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Taaffe does a U-turn

SPEW's last-minute about-turn on 'supporting' SWP lobby reflects internal crisis

The political instability of Peter Taaffe and his clique were exposed on Sunday's lobby of the Labour Party conference at Bournemouth, organised by the Socialist Workers Party. Members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales were handing out leaflets which completely contradicted what their general secretary had said publicly less than a fortnight earlier.

Speaking in Leicester on September 13, Taaffe responded to an SWP comrade who called on SPEW to back the lobby. He retorted: "As Blair is totally insulated from workers - he has his money from big business - the lobby is a waste of time. It won't change anything, no matter how big, no matter how well attended, so, although individual comrades will be attending, *we are not supporting the lobby*" (see *Weekly Worker* September 16).

As comrade Pat Strong of the Socialist Party reported, Taaffe was rather more blunt in private after the meeting: "Why should we build anything that benefits the SWP?" he asked his cadre. Such disgraceful sectarianism is inexcusable, though explainable. SPEW's national committee has been riven with differences over whether or not to cooperate with the SWP. Industrial organiser Bill Mullins takes a hard anti-SWP stance. And Taaffe dreads another split in his disintegrating 'party'.

True, the SWP puts its own narrow interests way above those of the working class as a whole and routinely refuses to cooperate with the rest of the left whenever it can get away with it. But that is no reason for others on the left to behave in the same way. Of course, the lobby and its platform should have received critical backing.

Half a dozen SPEW comrades from

the south coast were in attendance, distributing the flyer and selling *The Socialist* on September 26. It was, however, a centrally produced leaflet which stated that the lobby "is an expression of anger against government attacks on working people and their families". Our polemic had hit home and had the desired effect.

Clearly Taaffe did a U-turn. He was furious when he read our press. In a rage he flung copies of the *Weekly Worker* across his Hepscott Road office and promised to deal with any members who have the nerve to report his statements - even when they are made in public. What a sorry indictment of SPEW's so-called version of democratic centralism - 'democratic unity'; bureaucratic centralism in reality.

Taaffe decided to make the best out of a bad job. Local members were sent a leaflet, the text of which actually amounted to Taaffe trying to justify Taaffe: "The Socialist Party has consistently pointed out that Blair's Labour Party can no longer be considered a workers' party. It has gone over lock, stock and barrel to the capitalist class ... [Politically Labour has never been a workers' party - in terms of its base and electoral support, however, it remains working-class - PM] "Therefore, whilst the Socialist Party supports this demo against the government, it would have been better if the organisers of today's event had called it as a protest rather than a lobby. A lobby can give the impression that it can change the government's mind by putting pressure on it through the Labour Party conference. In reality, the conference is a completely stage-managed affair, where it is absolutely impossible for the voices of ordinary working people to be heard" (my emphasis).

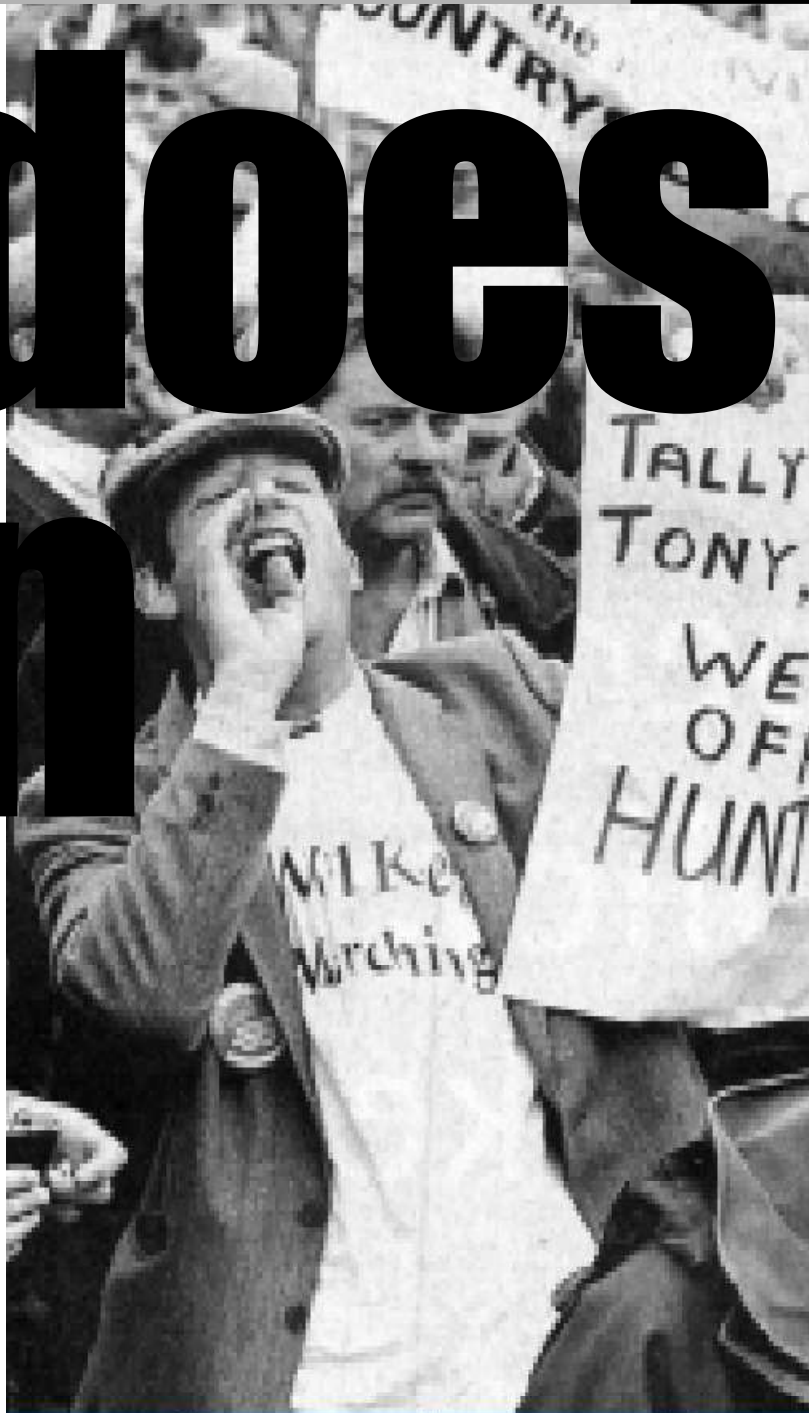
Comrade Taaffe - incidentally a card-carrying Labour Party member for some four decades - could not bring himself to name "the organisers", even though everyone present knew who they were.

A valiant (though unsuccessful) attempt at sophistry: refusing to back "the lobby" while 'supporting' "this demo". The SWP may have dubbed it a lobby, but that did not make it a tame appeal to the Blairites in control of the Labour Party. Around 4,000 demonstrators gathered in Meyrick Park to hear speeches from the platform then set off on an hour-long round trip through the centre of Bournemouth, passing the conference venue without stopping, and returning, Duke of York-style, to the starting-point for more speeches.

The deeply divided SWP leadership is of course at sixes and sevens over its own attitude to the Labour Party. In the 1997 general election it called on workers to "vote Labour or socialist". It seemed for a time that it would take up the electoral challenge and itself stand in the June 1999 EU elections as part of the Socialist Alliance, but it pulled out in London and the North West region, while remaining on the SA list in the West Midlands. It advised its supporters to vote for Scargill's Socialist Labour Party in London only, and backed the Alternative Labour List in East Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside. Elsewhere it gave no advice, leaving it to individuals to decide whether to vote SLP or New Labour.

Nevertheless, the decision to call a 'lobby' was tactically sound. Surely the main aim was to try and influence the Labour left, not "change the government's mind", as SPEW absurdly suggests. Or does Taaffe think that attempting to win over the millions of class-conscious workers who still have illusions of some kind in the Labour Party is also "a waste of time"?

Taaffe was not the only one who tried to put the damper on things. In 1997 and 1998 the SWP organised similar lobbies, but had not done so in its own name. The University College Hospital Unison branch acted as sponsor. But this year retiring gen-



Left, take note: Countryside Alliance four times bigger

eral secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe pulled out all the stops to sabotage it. An August 4 circular instructed Unison branches not to use union funds, "any resources" or even banners in support of the lobby. Thankfully a couple of branches defied his edict. Bickerstaffe - a friend of the *Morning Star* - wants to avoid any embarrassment to Blair at any cost. To all intents and purposes, Taaffe's sectarianism had the same effect - there was no organised attempt by SPEW members or SPEW-influenced trade union organisations to build the lobby.

Well over half the demonstrators were members or supporters of the SWP, although Tony Benn, addressing the post-march rally, made a feeble attempt to disguise this fact: "Not all the people here are Labour Party members," he said, without a trace of irony. "Some are in the SWP or Communist Party." In fact those in Blair's party were few and far between and there were certainly no Labour banners. Similarly there were only a handful of union banners, although the SWP's Yunus Bakhsh, in closing the rally, seemed to believe that there was a sea of them. It was only the union leaders who stayed away in comrade Bakhsh's eyes, and he ended with the announcement that the lobby was - yet another - 'start of the fightback'.

In fact the lobby was distinctly smaller than the events of the previous two years, reflecting the continuing absence of any working class confidence or self-belief, and, linked to this, the ongoing demoralisation of the left. It is a sad reflection of the strength of our movement that the demonstration organised by the right-wing Countryside Alliance just two days later dwarfed Sunday's lobby in terms of numbers.

The SWP and SPEW must recognise the reality that is staring them in the face. There is no "crisis of expectations". I was stopped by two elderly Labour delegates in Bournemouth who demanded to know what the marchers thought they were doing: "Do you want another 18 years in the wilderness?" They said they used to be communists. Seeing no hope for a left alternative, it was a Tory comeback they feared. Latest opinion polls (before the Labour conference) may have registered increasing disappointment with Blair's record, but Labour is still riding high.

In these circumstances there can be no place for go-it-alone sectarianism of either the SWP or SPEW variety. The left must unite - not only at the polls, but first and foremost around the building of a mass democratic centralist party.

Peter Manson

Party notes

I am grateful to the comrade who drew my attention to the website of the Socialist Democracy Group. In the subsection of its 'links' area titled 'the hard left', the web addresses of nine organisations are given along with brief descriptions and political evaluations. In keeping with its assiduously cultivated 'fluffy' and 'non-sectarian' self-image, the critical remarks it directs at most are fairly muted.

