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Unity against Blair

SWP and the left must break from auto-Labourism

"New Labour has continued with Tory policies, betraying millions of workers" - that has been the standard battle cry of the Socialist Workers Party, as it mobilised for this weekend's lobby of the Labour Party conference at Bournemouth.

But the question must be asked: in what sense can the New Labour project be viewed as a 'betrayal'? Surely Blair made his intentions only too clear long before the general election of May 1997. He went out of his way to dampen any expectations workers might have had that New Labour would deliver anything more than the most meagre of crumbs.

There was to be no repeal of the Tories' anti-trade union legislation. No meaningful tilting the balance in favour of workers' rights. No return to full employment policies. No massive cuts in the arms bill. The most that "millions of workers" were expecting was a marginal improvement compared with the Thatcher-Major governments. Things could hardly get worse - or so they thought.

The SWP, however, was fully aware of exactly what New Labour had in mind. Yet it could not bring itself to break from its traditional call come election time - 'Vote Labour, but ...' True, there was a caveat. Instead of urging workers to cast their votes only for Blair's party everywhere, the SWP gave the most confusing, ambiguous and pitiful advice: 'Vote Labour or socialist'.

As we were to learn within 18 months, this pathetic slogan was not merely the result of woolly-mindedness. In which constituencies, in what circumstances were workers supposed to ignore their 'traditional social democratic party'? Just who were the socialists the SWP deemed worthy of support? After all, the deeply sectarian SWP leadership usually makes it a rule never to mention the existence of other left groups - a partial exception has been Scargill's Socialist Labour Party - and

likes to imply that it provides the only working class alternative ("Join the socialists" is its weekly recruiting call in *Socialist Worker*). Yet the SWP as usual pointedly refused to stand itself, leaving the field clear for the SLP, Socialist Party in England and Wales, CPGB, and Scottish Socialist Alliance (now the SSP). Before 1997 it had routinely insisted that for a revolutionary group to contest elections consisted in itself of "electoralism".

No, the SWP's position at the general election did not result from confused thinking alone. Primarily it was a compromise - the first public sign of the deep divisions within the organisation's top committees. On the one hand there is the old guard, epitomised by Julie Waterson, who warns against repeating the "disaster" of the Stechford by-election contested by Paul Foot more than two decades ago, when "the socialists" were beaten by the National Front. This faction on the political committee is equally dismissive of left cooperation in general and wants to continue along the same old path - leaving elections to the Labour Party, while the SWP continues to focus exclusively on trade union-type questions - in other words economism, but carried out in the name of revolutionary action, of course.

On the other hand there are those around national organiser Chris Bambery who, given New Labour's headlong rush to the right, can no longer stomach the thought of supporting Blair's party. Obviously, if you have consistently been telling your members to automatically back the bourgeois workers' party (despite your proclaimed aversion to "electoralism"), you cannot simply switch to abstentionism - not without a great deal of discomfort at any rate.

So the SWP began to contemplate not only candidates, but electoral blocs. The first concrete example of this was in the North Defoe council by-election in Hackney in January of this year, when the local SWP organisation gave its backing to the CPGB's



Tory policies yes, crisis of expectations, no

candidate, Anne Murphy, standing for Socialist Unity. Then, in what seemed to be an indication of the Bambery faction's victory, the SWP began to discuss with others the possibility of a left slate for elections in May to the Scottish parliament and Welsh assembly, and in June for the EU elections.

But this new position was not without its contradictions. Both factions seemed to be united around one thing: that the election of a New Labour government would soon provoke a "crisis of expectations". It was a position echoed, to one degree or another, by the Socialist Party, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Socialist Outlook, etc. But the SWP was not content with predicting the imminence of an upsurge in working class combativity: it kept insisting that the explosive fightback was already beginning. The absurdity of this can be seen, even if it were to be judged

solely on strike statistics, from the most recent figures: in the 12 months to June a mere 259,700 days were lost through industrial action. Just 105,200 workers out of 27 million employed were involved.

And what of a political opposition to Blair? In fact the largest demonstration by far since the election of New Labour has not come from the left, but from the rightwing Countryside Alliance. A large proportion of the 200,000 who marched through London in March 1998 were actually supporters of the Conservative Party. Similarly this weekend's SWP-sponsored working class lobby of the Labour conference, despite winning the backing of the likes of Tony Benn, Tariq Ali and NUJ general secretary John Foster, is likely to be rivalled - in terms of numbers - by the Countryside Alliance, who will once more be mobilising behind pro-hunting slogans. CA claims it will have "a symbolic" 16,000 in

Bournemouth on Tuesday September 28 - "one for each job loss" if hunting with hounds is banned.

Be that as it may, if, as the SWP ludicrously maintained, workers' anger with Blair was soaring, surely this ought to be reflected in high votes for leftwing candidates? Not surprisingly the organisation was reluctant to see the vacuousness of its analysis completely exposed. When its candidates in Scotland and Wales could only win one to two percent in the devolution elections, the Waterson faction was looking for an excuse to pull the plugs on June 10. This came with the announcement that Scargill was to head the SLP's list in London. In contrast to king Arthur's motley crew, the Socialist Alliance electoral bloc was no longer considered "viable". First the SWP, then the Independent Labour Network, SO, the AWL and finally SPEW all abandoned the field, leaving the CPGB to stand alone.

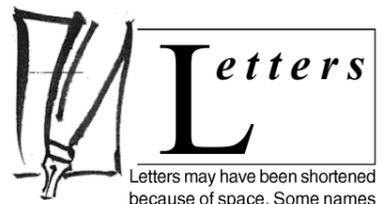
So where does that leave the SWP now? For example in next year's London mayoral and assembly elections, Scargill is bound to ignore all approaches from the left for electoral unity, just as he did last spring. Already the signs are not good. Although it sent Rob Hoveman to the August 1 relaunch of the London Socialist Alliance election bloc, the SWP was conspicuous by its absence from the follow-up meeting two weeks ago. Yet it has never been clearer than today that what is needed is a united left alternative at the polls to challenge Blair and begin the task of breaking workers from Labour.

Ken Cameron may have called for ending of the Labour-union link at the TUC, but he specifically ruled out talk of a new party. The SLP has now definitively failed as an attempt to win over the left union bureaucrats. But a new impetus could yet come from another quarter. As the Labour Party faithful gather in Bournemouth, Ken Livingstone is still talking up his own candidature for London mayor. In view of the fact that he will surely be barred by Millbank gerrymandering, this week could see him make a further move.

If Livingstone's London Independent Labour becomes a reality, there must be no moralistic refusal to give critical support to his campaign. Yes, he was an enthusiastic ally of bomber Blair over Kosova. But remember, comrades, Labour's wholehearted backing of the World War I carnage did not prevent Lenin from advocating the kind of "support" a rope gives a "hanged man". What is important is the opening up of a space for working class politics and a real movement.

Those who will not abandon auto-Labourism will be left on the sidelines. The left must seize whatever opportunity the new situation presents ●

Peter Manson



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

Poor defence

It is a shame that Steve Hedley could not direct his anger towards the union bureaucrats and their supporters in 'the left' rather than someone who provided so much assistance to him in the period 1995-98. Instead he employs the best traditions of his hero, Mr Stalin, to indulge in a litany of smears, innuendoes and outright lies (*Weekly Worker* September 16).

I am not a boss. I work in a community centre which includes a creche. Last year, at 39, I earned just over what Steve Hedley currently earns. I do not have a middle class lifestyle. I live in an asbestos-ridden, one-bedroomed flat on an estate in Hackney. Steve Hedley knows this, as he stopped at my place on many occasions.

As regards claims that I am prone to "delusions of grandeur bordering on megalomania" or a "crazed individual", then clearly these are recent illnesses, because on July 6 I was asked by Steve Hedley to attend the picket line the following morning. He said, "It would be good if you came, as we need people with experience."

I did attend and Steve Hedley shook my hand and thanked me for coming. I will only be too pleased to work with him at any time, but I will not be willing to keep quiet if I have any criticisms to make. Incidentally I have been going to building workers' picket lines for 30 years, during disputes my dad was involved in.

I will not indulge in smearing Steve Hedley's character. Indeed in my article I wrote, "Steve Hedley has much greater standing than most people" - an assessment I still stand by despite his attacks on me!

Steve is largely unable to challenge the main points in my article and when he does he presents a poor defence. For example, his claim that in regard to signalworkers at Euston it was only a "rumour spread by ourselves in order to panic management" about them taking strike action, then how come at a meeting on August 5 1998 he agreed to approach the signalworkers about taking action? Why didn't he say there was no chance of anything happening? How come at the Strike Support Group meeting I was invited to attend he said in front of 20 witnesses that "only two of the five" were prepared to take action? Incidentally, at the August 5 meeting Steve agreed that 'mistakes' had been made.

Regarding my claim that I advised him to get an education when he was sacked. Pardon me, but he was already studying part-time at college for a degree! Good for him, I say: working class militants should utilise all opportunities to educate themselves, and my original advice was given because I feared he would get sacked and be permanently unemployed.

I did not bring Brian Higgins into anything - Steve asked him to speak at a meeting. Steve also asked for his advice when he was sacked and in the first few weeks after then. He largely ignored the advice.

Mark Metcalf
London

All Irish

I have been following the debate in your paper concerning the theses, 'Ireland and the British-Irish', and would like to commend Jack Conrad and the other contributors.

While there is much in the theses I would agree with, I believe Jack has erred in creating a new semi-nation, "the British-Irish". Loyalists, republican socialists, RUC, nationalists have one thing in common - we are all Irish. Unfortunately, one section of our people have been encouraged, by virtue of a more privileged position, to see themselves as somehow distinct from the rest of the Irish nation. This myth has been reinforced by the likes of Thatcher, who said that the Six Coun-

ties were as British as Finchley, by the manipulation of a British-dominated media, and by base sectarianism.

Apart from the rights or wrongs of point 15 in Jack's theses, it is also impracticable. I come from a republican area completely surrounded by loyalist areas. Would my community have the right to opt out of any new "British-Irish" statelet? This thesis allows for the repartitioning of Ireland with a large proportion of the population opposing the very existence of the statelet. This would not be a solution.

The future does not lie in repartitioning our country, or indeed through the failed Good Friday agreement, but through working for the establishment of a 32-county socialist republic. Some of our people remain to be convinced of the benefits of a united Ireland, never mind a socialist Ireland. However, that does not mean socialists should advocate solutions where the most reactionary elements could opt out and create another sectarian state to dominate. This would be like socialists agreeing to the pro-Indonesia militias carving out a piece of East Timor for themselves.

Socialists should insist on the British government announcing an intention to withdraw from Ireland. Only when this happens can progressive forces in unionism/loyalism have the opportunity to come to the fore.

Ruairi McCallan
IRSP Long Kesh

Panacea

When I read Michael Malkin's article about Kosovo and East Tibet (*Weekly Worker* September 16), it gave the strong and worrying impression that for the CPGB the right of nations to self-determine is the only question communists should be worried about. Of course, comrade Malkin was being polemical and perhaps 'bending the stick' to expose inconsistencies.

