the events of the Balkans war shattered this particular 'unity'.

This amendment is also an attempt to finally get rid of the CPGB, who have consistently embarrassed GMSA officers because of our public defiance of their disgraceful exclusion of our organisation. In reality comrades Nicholson, Manning, Jones and co know our continued absence from the steering committee is untenable in terms of their own democratic credibility. Hence the attempt to circumvent their blushes by ditching the steering committee altogether. With an arrogance that befits the man Nicholson appears certain that he and his allies can gain the five officer's positions in GMSA.

As can be seen from the above, proprietorial control is the overriding aim. This impression is further reinforced by comrade Nicholson's proposed amendment to the membership clause. This currently reads: "Individual membership shall be open to anyone living in Greater Manchester and to anyone in neighbouring areas." Nicholson's proposal retains this statement as its opening, adding: "Applications shall be considered by the officers, whose decision shall be final in between annual conferences. The annual conference shall

ratify or otherwise all decisions of the officers. Annual conference decision shall be final."

Nothing could illustrate better the method of clique-building. In the absence of any expressed criteria, presumably it is only those deemed acceptable by comrade Nicholson who will be able to join. Like the sectarians whom he purports to detest, he believes that he can build a career by excluding those who step outside a narrowly defined 'consensus'. If potential recruits are prepared to accept the aims and constitution of GMSA then membership should be an automatic right.

The political method of Nicholson has nothing whatsoever to do with the building of a broad-based, democratic, working class alliance. It has everything to do with bureaucratic manoeuvre. It is unsurprising that the incumbent 'leaders' of the GMSA have done virtually nothing in terms of initiating campaigns and electoral interventions. Back-slapping and the odd tightly controlled conference are simply not the means by which socialists rally the working class. If Nicholson gets his way and these amendments win at the 1999 AGM, then it really will have to be questioned what possible further use GMSA will be to the working class.

In order to save the GMSA the CPGB is approaching all democrats and revolutionaries in the labour movement to break Nicholson's stranglehold. The AWL is proposing a set of amendments to those of Nicholson, many of which Manchester CPGB agrees with. Comrades, Nicholson and his clique have no divine right over GMSA. If the democrats unite, comrade Nicholson and his courtiers can be stopped. Then GMSA can move forward as an open, inclusive, campaigning force for the Manchester labour movement ●

Phil Watson

## GMSA AGM

Saturday September 11, Friends Meeting House, Manchester, 11am-4.30pm

## Fighting fund

# August shortfall

As I feared, the holiday period has taken its toll on our fighting fund. We need a minimum of £400 each and every month both to ensure continued publication and, perhaps more importantly, to prepare for future expansion of the *Weekly Worker*.

Unfortunately, August's total of £313 fell well short of what is necessary. However, with comrades returning from their breaks, we have every hope not only of busting

through the £400 figure, but making up the shortfall in September.

Donations from GK (£30) and PL (£20) were two outstanding contributions received in the last few days. Thanks, comrades. Let's hope many others follow your example in the coming weeks ●

Robbie Rix

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

## action

### ■ CPGB seminars

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

Sunday September 12, 5pm - special seminar: 'The Turkish earthquake: official aid and the working class'. Speaker: Esen Uslu.

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.

### ■ Solidarity with Kosova miners

Saturday September 25, 12 noon at the Miners Hall, Red Hill Durham. Reports from Bajram Mustafa (Union of miners of Kosova) and Dragomir Olujic (journalist and trade unionist from Belgrade). Organised by Durham NUM.

### ■ 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.

## Website

Our website carries a comprehensive archive section including key articles on Russia, left polemics, the Northern Ireland peace process and the British-Irish question.  
[www.duntone.demon.co.uk/CPGB/](http://www.duntone.demon.co.uk/CPGB/)

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# Inconsistent democ

The *Weekly Worker* is, no doubt, beginning a vociferous exchange on the national liberation struggle in Ireland and strategies for neutralising the Ulster loyalists.

The argument revolves around Jack Conrad's position that consistent democracy in Ireland means "the protestant - British-Irish - minority having self-governing autonomy up to and including the right to separate" (*Weekly Worker* July 1). Since then this position has been the subject of fierce debate in a Party aggregate (July 11), a follow-up article by Marcus Larsen (*Weekly Worker* July 15), letters from supporters, four sessions at Communist University and, latest of all, comrade Conrad's theses of August 26.

The new thinking has come about at a time of change in the circumstances of the Irish struggle. Its revolutionary situation is in an advanced state of being resolved in favour of imperialism. This also at a time when the politics of the CPGB are refocusing on democratic questions, assisted by talks with the Revolutionary Democratic Group and Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Dave Craig of the RDG publishes regularly in the *Weekly Worker*, explaining his model of the 'democratic revolution'. He influenced the CPGB in developing its policy for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales. Sean Matgama is one of many AWL comrades to have spoken at CPGB forums. He has written in favour of repartitioning Ireland as a democratic solution to the loyalist problem. To be fair to comrade Craig he is not in favour of self-determination for the Ulster protestants, reasoning that national rights are for nations only, and they are not a nation.

Through the pages of the *Weekly Worker* and its predecessor *The Leninist* is documented a history of principled communist propaganda, agitation and solidarity work in support of the Irish national liberation struggle. There is precious little in print however on the protestant working class, and still less on the loyalists. It is therefore perfectly apposite to develop our policy and programme in a manner that attempts to resolve the problem caused for revolution by the existence of loyalism.

According to CPGB orthodoxy, the identity of the Ulster protestants is as an integral part of the Irish nation. The economy of the Six Counties is separate from that of Britain, and its culture has more in common with the rest of Ireland. The separate parts of Ireland are different in a manner akin to partitioned Korea, Germany and Vietnam. Local and British bourgeois rulers cemented the position of the protestants as a privileged labour aristocracy captured by loyalism. Obviously the character of the protestants is not fixed. However, changes brought about during the 'troubles' have been towards greater xenophobia and sectarianism rather than towards revolution. In fact, with continued separation it is possible that the Six Counties could develop into a separate nation over time, in say 200 years (Jack Conrad, 'Ireland', part II *The Leninist* November 1984). Conrad now chooses to stress the differences and separateness of the Ulster protestants, for different reasons.

Loyalism has been the only significant political movement to come out of the protestant working class in Ulster since partition. It emerged as the reflection of unionism in the class

Steve Riley opposes Jack Conrad's arguments for a British-Irish federal entity in a united Ireland to exercise self-determination

.....

**"Comrade Conrad has nothing to bargain with. In unlocking protestant consciousness with the repartition key, he locked himself out"**

.....

mirror: exclusive and brutal. Even where loyalism developed an antagonism to bourgeois unionism it has remained within the unionist paradigm, protecting the privilege it holds against the catholics, who constitute for it a subclass.

Alan Merrick captured the character of the 'class conscious' loyalist well in a pair of articles, in 1987. The first was about a favourable interview in the *Morning Star* of Gusto Spence, UVF commander in Long Kesh and later a leading member of the Progressive Unionist Party. Then as today the PUP said that it would talk with the IRA, if it gave up the struggle for national liberation. Nevertheless, that has not stopped them targeting uninvolved catholics for torture and assassination, as a means of instilling terror. The Merrick article characterised Spence and the PUP as 'Strasserite', the trend within the Nazi party that favoured a more workerist approach than that adopted by the Führer (*The Leninist* April 3 1987).

