

RUC storm

This week's publication of the report into the future of policing in Northern Ireland looks set to deepen still further the divisions within the unionist and British establishments.

Even before the recommendations of Chris Patten's commission officially saw the light of day, the heavily leaked document brought forth cries of anguish from unionist leaders. John Taylor, deputy leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, described the proposals as "dynamite", likely to deal "the final blow to the Belfast agreement". It seems possible that the review of the whole peace process under former US senator George Mitchell will effectively have to be suspended for a week or so as a result of the outcry.

The UUP cannot even stomach what *The Daily Telegraph* described as "symbolic changes", such as the renaming of the Royal Ulster Constabulary as the Police Service of Northern Ireland (September 4). And, as for scrapping the RUC's present uniform and insignia, the oath of loyalty to the queen, hauling down the union flag and removing portraits of Elizabeth Windsor from police stations across the Six Counties, these were just beyond the pale for loyalism.

There are of course proposals that amounted to much more than symbolism. Leaked recommendations to decommission 3,000 reservists and, more importantly, to devolve some powers to 26 local police authorities, with rights to hire their own extra forces, threw the unionists into apoplexy. These new authorities, despite working under a central police committee, would consist largely of local politicians and opens up the possibility of some of them falling under the control of Sinn Féin, or parties associated with loyalist death squads.

UUP leader David Trimble was beside himself at the "ghastly prospect" of "paramilitaries taking over both policing and judicial functions", although Patten himself ridiculed "suggestions that we are intending to Balkanise the police service in Northern Ireland" as "straightforward fabrication" (*New Statesman* September 3).

The reason why the unionists are unable to contain their fury at such proposals is plain to see. The RUC, founded in 1922, is the very epitome of the protestant ascendancy, and even today is only around eight percent catholic. It is, as *An Phoblacht* so aptly remarked, "a unionist police force for a unionist people in a unionist state" (September 2). The reaction of Trimble, Taylor and co to such "cosmetic changes", the paper correctly pointed out, "exposes their inability to deal with nationalists or move towards any understanding".

An Phoblacht reported that "community leaders and human rights activists" had issued a 10-point checklist against which the Patten recommendations ought to be tested. For example, "Will there be 43% nationalists at all ranks and within all departments of the new service?"; "Will members of the new service be banned from the loyal orders and similar secret organisations bound by

Nevertheless there is no doubt that Blair needs to take urgent steps to at least neutralise the mistrust overwhelmingly felt for the police by nationalist/republican working class communities. The no-go areas established by militant resistance to British and Six County forces in the early 70s have long since been physically repressed. But the RUC cannot operate as a normal bourgeois police body

condemnation" of the 'inhuman' IRA for exiling the four Dungannon youths, for employing "classic, fascist tactics" (*Irish Times* August 31), does not correspond to reality.

The Daily Telegraph, hardly renowned for its republican sympathies, gave a more accurate reflection of the attitude of Fairmount Park and Ballygawley Road residents to the youths and the IRA: "I'm no Provo,"

will continue to happen as long as people cannot trust the RUC and don't enjoy the benefit of an impartial police service." In fact it is not so much a case of self-policing as policing by the IRA. Nevertheless, despite the lack of democratic control, the Provisionals are generally regarded as the legitimate authority. Quite rightly the RUC is viewed as the brutal agency of sectarian oppression and British occupation.

This total disdain for the state and a preference for revolutionary forces is entirely healthy. We do not join in the crocodile tears for the anti-social elements who are on the receiving end of IRA beatings or orders to quit. It is regrettable that more humane options are not available, but the IRA does not hold state power and cannot, for example, compel attendance at rehabilitation centres. We are also aware that IRA terror is sometimes meted out to political opponents within the democratic movement condemned as 'disruptive'. This is unjust.

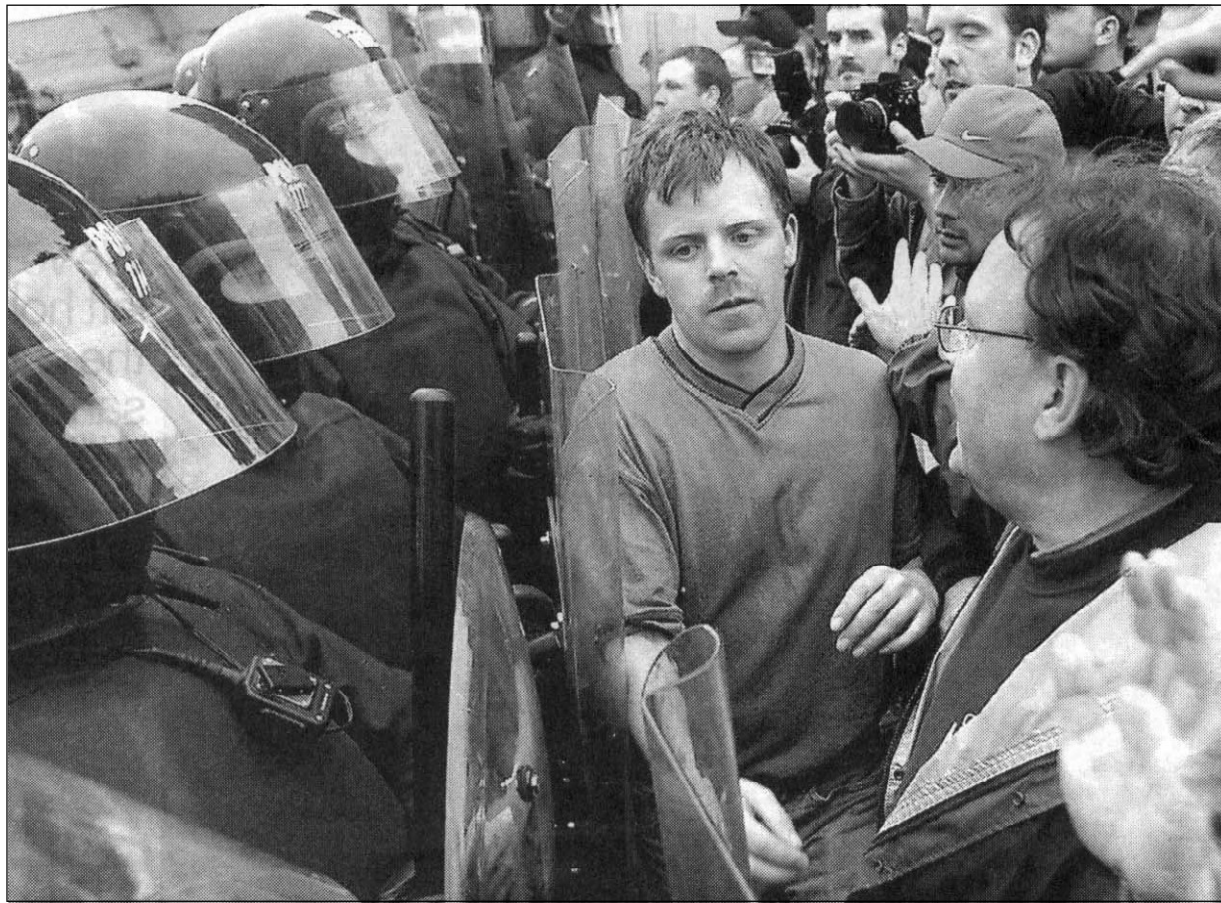
We have no illusions that SF/IRA are for working class self-emancipation. We support them critically to the extent that they remain revolutionary anti-imperialists (whether they use violent or peaceful means). To the extent that they become integrated within the bourgeois political system and subordinate themselves to imperialism or the Irish government, we oppose them.

For the moment the government has all but accepted the right of the IRA to police 'its' areas. Mowlam's announcement that its ceasefire had "not broken down", even after the killing of Charles Bennett, could only be interpreted in this way. The British know that they cannot win over the nationalist/republican communities to trust and support the existing forces of the Six County statelet, no matter how many tinkering reforms they make. A better plan would be one that provides for the gradual incorporation of SF/IRA into new state structures.

But, faced with the loss of privilege and monopoly over the levers of power, loyalism will oppose this every inch of the way. That is why defence of the RUC assumes such significance. Perhaps we will see not just "former members" rallying to the cause, but the mobilisation of existing officers of this wing of the state. Stayaways, demonstrations of uniformed police, even mass resignations or strikes are all on the cards.

And the British Conservatives, themselves staring into the political wilderness, are actively making common cause with the loyalists, breaking with the 30-year tradition of bipartisanship over Ireland. Such divisions in the ruling class are our opportunity ●

Jim Blackstock



Sectarian force

oaths?"; "Will former RUC members applying to join the new policing service be screened to ensure that they have not been involved in human rights abuses?"; and "Will members of the new service be dismissed if they ill-treat any section of the community?" The Sinn Féin-inspired points also included a call for accountability - not only to "the public", but to "the Irish government".

The British government has no intention whatsoever of attempting to meet SF's criteria for a 'non-sectarian police force'. Certainly Blair wants to end overt anti-catholic discrimination, but he knows that an immediate cull of loyalists would finally wreck the peace process, if not lead to open rebellion. The same edition of *An Phoblacht* reports that a pro-RUC rally in Belfast has been jointly organised by the "Unionist Information Service" and "Friends of the Union" for September 18. It is due to be addressed by "former members" of the RUC.

in, for instance, the Bogside or West Belfast. Such neighbourhoods are effectively hostile zones for the state's forces.

This fact was explicitly recognised by Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam when she addressed school students in Carrickfergus last week. She stated: "Life in Northern Ireland is sometimes not as straightforward as it would be elsewhere. When the IRA ordered teenagers to leave Dungannon last week, some at least - small in number - in the local community supported that action because they could not support the police. That I find very disturbing."

She is of course understating the total opposition felt by nationalists towards the RUC. A frank admission that the IRA enjoys the passive support of the majority in working class catholic areas would fly in the face of claims that the 'men of violence' were no more than mindless thugs, isolated from the community. The "widespread

a middle-aged woman was reported as saying, "but they've done the right thing this time" (September 4). The *Telegraph* continued: "The prevailing attitude is that the victims of paramilitary punishment are 'no-marks', guilty of burglary, car theft and attacks on the elderly and that they deserve what they get."

The IRA claimed to have taken such extreme measures "as a last resort", because of the absence of "an acceptable police force". In fact even the RUC admitted to the failure of state control. The four had apparently appeared before the courts "a total of 153 times", leading the RUC to decry the "inadequacy of the juvenile sentencing regime", according to the *Telegraph's* reporter, Sean O'Neill.