For example, the Socialist Workers Party is "not very keen on far-left unity"; the revamped Class War is "somewhat lacklustre" and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty is implicitly criticised for its failure to "oppose Yeltsin's coup in 1992, or Nato's war against Serbia in 1999". The tone of all of this is very much in line with its declared aim of rising above the internecine bickering of a chronically divided left. On the other hand, here - in full - is what the SDG comrades have to say about the *Weekly Worker*: "This poisonous shit sheet denouncing the whole left (including their own correspondents), produced by a bunch of ultra-left nutters with half the price of a printing press, is, nevertheless, a source of (often ill-gained) documents and news of the far left. Wash your hands after reading."

I confess that I am absolutely delighted with this passage and am thinking of reproducing it on a teshirt. The left in this country is characterised by a smug complacency, even as it disappears down the plughole. If the sharp, uncompromising and thoroughly principled open polemic conducted by the Communist Party has blown the cover of this two-faced sect and prompted this cowardly little snarl, I am happy. Moreover, it is so refreshing to see the SDG actually say what it *means* without detour into long pretentious meandering and Delphic formulations. The author is to be congratulated.

The stated aim of the SDG is to aid the formation of a centrist/left reformist "party of recomposition", a strategy to counter the "growing problem of dispersal and fragmentation on the socialist and radical left" (*Socialist Democracy* No1, November 1997). Such "broader and more inclusive formations" would cast off the rotten traditions of "ostracism, denunciation and vicious attacks" (not the one quoted above, presumably) that has been the standard fare of the sectarian left and which in fact is a "gross distortion of the spirit of debate and controversy which pervaded Lenin's party". The SDG - apparently - represents a group of sincere, young (or so they told us) comrades turning their backs on "the heavy-handed, authoritarian regimes which seek to batter down, intimidate and eventually drive out oppositions and even critically-minded individuals" (*ibid*).

I think readers can guess the type of welcome that communists - we "ultra-left nutters" - would receive in the type of party the SDG has in its mind's eye. In fact, we hardly need to draw our conclusions simply from the quoted passage on the group's website. There is also our concrete experience of SDG individual members over the last few years.

Not only does this mushy little sect include unrepentant anti-communist witch-hunters from the days of the Socialist Labour Party; the SDG was actually instrumental in attempting to expel the Communist Party from the London Socialist Alliance in July last year. Then, a document circulated inside the SDG revealed the actual agenda of these 'democrats'. The author was Duncan Chapple, leading SDGer. Tucked away in the inflated verbiage was the call for a purge of the "absolutist" CPGB: it would be better, comrade Chapple concluded, to "find ourselves in the position where we ... are in different alliances" (*Weekly Worker* July 9 1998). It was in 'honour' of this shameful attempt to split the embryonic alliance that we dubbed the organisation the 'Socialist Hypocrisy Group'

- 'open', 'inclusive' and 'democratic' on the outside; deeply sectarian at the core.

Thus, we pointed out the delicious irony that the Chapple document could blithely jabber on in one paragraph that the LSA needed "clear, free, open and participatory discussions to clarify the alliance goals" and in another suggest that it must "select and control those who are within the alliance on the basis of what they bring to it" (*ibid*). If ever there was a formulation to justify "[driving] out oppositions and even critically minded individuals", this is it.

Clearly our exposure still smarts. The snide reference to "ill-gotten documents" reveals as much. In fact, the Chapple piece was supplied to us by an SDGer who suffered a spasm of conscience about the nefarious activities of their organisation.

Apart from what it reveals about the real agenda of the SDG, the website passage itself is hardly worth commenting on, although we are gratified to see that the comrades now believe that we are necessary reading for "news of the far left", even if with surgical gloves on. This represents a more honest appraisal compared to their *printed* estimation of our journal as "irrelevant sectariana" (*Socialist Democracy* No2, January-February 1998).

In many ways, the SDG is an excuse for *not* forming a serious political organisation. However, in conditions of general meltdown, demoralisation and fragmentation, it can have a certain attraction for some. I spoke to a recent recruit who was quite explicit that there were no *good* reasons for joining its ranks: indeed, he agreed with my characterisation of his new political home as "a holding pen for traumatised Trots". This actually is the defining feature of the SDG. Yet, given this period, it is still a danger.

The group has identified as its "best opportunity" for growth and influence an intersection with "the forces emerging from the Militant tradition" (*Socialist Democracy* No7, August-September 1999). We have already reported on SDG hopes at one stage to carve away a section of the remaining Socialist Party organisation in London (*Weekly Worker* May 27 1999). Indeed, we have been told that our article was important in spiking the attempt for the time being.

Splits and individual defections from the Socialist Party so far have been almost uniformly to the right. The SDG is the manifestation in organisational form of that mood of defeat and liquidationism. Its pretensions are to offer a new and 'radical' alternative to the sterile sectarianism of the past. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It was formed casually, by a small group of comrades who split from the Socialist Party, without a hint of anything that could be graced with the title of 'political struggle'. In other words, it came into existence in the same light-hearted, prissy manner in which so many new, immaculately formed little sects regularly appear on the left. Its founding conference advertised itself as "open to anyone who agrees with the need for the construction of a broad, pluralistic socialist party" (*Socialist Democracy* No2, January-February 1998) - "anyone" apart from communists, that is. We were explicitly excluded. In pursuit of its own trademark shibboleth - a right-leaning "party of recomposition" - it has since proved itself willing to split alliances to exclude communists and others on the left who disagree. Exactly the same sort of "ostracism, denunciation and vicious attacks" it claims to abjure.

Thus, although we do not take the website ranting at all seriously, this group is not as innocuous as it claims. In its own way, it is a walking, talking example of many of the things that are wrong with the contemporary revolutionary movement ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

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Expel miscreants

The *Weekly Worker* (September 16) carried an article outlining the result of the debate at the Party aggregate in September regarding the newly termed 'British Irish'. While the article contained the usual spin, it was a fair reflection of the positions taken. The accompanying statement from Jack Conrad, however, was not and contained a worrying trend to vilify those who will not bow down to the great intellectual Party thinker at the first opportunity.

The argument and subsequent non-vote on the theses was caused solely by Conrad right at the end of the meeting (when all amendments had been put and voted on and the chair had called for a vote on the theses), insisting that it be voted on paragraph by paragraph, after the discussion had taken it as a whole. This was quite rightly rejected and it was agreed the theses would 'lie on the table'. Therefore it comes forward to the next aggregate. Why then the need for a special statement?

The name-calling also reflects the way the comrade dealt with opposition at the aggregate. Whilst part of that opposition and one of the principal antagonists, I fully accept that comrades put their views forcefully and sincerely and at times in the heat of the moment resort to 'unparliamentary language'. The carrying it on into print is something else. If Conrad believes that his opponents are imbued with "vicarious Irish nationalism, residual bureaucratic socialism" - ie, Stalinism - then surely he should be taking steps at the PCC to have these miscreants thrown out!

Let's get back to the arguments and stop this nonsense of trying to label everyone who disagrees as somehow politically deficient. This was the method employed by the likes of Healy, the Sparts and - yes - the old official Stalinists of the CPGB. There should be no room for this in the reformed (expunged of Stalinists) CPGB.

Michael Farmer
Rochdale

British-Irish

With his leadership faction giving pride of place to his 'Theses on the British-Irish' at the CPGB aggregates, Jack Conrad can have every confidence that he will achieve a majority in October. This leader of the Party was also provided with highlighted space for a demagogic statement denouncing the opposition as being "amorphous and theoretically weak" and opposed to 'consistent democracy'. Unlike Conrad with his powerful intellect, their ideas apparently stem from "vicarious Irish nationalism and residual bureaucratic socialism".

With Conrad getting his majority, can we expect a future occasion when the stalwarts of the 'CPGB' will carry the slogan 'Arm the British-Irish Liberation Army', while demanding the self-determinational right for Conrad's new 'patchwork Ulster' to be part of a Greater Britain within Ireland?

Dave Norman
London

Nano-smears

I would not plumb the depths, the new political low, of Steve Hedley with the lurid and utterly shameful headline, 'Informer Metcalf's infantile disorder' (*Weekly Worker* September 16). Nor do I need to defend Mark against the worse slur and smear on the character of anyone involved in the workers' movement I have ever read in more than 25 years. He can quite adequately defend himself. Incidentally didn't a "dead Russian" coin the phrase, "infantile disorder"?

If Steve Hedley had written a political reply to a very political statement by Mark Metcalf - which clearly outlines the difference between a bureaucratic, broad left approach to industrial activity and organisation and a rank and file one - I would have written a political reply as my contribution to the debate. But I am not about to start swimming in the murky depths in which Hedley is trying to submerge the debate.

What I will reply to is his snide references to and dig at myself and the Building Workers Group of which I am proud to be secretary. It seems he is engaging in the "nano-sized" argument as a substitute for real political debate. On what authority does he base his assertion that there is only myself and "two other workers in the Building Workers Group"?

If we are so small and by inference have such little influence and impact, how come John Laings took out a high court injunction against us in 1986, which we successfully defied? How come full-time Ucat official Dominic Hehir took out a



high court writ against me in 1996, with the tacit support of the general secretary and executive council, in another attempt to silence us? We saw this off as well. How did I manage to get 15% of the vote in a three-way contest against two broad left candidates officially backed by the union in a recent election to the executive council?

Recently in furtherance of a Ucat recruitment drive I visited dozens of sites and was very well received by literally hundreds of building workers in this process, to the extent of getting an enthusiastic round of applause in a canteen full of groundworkers on one particular site. None of whom were in the union, but quite a few joined. I will be visiting many more sites. Of course I will be delivering a rank and file as well as the official union message. Maybe not if Ucat general secretary Brumwell reads this!

No, I am not isolated from the only people who really matter. The union bureaucrats and their allies in the broad left have undoubtedly tried to put me in political isolation but have not quite succeeded. I am quite physically and geographically isolated by the building employers with my severe blacklisting but refuse to let it stop me agitating and organising.

Brian Higgins
Building Workers Group.