The second article was, remarkably, an interview with Gusto Spence's brother Eddie, who had married a catholic and lived in a nationalist area of Belfast. His denunciation of the PUP as a semi-fascist organisation full of bigots could not be clearer. About his brother he said, "I'm not saying that [he] didn't try to break from sectarianism, but he never had the means ... He didn't see that the only real alternative is Marxism ... He's [now] gone back to the old ways of thinking. Loyalism, you know, is a reactionary thing. If you think you can change it from the inside you cannot break from sectarianism" (*The Leninist* July 17 1987).

The basis of Conrad's new position is that he does not restrict the right of self-determination to nations. Indeed, Scotland and Wales are not 'nations', but 'nationalities', and the protestants are, he claims, sufficiently nation-like to warrant similar consideration. But how 'nation-like' are the protestants? Often in these debates it is useful to

refer to JV Stalin's five features of nationhood (1913).

These are: (i) a stable community; (ii) a common language; (iii) a common territory; (iv) economic cohesion; (v) a collective character.

To deal with the easy one first; it is easy to say that the Ulster protestants have a common language. It is English. It is the common parlance shared by much of the rest of the world, including the 26 counties, but it is *the* language of the Ulster protestants. The Ulster protestants have much that is collective in their character too: they share a religion; they share a range of cultural outlooks, including an affinity with the UK and an historical background which looks to Scottish and English settlers and to William of Orange; they support Linfield and don't play GAA football. It is difficult to see this as decisive, however, when the Six Counties protestants have so much in common with the nationalist population of the Six Counties and the population of the other 26. For instance a mythology that shares Fionn mac Cumhail and Cuchulainn, a history which includes the United Irishmen, much in traditional music, a liking for good stout and whiskey, and a deep seated suspicion of the Brits!

If we are to consider the stability of the community of the Ulster protestants, we must first justify leaving the protestants in the rest of Ireland out. Then we must justify leaving out the protestants in the rest of Ulster, because those under consideration are in only six of the nine Ulster counties. Since the resurgence of the war in 1969 there have been several suggestions of repartition from politicians in the north, south and Great Britain, which would redefine the community in an instant. It is clear then that the 'protestants of Ulster' are a product of the 1921 partition, and are defined by the politics of the day. We need not add to this the issues of emigration, of non-observance and conversion to see how mutable is the community of 'Ulster protestants'. While undoubtedly a core of people have for 100 or more years called themselves 'Ulster protestants', this by no means reflects a 'nation-like' stability among a common people.

The claim to have a common territory is subject to the same political considerations as is 'community' above, with the additional complication that this changeable territory never has been contiguous anyway. The sizeable minority, which may even constitute a majority by 2015, is dotted about the whole of the Six Counties in its own community areas. Protestant Belfast contains catholic West Belfast, which in its turn contains the protestant Shankhill Road. Protestant Portrush is next to catholic Portstewart. Coleraine, Enniskillen, Lurgan, Lisburn, Derry and almost every other sizeable town you wish to mention is made up of segmented zones where catholics live and other ones where protestants live. Often one cannot tell whose ghetto you are in except for the colour of the painted kerbstones. To get to work one might have to walk through a hostile area or take a long detour. Yes, a head count

in the Six Counties for the present would reveal a larger number of protestants than catholics, but to talk of the Ulster protestants occupying a common territory is absurd. They share it with a sizeable minority not much fewer in number than themselves.

Neither is it possible to talk of an 'Ulster protestant economy', since economic activity in the Six Counties is not segregated in this fashion, except for the now dwindling Belfast and Larne engineering works. However, the economy of the Six Counties, has been far from cohesive. Subsidy from the UK and EC (excluding military expenditure) rose steadily from £74 million in 1970 to £3,448 million in 1997 (O Gay and B Morgan *Northern Ireland: political developments since 1972* House of Commons research paper 98/57 1998). The balance of trade with the rest of the world is consistently and significantly negative and, while most Six Counties export goes to Britain, there is significant trade in both directions with the south (B Rowthorn and N Wayne *Northern Ireland, the political economy of conflict* Cambridge 1986). Farm work straddles the border, giving rise to constant efforts to stop the army closing roads.

It is clear that the Six Counties is unable to produce equal to its own needs: it is massively dependent upon economic aid, and despite the efforts of successive unionist administrations it remains economically engaged with the south. This latter fact is specifically recognised in the currently developing settlement. The Belfast agreement of April 10 1998 contains provision for a north/south ministerial council to legislate on common matters, including agriculture, education, transport, environment, waterways, social security, tourism, EU programmes, inland fisheries, marine matters, health and urban development.

While Stalin's 'check list' is not the be-all-and-end-all in debates on issues of national status, on this occasion it does show us that the Ulster protestants cannot reasonably be considered as nation-like at all. Much of the difficulty arises from the protestants being a religious faction, not a people, and also that their 'Ulster' is an administrative and political convenience of imperialism, not an historically constituted territory. Comrade Conrad says that he too does not think that the Ulster protestants are a nation, but that he extends to them the right of self-determination anyway.

The right, however, to break away and form an independent state as a separate people must depend on some approximation to nationhood in the sense discussed. After all, one would not consider Nation of Islam, the Boy Scouts organisation or the inhabitants of Moss Side suitable candidates for separatism, even should they present their case with some justification. It is sensible not to be dogmatic on the precise definition of what a nation is, but we should still be aware that what is being conferred here is a status which most normally resides with nations. The

further one stretches the definition, the better one's reasons ought to be.

There is a danger within this argument of treating all Ulster protestants alike, whereas it is only those who are prepared to raise arms against revolution, the loyalists, who are the problem. The danger even arises in framing the original proposition, that it is the 'Ulster protestants' and not the loyalists who are entitled to break away and form their own state. It may be that this is a polemical device to carry the politics further than would otherwise be sustainable, or else it is from a belief that, no matter how unlike a nation the Ulster protestants are, they are still sufficiently nation-like for the proposition to hold. No matter: it is still the loyalists, not the protestants that have to be neutralised.

Several historical episodes figure in the development of counterrevolutionary loyalism: most notably, the Carsonite rebellion of 1912, the Ulster Workers Council strike of 1974 and the strike against the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1986.

In September 1912 the Liberal government of Henry Asquith, backed by a sound majority in the Commons, submitted the Home Rule Bill. Edward Carson, who raised and armed a 100,000-strong Ulster Volunteer Force, organised through the Orange Order and backed by the Conservative Party and unionist establishment, opposed this. The rebellion threatened to split the British army and the colonies. Forty thousand rifles were smuggled into the north of Ireland. The rebellion lasted until August 1914 when Asquith was forced to abandon the bill.

The second of these three episodes was the UWC strike of May 1974. The UWC was set up to organise loyalist resistance to two measures: power-sharing with the catholics in a Six Counties executive; and the Council of Ireland, which would involve the government of the 26 counties. The UWC was a grass-roots organisation, drawing its support almost entirely from the working class. It organised roadblocks and welfare through the UDA, UVF and street committees. The assembly and the executive collapsed and direct rule from Westminster was re-established.

Lastly is the strike in March 1986 against the Anglo-Irish Agreement of the previous November. The 24-hour strike saw roadblocks and demonstrations, but these were mainly in the loyalist heartlands of Larne, Carrickfergus and east Belfast. The impact of the strike was patchy and marked by loyalists actively intimidating their own working class protestant communities into compliance. The agreement remained intact. The attempt to repeat the victories of the UWC strike had failed.