It does however seem to me that the many in the CPGB are beginning to regard the right to self-determine as a democratic panacea for bringing the working class closer together and are beginning to see the question where it does not exist.

Jack Conrad's approach seems to be to correctly observe the cultural cohesion of Irish protestants and then to look for a geographical area in which they are dominant. The problem with this approach is that it is difficult to imagine the British-Irish themselves finding it particularly democratic, as it divides their own community into areas which are British-Irish and Irish-Irish. Some of them are free to become independent and some of them are 'chillingly herded into catholic Ireland'. That is not to mention the catholics who are 'chillingly herded into protestant Ireland'.

The impression the Conrad thesis gives is to have solved the problem of the divided community in Northern Ireland. I do not believe this can be done using *only* formal democratic rights, although the minimum demand for a united, secular, republican Ireland is surely correct.

Andrew Cutting
St Andrews

Reactionary KLA

The CPGB is correct in supporting the independence of East Timor and Kosova while opposing Nato/UN intervention, but is wrong in characterising both the progressive Fretilin and the reactionary KLA as national liberation movements who should be supported.

Fretilin emerged as a legitimate anti-imperialist guerrilla movement inside a backward capitalist colony which courageously fought against the Portuguese empire and later on against the genocidal occupation of the US-backed dictatorship that crushed one

million leftwingers and annihilated one third of the East Timorese.

The KLA never fought against imperialism. On the contrary, it was armed and financed by the west and it was the main imperialist local puppet. Kosova was not a colonial capitalist enclave, but an oppressed province inside a former degenerated workers' state that had been transformed into a new bourgeois state. For workers all over the world it is decisive to defend post-capitalist relations against bourgeois restoration. The KLA was in the forefront of the social counterrevolution and wanted Kosova to secede in order to transform it into a western, free-market, semi-colonial enclave. KLA leaders participated in the ethnic cleansing of an entire republic (Krajina) and today are driving out the gypsies and Serbs.

Indonesia peacefully accepted the intervention of UN troops in an occupied territory which has just voted for independence. Imperialism, which initially supported Indonesia's annexation, now sought to take advantage of the fact that reaction wiped out several radical pro-independence activists immediately after the referendum, and is preparing to guarantee the transformation of East Timor into a normal capitalist semi-colony.

Yugoslavia, on the other hand, was heavily attacked by all the imperialist powers. It is Europe's only former multinational 'socialist federation' which does not accept its dissolution and has continuously had a government based on the old Stalinist party. United Germany emerged promoting the division of Yugoslavia. At least one million Serbs were ethnically cleansed from lands in which they were the majority population for centuries. The economy and infrastructure of all Serbs areas have been severely damaged by the combination of the most terrible bombardments and economic blockade.

Marxists defended Kosovar rights to secede from capitalist Serbia, but when Nato launched its attack we needed to defend the whole oppressed country against the planet's bosses. The KLA was a direct imperialist tool.

John Stone
London

Key silence

Ian Hamilton (Letters, September 16) is very indignant that I appear to have "suggested" that he "no longer supports the right of nations to self-determination".

Yet around the issue of Kosova, he goes on to do just that. His support for the right of self-determination is a bit like Alice in Wonderland - jam tomorrow. Comrade Hamilton dredges up the obligatory quote from Lenin to excuse his denial of Kosovar rights today and asks, "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?"

So what "general democratic world movement" are we talking about, comrade? The forces that were actually fighting Nato and the KLA - in the real world, as opposed to comrade Hamilton's imagination - were the most debased fascist and extreme racist excrement of Stalinism and Serbian nationalism. Many of them were those who have been agitating for the 'final solution' of the 'removal' of the ethnic Albanian population from Kosova for the whole of Milosevic's period in office. Does this "general democratic" movement include Milosevic's fascist deputy prime minister, Vojislav Seselj, one of the most notorious advocates of the wholesale expulsion of the ethnic Albanians, who gained notoriety in the earlier period of the break-up of Yugoslavia for his call to "cut the Croats' throats with rusty knives"?

This goes unmentioned in comrade

Hamilton's letter. He states: "at no time have I counterposed the Albanian national struggle to a socialist federation, but I have argued that these two struggles should be interlinked"; and "only on the basis of breaking Serb nationalist illusions in the working class can Kosova be granted the self-determination it desires".

There is something missing from all this abstract verbiage, is there not? It may have escaped comrade Hamilton's notice that there was a shooting war over the question of Kosova. One can criticise the KLA for its military bloc with Nato as much as one likes, but that will cut no ice with those several hundred thousand ethnic Albanians who were driven out of Kosova during the war, and who have now been able to return thanks to the victory of the military bloc of Nato and the KLA. Abstract verbiage aside, which side was comrade Hamilton on in the war between the Albanian people of Kosova and the Serbian forces? Not some imaginary Albanian people in some other parallel universe, but those that were being persecuted, massacred and driven out of their homeland earlier this year.

Without taking a clear position in defence of this people's democratic right to exist *irrespective* of their illusions in Nato imperialism, comrade Hamilton's claim to stand for Kosova self-determination is utter twaddle, and thus the biggest political gift to the Nato 'liberators' imaginable. A people that has been annihilated cannot exercise the right to self-determination, within or without a 'socialist federation'.

Comrade Hamilton's silence on this key question bespeaks his implicit position. For all his 'theoretical' gloss about the need for a socialist federation "without Milosevic, Nato and the KLA", his unspoken position is that the Serbian forces - Chetnik pogromists and fascists and all - are part of some 'anti-imperialist' "general democratic world movement".

Truth is concrete - the nationalism of the KLA under Serb rule was the nationalism of a desperately oppressed people against a racial tyranny in Kosova that had more in common with the policies of Adolf Hitler than anything associated with democracy.

Ian Donovan
London

Stalin's genius

The people who denigrate Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union, those who berate the *Morning Star* because it gives praise where praise is due, are obviously under the influence of the

SWP or have not studied history.

In 1918 70% of Russians were illiterate. By 1932, illiteracy was all but abolished. As a result, the people became politically aware and educated, and embraced socialism, collectivisation and the abolition of capitalism.

That the citizens of the Soviet Union fully supported socialism is shown by the fact that during the Great Patriotic War they made such incredible sacrifices. They drove the nazis out of the Soviet Union and in 1945 hoisted the red flag over the Reichstag. All this was achieved under the leadership of Joseph Stalin.

Khrushchev's vile and poisonous attack on Joseph Stalin was followed by the rise of groups that were corrupted by power and privilege. In 1991, the counterrevolutionaries used Gorbachev to dissolve the CPSU and declare that socialism in the USSR was dead. The Soviet people resisted to such an extent that Yeltsin declared war on the soviets, shelling the White House, killing at least 2,000 comrades who had come to defend it.

Despite this treachery, the sell-out of the Soviet Union to western imperialism, communism still lives. People are fighting back, but with no one with Stalin's calibre, his genius, to lead them, it will be an uphill task to re-establish socialism in the land of its birth. But, as Joseph Stalin declared in 1941 on the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War, "Our cause is just. Victory is certain".

William Benton
Birmingham

Stalin's terror

Having witnessed several of the countless numbers of capitalist injustices first-hand, it has puzzled me that more people are not dedicating themselves to our noble cause.

I have come to the conclusion that people fear a brutal, Soviet-like regime in which all opposition is violently crushed. We must begin a campaign to reassure people that, far from being oppressive, communism is in fact the purest form of democracy. Above all, comrades, we must renounce Stalin and his reign of terror and distance ourselves as much as possible from the violent acts of this brutal dictator, who destroyed the lives of millions of hard-working Russian citizens.

Victor Davies
Ipswich

Act to stop Iran massacre

You will undoubtedly be aware of the large number of arrests of students and political activists after last July's pro-democracy demonstrations in Tehran, Iran. The repeated calls by the ultra-conservative faction for the death sentence on demonstrators who have been labelled *mohareb* (someone who fights god), *molhed* (heathen) and *mofsed* (corrupters) indicates that the lives of many of those arrested are in danger. The death sentence passed on four of those named validates these predictions.

The international campaign in defence of Iranian students was initiated by the Coordinating Committee of Workers' Left Unity and the editorial board of *Iran Bulletin*. It has

had the support over 450 academics, journalists, professionals, members of parliament, trade unionists, students, individuals, and over 50 organisations from across the world.

We ask you to publicise the demands of the campaign in your press. In the current national and international climate such outside pressures would undoubtedly help stop the potential executions and also the release of those already given long prison sentences. We urge you to put pressure on the Iranian regime to respect the basic human rights of its citizens ●

Coordinating Committee of Workers' Left Unity
Editorial board *Iran Bulletin*

Communist culture

Andy Croft (editor) **A weapon in the struggle: the cultural history of the Communist Party in Britain** Pluto Press 1998, pp218, £14.99

The social and political contours of the CPGB's past continue to be mapped apace, the latest being this rather fine collection of essays which attempt to probe some of the issues related to cultural commitments. Framed by an effective introduction from Andy Croft, this serious work attempts to highlight some key theoretical issues. In particular, one of the Communist Party's most respected cultural theorists, Alick West, is quoted to good effect:

"I was asked in 1953 to take a weekend school on the theme 'Culture is a weapon in the fight for socialism' ... At the school I said that culture ... heightens our consciousness of the world we want to win and our energy to win it. In this sense it was true that culture is a weapon in the fight for socialism. But the truth depended on recognition of the greater truth that socialism is a weapon in the fight for culture. For our final aim was not the establishment of a political and economic structure, but the heightening of human life" (p1).

West sums up perfectly the ambiguity at the heart of the CPGB's cultural practice. It is this contradiction which has to be written into our understanding of its history. Certainly, the CPGB had different aspirations to your average modern-day leftwing outfit. In its time the Party has launched, or had a very close relationship to, a wide variety of cultural organisations that ranged across the spectrum of artistic and intellectual spheres.

Lewis Jones explained in 1938 that the CPGB had "not taught workers that ... communists are concerned with and understand every phase of human existence, and all its 'cultural' aspects as well as the political. In other words we have not shown that communism is not a creed but that it is life".

Such noble aims became offset by the sect-like manner in which the CPGB organised itself around the 'line' and the concurrent suppression of political differences. This democratic deficit was of course deeply harmful to the cultural expression of the Party. This point is graphically illustrated by Richard Hanlon and Mike Waite, who detail the inability of the Workers Music Association to develop any understanding of the flowering of 'pop' culture in the 1960s. The communist composer Alan Bush compared screaming audiences with voodoo in Guyana, concluding that a new low point had been reached in the development of popular culture (pp83-84).

The incursion of the political into the artistic was however much more deeply rooted in the method of the CPGB, to the point at which it showed a marked influence on its actual production and reception of artistic forms. Croft draws attention to the Party's reception of a series of poetry in 1950. The *Daily Worker* featured a selection of letters denouncing this 'modern' poetry. The 'unintelligibility' of such art was rebuked; instead a more simplistic, 'working class' approach was urged. One writer insisted on the

need for "such poems as our Chinese comrades chant on the march; satire for our pamphlets; works which might put life into a public meeting; songs our young communists could brighten a ramble or a demonstration with" (p143). Croft correctly sees this as a Zhdanovite dry run for the subsequent assault on Christopher Caudwell's aesthetics in the *Modern Quarterly* (p144).