An Phoblacht summed up the inability of the Six County statelet to impose its law and its order on the nationalist community in the following way: "What we have in many areas is local people policing themselves. This

Party aggregate

An important item on the agenda of our forthcoming aggregate will be discussion around the draft theses submitted by comrade Jack Conrad (see *Weekly Worker* August 26). A vote on the theses will not automatically be taken at the meeting - there remain very important differences of approach that it will hard to fully explore, let alone resolve at the aggregate. Rather, the debate around the Conrad document will be part of an ongoing process of clarification.

This is not to say that we should not be in favour of arriving at a 'settled' majority viewpoint, codified in a resolution or theses adopted by a vote. To argue anything different is to introduce anarchism into our debates. The question is how this should be achieved.

The controversy around the position of comrade Conrad and others on the British-Irish sparked sharp exchanges at our recent Communist University '99 (see *Weekly Worker* August 19). I have previously written of how recurring themes tend to emerge during the course of this intensive week of debate and contention. In 1998 for example - whatever the particular subject under discussion and through various circuitous routes - we continually returned to the question of the USSR. In 1999, the method and meaning of revolutionary democracy was the moot point.

In my view, this is the essence of the disagreements that surfaced during the school and have subsequently continued in the pages of this paper (eg, Steve Riley's article, September 2). These differences concretely revolve around three key political questions - Ireland, the allegedly racist nature of the bourgeois state (in reality, this debate reflects the struggle to understand changes in the hegemonic ideology of the establishment) and the Soviet Union.

As an organisation, we have no problems about debating these and other important questions openly, in our press, as well as in public forums. Indeed, we would welcome contributions from comrades from other political traditions in this vigorous search for clarity.

Sharp differences are to be expected in any organisation that is *thinking*, particularly in such a fluid political period as this one. We are attempting to grapple with the changing reality of bourgeois rule. As a revolutionary collective, we are attempting to develop a communist critique of the contemporary forms of capitalist hegemony in order to find ways for our class to go from defensive to offensive mode. This search will not be a uniform process in our ranks - there will be differences, arguments and sharp exchanges. This is inevitable: indeed it is *healthy*.

The bulk of the old left appears brain-dead. It is totally defensive, both in relation to its own - now atrophied - orthodoxies and in terms of the agenda it advances for working class struggle. Its descent into programmatic incoherence - dementia almost - will prove to be the prelude to organisational death.

Our differences are not something we wish to hide from the scrutiny of the political public. Quite the opposite, in fact. We believe that one of the preconditions for the *positive* resolution of our controversies is open political and theoretical struggle. After all, we do want a monolithic party, an organisation that is voluntarily bound together not simply by discipline or Party patriotism, but by a *common point of view* on the important issues facing our class and humanity. It may seem a paradox to some, but that is precisely what we are fighting for by encouraging the flourishing of debate, the fullest possibilities for comrades to freely express their different opinions and seek out others who think likewise.

This not in order to facilitate jolly interesting debates, still less to be 'nice' to people. We advocate openness as the best possible precondition for scientifically correct, true ideas to emerge and win an overwhelming Party majority. Science in the field of politics consists of the practice of moving beyond the observation of relatively simple causal-consequential relations and surface connections to the discovery of ever more profound and fundamental laws of social being and consciousness. It was in this context that Marx commented that "all science would be superfluous if the form of things directly coincided with their essence".

Precisely because of this, ideas that accord with deeper reality - as opposed to 'common sense', or established dogma - tend to come into the world everywhere as the viewpoints of *individuals* or *extreme minorities* and have to *struggle* to win. Thus, as an individual Party member, I agree wholeheartedly with the Conrad theses on the British-Irish; I believe that to describe the ruling ideology of the contemporary British state as "institutionally racist" is nonsensical and that the Soviet Union ceased to be a workers' state in any form from the late 1920s. Yet I am also aware that every single one of these developments of our ideas started as the viewpoint of an individual or small minority in our organisation (at least one of them remains so). Open struggle has enabled these insights to be acquired by others, gaining new adherents through the course of the polemic and in some cases now becoming the viewpoint of the Party majority.

Finally, the process I have described above is obviously an ongoing one. Even a Party majority - 'settled' by a vote - on *any* political question cannot end critical development, argument and controversy as we attempt to refine and further communist politics. Naturally the truths we arrive at will be partial and one-sided - reality constantly changes and mutates. As Lenin writes, "We cannot imagine, express, measure, depict movement, without interrupting continuity, without simplifying, coarsening, dismembering, strangling that which is living" (VI Lenin *Collected Works* Vol 38, pp259-60).

Comrades should express themselves frankly and, where necessary, sharply in the debates bubbling up in our ranks. This is the best way to advance genuine communist politics ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser



False conclusion

Ian Hamilton (Letters, August 26) attacks the KLA as being simply Nato's "eyes and ears" in the recent war, for having a manipulative and undemocratic internal regime, and for coopting reactionaries like Agin Ceku onto its leadership. He correctly condemns the recent attacks by ethnic Albanians on the Serb and Roma minorities in Kosova, but he falsely concludes that there was no democratic content whatsoever to their fight against Serb rule, that they were in fact simply "fighting for a Nato protectorate".

Attacks on the Serbs and Roma in Kosova are anti-democratic. They are crimes against the interests of the working class and are to be condemned. But they do not negate the democratic content of the struggle of the Albanian majority in Kosova to throw off Serb rule, and to defeat Milosevic's attempt to drive the Albanians out wholesale. A struggle against the oppression of Roma is a strategic requirement of Marxists in the whole of eastern Europe and beyond, and it is indeed criminal that Albanian nationalists are using the opportunity of the post-war dislocation to attack them. But that no more negates the progressive character of the Albanian struggle than the oppression of travellers in Ireland negates the progressive character of the struggle against British oppression in that country.

Hamilton counterposes to the Albanian national struggle "a multi-ethnic socialist federation, without Milosevic, Nato and the KLA". This is completely abstract and, in equating Milosevic with the KLA, baldly equates the nationalism of the oppressed with that of the oppressor. To tell the oppressed to wait until the oppressor nation is ready for the socialist revolution is in reality to act against such a revolution, since revolutionary consciousness is completely incompatible with even tacit support for the kind of savagely oppressive status quo that prevailed in Kosova under Serb rule.

Hamilton states that he has "problems" with the IBT's call for the "military victory" of the Serbs over the "pro-imperialist" KLA. Indeed he should have. One of the most basic maxims of socialism and democracy is that "a nation that oppresses another cannot itself be free". But he shares much of their reasoning. In this period of negligible class consciousness and a 'unipolar', US-dominated world, the pro-Nato illusions epitomised by the KLA are the norm in terms of the spontaneous consciousness of oppressed peoples. A refusal to fight against oppression out of fear of being 'tainted' by this consciousness does not combat imperialism. It consolidates the view that only the 'great power' can help the oppressed.

Far from really acting in opposition to Nato, Hamilton's position renders it political aid.

Ian Donovan
London

Satpal assaulted again

On Thursday August 19 Satpal Ram was yet again assaulted by prison officers in the segregation unit at Frankland prison.

This latest attack began when Satpal went to go on exercise and was jostled around by screws as he left the shower area and put his jumper on to go outside. When he returned from exercise, five or six screws came to his cell and subjected him to a torrent of verbal (particularly racial) and physical abuse, resulting in numerous injuries - pulled ligaments, tendons and internal bruising.

Satpal has been in the segregation

unit continuously, apart from one day, since June 29, when he declined to have his photograph taken. He had been photographed just a few months earlier and his appearance had not changed since, so there was no justification for the demand. Satpal had already had his stereo confiscated and his legal paperwork rifled through a week earlier, so just saw this as further harassment. He was then ordered to go to the segregation unit to be adjudicated on for refusing a direct order. When he refused this order as well, he was taken to the segregation by the 'control and restraint' squad.

Satpal has contacted Durham police and reported the prison staff for assault. He will be taking legal advice regarding a civil action for damages. Incident 1, Wednesday June 16: Satpal's cell was trashed by prison warders. Incident 2, Wednesday June 30: Satpal taken from his cell, dragged down to the block, stripped naked and tossed into a segregation cell.

Send letters of solidarity to: Satpal Ram E94164, HMP Frankland, Brasside, Durham DH1 5YD. Send letters of complaint about the assault and Satpal's general treatment to governor Ivor Woods at the same address. Please fax a letter of protest to the governor of Durham prison. Fax to 0191-384-9203.

Free Satpal Ram Campaign

www.ncadc.demon.co.uk/satpal.html

Betrayed

Long before the overwhelming vote for independence on August 30, the explosion of violence in East Timor was totally predictable. Ever since the leaders of Fretilin were forced to abandon the armed struggle for the peaceful process of a UN-negotiated solution, it was clear Indonesia would not give up without a fight. The Golkar regime has made no secret of its purpose in bringing in migrants and arming paramilitaries. It wants to hang on to East Timor because it is has rich resources. Its illegal occupation has been backed by the US, Australia and New Zealand for 24 years.

In the face of this reality, to believe that it was possible to make a peaceful transition to independence was a criminal betrayal of the people of East Timor. The only course possible from the start has been for armed struggle to defend the independent state of East Timor declared by Fretilin in 1975. In the crisis today, workers around the world must call for the right to self-defence of the East Timorese, for a total ban on any military and political support for the Indonesian regime, and demand the immediate withdrawal of all Indonesian and paramilitary forces!

The overwhelming vote for independence has not set off massive celebrations among the 78.5% who survived 24 years of repression to vote for separation. Instead it has sparked off a mounting campaign of terror by the pro-Jakarta armed thugs. They are being allowed free reign to terrorise and murder pro-independence supporters. Their purpose is to act as stooges for the Indonesian regime to destabilise the process of secession in order to keep control of at least the territories with the richest resources.

This crisis is the result of 24 years of Indonesian occupation and resettlement of East Timor. After many years of military campaigns to destroy Fretilin, the downfall of Suharto brought the fate of East Timor to a head. Habibie only agreed to a referendum under pressure from the US which wants to pose as the champion of 'human rights'. No doubt Habibie expected that the years of brutal repression and the policy of deliberate resettling migrants in East Timor would have ensured a majority for integration with Indonesia. Now that the result is such a resounding victory for independence, Jakarta is at-

tempting to once more hang onto the territory by force. It will take the Jakarta regime until November to ratify the vote. Only then will it agree to the UN implementing the transition to independence.

