

Peter Taaffe's political leprosy

Pat Strong of the Socialist Party demands that the organisation's leaders come clean on differences over the SWP and left unity

The recent correspondence between the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party (see *Weekly Worker* September 9) and rumours of a split in the Socialist Party executive committee regarding the question of closer links with the SWP once again raise basic questions concerning our attitude to and practice of internal democracy and revolutionary openness.

A statement by the party's industrial organiser, Bill Mullins, has been circulated to SP members of Unison, allegedly adopting a hardline anti-SWP stance. It urges comrades not to participate in the SWP's lobby of the Labour Party conference on September 26, and condemns that organisation's approach to left unity and its response to the witch-hunts currently taking place in Unison. (I say 'allegedly', because, not being a privileged member of comrade Mullins' inner circle, I have not been permitted to see the document!)

In contrast, loyalists speak of a faction, headed by general secretary Peter Taaffe and national organiser Hannah Sell, that apparently wishes to explore the possibility of closer links with the SWP. However, speaking at a public meeting in Leicester on September 13, Peter Taaffe, in response to an SWP intervention from the floor urging support for the lobby, stated: "As Blair is totally insulated from workers - he has his money from big business - the lobby is a waste of time. It won't change anything, no matter how big, no matter how well attended, so, although individual comrades will be attending, we are not supporting the lobby."

After the meeting, though, the truth was rather different, when Taaffe bluntly asked SP comrades, "Why should we build anything that benefits the SWP?" While this short-sighted sectarianism is not in the least surprising, what is of rather more concern is that the wider issue of left

unity is 'debated' in this manner. Other than the publication of the SP/SWP correspondence in *Members Bulletin* No37, the entire issue has been and is being conducted over the heads of the rank and file. It remains the province of the executive committee.

It is surely a disgrace that only a tiny section of the membership has had sight of Mullins' document. Furthermore, how can an organisation claiming to operate on the principles of democratic centralism (or unity) exclude virtually its entire rank and file from *any* discussion, never mind one that is so important for the revolutionary movement today as left unity?

Of course, this type of behaviour is symptomatic of the political bankruptcy infecting not just the Socialist Party, but much wider sections of the British left. Quite apart from the need to include as much of the class as possible in discussions, quite apart from the importance of allowing workers to distinguish "which leaders are pursuing this or that line" (Lenin), the sharpening of your individual and organisational political programme which results from engaging in informed and often heated exchanges is not only valuable, but is indispensable to the building of a living, breathing, vibrant revolutionary party.

Alas, the converse is also true. The suppression of debate, the policing of your own members, their emphasis on bureaucratic, organisational and administrative forms - these lead as surely as night follows day to a stagnant, moribund political culture where comrades are recruited at the lowest political level and remain there. This results in a kind of political leprosy, with whole chunks dropping from the main torso. For further proof, you need only consider the recent events in Liverpool, Manchester, Pakistan and Scotland.

What is more, such stagnation is

inevitably reflected in the pages of your organisation's paper. You will search the pages of *The Socialist* for signs of a healthy internal life or even for meaty theoretical articles. No, pure agitation is all that is on offer - ain't life hard and, my word, ain't Blair a bad man!

Of course, the justification for this 'dumbing down' approach is the crass idea that the consciousness of the class has been thrown so far back that "The main task facing us now is to win support for a socialist programme and for socialist ideas generally" (*Members Bulletin* No18, June 1996). As if somehow genuine revolutionaries arguing for a clear revolutionary programme are prevented from discussing with less advanced elements of the class!

This patronising attitude speaks volumes about the kind of society SP loyalists are seeking to establish. Revolution is not about the self-liberation of our class; it is not about raising the working class to the status of a ruling class: no, what we are in effect saying is 'we know best' - involving the class in debate at the highest possible level will only confuse them - after all, their consciousness is very low, isn't it?

Comrade Taaffe, we urgently need to think again. We need a political and cultural revolution, where comrades are recruited, integrated and educated at the sharpest political level; internal bodies need to be fully open and democratic. Debate must involve all sections of the party, the left and our class, and, of course, our paper needs to reflect this.

The idea that anything less will be sufficient to build a genuine revolutionary party with the vibrancy and confidence to lead our class to power is laughable.

At the moment, sadly, the only thing growing in our party is philistinism and demoralisation ●



Party notes

LSA

The first gathering of the newly reconstituted London Socialist Alliance election bloc met on September 8 (see *Weekly Worker* August 19 for the pre-history). The meeting brought together 18 comrades representing 10 organisations, including the Socialist Party, the CPGB, the Socialist Democracy Group, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Workers Power, Socialist Outlook and the Independent Labour Network. Comrades began the job of focusing attention and work on next year's London assembly elections.

A notable absence however was the Socialist Workers Party. Comrade Toby Abse of the ILN reported that, despite approaches to the SWP's two previous representatives at the abortive United Socialists discussions preceding the European elections, there was no firm indication of the SWP's willingness to participate in this latest attempt to unite the left in the capital. This may again place a question mark over the whole enterprise, as the SWP's collapse before Scargill's Socialist Labour Party in June prompted most to desert the project. Nothing indicates that they are made of stronger stuff now.

The meeting was conducted in a fraternal manner, although there were several important bones of contention. In the Communist Party's view, despite best intentions, there is a danger of repeating the errors that wrecked a united left challenge in London last time around.

First, on choosing candidates. Communist Party representatives put forward a resolution outlining a straightforward, transparent and fair method of picking the slate. This proposed that the 14 constituency-based candidates for the London assembly be chosen bottom up, by meetings of Socialist Alliances and other interested working class bodies. Where no local Alliance exists, we suggested that the LSA should fill the position with a round-robin system of the organisations in the electoral bloc or with mutually agreed 'independents'.

The 11 candidates in the alternative list system should be chosen by the LSA. Each constituent political organisation in the LSA would be guaranteed one candidate each, with the remainder being picked by the LSA as a body through negotiation and compromise.

To us, these seem eminently sensible suggestions, calculated to build trust, give clear gateways to other groups that may wish to join the bloc and retain a flexible approach to incorporating non-aligned candidates that may come forward from the wider movement. It is disappointing then that the meeting rejected them, with only the two CPGB reps voting in favour.

Apart from the all too familiar knee-jerk anti-CPGBism that some comrades seem unable to grow out of, this reflects the left's hopeless lack of self-belief. Clearly, comrades are still hung up on recruiting what they dub "credible" candidates for the LSA slate. The notification for this September 8 meeting (signed by LSA secretary and leading SOer Greg Tucker) illustrated what this delightfully ambiguous phrase means to some. It spoke of how "in the right circumstances", a slate of "credible candidates with a proven record and a good campaign" could attract a layer of voters. The "credible candidates" would be "trade unionists, strikers, environmentalists and other campaigners and socialists". The fact that "socialists" are tacked on the end almost as an afterthought is obviously no accident.

Thus, the September 8 meeting agreed that LSA officers should approach the London bodies of various unions - in particular the RMT and the firefighters' union - "to arrange discussions on the issue of independent candidates" (LSA minutes, September 13). Yet despite rumblings from some sections it is unlikely that we will witness any sort of mass split away from official Labour by London trade unions - in the absence of a rebel Livingstone election bid, that is. Rather it seems that independent candidates of the left opposing privatisation of London Underground might receive what was called the "tacit endorsement" of transport union branches and higher regional bodies. The decision on LSA candidates has been put off to an unspecified "future meeting". But nothing stands in the way of a united left putting together a "credible" platform *now*. Nothing, that is, apart from the fantasy perspectives that allow most socialist organisations to see massed ranks of illusionary "trade unionists, strikers, environmentalists and other campaigners" just over the hill, mustering to save them.

What would actually give an LSA platform credibility under today's conditions? First, the actual prospect of the left coming together at long last. That would be an effective answer to charges that it has been more interested in its various petty 'party'-building projects than actually being of *use* to the movement. The oft repeated 'why don't you all get together?' has a philistine aspect to it, but also expresses a perfectly understandable exasperation at the sectarian nature of much of the left.

This relates to the other contentious point in the September 8 meeting. What is the political platform? It has been taken as read that "the programme adopted for the Euro-elections would form the basis" for the platform for the London assembly contest. Yet this programme was not debated openly by all the organisations involved in the United Socialists initiative. It is a hopelessly economistic document, cobbled together in various backroom cabals.

We believe that if the LSA initiated an honest, open and wide-ranging debate about the type of programme we need, this could have the effect - not of "confusing" potential voters, as one comrade patronisingly put it - but actually mobilising support for our slate ●

Mark Fischer, national organiser

British-Irish

Jack Conrad's 'Theses on the British-Irish' (*Weekly Worker* August 26) statement lacks clarity. I am forced, as is everyone else, to choose between, say, thesis 15 ("Communists must include in their programme for Ireland the demand for a federal solution whereby the area containing a clear British-Irish majority has the right of self-determination up to and including secession"), and thesis 7 ("There can be no right of present-day Northern Ireland to self-determination. The six-county statelet was founded in 1921 on the cynical basis of permanently institutionalising the oppression of the catholic-nationalist minority. We do not, and cannot, support the right of the British-Irish majority in the north to oppress the catholic-nationalist minority").