This influence spread deeper into the productive laboratory of the communist artist. Hanlon and Waite illustrate how Bush moved away from the "individual and rigorous modernism" (p75) of his 1929 string quartet *Dialectic*, towards a commitment to a 'national' musical tradition which Hanlon and Waite rather unflatteringly refer to as the setting of "leftish doggerel to simple folk tunes" (p77). Hanlon and Waite go on to cite an interview with Bush in the early 1960s, where the composer offered a Zhdanovite self-condemnation of formalism - the crime of prioritising musical form over the communication of a social content (p78).

These thoroughly dreary themes resonated through the CPGB's involvement with British folk music through the likes of AL Lloyd and Ewan MacColl, discussed here in the essay by Gerald Porter. The 'progressive' tradition of British radical song (traced through works such as Lloyd's *Folk song in England*), relied upon closely reflective interpretations of an urban and industrial landscape, rooted in modes of collective expression - often in "resistance to the status quo" (p173). MacColl, after serving his apprenticeship in agitprop formations such as Red Megaphone, actually left the CPGB in 1953 after apparently being told by a Party official that "It doesn't matter a toss what you sing: just pack the people in" (p172).

In fact, the 'anti-formalist' approach relied upon by Lloyd and MacColl could only but reinforce such philistine sentiment. The reliance on woodenly reflective social content, and the folk movement's emphasis on group expression, impeded the CPGB's understanding of art's autonomy and concretisation through its own formal laws. Once art becomes predominantly a site for the utilisation of a specific social content this leaves the door open for what Alick West saw as its degradation for a political end. This approach also tends to freeze the aesthetic into national-centred narrowness, whilst specific artistic forms lend themselves more easily to a universal outlook. Once artistic practice becomes rooted in themes of political content, you allow for the indifference of the unnamed CPGB official in his above response to Ewan MacColl. After all, what is the point of a topical song if its message could just as easily be encapsulated in a political slogan?

This inability to appreciate the autonomy, or objectivity, of art is of course grounded in the subjectivism that marked the practice of 'official communism' during and after the Stalinist era. Such practice was unable to comprehend - in the way in which it 'planned' and ruled societies - the sensuous, objective world. Its practice in the cultural sphere was an extension of this outlook. Art under the bureaucracy was something to be crudely manipulated for political

means, and it was this position, closely formulated by AA Zhdanov, that was transmitted into organisations such as the CPGB, down into the formal practice of its artistic protagonists. Even in tactical shifts such as the popular frontist period of the mid-1930s, which potentially offered the CPGB a broad-based means by which to grasp the dynamism of popular culture (albeit in an opportunistic fashion), the underlying subjectivism of the 'official communist' movement and its associated distrust of 'formalism' meant that such developments could be transitory at best. Art certainly does have a relationship to the political, but this can only be traced if art, and the artist, are given a real existence from the outset rather than being featured as a mere 'weapon in the struggle'.

We have seen quite clearly above how this culture worked its way through its practitioners in the CPGB. Therefore we can be somewhat sceptical of the analysis offered by Gerald Porter who argues that, while the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s "was strongly influenced by individual communists and the work of some branches, the Party never had a coherent or effective policy towards the political song. The role of Party activists depended less on decisions made at the centre about a 'cultural popular front' than on a principled response to the constantly changing field of values, beliefs and practices competing for dominance within a social formation dictated by capitalism and industrialisation" (p171).

Porter's view may no doubt be true on an organisational level. In many spheres of the CPGB's work - trade unionism for example - decisions were effectively taken without the 'political' guidance of the centre and often on the basis of sectional considerations. Nevertheless, as we have seen above, the very fact that Party activists were involved in a 'folk' movement can be seen as the result of certain Zhdanovite 'national' assumptions embedded in the CPGB's aesthetic culture. Porter's vision of a disaggregated Party is a rather overblown reaction to the inane pap that

various Trotskyite authors have served up on the CPGB. However, it is important not to replace a 'Moscow-centric' version with an anarchist one. The relative autonomy that undoubtedly existed in national and regional communist organisation has to be understood as precisely that.

Similarly we must point out some of the possible misconceptions that could arise from Paul Hogarth's 'Afterword'. On the foundation of Hogarth's experiences in the Party artists' group in the late 1940s and early 1950s he writes: "... communist writers, editors, musicians artists and artistes strove with incredible dedication to create the literature, the periodicals, the pageants, the music and the festivals which have since become an inseparable element in the mainstream of a popular culture committed to the heightening of human awareness" (original emphasis, p209). In a similar vein, Croft argues that "the Party's artistic life was not always as reductive or as grim as its pronouncements on the subject" (p1).

Therefore, it seems that despite their critique of the CPGB's cultural life Hogarth and Croft are keen to argue that legitimate art forms could still rise up unscathed. The Party produced effective art, almost in spite of itself. Whilst this is no doubt true in some cases, one could also make the point that the Party was also responsible for either alienating or mangling artistic talent in the grinder of political orthodoxy.

Again, it seems as if the likes of Hogarth and Croft want to salvage the reputation of the CPGB's cultural practitioners by establishing some distance between their output and the more functional outlook desired by the CPGB's subjectivist theoretical approach to artistic form. However, whilst the influence of this culture was certainly not all-embracing, the experience of characters such as Alan Bush warns us against throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The 'autonomy' of the CPGB and its membership only makes methodological sense if we understand its associated limitations ●

Phil Watson

Fighting fund

Big boost

In writing to support the *Weekly Worker*, comrade JT talks of the big money that runs just about every aspect of capitalist society, even sport. Football, the 'working class game', features players on £40,000 a week and makes millions for its big business bosses.

Unlike the soccer profiteers, we do not charge exorbitant sums for our 'commodity'. While income from sales and subscriptions is continuing to rise slowly, it still does not cover all our costs, let alone allow us the leeway to prepare for future expansion. We rely on our

readers' generosity, as always.

This week's postbag brought us £92, taking our September total to £327 - well within striking distance of our £400 requirement. But don't forget the deficit we need to make up as a result of August's shortfall!

Thanks to EK and NB (£20 each), and especially to comrade TR, whose £25 gave us a big boost. ●

Robbie Rix

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

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CPGB seminars

London: Sunday September 26, 5pm - 'Tendency to overproduction in Marx's early works', using Simon Clarke's *Karl Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide. Sunday October 3, 5pm - 'Capitalism and the bourgeois paradigm', using Ellen Meiksins Wood's *The pristine culture of capitalism* as a study guide. Call 0181-459 7146 for details.

Manchester: Monday October 4, 7.30pm - 'Ireland: loyalism and partition'. CPGB2@aol.com.

Lobby Labour

Bournemouth: Sunday September 26, 3pm - Meyrick Park, Braidley Road. Call: 0171-803 9877 for more details.

Freedom for East Timor

Picket every Monday 12 noon - 2pm, Indonesian embassy, Grosvenor Square, London.

Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison

National meeting to decide on candidate for general secretary: Saturday September 25, 12 noon. Palm Room, 4th floor, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1.

Solidarity with Kosova miners

Rally, 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 unionist from Belgrade).

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 comrade from the Iranian left will speak. All welcome

Support Tameside

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

Stop privatisation

Conference against privatisation of public services - Saturday November 6, 10am - 5pm, Natthe headquarters, Britannia Street, London WC1. Call Greenwich Unison (0181-854 8888 x5227) for more details.

Scrap tuition fees

National demonstration - Thursday November 25. Assemble 12 noon, Malet Street, London, outside University of London Union, WC1. Organised by National Union of Students.

Anti-Fascist Action

An afternoon of film and discussion: Sunday October 10: Lux Cinema, 2-4 Hoxton Square, London N1 6NU, 2.30pm - 6pm. £5 and £3 concessions. Nearest tube - Old Street.

Party wills

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

Mark Metcalf makes the classic, false division between the working class and its trade unions, and sets Steve Hedley up as a scapegoat for the failure to win his own reinstatement. Metcalf tells us that "the aim" is to show that Steve Hedley "preferred to rely on the bureaucracy of the RMT and its acolytes in 'the British left' rather than the rank and file railworkers who he had already inspired to take action". "By doing so" he "turned his back on his closest supporters, and now he has clearly decided that 'if you can't beat them [the bureaucracy] then join them'."

This last point refers to the fact that Steve is now a development officer for Ucaat, recruiting and organising on the construction sites. Metcalf's childish view is that anyone who works for a trade union is automatically reactionary.

It is impossible to comment on his reference to the RMT's "acolytes in 'the British left'", because he does not name them. Likewise he does not tell us who he means when he says that Steve Hedley "turned his back on his closest supporters". This kind of phrasemongering is designed to develop an atmosphere of distrust.

There are many lies and distortions, and it is difficult not to suspect Metcalf's motives in distributing allegations which, if true, could place Steve Hedley in great difficulty. I also consider that if a socialist newspaper receives such a piece about an active (and victimised) trade unionist and fighter for socialism, the principled thing to do would be to speak to the victim before taking a decision to give it space. We are not playing games. A gullible reader of the *Weekly Worker* could take it into his/her head that Steve Hedley should be the target for open and even physical attack.

Nevertheless Metcalf's piece is worth commenting on because he is not the only one who rejects the Marxist world outlook, and reduces the problems of the working class to the abstract level of a single dispute, rank-and-fileism and even to a single leader upon whom he heaps blame for his own disappointment. Steve Hedley today, Tony O'Brien (Ucaat member and convener of shop stewards on Southwark DLO) yesterday and somebody else tomorrow!

The trade union question is the most important question of working class policy. The unions have degenerated from organisations which raised the material and cultural level of the working class, and the extension of its political rights in the period of the rise and growth of capitalism, into the reactionary role they play today when capitalism for its survival is forced to attempt to take away all the gains of the working class. This is the central problem for the working class and for all socialists.

The trade union bureaucracies attack internal democracy, persecute the socialist militants and bend union rules to conform to bourgeois state laws designed to curtail the very reason for the existence of trade unions. But this reality does not automatically galvanise workers into a fight against the bureaucracy. Bourgeois ideology has to be fought at all levels in the labour movement, and this is the task of socialists in the reconstruction of the workers' movement.

The turmoil in the trade unions, induced by state attacks and the break-up of traditional industries that accompanied the beginning of the end of the boom in 1972, produced the trial and imprisonment of the Shrewsbury building workers' pickets, and the imprisonment and release of the Pentonville Five dockworkers. From 1985 to 1989 the 'old guard' workers attempted and failed to hold on to their jobs and trade union rights in the miners', printworkers', seafarers' and dockers' strikes. Each one was a test of the unions' need to break the anti-trade union laws. Only the min-

Disappointed sectarian

Dot Gibson responds to Mark Metcalf's criticisms of Steve Hedley (*Weekly Worker* August 26)

ers' and the seafarers' unions were willing to do so and they could not win on their own.