This gives the pro-Jakarta forces over two months in which to occupy the key regions they want to retain and to politically cleanse these regions of Independencias. When the UN finally gets into gear it will be too late to undo the genocide.

Can the west intervene unilaterally? Yes, it can. The US sidestepped the UN last year over Iraq, and more recently in unleashing the Nato bombing of Kosovo. But will it and ought it to intervene? The peacenik left in the west was softened up to the point of giving back-handed support to the US in Kosovo. While opposing Nato's bombing in principle, it blamed Milosevic's 'ethnic cleansing' of Kosovo for the intervention. The effect was to qualify its opposition to Nato by calling for Nato to turn itself into a 'peacekeeping' force in a sovereign territory in the name of 'human rights'.

The same with East Timor. While preferring a UN solution, most of the left are calling for immediate action by the US to defend the 'human rights' of the people of East Timor. This is like calling on the tiger to make the tea. The US was the main backer of Indonesia's invasion of East Timor in the first place. It is total hypocrisy or naivety at least to suppose that the biggest enemy of the declaration of independence in 1975 can now turn around and be the defender of 'human rights'.

For revolutionaries there was always only one course of action against Indonesian occupation - that of armed struggle. As the students in Jakarta have shown over the last two years mass, direct action comes up against the state forces. The insurgents in Aceh have learned the same lesson. But this bloody lesson has been part of the education of the East Timorese for 24 years. It has cost the lives of more than 300,000 innocent people. Now thousands of more lives are to be sacrificed to the altar of peaceful negotiation. There can be no better demonstration of the necessity of armed struggle than the fight of the East Timorese for their independence.

For workers around the world there are a number of actions that can be taken to build international solidarity with the independence struggle.

First, all workers must champion the right of the masses in East Timor to defend themselves against the paramilitary terror. No faith in US intervention or UN safe havens! For material aid to the East Timor resistance! For the formation of self-defence committees! Second, international workers' action to blockade Indonesia's armed forces must be taken. Third, we must call on the workers, students and poor peasants of Indonesia to demand that Habibie and Sukanoputrie remove all Indonesian military and paramilitary forces from East Timor. For the convocation of a Constituent Assembly! For workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils and militia. Fourth, we must call on Indonesian workers and students to immediately recognise and demand the right to self-determination of East Timor and all other independence movements that have popular backing.

Only by doing so will those secessionist movements be able to choose freely to secede or stay as 'autonomous' regions of Indonesia. For a Federation of Socialist Republics of Indonesia!

Communist Workers Group
New Zealand

East Timor and Australian DSP

Capitulation to junior imperialism

Just days after the East Timorese people emphatically rejected special autonomy within Indonesia in favour of independence, the Indonesian military has unleashed its bloodhounds in the form of pro-Jakarta death squads. The situation in Dili and outlying areas is spiralling 'out of control' (under the control of the army). Martial law has been declared and in Indonesia itself there is talk of an impending coup. The government has rejected any immediate deployment of an international peacekeeping force. The United Nations is withdrawing its mission from Dili immediately.

Yet sabres are rattling. With the UN sending a mission to Jakarta, the US and Australian governments have ruled out an "uninvited" military presence in East Timor - for now. But as pressure builds this stance will become increasingly difficult. With thousands of troops moved to the northern Australian city of Darwin on 24-hour active notice and the third party of Australian politics, the Democrats, calling for immediate military action, some sort of international 'solution' - whether welcomed by Jakarta or not - is looking likely.

In East Timor itself, reports of massacres and forced migrations to Indonesian West Timor is piling pressure on the Australian government in particular. Jose 'Xanana' Gusmao - the leader of the East Timorese resistance movement, Fretilin - has been released after seven years in gaol and is now in Dili. The East Timorese independence organisations are calling for the UN to intervene, or, if necessary, for other powers to push in uninvited.

This is causing a furore in Australia. Echoes of Kosovo and Nato's intervention are reverberating, as the liberal mainstream press begins to accuse the UN of sitting on its hands while thousands are terrorised and killed. The conservative Liberal Party prime minister John Howard has said there is a need to balance stability with the safety of Australian soldiers. The French government has been the first western country to call for immediate military force - with or without Indonesian approval.

It is in times of crisis such as this that political programmes are tested. The response of the left to the crisis in Kosovo revealed much that was fossilised in living flesh and blood, as the main organisations of the old sects revealed their bankruptcy through their different opportunistic slogans. Support Yugoslavia! Demand UN intervention! No to Kosovar self-determination! Rights for states, not people! Welfare, not warfare! Condemn all involved!

Only a small minority - CPGB, Socialist Outlook, Workers Power - took a principled position: Against Nato! Independence for Kosovo!

We are beginning to see the same confusion raise its head over East Timor. Incredibly, the main left organisation in Australia, the Democratic Socialist Party, has demanded the immediate deployment of Australian troops. Its national executive statement of September 6 said: "The Democratic Socialist Party calls on all supporters of democracy to mobilise

to demand that the Australian government insist that the United Nations authorise the immediate dispatch of Australian troops to East Timor." Further, it states that: "If the United Nations security council continues to argue that an international military force cannot be sent to East Timor without the Indonesian government's agreement, then the Australian gov-

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ernment should act unilaterally and send its armed forces into East Timor."

On the surface, this outright capitulation to Australian junior imperialism is all the more surprising, given the DSP's active involvement in support for the East Timorese resistance through its front organisation, Action in Solidarity for Indonesia and East Timor. But this belies the DSP's consistent tailist method in all its international work. It bases its approach on the 'diplomatic internationalism' characteristic of the 'official' communist parties, not consistent and honest proletarian internationalism.

In calling for imperialism to solve the crisis in East Timor (which was in no small measure created by Australia in the first place), the DSP said: "All East Timorese national liberation forces have called for immediate UN-authorised military intervention in East Timor." Apparently it does not want to endanger its links with Indonesian and Timorese organisations by pointing out the dangers in relying on imperialism - but perhaps that is a generous interpretation.

As in Kosovo, it is not surprising that nationalist forces such as Fretilin call on the UN to come to its rescue. There is no effective, internationally organised working class movement - let alone core republics where the working class holds power. If these existed, then such forces would surely look elsewhere. Nevertheless, whatever the state of our movement, we must not dissolve our programme into the 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' expediency of petty bourgeois national liberation movements.

The DSP must answer these questions: does imperialism have a progressive role to play in East Timor? How does your call for imperialism to assist the East Timorese resistance further the revolutionary movement

in Australia and Indonesia?

Such a slide into liberalism is disgusting in a supposedly Marxist organisation. Just as Noam Chomsky ended up supporting US troops invading Haiti, the DSP has fallen into the camp of those who, in desperation, are forced to the conclusion that 'there is no alternative'. But there is no such thing as benign imperialism.

Yet this does not mean that nothing can be done. As demonstrators in Jakarta, Darwin, Sydney and Melbourne have already shown, the only democratic solution for East Timor lies in the hands of the Indonesian masses, supported by working class mobilisation across the world. It is clear that the Indonesian military is behind the horror. It is also clear that the Indonesian regime - under both caretaker Habibie and his most likely successor Megawati - is deeply reactionary. The regime and all its factions rests on the bones of half a million communists - massacred with CIA connivance in 1965. The Indonesian masses - above all the working class - must demand: No imperialist intervention! Arm Fretilin! Disband the armed forces! Organise a popular militia! Indonesia must be forced to concede immediate independence for East Timor!

Working class organisations throughout the world ought to emulate and generalise the protest action taken by the Australian Services Union. Its members occupied the offices of Garuda - Indonesia's national airline. The Australian Council of Trade Unions is considering placing a ban on all Indonesian imports, echoing the actions of the Communist Party-led unions in the 1940s against the Dutch in their oppression of the Indonesian national liberation movement. We must mobilise our own class, not rely on Australian junior imperialism.

The DSP's line has already produced a storm of condemnation. And rightly so. Doug Lorimer, DSP executive member and the organisation's leading theorist has responded, saying: "Our call for supporters of democracy (ie, most working people) to mobilise to demand that the Australian government immediately send troops to East Timor to liberate the East Timorese people from the Indonesian military's genocidal occupation is a call for the working people to actively oppose the Australian imperialist government's reactionary alliance with the Indonesian military and for the Australian government to take immediate action to put a stop to the genocide bring carried out right now by the Indonesian military against the East Timorese nation."

Lorimer invokes Lenin's pamphlet written during World War I, *Socialism and war*: "Lenin begins by pointing out that 'We Marxists differ from pacifists and anarchists in that we deem it necessary to study each war historically (from the standpoint of Marx's dialectical materialism) and separately.' He goes on to quote Clausewitz's famous dictum, 'War is the continuation of politics by other (ie, violent) means'."

Exactly. Australia's war in Indonesia and East Timor could only but be a continuation of its reactionary politics at home and abroad during peace-

ful times. A DSP-backed war would be a continuation of opportunism. Rather than appealing to the Indonesian and Australian masses to take action, opportunist strategy is to demand that the government 'do something' in order to 'expose' it. But the DSP's statement does not even amount to 'exposing' imperialism: rather to giving advice. It is calling on the Australian state to shift from one imperialist tactic (brutal connivance with Indonesia) to another (military opposition to Indonesia's occupation and pogroms).

Ending pogroms and a peaceful transition to independence with as little disturbance as possible is clearly in the interests of Australia. What the DSP is demanding dovetails with those interests, not with the interests of the Australian, Indonesian and East Timorese masses - which lie in self-activity. As imperialism has shown in Kosovo, it is quite capable of intervening militarily under the guise of protecting 'human rights'. Lorimer, again dishonestly turning to Lenin to excuse his conversion to social-imperialism, says that it is perfectly alright to call on Australia to intervene because its imperialist bourgeoisie has no territorial designs on East Timor. He writes: "We are not in the midst of an inter-imperialist war. Australian imperialism is not seeking to annex East Timor, or use defence of East Timor's right to national independence to 'grab at' some other state's territory." Yet imperialist stability and continued exploitation of the millions-strong working class in Indonesia is the aim. For this, Australia could go to war.