Gramscian

Steve Hedley's appointment to a Ucat official's post, following his dismissal from rail work and, I can only presume, his leaving the RMT union, smacked of Gramscian theory on the nature of trade unions under capitalism, where "A metal-worker's official can pass on indifferently to the bricklayers, the bootmakers or the joiners. He is not obliged to know the real technical conditions of the industry, just the private regulations which regulate the conditions between entrepreneurs and the labour force."

Current pay scales under the construction industry joint agreement range from £4.55 an hour for a general building operative to the craft rate of £6.05 an hour. On average less than Steve Hedley's £17,000, warm office environment and comfortable job security.

Only by a return to the militant rank and file action used in pressing the building workers' charter in 1972 will the beaten, defeatist attitude prevalent on sites for the past decade be lifted. Unfortunately, as I am sure Steve is aware, a sizeable number of construction workers in this country consider trade unions 'a waste of time'.

Jon Tait
Lancaster

Arthur's backing

While I enjoy Simon Harvey's insights into the SLP, I believe he made one small error when he implies that comrade Scargill would not be best pleased to hear that his party's youth section supports violent action such as June's 'Carnival against capitalism'.

I recall, back in the summer, comrade Scargill stated (on the BBC's 'Question time') that he backed the rioters' action "wholeheartedly". I confess to being surprised but he gained a round of applause from me at least.

Ivan Doyle
Oxford

Unprincipled

I have been reading your paper through the internet and I have to congratulate you because you are having very useful discussions.

John Stone (*Weekly Worker* July 22) denounced the League for a Revolutionary Communist International's motives in making a bloc with the Argentinean PTS. I would like to add some information regarding the methods of this organisation. For almost four years the PTS and the LRCI flirted, talking of creating a pole of attraction. None of their discussions were in front of the class.

The PTS also promoted a broader political movement aimed at fusing with many currents to form a non-Leninist grouping. It failed because no significant working class organisation joined them. The PTS is capable of changing lines and political relationships in a very unprincipled way - as does the LRCI.

Gabriel
Argentina

Indonesian crisis

Students show the way

Militant demonstrations last week forced the Indonesian government to back down from the immediate implementation of its new security law. Six civilians and one police officer were killed last Friday as students took to the streets after the outgoing Suharto-era Indonesian parliament passed the ‘state of danger’ draft law. In an attempt to curtail further mobilisations, president Habibie has postponed signing his consent, but has refused to reject it outright - a move expected to provoke further protests.

The security bill, which allows for the Indonesian military (TNI) to take power during unspecified national emergencies for an indefinite period, all but reintroduces the subversion law of 1963, revoked last year in the wake of Suharto’s resignation in May 1998. If introduced, the law will also allow for detention without trial and the abolition of press freedom.

The bill is an attempt by the TNI to reassert its central position in political life before the new parliament, elected in May, opens on October 1. In justification the army is whipping up anti-western, nationalist feelings, as Australian-led UN troops fan out over East Timor. The military is seen to have been humiliated after Habibie’s about-turn two weeks ago and the subsequent withdrawal from East Timor under pressure from the IMF, World Bank and US/EU/Australian imperialism.

While the media in Australia have publicised some of the Indonesian protests against the security bill, they have not attempted to distinguish them from nationalist demonstrations. In general there has been a growing chorus calling for more military spending and a shift in Australian foreign policy towards greater intervention abroad, associated with what has been dubbed the ‘Howard doctrine’.

This envisages ending the ‘special relationship’ with Asian dictatorial regimes.

Advocates of social-imperialism - chiefly the Democratic Socialist Party - dovetail behind this shift in the strategy of the Australian government. The DSP junked basic socialist principles by opportunistically pursuing the line of least resistance and calling for Australian armed intervention - unopposed or opposed.

Yet now the DSP leadership protests about the results. In *Green Left Weekly* Allen Myers writes: “The logic [of the way in which the UN is entering East Timor] is the logic of domination and control. The UN force is seen by the governments of Australia, the United States and other imperialist powers as a *de facto* government of East Timor for an indefinite period.

“East Timor is to become a UN protectorate in much the same way that

Kosova is being made into a Nato protectorate. The aim will be to ensure that the government of independent East Timor, whenever it finally comes into existence, will be a thoroughly tame, predictable and neo-colonial one - a government whose actions will upset neither the generals in Jakarta nor corporate offices in Sydney, Melbourne and New York.”

Did the DSP really think that once imperialist troops had gone in the East Timorese revolutionary movement would flourish? Fretilin is in a similar quandary to the KLA. Having invited the imperialists in, it is in danger of becoming an aid-funded puppet.

Only the communist programme based on the independence of the working class can bring a democratic resolution of the crisis in both East Timor and Indonesia. Last week, the students of Indonesia showed the way forward ●

Marcus Larsen

Blair’s new drugs offensive

The government’s assault on civil liberties continues without let-up. Next on the agenda is compulsory drugs testing for those arrested, whether for drugs offences or not. The idea was aired by both Tony Blair and home secretary Jack Straw at the Labour Party conference in typically disingenuous style - presenting it as a way of helping drug abusers kick their habit and cutting crime.

Crime-cutting is a perennial vote-winner in this alienated and fearful society and, with the next general election on the horizon, New Labour is placing its offensive against drugs-related criminality centre stage. For the Blairites, tackling the ‘causes’ of crime means the introduction of blanket drugs testing of arrested persons.

A positive test result is likely to mean denial of bail for offences where it would otherwise have been obtained. Furthermore the decision to test will lie with the desk sergeant: refusal to take a test would be viewed in the same light as a positive result.

The right to bail will obviously be eroded. Although in law there is a presumption that everyone is entitled to bail, it can be refused by the police or subsequently the courts, but only under certain stipulated conditions (likelihood of failing to appear at court, of committing further offences or of interfering with witnesses).

Interestingly, a leader in *The Daily Telegraph* took an almost democratic position, noting that Blair “seems to have difficulty with the idea of personal freedom ... Being accused of a crime is not the same as being found guilty ... it reverses our entire conception of justice ... we do not expect to be randomly tested for drugs any more than we expect to have our houses randomly searched for stolen goods” (September 28).

The presumption of innocence has been a basic principle, and is why only those defendants whom the courts find guilty ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ can be sentenced. But under Blair’s New Labour those who are arrested and then found by mandatory urine or blood test to have taken illegal substances are refused bail: they are clearly being punished before judicial proceedings have started. A positive test result alone will put one’s liberty in jeopardy.

Only certain drugs such as tobacco and alcohol can be countenanced by our rulers - illegal ones like cannabis, LSD, ecstasy, amphetamines, heroin and cocaine are presented, along with their lower class and younger users, as the greatest evil facing Britain. This was one of the main thrusts of Tony Blair’s speech in Bournemouth. Before and after his speech the bars at the conference centre were of course full to overflowing with delegates, the press and lobbyists swilling booze like there was no tomorrow.

But millions - especially youth - are frequent recreational users of cannabis, LSD and ecstasy. A smaller number like heroin and cocaine. Naturally all drugs have their dangers, whether they are legal, like valium, alcohol and tobacco, or illegal. How-

ever, a great many of the problems associated with illegal drug use would be greatly lessened if not removed altogether by legalisation. The impurities present in illegal drugs, diluted or ‘cut’ with inert or even grossly harmful substances, are responsible for a high proportion of those suffering bad effects; and indeed the high cost because of their very illegality

propels some users into criminal activity.

We challenge the state’s right to dictate what we shall or shall not do with our bodies: by doing so we start to challenge its right to exist. These anti-democratic and unjust proposals on drugs tests must be strongly opposed ●

Jim Gilbert



Fighting fund

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Act now!

As we go to press, we are on the brink of breaking through the £400 barrier and meeting our monthly fighting fund target. Last week’s postbag netted us £70, leaving us tantalisingly close at £397.

September’s fund closes on Friday October 1. Comrades, there is still time to phone through details of your last-minute donations. We have a real chance of making up our summer shortfall if you act as soon as you read this.

Among the welcome gifts received this week was one from an anonymous reader who thrust a £20 note into the hands of a *Weekly Worker* seller on last weekend’s lobby of the Labour Party conference in Bournemouth. Thanks also to TG (£20), RF and DS (£10 each) ●

Robbie Rix

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

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action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday October 3, 5pm - ‘Capitalism and the bourgeois paradigm’, using Ellen Meiksins Wood’s *The pristine culture of capitalism* as a study guide.

Sunday October 10, 5pm - ‘Trade unions and the international’, using Hal Draper’s *Karl Marx’s theory of revolution* Vol 2 as a study guide.

Call 0181-459 7146 for details.

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

■ Freedom for East Timor

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

■ Drivers’ rights

‘Say no to driver fatigue’. Demonstration organised by TGWU in protest at long hours. Tuesday October 5, 12 noon, Bluebirds banqueting hall, 137 Snargate Street, Dover.

■ Defend Southwark housing

Public meeting - ‘Homes, not profit’. Thursday October 7, 7pm, North Peckham Tenants Hall, Daniel Gardens, Sumner Road, London SE15.

■ Hands off the tubes

Family day in Trafalgar Square: Saturday October 9, 12 noon to 4pm. Music, campaign stalls, exhibitions, speakers. Organised by Campaign against Tube Privatisation.

■ Glasgow Marxist Forum

Public meeting and discussion: ‘Ireland peace process in crisis. What is the socialist view?’ Speaker from Socialist Democracy, Belfast. Thursday October 14, Partick Burgh Halls, 7.30pm. 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.

Jack Conrad's theses on Ireland have two significant innovations. First, they advocate the right of self-determination, including the right to create its own state, for a people who the author recognises do not constitute a nation. Second, they propose to give that right to the British-Irish. I would argue that for Marxists self-determination is only applicable to nations and it is not a universal principle. To accept that an ethnic group should have that right would mean a significant alteration in Marxist principle, even more when it is a case of a privileged community whose benefits have been achieved through backing the imperial power at the expense of the rest of the same nation.

In order to clarify the differences I would like to start by stating where I agree with Jack:

- The British-Irish are not a nation - they were and are a privileged segment of the Irish nation which oppressed the catholics, nationalists and republicans and served Britain against the Irish nation's right of self-determination.

- Six Counties Ulster is a reactionary, segregationist and oppressive statelet created by British imperialism against the will of the overwhelming majority of the Irish nation.