As Steve Riley pointed out in his thoughtful, extremely well argued, analysis of the questions posed by Jack Conrad - an article deserving far better than Conrad's ill-considered, knee-jerk, dismissive response (*Weekly Worker* September 2, 9) - any support for thesis 15 would merely serve to justify a rejuvenated, leaner-meaner, version of the present-day institutionalised orange state. To offer support for this thesis is to identify communists with a reactionary state, one in no way preferable to the existing state, one distinguished from it only in having a far less precarious protestant majority, one, indeed, which could far more efficiently ethnically cleanse itself of troublesome republicans.

Some important, even relevant, points are made in thesis 16. Jack's theses imply, or appear to imply, that a stable, voluntary and peaceful solution to the Irish question is possible within one, two, or more bourgeois republics of Ireland. What we have here is an example of naivety born of a theory of democracy incapable of distinguishing between bourgeois and proletarian rule. The reality is that the problem posed by the 'British-Irish' will remain a festering sore so long as the capitalist class have both the incentive and the resources to play the orange card.

Insofar as Jack insists that the borders of his (thus far) non-existent two Irish republics have to be determined by agreement with the population of the other zone, he is departing from the unconditional meaning of self-determination of nations attributed to it by his above-class revolutionary democracy. If to pass the Jack Conrad test for being a consistent democrat it is essential to endorse his thesis 15, it would be no less essential to support the right to an independent state for towns with a catholic majority trapped inside Jack's new protestant state for a protestant people. And such a test would surely demand support for streets with a protestant majority trapped inside the catholic city-state enclave. That said, Jack's theses do have much to commend them.

I have no problem in agreeing that if, within a victorious republican movement, there emerged an overwhelmingly powerful reactionary gang obsessed with exacting revenge against the protestant people as a people (in other words, a mirror image of loyalism) we would be presented with new problems. Theoretically, circumstances could, at some stage, dictate that communists champion a new independent state in the north of Ireland. Such a state would, though, be secular with equal rights for catholics and protestants, not a state with a permanently guaranteed protestant majority, a guarantee enshrined in thesis 15.

Tom Delargy
Paisley

Province of crisis

I have a number of comments on your article on Ireland (J Conrad *Weekly Worker* September 2). The first paragraph says, "Since Easter 1998 the situation in the Six Counties is best characterised as an unstable counterrevolutionary situa-

tion. Neither war nor peace."

What is happening overall is progress. It is also an inevitable, essential step.

The agreement reduces violence and attempts to establish a level of democracy and hence accountability. It moves towards a situation where the governed determine *how* they are governed. The agreement creates stability and a degree of normalisation that we have not had in Northern Ireland since its establishment. It allows ordinary people to become involved in left-right, worker versus exploiter, politics.

In your penultimate paragraph you say, "We are for an immediate British withdrawal and reunification." This is fine from the outside, but is completely useless as a practical, short-term programme for the workers' movement inside Northern Ireland. This may well be the best long-term option. But that depends on the people. To get there we need stability and a level of democracy that allows these issues to be opened up in a way that does not threaten the interests of ordinary people, that cannot be manipulated and distorted by narrow sectarian forces.

The ups and downs you describe are important and interesting. They reflect the attempts, by people who want no compromise short of total victory for their side, to confuse and obstruct. The opposite forces to all this are within both sides and within the labour and socialist movement.

Why not support the overall process, show how it is in the ordinary people's interest to advance democracy? The socialist and left movement has not been very good at using democracy. But that should not be used to dismiss any advance. We in Ireland intend to use the fight to win democratic freedoms to work for a just, fully democratic and socialist society. Whether within or without Britain or Ireland is not the central issue - although nor is it irrelevant. This is surely the way that the socialist movement would have seen things in its first years.

Alan Evans
Northern Ireland

Abstract?

Comrade Ian Donovan appears to suggest (Letters, September 9), that I no longer support the rights of nations to self-determination.

At no stage have I denied Kosova's right to self-determination. However, as Lenin put it in *The Discussion on self-determination summed-up* of July 1916, "The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but only a *small part* of the general-democratic *world* movement." Does comrade Donovan deny that getting Nato out of the Balkans is a far larger part of "the general-democratic *world* movement" than supporting the KLA? This is especially the case since Kosovar self-determination is impossible without getting Nato out of the Balkans - something the KLA has never even suggested since Rambouillet.

Moreover, comrade Donovan says that "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." At no stage have I counterposed the Albanian national struggle to a socialist federation, but I have argued that these two struggles should be interlinked, as "Only on the basis of breaking Serb nationalist illusions within the working class can Kosova *be granted the self-determination it desires*" (Letters, August 26). It is comrade Donovan who is making "abstract" calls when he calls for an independent Kosova through the KLA.

The principal reason for supporting Kosova's right to self-determination is to get closer to my "abstract" aim of a "multi-ethnic socialist federation without



Letters

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

Milosevic, Nato and the KLA". It is not to set up a KLA-policed Nato protectorate. It seems that, rather than relying on the Yugoslav working class to save Kosova and the Balkans as a whole, comrade Donovan prefers to rely on the KLA, who in turn prefer to rely on Nato, rather than their various cheerleaders on the left such as comrade Donovan.

Ian Hamilton
Cambridgeshire

Legitimate

In my article last week (September 9) I made it clear that to actively call for Australian troops to intervene in the current situation in East Timor was a betrayal of independent working class politics.

The Democratic Socialist Party, in attempting to defend their opportunism - which amounts to social-imperialism - have claimed that they are placing a demand on the Australian government to 'expose' their connivance with the Indonesian military and its regime.

That Australian troops are now leading the UN expedition into East Timor - albeit after the Indonesian military has effectively destroyed Dili and massacred thousands of pro-independence East Timorese - has shown the DSP's tactic to be utterly wrong. Nothing has been exposed.

This is not to say that communists refrain from placing demands on bourgeois governments - that would be pure ultra-leftism. In the current situation it is legitimate to demand that the Australian government *immediately* recognise East Timor's independence. But to call on the Australian military to intervene (and effectively go to war with Indonesia) is to abandon Marxism and collapse into a desperate and defeatist liberalism (we cannot act, but 'somebody' should do 'something').

Marcus Larsen
South London

Proud

I would like to reply to comrade Logan (Letters, August 26). I am also a former member of the CPGB who joined in the 30s. But unlike comrade Logan I believe it had begun to change for the worse long before. However, the worst thing which happened was the adoption of *The British road to socialism* in 1950. I was still proud of my membership, even though I disagreed with more and more of its policies until it met its demise at the hands of the liquidators led by Nina Temple.

The problem of attracting youth is as old as the party itself, for without them there can be no future. I agree with our comrade when he says we must recruit within the trades union movement, but one must remember that not all union activists are even progressive, let alone communist-inclined. I am convinced the CPGB PCC endeavours to contact all parties to discuss the need for communist unity, within the framework of the party programme and, where such unity proves to be impossible, would try to find agreement for joint action on specific issues.

Ted Rowlands
Bishop Auckland

Very proud

I am an Italian 30 years old living in Rome. I am very proud that people like Mrs Melita Norwood still sustain their ideals! Please let me know if she needs economic support for legal defence. I read the story, a wonderful story of political ideals. I am young, but my father was a partisan during World War II, and such communist ideals are my daily task.

Sveva Morelli
Italy

Greater Manchester annual general fiasco

The annual general meeting of the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance took place, five months late, on September 11. It marked a further stage in the degeneration of this originally promising organisation. Reporting upon last year's AGM (*Weekly Worker* May 21 1998), I observed that, "Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance has effectively now reverted to the proprietorial control" of a small clique. This has now been formalised.

At the 1998 AGM, the constitution of the organisation was amended in a democratic coup by GMSA convenor John Nicholson and his associates, which saw the removal of the right of all affiliated organisations to a seat on the alliance's steering committee. Under the new rules, affiliates and individual members could make nominations, from which the AGM would elect comrades for the 10 steering committee seats. The new constitution was immediately applied, and the election resulted in all affiliates - except the CPGB, and the CPGB-led Campaign for a Democratic Socialist Labour Party - retaining their seats. My report commented upon the predictable support Nicholson had received from the Socialist Party in England and Wales and Socialist Outlook delegates, and upon the failure of the delegates of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the International Socialist League to back the CPGB delegates' condemnation of the gross abuses of working class democratic norms which had characterised that meeting.

"First they came for the communists ...", the famous saying goes. During its five months' delay over the calling of the 1999 AGM, Nicholson's clique again arranged that proceedings should be dominated by their proposals for yet another new constitution. This time they moved that the 10 steering committee seats held by the affiliated organisations should be deleted and that, henceforth, "the implementation of policy and activities between conferences, the organising of annual and any other conferences, and the management of the organisation of the GMSA will be the responsibility of the elected officers". A new clause proposed a

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 " ... the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance now resembles, more closely than before, a new sectlet rather than an alliance. It is effectively an organisation of the 'great and the good'"

tightening up of the criteria for eligibility for membership of the GMSA. This would only be available to "individuals, groups and organisations who agree with [the founding statement of the network of Socialist Alliances in England]" (my emphasis). Even in cases where such agreement was avowed, applications for membership were to be subject to the approval, or otherwise, of the officers, with the annual conference being em-

powered to vary the officers' decisions.