Subsequently the TUC was forced to expel the rightwing EEPTU for their scab role at News International (Wapping). Later OILC was formed by North Sea oil rig workers. Splitting with the TGWU, the AEU and other unions, skilled workers took a lead to organise the low paid domestic and cleaning workers on the rigs. The TUC would not recognise them, but did reinstate the EETPU, which then merged with the AEU to become the AEEU - an arch-reactionary union.

These events were, and are, signs of the break-up of old relations in the workers' movement. A split was covered over and delayed by both wings in the trade unions on the erroneous basis that when the Tories were defeated and a (reformist) Labour government took office the working class and its unions would have political representation to enable them to fight the bosses and bring in legislation to restore basic rights, end unemployment and put a stop to privatisation.

In May 1997 we saw the return of a Labour government with a massive majority. All its policies are directed to upholding the international rule of capital (imperialism), developing the policies laid down at Maastricht. Together with the other social democratic governments in France and Germany, this government must attack all the gains of the working class, the unions, health, housing, all public and social services, education, rights at work, rights to asylum, etc.

Over the last 25 years exploitation of workers has enormously increased. Younger workers (even those in their 40s) who are lucky enough to have a skill and a job have experienced only privatisation, anti-trade union laws and the threat of unemployment. Communities have been broken up, most workers now have mortgages hanging over their heads and fear taking action they think will threaten the 'stability' of their families. Many are on individual contracts, and are not in trade unions. Millions of others have no skill, no job and no union. Class consciousness has suffered.

Metcalf makes no attempt to concretely reveal these problems and the isolation workers experience. The speed of the attacks by giant international companies on wages and conditions, the anti-trade union laws and the failure of the leadership to fight against them, the stream of defeated strikes of the 'big guns' in the working class (miners, steelworkers, dockers, printers) and the victimisation of militants have sapped the confidence of all workers. Now there is the shock of realising that the Labour government's adoption of these same laws, and its continuation of cuts and privatisation, face workers with the very big responsibility to build their own new socialist party.

Metcalf's conclusion ignores these central questions. His answer is not to understand where workers are coming from, to be with them and build their confidence and class consciousness, but to develop a kind of 'ginger group' to parachute in when workers are in dispute. He says that "the key to winning any industrial dispute is the organising of flying pickets and going directly to workers in their workplaces". Compare this with the rules and aims of the Strike Support

Group: "to give financial aid to workers in struggle; to give striking workers resources to print and publish their own leaflets, etc; to physically support pickets and other demonstrations of workers in struggle." The main thing is to respect and assist the actual organisation that has developed on the job.

Metcalf puts great emphasis on establishing "a policy of organisation and action independent of the full-time union officials". What does "a policy of organisation and action" mean? Metcalf does not explain. For him it is sufficient that this must be "independent of the full-time officials", because for him all full-time officials are traitors. However, there can be no substitute for patient recruitment, the development of organisation and the building of a socialist tendency to fight for *unions independent of the state, democracy in the unions*, and for the development of *internationalism* to combat the attacks of global companies.

Workers' loyalty to their union and respect for the leadership are not negative. Neither do most workers share Metcalf's view that all trade union organisers are reactionary. What is the point of a trade union without organisers? And what is the point of militant workers avoiding this responsibility? Like everyone else these organisers must be tested; what they do must come within the campaign for inner-union democracy.

Metcalf treats workers as though they have no opinion, as though their basic organisations mean nothing to them and they can and will simply and easily jump out of their loyalty to their unions when he and his like come along and tell them obvious truths about betrayals, etc. The trade unions have a proud, historic place in the making of the working class. That history does not belong to the bureaucracy. Defence of the right to organise in trade unions on the job is the first step to making the necessary changes.

It was for this reason and against this background that Steve Hedley was victimised to deny representation to an important section of workers. From the outset he was faced with the RMT leadership's refusal to defy the anti-trade union laws (the union conference decision, stating that such action could be taken, vaguely left it to the officials to decide when it was appropriate).

Therefore, when the Euston GTRM workers took unofficial action for his reinstatement, they were immediately weakened when they came into conflict with their union. General secretary Jimmy Knapp sent a letter of repudiation disowning the strike. This was later followed by the actions of some of the company reps (influenced by GTRM management) who insisted that Steve's reinstatement could not be part of the negotiations on the new contract.

Then his industrial tribunal was cancelled because his legal advisors considered that the company's CCTV footage contradicted some of his witness statements. After that the union's EC recommended acceptance of the deal without including in their circular to the branches the principle of Steve's reinstatement. By this time settlements had been reached on negotiations with all the other rail maintenance contractors, and the GTRM workers were getting fed up with the

long drawn out negotiations. Many resented the fact that 14 days of strike had not resulted in a satisfactory settlement.

A number of key workers went off and got other jobs, and some RMT members left the union and joined the AEEU instead. Whether Metcalf likes it or not, years of setbacks do not create a militant working class. There is hesitancy, individualism, fear of breaking the law, of moving against official leaders and mainly of losing jobs.

Metcalf shamefully pours scorn on Steve Hedley's real and not imaginary understanding of the GTRM workers, and his responsibility towards them. Under Steve's leadership two issues of the Support Group paper, *Unite!*, were published explaining the issues, together with an issue of *Unite!* written and prepared by a meeting of rail and bus workers. Thousands of leaflets were distributed. But by then he was out of the workplace, separated from the rest of the workers. The company knew full well the importance of such an attack on worker-leaders in its dealings with the rest of the workforce. (Look at the record of the three-year industrial tribunal of the victimised London dockers after the 1989 strike.)

Steve was charged with criminal damage. Management-inspired rumours gave credence to the charges, spreading confusion among some workers, especially when a group of rightwing reps backed up these stories. Steve was innocent. The police dropped the charges and the case was not brought to court. However, all this took up time, during which the rightwing reps were busy on the job with their campaign to separate Steve's reinstatement from the long-awaited wages and conditions settlement.

Continuation of the unofficial strike would no doubt have meant the sacking of the workforce in the Euston depot, and a further rift with the union leadership, both of which the workers were not ready to handle. As Metcalf reports, the Watford depot workers would only agree to continue the strike if the union made it official.

However, Metcalf is supremely confident of his own ability, and that of Building Workers Group leader Brian Higgins, to convince workers against the advice of their union leadership. He considers that by sending round a group of "flying pickets" from outside, workers should and could sustain an unofficial action against the wishes of their trade union leaders.

Disappointed that the workers were not prepared to do so, Metcalf says: "It has never been possible to find out whether the workers had put forward this argument themselves or whether Ashcroft had put the idea forward first and the workers had latched on to this in desperation or in the certainty that the union would not give such support - as was to be proved!"

Nevertheless he has the answer: "It should be recorded that history has shown that workers very rarely, if at all, make official support a condition of spontaneously 'downing tools'. These questions always come up and are raised after such actions by the fainthearts and those of a bureaucratic persuasion looking for a way out!"

Metcalf tells us that *if* the flying picket had talked to signalworkers instead of going to the RMT headquarters, *if* Metcalf himself had spoken to

the workers, *if* Billy Ashcroft had not gone on holiday, etc, etc, "there was a real chance to smash management's and the government's plans to make railworkers pay for the catastrophe of privatisation".

This may seem to be true in Metcalf's imagination, placing an exaggerated gloss on the GTRM workers' wage and conditions dispute and the victimisation of one of their reps, but - in the real world - it is an oversimplified and romantic view of the situation. *To settle accounts with "the catastrophe of privatisation" requires a mass political campaign!*

It is a pity Metcalf and Higgins do not stop to consider why they remain so isolated; why, after Higgins "gave an inspiring speech about the need to fight the employers whilst not expecting the full-time officials of any union to do the same", the workers at that meeting in the railworkers' club in Willesden on July 29 1998 said they did not want him, an outsider, speaking in such vitriolic terms about the union, on their platform again.

Metcalf should think about why those same workers *did* want Bob Crow on their platform. They reasoned that since he had authority in their union and was responsible for the negotiations they could have a fruitful discussion with him and tell him their concerns. They considered that without the union's full backing they did not have the organisation in place to break the law by continuing the action. Workers are quite rightly wary of sectarian cheers and advice from the sidelines about going it alone without union backing, when they are the ones risking their jobs.

However, workers are concretely faced with fighting for the independence of their unions and the need for their own socialist party. To defend capital today the Blair government is on the attack. The working class will more and more come into conflict with the government and union leaderships which support and defend it. The split in the trade union movement is opened afresh in different circumstances.

How else can we view the decision of the three rail unions, led by the RMT, to oppose plans for the privatisation of London Underground? How else can we understand the necessity for the Fire Brigades Union to come out against Labour's proposed laws to make a strike of its members illegal? But Metcalf abstractly warns workers that "when major events in the class struggle occur, the subordination of the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy to the right wing is pronounced".

Yes, left reformists subordinate themselves to capital, and it is necessary to study and speak out about the reactionary nature of reformism. However, even the slightest movement of a union against this government will open up opportunities for building the mass workers' movement. It is in the building of that movement that the GTRM workers and millions of others can shed their confusion, develop class consciousness and break their isolation.

At the time of writing the RMT leadership has not signed off the agreement with GTRM because the dispute continues over Steve's reinstatement. His union branch has called an open meeting with Steve and Bob Crow speaking, where these issues can be discussed. Quite rightly the rank and file leadership of that union branch is patiently working towards clarification of the situation the workers face and what kind of organised fight they must conduct.

The working class has lost many battles, but it has not lost the war! ●

SLP - the nine errors

Delphi reflects on the failure of Scargill's former close courtiers, the shadowy Fourth International Supporters Caucus (Fisc)

Simon Harvey is at it again. Instead of real analysis of 'Fisc', Brar, the Scargill phenomenon and the decline of the SLP we have yet another superficial report on personalities and organisational intrigue, much of it repeated from earlier material in the *Weekly Worker*. Simon is not so well informed as he makes out, otherwise his 'revelations' would be more up to date and informative (*Weekly Worker* September 16).

While the *Weekly Worker* printed a document entitled a 'Fisc manifesto', there has been no comment on the actual (and, as it transpired, valedictory) discussion document circulated by Pat Sikorski, for the 'invitation only' meeting of disgruntled SLPers in July. Obviously Simon was not invited, as we would have expected a full analysis of the *real* Fisc manifesto and a report on the meeting.

Delphi (who, to reiterate, is not of 'Fisc' and genuinely knows not if such a group exists, other than a body of co-thinkers out of the Socialist Outlook stable) can assure the *Weekly Worker* that the published, so-called, 'Fisc manifesto' in fact emanated from a group of branches in the SLP which have no allegiance to Fisc, nor do they constitute a faction in the SLP. The real Fisc manifesto has apparently fallen on deaf ears, since the 'invitation only' meeting, like Carolyn Sikorski's attempts to found an alternative SLP womens' section, was a complete flop. In this document (which was intended to be circulated as a pamphlet after the meeting) the disillusionment and demoralisation felt by Sikorski and his followers is almost palpable.