Several threads flow through these events which epitomise loyalist resistance in the eyes of the protestant communities themselves. It is not necessary to relate the stories of pogroms, death squads, Shankhill butchers, discrimination and intimidation to establish that the loyalists will use whatever terror they can to maintain their privilege. And neither is there need to tell of security forces, Bloody

# ocracy

Sunday, shoot-to-kill, internment, Diplock courts, supergrass, gerrymandering and a general level of harassment to demonstrate that the state supports that. The threads to follow are the waning of establishment support for loyalism, a need for working class loyalists to organise on their own initiative and an uncertain support from the mass of the protestant working class in recent years. The failure of the Drumcree stand-off to force an Orange march down the Garvaghy Road is a further pointer in the same direction.

Of course, there is no telling in advance the level of reaction there will be within the Ulster protestant communities to a resurgent revolution in Ireland to come. Will loyalism rebuild its mass working class base? Will the establishment back loyalism, Carson-style, in a revolutionary crisis? Who knows? The important point however is that loyalism is counterrevolution, is fascistic; not a force to be co-opted or bought off with promises of favours. The Ulster protestant working class has too close a relationship with loyalism, but they are not synonymous. The protestant community has historically been prepared to defend its sectarian privilege against democratic change, but it is not monolithically reactionary.

For comrade Conrad, the Ulster protestants should have "self-governing autonomy up to and including the right to separate". But what does this mean? Among Conrad supporters there is considerable confusion, giving rise to three versions already. Each version lays claim, alongside Conrad himself, to be in pursuit of 'consistent democracy'. After all, comrades, we are all consistent democrats now. For this author, the Conrad assertion can practically mean only one thing - the repartition of Ireland - which in my humble opinion under foreseeable circumstances cannot serve consistent democracy. We now know that repartition is precisely what Conrad has in mind. Nevertheless, let us look briefly at the alternatives as discussed by Conrad's supporters.

The first of these I will call 'anarchistic self-determination'. Several comrades have expressed support for the Conrad line because they understand it to mean the utmost extension of democracy, where no-one, loyalist or Irish nationalist, will be forced into a state against their aspirations. This, its supporters acknowledge, would lead to a proliferation of micro-states. When pressed on the real ghettoisation of the Six Counties, they are forced to concede that their interpretation means every town, every street, every house, every bed-sit has the right to separate and form its own state. Then no-one would be an oppressed minority. This, comrades, is not socialism; it is not consistent democracy; it is out-and-out anarchy. It is gibberish from start to finish, from which Conrad was quick to dissociate himself.

The second alternative is the hoary old question of cultural national autonomy. It might appear surprising that this issue should resurface at the current juncture, but a bit of analysis reveals how it flows from Conrad himself. Lenin's argument against cultural national autonomy has been treated in detail elsewhere (see LA Bates, 'Autonomy, federalism and centralism' *Weekly Worker* February 20 1997), but we will refresh our memory. In 1903, the organisation of Jewish workers in Russia, the Bund, was de-

feated in its bid to be the sole organiser of Jewish workers in a federal structure with the rest of the RSDLP. Lenin argued that the Jews are not a nation, and to separate from other workers in the same state would be to disorganise the working class. In 1912, the Bund made another bid, along with the Menshevik liquidators, on the same issue and around the elections to the duma.

Throughout these arguments, the opponents of Lenin leaned on the definition of nation and self-determination developed by Otto Bauer. He and others were working on the problem of self-determination for the many nationalities within the Austro-Hungarian empire. They concluded that a multinational state should be established wherein nationality is determined extra-territorially by cultural association. In the programme of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, this was resolved by "absolutely autonomous" "national parliaments" made up of "self-governing regions of one and the same nation" (JV Stalin *Works* Vol 2, Moscow 1952, p334). The remit of the national parliaments would be the cultural affairs of each nationality, such as education, literature, art and science, the formation of academies, museums, galleries and theatres, whereas 'political' matters would be left to the overall imperial parliament.

Now we come to the link between the unfortunate proponent of cultural national autonomy for the Ulster protestants, who thought he was following Conrad, and Conrad himself. Conrad conforms to Bauer's definition of a nation more than to Stalin's: the reason is as follows. Since the claim to a common territory and common coherent economy are so tenuous for the Ulster protestants, and since Conrad insists that they are in any case sufficiently nation-like to be accorded national rights, Conrad must consider a common psychology or character to be sufficient qualification for national rights. This is precisely the assertion made by Bauer, when he says that "A nation is a relative community of character", and national character is "the sum total of characteristics which distinguish the people of one nationality from the people of another nationality - the complex of physical and spiritual characteristics which distinguish one nation from another." (*ibid* p310). So, while rejecting the state-organisation form of cultural national autonomy espoused by the Austro-Marxists, Conrad is forced back on the definition of nation on which cultural national autonomy is premised. This is non-scientific, it is not Marxism and it is not even consistent democracy.

The third version of self-determination is the obvious one to which this author first alluded: the repartition of Ireland. It is also the one that Conrad himself thinks most workable. A national state must have a territory, and it must hold to some concept of a majority people. The British knew this in 1921 when they partitioned six counties of the original 32. Partition has been the primary feature of Irish politics since it happened. It defeated radicalism in the end of the 1918-21 war of independence from Britain; it was central to the treaty over which the 1921-24 civil war was fought. Through partition was bought the clientship of the labour aristocracy in the Six Counties. The threat of the loss of economic and political advantage was enough to break the unity

of the organised working class on many occasions since. The revolutionary war of the Provisional IRA and Inla was fought over the partition of Ireland by British imperialism.

Do comrades imagine that in a conflict which bears the possibility of repartitioning Ireland, a conflict which involves the expulsion of British imperialism from a revolutionary Ireland, and the possibility of a revolutionary Europe, do you imagine that imperialism, counterrevolution, would fail to place the fight for repartition centre stage? Of course they would. Then, having achieved repartition, the nationalist minority would be locked into a more securely partitioned Ireland for as long as imperialism was able and willing to sustain it. That then is the nature of partition. It is no mere organisational gimmick, to be played with to unlock the consciousness of the protestants. Although we should understand that it is indeed a key, a key to their *reactionary* consciousness as labour aristocrats, oppressors, loyalists and counterrevolutionaries.

Comrade Conrad has however made a concrete proposal, so let us have a look at it. He suggests that Ireland should be repartitioned with Co Antrim, north Tyrone, south Derry, north Armagh and north Down all within the new protestant state. He includes one county and four parts of counties, as if he has put some thought into it. Conrad has simply undertaken the same kind of assessment the British did in 1920, when segregating the Six Counties: in what territory can the protestants hold a majority? Sadly the proposal falls down before the reality of Ireland: that repartition, like partition before it, defies the interpenetration of populations.

Consider the following, not exhaustive, list. Co Antrim includes the Ballycastle-Cushendall-Cushendun *gaeltacht* area, where catholics are more than 75% of the population. It contains the east shore of Lough Neagh, where catholics are about 50% of the population, also the Toom Bridge-Randalstown, area where catholics are more than 50% of the population; North Tyrone includes the Castlederg-Newtonstewart area, where catholics are about 50% of the population; also the Coalisland-Cookstown-Magharafelt area, where catholics are more than 50% of the population. North Armagh includes Lurgan district, where catholics are about 75% of the population. It also includes Drumcree. The redrawn border misses out Coleraine and Enniskillen, towns which figure highly in protestant consciousness. In addition, if Derry were to be partitioned Bogside to Waterside, *a la* Berlin, it would also leave the north of Co Derry with no land links to the rest of Ireland. It could communicate only across the waters of Lough Foyle. Clearly, the attempt to define a democratic protestant contiguous territory is pie in the sky. Conrad should learn from the mistakes of British imperialism, not repeat them.