As comrade Phil Watson explained (*Weekly Worker* September 2), the existing steering committee was now deemed 'unreliable' by Nicholson and co. He had alienated the AWL and the ISL in Manchester with his unprincipled collaboration with the Socialist Workers Party in the Campaign Against War in the Balkans, during which he had publicly refused to give voice to GMSA resolutions supporting the right of the Kosovar people to self-determination. He had also experienced 17 months of public defiance by the CPGB of its exclusion from the steering committee, for which he had retaliated by removing the CPGB and individual CPGB supporters from 'his' mailing list, even though the organisation and the individuals all remained fully paid up GMSA members. The AWL and ISL had displayed growing embarrassment at the exclusion of the CPGB, a matter which had surfaced more than once in discussions in the electoral bloc for the 1999 European elections, the North West Socialist Alliance. It had become clear that those two organisations at least would be unlikely to connive at the extension of the exclusion for another year.

The CPGB was more than happy then to witness, and to support, the action of the AWL in bringing forward amendments for debate at the 1999 GMSA AGM which would *inter alia* restore the automatic right of affiliates to a steering committee seat. The AGM was much in the mould of its predecessor. A similar number, 20, were in attendance - representatives of the CPGB, SPEW, ISL, AWL, SO, Socialist Movement, plus Nicholson's 'independent' friends. Recent SPEW leaver Margaret Manning took the chair. After a rather flat and uninspiring 'discussion' on "building campaigns against Nato", during which Nicholson sought to excuse his actions in the Campaign Against War in the Balkans on the grounds of the 80%-20% principle of the Socialist Alliances in seeking out agreement, the meeting moved onto the constitutional proposals.

Initially, comrade Manning indicated that she wanted to hear only the proposer and one speaker against, on each amendment being moved to the Nicholson document. Whilst this move was successful, against CPGB objections, it was nevertheless set aside for the particular debate on the steering committee, after Nicholson stalwart Chris Jones of SO had made a plea for more discussion. Jones added that he had 'agonised' over this particular proposal, even to the extent of not having made up his mind on his way to the meeting that morning. However, he had now been convinced and would support the leadership.

The vote on the AWL amendment was tied, 10 each way. Manning ruled that it fell. Then something interesting happened. From the floor, SPEW's Noel Pine, a former GMSA chair, objected that surely Nicholson's proposed change to existing practice also fell as a result of this tied vote. Manning ruled that this was not so: the steering committee's action in moving, as an indivisible whole, a replacement constitution had not been challenged at the outset of the debate. It was not possible to accept or reject the constituent parts of the Nicholson

Fighting fund

Most challenging

An Italian communist, now living and working in this country, writes: "I have bought many magazines and newspapers of the British left, and of the many yours is the most challenging intellectually."

Thanks, comrade. Your letter was among a batch just received from new readers wanting to support our paper. It is because the *Weekly Worker* is so valued that we can rely on such stalwarts as comrade TR, who sent us £20 for our monthly fighting fund this week.

Thanks also to HG (another £20 donation), LP (£15), KN and TP (£10 each), and MM (£5). Another good week takes us to £235 half way through September - well on the way to reaching our £400 target, not to mention making up the August shortfall ●

Robbie Rix

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

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: 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.

Sunday October 10, 5pm - special seminar: 'Atlantic Celts - ancient people or modern invention?' Speaker - Simon James (British Museum).

Call 0181-459 7146 for details.

Manchester: Monday September 20, 7.30 pm, special seminar - 'Communists and Ireland'. Email: cpgb2@aol.com.

■ Party wills

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

■ 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

Liverpool: Thursday September 23, 7pm, Bluecoat school, School Lane. Organised by Merseyside Socialists

Durham: Saturday September 25, 12 noon at the Miners Hall, Red Hill, Durham. Organised by Durham NUM.

Reports from Bajram Mustafa (Union of Miners of Kosova) and Dragomir Olujic (journalist and trade unionist from Belgrade).

■ Support Tameside

Support group meets every Monday, 7pm, at the Station pub, Warrington Street, Ashton under Lyne.

Donations and solidarity to Tameside Strike Support (Hardship) Fund, 15 Springvale Close, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancs.

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www.duntone.demon.co.uk/CPGB/

Informer Metcalf's infantile disorder

Steve Hedley replies to Mark Metcalf (*Weekly Worker* August 26), who argued that comrade Hedley's dismissal from the railways could have been prevented, and that he had now "turned his back" on his supporters by accepting a union official's job with Ucat

In an article in your paper, M Metcalf performs what is described by you as a "Steve Hedley autopsy". First let me use the obvious cliché that reports of my death are somewhat premature. Secondly I question the validity of publishing a personal attack from an individual (who has no party or group) which is fundamentally incorrect and contains sensitive information. Your paper has degenerated into a lefty gossip column.

In a long, rambling article virtually devoid of politics, Metcalf airs his hurt feelings and disappointment at the outcome of the strike following my dismissal from the rail infrastructure company, GTRM. He also criticises me for becoming a "bureaucrat". It is probably easier to deal with this concoction of lies and half-truths as they arise in his diatribe.

Firstly Metcalf claims: "It is no surprise to anyone that Steve Hedley has taken such a job to gain status and an improvement in personal conditions." Let me point out that in my previous job as a railworker the pay was £20,000 a year plus benefits, and I now receive £17,000 a year as a union official. Hardly an improvement in either salary or status! Further, after the infrastructure dispute a railworker's salary for my job has risen to £24,000 plus benefits. M Metcalf's reasoning does beg the question: what constitutes a union bureaucrat? Surely he does not mean anyone who works for a union, because he himself enjoyed appointed positions in the TUC as a lecturer, as a worker in the Trade Union Support Unit and in Newham Unison.

Perhaps he would like to point out any instance where I behaved in a bureaucratic manner. Indeed the evidence (such as victories in the Bouyges building workers' strike, which involved breaking anti-trade union laws) proves the exact opposite.

Next Metcalf attempts to finger me as a "key man" who was secretly working with the *Mirror* newspaper exposing health and safety issues at Euston. If these allegations are true, Metcalf has degenerated into nothing more than a 'grass' who is alerting management to my alleged activities, even while he acknowledges that the union is still seeking my reinstatement.

Then Metcalf claims that George Brumwell (general secretary of Ucat) appointed me, when in fact I was appointed by the union's NEC, which did include Brumwell. My decision to accept this job was a political one. No serious communist is going to turn down the chance of organising thousands of building workers for fear of offending anyone.

Metcalf names Bob North as an RMT executive committee member. This is sadly typical of his article. There is in fact no Bob North. I think he is referring to Bob Law, who was on the executive at that time.

Not content with fictional characters, Metcalf claims that the signalworkers at Euston were prepared not to cross a picket line. This was a rumour spread by ourselves in order to panic management, as Metcalf is well aware. With reference to the Watford workers, after a long discussion they were persuaded to go on strike, but they insisted it was only for a day unless the union made it official.

At no time was Metcalf or Terry Dunn prevented from speaking to anyone. Terry will confirm this. It does however cast some light on Metcalf's psyche that he believes that a few wise words from him

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"... it is the height of cynicism to condemn me for continuing to play a part in the workers' movement instead of opting for full-time education and a comfortable middle class lifestyle"

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would have drastically altered the situation. Bear in mind that he was a complete stranger to these workers whom I had known for over 10 years. I believe this indicates that Metcalf is prone to delusions of grandeur bordering on megalomania.

Metcalf then turns his fire on to the "left bureaucrats". In fact Mick Atherton and Greg Tucker did attend unofficial picket lines and urged workers to come out in support of me.

Next he says that I remained silent on the issue of stepping up the picketing. In fact I organised the flying picket from Euston the next day. We went to Watford, where workers walked straight across the picket line, as they had promised to do if the strike remained unofficial. Meanwhile people at Stonebridge had been intimidated back to work, leaving only 17 staff at Euston and Jamie from Stonebridge still on strike. The RMT meanwhile repudiated the unofficial action - a decision taken by Knapp and then defended publicly by Crow. This practically killed off any possibility to reignite the strike at the other depots. However, the Euston workers visited these depots pleading for support, but none was forthcoming.

We were now in a situation where a strike of over 100 people was reduced to 18 with no possibility of spreading it. As Metcalf knows, the leaders of an unofficial dispute can be singled out and sacked with no right to an industrial tribunal. With this in mind, and after a full discussion, the Euston staff agreed that they should end their unofficial dispute and have an official ballot. In fact none of these staff actually returned to work in the interim because they were all sick. Ballots at all the other depots were lost.

Metcalf then complains that we did not exclude all SWP members because he believed one of them to be a disgrace. This is truly the logic of a lunatic. In fact some SWPers were helpful in spreading propaganda and fly-posting, etc.

He then attacked my interview with *The Big Issue* on the Strike Support Group. The group's purpose is to give practical aid to workers in struggle and it forbids sectarian remarks between the groups that are involved, showing that we put the interests of the class before the interests of any groups. Something which Metcalf is unable to understand. In fact he did turn up to a recent meeting of the Strike Support Group where he aired his views in an emotional and somewhat incoherent way, but was quite free to do so, as we do not stifle debate.