The US/British-led force against Yugoslavia had no goal of 'annexing' Kosovo. There was no inter-imperialist war. Yet the DSP rightly opposed UN involvement and the "uninvited" K-for. Where is the consistency, comrades?

It will be instructive to keep an eye on the other end of the Trotskyite spectrum. In the event of an imperialist intervention in East Timor, will those organisations (SWP *et al*) which opposed self-determination for Kosovo and refused critical support to the KLA's struggle against the Serb army feel obliged to turn their backs on Fretilin too? Will this liberation movement be transformed into yet another 'cat's-paw of imperialism' by the very act of the west's opposition to Jakarta? Will the struggle for national liberation by the East Timorese become 'secondary' in view of the overriding need to defend non-imperialist Indonesia? ●

Marcus Larsen

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/

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday September 12, 5pm - special seminar: 'The Turkish earthquake: aid and the working class'. Speaker: Esen Uslu.
 Sunday September 19, 5pm - 'Progressive trade unionism', in the series using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* Vol 2 as a study guide.
 Call 0181-459 7146 for details.

Manchester: Monday September 20, 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.

■ Glasgow Marxist Forum

Public meeting - support Iranian workers and students in their struggle against repression. Solidarity with the Iranian left. Free political prisoners. Thursday September 30, 7.30pm, Partick Burgh Halls. A speaker from the Iranian left will report on the present situation and the need for international solidarity. All welcome.

■ 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.

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Self-liberation or vica

Jack Conrad replies to Steve Riley and renews his call for a democratic approach to the British-Irish question

That comrade Steve Riley has entered our discussion on the British-Irish question in print is welcome indeed. That comrade Riley's 5,000-word contribution, 'Inconsistent democracy', is a catalogue of mistakes, misunderstandings and woefully misdirected polemics is to be regretted (*Weekly Worker* September 2).

Perhaps Jack Conrad is to blame. Perhaps my argument in favour of a British-Irish federal entity in a united Ireland having the "right to self-determination up to and including the right to secession" (thesis 15 *Weekly Worker* August 26) is so complex and so difficult to grasp, such a radical departure from previous CPGB positions and such an innovation in communist thought, that 'orthodox' comrades like Riley are bound to be confused, mystified and angered to the point of blind rage.

Comrade Riley begins his attempt to "trash" my proposals with the insinuation that Jack Conrad has abandoned the CPGB's "principled history" of solidarity in support of the Irish national liberation struggle. My supposed "new thinking" on the British-Irish question in Ireland is explained in no small measure by the, presumably malign, influence of outside forces. On the one hand Dave Craig and the Revolutionary Democratic Group, and on the other hand Sean Matgamna and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

Transparently this is not the case. Without exception everything I have recently formulated on the British-Irish question flows directly from, and is absolutely consistent with, what I and my co-thinkers have been saying on democracy over the last 20 years. Regular readers of the *Weekly Worker* will hardly need reminding, but for the benefit of comrade Riley, and the sake of furthering the polemic, let me repeat a fundamental proposition, one enshrined in the CPGB's *Draft programme*. Democracy and socialism are inseparably linked. Without democracy there can be no socialism. Without socialism democracy is incomplete and always in danger of being subverted and turned into its opposite.

When it comes down to it, here we have a CPGB 'orthodoxy' with which comrade Riley has never really agreed. Today as a freelance communist and yesterday as a brittle member of the Communist Party, comrade Riley entertains a stubborn illusion in bureaucratic socialism. Half-seriously, half-mockingly, he remarks, "We are all consistent democrats now." Unfortunately this is rot. For our friend democracy is a nice, nay desirable, add-on extra to socialism ... if the material conditions permit and the benighted masses are sufficiently trustworthy in terms of voting the right way.

In other words for him there can exist, and has existed, a socialism with the complete absence of democracy.

The counterfeit title of this chimera was the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. Comrade Riley still believes that under the superstructural monarchy of Stalin the USSR was essentially socialist, not the slave society, the bureaucratic travesty of socialism, I have written about and am still in the process of trying to fully theorise.

Comrade Riley combines inconsistent democracy with a predisposition towards bureaucratic socialism, not only retrospectively in relation to the USSR of Stalin, Krushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev, etc, but the politics of contemporary Ireland too. The country's dichotomised communities are not to be brought together voluntarily through the leadership of a self-liberating working class. No, on the contrary, unification for him centres on the primitive notion of land and is to be achieved using the methods of blood and iron. Where we concern ourselves with uniting peoples, comrade Riley substitutes territory. That is the only possible conclusion consistent with comrade Riley's line of reasoning, not least when it comes to his denial of elementary democratic rights for the protestant British-Irish in Northern Ireland.

Who are the British-Irish? Comrade Riley and myself disagree. Comrade Riley can see no British-Irish people: only Irish protestants, who constitute a mere "religious faction". The British-Irish are not a distinct community. Protestants are an "integral part of the Irish nation". They have more in common with the rest of Ireland - from economic life to preferences in alcoholic beverages - than Britain and the British. What keeps the Irish nation divided is British imperialism, above all Britain's role in cultivating the protestants in the Six Counties as a labour aristocracy which solidly votes for reactionary loyalist parties and organisations. Communists must "neutralise" the Ulster unionists.

Jack Conrad has a different analysis. It is correct to say that Britain is the main problem and that the majority of protestants in Northern Ireland have throughout the 20th century constituted a labour aristocracy (a politico-economic category). They have sought to preserve their meagre privileges at the expense of Catholics by initiating and buttressing sectarian discrimination from below and by appealing above to the Northern Ireland and British states. However, the protestants are not simply a labour aristocracy: "There is an undeniable historically established religious, ethnic and cultural dimension" (thesis 1).

The British-Irish have continuously inhabited parts of what is now Northern Ireland since the early 17th century. They were settled in Antrim and Down as a mass of 'strong farmers' - from England, but mainly Scotland - to pacify the most rebellious part of Gaelic and Anglo-Irish Ireland and hence "assure" it for an absolutist British monarchy that had recently redefined itself according to its nationalised version of protestantism: ie, Anglicanism. Inevitably the settlers quickly diverged from their origins and formed another - hybrid - Irish identity. They stopped being Scottish or English. Yet in general they kept themselves against and separate from the Irish Catholic majority (both Gaelic and Anglo-Irish). Significantly cultural links between Scotland and the British-Irish in Northern Ireland are nowadays still stronger than those between the British-Irish and the south. Either way, the million-strong British-Irish are "a historically constituted and distinct community of peo-

ple" (thesis 2).

As a matter of strategic calculation the British-Irish were given privileges denied to the native Irish. Being Presbyterians, they were themselves subject to prohibitions as dissenters by the Anglican ascendancy - hence some of the 'strong farmers' of Antrim and Down 'were out' in the 1798 United Irishmen rising. That notwithstanding, in 17th century Ireland, British-Irish protestantism did not represent a progressive alternative to Catholic obscurantism, but a subaltern arm of British colonial domination.

The Catholic majority were victims of constant persecution as Catholics. The old English in Ireland were thereby "excluded" from the emerging British nation (SG Ellis *Tudor Ireland* London 1985, p319). Non-change meant change. Because they remained Catholic the Anglo-Irish became simply Irish. The bitter divisions between the Anglo-Irish and Gaelic feudal cultures "gave way ultimately to a sense of common Catholicism" - the highly fragmented Gaelic-Irish slowly merging with and forming a new "subordinate" English-speaking culture "in the polity of Ireland" (H Kearney *The British Isles* Cambridge 1995, p170).

As a consequence the Irish national question and British domination both took the outer form of religion. This has undergone constant rearticulation. The motives of the Cromwellian plantations are not those of modern Paisleyism. Nor are the motives of the Land League those of Sinn Féin. Suffice to say, religion in Ireland is not simply a matter of religion, as comrade Riley stupidly contends. For example, I have met not a few Catholic atheists in west Belfast. Only a hopeless doctrinaire would describe this as an oxymoron.

Comrade Riley turns to Stalin as a mentor (thankfully when he was a pupil of Lenin's). Nations have, said Stalin, in his famous 1913 pamphlet *Marxism and the national question*, five "characteristic features". Firstly, and "primarily" a nation is a definite, stable, community of people; secondly, nations must share a "common language"; thirdly, they possess a "common territory"; fourthly, they have an internal economic bond to "weld the various parts into a single whole"; fifthly, they have a collective "character" which manifests itself in a "common culture" (JV Stalin *Works* Vol 2, Moscow 1953, pp303-307).

Comrade Riley finds the British-Irish severely wanting. The protestants are merely a "religious faction, not a people." Ulster is no more than "an administrative and political convenience of imperialism"; it is "not an historically constituted territory". And as only nations, or people deemed sufficiently nation-like, should have the right to "self-determination up to and including secession", comrade Riley decrees that the British-Irish have no right to "break away and form an independent state". He jokingly lists the Nation of Islam, the boy scouts and the inhabitants of Moss Side as being similar "candidates for separatism".

The comrade is not a complete ass. He concedes that Stalin's definition must not be treated too rigidly. So let us flexibly discuss Stalin's five characteristics *vis-à-vis* the British-Irish and see what we come up with.

As shown above the British-Irish have constituted a "stable community" for some 400 years. Due to their similar conditions of existence in north-eastern Ulster they have from generation to generation developed customs, an outlook and character peculiar to themselves (Stalin's points one and five).

The work ethic, blunt speaking, a collective memory of King Billy, 1688, July 12 and the battle of the Somme, the union jack, rival Presbyterianisms, orangeism and hostility to republicanism and popery all mark out the British-Irish in terms of self-image.

That "common psychological make-up" is surely why Irish-Catholic nationalists have such completely contradictory assessments of the British-Irish. There are those who hold them as an alien element akin to the "Saracens in Spain" (O MacDonagh *States of mind* London 1983, p19). On the other hand they are claimed, albeit as "perverted" Irish, who thereby, in the immortal words of Arthur Griffith, have no right to call "into question" the "integrity and authority of the nation" (cited in C O'Halloran *Partition and the limits of Irish nationalism* Dublin 1990, pp36,37). Comrade Riley would appear to fall into the Griffith camp. Be that as it may, the British-Irish are defined as 'other' by mainstream Irish-Catholic nationalism, a vital external factor which tangibly shapes the ethnic identity of both communities. As the Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen notes, "ethnicity is a product of contact and not isolation". So ethnicity "entails both commonalities and differences between categories of people - both complementation and dichotomisation" (TH Eriksen *Ethnicity and nationalism* London 1993, p35).