Having imagined a circumstance where imperialism defends itself against revolution, we should try to imagine what the reaction of the loyalists would be. These are the Black Hundreds, the Falange, Unita, the Contras. Can an appeal be made to the loyalists to give up counterrevolution by telling them that they have a right to repartition Ireland? Hardly! Can then the protestant working class support base be cut out from beneath the loyalists by making that offer? This seems to be the nub of the question.

Can the protestant working class be won to a democratic programme or to our minimum programme - a revolutionary democratic programme, to borrow a phrase - by recognising their right to self-determination? Well, it is not going to win them to revolution. There is not one ounce of revolutionary content or intent in the repartition

of Ireland. Aspirations toward protestant self-determination will be a strong incentive to act against the danger of a revolution that threatens their privilege. What then of its democratic content? Is that going to win them? Certainly this is the reason it has Conrad's support, but should it have communists' support?

"The right of nations to self-determination (ie, the constitutional guarantee of an absolutely free and democratic method of deciding the question of secession) must under no circumstances be confused with the expediency of a given nation's secession. The Social Democratic Party must decide the latter question exclusively on its merits in each particular case in conformity with the interests of social development as a whole and with the interests of the proletarian class struggle for socialism" (VI Lenin *CW* Moscow 1968, Vol 19, pp417-31).

This is the justification made by Conrad in posing the issue of self-determination for the Ulster protestants. Just like with our demand for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, the argument goes, we are supporting the right to self-determination while opposing separation. The point about recognising this right for Scotland and Wales, is that if these unions were to become enforced by oppression or military might, we would then support a revolutionary struggle for independence. There are democratic deficits in the relationships between England on the one hand and Scotland and Wales on the other. Scotland and Wales are unambiguously nation-like. There is no minority upon whose oppression the domination of the majority relies. There is every reason for communists to expect to win the argument for continued unity in a federal republic. Moreover, if we lose it is not a disaster, but a precondition for unity at a future date. As nation-like entities Scotland and Wales are not like the occupied Six Counties of Ireland.

How many Ulster protestants will be convinced of the higher democratic unity of the whole of Ireland above the 'democratic' unity of a protestant Ulster? I dare say some will. A majority in a plebiscite may even be possible. But how many communists will gamble our support for a loyalist repartition on the outcome of that plebiscite? Are we therefore prepared to support an armed struggle against the unity of Ireland by loyalist separatists? To ask the question is to answer it. If it is your intention to recognise the right of self-determination now, and then condemn the fight to gain it against the majority Irish in the future, that is the lowest form of opportunism I can think of: it is mere trickery and deceit.

Unfortunately more of this follows. The next suggestion is that repartition does not necessarily mean the oppression of the remaining minority. Well then, notwithstanding the automatic denial of the right to self-determination of the whole of the people of Ireland, and also notwithstanding the rights of the repartitioned nationalist minority, let us have a look at it.

Comrade Conrad suggests that there can be no right of the "present-day Northern Ireland" to self-determination. We are not for "expelling Northern Ireland from the union", but for the "withdrawal of the British state and British troops" and "a united Ireland" (*Weekly Worker* August 26). From this we can understand the scenario Conrad has in mind, although he does not express himself in such terms: it is for a successful expulsion of British imperialism from the whole of Ireland, aided by revolutionary democratic forces of the Ulster protestant working class. Only then will the argument be opened whether repartition takes place.

Such a unity based on the promise of the right to self-determination is wishful thinking bordering on self-de-

lusion. The Ulster protestants already have their statelet: not how they really want it, but better than the one-and-four-half-counties on offer from comrade Conrad. Comrade Conrad cannot aid them in overcoming their democratic deficit, since it is they themselves who are someone else's democratic deficit. Comrade Conrad cannot protect their privileges: in fact he wants to take them away! So it turns out that comrade Conrad is no comrade in the fight for repartition at all; in fact he's a sneaky little communist who wants to deliver the protestants into a united Ireland. Comrade Conrad has nothing to bargain with. In unlocking protestant consciousness with the repartition key, he locked himself out. Repartition would be on loyalist terms. Whither then the rights of the nationalist minority?

It is the contention of this author that partition is inextricably linked with the reactionary ideology of Ulster loyalism. Also that repartition has this same relationship, if standing somewhat in a rearward position. If there is any democratic content to the claim to self-determination for the Ulster protestants, then it disappears under the mass of oppression that partition, and repartition, by their very nature bring down upon the catholic minority. The containment of a catholic minority would be unavoidable. It would be opportunistic folly for the Communist Party to attempt to purchase the adherence of the Ulster protestant working class to such a 'democratic' programme. They have nothing to gain from that perspective, whereas we have everything to lose.

On a final note, while this article has attempted to trash the Conrad proposal on Ulster protestant self-determination - and no doubt more effort will be required before it finally does sink - it is without irony that I welcome this incursion into the political problem of the Ulster loyalists. Hitherto, the approach from the left has been inadequate to the task. The economists have always relied on 'working class solidarity' and 'normal politics' to overcome the divide. The revolutionary left has understood that partition is like a metaphor for the working class condition in Ireland: partition itself is the obstacle to working class unity.

While James Connolly was no prophet, he was an astute revolutionary politician. It was through the efforts of Connolly and James Larkin that major inroads were made against orange bigots in the working class in Belfast. So it is worthwhile repeating what Connolly said about partition in 1914 when it was first mooted:

"Such a scheme as that agreed to by Redmond and Devlin, the betrayal of the national democracy of industrial Ulster, would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured" (J Connolly *Collected Works* Vol 1, Dublin 1987, p393).

Communists must redouble the search for positive programmatic proposals to neutralise the loyalists, to win the protestant working class to a revolutionary transformation of society. Notwithstanding that we think we know the lessons of Connolly, this could still be a worthwhile starting place. In the meantime there should be a counter-proposal to that of Jack Conrad. If removal of the partition of Ireland, and opposition to its repartitioning, is not part of the minimum programme of the Party, then we should conclude that the Party believes there is no longer any revolutionary content in the demand for national self-determination for the people of Ireland as a whole. We will have subordinated this long-standing revolutionary principle to a vain, opportunist attempt to buy off the protestant working class ●

# What kind of republic

On November 6, Australians go to the polls in a referendum on whether the 100-year-old federation of six former British colonies should become a republic. More precisely, voters will be asked whether they approve "the proposed law to alter the constitution to establish the Commonwealth of Australia as a republic with the queen and governor-general being replaced by a president appointed by a two-thirds majority of the members of the commonwealth parliament".

There is a second question, asking voters whether they approve the proposed law to insert a preamble to the constitution. With explicit religious overtones, the proposed preamble begins: "With hope in god, the Commonwealth of Australia is constituted by the equal sovereignty of all its citizens." In effect it endorses Australia's military interventions abroad - Korea, Malaya, Vietnam - and has an inadequate, token reference to prior inhabitation; which has been largely condemned by Aboriginal leaders.