Metcalf descends into complete fantasy-land when he claims to have discovered, after the event, that areas in England and Scotland were ready to come to our aid, and that we could have pushed on to Milton Keynes and Northampton. In both Milton Keynes and Northampton whole depots were already scabbing on the national dispute and when I attended the RMT grade conference no one claimed that their depot had been ready to come to our aid.

Whilst Metcalf was demanding heroics from the Euston staff, he was ensconced in his management job in a creche in Kilburn. I have known him for four years and during this period he has never been on strike, either official or unofficial. Despite this he thinks he can parachute into every dispute and persuade a workforce to abide by his wishes. This is an anti-materialist view, which results in the likes of Metcalf becoming disappointed with workers: hence his year-long absence from politics during the dispute.

Hypocrisy can be added to his list of crimes, because he advised me, when I was sacked, to get an education or I would end up like Brian Higgins, whom he described as isolated in the union movement with no real base of support except the two other workers in the Building Workers Group, which claims to be a rank and file organisation. Nevertheless Metcalf is now trying to bring Higgins and co into this to give him some credibility with building workers.

I think it is the height of cynicism to condemn me for continuing to play a part in the workers' movement instead of opting for full-time education and a comfortable middle class lifestyle like Metcalf's.

If Metcalf is so interested in benefiting rail and building workers with his self-proclaimed organising abilities, then he should get a job on a site or a rail station. Of course this would mean leaving the cosy creche in Kilburn. However, I am challenging him to do this. Perhaps then his criticisms of those who are trying to organise these workers will have some validity.

Meanwhile could I recommend to him Lenin's *Leftwing communism, an infantile disorder*? This book shows how the correct method is always to be with the workers through their learning curve (brought about mostly by experience and not leaflets and speeches) on the path to revolution.

Contrast this to Metcalf's method of working on hurt feelings, lashing out and falling into depressions when workers do not follow him. He is now a member of no group and is akin to a crazed individual, standing on a corner shouting 'bastard' to anyone who passes. I know which method I will endeavour to follow and it is certainly not his •

Workers' assimilation

Comrade Esen Uslu - a comrade with a long history in the communist movement of Turkey - addressed a special London CPGB seminar on September 12 on the recent horrific earthquake in his country. The comrade described the abject failure of the state to provide aid in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. However, he pointed out that the revolutionary left had been found wanting too. In the first few days of the disaster, a political vacuum existed. Revolutionary and communist organisations were too weak to organise the anger of the masses against the authorities.

In wide-ranging discussion that followed the comrade's opening, one of the most important topics touched on was the question of assimilation. The Turkish and Kurdish populations - concentrated

in London - are undoubtedly the most revolutionary communities in Britain today. Yet, unlike the history of many such exile peoples in this country, there has been little or no real blending of our two traditions. Those from Turkish and Kurdish backgrounds have had at best a peripheral role in the indigenous workers' movement, to our detriment.

Assimilation cannot be fought. The youth of Turkish and Kurdish ethnic origin will become an organic part of British society. But without a conscious struggle they will not do so as revolutionaries. This would be a great loss.

The comrade spoke of the response of exile organisations in this country to the quake and singled out the quick initiative and militant orientation of Day-Mer (see below) •

Mark Fischer

Direct aid for Turkey

Appeal from Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Solidarity Centre

The Turkish government has shown itself to have reacted irresponsibly once again, leaving its citizens to deal with the situation themselves.

Tens of thousands of people were left alone in the rescue work, trying to dig up tons of debris with their bare hands. As time went by, hope for those trapped faded away.

In addition to tens of thousands of people killed, lost or injured, hundreds of thousands are affected materially as well. Past experience indicates that these people will receive nothing from the government but undelivered promises.

There has been very little state-coordinated rescue work, and almost all of this has been concentrated on the navy base in Golcuk, while the ordinary people in many earthquake-hit areas have received no help. This too raises suspicion as to how the aid received by the government is to be distributed.

Therefore it is very important for the people of Turkey to get support directly from the people of other countries. Please

contribute to our hardship fund.

Also emergency goods and clothing will be very valuable. The most needed items are medicine, children's food, nappies, underwear, corpse bags, plastic bin bags, heavy work gloves, etc. All goods and funds will be delivered to the relief committees set up by democratic mass organisations in Turkey with a lorry hired for this purpose.

These organisations, which include human rights organisations, trade unions and community groups, can guarantee that all aid received will go directly to people in need.

Please make your cheques payable to Day-Mer Migranet 2 and send them to Day-Mer, Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre (former library), Howard Road, London N16 8PR.

If you are able to donate goods, please bring them to the above address between 10am and 7pm any weekday. Any help you can give, big or small, will make a real difference to those in need. We thank you for your support •

Freedom for East Timor - even if imperialism intervenes

.....

“To be consistent, after their miserable stance on Kosova, logically the left would have to defend ‘non-imperialist’ Indonesia against imperialism”

.....

the brutal suppression of dissent - such a policy was entirely appropriate. The fall of Suharto and the advent of BJ Habibie, however, created a fundamentally different and potentially dangerous scenario for imperialism. Habibie's decision to lift restraints on the press, to free some political prisoners and, most of all, to initiate moves towards a ballot on independence for East Timor - all of these steps evidently taken against the wishes of the military - opened up a Pandora's box of instability, and a serious dilemma for the imperialists. Self-determination and independence for East Timor would inspire others - for example, Aceh and Irian Jaya, both rich in oil and minerals - to follow the same path.

This problem became acute when the results of the August 30 referendum became known last week. On one side, there was the Scylla of almost universal condemnation for standing idly by while the entire East Timor population was either liquidated or driven into exile by Jakarta-backed militia death squads; on the other, the Charybdis of being obliged by the pressure of world opinion into undertaking some form of military intervention, with all its associated strategic political risks for imperialism's interests in the region. A fudge was inevitable, and that is what Jakarta's 'invitation' to UN peace-keeping forces represents.

There is, of course, another respect in which the parallel we spoke about above does not apply: whereas the aspiration of the Kosovars to self-determination and independence, though clear to everybody, has yet formally to be tested in a democratic referendum, the situation in East Timor is completely different. On August 30, some 98.6% of the population went to the polls, of whom 78.5% voted for full independence, as opposed to Habibie's preferred option of greater 'autonomy'. Nobody, therefore, can

claim that the people of East Timor have not spoken decisively. Nobody can claim that the Fretilin liberation fighters - in some respects the equivalent of the KLA in Kosova - are not waging a struggle based on a real mandate.

This, then, is the background against which we as communists and revolutionary socialists must take our stand. What of the positions adopted by the British left? First, let us take the CPB, as represented in the pages of the *Morning Star* - a paper which during the Kosova conflict came out against the Leninist principle of self-determination of peoples (eg, the Kosovars and East Timorese). Self-determination could only be exercised by recognised states (eg, Yugoslavia and Indonesia). When it comes to Indonesia and East Timor, we look for analysis, but not surprisingly find only moral outrage, and a naive appeal to the United Nations, whose credibility, the paper warns us, is at stake if it does not intervene to stop the slaughter and "carry through the process of self-determination that it organised for the whole population of East Timor" (September 7). In an editorial entitled 'Betrayal of the people', the paper castigates foreign secretary Robin Cook for having betrayed us by failing to live up to New Labour's promises of an "ethical foreign policy".

What kind of Marxist is it that could believe for one moment that there could ever be anything remotely "ethical" in the foreign policy of an imperialist country like Britain, a country that has effectively supported Indonesia's terroristic suppression of the East Timor people for more than 24 years? What kind of Marxist is it that can place any faith whatsoever in the promises of a bourgeois politician? Maybe the paper was thinking of Cook's assurance, given before the last election, that "Labour will not permit the sale of arms to regimes that might use them for internal repression or international aggression". Fine words, but Labour's deeds tell another story. By the end of 1998, less than 18 months after it came to power, the Labour government had approved more than 90 contracts for the sale of arms to Indonesia, contracts backed by taxpayers' money under the export credit guarantee scheme, just in case 'our' merchants of death fail to receive payment for their lethal wares.

The reality of Labour's 'ethics' was made clear earlier this week, when, with the greatest reluctance and in the face of the most determined opposition from the ministry of defence, the Blair government finally agreed (even after the United States had already led the way) to suspend arms exports to Indonesia in the light of the current mass violence in East Timor. The 'ethical' Mr Cook would have us believe, through reports from 'sources' close to him, that the suspension places him "where he wanted to be after personal unhappiness at cabinet resistance to his own private view" (*The Guardian* September 13). We can presumably expect the *Morning Star* to express its appreciation of this courageous stand by 'our' foreign secretary.

The *Morning Star*'s coverage of

East Timor is marked by a depressing lack of real politics, confining itself to a reiteration of the position taken by the CPB's industrial organiser, Kevin Halpin, at a session of the party's political committee, which "condemned the continuing violence ... and called on the United Nations to use all means at its disposal to protect the people of East Timor and ensure a peaceful transition to their long-awaited independence" (September 6). It is a sad prospect indeed, and evidence of dire theoretical poverty, when so-called communists call on the UN - with its appalling record - to be the guarantor of peace and democracy anywhere. Of course, the *Morning Star* is not alone in placing its faith in this organ of the big powers.