What of language? Comrade Riley cannot but admit that the British-Irish speak English (Stalin's point two). However this is shared by the Irish-Catholics and "much of the world". We need not quibble here about Gaelic or the fact that the vast majority of the world's population do not speak English even as a second language. Unlike the Nation of Islam or the boy scouts the British-Irish have a "common language".

What of a common territory? For comrade Riley the idea that the British-Irish occupy a common territory is "absurd". Why? Because they occupy Northern Ireland along with a sizeable Catholic-Irish minority. I am the last to deny the presence of the Catholic-Irish minority imprisoned within Northern Ireland or their palpable cultural-political affinity with the south. But the British-Irish are not scattered throughout Ireland. They are not the equivalent of the Jews in tsarist Russia. There is a one-county, four-half-counties area containing "a clear British-Irish majority" (thesis 15). This forms a geographically coherent whole broadly comprising county Antrim, north Tyrone, south Derry, north Armagh and north Down (Stalin's point three).

Lastly we come to the economy (Stalin's point four). There is no "Ulster protestant economy" as such. Comrade Riley is perfectly right. Nevertheless there is a Northern Ireland economy which evolved along its own pathway, making it distinct from the rest of Ireland. Till the mid-17th century Ulster was generally regarded as the poorest of the Irish provinces. The industrial revolution changed all that. North-eastern Ulster developed in a way analogous to Liverpool and Glasgow. Belfast in particular was an industrial centre that in the 19th century and into the 20th century served not Ireland, but the worldwide British empire. Furthermore capital was mainly personified by protestants: "Virtually everyone engaged in commerce in Ulster was a protestant." Protestant control and rapid industrialisation "gave the political economy of north-east Ulster its unique character" (L Kennedy and P Ollerenshaw *An economic history of Ulster* Manchester

1985, p65). Today the north-south axis remains weak, the east-west axis with Britain strong. Whether or not it has a viable economy is not relevant. In the last analysis the right of "self-determination up to and including secession" is not about language or economics, but politics and democracy.

Communists do not invent or exacerbate national or ethnic questions. Our aim is to overcome such conflicts and antagonisms according to the principles of consistent democracy so as to bring forward and heighten the class struggle. For us the key practical task is not defining nations against a checklist. The British-Irish do not constitute a nation according to strict scientific criteria. But neither are they merely a religion or a population of colonial settlers who, by implication, should return from whence they came. The British-Irish have a common history, territory and culture and there is a long established conflict between them and the Catholic-Irish. That, and the continued British presence, calls for a definite political solution.

Comrade Riley savages those amongst "Conrad's supporters" who advocate a potted version of the cultural national autonomy theory, with which, it hardly needs saying, I profoundly disagree. This reactionary panacea, invented by the Austro-Marxist Otto Bauer, is a plan for the extra-territorial self-determination and autonomy of ethnic and national communities - parliaments, schools, arts, science, etc - within an existing state. Two principled objections are readily apparent. The right to separate is denied. Divisions are hardened and institutionalised. Undaunted, comrade Riley pins on me Bauer's notion that all that is required to constitute a nation is "a common psychology". That alone is "sufficient qualification for national rights". As evidenced above, that does not correspond to my conclusions about the British-Irish. Nevertheless in contradistinction to comrade Riley I have no hesitation in locating the rational kernel in Bauer's politics. Something Jack Conrad shares with Lenin.

In his lengthy article, 'The discussion on self-determination summed up', Lenin dismisses Bauer's "pet little point" of "cultural and national autonomy". But wisely he does not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Lenin praises Bauer because he "argues quite correctly on a large number of most important questions" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 22, Moscow 1977, p324). In terms of relevance to the subject at hand, what were these "most important questions"?

Both Bauer and Lenin stand for democratically delineated frontiers in accordance with the will and "sympathies" (ie, the "common psychology") of the population. A principle taken directly from Engels, who favoured national frontiers determined by the "language and sympathies" of the population ('The Po and the Rhine').

There is also the principled objection to force. "The socialist community," insists Lenin, "will never be able to include whole nations within its make-up by the use of force" (*ibid* p324). He approvingly reproduces a passage of Bauer's: "Imagine the masses of the people, enjoying all the blessings of national culture, taking a full and active part in legislation and government, and, finally, supplied with arms - would it be possible to subordinate such a nation to the rule of an alien social organism by force?" Bauer thinks that such a possibility "disappears". Lenin finishes his section on 'Socialism and

various nationalism

the self-determination of nations' with these rather pertinent remarks:

"By transforming capitalism into socialism the proletariat creates the possibility of abolishing national oppression; the possibility becomes reality 'only' - 'only'! - with the establishment of full democracy in all spheres, including the delineation of state frontiers in accordance with the 'sympathies' of the population, including complete freedom to secede" (*ibid* p325).

Lenin, let us recall, never felt the need to present his own special definition of a nation. His overriding concern was politics and hence the "sympathies" of the people. According to these "sympathies" communists should work for "democratically" agreed frontiers along with the "freedom to secede". "Socialism," emphasised Lenin, "gives full play to the 'sympathies' of the population, thereby promoting and greatly accelerating the drawing together and fusion of the nations" (*ibid* p324).

This is Marxism, a theory which, when applied to Ireland, comrade Riley fails to grasp and rashly denounces as "not Marxism and not even consistent democracy".

Having unsuccessfully attempted to "trash" Conrad using Stalin and Bauer, our comrade resorts to downright fabrication. He solemnly proclaims that "practically" my programme can "only mean one thing - the repartition of Ireland". An accusation repeated many times. Eg: "We know that partition is precisely what Conrad has in mind." Eg: "There is not one ounce of revolutionary content in the repartition of Ireland."

Polemics are a dual using words, not guns. As a matter of honour comrade Riley feels bound to challenge me. So be it. His vicarious Irish-catholic nationalism has been insulted. He demands satisfaction. The place of combat is chosen. We meet and take our stations. Eyes full of hate he turns, takes aim and fires ... and misses by miles. I am amazed. I am prepared to have shortcomings in my arguments shot to the ground. But comrade Riley's target is a phantom. His partitionist Jack Conrad exists neither in flesh and blood nor in paper and print. No, comrade Riley's Jack Conrad is the product of his own mind.

Obviously I must once again patiently outline my programme. Jack Conrad is against the present division of Ireland. He is against any future division of Ireland. As things stand, he is also against all claims or demands for self-determination by the Northern Ireland statelet. My theses on 'Ireland and the British Irish' is quite explicit and should for the objective observer leave not a shadow of doubt concerning my attitude: "There can be no right of present-day Northern Ireland to self-determination. The six-county statelet was founded in 1921 on the cynical basis of permanently institutionalising the oppression of the catholic-nationalist minority. We do not, and cannot, support the right of the British-Irish majority in the north to oppress the catholic-nationalist minority" (thesis 7).

Moreover the CPGB is for the immediate abolition of the United Kingdom. As part and parcel of that, we demand the immediate - ie, unconditional - withdrawal of the British state and British troops from Northern Ireland. The CPGB is therefore committed to a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales and a united Ireland. I am convinced that such a programme is the best, most democratic and revolutionary way to bring workers together, not only within Britain and Ireland, but throughout the British Isles.



British, Irish or just plain Irish?

Of course, our programme is not a magic wand. It is a programme of working class struggle and therefore in its realisation a process of changing and overcoming apparently immutable antagonisms. Thus I am not in favour of the unity of Ireland for its own sake. It is the revolutionary unity of the catholic-Irish and British-Irish peoples that we communists aim for. James Connolly was spot on when he said: "Ireland without her people is nothing to me" (P Berresford Ellis (ed) *James Connolly: selected writings* London 1973, p38).

Communists therefore stress that unity must be voluntary and an integral part of the class struggle for democracy and socialism. The self-determination of Ireland is for us not about a head count, but the coming together of the working class. To bring about that outcome we must say beforehand what we are for: "In a united Ireland communists are for the maximisation of democracy and therefore working class leadership. There must be no discrimination against protestants. They must be at liberty to practice their religion and encouraged to freely develop the progressive side of their culture" (thesis 11).

In general communists favour the organisation of the working class in the biggest, most centralised states. That by no means contradicts far-reaching measures of local autonomy. As a transitional measure, however, we are prepared to accept or advocate federalism as a step towards the unity of people, in particular the unity of the working class. Two cases in point being Britain and Ireland.

In the early 1970s Sinn Féin adopted a programme, *Eire Nua*, which advocated a "federal Ireland". Unfortunately this ignored the actual cultural/ethnic divisions in Ireland and instead sought to revive the "four historic provinces" - Connacht, Munster, Leinster and a nine-county Ulster. A chilling refusal to address the objective British-Irish question in a democratic manner.

Comrade Riley does not need to brand *Eire Nua* a recipe for the redvision of Ireland. The British-Irish would be outnumbered in greater Ulster. The British-Irish would be given the right to 'jointly determine' the fate of Ireland. Yet all bourgeois democracies grant such a participation in a common parliament to all unwilling minorities (eg, the catholic-Irish in Northern Ireland). The replacement of British for nationalist gerrymandering can do nothing to overcome British-Irish xenophobia. It simply confirms for them that they will be an

oppressed minority.

In order to overcome present-day divisions it is necessary to honestly address the British-Irish question and the legitimate fears of the protestant community. This can only be done through consistent democracy. A united Ireland established through a "voluntary union" of its peoples should "fully reassure" the British-Irish if it includes in its constitution a federal solution whereby the area containing a clear British-Irish majority has the right of self-determination up to and including secession. That is a real, not a pseudo-federal arrangement.

For comrade Riley this is synonymous with a breakaway and the renewed oppression of the catholic-Irish minority. Like a dyed-in-the-wool Irish nationalist he is resigned to an unchanging British-Irish population. Nor does he understand that the rights of the British-Irish are not primarily something we have to convince protestants in Northern Ireland of. Instinctively everyone looks after their own. It is though vital, if they are to liberate themselves, that British-Irish rights are championed by the mass of Irish-catholic workers, north and south. A united Ireland fought for by such a *universal* class, in league with the proletariat in Britain, has every chance of forming a common front with the British-Irish. So self-determination is not synonymous with the redvision of Ireland, but the *revolutionary* unity of the working class.