That such questions are being put to the electorate with practically no pressure from below represents an important development. Nevertheless how the working class and the communists respond to this referendum is not a straightforward matter of common sense. To begin with we must look at the communist attitude towards democracy.

Is democracy an add-on to the struggle for socialism, or is it an integral part of our method for achieving working class rule? Do we, like the Mensheviks, separate the two and treat democratic questions as tasks for the bourgeoisie, do we descend into economism and tail the bourgeoisie, or do we take up *all* democratic issues and stamp them with the hegemony of the working class and integrate consistent democracy as a central component of our programme for socialist revolution?

In his study of Karl Marx's writings, Hal Draper notes that "throughout the history of the socialist and communist movements, one of the persistent problems has been establishing the relation ... between the struggle for socialism and democracy, between socialist issues and democratic issues. On one extreme end of the spectrum is the view that puts the advocacy of democratic forms in the forefront, for their own sake, and subjoins the advocacy of socialistic ideas as an appurtenance ... On the other extreme is the type of radical ideology that counterposes socialistic ideas ... against concern with democratic struggles, considering the latter as unimportant or harmful.

"Marx's approach is qualitatively different from this sort of eclecticism, and does not attempt to establish a sliding scale of concern with the two sides of the duality. For him, the task of theory is to integrate the two objectively ... Marx's theory moves in the direction of defining consistent democracy in socialist terms, and consistent socialism in democratic terms" (H Draper *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* Vol I, New York 1977, pp282-283).

Today, by far the most prevalent error on the revolutionary left in this regard is counterposing socialism and democracy - the former viewed as proletarian, the latter as bourgeois. Due to the inconsistency of the bourgeoisie and 'their' revolutions, democratic tasks are left to the working class to 'complete', almost as an afterthought of history.

.....

**"The main push for republicanism comes from the most internationalist, Murdoch/Packer, wing of Australian-based finance capital. It is keen to engage with south east Asia, China and Japan. In opposition stands the more conservative landed and traditional capital based on resource export to Europe and the US"**

.....

Central to this misunderstanding is the 'Marxism' handed down to the theorists of 20th century socialism by the Second International. Pivotal in this is the category of 'bourgeois democratic revolution' as a necessary, definite and bourgeois-led phase which introduces capitalism. It is not a category that emanated from Marx himself. As Ellen Meiksins Wood argues, "The curious thing about this paradigm is that, while it contains significant elements of truth, it does not correspond to any actually existing pattern of historical development. In England, there was capitalism, but it was not called into being by the bourgeoisie. In France, there was a (more or less) triumphant bourgeoisie, but its revolutionary project had little to do with capitalism" (*The pristine culture of capitalism* London 1991, p3).

The revolutions of 1848-9 proved to Marx and Engels that the bourgeoisie was not and could not be a consistently democratic class. 'Bourgeois tasks' are in fact no such thing. Left to our rulers, democracy is constantly turned into its opposite - a method of oppressive rule. Yet because of its 'bourgeois democratic revolution' paradigm, the left tends to collapse before the ruling class. Marx, who had no such straightjacket, developed his theory of permanent revolution as the most thoroughgoing and uninterrupted extension of democracy from below - not as an end in itself, but as the programme of working class self-liberation and the path to socialism and global communism. Our struggle is to give democratic forms a new social

content by pushing them to the extreme of popular control from below. This, in turn, entails extending the application of democratic forms out of the 'merely' political sphere into the organisation of the whole of society - the principle of socialism itself.

It is from this theoretical base that we must approach the issue of a republic in Australia. When the question is placed in this context we can see that consistent democracy and the programme of working class emancipation cannot tail bourgeois constitutionalism. Democracy must be understood not as the task of the ruling class under capitalism, or of the bourgeoisie in order to achieve capitalism, but rather as an area contested by classes in which the working class can and must take the lead.

Let us move on to the subject at hand. Australian republicanism is a strange beast. Tinged red by transported Fenians and the migration of Chartists and 1848ers, republicanism has also had its racist and chauvinist flip side - a white Australia for white labour. There has always been a desire to be seen to be independent from the 'mother country' and there is an egalitarianism that runs like a thread even through bourgeois politics of today. Yet this almost intrinsic loathing for all things aristocratic never became mass independent working class politics. So while republicanism has not always been central to radical and oppositional movements, it has always been an undercurrent.

Of course, the November referendum comes from above, not below. In the last analysis it stems from divisions within the ruling class, not only in regard to national consciousness but fundamental shifts in the economic and political basis of Australian capitalism. This former British colony that increasingly looked to the United States after World War II has dropped its white Australia policy. Australia is now officially a 'multi-cultural' society - reflecting waves of migration and an orientation to Asian markets. Internal stability and the external impetus of globalisation has dictated this shift from the queen and the old country by sections of the Australian elite.

In many ways, this process began in 1983 with the election of a Labor government. Over 13 years, prime ministers Hawke and Keating steered the Australian economy away from protectionism towards monetarism and free trade. Labor has retained links with the unions. However, its active pole openly serves the interests of big capital.

The main push for republicanism comes from the most internationalist, Murdoch/Packer, wing of Australian-based finance capital. It is keen to engage with south east Asia, China and Japan. In opposition stands the more conservative landed and traditional capital based on resource export to Europe and the US.

With an atomised working class and shifts in balance of power within the Australian elite, a relatively cosmetic constitutional change seems appropriate. Although the election of a conservative Liberal-National coalition in 1996 slowed things down, the direction is clear.

Australia is trying to recast itself as an Asian economy: it initiated the Apec economic forum of Asian and Pacific nations. Apec was set up partly because Australia was kept out of the Association of South East Asian Nations, while Cambodia and Vietnam were included. This must

have rankled, as Asean itself was established as a cold war organisation specifically in reaction to the spread of 'communism' in the region. Keeping Australia out of the Asian club is a particular hobby horse of Malaysian prime minister Mahathir, who ensures that Australia is painted as an insensitive, white colonial neighbour. (Pauline Hanson's One Nation party has been seized upon as evidence of this by Australia's Asian capitalist competitors.)

Paul Keating, the most recent Labor prime minister, is a self-styled 'ardent' republican. He, more than anyone else got the ball rolling that has led to the November 6 referendum. For Keating - and the most dynamic and internationalising fractions of capital which Labor represents - the monarchy was an embarrassing anachronism. Their Australia - trying as it is to conquer new Asian markets and lay down the foreign policy framework for a whole region - needs to be seen to be breaking with the symbols of its European past.

Yet tinkering with constitutions is a dangerous business. At every step, the official republicans have endeavoured to cause as little disruption to the political fabric of the country as possible. It is their minimalist republican model which is on offer in November.

The formation of the very respectable Australian Republican Movement in 1991 precipitated the Keating Labor government to establish the Republic Advisory Committee (RAC) in April 1993. It was chaired by Malcolm Turnbull, the head of the ARM.

In its report of October 1993, the RAC concluded that a "republic is achievable without threatening Australia's cherished democratic traditions". In a statement on June 7 1995, Keating set out his government's view that Australia should become a republic by 2001.

Had the Labor Party been returned to office in 1996, it is likely that a referendum would have been drawn up without going through the Liberal-National-dominated constitutional convention (ConCon) of 1998, a body which, considering its outcome, can only be described as the country's most expensive opinion poll.

