

Ladbroke Grove disaster

Workers' control



Take the rail network from out of the millionaires' hands

The rail disaster just outside Paddington station has shaken industry and the Blair government itself. As a result the privatisation of air traffic control and the London underground are now officially on hold.

Although thankfully the fatality figures are being scaled down from the initial 100 plus to under 40, they still represent the unacceptable human cost paid by railworkers and the travelling public for the dogmatic privatisation of the railways pushed through at breakneck speed in the dying days of the Major government. The result of privatisation has not been better services or less expensive fares, but administrative chaos, penny-pinching, lax safety and a string of former British Rail officials who are now capitalist multi-millionaires.

The fact that the Ladbroke Grove crash involved Great Western Trains, part of the First Bus Group, only two years after the Southall crash just a couple of miles down the line, has created an upsurge of public anger. Then GWT were charged with manslaughter and only just escaped prosecution through legal trickery. They were however fined £1.5million, the biggest sum imposed on a company under the Health and Safety Act.

The Southall inquiry was given evi-

dence of a catalogue of breeches of safety procedures by GWT. How, for example, in the interests of keeping its aged fleet of high speed trains running, crucial safety equipment in the driver's cab was isolated due to defects. It has also heard how the company removed - along with other train operators - the requirement to have a second driver in trains running in excess of 110 mph. The company admitted that it had pressurised the Southall driver to take out the train with the Automatic Warning System (AWS) isolated and the Automatic Train Protection system (ATP) switched off. Both these devices would have prevented the driver missing the warning signals - and avoided the subsequent collision with a freight train crossing the HST's path.

The Ladbroke Grove crash has ominous similarities. A GWT HST proceeding into Paddington at high speed crashes head on into a Thames Trains unit coming out of Paddington. Initially blame was put on the Thames Trains driver. He passed at danger a SPAD signal SU109. Since then, however, evidence has mounted up revealing what the Health and Safety Commission calls "a systems failure". Railtrack has been further exposed by statements produced by

Aslef safety reps, such as myself, who complain of repeated attempts to get Railtrack to rectify the sighting difficulties of this signal. SU109 had been SPADed - ie, passed at danger - eight previous times since its introduction in 1993 when the line was remodelled, re-signalled and electrified as part of the Heathrow Express project. Further revelations on Channel 4 news from the ex-BR Western Region general manager, who was involved with the early stages of the project, showed that this junction was designed for use solely on the basis of all trains having ATP added - further proof that this accident was entirely avoidable.

The fallout from the Ladbroke Grove disaster has yet to hit home fully. Nevertheless, already it is highly likely that Railtrack will lose its safety functions and that ATP will be fitted to some trains, especially after Aslef general secretary Mick Rix scared Prescott with his threat to ballot all train companies that refused to fit ATP. Obviously the government is going to fund some improvements in rail safety and/or force the private train companies to cough up.

A largely ignored side to all of this is the RMT balloting its conductors over the recent changes introduced by Railtrack at the behest of the train

companies to the standard rule book. They effectively take the safety functions - in the event of a failure or a crash - away from the conductor. Instead these duties are placed onto the driver. This tampering with rules that have held good for decades is all to do with the companies wanting to de-skill conductors so they can subcontract the job to security firms like Burns. Such changes are a real threat to both workers' and passengers' safety, being a recipe for confusion and delay in event of an accident, where the stopping of oncoming trains is vital and must be effected quickly. But this is the logic of a fragmented network of capitalist rail companies whose *raison d'être* is cutting costs in the drive for profits.

What should the attitude of communists be? Is it good enough to just call for the re-nationalisation of the railways as the SWP, *Morning Star* and most of the left do? Is it enough to identify the outrageous salaries paid to the directors and call for their sacking? No. Re-nationalisation under Blair will just replace a set of capitalist bosses with a set of state capitalist bosses. After all under successive Labour and Tory regimes nationalised British Rail was starved of cash. Accidents like Clapham were

caused by excessive pressure on the workers and cost-cutting.

What is needed is for the railways to be under *workers' control*: that is, under the democratic control of those who work on the railway. This demand can be met under capitalism although it very much challenges its logic. It is a demand premised on the needs of those who work on the railways and travel on the railways, while ignoring all the hand-wringing debate over how much safety capitalism can afford.