The question arises as to why this should be so. On one level, it can be seen as a gut reaction to the sheer horror of events in East Timor - a pity the CPB showed not an ounce of empathy for the similar sufferings of the Kosovars. On the contrary, it denounced the KLA and defended as a matter of so-called principle - a 'principle' of their own invention - non-imperialist Yugoslavia against imperialism. Be that as it may, the CPB's position on East Timor/Indonesia demonstrates a singular failure to understand even the basics of a Marxist approach. True democracy and freedom are not gifts that can be bestowed by some benign force from on high (least of all by the likes of the UN). They are the outcome of revolutionary struggle from below, a struggle for human self-liberation by the oppressed working class. While we share with all civilised people a sense of revulsion at the deeds of the death squads in East Timor, we recognise that only revolution - beginning above all in the urban heartlands of Indonesia - can destroy the whole rotten underlying structure of capitalism that always has and always will breed such violence.

If we turn to the SWP's *Socialist Worker* for some insight into the East Timor conflict, we find a mixed picture. The paper rightly points out Australia's role as a key supporter of dictatorship in Indonesia. It correctly calls for a ban on all arms exports. But at the centre of a deeply confused article by Paul Foot - written before Indonesia acceded to a UN peace-keeping presence in East Timor - we find what amounts to a call for the imperialist powers to make war on Indonesia. Sarcastically pointing to the "new leftist warmongers" who defended Nato's bombing of Serbia (a conflict over which the SWP adopted a stance of hand-wringing social pacifism), Foot now seems to be criticising the same "leftist warmongers" for not adopting a similarly bellicose approach in the present case. According to his logic, since "the situation in East Timor is far worse than it ever was in Kosova", the west should be bombing Jakarta and preparing to launch an invasion.

Of course, if imperialism did make a 'forced entry' into East Timor, what would the SWP and other such leftists say? To be consistent, after their miserable stance on Kosova, logically the left would have to defend 'non-imperialist' Indonesia against

imperialism and denounce Fretilin for calling for outside intervention. The demand for independence for East Timor would go, dismissed as a "diversion" or a slogan in "support" of imperialism. Such are the results of anti-imperialism shorn of democracy.

Foot, for his part naively, then goes on to explain to us in schoolmasterly fashion the reason why imperialism will not "risk their massively expensive armed forces" - remember, this is before the UN intervention force was announced - in East Timor, namely that "our rulers' criterion when assessing whether or not to go to war is simple and constant: how will it affect their wealth and power?" Hence, the Gulf War was about oil; the Balkan war was about the need to deal with "unrest and instability" (*Socialist Worker* September 11). Since, according to Foot, the situation in East Timor represents no threat to imperialist interests in the region, they will not intervene. What we have here, in essence, is a smug and rather condescending sermon about the double standards and hypocrisy of the imperialists. Questions of democracy and revolution are unaddressed in the blinding insights of one of the SWP's leading figures.

By contrast, the approach taken by the Socialist Party is much more encouraging. Kerry Morgan - again writing before Indonesia's acceptance of UN troops - urges readers to place no confidence in the efficacy of foreign armed intervention and rightly points to the UN's dismal record as a 'peace-keeper'. Quoting from a statement issued by the Committee for a Workers International, *The Socialist* outlines what it calls "a real alternative in the form of a socialist programme". The statement demands maximum international solidarity with the people of East Timor. It calls for the immediate withdrawal of all Indonesian troops and the immediate implementation of the independence decision, and goes on to say that, "The workers' movement internationally must find ways of assisting local defence forces of East Timorese fighters to arm themselves to crush the counterrevolutionary militias. These forces would have to be under the control of elected committees of the working and poor people of East Timor. We give full support to the East Timorese and other oppressed people's struggle within Indonesia for total self-determination. The movement needs to guarantee the rights of all minorities within a socialist independent East Timor and to spread the struggle for socialism through appeals to the workers and poor of neighbouring countries and South East Asia as a whole" (my emphasis, September 10).

Apart from the sloppy confusion between minimum and maximum formulations there is nothing in this statement with which we disagree. It represents exactly the principled position which the CPGB, as consistent revolutionary democrats, took towards the struggle of the Kosovars for self-determination and independence from Serbia. We take the same approach to East Timor and call on all comrades to support it ●

Michael Malkin

Yesterday it was Kosova, today East Timor. Once again, the theoretical coherence and commitment to principle of organisations on the left are tested in the face of mass oppression and the intervention of the 'international community' (ie, imperialism) in the struggle of a persecuted people for liberation. At the heart of both issues are fundamental questions of democracy and revolution.

In some respects, the parallels are striking. On the one hand, we have an oppressor - for Serbia, read Indonesia - wracked by internal political turmoil, where the forces of reaction and militarism are determined to uphold the 'territorial integrity' of a state only held together by the threat and use of mass violence and terror. On the other hand, we have an oppressed national group - for the Kosovars, read the East Timorese - who aspire to self-determination and independence. In both cases, the forces of imperialism, faced with the need to secure the stability that is an essential prerequisite for continued capitalist exploitation and the furtherance of their geo-political objectives, deploy the hypocritical rhetoric of 'humanitarianism' and 'peace-keeping' to cover their real purposes.

Whether we are talking about Nato - an ostensibly defensive military alliance that in actuality exists to further imperialism's ambitions towards truly global hegemony - or the United Nations - another surrogate body for capital - the objective reality is the same: both are in essence controlled by the big powers exclusively in their particular interests. As we shall see, there is such theoretical poverty among some sections of the left that, while Nato is justly condemned, the UN is perversely regarded as in some sense a legitimate body, that can justifiably be called upon to act as a gendarmier for the whole of the 'civilised' international community.

Of course, the comparison between Serbia and Indonesia is by no means exact. In the former case, as we found during the Balkan war, some left groups, such as the CPB, the SLP and NCP, were so mired in a perverted version of Marxism that they supported the national chauvinist regime of Milosevic, supposedly because it was presiding over a 'former workers' state', one which in some mystical way still embodied in death the ideals of socialism. Either way, Serbia, as 'the enemy of our enemy', had to be defended.

Not even these troglodytes can say the same for Indonesia. This vast archipelago, covering four time zones and comprising more than 17,000 islands, has for decades been a bulwark of reaction. When Kemusu Suharto took over Indonesia in 1965, imperialism acquiesced in his bloody coup - half a million communists were butchered. When the Suharto dictatorship brutally invaded East Timor in December 1975, the west was happy to turn a blind eye. Their only concern then, as now, was to ensure that Indonesia remained safe and stable for exploitation. Hence the unremitting and highly profitable flow of weaponry to Jakarta, much of it used in the suppression of dissent, not least in East Timor, where, over the years, hundreds of thousands have been killed with arms supplied by the west. Hence the billions of dollars in loan capital supplied by the IMF.

So long as the Suharto regime remained in place, imperialism could leave the primary responsibility for the region in the hands of its junior partner - Australia, the only state which accepted the legality of Indonesia's annexation of East Timor. Given Australia's enormous economic and financial stake in the region, especially its oil and mineral interests, and its cosy relationship with the Indonesian army, including the training of army units in 'counter-insurgency' techniques - ie,

Self-determination

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group argues against self-determination for the British-Irish

Jack Conrad argues that a united Ireland should have a federal structure. Alongside the central parliament for the whole united state, there should be local parliaments for one or more regions. I have no objection in principle to this. Indeed I argued the case for a federal united Ireland in 1981 in a debate in the SWP.

The Marxist theory of democracy is clear that federalism is less democratic than centralism. We advocate it only as an exception. A united centralised Ireland with one central parliament is generally preferable. However, the existence of the national question provides reasons to consider a federal exception as the best way forward for the Irish working class. A federal constitution for a united Ireland would or should guarantee the same democratic rights and civil liberties to all Irish citizens regardless of religion, culture or ethnic origins. At the same time it would allow local variations in laws in the different regional political units and a degree of local autonomy.

A united Ireland means the end of British-Irishness. Federalism is a concession to the ex-British-Irish, who may form a majority in the north-eastern part of the federation. It is a peace offering by victorious republicanism to defeated loyalism. A defeated army or one facing inevitable defeat may be partially won over if they are treated fairly by the victors and not massacred or humiliated.

In reality loyalism is far from defeated. An undefeated army will not surrender merely because their enemies promise there will be no revenge. We would be fooling ourselves if we thought that the offer of a federal Ireland would cause the loyalists to throw down their weapons and surrender, rather than laugh in our faces. Only at the moment of their impending defeat will the question of federalism become real politics for the British-Irish. Therefore federalism is not the programmatic holy grail that will cause the British-Irish to support a united Ireland.

The role of federalism is different. It is about creating the best conditions for the political reunification of the Irish working class - catholic, protestant, atheist, etc - in a newly uniting Ireland. It is the road that could enable a relatively 'peaceful' development of the Irish revolution and realignment of class-political forces in Ireland.

Federalism could only play this transitional role for a temporary period. It is a type of transitional relief. It is not possible to predict in advance how long such a transitional period should or would exist. It would depend on the balance of class forces. If the Irish working class was strongly organised, federalism would soon be overcome. If not it might linger. But clearly Marxism teaches that at some point federalism would become a barrier to further political and democratic unification of the Irish working class. In a united Ireland communists would continue to fight for greater democracy and begin to argue for the replacement of federalism (as in modern Australia) with democratic centralism.