I think we can draw a few useful lessons from the experience of revolutionary Russia. The Bolsheviks promised all nations within the Russian empire the right of self-determination up to and including the right to separate. Soviet Russia and then the Soviet Union were constitutionally founded as federations of soviet republics, and amongst them was the Don Republic (ie, the land of the Cossacks). The Soviet Republic was established as a "voluntary union of the peoples of Russia" - something for Lenin which "should fully reassure the Cossacks" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 36, Moscow 1977, p472). His optimism was not misplaced. The 1st Congress of the Soviets of the Don Republic, held over April 9-12 1918, "regarded the Don Republic as part of the RSFSR" and declared the "working Cossacks' readiness to defend Soviet power" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 42, Moscow 1977, p509n). The Cossacks, it should be noted, were a historically established privileged caste who served as the counterrevolutionary terror troops of tsarism. Is there a qualitative difference between the Cossacks and the British-Irish?

Surely not. Except that in a small country like Ireland the million British-Irish add up to something like 20% of the population. The Cossacks were a mere drop in the continental sea of Russia.

What of borders? Again there are lessons from the Russian Revolution. In February 1918 Lenin and Stalin, the commissar for nationalities, instructed that the "geographical boundaries" of the Don Republic "must be fixed by agreement with the population of the neighbouring zone and the autonomous republic of the Donets Basin" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 36, Moscow 1977, p483). A similar approach ought to be adopted in Ireland, where a federal solution would require new internal borders. I have suggested an Antrim, north Tyrone, south Derry, north Armagh and north Down British-Irish province. But the point here is not the details of where half-counties will be drawn on a map, but the principle of voluntary union, democratic negotiation and the right to secede.

There would, as comrade Riley triumphantly declares, still be a catholic-nationalist minority in the British-Irish province. There would also be a British-Irish minority elsewhere in the united Irish republic. So what! "Whatever the religio-ethnic community, there must be full citizenship rights" (thesis 17). We communists do not advocate a movement of population or ethnically 'pure' territories or states. This was certainly the case in the Soviet Union under the leadership of Lenin. The Ukraine contains Russians, Poles, Jews and many other smaller minorities besides the Little Russians. The same went for every other republic, from Georgia to those pocket-sized republics established for Don Cossacks, Volga Germans and Asian Jews.

Comrade Riley tries one more trick. There is a "danger" of giving the right to break away not to the British-Irish, but to loyalists. Again I will restate my position. Am I for self-determination, up to and including the right to secede, for loyalism? No. Am I for such a right for all Irish protestants? No. Loyalism is a deeply reactionary and sectarian movement. Protestantism in Northern Ireland is a cultural-political-religious category. "There can be no right of secession for political movements or religions" (thesis 19). National rights have to be attached to a distinct, significant and historically established territorial dimension: ie, a one-county, four-half-county federal entity in a united Ireland.

Now, finally we come to the programme of involuntary union implicitly advocated by comrade Riley. He is willing to concede that a British-Irish "majority" could be gained in a plebiscite. But he urges communists not to "gamble our support for a loyalist partition on the outcome".

I suppose the British-Irish are somehow a uniquely or permanently reactionary people who should be denied rights even in a 'democratic' or 'socialist' Ireland. Such ideas are repugnant to me and alien to the spirit of Marxism. Comrade Riley asks if we communists would be "prepared to support an armed struggle against the unity of Ireland by loyalist separatists". As a vicarious Irish nationalist, he insists we must.

Yet nothing of the sort follows: "Communists support the right of a British-Irish federal entity in a united Irish republic to self-determination, but argue against exercising that right in favour of secession. We are for voluntary unity and the growing together of the two traditions in Ireland on the basis of a common struggle for international socialism and world communism" (thesis 20).

A crazed loyalist rebellion which is massacring militant catholic-Irish and British-Irish workers alike should be crushed if there are the means available. Needless to say, all our efforts in the here and now must be directed towards positively avoiding such a disastrous scenario. We can win a British-Irish majority to communism, as the Bolsheviks once won a Cossack majority. Something that cannot be done with bloodcurdling promises of force and communal-religious warfare. Democracy, as the Bolsheviks proved, is our unbeatable weapon. Moreover, means determine ends and ends determine means.

Engels once said that there is only "one, absolutely internationalist, principle" - that it is impossible "to force blessings upon" other peoples. If, as it is, socialism is the self-liberating act of the working class, then the unity of Ireland under the leadership of the working class must be a voluntary unity of both its historically constituted communities. Freedom cannot be forced upon the British-Irish.

Communists strive for a society where humanity can at last find full collective and individual expression and development. Instead of dumbly expecting the British-Irish to fight to the bitter end in order to hang onto their miserable *relative* privileges, our programme offers a truly inspiring and fully realisable future. Comrade Riley seriously maintains that the British-Irish "have nothing to gain" from our programme, whereas we have "everything to lose". Evidently it is the reverse. The British-Irish have everything to gain. We communists have absolutely nothing to lose.

However, in the event of a 'victory' under comrade Riley's programme of military conquest his so-called socialism can only be an anti-capitalism which exploits and oppresses the working class. Whatever his fine intentions, he is back to Stalin's USSR and bureaucratic socialism.

So, yes, we communists are against a fratricidal war against the British-Irish. There are a million of them and they have at present 100,000 legally held firearms (not counting those in the arsenals of the RUC and the loyalist paramilitaries). Communists have no wish to rerun the barbarism of Lebanon or Yugoslavia. Nor do we desire a reversal of the poles of oppression. We fight not for a 32-county nationalist Ireland, but working class ascendancy. ●

SPEW split on SWP

We reproduce some recent correspondence between the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Socialist Workers Party, together with a report of a meeting between the two groups, taken from SPEW's *Members Bulletin* No37, June 1999. The significance lies not in the exchange between SWP and SPEW. No, the fact of the matter is that SPEW's executive committee is now split down the middle over its relations with the SWP. One the one side is Peter Taaffe and his loyal lieutenant Hannah Sell - they are prepared to work with the SWP, for example, on its lobby of the Labour Party on September 26. Bill Mullins, industrial organiser, is bitterly opposed and his report shows he wants to publically polemicise against the SWP. He has moreover produced a factional platform - circulated only to Unison members of SPEW, which we hope to comment upon next week

To the Socialist Workers Party executive committee

Electoral agreement
Dear comrades

As you are aware, your members in different parts of Britain have approached our members with proposals for electoral agreements between the Socialist Party and the SWP for future elections ...

In the past the SWP have castigated the Socialist Party for 'electoralism' because we fought elections and used them in an attempt to raise the level of understanding of the working class, linking their day-to-day struggles with the ideas of socialism. You have changed your position on standing in elections without explaining, as far as we can see, what new factors in the situation have led to this.

Nevertheless, the Socialist Party has always been prepared to arrive at principled agreements with other socialists and other parties in order to maximise the potential for the left and of socialism.

This has been our position in the trade unions, in the student field and in elections. This unfortunately has not been the approach of the SWP. In some union elections you have promoted your own candidates against the commonly agreed candidate of the left.

This has been despite approaches made to you for a common candidate, as with the general secretary elections in Unison. You promoted your own candidate, Yunus Bakhsh, in opposition to Roger Bannister, the candidate of the Broad Left organisation, the CFDU. Bannister got 18% of the vote and your candidate got less than five percent. A common candidate of the left would have obviously maximised the left vote.

This was the general view of many left activists in Unison before, during and after the election. The SWP, we believe, acted in a sectarian fashion in this election and unfortunately this is not an isolated incident ...

This, for instance, has been our approach to elections in the former Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA), now the PCS.

We have had a recent example of your approach in the student field. Our comrades have been excluded from the left 'Unity List' for the NUS conference by your student members who are in a bloc with the Campaign for Free Education (the majority of whom are members of the very small Workers' Liberty group).

Socialist Party members are not the only ones, however, who have been arbitrarily excluded. So have other important groups of left students. The justification for this approach by your student members is that the Socialist Party has "not got

a base" in the universities.

You are well aware that this is not true. In the very successful November 18 demonstration, called to protest against tuition fees and the withdrawal of the student grant, 5,000 students participated and at least one-third of this demonstration was mobilised by members of the Socialist Party or our supporters and sympathisers.

The Save Free Education campaign is the only one which has consistently and unequivocally called for a mass campaign of non-payment against tuition fees. You dismissed any idea of a mass campaign on this issue as "ludicrous". You made a similar mistake on the poll tax when you discounted that mass non-payment would defeat the Tories.

We do not want to rake over the past. But we wish to make it clear to you that while we are in favour of fighting agreements with all serious left organisations we will not allow the SWP, or any other organisation, to 'cherry-pick' when 'left unity' is 'appropriate' and benefits you, and when it is 'inappropriate' ...

If the SWP thinks they can act in a similar fashion then the steps that you have already made towards electoral agreements will be completely shipwrecked. Moreover, if you continue to act in a sectarian fashion in the trade unions and the student field then any steps towards 'left unity' in elections would be jettisoned because of the mutual suspicions which will be generated.

We have clear political differences with the SWP and neither you nor we have sought to hide these differences. But this does not preclude fighting, practical agreements in the electoral field which can enhance working class struggle and the general cause of socialism.

We would like a reply to the following points: 1. The SWP's views on electoral agreements involving the Socialist Party. 2. The SWP's approach towards left unity in the trade unions and in the student field.

Depending on your reply, we would like to meet you to discuss these issues further.

Yours fraternally

Hannah Sell

Socialist Party executive committee
February 19 1999

To the Socialist Party executive committee

Dear Hannah

Thank you for your letter of February 19.

As you know, the Socialist Workers Party has reached agreement with local Socialist Alliances, the Socialist Party and others on the left on standing a common list for the Welsh assembly and in the European elections

in London and the West Midlands while discussions are ongoing in the North West. In Scotland we have reached agreement with the Scottish Socialist Party.

We are, however, somewhat puzzled that the proposal for a meeting should be accompanied by such a lengthy criticism of us. For our part we believe that unity should be based on what unites us in opposition to Tony Blair and New Labour rather than cataloguing the disagreements which might exist. For that reason we are happy to meet with you.

Yours fraternally

Chris Bambery

national organiser, SWP

February 24 1999

Report of meeting with the SWP on March 30 1999

This meeting took place as a result of correspondence between ourselves and the SWP. Attending for us was Judy Beishon, Lois Austin and Bill Mullins, and for the SWP, Julie Waterson and Chris Bambery.