The Aslef and RMT leadership - both of which contain a not inconsiderable stratum of leftists, including some remaining SLP members - must not be allowed to mouth militant hot air till the dust settles. Privatisation is in crisis. Huge numbers of ordinary passengers are angry. A majority of Aslef, RMT and TSSA members could be won to political protest strikes around the democratic demand for taking the running of the rail industry from out of the greedy and incompetent hands of the millionaires. If the leadership cannot or will not fight, then the rank and file must - their very lives depend on safety.

A cross-union rank and file movement with a programme for workers' control is an urgent necessity ●

Steve Johnson

Party notes

SWP in or out?

The October 6 meeting of the London Socialist Alliance produced few surprises. Around 15 comrades representing 10 organisations attended the central London meeting, convened to discuss the common platform for the alliance's putative challenge in next year's Greater London Assembly elections. The woefully economistic manifesto agreed for the abortive joint left challenge in June's European elections served as the basis for discussions.

In fact, documents that amounted to full text alternatives had been submitted by two organisations before the meeting - Workers Power and the Socialist Party. The Communist Party confined itself to attempting to introduce amendments to the Euro-platform, producing a bit of a Frankenstein's monster in the process. In hindsight, it would have aided clarity if we had actually produced a full alternative. In recognition of this, our representative on the night withdrew our amendments and supported the Workers Power draft, with the understanding that we would re-introduce versions of them to whatever substantive text that was passed - including the confused and left economistic Workers Power piece, should it be passed.

On the night, Socialist Outlook gave us a document that attempted to "amalgamate the best bits" of these WP and SP drafts, although the former recognised little enough of the final version and voted against it.

After an ill-structured and pretty desultory discussion, the SP/SO documents were adopted as the collective drafts to be further amended and hacked about. Additional political amendments and editorial work will be conducted through a sub-committee which will hopefully facilitate more fruitful and better shaped discussions. The defeat of its draft will of course place a question mark over the further participation of Workers Power. This group's method of political intervention in such blocs appears to be to issue a programmatic ultimatum along the lines of 'agree with this, or we vote Labour'.

Given the defeat of its proposal, the WP rep was very reluctant to commit himself beyond a 'we'll see' response, when questioned about his group's further participation. Yet one would have thought that critical support to an LSA bloc in the GLA elections would have been the ideal opportunity to make general propaganda for socialism - which is, it seems, all it does nowadays, judging from its abstract monthly newspaper.

The far more interesting aspect of the meeting concerned the half-hearted participation of the Socialist Workers Party. I reported that the SWP was conspicuous by its absence at the last LSA meeting (see *Weekly Worker* September 16) - a worrying development, given the concern of every other constituent part of the alliance for what is dubbed "viability". Perhaps the presence of the SWP's two representatives on October 6 reassured some, but their pronounced reticence should have sounded a warning.

The SWP comrades have clearly been briefed not to commit themselves or their organisation to anything. They argued against the adoption at the meeting - even by indicative vote - of drafts to be worked on collectively for our electoral platform. This, they warned, may "frighten away others". We needed to maintain openness and a flexible approach rather than present newcomers with a 'programmatic' *fait accompli*.

Correctly, comrades argued that adopting "principled" politics now (or rather what passes for principled politics in these circles) did nothing to preclude flexibility if serious forces came our way later. Pressed for details of these "others", the SWP comrades mentioned names such as Paul Foot and Tariq Ali, prominent individuals who may be persuaded to challenge. They also cited reports of stirrings amongst the London Fire Brigades Union, Jubilee Line electricians (more unlikely) and the London region of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (who actually sent a rep to the meeting). But whether the SWP has the prospect in its mind's eye of such forces standing under the auspices of the LSA as presently constituted, or as part of an SWP-centred *alternative* initiative, is a moot point.

It has been confirmed to me by a comrade who took a leading role in convening the Euro-election meetings that one condition the SWP sought for their full participation then was the total exclusion of the Communist Party and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. It is dubious whether it will find the revamped LSA much more to its taste. Indeed, an SWP comrade at the October 6 meeting set alarm bells ringing when he showed what seemed to some to be an overly-detailed interest in the mechanics of registering *new* political formations in time for the GLA elections.