It may be an irony of history that the only way that the British-Irish can

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"The 'nation' is the sovereign political constituency in the modern world. This is why consistent democracy cannot separate 'self-determination' from 'nation'"

.....

gain a real measure of self-government and autonomy is in a federal, secular Irish republic. Certainly restoration of self-government in the British union is proving very problematic. The loyalists want a Stormont-style orange parliament supported by an orange state. This is not possible because the balance of political forces is against it. First is the strength of the IRA and Sinn Féin. Then there is the politics of the SDLP, the Irish government, and the Irish-American lobby.

More importantly, Anglo-US imperialism is against it. Blair and Clinton are backing a reformed unionism based on a bipartisan state. Political power sharing, and a reformed police force and civil service, could win the support of catholics. It is an equal rights agenda. This is totally unacceptable to the British-Irish who believe an orange state is their democratic birthright. The reason Trimble and the Ulster Unionists are going along with Anglo-US plan is because it might demobilise, demilitarise, divide and eventually defeat the IRA. Then of course the bipartisan state can again show its true orange colours.

The old Stormont-style orange parliament is not on the agenda. The Good Friday agreement promises a

power-sharing parliament. But in practice this option has proved so far to be a mirage. The British-Irish demand the surrender of the IRA as a precondition. The nationalist population understand that the IRA is the only thing that stands between them and a return to old-style sectarian rule. Whilst this remains true, the real choice may be between continued direct rule from Britain or a federal united Ireland.

Between these two, economic trends will decide. The economic basis for unionism has ended. Both parts of Ireland are part of the integrating economy of the European Union. Capital in the Irish Republic has been able to take greatest advantage from membership. The Irish 'tiger' economy seems to offer more opportunity for Irish capitalists than clinging to handouts from a cost-cutting British treasury. A single currency, together with the abolition of all EU borders and trade barriers, points in the same direction. The link with Britain now holds the north back.

Historically therefore British-Irish unionism is finished. The only question is whether it is quickly buried, or whether its rotting corpse will continue to pollute the Irish working class and create ever more pain and tragedy. Obsolete political arrangements can continue for decades or even centuries. This is why we stand for the immediate abolition of the union, British withdrawal and a united Ireland and not some drawn-out, transitional stages. It is why we opposed and still oppose the Good Friday agreement, which is no more than an attempt to delay the inevitable. It is an attempt that may prove costly in terms of human suffering.

However, it is necessary to separate the question of federalism from that of self-determination. In my opinion Jack opens up a can of worms when he links the two together. I think it was very sensible that the CPGB did not vote on this question at their recent aggregate. It would have been premature to make such a decision without working out more fully the political ramifications.

The constitutions of some federal republics do not contain the right to self-determination. The US and German constitutions, for example, are identified as one nation. A multinational federal republic (eg, England, Scotland and Wales) or the former USSR on the other hand must contain the right to self-determination and a democratic means of exercising that right. An Irish federal republic is the former, not the latter type. Ireland is one nation, divided by politics, religion, and culture, partitioned by force in 1922. Consequently Irish communists must oppose any clause in the constitution of a united federal Ireland for self-determination for the British-Irish. On this point I agree with the arguments of Steve Riley (*Weekly Worker* September 2).

The question of self-determination raises many important points. The first of these is the distinction between consistent democracy on the one hand and liberalism and anarchism on the other. Jack is taking the imperative of consistent democracy. He is quite right to do so. He is quite right to point to the inconsistency in opponents who fail to understand that the non-existence of workers' democracy in the former USSR is not merely an unfortunate oversight, but negates socialism. Not with slavery of course, but wage slavery. Try working eight hours a day for seven roubles an hour

plus piece work bonuses, in the 'Lenin No 2 Machine Tool' factory!

Consistent revolutionary democrats look at the Irish and Soviet questions through the same pair of Marxist spectacles, albeit in very different historical circumstances. However, Jack's claim to have a position on self-determination derived from consistent democracy rather than anarchism cannot be accepted without the test of criticism.

The origins of this are in Jack's previous arguments about Scotland and Wales. He denies Scotland and Wales are nations. Therefore the right of nations to self-determination cannot apply to them. This is a logical, but politically unacceptable conclusion. Jack decides to take a libertarian attitude and grant them the right anyway. Therefore he invents a 'right to self-determination', which can now apply to non-nations like Scotland

CPGB aggregate British-Irish

The September aggregate of the CPGB, held in London on September 12, dealt with two subjects in addition to routine business. First on the agenda were two motions submitted by the Provisional Central Committee dealing with attendance and conduct at Party meetings. Then the bulk of the day was devoted to a long, intense, and productive debate on the draft discussion theses on 'Ireland and the British-Irish', written by comrade Jack Conrad and published in the *Weekly Worker* (August 26).

The first of the PCC's motions was passed unanimously after very little discussion and dealt with the need to ensure a full "attendance at all sessions of our annual summer school, the Communist University". The second motion upheld the "right to heckle at CPGB meetings", but stressed that there is no right to "disrupt a meeting".

Comrade Jack Conrad introduced the debate on his draft theses. As predicted in 'Party notes' (*Weekly Worker* September 9), the debate was part of an ongoing process of clarification, and the theses themselves were not in the end put to the vote. Several amendments were proposed and debated: all were overwhelmingly defeated. But the process of debating the theses was not completed. Some comrades said they wanted to discuss the theses further at future meetings, and the chair suggested that the item be continued at the next aggregate.

Comrade Conrad had insisted on having separate votes on each of the 20 theses. He expressed the hope that comrades would vote for those they agreed with and submit amendments to those they opposed. In that way areas of disagreement would be highlighted and invention avoided.

One such misrepresentation is, he said, the claim that the theses argue for a redivided Ireland. Comrade Conrad reiterated that he stands for a united Ireland. Communists believe in the largest possible states organised on democratic centralist lines as a prelude to the dying away of all states. But unity - if it is to be "subordinate to the struggle for socialism" - has to be voluntary. It must not be imposed on an historically established people by force. Our call for Irish unity is not motivated by vicarious Irish nationalism, or simply by a desire to see British imperialism suffer political and military defeat if the cost of this would be fratricidal civil war between the dichotomised communities of Ireland. Rather, we wish to create the best possible conditions for the voluntary union of peoples

and thus the working class.

Among the most vocal opponents of the Conrad theses during discussions at Communist University '99 last month was a former CPGB member, comrade Steve Riley, who attempted to "trash" the theses in *Weekly Worker* September 2. His co-thinkers took up the cudgels against comrade Conrad at the aggregate. In light of the Conrad theses comrades in Manchester have begun a special study of the Irish question in their seminars. One of the Manchester comrades, Peter Smithy, declared that he was willing to be convinced, as he could see there may be some merit in the theses. But he could not at the moment agree with the conclusions they logically led to. He thought the Party was heading down a dangerous path. The comrade said opponents of the theses do not support the current 26-county state, which is reactionary, or wish to deny democratic rights to orangemen, protestants, or anybody else. But he believed that during a revolutionary upheaval it would be possible to win the protestant working class to a united Ireland without needing to offer them the retrograde step of forming an independent state.

Another strong opponent of the Conrad theses, comrade John Pearson, tried to show that the theses contradict comrade Conrad's earlier position on the Irish question, by quoting at length from the supplements by comrade Conrad published in *The Leninist* in 1984, which discussed the question of nationality in Ireland. Comrade Pearson stated that, as loyalism defines itself through the oppression of catholics, a British-Irish state that did not oppress the substantial minority within it is impossible. He argued that, while comrade Conrad may not be advocating a repartition of Ireland, he is countenancing such a division, which could never be democratic or progressive. Further, he insisted that all contemporary issues should be looked at primarily through the lens of class, not democracy. He denied the claims by comrade Conrad and his co-thinkers that Lenin insisted that democracy must be the primary consideration, quoting a sentence from *The socialist revolution and the rights of nations to self-determination* written in 1916: "The proletariat can retain its independence only by subordinating its struggle for all democratic demands, not excluding the demand for a republic, to its revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie."