This signals the end not only of a faction in the SLP (for as such they ended up operating, even if they did not constitute one from the start), but of one of the hitherto healthier currents in British Trotskyism. In the process they have laid the SLP on a plate before some of the most loopy Stalinists ever to gnaw at the fringes of the British labour movement, and have let down all the SLP members who looked to them for leadership. As such the failure of 'Fisc' is worth analysing in more detail than the *Weekly Worker* has so far attempted.

Delphi would like to contribute to this analysis by outlining some of the errors made by Fisc.

● **Error one** is referred to in comrade Harvey's article. Support at the founding congress from Brian Heron and Trevor Wongsam for the infamous formulation on 'non-racist immigration controls' to be drawn up "in the cold light of day"! This seriously undermined the SLP's credibility as an internationalist, anti-racist party.

● **Error two** The failure of Pat Sikorski to carry out his job as general secretary and use it to maintain contact with members. This both undermined his credibility with the membership and aroused the ire of Arthur, himself a 'workaholic' and 'slavedriver' when it comes to even the detailed organisational tasks. Stalin used his position as general secretary to build a power base in the provinces. It seemed that Sikorski was not interested in courting branches outside London. The way he posed his resignation was

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 "At no time has Fisc posed a theoretical alternative to Scargillism or Stalinism which can form the guidelines for the creation of the type of party they claimed to be striving for"

seen as a form of blackmail and by taking his bat home he handed the post to Arthur. His reasons - pressure of trade union activity and work - may have been valid. If so, why did he not request the help of London comrades and run a *de facto* secretariat - one of the suggestions he later proposed for curbing Arthur's control?!

● **Error three** Despite a high-profile black member in Imran Khan there was little real effort made to build a black section. For example, despite requests, no foreign language texts were produced for the 1997 general election leaflets. And only a few meetings were called for a handful of members. This fuelled the suspicion that the main interest was black section seats on the NEC.

● **Error four** On being defeated over black sections at the 1997 congress again the 'Fisc' delegates took home their collective bat - an action which, howbeit short-lived, demonstrated their unreliability and did not go down well with non-aligned members. It overshadowed the 3,000 votes issue.

● **Error five** The Fisc members on the NEC failed to carry out their duties, including producing the NEC bulletin, and undermined arrangements for the 1998 congress, diverting their energies to attacking the Scargill leadership, in what was regarded by members as an underhand way through the 'Appeal' circulated to selected members. Pat Sikorski dug his own political grave by being seen to challenge Arthur, when, in reality, he had not done the groundwork in the party to mount such a challenge.

● **Error six** On the ousting of Sikorski by Bull Fisc went into overdrive demanding Bull's expulsion, despite the presence of *EPSR* supporters in the party having gone unchallenged be-

fore. Instead they should have bitten the bullet, demanded the muzzling of Bull (which he would not have consented to), exposed his politics before the membership and then moved to his expulsion, even being prepared to wait until the next congress to remove him. The excuse that his presence as vice-president was damaging to the party paled besides the sad reality that the Fisc response proved even more damaging.

● **Error seven** Carolyn Sikorski's cancelling of the women's section conference, in the fear that it was being packed by 'Scargillite' supporters, and her boycott of the reconvened conference, which left herself and a handful of perceived party dis-loyalists literally standing on the doorstep and voluntarily excluded from the debate. It was only thanks to non-aligned women present that the Stalinists who had been handed, again on a plate, the 'leadership' of the women's section did not there and then initiate expulsion proceedings. Instead of trying to regain lost ground Sikorski went ahead with a doomed attempt to set up an alternative women's section, thus alienating even those women who had supported her.

● **Error eight** This needs no elaboration, as the *Weekly Worker* has described the whole sorry farce. The taking the bat home experience *par excellence* The refusal to play during the Euro elections. London region is handed to the Stalinists on another plate with heaps of garnishing and an apple in its mouth.

● **Error nine** Carolyn and Brian falling in arrears of subs. Voided on their own petard.

Perhaps other instances can be added to the nine errors of Fisc. They led inexorably to Fisc not only putting itself out on a limb, but helping the Stalinists saw it off. What are they due to? Sheer incompetence and amateurism? A total lack of a sense of tactics and patience to achieve what can only be approached as a long-term objective - the creation of a new party?

The root of the problem resides in the factionalist, sectarian mentality inherent in Trotskyism and the 'Bolshevik' left in general, to some degree or another. At the root is fetishism of the programme, which stems from a failure to realise the primacy of praxis, practical revolutionary action. The sect attempts to assert its authority and legitimacy, not through involving itself in the struggle of the oppressed, but by perfecting a programme wherein lies all the answers to the class struggle. The task of the sect and of the party it tries, but inevitably fails, to create is to present the programme to the class and win adherents to the revolution on the basis of acceptance of the programme.

Those who depart from the programme are anathematised as intractable opponents, leading to the perennial factionalism and splitting which afflicts the left. Despite their proclaimed intention of building a broad-based party of left re-foundation, 'Fisc' has proved unable to work with those with whom it has disagreements - not only ideological Stalinists, but those employing 'Stalinist' organisational methods drawn from the trade union bureaucracy. This is despite that fact that they ostensibly shared the same programme as embodied in the SLP constitution. The only erosion of this agreed platform has been the loss of black sections. But that in itself should not have led to Fisc's retreat. If the real issue is that of self-organisation, then despite

the abolition of black sections, there was nothing to stop them pursuing a campaign of recruiting and organising black people within the party, ultimately leading to the restoration of black sections. But no. A shibboleth of the programme had been defiled and it was time to get Scargill. Foolishly they decided to fight him on his own ground - organisation - and not exploit his weakness - theory.

At no time has Fisc posed a theoretical alternative to Scargillism or Stalinism which can form the guidelines for the creation of the type of party they claimed to be striving for. They could argue that the internal regime in the party prohibiting the circulation of documents prevented this, but there are ways this can be circumvented (Harpal Brar has no problem doing this!) and platforms outside the party (such as, no doubt, the *Weekly Worker*) which could be used to generate real debate about the way forward for the SLP.

The departure of Fisc now means that the opposition to Stalinism in the SLP has been severely, though not yet mortally, wounded. Harpal Brar is now the leading active intellectual in the party with several regions under his belt, as far as place-men and women on committees goes. However, his ideology has not permeated to the remaining rank and file of the party and is more likely to alienate members than win them over if it does.

The conflict between the two currents of the Bolshevik tradition has brought the SLP to the verge of disaster, despite the objective historical basis for Bolshevism having long since disappeared. Another example of - as your 'Fisc manifesto' said, quoting Marx - "the traditions of past generations [that] weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living". Does this mean that there is no hope for a revolutionary socialist party of a new type? Does it mean that the SLP and the Socialist Alliances, as I have previously said, will remain towers of Babel, with everyone reaching for the socialist heavens but cursed to speak mutually unintelligible languages - if often using the same words?

The key lies in the left gaining an understanding of revolutionary praxis. The fault of both the Trotskyist and Stalinist left stems from the adoption of a false dichotomy between theory and practice, between subject and object in history. Thought is seen, on the one hand, purely in terms of reflecting the material world. On the other it becomes a body of theory, abstracted from those reflections, to be mechanically applied to change class consciousness to correspond to political and social change which is attributed primarily to predetermined, historical laws. This is most apparent in the pseudo-scientific, millenarianist outpourings of Royston Bull, but it afflicts to varying degrees all the 'Marxist' left. Far from actually reflecting objectivity, left theory has developed an autonomy from the real world with its own values, points of reference and rules. It has become a fantasy land of ideal types - 'the proletariat', 'imperialism', 'revolution', etc.

Instead, thought itself must be understood as a form of praxis. Even the most sacrosanct precepts of theory must be constantly tested in the cauldron of real life practical struggles. The reality must be faced that the left globally is in a weaker position than any time in the past century, that the industrial proletariat is not straining at the leash to fulfil its historical mission of carrying forward the produc-

tive forces and that imperialism is not on the eve of imminent catastrophic collapse. This is the real world which has to be analysed if we are to devise new tactics and strategy of socialist revolution. It does not allow for nit-picking perfectionism about details of abstract party programmes or correct organisational forms. This time and intellectual energy should be devoted to refining a critique of 21st century imperialism as it is - its dynamics, the new class formations it is creating, how it exerts its ideological hegemony. We cannot defeat the beast we do not know - especially with weapons the left has mainly devised to tilt at windmills.

The divorce of thought/subject and theory/matter has also obscured the left's vision of the basic contradiction of imperialism - the conflict between human society and the natural world. The misapprehension that human thought is separate from, and not a property of, nature has reinforced the technocratic, scientific view of socialism as primarily about the development of productive forces. In turn this has abandoned whole fields of struggle (including literal fields of GM crops) to environmentalists who often fail to challenge the fallacy that an ecologically sustainable economy and capitalism are reconcilable. It has prevented the left from combating consumerism and the myth of capitalist 'wealth'. Above all it has prevented the left infusing socialism with a true humanist perspective which envisages humankind as the material world becoming aware of itself, utilising that awareness consciously to develop as a species-being in harmony with other species.

Delphi was gratified to see Gerry Downing's tribute to John Toland (*Weekly Worker* July 8), who in the early 18th century grasped the unity of the material world in a way that many 20th century 'Marxists' have proved incapable of comprehending. They have replaced the duality of spirit (emanating from god) and matter, which Toland and Spinoza refuted, with the duality of matter and theory (emanating from Marx/Lenin/Stalin, etc). Socialism should be the contemporary realisation of the pantheism of Toland and of the monists who have succeeded him, including Marx, synthesised with all those other philosophers and revolutionaries who understand that there is more to socialism than carrying forward the productive forces to provide a world of abundant commodities and a classless but goalless society.

This realisation should also provide an ethical underpinning to socialism which it currently lacks. The cold, soulless, joyless version of socialism currently on offer has no attraction for the oppressed, even those starving on the margins of existence. In practice in the 20th century it has only delivered new ruling classes and forms of exploitation. Socialists need to emphasise the creation of new, non-exploitative, relationships between people - not only after the revolution, but in the process of struggle. This requires a whole new culture on the left. To get back to the origin of the article, it needs a type of approach which Fisc showed itself incapable of delivering. Despite the subjective impulse to build a new party, Fisc proved in practice as conservative and impervious to concrete realities as its opponents.

The experience of the SLP provides vital lessons for all socialists. It deserves a bit more searching analysis from comrade Harvey ●

British-Irish: once again

Our discussion, for and against the right of a British-Irish province to self-determination within a united Ireland, has revealed disquieting theoretical shortcomings throughout the Communist Party's ranks. A warning of what can result, if not swiftly corrected, can be seen in the dire contributions of Tom Delargy and Dave Craig (*Weekly Worker* September 16).

Of course, it goes without saying that both are subjectively committed to socialism and the freedom of the working class. Comrade Delargy is a member of the Scottish Socialist Party, while comrade Craig leads the non-functioning Revolutionary Democratic Group. Unfortunately, despite lofty intentions, when it comes to Ireland and the British-Irish, the draconian means advocated by comrades Delargy and Craig could only but result in unintended opposite results - if they were ever to discover a political agency willing to put their programme into practice. Not self-liberation, but a new form of slavery.