Is the SWP in or out? And will the other parts of this still fragile bloc hold if it splits and calls into question the 'viability' of the chasing pack? The possibilities for a principled, united left challenge to Blair's Labour in the capital still remain tentative ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Full texts of platforms submitted to the LSA, including amendments and other related materials, are available on the CPGB website

Universal panacea

I am quite honoured to receive such a well elaborated, double-page response from comrade Conrad ('Bolshevism and consistent democracy' *Weekly Worker* October 7). Jack's use of quotations from some 20 books shows that he knows a lot about the subject. Unfortunately, my friend did not respond to my main point: that the right of self-determination of the Irish nation as a whole is incompatible with the right of self-determination of its pro-British layers.

To allow the unionists the right to secede is to support their right to veto Irish national self-determination and to keep a sectarian and segregationist statelet in the north. Jack's desire to be very democratic towards an oppressive community means sacrificing the democratic rights of the oppressed majority overall. The fact that he accepts a new partition, allowing half of the Six Counties to reunite with Ireland and the other part to secede or remain inside the UK would not satisfy anybody and would increase ethnic cleansing and the likelihood of communal massacres.

I would like to come back on many issues where I think that my friend is incorrect. For instance, he says that a common language is indispensable for a nation and that Switzerland is a multinational country. It was Lenin who described Switzerland as an example of a multilingual nation (as Wales or Ireland are). However, for the moment I will try to keep the debate around the central issue.

The CPGB is transforming the right of self-determination into a universal panacea which could be applied anywhere, even to non-nations and against the anti-imperialist cause. In fact, it has led it to make proposals against the democratic right of the oppressed nation to be united, and free of the remnants of colonial occupation. A pro-imperialist minority could be granted many democratic rights, but not the right to undertake a sectarian and pogromist repartition. The unionists do not want self-determination: they want to maintain their historic and privileged domination. If the unionists were to fight for their right to secede in opposition to Irish unification on the grounds that they are a semi-nation, would Jack support them or call for them to be armed?

The only way to win British-Irish workers to our side is through combining demands on improving their social conditions with saying to them that they would be better off rejecting loyalist privileges and accepting national unification under socialism.

José Villa
LCMRCl

New majority

One point that Jack Conrad's critics have overlooked is that there is no role for Britain or the USA in his proposals. Only the Irish, both north and south, are to decide the issues. This makes it a question of how the Irish majority deal with their most troublesome minority. Do they try to incorporate them or repress them? A philistine would take the view that it just isn't going to happen, so why the fuss? Steve Riley (*Weekly Worker* September 2) and his sympathisers are making a fuss because they are only prepared to consider the protestant community as a subordinate, perpetually isolated minority.

However, a revolutionary programme needs to build a class with progressive answers to real problems and must show a path by which the working class can contend for power with the bourgeoisie by uniting the broadest forces to our side. Democracy is the key to building trust and removing deeply ingrained hostilities and gives the class the necessary experience to mould itself into a ruling class. The right to self-determination does not imply that exercising it in favour of secession is the best answer, nor is it just a matter of reflecting reality, though this is always a good place to start. Most importantly it contains the

necessary moral attitude for a majority that wishes to incorporate alienated reactionary minorities.

The revolutionary usurpation of power is just an episode in the permanent revolution which has already started and goes on to abolish class altogether. Steve Riley's argument implies there are two distinct periods. The present period, in which we only agitate for the military overthrow of capitalism (and of course higher wages), and the post-revolutionary period, in which we have socialism. Neither is true.

The question of whether the protestants are a nation or not is irrelevant: there are an awful lot of them, they live close enough to coordinate a military campaign, they have guns and they have the support of a section of the British ruling class. They can fight, they might fight and they could even win. Comrade John Pearson admitted at the last Party aggregate that in the case of negotiations turning out this badly we can then concede their right to self-determination, but we should not let them know what our bottom line is because it is a bad negotiating tactic. Of course the Orange Order can make their own calculations as to what the odds are and keep their own bottom line just as close a secret. The problem with this Machiavellian approach is that it makes civil war more likely. Neither side is being honest with the other, thus maximising distrust, entrenching prejudice and polarising the situation between Catholics as a whole and protestants as a whole, while encouraging imperialism to come fishing in troubled waters.

The opposition conceded that Conrad's position might serve to split the protestant moderates from the Ulster bigots, but, according to these comrades, the Ulster bigots are *just* bigots: reason, justice and moderation are beyond them and always will be. There is no alternative but to crush them.