Several comrades sympathetic to the Conrad theses denied that any-

and Ireland

and Wales and the British-Irish. The right of nations to self-determination is recognised by Marxism as a principle of consistent democracy. But the newly invented ‘right to self-determination’ means we no longer need any guidelines for defining nations. Anybody can form their own state. Here lies an anarchist principle, based on extreme individualism. When carried out consistently it leads to conclusions that are absurd

divisions

thing from 1984 contradicts what is being put forward now. Comrade Tina Becker claimed that there is a development from the past in that we are taking a step forward. Comrade Marcus Larsen declared he was moving closer to Conrad’s position, and said he was disturbed by the first sentence of comrade Riley’s reply (*Weekly Worker* September 2), which mentions “strategies for neutralising Ulster unionists”, if by that what was meant was the working class British-Irish. We should go beyond “neutralising” them, comrade Larsen said, and try to win them. But, he went on, comrade Pearson was right in saying self-determination does have to be subordinated to socialism - even though the comrade does not understand what that actually means. The struggle by communists for a united Ireland is not a thing in itself. Moreover if the protestant majority in a one-county, four-half-counties British-Irish province insisted on oppressing catholics through Paisleyism, etc, then the organised working class movement would be correct to defend the catholics using whatever suitable means are available. Comrade Peter Manson said that what should be neutralised is loyalism as a political force and, as Lenin said, the more you champion a people’s

and reactionary. So when Jack looks inside this can of worms, the sight is so horrible that he has been trying to close the lid ever since. Jack recognises the dangers in his thesis in sections 18 and 19. He says: “There can be no right of secession for political movements or religions as such.” Unfortunately he is trying to plug the holes in a leaky sieve. The new ‘right’ to form a separate state applies to non-nations, but

right to secede, the less likely they are to exercise it. Comrade Manson’s main disagreement with the theses, which was shared by some other comrades, was that thesis 15 is too specific about the exact area which should have the right to self-determination. He and others suggested amendments making the proposed area less definite. These were put to the vote but none were carried. Replying to the debate, comrade Conrad reiterated that, as the British-Irish are a distinct people, to deny them democratic rights, including the right to secede, would run counter to the interests of socialism as the self-liberation of the working class - to which every democratic demand, including the unity of Ireland, must be subordinated. He said that imposing freedom on people leads to unfreedom and bureaucratic socialism. He commented that it is therefore totally logical that comrades who defend the bureaucratic system of the USSR under Stalin are by and large the same comrades who oppose a democratic programme for Ireland. He urged comrades to study the theses carefully and be ready to amend and vote on them all separately at the next aggregate, in order to take the debate forward ●

Mary Godwin

not to political or religious movements. Where does that leave us? Consistent democrats are not simply concerned with minority rights. Democracy means the rule of the majority and the subordination of the minority to majority decisions. This means coercion. The majority will apply force - at first moral, but ultimately physical force against the minority. We know the tyranny that can take place in the name of the majority. Therefore real democracy makes absolutely sure that the rights of the minority are identified and enforced in practice. In terms of workers’ democracy we accept the decision to take strike action is decided by majority vote. The minority must have the full freedom for criticism both before and after the decision is taken. But they do not have a right to defy the majority by scabbing. The word ‘scab’ shows the absolute condemnation which the workers’ movement has for minority ‘self-determination’. The right to scab by ignoring majority decisions is an example of anarchism or extreme individualism. Suppose that the majority votes to remove the rights of a minority and take action to enforce this. Consistent democrats would oppose this absolutely, as a defence of working class democracy and consider it justified to ‘scab’ or take up arms. Fortunately in our movement anti-democratic strikes are the exception, not the rule. Consistent democracy is not the absence of force, but the application of force to the minority. But this force is two-sided. The violence of the majority is used to suppress the threat of force and violence by the rebellious minority. It always takes two to tango. Naturally pacifists do not make good democrats. Bourgeois democracy is not and can never be democratic, because it is based on the permanent rule of the minority class over the majority. This does not prevent capitalist governments claiming the democratic mantle in every decision they make. It does not prevent consistent democrats from organising action against such ‘democratic’ government. The poll tax was a classic example. Marxism applies consistent democracy to the national question. Marxism demands that the question of unification or national separation or secession is settled by majority vote in a referendum. But who should vote? The constituency is defined by the ‘nation’. The ‘nation’ is the sovereign political constituency in the modern world. This is why consistent democracy cannot separate ‘self-determination’ from ‘nation’. This is why we defend the right of nations to self-determination and not the right of individuals, families, religions, cultural groups or boy scouts to form their own states. Unfortunately the definition of who is a nation is never clear-cut. It is a problem. It is made worse by the fact that new nations may emerge that we have not previously recognised. Life is a great teacher and we should never be absolutely dogmatic about our check list. But Stalin’s position on this in 1913 still seems to me to be the best guidelines we have. In the case of Ireland we have to base consistent democracy on national self-determination on whether there is one nation (culturally divided) or two. If there is one nation (my view), then the right to decide on unity or separation belongs to this

constituency and this constituency alone. If a minority, guaranteed full democratic rights, rebels, then the majority has the right to use force. In addition, the current nationalist minority in Northern Ireland are part of the Irish majority and have the legitimate right to rebel against partition. Partition was a fundamentally undemocratic act. On the other hand if there are two nations in Ireland then both nations have the right to referendum. The British-Irish part of Ireland has a legitimate democratic right to remain part of Britain or form its own state. The partition of Ireland was then democratically legitimate, albeit the border was wrongly drawn. Repartition might be the best democratic solution. Whilst we would demand equal rights for the catholic minority, the armed struggle by the IRA for a united Ireland would then be an anti-democratic use of force. A united Ireland would only be democratically legitimate if the British Irish voted for it. It would be a voluntary union which would obviously contain the right to leave: ie, self-determination. Jack’s position seems to fall between these two stools. It is inconsistent. He agrees that the struggle of the IRA is legitimate. The British-Irish must be forced to join a united Ireland from which they will then be allowed to leave. We want to use force to get them there, but not keep them there. The obvious question is why we should force them there in the first place. We have arrived back at the ‘protestant veto’ and the Good Friday Agreement. Blair’s new unionism is the promise to give catholics full minority rights within the British nation. Let us now return to Jack’s view of the British nation: that is, the British-Irish, British-English, British-Scots, and British-Welsh. He set out to show that there was a British nation, which might otherwise be called the Anglo-protestant nation. The Anglo-protestant nation was forged in the 17th century and incorporated south Wales, lowland Scotland, and northern Ireland in opposition to what has been called the ‘Celtic fringe’: north Wales, Scottish highlands and catholic Ireland. The existence of this reactionary imperialist ‘British nation’ seems to me to be indisputable. However, Jack goes one dangerous and unnecessary step further. He denies that Scotland and Wales (and perhaps England and Ireland) are nations. In fact they are real nations suffocating under the rule of the Anglo-protestant nation, symbolised by the monarchy and the union jack. The British nation is not homogeneous, but a multinational state. Within the British nation-state, there are four nations struggling to breathe, struggling for air, struggling to get out in the open. Recognising both the British nation and the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish nations is to recognise the real political contradictions that exist in these islands. The British-Irish are not a nation, but the Anglo-protestant part of the Irish nation. We are in the midst of working out an historical resolution of this. Our slogan of a federal republic of England, Scotland, and Wales, and for a united Ireland, indicates the road that we communists think the people and especially the working class should travel to resolve these contradictions. Federal united Ireland - yes. Self-determination for the British-Irish - no ●

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.

Statement

September’s CPGB membership aggregate saw comrades divide into two roughly equal camps over Ireland and the British-Irish. The first camp is a majority in the making. We stand for consistent democracy and agree that in a united Ireland there has to be a federal solution so as to “fully reassure” the British-Irish and thereby bring about working class unity. The second camp is amorphous and theoretically weak. At its core lies a small minority which claims that the 20 theses presented by Jack Conrad are a devious cover for the redivision of Ireland. Something which evidently relies on pure invention. In reality the comrades’ objections to consistent democracy stem from a combination of vicarious Irish nationalism and residual bureaucratic socialism. This core found itself allies in a larger group of comrades who argued that the CPGB should not

vote on such matters or that there had not been sufficient time to fully consider the issue. Be it open or concealed, an unwillingness to champion consistent democracy is opportunism. The British-Irish question is no lifeless abstraction or a dusty historical footnote. It is the key to working class unity in Ireland. Communists must bring forward their principles and present concrete answers. At the next membership aggregate in October I will resubmit my 20 theses for voting. Comrades who object to my formulations should submit amendments. Let us debate each thesis patiently and in detail and see where we agree and where we disagree. That is the only serious and honest way to proceed. I am confident that after the October aggregate the *Weekly Worker* will be announcing a solid CPGB majority for consistent democracy ●

Jack Conrad

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Simon Harvey of the SLP

Final snub for Fisc

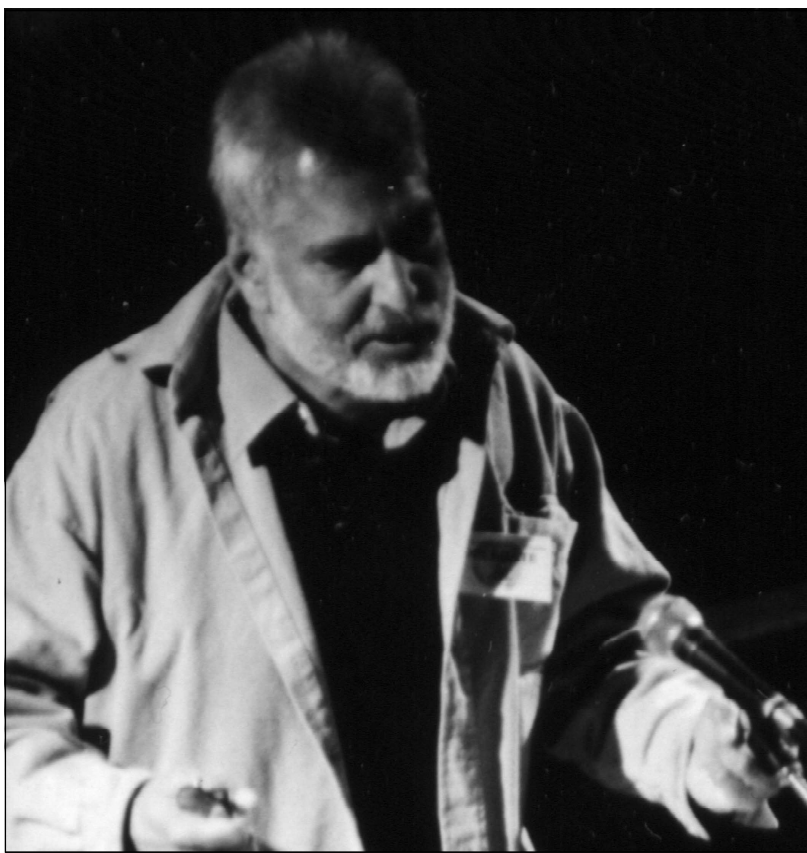
Two former members of the Socialist Labour Party's national executive committee, Carolyn Sikorski and Brian Heron, have had their application to rejoin the SLP refused.