Comrades Delargy and Craig are SWPers in exile. Sadly that also makes them devotees of the cult of the Soviet Union as a form of state capitalism - a dogma which completely mangles and therefore negates the basic categories of Marxism. To the casual observer it might appear strange then that the duo express solidarity with Steve Riley (*Weekly Worker* September 2). Comrade Riley, it will be recalled, still believes that the Soviet Union under the monarchy of Stalin was an example of "really existing socialism". So in the USSR and Ireland at least comrade Riley has the dubious virtue of a consistent credo. Freedom will be handed down from the mailed fist. Socialism needs not a tincture of democracy.

What comrades Delargy and Craig share with comrade Riley and leads them to the same undemocratic conclusions on Ireland and the British-Irish is pidgin theory and therefore erroneous thinking. Comrade Delargy is a self-confessed opponent of revolutionary democracy, which he derides as being above class and thus unable to distinguish "between bourgeois and proletarian rule". Evidently this is untrue. Nevertheless in cocksure ignorance comrade Delargy lambastes the essential political theory of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky in the name of an inflexible economism (which, needless to say, he foolishly imagines is authentic Marxism). He thus arrogantly belittles or denies the dialectal relationship between the class struggle for democracy under capitalism and the realisation of socialism. Confusion on Ireland is inevitable.

Comrade Craig is heroically loyal to fixed categories and the outer appearance of things. Impervious to reason, this means he insists as a matter of sectarian faith that the rouble in the Soviet Union was money. It concerns him not in the least that the rouble was no universal, but only a partial equivalent. Nor does the fact that labour power was neither bought nor sold for roubles matter a jot to him. The theory of state capitalism demands "wage slavery" in the Soviet Union, so "wage slavery" there was.

The same trammelled *a priori* method leads him to get completely lost in the mists of nationalism. According to comrade Craig, nations are ancient, not modern phenomena. Frustratingly, defining "who is a nation is never clear-cut". They do not have hard, exact edges which allows them to be easily differentiated from

Jack Conrad argues that communists must champion the democratic rights of all peoples

non-nations. Nevertheless even Jack Conrad admits the British-Irish are not a nation. Hey presto, he has me. In his dreams. As only nations can be granted national rights, it follows *ipso facto* that non-nations such as the British-Irish cannot have anything approaching national rights by definition. So to hell with self-determination. Let the British-Irish quietly content themselves with the parochial rights of a German *Land* or an American state. And heaven help them if they object. If the British-Irish challenge their lot they will be subject to "coercion" by the majority. Put another way, unity in Ireland is not to be founded on consent, but brute force. The awful fate of Yugoslavia and Lebanon beckons.

Before comprehensively dealing with comrade Craig and his muddle on the British-Irish and the national question overall, let us examine comrade Delargy's critique of Jack Conrad. His opening gambit maintains that the 20 theses I presented on Ireland and the British-Irish lack "clarity". In particular he claims that there exists a contradiction between thesis 7 and thesis 15. Oh really. Let us see. Thesis 7 reads as follows:

"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 the oppress the catholic-nationalist minority." And 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. This area forms a geographically coherent whole and includes country Antrim, north Tyrone, south Derry, north Armagh, and north Down (there are catholic majorities in Fermanagh, south Tyrone, south Armagh, north Derry and south Down). West Belfast also has 100,000 catholic-nationalists. In a united Ireland a federal solution would require new federal borders" ('Ireland and the British-Irish' *Weekly Worker* August 26).

Comrade Delargy supposes himself "forced" to "choose between" thesis 7 and thesis 15. Suffice to say, there is no 'either-or' choice to make. We are not in a political anteroom faced with two alternative doors: one marked 'no self-determination' and the other 'self-determination'. The propositions on self-determination are not contradictory, but complementary. The 'self-determination' door follows down the programmatic corridor from the one marked 'no self-determination'. Open the one and you arrive at the other. I know it is testing the patience of the intelligent reader. But bear with me while I outline the argument for the sake of a comrade Delargy, who is dumbfounded by the formal opposites of 'no self-determination' and 'self-determination', but fails to see the obvious connection in terms of concrete application.

"Present-day" Northern Ireland was

founded in 1921 and does not contain a "clear" British-Irish majority. As alluded to by thesis 7, the borders of the six-county statelet were mapped out "on the cynical basis of permanently institutionalising the oppression of the catholic-nationalist minority". A minority that now accounts for something like 43% of Northern Ireland's population. The Lloyd George government and Sir Edward Carson's unionists were determined to maximise British territory around the then strategically important industrial-military centre of Belfast. They had neither the wish nor the wisdom to take account of the "sympathies" of the catholic-Irish population. Three of Ulster's counties were surgically removed and discarded. To have done otherwise would have jeopardised the protestant ascendancy.

In other words Northern Ireland is a gerrymandered statelet built upon the national oppression of a large, and unwilling, catholic-Irish population. Thesis 7 is perfectly clear: "We do not, and cannot, support the right of the British-Irish majority in the north the oppress the catholic-nationalist minority." That is why we stand as a matter of principle for the immediate abolition of the six-county statelet.

What then of thesis 15? This concerns the future. It is premised on a "united Ireland" which would, if it was to be fully democratic, have to take account of the will, "sympathies" and "legitimate fears" of the British-Irish. Within a united Ireland I therefore advocate a federal solution, whereby a one-county, four-half-county British-Irish province would exercise self-determination. Is this synonymous with present-day Northern Ireland? No. Is it a code words for a "rejuvenated" or "leaner-meaner" protestant ascendancy? No. Is there a contradiction between calling for the abolition of the Northern Ireland statelet and calling for a united Ireland with a British-Irish province? No. Does comrade Delargy need a course in elementary logic? Yes.

Incoherence follows in the footsteps of incoherence. After the bogus claim that there is a contradiction between thesis 7 and thesis 15 comrade Delargy fields a number of insubstantial arguments that are indeed mutually contradictory or simply defy the verifiable lessons of history. "Jack's theses imply, or appear to imply," says the comrade, "that a stable, voluntary and peaceful solution to the Irish question is possible within one, two, or more bourgeois republics of Ireland." Such "naivety", announces comrade Delargy, "is born" of the theory of revolutionary democracy: "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."

Here we have an eclectic mix of right and wrong. No doubt "so long as the capitalist class have both the *incentive* and the *resources* to play the orange card" the British-Irish question will remain a "festering sore". Myself and comrade Delargy are at one on this. However, comrade Delargy is convinced that the antagonism cleav-

ing the British-Irish and the catholic-Irish cannot be resolved, even partially, under capitalism. That is his main point. I profoundly disagree. Northern Ireland is not static. Rather it is the product and site of conflicting class and religio-national-ethnic interests, compromises and struggles. That is why the only thing I am absolutely certain of is that nothing is fixed. Everything is undergoing a process of being and becoming: ie, change.

The capitalist class in Britain and Ireland certainly have a manifest incentive to deliver a peaceful solution. European integration, US super-imperialism, Blairism, the Good Friday deal and Dublin's willingness to drop its claim to be the lawful government of all Ireland signal a new constitutional agreement as a real possibility. Hence despite the irresistible force of Sinn Féin/IRA and the immovable might of unionism the Northern Ireland crisis could *theoretically* be resolved under the conditions of commodity production. Multinational Switzerland, the 1919 Wilsonian reorganisation of Europe, the post-Franco settlement in Spain all testify that this is no flight of naive fantasy. As do the 'velvet' divorces between Sweden and Norway, Denmark and Iceland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Talk of the impossibility of a solution prior to socialism is absurd theoretically and historically counter-factual.

There is also our preferred possibility. The working class taking up the politics of the offensive for the maximisation of democracy: from the capitalist present all the way to communism. Indeed unless the working class fights for consistent democracy, including the equality of all nations and nationalities, in the here and now, there is no hope for proletarian hegemony or proletarian state power. Either way there can *theoretically* be a "stable, voluntary and peaceful solution to the Irish question" under the conditions of capitalism (realised by vying bourgeois politicians due to a common desire to ensure the smooth reproduction of capital or by the revolutionary proletariat as a stage in its uninterrupted struggle for self-liberation).

Worse follows. Comrade Delargy holds that in proposing democratically agreed federal borders within a united Ireland Jack Conrad departs "from the unconditional meaning of self-determination of nations attributed to it by his above-class revolutionary democracy". Obviously in a desperate attempt to rubbish Jack Conrad's 20 theses at any cost comrade Delargy departs from the ABC of democracy. This is a shame, the comrade surely knows better. Communists have no wish to impose borders, to force solutions upon peoples from on high. Does comrade Delargy disagree? For our part communists in the CPGB stand resolutely for democratic solutions to all such problems, not in the name of an "above-class democracy", but in the vital interests of the working class.

Again in his attempt to rubbish Jack Conrad comrade Delargy rubbishes revolutionary democracy and thereby Marxism. He insists that if one sup-

ports my thesis 15 - ie, a federal solution within a united Ireland - "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". He takes my argument to the point of absurdity by holding out the "demand" for protestant street statelets "trapped inside the catholic city states", etc, etc. One might just as well accuse Lenin of such a Russian dolls scenario. He too acknowledged the right of historically constituted peoples to exercise self-determination up to the point of secession. It should not need saying, but neither I nor Lenin call for the formation of ethnically-religiously pure states of any sort. Nor do Leninists want micro-states. Only those who baselessly conclude that peoples from different religious-ethnic backgrounds or nationality cannot peacefully live together would entertain such a bigoted proposition. I believe in the unity of humanity. That said, in the concrete I would argue for *transitional* measures whereby British-Irish and catholic-Irish cities, towns, enclaves and, yes, if necessary, streets, in what is now Northern Ireland, have "far reaching measures of local autonomy" (thesis 13). The wounds and sensitivities of the last 30 years necessitate such a policy of devolution *in extremis*.

Unless he wants to be branded a fraudster comrade Delargy would be well advised to cease his habit of putting stupid formulations into my mouth. Eg: Jack Conrad stands for a "new protestant state for a protestant people". For the umpteenth time I anticipate and favour a united Ireland: that is, one state. Got it, comrade Delargy? Within that republic I advocate a federal arrangement whereby a clear British-Irish majority territorial area in north-eastern Ulster, a British-Irish province, exercises self-determination up to and including the right of secession. It should not need repeating, but it seems I must do so: Jack Conrad is against that right being exercised in favour of separation (independence). Got that too, comrade? Furthermore a British-Irish province is something I would countenance in terms of implementation under two preconditions. Firstly, due to the efforts of democracy - including, I would hope, in Britain - British imperialism has been defeated in Ireland (troops are withdrawn and the treaty of union is annulled). Secondly, the statelet of Northern Ireland has been democratically abolished.

No one is calling for a protestant state for protestant people or grotesquely suggesting that a majority in a British-Irish province has the right to oppress the catholic-Irish minority. Read thesis 17: "There would, of course, still be a catholic-nationalist minority in the British-Irish part of the country. There would also be a British-Irish minority elsewhere in the united Irish republic. We do not advocate a movement of population or ethnically 'pure' states. Whatever the religio-ethnic community, there must be full citizenship rights."