The point, however, is not to split the protestants, but to split both the Catholics and the protestants. Democracy is not just about majority rights: it is also about change - change for the better on the basis of substantive equality. In principle even the Rev Paisley may prefer it. It is about getting rid of the Catholic majority as well as the protestant minority, and creating a *secular* majority in its place. But only the majority has the power and authority to make this change. A majority that lacks the political vision to supersede itself is reactionary. In politics the word 'split' usually means divide (and thereby rule), but it also can mean breaking from the past, and this is the sense that I wish to emphasise.

The opposition to Conrad's theses wrongly interpret his position as being essentially advice to the bourgeoisie on how to settle their Irish problem. It is nothing of the sort. The left has for so long been in opposition that they can only advise the working class to say 'No! No! No!' In fact a bit like Ian Paisley. They have no concept of a positive programme. Another fault that flows from their distrust of democracy is that it inevitably leads to a party that is separate and external to the class rather than a part of the class; a throwback to old 'official communism'.

Phil Kent
London

Left posturing

Peter Manson's article on the SWP's Labour Party lobby (*Weekly Worker* October 7) calls to mind another lobby of the Labour Party conference in Bournemouth called by the WRP in 1985, after the defeat of the miners' strike.

In the final weeks before the WRP exploded (and when all leaders knew it was coming) Simon Pirani produced a good document attacking the party's ultimatic perspectives. He questioned why on earth we had gone to Bournemouth to *demonstrate* against the Labour Party on the instructions of the political committee when the Alexander Pavilion rally (a 5,000-strong culmination



Letters

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

of the WRP's Campaign to Free the Jailed Miners) had decided to *lobby* the conference. Practically everyone on the left recognised that to march around Bournemouth and not even go near the conference was about as foolishly sectarian an exercise as we had ever attempted. Why not go to Scotland to demonstrate?

Mark Fischer explained in the *Weekly Worker* (September 23) that Peter Taaffe was a crazy sectarian to deny there was any point in putting pressure on the Labour Party. Even Indonesian dictators were susceptible to international pressure. But comrade Peter Manson says that we must be demonstrators and not lobbyists. It is useless to attempt to get Tony Blair to change his mind; the point was to influence the Labour left. To do what precisely? If a tiny demonstration at his London embassy that he may not even hear about is putting pressure on Habibie, why is a 2,000/4,000/10,000 (take your pick) lobby and demonstration not going to influence Tony Blair to change his mind about anything? Would no lobby or demonstration at all have been better? Would that have put greater pressure on Blair?

The whole thing is symptomatic of the disorientation of the sectarian left who say, 'A plague on the Labour Party (and by implication the workers who vote for it): we will build a new workers' party'. This just confuses the actual relationship of forces - Blair is still unfortunately popular with most workers - with what we would like to see: a real fightback emerging from the unions and the oppressed.

The existing leadership has consolidated its hold over the structures of the mass workers' organisations. The anti-trade union laws were of enormous assistance in consolidating the dead hand of the Labour bureaucracy over the rank and file workers. The SWP are at least partly correct in that the spirit of a fightback is re-emerging, but the bureaucracy is succeeding again and again in snuffing out the revival.

Therefore lobbying all Labour movement conferences (trade union, TUC and Labour) is a vitally necessary activity to pressure splits in that bureaucracy. We have a right and a duty to demand of Tony Blair a long list of unfulfilled promises as well as many socially necessary measures he avoided or fudged. We have a right and a duty to demand that the left Labourites and trade union bureaucrats fight Blair for the things they claim to represent. We also have an obligation not to be foolish and expect that demands will win concessions on their own. But they may force errors which will benefit us; they may force lefts to fight that bit harder and go further than they desire and so give space to the working class to come forward.

It is the dreadful counterposition of 'lobby' and 'demonstration/rally' that I find idiotic. It is the counterposition of 'We will not demand anything of Tony Blair, but organise the working class to smash capitalism' and more pathetically 'Smash the monarchy and the House of Lords and keep capitalism' that is so foolish. This has nothing whatsoever to do with revolutionary strategy and tactics and is just ultra-left posturing.

The SWP, for all its backwardness, continually gets one aspect of its orientation correct. It knows it must engage the consciousness of the working class by putting demands on its existing leadership and therefore it recruits a vanguard layer emerging into politics. The fact that it quickly destroys them by getting little else right is well known on the left. But why go to Bournemouth and not engage in political conflict with the delegates at the Labour Party conference? Unless your ambition is to fill the political space unlamentably vacated by the old WRP in 1985?