- The struggle of Irish republicans, despite its democratic and national bourgeois limits and often wrong methods, was and is a legitimate anti-imperialist cause.

- Britain must withdraw immediately from every part of Ireland, allowing this nation to re-unite.

It is important to clarify some concepts. Jack is demanding an extension of the right of self-determination to ethnic communities. There is a big difference between nations and ethnic groups. The first is constituted by groups of people, divided by antagonistic classes, who share the same territory, a common history and many cultural, linguistic (this could be one or more languages) and economic links. The second is a group of people who share only *some* of these characteristics. They could be based around a common faith, descendants, race, roots in another country, languages, customs or cultural manifestations. In many societies some social classes, occupations or strata have overlapped with what are today considered ethnic groups.

Every nation has many ethnic groups or communities. Britain has hundreds of them. Some British communities (like the Afro-Caribbean or muslim) are larger than the British-Irish. Marxists must demand the right for every community to cultivate their own languages and dialects, to have their own schools and associations, to freely practise their cults - as well as the right not to be segregated on racial, linguistic or religious grounds - and other democratic rights. However, we are not in favour of giving them the right to form their own state. There are *tens of thousands* of ethnic groups all over the planet and it is simply impossible to advocate their right to form sectarian, ethnically-based states which would create several other problems. When 'rights' for some of these communities could mean trampling over the rights of other communities, we are not going to back them. For instance, we do not defend the right of the white British to put quotas on coloured people or immigrants.

In fact imperialism created many communities as tools to impose its dominance. They were privileged strata based on native inhabitants or immigrants. There were one million French descendants in Algeria. Most of them came from poor backgrounds. However, Algerian anti-imperialists correctly were against giving them the right of self-determination.

Today Britain has other enclaves in lands that it took from other countries.

British-Irish debate

Bourgeois democracy or socialism

Do oppressor communities have the right to create their own states? **José Villa** accuses Jack Conrad of sacrificing the rights of the majority

In Gibraltar, the Malvinas or other Caribbean or oceanic islands a significant proportion or even most of the population would not like to separate from what was the largest overseas empire.

The USA has several political-military bases over the planet. In Guantánamo and Panama it has its own enclaves. Perhaps a significant proportion (or even a majority) of the local population would like to keep the dominance of the world's mightiest power instead of returning to their former backward semi-colonial countries. However, communists should support the right of Cuba or Panama to expel the yankees and to retake their own territories. If tomorrow Puerto Rico votes for independence we would not recognise the right of a section of that island that wished to become part of the USA.

Perhaps Jack could point out that these pro-imperialist communities could not be compared with the British-Irish, who have a 300-year tradition. It might be interesting to study the case of the Boers and the white Anglo-South Africans. The white settlers arrived in South Africa more or less at the same time as the British settlers crossed the Irish Sea. While the different Irish communities are part of the same nation, speak the same language and share many racial and cultural features, the Afrikaners and white Anglo-South Africans spoke different languages and had strong racial, cultural and even national differences in relation to the rest of the population. There are at least 12 linguistic-national groups and the Afrikaners have their own common, fully developed language.

The whites represent a similar percentage of the South African population to the British-Irish in relation to the whole of Ireland. They also dominate entire regions. Many racial segregationists insisted on allowing the Boers national self-determination, including the right to have their own state.

In South Africa anti-imperialists were against giving the whites any right to self-determination and were also against the Bantustans. We were against the white capitalist segregationist project of dividing the South African peoples amongst racial or national-linguistic groups.

Marxists wanted to win as many workers as possible from the white population (at least five times larger than the British-Irish), but they never advocated self-determination for the Boers or Anglo-South Africans. They knew that the white proletariat was privileged and had better wages than their black brothers and sisters and that the best way to win them was in the fight for better social and economic conditions and to end the segregationist, authoritarian state

through building an equal and multi-ethnic society.

Many leaders of the ANC, SACP and other left organisations were whites. The progressive whites did not fight for a separate state in which the European descendants could cultivate their own culture because it would mean a state based on the most reactionary layers and against the rest of the population.

The right of self-determination is not a universal principle even for nations. When the right of a nation to build its own state could only be realised through oppressing other nations we should not support that right. An Afrikaner or white Anglo-South African state could only be achieved through suppressing the national rights of the Southern African peoples. That is why we demanded of the Euro-Africans in Zimbabwe, South Africa and other black countries that they should accept majority rule.

We do not support the right of Sikhs to create their own Khalistan at the expenses of Punjabi Indians. In Palestine we do not support the right of the Israeli Hebrews to establish their own separate state. The country was built up through expelling most of its native population. Four million Jews were gathered together from all over the world and, despite their huge linguistic, ethnic, cultural and historical differences, were trying to unite in one single nation against the Arabs. If we recognise the Israeli state we would recognise its rights over Palestinian lands and over the expulsion and segregation of four million Arabs, and we would support the right of a religious community to create a country based on the old testament. In Palestine we are for a multi-ethnic workers' state in which the toilers of all communities (christian and muslim Arabs, oriental, Arab; western, Russian and black Jews; Druses, Beduins, etc) would be equal.

Jack believes that the best way to win some support amongst an oppressor community is to advocate their democratic right to secede and create their own state if they wish to do so. The problem with that idea is that it walks all over another democratic principle: the rights of the majority of the same nation.

We cannot equate the rights of the oppressed with those of the oppressor community. Furthermore, such 'rights' are frequently in contradiction with those of the majority. For example, the capitalist 'democratic' right to hire and fire workers or to acquire property and capital is in absolute antagonism with the workers' democratic rights to job security, better living conditions and control of the means of production. In the case of South Africa, Palestine or Ireland the right of self-determination for the oppressor people would affect the right of self-determination for the oppressed.

Jack says that there are one million British-Irish and that they ought not to be directly identified with loyalty to the

queen or with protestantism. Although both aspects are dominant trends inside that community, what distinguishes that people from the rest of the Irish is that they are mainly descended from former British settlers and have some cultural allegiance to Britain.

For Jack, if we became the champions of the democratic rights of that privileged community we might be able to split it, and the cornerstone of such rights is to accept their possible wish for a new partition of Ireland. Tom Delargy pointed out that Jack's theses have two contradictory points. It is not possible to reconcile the right of self-determination of the Irish nation as a whole with the right of its pro-British layers to veto it and to re-divide the nation and the country (*Weekly Worker* September 16).

For decades or even centuries the Irish nation has overwhelmingly, continuously and repeatedly expressed its democratic desire to have its own united republic. It is not acceptable to turn this reality on its head - converting the minority's pro-imperialist veto into a democratic decision imposed against the majority.

For eight centuries Britain ruled Ireland. Its domination was so ruthless that several rebellions were crushed in blood. Britain caused the death of more than one million during the potato famine and today more than 80% of Irish descendants do not live on the island. In 1921 the orange statelet was created as a reactionary colonial outpost against the wishes of the great majority of the Irish nation. It was established in two thirds of Ulster, where the pro-British were a tiny majority. The Irish catholics, nationalists and republicans remained second class citizens, suffering discrimination in jobs, housing and state employment, and terror and abuse from the British army, the RUC and the paramilitaries.

If Irish national consciousness was defined in the struggle against British imperialist domination, British-Irish consciousness is defined in the struggle for defending what was the largest overseas empire against its first and last colony (Ireland). The British-Irish want to be more British than the British.

Like many other peoples who have benefited from imperialism at the expense of a native population, their allegiance to the imperialist motherland has hardened. The political representatives of this community are united in their desire to keep their privileges, to smash the IRA (the main armed force that prevented their total domination), and to veto national reunification.

In order to win some sympathy amongst the British-Irish Jack proposes that revolutionaries should accept repartition if they decide not to

be part of a united Ireland. He even suggests a formula in which the northern Six Counties would be divided in half: one county and four half-counties for each community. This alternative would not satisfy anybody and would not solve any problem. The orange state would be reduced by approximately a half but with a more concentrated British loyalist majority. The loyalists would feel resentment against the Irish catholics for taking some of their post-1921 territory, and this would increase their desire to be part of the UK. The Irish nationalists would still be unhappy because the island would still be divided and many catholics would remain in ghettos inside the British-Irish state. Sectarianism and communalism would persist.

Jack repeatedly uses the example of the Russian Cossacks. They were the tsar's most reactionary tools against the workers and the oppressed nations. If the Bolsheviks granted a soviet republic to them, why could we not allow the same right to the British-Irish? Jack confuses many things. First, the Bolsheviks were against giving any national or democratic rights to the Cossacks. Even more, at the beginning of the civil war they said that all the Cossacks were a reactionary stratum that needed to be smashed. In the course of the war Lenin realised that it was possible to split this mass around social and class questions. Later on, *when the reds defeated them*, Lenin imposed the victors' conditions. The Cossack elite was expropriated and a non-sovereign *Soviet* republic based on the oppressed Cossack labourers was established in the middle of Russia as part of the Soviet federation. The Bolsheviks would never ever accept the right of a reactionary and segregationist Cossack state to secede.

Today Jack is advocating a principle that the Bolsheviks never fought for: the right of an ethnic group to secede, and, even worst, the right of an oppressor community to create its own state against the wishes of the majority of their oppressed nation. A British-Irish state created in this capitalist system and without a revolution would be a continuation of the same orange segregationist and ultra-reactionary statelet. Advocating democratic rights for an oppressor community means denying democratic rights to the oppressed nation as a whole.

A big problem that the CPGB has is the way in which it deals with the question of bourgeois democracy. It raises it as a universal principle. Jack is in favour of federal bourgeois republics in Britain and Ireland. The struggle for a pure bourgeois democracy has led to the immolation of the democratic rights of the majority of the Irish nation. In addition it creates a barrier between democratic and socialist demands. The only way to achieve full democracy and national rights is to expropriate the ruling class and to socialise the means of production. A real solution to the constitutional, national and social issues in the British-Irish islands could only be achieved when the capitalist class is expropriated through a socialist revolution and a federation of workers' republics.