Sitting over February 2-6 and 9-13 the 76 elected and 76 appointed delegates to the ConCon were powerless. They were merely members of an advisory committee to the prime minister who was not bound to accept or act upon anything. The majority were republican. On the motion, "That this convention supports, in principle, Australia becoming a republic", 89 voted 'yes', 52 'no' and 11 abstained - a reflection of general opinion. Yet on the type of republic, the republicans were - and remain - split. A minority supports a directly elected head of state. As a result, the current minimalist model being offered in November could not garner an absolute majority. 73 voted 'yes', 57 'no' and 22 abstained.

For all the disagreement at the convention, everything took place within the safe limits of constitutionalism and the 'Australian way'. This was epitomised by the monarchist prime minister, John Howard. In summing up, he said: "I have learnt out of this convention that this Australian way we have of doing things is special and is unique."

Howard, a monarchist despite his inclusive rhetoric, has played things with exceptional skill. He has managed to divide republican opinion by fram-

ing the November 6 questions entirely to his advantage. The prime minister is deliberately offering change to prevent change - and whether the outcome is a credible 'yes' or 'no', in essence he will achieve his aim. Already, a camp of 'no' republicans has emerged. They favour a US-style presidential system and are not prepared to accept the appointed system. Treasurer Peter Reith has also now declared himself to be a 'no' republican.

What sort of a republic is on offer? Every five years, the sitting prime minister will nominate one candidate to a joint sitting of both houses of parliament. This candidate must then be seconded by the leader of the opposition, or else the nomination falls. The candidate is prohibited from being a member of a political party. So it is not about popular sovereignty from below. It is a repackaging of the constitutional monarchy. Significantly, the act to create a republic only becomes law, not after the constitutionally required referendum, but after the bill receives royal assent. The president is to represent a phantom common national will.

This president will not even be accountable to parliament, but to the federal executive council. Only the prime minister will have the power to dismiss the royal president, and the president will retain the power to dismiss the PM - in 1975 the Whitlam Labor government was sacked by the governor-general, the monarchy's representative in the Australian federal executive council. In any constitutional crisis, it will become a matter of who blinks first.

The president will in fact retain all the monarchical powers of the governor-general. The president will be head of the separate federal executive council and also of the armed forces. This minor modification of the status quo is explicit in the proposal for a republic. If passed, section 70a of the Australian constitution will read: "Until the parliament otherwise provides, but subject to this constitution, any prerogative enjoyed by the crown in right of the Commonwealth immediately before the office of governor-general ceased to exist shall be enjoyed in like manner by the Commonwealth and, in particular, any such prerogative enjoyed by the governor-general shall be enjoyed by the president."

Such an undemocratic state of affairs must be rejected. In the November 6 referendum, we are asked to choose between the unwanted and the unacceptable. On the one hand we cannot support the monarchical constitution system; on the other, we are offered the most minimal of changes to a system that might thereby become strengthened. There is no imprint from below, no democratic working class alternative.

We must reject this whole exercise as a fraud. It is a fraud as democracy and a fraud as republicanism. To vote 'yes', no matter what your private caveat, is to endorse a modified version of the current undemocratic constitution. Yet we cannot vote 'no', as those supporting a directly elected president are arguing. Such a tactic would make us indistinguishable from the monarchists. The only consistently democratic position is to call for a boycott of this rigged referendum.

What has been quite amazing throughout this entire constitutional debate is the quiescence of the left. This was most obvious in the elections to the toothless constitutional convention. The government wanted

# for Australia?

to ensure the most widespread inclusion in the process. Thus the election of the 50% of delegates not appointed to the convention were designed to be the most proportional Australia had ever seen.

Among the hundreds who put up for election there were no candidates of the left *whatsoever*. Almost universally, the left, small as it is in Australia, views these constitutional matters as the sole preserve of the bourgeoisie and professional middle class politicians. The only reflection of a reformist agenda came with those delegates - such as Aboriginal magistrate Pat O'Shane - arguing for a directly elected head of state and a bill of rights under the banner of 'A just republic'.

To script, the left organisations posed 'revolutionary' during the elections to the constitutional convention, effectively abstaining on the spurious grounds that workers were not interested in an establishment talking shop. Yet now the left, which pooh-poohed the whole republican issue as irrelevant, is flipping to 'realism'.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty's Martin Thomas, on political secondment to Australia, recently called for a 'yes' vote in the referendum, *before the question had even been announced*. It is this sort of non-thinking which is leading the left nowhere. It is tantamount to writing a blank cheque. The response of Dave Ball - a correspondent of the AWL's *Action for Solidarity* paper (July 23) - tails the ruling class on questions of democracy. He writes: "We should see the proposed change as a small step towards a radical democratic socialist programme." It is, of course, no such thing. A 'yes' will take the working class not one step closer to power. Comrade Ball's tactical 'yes', "coupled with criticism of the very limited and wealth-dominated democracy on offer", is to be linked with socialists campaigning independently on their own programme. The comrade is incapable of even contemplating an active boycott on a working class programme, despite being able to conclude that "voting in elections cannot be viewed in the same way as voting in referenda". Boycotts are the exception in elections, but they are frequently a useful tactic in referenda, that most undemocratic form of rule by consent.

And what of the others? The rump 'official' Communist Party of Australia is giving an uncritical 'yes'. The CPA favours an indirectly elected president with powers. What remains of the former Eurocommunist leadership of the old CPA, now a trust fund called the Search Foundation which backed the 'Just Republic' ticket in elections to the constitutional convention, has capitulated to the establishment's agenda, but is nevertheless running a 'yes, and more' campaign.

The main organisation on the Australian left is the Democratic Socialist Party. In an article, "Republic yes, but not a 'safe and conservative' one" (*Green Left Weekly* August 18), the DSP announced that it will campaign for a 'yes', but urge voters to write "elected by the people" on the referendum paper. This tailism reflects the DSP's opportunism as well as its economism.

Correctly, the article points out that "for establishment republicans any change should be about nothing more than nationalist symbolism". It goes on to note that such figures are determined "to ensure that any shift to a republic does not prompt a more

general questioning ... that could lead to instability". Quite right. ARM leader Malcolm Turnbull argues: "The November model is a safe and conservative means of achieving an Australian head of state while preserving our Westminster system of parliamentary democracy."

Amazingly, to support its argument for voting 'yes' (albeit combined with the slogan "elected by the people"), the DSP invokes a successful *boycott* of a referendum in Tasmania in 1981. After a two-year campaign to stop the damming of a wilderness area, the state government called a referendum to choose between the conservative government's hydro-electricity plan and the Labor opposition's 'compromise'. A full 38% boycotted what the DSP rightly calls a phoney choice and wrote 'no dams' on the ballot paper.

Yet when the votes are counted on the night of November 6, the DSP's will be indistinguishable from Malcolm Turnbull's as they will all end up on the 'yes' pile. Only an independent programme around a democratic republic, with a tactic of clearly *spoiling* the ballot paper would register independent politics.

Then there is the DSP's collapse into presidentialism - an anathema to the Marxist programme. There will be passive abstentions on November 6, even though federal referenda are compulsory. Due to cynicism felt towards establishment politicians, 67% of Australians support a republic with a directly elected president. Support for a republic falls to 47% under the minimalist model being offered.

Without thought, the DSP is opportunistically falling in behind this spontaneous presidentialism. Economism does not allow them to lay out a fully democratic and militant republicanism.