Gerry Downing
London

Livingstone for mayor?

Blair loads the dice

Frank Dobson's declaration that he is to seek the Labour nomination as candidate for London mayor came as no surprise. Labour needs a candidate who can defeat the irksome Lord Archer. More to the point, New Labour needs a candidate who can at least semi-democratically defeat the enemy within - Ken Livingstone. Dobson might well do it, though of course he had to be pushed into standing. It was either that or being sacked by Blair and dumped in the political wilderness.

The Dobson move allowed Blair to announce a wider cabinet reshuffle: Mo Mowlam leaves the Northern Ireland office to take over from 'plutonium' Jack Cunningham as cabinet enforcer; chief treasury secretary Alan Milburn moves to health; and, after a short period of disgrace, the resurrected Peter Mandelson resumes his career at the Northern Ireland office.

Despite Livingstone's sycophantic open letter to Blair and his nauseating support for Nato's Balkans blitzkrieg, latest developments shows that, although he has every chance of getting onto the shortlist he has only an outside possibility of securing official nomination. It is not that Dobson is so popular. Rather that Millbank Tower has put in place a voting system which favours bureaucracy - ie Dobson - over populism - ie Livingstone. There are to be three equal electoral colleges in London:

- the trade unions and socialist societies;
- MPs, MEPs and GLA candidates;
- Labour Party members.

If Livingstone can be beaten here, albeit only semi-democratically, it would end all talk of Red Ken standing as an independent and providing an alternative pole of attraction for working class discontent. The Millbank mafia will be pulling out all the stops, employing all the usual behind-the-scenes chicanery and arm-twisting to ensure the votes go

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.....

where they are supposed to: ie, to Dobson - the official Blairite candidate in all but name.

Livingstone's initial reaction was equivocal. One the one hand, he recognised that the electoral college system - the same method used to select Labour leaders for Wales and Scotland - was weighted in favour of Dobson. On the other hand, "It also nails the lie that I was going to be ruled out on some disloyalty grounds." No doubt recalling how Rhodri Morgan was stitched up in Wales with the help of the union bureaucrats, he called on all London unions to ballot their members before announcing support for any candidate. Even if that occurred and Livingstone won a majority of union votes, in addition to the expected huge support he will surely get from individual members, Blair's trump card is the one-third vote from London's 57 MPs, four MEPs and 14 adopted candidates for the Greater London Authority. Backing for Dobson from amongst these careerists is likely to be so overwhelming, it will - hopes Millbank - swing the balance against any Livingstone majority among unions and individuals.

In addition, Labour's national executive committee announced strict spending limits for the campaign - another blow directed against the Brent East MP, who has raised a small fortune as a result of his 'Let Ken stand' appeal earlier this year. Never-

theless, Livingstone is a match for the Labour machine when it comes to spin-doctoring and pulling media strings. Blair may have loaded the dice in Dobson's favour, but the outcome of the contest is far from settled.

So what should our attitude be to Livingstone's candidacy? Clearly communists must oppose Blair's gerrymandering and demand a free and open contest. We must also insist that the union tops allow one member, one vote. We make these demands not because of any love for Livingstone, but in order to expose New Labour's anti-democratic regime. More importantly, tensions and divisions within the Labour Party will open up room for the left to take steps towards the creation of a genuine working class alternative.

And what if Livingstone won the nomination in opposition to the Millbank pro-Dobson campaign? That too would open up possibilities. It is bound to encourage Livingstone himself to assert a greater degree of political and organisational independence. However, unless he agreed to stand on a minimum platform of democratic and working class demands - openly differentiating himself from Blair's programme - we would only consider backing his campaign critically. There is no way we could support a New Labour manifesto. Livingstone as 'Independent London Labour' would demand a similar approach.

There are those, on the other hand, such as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty who, while quite happy to call for a vote for New Labour in 1997 on the basis of the quite illusory gains to be had from the so-called 'crisis of expectations', incredibly see no contradiction in opposing support for Livingstone, even as an independent, on the grounds that his leftist veneer is just that - a veneer.