However, the CPGB's programme stands for a bourgeois democratic stage. Its central goal is to sort out the monarchy's crisis, advocating a pure bourgeois solution: a federal republic. Marxists should not propose replacing the UK with another kind of capitalist federal state *à la* Germany or USA. Unfortunately, anti-capitalist revolution, socialism and a federation of workers' republics are absent from the CPGB's day-to-day programme. Adapting to bourgeois democratic principles means sacrificing the struggle for democratic rights for the oppressed majority and for a socialist alternative ●

Still defending Serbia

Inversion of Marxism

Comrade John Stone is an intelligent man, who has written good articles for this paper. All the more disappointing, therefore, that his latest contribution (Letters *Weekly Worker* September 23) is an incoherent ramble, characterised by all that is most bone-headed and philistine about a certain kind of Trotskyite 'thinking'.

The comrade's letter was prompted by my piece on East Timor (*Weekly Worker* September 16), in which I drew certain analogies between the conflict in the Balkans and the situation in Indonesia, between the KLA and Fretilin. At the heart of Stone's riposte is the question of how Marxists should categorise the rump state comprising Serbia and Montenegro. He describes it as "a former degenerated workers' state that had been transformed into a new bourgeois state ... 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".

What are we to make of this? It is good that the comrade recognises that Serbia is a bourgeois state. Good too that he is honest enough to place 'socialist federation' in quotes. But this concession to truth is a parenthetical aside. The comrade's head may tell him one thing, but his heart yearns for the old certainties, whereby Yugoslavia/Serbia, as a "degenerated workers' state" must be defended unconditionally by Marxists.

Not only is the comrade's formulation inelegant, it is not even correct in terms of Trotskyite scholastics: he should know that the epithet 'degenerated' is reserved for the USSR; that the other former 'socialist' states of eastern Europe are categorised as 'deformed', on the basis that their political structures were marred by bureaucratic distortions from birth. Let us not quibble, however. We know what Stone is talking about and we assume he does too.

His position derives, of course, from Trotsky's writings on the USSR, and at this point I hope readers will forgive me if I explore what, for many, will already be familiar territory. It is important to get matters straight, because comrade Stone's variant of Yugoslav defencism is objectively much the same as that adopted during the Balkans conflict, not just by other Trotskyites, but by 'official communists' who would shudder at the thought that their position rests on the theories of the great apostate from 'Marxism-Leninism'.

As we all know, even after 1933, when he called for the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalin regime, even after the foundation of the Fourth International, even after the German-Soviet non-aggression pact and the occupation of eastern Poland and the Baltic states by the Red Army, Trotsky still persisted in calling for the unconditional defence of the USSR. The twin pillars supporting his argument that the USSR still constituted a workers' state were the great gains of October and of the Soviet working class: namely the existence of nationalised property and a planned economy. Thus, he wrote that "in spite of monstrous bureaucratic distortions, the class basis of the USSR remains proletarian" (LD Trotsky *Stalin* New York 1967, pp405-6), and that "In general and on the whole the new economic base is preserved in the USSR, though in a degenerated form" ('The world situation and perspectives' *Writings*

of Leon Trotsky 1939-40 New York 1977, p156).

There is no doubting that Trotsky was a masterly Marxist dialectician, perhaps even a genius, but he was wrong about the USSR and his characterisation of the Soviet Union as a workers' state now seems grotesque. Any objective observer must note the amalgam of contradictions and the internal incoherence on the subject. Let us begin with Trotsky's repeated emphasis on property forms. Trotskyism has consistently made a fetish of *property forms* instead of giving adequate attention to the real social relations of *production* - their focus has concentrated on the relation between *having* rather than *being*, on *things* rather than *human beings*.

So far as nationalisation is concerned, it is immediately apparent that the notional social ownership of the means of production by 'the people' - a form of 'socialist property' to which Trotskyites attach such significance - was indeed purely *formal*. 'Ownership' is one thing, control another. Given the absence of even the most primitive forms of democracy, control over the means of production was exercised exclusively by the party and the bureaucratic apparatus.

That the social ownership of the means of production could be emancipatory in form but exploitative in content was a contradiction that Trotsky himself recognised. The Stalinist bureaucracy may have been, in his terms, only a morbid growth on the body of the working class, but "The Soviet bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically in order by methods of *its own*, to defend the social conquests ... The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy. If these as yet wholly new relations should solidify, become the norm and be legalised, whether with or without resistance from the workers, they would, in the long run, lead to a complete liquidation of the social conquests of the proletarian revolution" (*The revolution betrayed* New York 1989, p249). This is precisely what had already happened, in the USSR, and was so from the beginning in the eastern bloc states, including Tito's Yugoslavia.

So far as planning is concerned, the same contradictions are apparent. If we define planning - which as Marxists we surely must - as the conscious and direct regulation of society by the associated producers themselves, it is self-evident that without democracy there simply can be no planning at all. What was *called* planning in the USSR and eastern bloc countries was in fact the direction of production and distribution by the bureaucratic administrative-command apparatus. Again, Trotsky himself was ambivalent on the matter. The first chapter of *The revolution betrayed* can be read (and is disingenuously quoted by Stalinists like Harpal Brar) as a paean of praise to the "gigantic achievements in industry" and "enormously promising beginnings in agriculture" that took place under Stalin (*ibid* p8). But later in the same book, Trotsky emphasises that "the political lever in the form of a real participation in leadership of the interested masses themselves, a thing which is unthinkable without soviet democracy", is an essential precondition for real planning (*ibid* p66).

Trotsky specifically uses the category of 'administrative planning' to

differentiate the activity of the Stalin bureaucracy from the real thing. Time and again, for instance in his article 'Does the Soviet government still follow the principles adopted 20 years ago?' (*Writings of Leon Trotsky 1937-8* New York 1976, p217), Trotsky insists that democracy is the one and only conceivable mechanism for running a socialist society. From this viewpoint, it can readily be seen that planning in these terms never existed in Stalin's USSR or the other eastern bloc countries. The vital ingredient - direct, democratic participation by the working class - was absent.

In the light of the above, we can say that the twin pillars of Trotsky's defence of the USSR as a 'degenerated workers' state' were made of sand, but there are many reasons why we can and should forgive him for his mistakes.

Those 'official communists' like the CPB's Robert Griffiths who now plagiarise an unacknowledged Trotsky and his theory of the 'degenerate workers' state' for their own purposes pass over in silence Trotsky's insistence that the social ownership of the means of production and the existence of planning in the USSR could never be in and of themselves sufficient for *socialism*. He considered them a necessary, but not a sufficient, precondition. For Trotsky, however great the gains of October, they existed within the framework of a *transitional* state formation characterised by the absence of democracy and by the rule of a bureaucratic elite. Only the overthrow of this elite and the recapture of power by the proletariat in a revolution could introduce the conditions that would make socialism possible.

The point is made clear in his discussion of the occupation of eastern Poland and the Baltic states. Emphasising once again the centrality of property forms, Trotsky says that "Our *general* appraisal of the Kremlin and the Comintern does not, however, alter the *particular* fact that the statification of property in the occupied territories is in itself a progressive measure." But he goes on to say that "In order that nationalised property in the occupied areas, *as well as in the USSR*, become a basis for genuinely progressive - that is to say *socialist* - development, it is necessary to overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy" (*In defence of Marxism* New York 1973, p19). Furthermore, he later makes the point that "the USSR minus the social structure founded by the October Revolution would be a *fascist* regime" (my emphasis *ibid* p53). Here lies the basic contradiction in Trotskyite and neo-Trotskyite thinking *vis à vis* the USSR. We do not need to describe the USSR under high Stalinism as fascist in order to accept the essential correctness of Trotsky's reasoning. The October Revolution ushered in a "social structure" based on elected and recallable soviets and workers' and peasants' democracy. By the mid-1930s that "social structure" had been completely eliminated. Only an outer husk of names remained. Whatever the exact date of the counterrevolution, it is surely undeniable that without democracy and the rule of the working class, no state - even if it has abolished private ownership of the means of production and introduced 'planning' - can legitimately lay claim to be proletarian or socialist.

In this light, the attempt by comrade Stone and many others on the Trotskyite and 'official communist' left

to defend Serbia on the basis that it is *any* kind of workers' state is fatally flawed: any reliance on arguments adduced by Trotsky concerning 'degenerate' or 'deformed' workers' states is demonstrably unsustainable, except on the basis of his evident mistakes.

The only recourse left to them, as comrade Stone's letter also illustrates, is a Pavlovian anti-imperialism, whereby *any* regime, no matter how despicable, must be defended simply on the basis that it is under attack by the forces of imperialism. As the comrade writes in his letter, "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." It is interesting to hear the comrade claim that "Marxists defended Kosovar rights to secede from capitalist Serbia". To be sure, *some* of us Marxists did, but many, including comrade Stone - unless my memory deceives me - did not, or at least his position on the question was marked by equivocation. Was it not comrade Stone who wrote: "We believe that the Kosovars have the right of self-determination, but in the context of imperialist attack against a non-imperialist country revolutionaries have to subordinate this principle to that of defending an oppressed nation (Yugoslavia) against the world's bosses" (*Weekly Worker* July 22)?

It is difficult to think of a more sterile, useless and fundamentally unprincipled approach to the problem of supporting the right of oppressed peoples to self-determination: support the right 'in principle', but the moment their oppressor falls out with the imperialists, forget it: subordinate everything to the paltry maxim that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. Leaving aside Serbia for a moment, applying the same approach means that so long as a single US or British missile lands on Iraq, for example, then the rights of the Kurds to *life*, let alone mere self-determination, must be 'subordinated' to the principle of supporting Saddam Hussein's noble struggle against "the planet's bosses".

Fortunately for comrade Stone, however, he is excused in his own mind from siding with Jakarta against the same bosses, because "Indonesia peacefully accepted the intervention of UN troops in an occupied territory which has just voted for independence". The implication is clear: if imperialism had not succeeded in "peacefully" persuading the Indonesian regime to comply, if the UN or Nato had decided to bomb Habibie into submission, revolutionaries would have been obliged to 'defend Indonesia'. Surely the fact that East Timor was "an occupied territory which has just voted for independence" (a reasonable approximation to the situation in Kosova) would have to be 'subordinated' to defending "an oppressed nation ... against the world's bosses". Or would it, comrade Stone?

To return to comrade Stone's letter, he begins by taking issue with me for supposedly "characterising both the progressive Fretilin and the reactionary KLA as national liberation movements who should be supported". I did indeed refer to Fretilin as "in some respects the equivalent of the KLA". As every reader must know, in the course of many articles earlier this year the CPGB gave its support to Kosovar independence and to the

struggle of the KLA. We did so without any illusions in the petty bourgeois nationalist orientation of the KLA's politics and its request for assistance from Nato forces (comrade Stone insisted on seeing only those aspects and therefore considered the KLA to be simply "reactionary").