This represents the final humiliation for the leaders of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus, the SLP faction of social democratic Trotskyites that had invested so much hope and sycophancy in Arthur Scargill as the future head of Britain's 'party of recomposition'. Fisc's third leading figure, Patrick Sikorski, resigned from the party during the summer and, unlike his erstwhile comrades, says he has no intention of reapplying for membership.

Comrades Heron and Carolyn Sikorski were informed in April of this year that their membership had lapsed after 13 weeks' non-payment of dues. As part of their 'strike' against the leadership in protest at the election of Royston Bull to the vice-presidency at the November 1998 special congress, the two had apparently decided to withhold their membership contributions until the last moment. None too bright. When they finally sent off their cheque just before the 13-week deadline, it was 'lost in the post'. This allowed the general secretary to effectively expel his one-time courtiers after attempts to achieve the same result through the party's complaints procedure were successfully challenged on legalistic grounds by the Fiscites and their attorney Imran Khan.

The SLP's internal *Information Bulletin* (August) reported that the NEC, "upon consideration of events", decided not to allow the two back in. Just which "events" had been under "consideration" is clear enough from a different *Information Bulletin* report regarding Socialist Labour's "credible performance" in the June 10 EU poll. This election result was achieved despite the fact that in London "for months the party had been paralysed by people holding regional office who not only refused to participate in European election campaigning, but attacked comrades for putting up a list of candidates (in accordance with SLP policy, congress and NEC decisions) in the capital". Comrade Heron was the London president and comrade Sikorski a prominent regional committee member.

It is almost as if Scargill's sponsorship of comrade Bull to replace Pat Sikorski as vice-president was a cleverly calculated move to flush the Fisc oppositionists out into the open. Both the Scargillites and Fiscites had been fully aware of the homophobic contents of Bull's wondrously misnamed *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, but had preferred to ignore them. After all the *EPSR* gang had been rather useful in fingering the left, which both leadership fac-



Harpal Brar: differences with Arthur

tions had been determined to drive out of the party. However, when a Stalinite-loyalist-*EPSR* alliance was voted in at their expense, that was too much for the Fiscites. They demanded that king Scargill overturn the democratic election and withdrew all cooperation in their London stronghold.

Killing two birds with one stone, Scargill initiated disciplinary action against both Fisc and Bull. Against Fisc for refusing to withdraw their 'Appeal for a special conference'; and against Bull for refusing to close down his beloved *EPSR*. The action failed, but it was enough to ruin the dreams of both sets of courtiers. Fisc's supporters and allies slunk off from the party ingloriously, while the *EPSR* were split. Bull's followers thought that Scargill's move against their leader meant that the SLP was finished, while a group around Dave Roberts - elected onto the NEC a year ago as part of the same anti-Fisc bloc - still believe that they can yet gain influence for their own peculiar brand of Stalinism.

Fisc and the *EPSR* are of course only the latest to abandon the SLP in despair. From its high point in 1996-7, when it had over 2,000 paid-up members, Scargill's party is now reduced to a rump of a couple of hundred dazed souls. As a result a handful of ultra-Stalinites under the leadership of Harpal Brar and his Association of Communist Workers have seized their opportunity.

It was comrade Brar - effectively

Scargill's number two on the NEC - who came up with the list of 10 London candidates for the EU elections - half of them his close associates in the ACW or Stalin Society. The Brarites also control the national youth and women's section - their respective journals, *Spark* and *Women for Socialism*, are edited by Harpal's son, Ranjeet, and daughter, Joti - a truly family concern. Their father has no need for his own SLP publication: apart from those two house journals, he is editor of *Lalkar* - officially the bimonthly paper of the Indian Workers Association.

Sad picture

With just about all of the former London officers and committee no longer party members, the region has not been operating for a good six months. The only semi-active branch was Harpal Brar's own - Ealing and Southall. However, "in accordance with the instructions of the general secretary", a meeting "for the establishment of a London regional executive committee", open to all members in the capital, was called by comrade Brar last week.

Two dozen comrades from eight constituency SLPs were the sum total in attendance. Opening the meeting, comrade Brar reportedly admitted that the London organisation was now much smaller numerically (thanks to the anti-democratic wrecking activities of Fisc and Scargill himself, this sad picture is replicated throughout the country), but he be-

lieved it was "stronger politically". Without naming them, he lambasted the Fiscites for their refusal to abide by decisions with which they disagreed. Since the December 1997 2nd Congress, when comrade Brar himself had successfully moved the abolition of the black sections, they had engaged in "sabotage" and "conscious disruption for two and a half years", culminating in their 'strike' over the EU elections.

Ironically that was exactly the kind of language Fisc, along with Scargill and other witch-hunters, had used against SLP communists and democrats - when Heron, Sikorski and co were part of the leadership majority. Comrade Brar considered that they should have "learnt to be a minority". That, he said, was part of party discipline - he himself often disagreed with Scargill, but was prepared to abide by majority decisions.

All very well, of course. But Brar has never publicly expressed any differences with the Great Leader. And he has always either kept quiet or, more likely, shouted his support when the general secretary has resorted to blatant anti-democratic measures of control: for example, Brar thought it was an excellent thing when Scargill pulled 3,000 block votes out of his back pocket to force through the black sections abolition against the wishes of a large majority of congress delegates. He backed moves by both Scargill and Fisc to void the membership of party opponents, who were denied the right to hear the evidence against them, state their case or appeal against their expulsion.

Last week's meeting - around half were ultra-Stalinites and the rest were overwhelmingly eccentric Scargill fans - elected comrade Brar as London regional president and John ('Oddball') Hayball vice-president. Soft Trotskyite Steve Cowan - always a staunch loyalist behind whatever faction finds itself in the leadership - was elected secretary/treasurer. All three were unopposed. The new committee of nine - seven CSLP comrades, and one representative each from the (non-existent) London youth and women's section - consists of five Brarites, three eccentrics and Bob Crow. Comrade Crow - RMT assistant general secretary - was not present and had not actually agreed to be nominated. It is highly unlikely he will be prepared to work alongside this motley crew of misfits.

One item on the agenda concerned "our activities in the coming period". Comrade Hayball spoke of the possibility of contesting next year's London mayoral and assembly elections, but apart from that nobody could think of anything much in the way of "activities". Comrade Cowan suggested that regional membership meetings should be held monthly, but comrade Brar, clearly not overly im-

pressed by the quality of the remaining party membership, thought that this was a little "ambitious". Accordingly the next meeting was fixed for November 30.

Word of warning

Stung by my revelation of his secret Brussels speech to an international gathering of Stalinites a year ago (see *Weekly Worker* May 27), comrade Brar has decided to take the bull by the horns and publish his contribution to this year's May Day forum organised by the Workers Party of Belgium. Mind you, his speech this time - 'The military strategy of British imperialism' - was far less interesting than in 1998. Then he 'openly' voiced criticisms of Scargill's reformist shortcomings.

The September-October edition of *Lalkar* carries an article based on this year's speech with the credit: "By Harpal Brar, national executive committee member of the SLP and its economics committee chair". It seems that the WPB is now being presented as a fraternal organisation of the SLP. I wonder what fellow NEC members, such as Bob Crow, John Hendy and Joe Marino, will make of that - not least given that its general secretary, Ludo Martens, has published a string of appalling books excusing the crimes of JV Stalin.

I wonder too if Scargill actually reads the official youth journal of the SLP. The latest issue of *Spark* gives its whole-hearted backing to the June 18 'Carnival against capitalism' riot in the City: "*Spark* supports the rights of people to express their legitimate protests and if the police get in the way we will press on by any means necessary" (No3, undated). Healthy revolutionary sentiments, but will comrades Scargill, Cave *et al* be impressed?

And how about the article on immigration? It declares: "Working people of this country must call for the abolition of all immigration laws." Quite right. But this statement is diametrically opposed to SLP policy, as determined by the May 1996 1st Congress. I can clearly recall comrade Heron successfully speaking against just such a line on behalf of the leadership. It was just not sensible for a responsible party to let in all and sundry, he argued. Surely a socialist Britain would want to keep out white South Africans? Here was surely the lowest point in Heron's political career.

A word of warning to the Brar family: others before you - not least Fisc and the *EPSR* - have thought they could speak their minds, or even persuaded themselves that Arthur would go along with what they had to say. Scargill has proved time and again that Socialist Labour is 'his' party. You too will be ditched if you fall out of line ●