The AWL correctly attacks Livingstone's record as leader of the GLC. But this misses the point. If Livingstone, as he and his confidants have intimated, fails to win the Labour nomination and then stands as an independent candidate - now less likely, but still not to be ruled out - his resulting expulsion and ensuing campaign has the potential to become a

pole of attraction for many dissident Labour activists and possibly trigger the onset of a deeper and wider split in the party. This must be welcomed. While we may predict with some confidence that under those circumstances his manifesto would be an unprincipled and cynical mish-mash of populist leftism and 'realistic' commitments, the fact remains that such a development could provide a launching pad for a new left party project. The correct tactical approach therefore, for partisans of our class, would surely be to orientate towards such a movement, calling for a critical Livingstone vote.

Talking of the ill-fated 'crisis of expectations', there are, believe it or not, still those who are awaiting its arrival. Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe may even still be waiting for a cavalry-like 11th-hour rescue of his Red '90s schema.

To put it brutally, there is no 'crisis of expectations'. Such opposition as there is to Blair's New Labour is inevitably muted, weak and isolated. Set in the wider context of the current period, which is one of reaction, Blair's relationship with the British electorate, far from exploding into demonstrations of mass anger, could well turn out, barring unforeseen developments, to be the longest honeymoon in history. We, therefore, support every initiative, development and overture that can provide the widest possible unity of forces to the left in opposition to New Labour.

Such developments could well become the seedbed from which a mass workers' party grows. It should not need saying, but - given our opponents' penchant for distorting much of what we say - let us be clear: our support in such cases would not be uncritical and would in no way foster illusions. Quite the reverse. Given our consistent and principled commitment to the concept of revolutionary openness, we strive for such pacts, alliances and so on to be characterised by the widest possible openness, democracy and freedom of criticism.

Under such conditions it would be possible to develop the fighting revolutionary programme our class needs ●

Terry Fenton

Fighting fund

Frittered away

It is not often that I am complimented for the column I write. But comrade GH from Wolverhampton was impressed with last week's. Commenting on my remarks about the former Eurocommunist leadership of the CPGB - now about to complete their liquidation by dissolving Democratic Left - he writes: "You are spot on about the Euros and their 'misappropriation' of Party funds. They have frittered away our hard-earned millions."

The comrade draws the necessary conclusion: "The *Weekly Worker* has got the *real* communism. What it hasn't got is the

cash" - and promptly does his bit to change all that with a brilliant donation of £40. Another stalwart, comrade TR, whose CPGB membership goes back to the 30s, adds £8. Special thanks also this week to comrade AC for his donation of £20 - not bad for a student.

After a good week our October fund stands at £134 towards our £400 monthly target. Keep it coming! ●

Robbie Rix

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Website

Our website carries a comprehensive archive section including key articles on Socialist Alliances, Russia, left polemics, the Northern Ireland peace process and the British-Irish question.

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action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday October 17, 5pm - 'Crisis and the *Communist manifesto*', using Simon Clarke's *Karl Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide.

Sunday October 24, 5pm - 'Marxism and the bourgeois paradigm', using Ellen Meiksins Wood's *The pristine culture of capitalism* as a study guide.

Manchester: Monday October 18, 7.30pm - Series on crisis: 'Beyond capital'.

E-mail CPGB2@aol.com.

■ CPGB weekend school

The national question in the British Isles: lessons of the October revolution. Speakers to be announced. Central London, November 13-14. Call 0181-459 7146 for details.

■ AWL public meeting

'What future for Chinese Stalinism?' Speakers: Paul Hampton (Workers' Liberty editorial board), Jack Conrad (CPGB). 7.30pm Thursday October 21. Queens Head, Acton Street, Kings Cross, London.

■ Nominate Bannister

The Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Union has chosen the Socialist Party's Roger Bannister as its candidate for general secretary. The CPGB is backing his campaign. For details on how Union branches can nominate call Glen Kelly on 0171-251 8449.

■ Support Tameside

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

■ Ireland conference

'Ireland: beyond the sectarian divide'. Saturday November 13, Manchester town hall, 10.30am. Organisations - £15 per delegate; individuals - £10 (waged), £5 (unwaged). Details: GMSA, 58 Langdale Road, Manchester M14 5PN.

■ 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.

■ Stop privatisation

Conference against privatisation of public services - Saturday November 6, 10am - 5pm, Natfhe headquarters, Britannia Street, London WC1. Call Greenwich Union (0181-854 8888 ext5227) for more details.

■ Hackney Socialist Alliance

To get involved, contact Box 22, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS.