What then should be our attitude to the presidential system? Marx dealt with this most undemocratic form of the democratic state in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, his study of revolution and counter-revolution in France from 1848 to 1851. Central to his critique was the bourgeois-liberal covenant of the separation of powers. Reflecting the need to balance the new regime of elected representatives with the continuation of the old executive rule and its entrenched bureaucracy, the separation of powers is essentially about checks and balances between classes. Presidentialism is a conservative safety valve in the constitution to prevent untrammelled democratic rule from below.

Marx wrote of the presidential system as proposed in France: "On the one side are 750 representatives of the people, elected by universal suffrage ... on the other side is the president, with all the attributes of royal power ... with all the resources of the executive in his hands ... officials and officers ... of the armed forces." Marx points out that, where each representative is elected by this or that segment of the populace, the president will be elected by the people as a whole [as proposed by the DSP]. The president, continues Marx, "is the elect of the nation and the act of his election is the trump that the sovereign people plays once every four years", which Marx argues is the abrogation of the constitution. This is because the president is not accountable to elected representatives but to a metaphysical "national spirit".

The Marxist programme is against the separation of functions in general and the presidential form of the

executive in particular - something the DSP is actively *campaigning for* in this referendum on top of their support for Howard's minimalist republic.

The attitude of the DSP is revealing. In criticising those 'radical' republicans voting 'no' on November 6, the DSP does so from the right. Leading 'naysayer' Ted Mack has argued that an appointed president will "preserve and extend a monarchical form of government ... as well as denying people the right to vote for their leader". While this smacks of presidentialism, Mack has hit on a truth. The DSP is reduced to a pathetic gradualism.

It claims: "Firstly, getting rid of the queen represents some long overdue house cleaning. It is an extreme anachronism that the head of state is a hereditary and sickeningly wealthy English landowner whose only claim to pre-eminence is that her forefathers proved more effective at crushing peasants and executing rivals that anyone else did. It is long past time to get rid of this vestige of feudalism."

Not only does this display a thoroughly philistine inability to grasp the fact that Britain has a *capitalist* monarchy; it shows that the DSP believes that democratic tasks are mere "house cleaning". It evidently holds to an "ideology that counterposes socialistic ideas ... against concern with democratic struggles, considering the latter as unimportant or harmful".

The call for a boycott must be used to highlight the working class road to a republic. We call for the abolition of the existing constitution and its parliament, its bureaucracy, its secrecy and its politicians. We do not need a bicameral parliament - we need a working body of instantly recallable representatives elected on an annual basis by proportional representation. A president, if there is to be one, should only be the presiding officer and an elected member of the assembly representatives - accountable to those delegates. We need no 'head of state' standing above the rest of society.

In order to achieve this radical constitutional overhaul, communists must demand the convocation of a constitutional convention with full powers. This must be central to our campaign for a republican government. To the extent agitation is successful, then action committees should be formed to organise opposition from below.

Our minimum programme must be based on extending democracy under capitalism to its limits. Our programme must be for the most thoroughgoing democracy from below - not as an end in itself, but as the road to working class rule. This is proletarian republicanism.

Concretely we say:

- Abolish the states. The states are a reactionary bulwark against democracy. This is most evident in the manner in which the referendum must be passed. To be successful, there must not only be a simple majority of 'yes' votes nationwide, but there must be a majority 'yes' vote in a majority of the six states. All it takes is 51% of people, say in Western Australia, Tasmania and South Australia to vote 'no' to scupper any referendum. In the extreme case his could amount to as little as 15% or 20% voting 'no' nationwide. Concomitant with abolition of the states is abolition of the senate, the upper house and its conservatising role of 'checks and balances'.

- Work for a treaty with indigenous Australians. Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are among the most dislocated on the planet. A republic can only be truly considered democratic once the majority comes to terms with the brutal history of oppression of indigenous Australians. This must include the right to self-determination for Torres Strait Islanders. There must be a treaty recognising traditional Aboriginal rights and the right to assimilate, the right to learn and be taught in your own language and the right to learn English.

- A comprehensive bill of rights must be drawn up which includes: workers' collective rights through the establishment of workplace committees with right of supervision over management - the right to strike and collective bargaining; a comprehensive freedom of information clause - an end to secrecy: open the books of business and of government to the people; the economic, social and reproductive rights of women must be recognised, defended and advanced; freedom of sexuality; freedom of speech, and of assembly.

- Recallable and accountable representation by proportional representation.

- A single-chamber working assembly which unites legislative and executive functions.

- Election of the judiciary.

- Abolition of the standing army.

These minimum demands must be filled out through further debate and through struggle. Yet, as I have said, our constitutional agenda is not an end in itself. It reflects our vision of socialism, of a different society.

Do we treat republicanism as an alienated thing in itself, as mere "overdue house cleaning", as does the DSP? Or is our republicanism about the very way we are ruled, about human beings deciding history; about the method of developing the working class as a future ruling class? Socialism will not be given to us by any government. It will be, and can only be, the act of the working class itself. For the working class to liberate itself, it must become the hegemonic force for consistent and thoroughgoing democracy. For this reason, we cannot pin our colours to the phoney republic on offer on November 6.

Given the hurdles in the constitution, the splits in the republican camp and the way the question has been set, at present it seems the most likely outcome of this rigged referendum will be a 'no' result. This will be no surprise as the question has been set to achieve this result. If there were another question - "Should Australia become a republic?" Then we could only vote 'yes' and it would undoubtedly be passed. But this is not what we are being asked, no matter how the likes of the DSP 'amend' their responses on the ballot paper.

A 'no' result would throw the conservative republicanism of the establishment back a step. It is not only opportunist to vote 'yes'; it is bad opportunism. The left should not tie itself to the sinking sink of the 'yes' campaign. By doing that, it is setting up the defeat of the establishment republicans as our defeat, which it will not be. If there is a 'yes' result, they are setting up an establishment republican victory as ours, which it will not be.

Ours is an independent, working class and democratic republicanism from below ●

Marcus Larsen

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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*Straw and travellers*

# New clampdown

**N**ew Labour's intolerance has been turned against yet another vulnerable section of the population. Travellers who take to the roads, living in buses and caravans where they can, are the latest people deemed socially deviant by home secretary Jack Straw.

They are not a homogeneous group. They include Roma from all over the British Isles, Irish tinkers, and new age travellers, each with their own characteristics and way of life. But what they have in common is an experience of prejudice and discrimination. Straw's recent call for a clampdown - since repeated and defended - is merely the latest in a litany of anti-traveller antipathy that takes more or less 'respectable' forms depending on the political climate.

Straw told Radio West Midlands listeners: "There are relatively few real Romany gypsies left, who seem to mind their own business and do not cause trouble to other people. And then there are a lot more people who masquerade as travellers or gypsies, who trade on the sentiment of people but who seem to think because they label themselves as travellers that they have a licence to commit crimes" - as if crime were not against the *existing* law. Incredibly, Straw considers that, "In the past, I'm afraid, there has been rather too much toleration of travellers and we want to see the police and local authorities cracking down on them" (*The Daily Telegraph* August 19 and 20).

While offended by charges of 'racism', Straw's agenda is clear. The state demands a crackdown on a whole section of the population - estimated to be between 100,000 and 200,000. Gypsies and travellers generally are beyond the pale. They do not conform to the 9-to-5 lifestyle that New Labour wishes us all squeezed into. There is also political mileage to be gained from picking upon a generally unpopular section of the population - because of their poverty they are associated with squalor.