To cap it all, and exposing comrade Delargy's utter befuddlement, he then concedes that "Jack's theses have much to commend them". He writes this amazing closing paragraph: "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."

Again, though he puts garbage into my mouth about "guaranteeing a permanent Protestant majority", here is comrade Delargy's solution *under capitalism*. He is a convert to revolutionary democracy. Unfortunately not a very good one yet, nor a very astute one. Yet what should one expect from a mere novice? To begin his education as one of us can I pose to Tom this straightforward but pointed question: why, before we are prepared to agree to anything short of a centralist Ireland, should the British-Irish be slaughtered by "an overwhelmingly powerful reactionary gang"? Does Protestant blood really have to flow down Shankhill Road in order to get you to propose self-determination?

The antagonism between the British-Irish and Catholic-Irish is not a remote "theoretical" abstraction nor an invention of Jack Conrad's. On the contrary it has dominated Irish politics for much of the last hundred years. The poles of oppression would in all probability be reversed in a united Ireland not brought about by the leadership of the working class.

Communists should not dumbly wait upon the victory of green nationalism, let alone a bloodbath, before we advocate the optimum conditions whereby to bring about the voluntary unity of the British-Irish and Catholic-Irish in Ireland. It is that, let me again emphasise - the unity of peoples, not territory - that I want the working class movement to champion. A federal solution is the most consistently democratic means to cement the rapprochement of Ireland's dichotomised communities. Whether we can realise that fully and completely under capitalism is problematic, of course. Capitalism is inherently undemocratic and constantly turns democracy into a means of lulling the masses and getting the exploited to meekly accept their exploitation. But not to advance such a solution now, immediately, and to inculcate the working class in the spirit of consistent democracy is to desert proletarian socialism, to betray the cause of human liberation.

What of comrade Craig? He has tied himself into mental knots over the British-Irish question and nations in general. To be honest, his whole approach reeks of petty nationalism. I will not waste time refuting his nonsense on the British nation. How this "indisputable" cultural, linguistic, economic and territorial unity of nearly 60 million human beings - who are prodigiously working class - is "reactionary" because of the union jack and the monarchy is beyond me. Nor will I bother with his claptrap about the "real nations suffocating under the rule" of the British nation: ie, England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Without doubt, nations emerge with the rise of capitalism. If the British nation was "forged" in the 17th century, as comrade Craig contends, what then of his pre-modern or ancient English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish nations? Did they have a common language, a common economy, a common culture and, if so, when? Comrade Craig's "real" nations are crude Victorian inventions, designed to mystify the past and divide the working class.

We will swiftly move on. Thank heaven, unlike comrade Delargy, our friend Craig has no objections to a federal Ireland as a matter of principle. No, he boasts when he was snugly in the SWP he "argued the case" for a federal united Ireland. Sad to say, his federal solution is a sham. There is no right of a British-Irish province to self-

determination. As noted above, Craig's reason for the omission is that the British-Irish are not strictly speaking a nation according to Stalin's pre-set criteria.

Such formalism runs counter to the theory and practice of Bolshevism which had no hesitation in giving non-nations like the Cossacks self-determination in the Russian Federation of Soviet Republics (or much bigger, strictly speaking non-nations such as the Ukrainians, Georgians and Armenians). Lenin, as I have shown elsewhere, never felt the need to present his own special definition of a nation. His overriding concern was politics and hence the "sympathies" of the people. According to these sympathies communists should work for "democratically" agreed frontiers along with the "freedom to secede". "Socialism," emphasised Lenin, "gives full play to the 'sympathies' of the population, thereby promoting and greatly accelerating the drawing together and fusion of the nations" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 22, Moscow 1977, p324-5).

Bound hand and foot by comrade Craig's check-list approach, the British-Irish province would have no more rights than one of the 51 states in the USA or a German *Land* such as Niedersachsen or Saxony. Moreover, having been designated a non-nation, the British-Irish, all one million of them, are to be united with the Catholic-Irish by force - it is a calumny that comrade Craig attributes this to me. They are also to be kept imprisoned in a united Ireland using the same means - a calumny he kindly excuses me of.

That 'force before unity, non-force after unity' paradox does explain why he considers my position inconsistent. Of course, in actual fact, I am perfectly consistent: "Communists support the right of a British-Irish federal entity in a united Irish republic to self-determination, but argue against exercising that right in favour of secession. We are for voluntary unity and the growing together of the two traditions in Ireland on the basis of a common struggle for international socialism and world communism" (thesis 20).

It is not the 100,000 legally held firearms in the possession of the British-Irish, their RUC and their irrational hostility to popery and republicanism that frightens me. It is the consequences for the working class project if a united Ireland is achieved using coercion against the historically constituted British-Irish population. As a consistent democrat - ie, a communist democrat - I am for voluntary union and to be voluntary there must be both the right to freely join together and the right to separate. For communists like myself there is a principle when it comes to uniting peoples. We say democracy, not force.

Blood and iron can only bring about the unwilling and therefore transient unity of peoples. It is a recipe not for rapprochement and merger, but religious-ethnic warfare on a scale dwarfing the 'troubles' of the last 30 years. How many on both sides have to die? Ten thousand, 100,000, more? Here, yes, we have the slippery slope that leads to comrade Riley's bureaucratic socialism, the gulags and the deportation of whole peoples. Comrades Riley and Craig - and, one presumes, comrade Delargy - would force freedom upon the British-Irish. If the ungrateful "scabs" - comrade Craig's analogy - resent their freedom so gained and break ranks with the Irish nation ... then presumably these prods should be crushed, butchered or driven into the sea, every man, woman and child.

Underpinning comrade Craig's article is the assumption that economic "trends will decide". The "economic basis" for unionism is "ended". The Irish 'tiger' economy and the interests of the EU, of British and US im-

perialism mean that historically "British-Irish unionism is finished". The comrade admits that "obsolete political arrangements" can hang on for decades, even centuries. But the long and short of it is that Irish unity is certain.

We do not in the least deny the importance of economics. Passing trends are another matter entirely, however. Forty years ago the 26 counties were a sleepy backwater. Go back to the beginning of this century and Belfast and north-eastern Ulster was an industrial-economic powerhouse on a par with Hamburg or Osaka today. A defining feature of economic development under capitalism is unevenness. The 26 counties could prove to be Europe's South Korea and suffer a similar meltdown. Perhaps it will go the way of Singapore? I have no way of knowing. What I do know though is that there is nothing more ridiculous than worshipping or being seduced by current trends. Economically speaking, nation-states are obsolete and have been so since the dawn of imperialism and the rise of finance capital to dominance. There is a global market and global production. Economically the next step for humanity is communism, by way of socialism and the dictatorship (rule) of the working class. Within capitalism the only sure thing as far as I am concerned is that booms are followed by slumps.

There is no need to dwell on comrade Craig's economic trends except to warn him of the trap of confusing economics with politics. Irish unity and the demand for a federal solution do not lie in the realm of economics, but politics in general and political democracy in particular. Hence, in contrast to what comrade Craig appears to argue, it is not economics which leads me to call for the abolition of the union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and a united Ireland. It is to the historic mission of the working class that we communists subordinate all democratic demands, including British-Irish self-determination and Irish unity.

Who are the British-Irish? Comrade Riley has dismissed them as a mere "religious faction" (*Weekly Worker* September 2). Comrade Craig is not so stupid. He discusses the British-Irish in terms of religion; but rightly adds culture, ethnic origins, politics and an historically established territory in north-eastern Ulster too. He even writes of the British-Irish as "Anglo-Protestants", a formulation he uses to describe the "British nation" in Great Britain. Leaving aside the Scottish antecedents of most British-Irish, the key thing to grasp is that, having been planted in Northern Ireland in the 17th century, the settlers quickly "stopped being Scottish or English" and formed a new hybrid Irish identity (thesis 2). The million-strong British-Irish are therefore an historically constituted and distinct community of Irish people. "That calls for a definite political solution" (thesis 6).

Given the palpable antagonism that has existed between the British-Irish and the Catholic-Irish throughout the 20th century, and certainty of this conflict continuing into the next century, it is frankly insane in terms of political strategy for comrade Craig to deny the necessity for the British-Irish to have the right of self-determination. His categories do not enlighten, but blind him.

Comrade Craig deploys the example of Germany. So shall I. Germany has been a nation since at least the middle of the last century though it was finally united by Bismarck and the Prussian monarchy. However, as we all know, in 1945 Germany was *de facto* cleaved into two (leave aside Austria). Federal Germany successfully developed as an integral part of the capitalist world economy. The German Democratic Republic was a relatively prosperous outpost of the

Soviet Union and bureaucratic socialism.

By the late 1980s, however, the GDR was in terminal crisis. Gorbachev had abandoned the Brezhnev doctrine, and the masses in Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden took to the streets demanding radical change. What should communists - real communists, that is - have advocated? Should they have called for an all-German referendum on the basis of the economic unviability of the GDR and the historic existence of a single German nation?

Such a stance would in my opinion violate elementary democracy. There were influential schools of thought in the GDR trying to concoct a 'third way' between capitalism and bureaucratic socialism. Others in the east preferred unity after a lengthy transition so as to avoid economic and moral pulverisation. Undaunted, Chancellor Kohl and his Christian Democrats pushed for immediate unity - and offered handsome bribes. But - and this is crucial - unity was obtained by getting a majority within east Germany, not Germany as a whole. There was, and had to be, a voluntary *Anschluss*. Imagine what would have happened if Kohl had steamrollered through a pan-German vote and refused to abide by the specific will of the *Ossis*.

There is no historical antagonism between the eastern and western peoples of Germany. If anything *Wessis* viewed the *Ossis* as suffering under a foreign heel. Much as the Catholic-Irish pity and empathise with their northern brethren. There is no equivalent of the alienated British-Irish.

Surely if a dull conservative like Kohl recognised the need to proceed with care and caution, taking full account of the wishes of the *Ossis*, should not communists approach the British-Irish problem as consistent democrats, not ham-fisted nationalists? To advocate rights to self-determination for the British-Irish is not to lapse into "libertarianism" or "anarchism", as comrade Craig laughably protests. The British-Irish are not the same as a town, or a street, or some student bedsit, as my polemical opponents insinuate. Nor will they vanish as an historically constituted people with the departure of the last British soldier and the unity of Ireland's territory, as comrade Craig envisages. There has been a long antagonism between the two communities in Ireland which cannot simply be removed along with British imperialism.

Self-determination and federalism are communist solutions to real problems. Comrade Craig does not understand that simple fact. For him formal criteria are everything. Britain is "multinational"; therefore it should be federal. Ireland is one nation, therefore there can be no right to self-determination for the British-Irish minority. Such a rigid and lifeless approach does not serve the workers' movement, neither theoretically nor practically. It is nothing other than economism.

For us British-Irish rights are not something which primarily concern the British-Irish. I do not argue for British-Irish self-determination so as to "pander" to orange or loyalist neanderthals so they will "support a united Ireland". That is ridiculous. No, for communists British-Irish rights are first and foremost about the consciousness of the Catholic-Irish working class. I want what is now a shapeless mass to make itself into a universal class. It will do so by championing the rights of others. Only then can we really begin to seriously talk about the struggle for socialism and communism. All comrade Craig recommends to the Catholic-Irish working class is fighting for the right of the British-Irish to be an Irish minority. That is just what Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael do as Catholic-Irish nationalists. Communists can and must do much more ●

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- 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.