In his eagerness to support his assertion that the KLA was "a direct tool of imperialism", comrade Stone resorts to statements that are - how can one put it? - counter-factual. For example, he writes that "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". This is just fantasy. If, as the comrade states elsewhere in his letter, the Kosovars wanted "to secede from *capitalist* Serbia" (my emphasis), then how can such an aspiration be described as "counterrevolutionary"? The old nostalgia is showing through once more.

The dichotomy which comrade Stone attempts to create between Fretilin on the one hand - "a legitimate anti-imperialist guerrilla movement" - and the KLA on the other - "armed and financed by the west ... it was the main imperialist local puppet" - is clumsy and false. If the west had a puppet - or at least a useful and compliant client in the region - then that position was filled for quite some time by Stone's beloved Slobodan Milosevic. Under whose aegis, and with whose aid, does the comrade imagine that Milosevic turned rump Yugoslavia into a "bourgeois" and "capitalist" state?

Go back only a year or so and you find that the KLA's ideological hero and model was the Stalinist, Enver Hoxha; Fretilin also has a leftwing past. But *both* groups are *now* characterised by right-moving, petty bourgeois nationalism. If the comrade has any doubt about this in respect to Fretilin, he should read reports of that organisation's attempts to reach a cosy compromise with Jakarta and of its agitation for an imperialist-led intervention force. East Timor under Fretilin will surely be an Australian neo-colony.

The comrade's fundamental problem is that he turns everything upside down. Rather than beginning with life - with all its dialectical complexity and contradiction - and then proceeding to formulate appropriate categories, he begins by dusting off a few 'time-honoured' categories from his impoverished and distorted lexicon of Trotskyism and then tries to impose them on reality. The inevitable result is not just a *perversion*, but an *inversion* of Marxism.

It is this approach which blinds him to some obvious Marxist insights into the situation in both Serbia and East Timor. Under present conditions, in which the working class across much of the world is atomised and passive, and where not a single major country has a workers' party worthy of the name, it is inevitable that the spontaneous consciousness of oppressed peoples like the Kosovars and the East Timorese will lead them into the illusion of believing that their liberation from tyranny (be it Serb or Indonesian) can be delivered by Nato or the United Nations. It is the duty of communists and revolutionary socialists (of whom the comrade is one) to support the freedom struggles of *all* such oppressed peoples, regardless of their illusions. ●

Michael Malkin

Communism is no

Is Communism a utopia? The answer to the question depends on what we mean by communism and what we mean by utopia. My own attitude is that it is not a utopia. Communism concerns control. It envisages a different way of controlling our social interchanges, our relationship to nature. The moment I speak of control, the question arises: what sort of control? In the past it was assumed that political control would do the trick. Now we know from bitter experience that it did not, that it could not succeed.

If you look around the world today, most of the former communist parties have abandoned the name 'communist'. The original CPGB now calls itself the 'Democratic Left'. God knows how long that will stay. And if you think of one of the most important communist parties of the past, the Italian CP, it has disintegrated. It has become reduced to something meaningless, a government party. The prime minister of Italy today is a former communist, but he would run away from any suggestion that he might have anything to do with communism.

That is the reality of what happened in the last 10 years. If we look at the former Soviet Union and the east European countries, there has been a complete change, a complete abandonment of all principles. The former communist leaders of eastern Europe have turned themselves into capitalists, who parasitically profit from former state property, transferring it to themselves or their offspring. It is quite scandalous, but this is what happened.

The problem goes deeper when we think of how Stalin defined communism. For him, communism meant overtaking the United States in coal, pig iron and steel production. How seriously can you take any notion of 'communism' which defines the idea in such totally vacuous and utterly fetishistic terms. You can double the United States pig iron production, and you have not moved one inch in the direction of communism. This shows the difficulty. Even if you have a political organisation which calls itself communist, as the former Soviet Communist Party and others did, that does not give you any guarantee that its ideas can be taken seriously.

On the other side - the utopia side - you have serious problems. In one sense I sympathise with the people who say we definitely have to accept that utopia has value. That under the present miserable conditions, we have to envisage a social transformation which shows something beyond it. And if they call us utopian for that reason, so be it. We accept it. One of those who took this position was Marcuse. Some of his writings on the subject are brilliant. But what happened later? Poor Marcuse realised that the kind of strategy he envisaged, and his way of talking about the agency of social transformation which could take us to this idealised state of utopia, were identified with students and outsiders in general. His theorem turned out to be very utopian in another sense - he became an extreme pessimist. Towards the end of his life, in his last works, such as *The aesthetic dimension*, he embraced a totally pessimistic view of the world, saying that it was not made for man, that it had not become more human, that there are only islands of good in the sea of evil, to which one can escape for only short moments of time.

In the Marxist tradition, from the

István Mészáros, the noted Marxist thinker, gave this opening to this year's Communist University

beginning, utopia was questioned and criticised. The most sustained work was Engels's long essay on the development of socialism from utopia to science. Engels stressed that the utopian conception of socialism - found in Owen and the French socialists - envisaged a way of establishing a new social order which would be the product of enlightened, far-sighted people capable of persuading others that such a society was good and worth striving for. It was a sort of moral appeal, a set of ideas that would produce a great change in society. Marx asked the question, who is going to educate the educators, what are the circumstances under which the conditions become favourable for this kind of enormous leap from the existing social framework?

There are those who would throw out the baby with the bathwater. If you think of more recent approaches, this idea - from utopia to science - was carried to the extreme by those who dismissed any element of social value. Moral values became labelled as negative and unscientific. A false opposition was made between science and values. Yet there is no way of avoiding the realisation that when we talk about a different kind of society - communist society - that involves values. The realm of freedom is not something that simply falls out of the sky and hits us, and then everything is all right. It is a very complex social transformation, and at the same time involves a certain conception of humanity and its conditions of existence. Take this quotation, where Marx is talking about the realm of freedom:

"The realm of freedom actually begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his needs, to maintain and reproduce his life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all forms of society and under all possible modes of production. This realm of natural necessity expands with his development, because his needs do too; but the productive forces to satisfy these expand at the same time. Freedom, in this field, can consist only in this, that socialised man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis" (K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, London 1981, pp958-9).

Here you have a total contrast to what we experience today. It is *value-laden*, an aspiration towards which we have to strive. Unless you do that, you remain imprisoned by so many shackles of the realm of necessity. The notion that science by itself can achieve it is fetishistic and technol-

istic. Even the greatest achievements of science can be turned to the most negative use. Just think of what is happening to our society today. We have tremendous production powers at our disposal. But they are not at our disposal. They are at the disposal of capital, which manipulates them and regulates our life. Capitalism has become a system of destructive production. So much of what we could have is dissipated and wasted. Unless society is orientated in the direction of overcoming such terrible legacies, such terrible determinations of the system, there is no hope that we can move forward.

The passage I just quoted is, as I remarked, replete with value: that is, a distinctive moral vision. Marx is talking about our doing things in the realm of freedom in a way which is *worthy* of our human nature. What does "worthy" mean, if morality does not enter the picture? You cannot run away from it, even though there might indeed be some people for whom the phrase 'Marxism and morality' already reeks of a tendency to bourgeois deviation. Morality certainly has an individual dimension, but some vital aspects of it are collective and relate to the question of solidarity. The emancipation of the working class from wage slavery - and with it the emancipation of society as a whole - is central to the Marxist conceptualisation of the problem. Labour cannot simply emancipate itself, and take over the role of the previous ruling classes which subordinated the rest of society. There are too many people involved in the category of 'labour' to make that feasible. So emancipation is absolutely vital, and the individual moral dimension is absolutely essential, given that it is social determination through interchange with other human beings that determines the matter. Real emancipation means not just emancipation from wage slavery, but the freedom to be as you are.

The society in which we live compels people not to pay any attention to morality, because the morality in question is pseudo-morality - a morality imposed from outside, from above. The predicament of our life is that we are controlled from outside, and morality in this sense, taking the form of the various creeds - whether religious or other creeds - is an external imposition.

It would, however, be a very poor form of socialism which would want to disengage from moral value. In this connection, it is, of course, not accidental that Stalin used to lash out against morality as mere 'moralising', which then could be condemned as something *a priori* evil. At the same time, he dictated from outside what your moral values or your aspirations ought to be.

The control I am talking about involves the only possible, the only feasible mode of control which is really sustainable. We have to think in terms of time. Sustainability is a very important category here. We cannot simply say we will solve these problems in 10 or 20 years. The only solution that is feasible is sustainable control - control which can underpin human efforts in the direction in which we want to

go. There is no way you can define it other than self-control, the only valid and feasible mode of control. And that is where so many political forces in the past have failed in their efforts: and we have seen the result - the collapses, the transformations which have led to so much tragedy.

In *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx talks about the fundamental difference between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. The whole thing climaxes with reference to what he calls "prodigiousness" of aims. Let me quote this passage: "Proletarian revolutions, like those of the 19th century, criticise themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses, and paltrinesses of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth, and rise again, more gigantic, before them, recoil ever and anon from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims."

Now this is very important, because the prodigiousness of aims is what we mean when we talk about communism. These prodigious aims - and again I must emphasise that this implies an orientation of *value* - are what we have to try and realise, no matter how unfavourable the circumstances. Yet Marx adds that there comes a point where there is no turning back, where you simply cannot recoil and make compromises - sadly a characteristic of the greater part of the 20th century working class movement. Understandable, but not justifiable.

The defensive determination of the socialist movement - given unfavourable power relations between capital and labour - has meant that taking the line of least resistance has been dominant and still dominates today. We can have no illusions about this, but the prodigiousness of aims remains. At the same time, the system of destructive production ever more strongly dominates and determines the conditions of our existence. No infinity of time is available in which we can evade this phenomenon.

The conditions are presenting themselves in which we must confront the alternative of adopting a different form of social metabolic control. This is what Marx means, when he says that turning back is no longer possible - when destructiveness is accumulating to such a degree that evasion means, in a sense, advocating suicide.