We introduced the discussion by posing a number of questions:

Why have the SWP changed their position on elections? How widely do they intend to stand? Will they stand in local and parliamentary elections? Will they stand in by-elections?

They had arrived at agreement in Scotland with the SSP, and in Wales with the Socialist Alliance. Was their position to always seek agreement and avoid socialist candidates standing against each other? Why was there no discussion with other lefts about Paul Foot standing for the London mayor?

How serious is the SWP's election strategy? For example, they seemed to be having second thoughts as regards the alliance slate for the London Euro-elections.

The SWP representatives resorted to a rambling discourse in response to most of our questions. However, there were a number of points raised by them which illuminates their very confused thinking and their inconsistency on the question of left unity. There were differences in the way that Waterson and Bambery responded. Waterson was arrogant and dismissive, whereas Bambery appeared uncomfortable at some of the issues we posed.

They attempted to justify the change in their position on elections by saying there has been a fundamental change in the character of the political situation between the 1980s and today. They argued - in an incoherent fashion - that, whereas in the 1980s the situation was polarised between the Tories and Labour, the election of a Labour government and its move towards the right has changed the situation. They said that the relationship of class forces and consciousness has changed. This now means that it is more viable for them and the left to stand in elections.

When challenged by us on their decision to stand for election in the 1970s in Stechford (where Paul Foot stood), Julie Waterson declared that this was a 'disaster' for them and demoralised their members, because the National Front beat the 'socialists'.

On the issue of the Euro-election campaign in London, Waterson argued that their position was "to maximise the socialist vote in the Euro-election". This was part of their justification for possible withdrawal (which they later did) from the left unity slate in favour of an SLP list headed

by Scargill. But she also argued, revealing their real fear, that Scargill and several other potential SLP candidates were 'high profile', and therefore standing against them would mean a much reduced vote for the left alliance list. We said that left unity for them, in this case, means that when Scargill stands and refuses to discuss with anybody else on the left, then we should just roll over and accede to Scargill's wishes. In effect, the SWP representatives replied, 'yes'.

So, in their first excursion into the 'new field' of elections, the method of the SWP, which is ultra-left in general but always heavily tinged with opportunism, is starkly borne out. Contrast this to our approach in elections. Although the vote we get is not unimportant, we have always stood primarily to get our socialist ideas across, rather than to get a good vote. We always seek discussion and agreement with other potential candidates on the left, to avoid left candidates standing against each other, and in some cases to stand a common candidate. And we have never bowed down before ultimatums from an increasingly dictatorial Scargill.

We pointed out that the SWP were quite happy to cling to the coat tails of Dave Nellist in the West Midlands, and to some extent went along with us in Wales (which they characterised as a model example of left unity), but it was a different question in fields or areas where we are, in their opinion, weaker than them.

At one stage in the discussion, they accused us of 'electoralism'. Later, when participation in the Socialist Alliances came up, they said that they could not participate in the Socialist Alliances because the Alliances don't reject the achievement of socialism by 'parliamentary means' in their programmes!

In response to the questions we posed at the start of the meeting, they said they may stand in future parliamentary by-elections; that whenever they want to stand they will enter into discussions with others on the left to try and reach agreement; and in the case of London, they would 'consult' others on the issue of standing Paul Foot.

We attempted to raise the issue of left unity in the trade unions and in the student field. We raised some details on the attitude of SWP members in Unison, and on the way SWP members have participated in a bloc against us in student union elections. We met a brick wall, particularly from Waterson. She declared that there was "no link" between community-based election work, and elections or work generally in the student field or in the trade unions.

We pointed out that Unison SWP members had not replied once to letters sent by our comrades and by the CFDU asking for left unity in Unison elections and in fighting the witch hunt against our comrades, the CFDU and the SWP. They retorted by attacking our Unison members, saying that Glen Kelly and Roger Bannister should have been "organising petitions in defence of SWP members who were being witch-hunted". But it was clear that they were not interested in collaboration. And 'left unity' for them in the unions means merely tail-ending the SWP and defending them against witch-hunters.

They mentioned the support they gave in our election campaign in Park Ward, Sheffield, but then they went

on to attack one of our Sheffield members. They claimed that Dave Milsom, our comrade involved in the housing benefit strike in Sheffield, had just called for a return to work. This was a blatant lie. The next day, Bill Mullins phoned Dave Milsom and asked whether he had proposed calling off the benefit strike on "two occasions". He strongly denied this, and shouted out in a room used by the strikers, "Has anybody here ever heard me proposing calling off the strike?" The response was a loud "No"!

The SWP representatives were adamant about pursuing a completely independent road in the trade unions. When we pointed out that their candidate in the Unison elections, who stood against CFDU candidate Roger Bannister, got a lot fewer votes than the CFDU, their riposte was: "We did OK in that election because our candidate was a revolutionary."

It is clear that in the trade unions they are not prepared, despite their protestations to the contrary, to maximise the left vote, thereby raising the confidence and ability of trade unionists to struggle, both against the rightwing leadership and against the employers.

On student work, a heated exchange took place between us and Julie Waterson. But Waterson and Bambery claimed not to know any detail of what goes on in the student work, and said they would discuss our points with their student comrades!

We said that Socialist Party members may have some difficulty in making electoral deals with the SWP for local authority elections, parliamentary elections, etc, while at the same time those same members have to face disunity caused by the SWP in their trade union work or student work. Waterson's response to this was that they have a strict division of labour in the SWP, with some members being devoted to the trade unions almost exclusively, some to the students, etc, so a problem of this nature would not arise in their party!

We drew the general conclusion from this meeting that there is no possibility of broad agreement with the SWP on left unity in general. They expressed willingness to engage in limited electoral agreements, but, given their sectarian attitude in other fields of work, this willingness may not extend very far in practice. They are also concerned to inoculate their members against arguments, from ourselves in particular: that would open wider the cracks already existing in their ranks.

Notwithstanding their attitude in this discussion, we still have to be prepared to make electoral agreements with all on the left. At the same time, we have to recognise that difficulties with the SWP will continue to be a factor in most fields in which we work. They attract completely ultra-left elements, many of whom would have travelled into the ranks of the WRP in the past.

Undoubtedly, some good people join them who are looking for a Marxist and revolutionary alternative. All the evidence shows that this layer do not remain within their organisation for any length of time. While concentrating on the main task of building our party and getting our ideas out as widely as possible, we may sometimes have to publicly criticise positions of the SWP in order to show the differences between their party and ours, so enabling new people to clearly distinguish between us ●

BM, LA and JB

review

Masterpiece of the coded message

Yesim Ustaoglu *Journey to the sun* Turkey/Germany 1999, Edinburgh International Film Festival, Turkish with English subtitles

This film focuses on two working class men in Turkey. The first is Berzan (Nazmi Oirix), who is a Kurd from the east of Turkey. Mehmet (Newroz Baz) is from the west - it is not clear whether he is a non-Kurd or merely a Kurd who is trying to abandon his identity. In any case, it is academic, because Mehmet's dark skin leads to police assuming that he is. Some way into the film, he will change his hair colour in a vain attempt to escape ethnic stereotyping.

There are strong hints that Berzan is politicised in some way. Mehmet sees Berzan on TV being arrested during a protest in support of prison hunger strikers. Berzan says it was "nothing". No political parties are mentioned in the film, but he sells cassettes from a box which has a yellow and green sign on it. These, plus red, are the Kurdish colours, and the sign is lingered on more than once, conveying the impression that the viewer is to take note. The omission of red may have a significance I will come to later. And in one scene on a bus, Berzan conceals a young woman's ID at an army checkpoint. She has her hair cut short and wears a scarf in the style of women guerrillas. Berzan says to her, "They nearly got us that time."

Berzan is possibly older than Mehmet, and certainly comes across as more mature and experienced. They get to know one another after Berzan's car is set upon by football fans, presumably fascists, who demand he toot his horn to support Turkey. When he does not do so, this shows he is a "fucking Kurd". Mehmet, who is passing by, comes to his aid and they flee for safety into an apartment.

Later Mehmet is arrested by the police at a roadblock while travelling on an Istanbul bus. A bag containing a revolver is found. A bearded man gets off the bus just before the roadblock, and we presume that the bag is his. Mehmet is interrogated about the gun, and asked which party he belongs to. He denies that the gun is his or that he is a 'terrorist'. His girlfriend (Mizgin Kapazan) comes to the police station, and is told by an old woman that she has been coming to the police station for weeks, waiting for news of her son who was arrested.

Eventually Mehmet is released, badly bruised. He goes to his workplace, and falls asleep. When he wakes up, his work colleagues tell him he has to go, because "they" have painted a red cross on the door, and "we're all fucked". Mehmet may be out of the police station, but he is not out of the prison that is Turkey. Clutching his only possession, a portable TV, he has a brief street encounter with a Russian-speaking prostitute - they are both outsiders, both the wretched of the earth.

He meets up with Berzan, who tries to help him, but Mehmet finds that

he is unemployable, a pariah followed by a red cross, one who needs to stay out of the way of the police.

Then Berzan is reported killed. Repeatedly in the film, TV and radio reports of a prison hunger strike feature, and we last see Berzan in apparent TV news footage, being set upon by riot police. Mehmet and his girlfriend claim the body, though the official in the morgue at first will not allow it because they are not family members. At this point, his girlfriend's parents drive up and take her back with them, and she disappears from the film.

Mehmet is left alone with Berzan's coffin, determined to take it to Berzan's home village in the east. He steals a lorry and takes the coffin. After various incidents he gets on to a train and shares a compartment with a fair-skinned young man from his own village who is doing army service. The man says he is a commando, and wishes he had never been assigned "out here". When a policeman comes into the compartment asking for IDs, the army soldier says Mehmet is travelling with him, possibly saving Mehmet from a hard time at the hands of the police.

Finally, Mehmet gets to Berzan's home village, which is deserted, flooded and has red crosses painted on several doors. He floats Berzan's coffin off into the water, and the film ends. The credits showed that a European Union fund had contributed to financing the film.

Ustaoglu, the film's director and screenwriter, answered some questions from the audience. She said red crosses were painted on the doors of Alevi and Kurds in the 1970s, and news reports suggested the practice was making a comeback. She said the film had had a limited screening in Turkey and she was hoping it would receive permission to be shown more widely.