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'Waste of time'

I recommend readers study the latest thoughts from that fount of Marxist insight, Peter Taaffe, the general secretary of the Socialist Party in England and Wales. At a meeting in Leicester on September 13, the comrade is reported as urging that the workers' movement effectively boycott the Socialist Workers Party-organised lobby of the Labour Party conference in Bournemouth on September 26. Here is what he said:

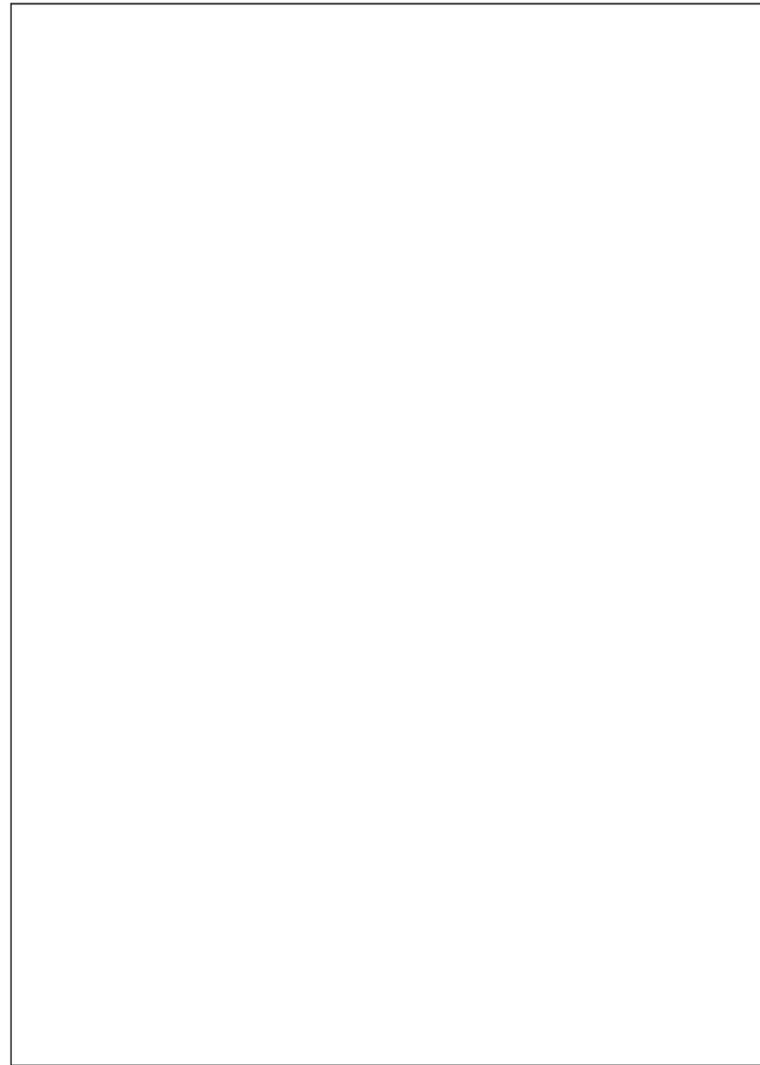
"As Blair is totally isolated from workers - he has his money from big business - the lobby is a waste of time. It won't change anything, no matter how big, no matter how well attended, so, although individual comrades will be attending, we are not supporting the lobby" (*Weekly Worker* September 16).

This is the first public comment on the lobby by a leading member of the SP and will come as a surprise to many of its members. After all, Taaffe is supposed to constitute a factional majority on the party's national committee - against industrial organiser, Bill Mullins - which favours cooperation with the SWP on elections, trade union work, student campaigning, etc (*Weekly Worker* September 9). These public comments - which were expanded upon after the meeting with the pettily sectarian, "Why should we do anything that benefits the SWP?" - cloud the internal SP picture. Not surprisingly Bristol SP branch has been agitating for a "full discussion" to be held, "with documents and outline perspectives" giving "our analysis of the SWP" ("Conference 1999 - resolutions and amendments").

Taaffe's ineptness as a leader is a secondary point. What we have here is yet another example of the growing marginalisation of the SP, something which is bound to deeply demoralise its cadre.

A number of regions and branches of the SP have either tacitly supported the SWP lobby, or at least surprised their Hepscoot Road centre to sponsor it. Taaffe's mealy-mouthed (and thoroughly irrational) outburst places such comrades in a difficult position. Should SPers have been actively opposing the lobby, campaigning against it? And what about the "individual comrades" that Taaffe reports will be attending? Will they be ambling along with the rest of the crowd, or will they be busy with an SP leaflet counterposed to the whole event, supplemented by critical articles in their press pointing out that that the whole thing is a total and utter "waste of time"?

Indeed, if the SP does not do this, surely it can only be acting in pursuit of its own parochial sectarianism, not the wider interests of the movement as a whole. Here is a small mass action organised by what amounts to the largest and most influential revolutionary trend in Britain today. And, according to Taaffe, as it is based on a totally false estimation of the na-



Our class needs unity not sectarianism

ture of Labour, the SWP is in effect sowing dangerous illusions in Blair's party, tying militants to the hopeless project of pressurising it to change.

In fact, all working class activists should critically support the September 26 action. In those trade union branches where we have comrades amendments to the resolution proposed by SWPers have been proposed - and defeated.

Taaffe's comments are foolish on several levels. First, the idea that, "no matter how big, no matter how well attended", the protest by definition cannot change anything because of the nature of the Labour Party's funding is quite idiotic. If for example the streets around the conference centre were clogged with a quarter of a million angry militants, it is a pretty safe bet that Labour would sit up and take notice. Although Taaffe's bluster sounds terribly 'lefty', it is in fact a sign of the disorientation of a group that was for decades ensconced deep in the Labour Party, but now does not know what to do or where to go.

Any bourgeois politician, of practically any regime, is sensitive to pressure from below. Thus, the Socialist Party has organised pickets of the

Indonesian embassy, not because of its illusions in the nature of the Jakarta regime, but to develop concrete solidarity with the revolution, to help exert international pressure.

History underlines that what has actually won influence over capitalist governments - whether of the Labour or Tory stripe - has been only the power, confidence and levels of organisation of the working class. Throughout most of its life, the SP's political forerunners posited the foul lie that the Labour Party was in fact the party of the working class in this country, that the proper relation of militants to it was one of critical loyalty. Taaffe seems to imply that, now he has been kicked out, this party has changed its fundamental nature (see below), and it is no longer worthwhile addressing any protests to it at all.

Again, all we have here is Taaffe articulating the narrow factional interests of the SP, not those of the wider movement. In order to justify its independent existence - and to maintain some semblance of dogmatic coherence - Taaffe has had to claim a qualitative change in the nature of Labour. This may or may not be true, but the problem is how the

SP has arrived at this position. It is a totally unexplained, pragmatic innovation in the 'theory'. In the early 1990s hidden polemics between on the one hand the proponents of a 'Scottish turn' to open work and on the other the Grant-Sewel tendency, which opposed anything that would endanger the "40 years" of consistent work as a loyal component of Labour, Taaffe *et al* were at pains to emphasise that they proposed a "detour", nothing more.

"There is no proposal to abandon a long-term orientation towards the Labour Party and a long-term tactic of entry," the *Militant* editorial board majority stated. "We will have to continue to orientate towards the party and, in the future, when there are developments within the party, the emphasis will once again switch to work within the Labour Party" (*For the Scottish turn: against dogmatic methods in thought and action* September 1991). Indeed, the Taaffeite majority replied with some anger to charges from the Grant-Sewel minority that it was redefining the nature of Labour to justify an ultra-left adventure. This is worth quoting at some length:

"According to the minority, [the open turn shows] that we have written off the Labour Party as the traditional party of the working class and will be putting ourselves on the same level as the sects. This, allegedly, is the theoretical root of our 'false tactics' ... In the long term, especially in Britain where there exists an unbreakable link between the Labour Party and the trade unions, entryism will remain a central plank in our strategy ... The Labour leaders also favour state funding for political parties, and would undoubtedly attempt to introduce this in the event of a Labour government ... How far they will be able to move in this direction remains to be seen. Moreover, even if the right wing were able to sever the close TULP links at local and national level, thus moving the Labour Party nearer to the position of many European socialist parties, this would not in itself end the traditional ties between the Labour Party and the trade unions" (*ibid* pp12-13).

All of which must be pretty embarrassing reading for the likes of Taaffe nowadays. Of course, changing your mind, drawing out the logic of your initial positions, is no bad thing in and of itself. These changes must be openly accounted for, however. Taaffe should explain why under today's conditions - where the link between Labour and the trade unions remains intact - he cannot now even countenance taking part in a demo outside a Labour Party conference, let alone a return to deep entry work.

Further, it is clear that - whatever the opportunist slant of their propaganda - the organisers of this lobby are not under the impression that they are trailing down to Bournemouth in

order the change Tony Blair's mind through a little bit of quiet persuasion. The role of socialists who believe that they have a principled line of march is not to stand aside in a huff from such relatively substantial actions, but to involve themselves, pointing out the limitations and mistakes of the movement.

In general, we organise such actions in the workers' movement not as an expression of some benign dialogue with the establishment, but as a manifestation of our strength ranged against theirs. The turnout on the day will be a concrete measure of this, of course. Moreover, the campaign to build it is itself an important component part of the process of actually enhancing that fighting strength, not simply a passive reflection of it.

This weekend, thousands of socialists, communists and other militants will march through Bournemouth. This imparts a concrete sense of collective strength and organisation. A successful event can bolster confidence, an ingredient that is glaringly absent today. The campaign to build this concrete action forges links between militants, and can deepen the shallow roots of revolutionary organisations in the working class. As a Comintern resolution on the method of work puts it, "when demonstrations ... are underway, it must always be remembered that the organisational experience gained in these campaigns will steadily and surely lead to increasingly firm links with the broad masses" (*Theses, resolutions and manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International* London 1983, p250).

Week after week, *The Socialist* reports the widespread use by SP branches of petitions to local Labour and Tory authorities, SP-organised or supported lobbies of councils and a whole host of other actions. These too would also be viewed as "a waste of time", if the sectarian spirit of Taaffe's anti-SWP snarls were generalised. Taaffe's comment - "Why should we do anything that benefits the SWP?" - is a piece of foul sectarianism.

For example, why should anyone apart from the SP have called for a vote for Lesley Mahmood, Tommy Sheridan and the Scottish Socialist Party or any other Militant Labour/Socialist Party candidate over the last 10 years or so? (Our organisation has made its political criticisms clear, but often supported SP actions and campaigns which we judge to be some sort of step forward for the wider movement.) Taaffe's method is a recipe for paralysis.

Would a large and militant demonstration outside this year's Labour Party conference positively or negatively affect the militant recomposition of the workers' movement? If the answer is the former, then it is incumbent on working class organisations to support it ●