In fact, despite Straw's presumptions there is precious little evidence of local authorities having behaved particularly tolerantly toward travellers. Grudgingly providing sites under previous legislation, beginning with the Caravan Sites Act of 1968, councils were more than happy when this requirement was abolished a few years ago. There were never enough sites even when the legislation was bearing fruit; with its abandonment the situation could only get worse for travellers, whether they were Straw's "real Romany gypsies" or not. Harried from pillar to post, travellers' lives are continually under the shadow of being forcibly moved on and of being targets for physical attack. Refusing to positively advocate the rights of travellers - eg, comprehensive education, voter registration and adequate

and high quality sites - local and national politicians are playing to voters' backward prejudices and fears. Interestingly, Tony and Ann Goss - of SLP witch-hunting fame - were amongst the local politicians to campaign against sites for travellers in Peckham, south London.

Tory shadow home secretary Ann Widdecombe was swift to congratulate Straw. Despite his clumsy presentation, she "would not quarrel with his remarks". This bipartisanship is hardly surprising. It is certainly indicative of New Labour's current approach. August's disturbances in Dover, in which local youths and asylum-seekers clashed violently, are a direct result of the xenophobia and chauvinism generated by the tabloids, Straw and Widdecombe, who made a point of personally going to Dover soon after the disturbances. This was no casting of oil on troubled waters.

Roma constitute a fair proportion of asylum-seekers who have been housed in Dover, having fled the Czech Republic, Slovakia and, of late, Kosova. Dover's Labour MP, Gwyn Prosser, refused to blame national chauvinism for the attacks on them. Instead he singled out "ultra-right groups" that had been "targeting Dover", and "one or two Tory politicians" who had been "raising the ante" (*The Independent* August 23). Neither Prosser nor any other New Labour MP has condemned Straw's statement stigmatising travellers. Travellers are in fact synonymous with 'gypsies' in many people's minds. Moreover, a good number of asylum-seekers are indeed Roma (ie, 'gypsies'), something the tabloids have not been slow to point out.

Straw's remarks were made in the comparative safety of local radio. If he had made them at Labour's annual conference/rally, he would have been in real political danger. Even New Labour's delegates would have booed and hissed. That would not have looked good on television. So Straw's decision to float the issue in the way he did was well considered and calculated. While the expression of such views might rouse a Tory Party conference to a 10-minute standing ovation, it is still true that New Labour has an altogether different social base. Nevertheless, when it comes to practice, Tory and Labour front benches are united against travellers.

While traveller organisations such as the Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) support group pressed for Straw's prosecution for incitement to racial hatred, there is no possibility of the criminal justice system being brought into action against him. The home secretary is one of the ministers (together with those such as the lord chancellor) who stand at the head of the administration of justice in the UK. And he was anyway no doubt thoroughly briefed beforehand

by fellow lawyers concerning what he could say to stay within the law.

Travellers must have the democratic right to determine the kind of life they lead without interference and harassment. When travellers have attempted

to formulate what they actually want, their needs have been distinctly modest: "All members of a free society should have the right to travel and the right to stop. Also that people have the right to a place to stay, with-

out the fear of persecution because of their lifestyle" (FFT *Aims*).

But such elementary democratic demands are clearly too much for Jack Straw ●

*Jim Gilbert*

*Minority rights and communists*

# Champions of the oppressed

**S**traw and his advisers seem to gorge themselves on the worst kind of saloon bar prejudice, intolerance and resentment - no matter how reactionary, philistine, irrational and ludicrous it may be - and then proceed to regurgitate the same rubbish in an effort to stoke up popular support for authoritarian measures.

The targets so far marked out for attack by Straw (and other ministers) include not only asylum-seekers and refugees, but also single mothers, social security claimants, the disabled, the unemployed, the homeless and beggars.

In each case, the government's tactics are broadly the same: first, we are told that *of course* there are asylum-seekers who are genuinely fleeing persecution, there are single mothers deserving of help, disabled people who have an authentic right to immobility allowance, unemployed workers who really are looking for work, and so on.

But in the next breath we are informed that many asylum-seekers are no more than selfish, would-be economic migrants; that many single mothers (believe it or not) deliberately get pregnant in order to enjoy the boon of a tower block council flat; that a large number of benefit claimants, including disabled ones, are no more than dodgers, cheats and malingers, trying to milk the resources provided by hard-working taxpayers. Where such vagabonds are concerned, there is naturally no room for what Straw calls "sentimentality".

In short, a whole thesaurus of abuse and vilification is plundered in order to target vulnerable minorities, the vast majority of whom are, needless to say, disadvantaged members of the working class - not just politically, economically and socially alienated, but many of them near to despair. The consequence is that the unfortunate people in question are essentially marginalised and written off as quasi-criminal elements against

whom 'society' (ie, the ruling class) has a perfect right to adopt the most stringent measures.

It seems to me that there are two principal ideological motives behind this methodology. In the first place, it serves to enforce the authoritarian credentials of New Labour as a government that has cast off even the vaguest pretence of adherence to social democracy, let alone anything resembling socialism.

Secondly, the hard rhetoric serves to deflect attention from the real causes of social ills. Neither the government in particular nor the capitalist system in general can be held accountable for the plight of the disadvantaged. If they suffer, and cause suffering for others in the process, then it is *their own fault*. And if the fault is theirs, then 'society' has not only the right, but the duty to deploy a small army of police spies, *agents provocateurs*, fraud investigators and so forth to combat the 'threat' which they pose to the state.

In the case of the travellers, for example, the 'threat' which they purportedly represent is one of uninhibited petty criminality. Many of them, we are assured, are thieves and for some unaccountable reason they also have a habit of defecating on the doorsteps of respectable citizens. Clearly, this cannot be tolerated in a civilised society. The latter charge is just too bizarre for words, but what about the former? Straw produces no statistics, and I have none to offer, but I suspect that the level of petty criminality among travellers is not markedly greater than that among the urban, so-called underclass or their counterparts among what remains of poor and bored rural youth. Of course, the real 'crime' of travellers is that for a variety of reasons they reject the norms of bourgeois society and choose to live only on its margins.

What of *our* response? Anyone who reads this paper will know that the CPGB is programmatically com-

mitted to become "champions of the oppressed" (see 'What we fight for', p7). At the most basic level, this means that we demand the fullest possible respect for and extension of people's democratic rights within the existing capitalist system. To this extent, and to this extent *alone*, it means that we find ourselves on the same side as genuinely progressive elements among the liberal bourgeoisie.

Herein lies the source of a potentially serious misunderstanding. Some people, even some comrades, may fall into the error of believing that our position is indistinguishable from that of mere 'bleeding heart liberals'. That we too are concerned principally with mere bourgeois right. Nothing could be further from the truth. In their touching concern for the oppressed, liberals content themselves with cries for greater 'fairness'. The last thing they want is the sort of radical transformation of society which would inevitably challenge their own enjoyment of comfortable superiority over the mass of the people.

We take a fundamentally different view. As 'What we fight for' goes on to point out, "oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society" itself. In the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, only a communist revolution that destroys the rule of the bourgeoisie can inaugurate human liberation by abolishing the alienation of labour that lies at the heart of all alienation and which constitutes, under present conditions, an insuperable obstacle to that true realm of human freedom "in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (K Marx and F Engels, *CW* Vol 6, p506).

This is the vision - not merely political, but intensely moral, which informs *all* our struggles on behalf of victims of oppression and intolerance, including travellers ●

*Michael Malkin*