You are all familiar with the Luxemburgist idea of socialism or barbarism, a very important notion. It originated in Marx, even if not in exactly the same words. You find it in *The German ideology*, where it is clearly indicated that the conditions of development come to a point where the alternative is either destroying yourself or taking a radically new course. The idea of communism is, in that sense, not something suspended in mid-air, but a *necessity*, a need, a transformation without which the existence of humanity itself is in peril.

The present mode of social control - the way in which our social metabo-

lism is regulated, our relationship among ourselves and with nature - is characterised by the most awful kind of inequality. You could not invent a worse one. Inequality is at the root of it, as are domination and hierarchy. Capital cannot share anything with anybody. Reformism was bound to be a failure, because it worked on the assumption that capital was capable of sharing its resources in the interests of the working class, so that, sooner or later, through small reformist transformations we arrive at the stage when we realise socialism. That is a complete absurdity, because capital either controls, or it has to be eliminated. Decision-making capital is the mode of making decisions for all of us, and we cannot escape from it. This is one aspect of what makes it a system of the most awful kind of inequality.

The second is that it is an adversarial system. It is a system of contradictions, antagonisms, a centrifugal system, whose elements pull in different directions. So in order to keep the system under control, we find the most awful kind of authoritarianism. The adversarial nature of the system means that from the smallest microcosm to the most gigantic transnational corporation, it always remains torn by internal contradictions. All the fantasies about 'people's capitalism' - give the workers a few shares and they will be happy - and about 'partnership', of the kind proposed by New Labour, amount to this: the public giving the funds for private robbery, private expropriation, of whatever can be in that way expropriated. It is simply absurd to expect that this kind of nonsense can lead to a happy, harmonious relationship which could overcome the adversarial nature of the capitalist system.

So we have to ask the question: what is the communist alternative? Some people claim that communism cannot be realised, but it is a value worth striving for. But if it can never be realised, how can you persuade people to adopt it and struggle for it? Communism must constitute a new kind of social framework, in which society can function in a radically different and sustainable way. It must embody a well defined, tangible and practicable set of regulating principles.

The first thing that comes to mind is that the communist system has to be an *advanced* communal system. Such systems existed in the past, but they were constrained by the conditions of production and development under which they had to operate rather miserably. A few years ago I remember seeing a documentary about a tribe living in the Sahara Desert. Completely communal, but in the greatest possible misery, where the hardship of their conditions of life would be for us completely unimaginable. There is, of course, nothing to be valued in such a model. Marx also referred to this situation in *The German ideology*, when he said that unless productive forces develop to the highest degree, all that we can do is share out misery, and that would mean inevitably that the old "filth" - as it is politely translated into English - would start all over again.

So it has to be an *advanced* communal system - advanced in terms of the way in which it produces its livelihood. It must be able to set aside enough free time for the members of society. But then the question immediately arises, what do you do with

utopia

the rest of your time? Unless time is meaningfully employed, it becomes social dynamite. The advanced communal system has to be capable of both satisfying the basic needs of its people, and doing it with the least expenditure of energy so as to leave time for other, "worthy", pursuits.

Equality is the other fundamental condition - substantive equality. There is so much talk in our society about equality, freedom, justice and all that, but it is laughable, it is scandalous. This kind of 'equality' is hammered home, and mystifies people's minds, because, if we have 'equality', there is nothing we can object to. But in reality we have the most abject form of *inequality*, coupled with some rather flimsy shades of formal equality, like being able to go once in five years and vote either Tony Blair or - shall I say - William Hague into 10 Downing Street. And you can do it with equality. So *substantive* equality is the only thing we can take seriously.

Needless to say, the 'equality' of bourgeois right must be unequal, because people are not equal in such a sense: they are individuals, they are all different. But from their differences, it does not follow that they have to be structurally subordinate to one another in a social framework. The originator of the idea of equality according to need was Babeuf, the great French thinker and political activist, who was actually killed in the aftermath of the French Revolution, because he set out and argued for the society of equals. He put it beautifully - real equality, substantive equality in that sense, is when the differences of people, in relation to their needs, are satisfied: if one person can lift up a heavy weight, and another one, a smaller person, can only lift up a third of it, so long as they are doing what they can, they are equal, and from society's point of view they are of equal merit. And then he adds to it another image, a comparison: namely that the man or woman whose thirst is satisfied only with a pitcher of water should have it, and the other one, for whom a cupful or a glassful is enough to satisfy them, should have that too, and that is equality. Now if you compare a pitcher with a glassful, you see inequality, but in relation to the need there is no inequality, because the appropriate measure is applied.

Next, planning. Again, a society which wants to be sustainable cannot function without genuine planning. The planning which we experienced in Soviet-type societies was absolutely farcical. It was a planning superimposed from the top down, by the state bureaucracy, upon the rest of the population. There are some people who say that the capitalist system has now adopted planning. One of the most prominent proponents of this theory - if you can call it a theory - is professor Kenneth Galbraith, who was recently in the Ritz, celebrating his notion of equality, and launching the 40th anniversary edition of *The affluent society*. To speak of 'planning' in connection with the capitalist system is a complete absurdity: partial planning processes, no matter how gigantic an enterprise may be, still remain a mere fraction of the totality of society. Moreover this 'planning' is imposed from above. Another feature that is completely farcical is the fact that it is a *post facto* process, carried out in the light of greater or smaller disasters.

Real, substantive planning is not feasible on such a basis, precisely because it can only operate on the basis of substantive equality, when the participants in the process can really present their views, their aspirations and determinations, and accept responsibility for them. Unless it is carried out by the people, planning is utterly meaningless.

Questions of time and sustainability are central. We plan in order to consider problems which may arise on the horizon, and because we want to attain the prodigious aims Marx was talking about. So long-term sustainability and planning are inseparable from one another. A further important question concerns the complex of problems referred to by scarcity and abundance. Scarcity dominates us and is something which has to be overcome. It cannot simply be dismissed. Remember what I set out in the first quotation, when Marx was saying that necessity is always with us, that necessity increases as we advance. We are not only producing goods for the satisfaction of human needs and wants, but also producing new wants and needs with every advance in production. Our aspirations and characteristics change, become enlarged. So unless there is a *rational* policy of production, you could go on *ad infinitum*, merely producing waste in a variety of forms.

The key to resolving the problem of scarcity, which is crucial to the idea of communism, is economising. We have forgotten the meaning of economy, the rational process which relates the objectives of production - human needs - to the human and material resources available for their satisfaction.

We need to remember the famous sentence in the *Critique of the Gotha programme*, where Marx compares the two phases of socialism or communism. The earlier phase, which is the phase inherited from the existing system, is characterised by the principle, "From each according to their ability; to each according to their contribution to the total social product". The more advanced phase - the communal system - is characterised by the principle, "From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs". It is the second phase that is crucial to us.

Scarcity is a relative conception. Without education, without a *rational* insight into what we consume, how we consume it, the whole thing is meaningless, and becomes a vicious circle. You can go on *ad infinitum*, multiplying wants and capricious needs, and therefore multiplying scarcity. Because in our society so much is wasted, not only in the way in which things are thrown away, but also in the way we consume. Needs are not something that you can determine from outside, because your needs can only be determined by yourself. But you do not live on an island of your own. So when you determine your needs, your own needs, you determine them in relation to the social setting in which you operate, which also implies the elimination of all that waste on which our social reproduction nowadays hinges. So, the need-orientated system has to get rid of the tyranny of, the domination of, use value by exchange value, which is characteristic of our present conditions.

There is another feature which is of crucial importance in characterising the kind of communist society which



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is feasible and practical: the coordination of the production processes. What we have in capitalist society is the division of labour - both a technological division, let us say a lateral division of labour, and a hierarchical, structural division of labour, whereby capital always commands and labour always obeys. That is its only function. In place of this division of labour, the new type of society, the new type of regulating social metabolic control, is concerned not simply with the division of labour. Division in a lateral, technological sense is a necessity obviously: it is part of the advancing process. But it is not enough. First of all it has to be made impossible that it should turn into a hierarchical social division. That is to say, certain characteristics, certain types of activity become equivalent to a certain level of social status.

Marx describes the capitalist enterprise as a military operation, where you have the officers, sergeants, and corporals - hierarchies of decision-making on the authority of capital - and then the mass, who simply execute the orders given to them. All that has to be blown away, and the lateral *division* of labour has to be complemented by the *coordination* of labour, the conscious coordination of labour from the local to the global. It is a very difficult question, but it becomes an impossible question if you do not eliminate from the picture the adversarial nature of the whole process.

The last point I want to mention is the nature of exchange. Exchange cannot be eliminated from our life. If we had a little smallholding, a garden in which we could produce everything, then there would be no need for exchange. But that is not the world in which we live. Exchange is absolutely vital, in the sense of how it orients social activity and the determination of our own life processes. But what sort of exchange? In capitalist society, exchange is the exchange of commodities, exchange of products, the exchange from which everything already falls in an authoritarian fashion. If exchange dominates our lives, as it does in so-called market society, it does so in the sense that what is brought to the market will have its feedback to the production process and so on - it is a vicious circle.

Marx insists that in a socialist society, you cannot have the exchange of *goods*: you can only have the exchange of *activities*. Of course, we cannot envisage a society in which everybody does everything, where everybody can do everything. Activities can be most varied, provided they are treated *equally*. It means treating activities as not being super-

rior one to another. The division today between manual workers - the overwhelming majority - and so-called 'brain workers' in whatever capacity is again a violation of the principle of substantive equality.

The exchange of activities remains a vital criterion, and a vital activity in a socialist society, but it is not an exchange of commodities or even products. The total social product is regulated on the basis of exchange of activities, and the individuals directly participate in this total social product, both through their activities and through the share they acquire in accordance with their needs. These are roughly the criteria which you find in various contexts in Marx's writings. As is that prodigious aim which designates the society of communists, the new society which is also a society that we cannot avoid. We cannot avoid it, not in the sense that it will come without our doing, without our participation in achieving it, but in the sense that unless we do achieve it we are in deep trouble.