This may explain a lack of political detail in the film. For example, two of the Kurdish colours feature on Berzan's sign, but not all three. Perhaps this is a concession to allow the film not to be interpreted as 'terrorist propaganda'. No political parties are mentioned by name, the fascist football fans do not display any insignia or give the grey wolves hand signal as in real life, and the organisations or demands of the hunger-strikers are not mentioned, only the fact they are on hunger strike. A dead striker's name is spoken, but is apparently fictional, so a definite connection with the 1996 prison fast, in which 12 leftwing inmates died, is not established. The film was shot in Turkey and probably had some sort of permission, though Ustaoglu said shots of tanks and soldiers on a street in an armoured car in the Kurdish east were taken clandestinely.

The film's camera work is often breathtaking. Jacek Petrycki, an associate of the late Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski, is responsible for it. The sense of menace around

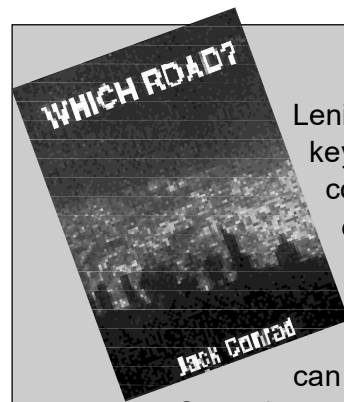
the characters is well conveyed, not least at the numerous roadblocks which interrupt the characters' journeys. Clearly, something is rotten in the state of Turkey.

In the foyer outside after the film, I heard an English-speaking Turkish woman express relief that *Journey to the sun* did not lay too much stress on politics. The audience was liberal-left, with quite a few people speaking Turkish. In my opinion, it should have been *more* politicised, without necessarily having to be a manifesto for a particular party or group. A non-Turkish audience would have to know Turkey well to understand various allusions in the film - for example, the annoying chime heard at several points is actually from a van

selling calor gas cylinders - an everyday phenomenon in Istanbul's shanty towns. A member of the audience was puzzled by the prostitute who spoke Russian, probably not realising that they are a common feature of post-Soviet Istanbul. He also did not understand why Mehmet seemed to follow what she said in Russian, although it seems the director was making a point about outsiders being able to understand one another.

I hope *Weekly Worker* readers get to see this film, if, for example, it is shown at the London Film Festival. It is a masterpiece, even with the criticisms I have mentioned, and will help anyone to understand Turkey at the end of the 20th century ●

James Robertson



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Fighting fund

Digging deep

Our September fund has got off to a good start. Admittedly JG's brilliant donation of £50 was intended for last month's total. As he wrote, "I haven't forgotten you - the bank holiday interfered." Better late than never, comrade - especially when such a large amount is involved.

This week's postbag also included gifts of £25 from TR and £10 from FJ, giving us a total of £115 already. However, we not only

need to achieve the full £400 for September, but we must also make up August's £90 shortfall.

I have every confidence that, refreshed from their summer breaks, comrades will get back into the habit of digging deep once again ●

Robbie Rix

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

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Earthquake fallout

Creaking state exposed

The earthquake which devastated the industrial region on the southern coast of the Marmara Sea in mid-August has shaken the Turkish state from top to bottom.

Leaving 30,000 dead and around 50,000 injured, its effect was most deeply felt by the working class and new migrants from rural Turkey. Poor quality housing and shoddy construction were the main reasons for the death toll in a region containing almost a third of the country's population. Today more than a quarter million are homeless and, if they are lucky, live in tent cities wholly dependent on food aid.

The shocked population was entitled to expect an orderly and speedy search and rescue effort. They did not find it and there was an outcry against the government as a result of its inability to mobilise the manpower and equipment of the armed forces. The inefficiency and disorganisation of the state was exposed, as it seemed incapable of distributing aid and organising health services and temporary accommodation. The insensitive and downright abusive actions and speeches of fascist ministers in the coalition government also caused outrage.

The growing anger of the people brought the cracks that the state had previously managed to paper over into the open. The much criticised army was obliged to defend itself before the public, which it did by blaming the government.

The top brass told a press conference that the government had three options for dealing with disasters: it could place the civil administration on an emergency footing; it could declare an 'extraordinary situation'; or it could impose martial law. The last two options both bring the civilian administration under overt military control to varying degrees.

As the government did not choose to implement any of the three, it was to blame, according to the generals. The local government administration had no legal powers to coopt the military. And as an armed service remaining loyally under civilian authority, they could not take independent action. This from an army that has blatantly intervened in public life three times in the last 40 years and whose veiled control of civilian government has been more than apparent.

Government ministers could not admit to the impotency of the administration in the most urbanised and industrialised part of Turkey. But it was clear that they were incapable of coordinating the relief effort since the state was not geared for this sort of emergency.

Since constituting itself as a republic, the state of Turkey has had two parallel administrations. The governors, appointed by the central state, were the mainstays of the central power in the provinces. They command a retinue of police chiefs,



Ready: for the wrong kind of emergency

prosecutors and judges, the tax collection service and the provincial representatives of all ministries, who are again centrally appointed.

However, local units of the armed forces are not, during normal times, under the governors' command, but operate under a powerful general staff based in Ankara. In reality, through the National Security Council - that is, representatives of the general staff, plus key cabinet ministers and the president - the armed forces oversee and direct the executive and legislative arms of the state.

The elected municipal councils and mayors are at best empowered to run city services under the tight financial and operational restraints of the central government agencies.

This domination of the central apparatus has completely blocked any development of local civil initiative or democratic local politics. Any independent civilian initiative - apart from capitalist enterprise - has been seen as a threat against the state and is therefore crushed.

The inability to organise an effective relief effort in the immediate aftermath of the quake left a vacuum which was filled by popular initiatives and self-help organisations. Youth all over the country volunteered for action and for two or three days were in control of local operations. Comrades taking part in organising the relief tell us how easily they countered the half-hearted efforts of the local police to direct things.

Later, after the state had finalised contingency plans for putting down challenges to its authority, the official relief operation became more apparent. The state stamped its authority over the "illegal organisations" who had coordinated the lo-

cal population. For example, the police baton-charged a march by people who had not even been provided with a simple tent a fortnight after the disaster.

On the other hand they openly promoted the fascist youth groups who claimed to be 'organising' aid through channelling state resources. In one town, after the police dispersed a left demonstration, two tent camps were erected side by side - one sponsored by grey wolves in government and the other by grey wolves in opposition. Both were of course formally recognised as providing assistance to the state.

Those who follow developments in Turkey might remember that the grey wolves were the notorious assassins and shock troops of the fascist party in the 70s. Since then the fascist party has split and the larger section appeared to moderate its rabid rhetoric. It is now a coalition partner in the government. The other, smaller section became an independent party and continues openly to expound fascist and racist-nationalist rhetoric in opposition.

The state has established tight control over the aid coming into the area. It prohibited unauthorised collections and paid particular attention to donations in foreign currency. Government ministers and the heads of so-called non-governmental organisations such as the Red Crescent gave speeches asking donors to be vigilant against "illegal organisations" making collections and using them for their own purposes. While shamelessly sabotaging the efforts of independent organisations, the Red Crescent itself devoted a mere six percent of its budget to emergency relief.

This dirty work was not restricted to Turkey. In Britain the aid organisation centred on the embassy tried to discredit leftwing organisations in public speeches, and through local Turkish radio and press. They even coopted British banks where official relief accounts were held. Managers refused to open them for 'non-recognised' groups.

Sickeningly, the bourgeoisie now looks hungrily at the disaster area, hoping for juicy profits from rebuilding. The first tenders are for the provision of temporary accommodation. There are already indications that foreign companies will be barred, so that lucrative contracts will fall into the laps of well connected businessmen.

Housing construction and rebuilding of the infrastructure will certainly bring opportunities. New credit, grants and aid from the IMF, World Bank and European Union have whetted appetites. Istanbul's stock exchange index registered an upsurge. The US government has indicated that it will temporarily lift the quotas imposed on cotton goods and textiles from Turkey, leaving industrial exporters full of joy.

The bourgeoisie is hoping for a boom in the economy. Like wars, natural disasters also destroy accumulated value and pave the way for new demand. However, foreign aid is not sufficient to finance this boom. Ways must be found of putting the burden onto the shoulders of working class.

Therefore the government and the grand national assembly - that is, the parliament - are looking to rush through a raft of tax legislation. Mobile phone companies will be obliged to levy an additional 25% tax on air time - with a hefty commission, of course. The ministry of labour and

trade unions have already agreed to donate one day's pay for the relief effort, to be funnelled into the government budget.

When the earthquake struck, parliament was in the process of discussing a social security reform bill. Nowadays when 'social security reform' is mentioned workers understand that a cut in welfare provision is in the offing. In this case the aim was to raise the retirement age in order to save the public retirement insurance scheme from bankruptcy. The draft met with strong opposition. There were 100,000-strong demonstrations and one-day stoppages. Moreover, trade unions of all persuasions came together. The quake interrupted the protests, but parliament did its duty and rushed the social security reform through on the second and third day after the devastation. The president promptly granted his consent without any further discussion.

The next item in the legislative assembly's agenda was an amnesty bill put forward by the government. It was paraded as a general amnesty. However, as a matter of course, it omitted all crimes against the state: that is, armed resistance - for example, by Kurdish guerrillas - offences committed by prisoners of conscience, and all the other 'crimes' on the statute book wielded against the left. The bill proposes to free all mafia bosses, drug-smugglers, state-protected assassins and those who took part in kidnapping, torture and disappearances.

During their rush to pass it in the mayhem of the earthquake, government officials made several mistakes. As a result, the legislation yielded very strange results. Those found guilty of murdering somebody to whom they were in debt would be freed. If, however, they had refused to repay a debt and had been found guilty of wilful misconduct, they would remain in prison. In other words a mess.

In the face of mounting criticism the president did not dare sign this sorry piece of legislation and returned it to the assembly for further consideration. The opposition claimed this as a major victory for the forces of liberalism and enlightenment. They did not of course raise any objections to the bill's discrimination against the left and working class movement.

Despite the creaking sounds coming from the state's infrastructure, the organisations of the left, working class and communist movement are in no shape to further their revolutionary aims. They did not mobilise large sections of the youth or trade unions. The vital need to expose the nature of the state at a time when the public was receptive was not sufficiently recognised or grasped.

However, as winter rapidly approaches, the tent cities are sure to provide an important focus of opposition ●

Aziz Demir