When Marx wrote - for example the *Critique of the Gotha programme*, where he speaks most explicitly about this communist society, or in parts of *Capital* and *Grundrisse* - he uses the expression "when" this and that comes or happens. Now, we have here to make a qualification. We cannot in the light of our experience, and the dangers immediately on our horizon simply use "when". We can use 'if ... then'. If such and such conditions are satisfied, *then* we can achieve our aspirations. But I would say the 'if ... then' qualification does not turn the idea of communism into what is dismissed as hopeless. Because the qualification is strengthened by the reality of our situation. Trouble is accumulating everywhere: you cannot find in the world today any part which is not deeply laden with problems. And unless these problems are faced, then the conditions can only be downhill towards catastrophe. Today we have the means by which humanity can totally destroy itself.

Now obviously Marx could not envisage these things. There was nothing like this on the horizon. But we do not have to envisage it. We can see it. We cannot ignore the militarism which dominates, which is on the horizons of our lives, with events constantly erupting and leading potentially towards the most devastating of conflicts.

These are part of our reality. And the strategies aiming towards the establishment of this radically new mode of social metabolic reproduction are tangible enough to be rationally adopted by the society of producers ●

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Spies like us

On one level, it has been hard to take the furore over the latest round of spy allegations at all seriously. And yet witch hunts are always dangerous and can develop their own frightening momentum.

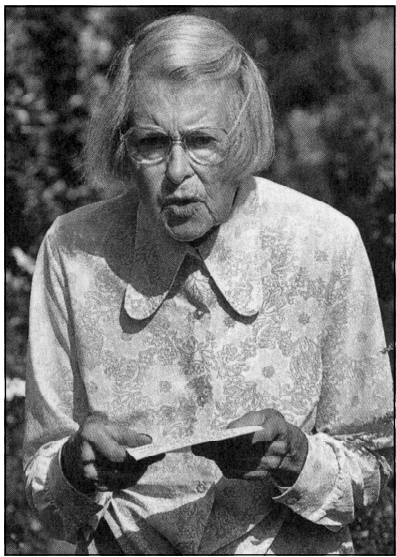
Inevitably any revelations about espionage on behalf of the former Soviet Union or eastern Europe will expose more moles in the ranks of Labour, the trade union and progressive movement than the Tories. Given the Tories' wrecking operation against the Blair project, Anne Widdecombe's obnoxious attempt to create maximum fuss around the latest allegations therefore has a certain purpose, even if it has been pretty desperate at times.

Viewed objectively, the whole thing has been very small beer. Quite what the *real* operative value of the intelligence supplied by the likes of the hapless Robin Pearson, economics lecturer at Hull university, is supposed to have had is very questionable. The tritely sensationalist BBC2 documentary, 'The spying game' (September 13), reported such high grade operations as "reading the dissertations" of students to identify leftist/rightist sympathies, informing his controller of those who went on to jobs in 'sensitive' areas such as Nato or the foreign office (although if Pearson knew, it can hardly have been very 'hush, hush'), passing on publicly available articles and "infiltrating" (that is, *attending*) the meetings and lectures of opponents of bureaucratic socialist regimes.

Indeed, there is a cynical parallel between the eastern bloc state security forces and the western media professionals. In the highly bureaucratised secret police of a highly bureaucratised 'really existing socialism', this state within a state was a law unto itself. Nevertheless, in societies where mendacity was necessary for survival - in public everyone repeated official untruths - the secret police were prone to lie to themselves. As in every sphere, targets were fulfilled, even if that meant invention. Not only would it be directly in the material interests of Stasi controllers to grossly exaggerate the importance of their contacts and the quality of the material they were supplying; it would have been fully in tune with the ethos of a system whose greatest achievements were in the realm of fictional statistics. Thus, it was interesting that Robin Pearson and his Stasi controller, for example, chose for their debriefing sessions locations that both of them had always wanted to visit - the Isle of Skye, Paris and so on.

And of course, the media professionals who have exposed this 'nest of traitors' have - from their own position in a highly bureaucratised, unaccountable apparatus - every interest in also talking up the importance of these agents.

Even the operative value of the



Melita Norwood: defend her

.....
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that may exist at
a particular
moment in any
country*
.....

material on Britain's nuclear technology supplied by Melita Norwood is very questionable. At best, it is probably most accurate to say that her information formed one small part of a much wider technical and espionage jigsaw that facilitated the development of the USSR's nuclear capability.

Leaving aside the media hue and cry, the incident has shown us the true balance of class forces in contemporary British society. Also, it illustrates something about the position of a communist party in capitalist society, about its relationship to those fluid categories of 'legality' and 'illegality'.

All partisans of the workers' movement must offer our support to those accused of these 'crimes' against their country. Most of these people - whatever some of their personal

motivations and foibles might have been - took brave decisions to work for a cause they identified with: the fight for the liberation of humanity.

The fact that the state seems pretty disinclined to take things further illustrates a number of things. First, it underlines the quality of the information the establishment evaluates it has lost.

Second, it emphasises in its own way the fact we are living through a period of reaction of a special type. In general, while the organisations of the working class have not been smashed, our world movement has suffered a devastating *ideological* defeat with the collapse of bureaucratic socialism. The idea of a revolutionary alternative to existing society - almost of *any* collective answers to our problems - has been enormously discredited. In other words, the government feels there is no need for some disruptive, semi-hysterical anti-communist witch-hunt. Why refight won battles?

Thirdly, there are some important general lessons to be drawn about the nature of our struggle as communists in a capitalist society.

Shortly before being jailed after being stitched up during the 1986 Wapping strike, Mike Hicks, later the general secretary of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, was quick to assure the court that "I have never attempted to, or encouraged others to, breach the laws of our land". Of course, rather than the expression of *individual* opportunism, this was the perfectly logical outcome of reformist politics, codified in the opportunist programme, the *British road to socialism* (in either its Eurocommunist or CPB versions).

The response of today's CPB to the exposure of Melita Norwood is further evidence of the contradictory and problem-fraught move to the left by this organisation since Hicks was ousted by Robert Griffiths. In the *Morning Star* of September 17, Andrew Murray, a former Straight Leftist, forthrightly gives his opinion that comrade Norwood "did us all a service" and that she "dwarfs her accusers". Quite right. Yet canvassed for *his* views, the former general secretary of the CPGB - the deeply conservative right opportunist, Gordon McLennan - assured the bourgeois press that he would have expelled her pronto. Who can doubt that the grey apparatchik Hicks would have done the same?

The orthodox communist understanding of legality and illegality does not see them as opposites, but simply as different moments in the development of the class struggle. A party that is revolutionary is *essentially* illegal, independently of the formal legal opportunities that may exist at a particular moment in any country. Indeed, the Communist In-

ternational - in its 1921 resolution, 'The organisational structure of the communist parties, the methods and content of their work' - had a developed view on the combination of legal and illegal work. It criticised "legal communist parties in the capitalist countries ... [that are] not preparing for illegal work; they assume they will be able to operate legally for a long period of time and adopt structures that meet only the requirements of the day-to-day struggle" (*Theses, resolutions and manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International* London 1983, p258).

It is in this context that we should view the activities of the members of the Party, without drawing formal and absolute boundaries between 'legal' and 'illegal'. Of course, as an organisation we discourage frivolous attitudes to breaking the law. But the boundaries of 'legality' are fluid anyway. During the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85, our organisation agitated for the generalisation of miners' hit squads, gave a platform for individuals forming these teams, and miners we influenced participated in them. However, any suggestion that sympathisers or members of the Communist Party should under today's circumstances substitute for the class and organise terror squads to enforce small strikes would be madness.

Similarly, in Ireland the republican movement has financed some of its operations through raiding post offices, banks and the like. Because of the level of the struggle and consciousness, such actions were perceived by the wider population as engagements in a liberation war, not criminal acts. The same lesson can be drawn from sharp clashes between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks over the former's armed expropriations. Lenin's position on these actions was presented in resolution form for the 4th Congress in April 1906:

"We are of the opinion and propose that the congress should agree ... That fighting operations are also permissible for the purpose of seizing funds belonging to the enemy - ie, the autocratic government - to meet the needs of insurrection ..." (VI Lenin, 'A tactical platform for the unity congress of the RSDLP').

In other words, the scope of the 'illegal' actions of the party are organically connected to the level of the class struggle itself. The Party is no more a gang of armed robbers than it is an espionage conspiracy organised for the benefit of 'foreign powers'. These things are subordinated to the political purpose of the Communist Party - revolution and working class state power. Of course, it hardly needs to be said that these aims are in themselves 'criminal' for the ruling class.

In 1943, Dave Springhall, the CPGB's national organiser, was ar-

rested and sentenced to seven years imprisonment for spying for the USSR, Britain's wartime ally. The former sub-editor of the *Daily Worker*, Douglas Hyde, a man who deserted the Communist Party to convert to catholicism and plied a trade as a professional anti-communist for decades, noted that "several other Party members during the same period were sentenced on similar charges. A vastly larger number who were guilty of the same activities were never caught" (D Hyde *I believed* London 1953, p133).

Springhall was immediately expelled. Opportunist political considerations were primary in this. Our Party's support for Britain's war effort was an important moment in the growing *integration* of what had once been a revolutionary party into capitalist society. Hyde, a prominent member at the time, pinpoints the real motivation behind Springhall's ejection. It was not because the Party "disapproved of his activities as such, but for two quite different reasons: first, because we had no desire, least of all at that moment of growing popularity, to get the public reputation for condoning spying by our members ...; second, because, viewed from any angle, it was a major indiscretion for the national organiser, of all people, to take such risks at such a moment" (*ibid* p133) - which are two ways of formulating exactly the same reason, actually.

In this sense, 'spying' was mass activity of the Party rank and file during World War II: "The information came from factories and the forces, from civil servants and scientists. And the significant thing to recognise is that those that did it were not professional spies, they took big risks in most cases, received no payment whatsoever, and (this is doubly important) did not see themselves as spies, still less as traitors. As Party members they would have felt that they were being untrue to themselves and unworthy of the name of communist if they had not done" (*ibid* p134).

As defenders of what they regarded as a bastion of genuine socialism, thousands of ordinary members crossed the formal boundaries of legality and 'spied' for the USSR. The Party's drift to the right, its "growing popularity", given its deeply opportunist support for imperialism's war effort, placed such comrades in a profoundly contradictory position as the revolutionary rhetoric and reformist practice of the CPGB diverged.

Springhall was only one victim of this rupture. The future reformed Communist Party we fight for will not rush to disown its own comrades in pursuit of bourgeois respectability and acceptance in the eyes of the establishment ●

Mark Fischer