■ Brent Socialist Alliance

To get involved, contact Galaxy News, Box 100, 37 Walm Lane, London NW2 4QU, or ring Stan Kelsey on 0181-451 0616.

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Protestant veto

Lenin opposed self-determination for the British-Irish, writes **Tom Delargy**

I would like to start by disentangling my own position from some of Jack's other critics. Jack stands firmly on orthodox Leninist foundations when he takes issue with José Villa on the question of segregated schools. Hopefully, this was a slip of the pen on the part of my "ally of convenience". Jack is no less right when he argues that it would be a mistake for communists to applaud the driving of the British-Irish into the sea. And yet I find it difficult to believe that a single one of Jack's critics seriously proposes such a 'solution'. It is hard not to suspect that Jack might be trying to frighten simple-minded CPGBers into his lobby by drawing a caricature of the opposition inside his own party.

Either way, those born in Ireland clearly need to have the right to remain there, and to have full citizenship rights. Exactly the same has to go for similar groups, such as Israeli Jews or white South Africans. Limits of space preclude me from elaborating on the many other areas of agreement, so I shall now turn to what divides us.

The more Jack has written on the subject, the clearer it has become that he is not just drawing up rules for the secession, from a future united Ireland, of a British-Irish entity in the north of the island. No, the 'right' of self-determination which he attributes to what he insists is an historically constituted people has a bearing on his attitude to their incorporation into a united Ireland in the first place. Such incorporation has to be voluntary rather than forced. Jack (clearly suffering from overwork) has chosen to align himself with the Reverend Ian Paisley and David Trimble. For Jack, the 'British-Irish' - a category which (let's be frank, Jack) can only be clearly defined in religious terms - must have a veto over the creation of a united Ireland. All those who have in the past taken up arms in order to prevent the creation of a united Ireland (the UDA, etc) must, in retrospect, be recognised as legitimate freedom fighters. Jack is, for the time being, unprepared to recognise this logic; it is, however, inescapable.

Possibly in a desperate bid to distract potential recruits to his cause (to distract them from the loyalist path down which his theses threaten to drag the CPGB), Jack has resorted to accusing me of having a Stalinist attitude to the British-Irish question. Jack has the nerve to castigate as Stalinists myself, Dave Craig and others - people who, unlike Jack, never thought the Stalinist states were progressive, people who did not need to see the USSR collapse before pin-pointing 1928 as the year when the Soviet Union ceased to be any kind of workers' state. And all because we are prepared to tolerate the "forcible" incorporation of the British-Irish into a united Ireland.

Is there a shred of legitimacy to such an accusation? There is not. I have, in writing, pleaded with Jack to pay a little less attention to Lenin's writings on the rights of the Cossacks in Soviet Russia and a little more to his writings on whether or not the Ulster protestants have the right to exercise a veto over the establishment of a united Ireland. Here is the most

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.....

germane of all Lenin's quotations on the British-Irish:

"A home rule bill for Ireland is now going through parliament. But in Ireland there is the Northern province of Ulster, which is inhabited partly by English-born protestants as distinct from the catholic Irish. Well then, the British Conservatives, led by Carson, the British version of our Black Hundred landlord Purishkevich, have raised a frightful outcry against Irish home rule. This, they say, means subjecting Ulstermen to an alien people of alien creed! Lord Carson has threatened rebellion, and has organised gangs of reactionary armed thugs for this purpose." Lenin goes on to accuse the Liberals of "losing their nerve, bowing to the reactionaries, making concessions to them, offering to conduct a referendum in Ulster and put off reform for Ulster for six years!"

He continues: "The haggling between the Liberals and the reactionaries continues. Reform can wait: the Irish have waited half a century; they can wait a little longer; you can't very well 'offend' the landlords! Of course, if the Liberals appealed to the people of Britain, to the proletariat, Carson's reactionary gangs would melt away immediately and disappear. The peaceful and full achievement of freedom by Ireland would be guaranteed.

"But is it conceivable that the liberal bourgeoisie will turn to the proletariat for aid against the landlords? Why, the Liberals in Britain are also lackeys of the money-bags, capable only of cringing to the Carsons" (VI Lenin *On Britain* Moscow 1979, p170).

Jack can be expected to raise objections to parts of this passage. I myself have some criticisms of it: designating the Ulster protestants (or British-Irish) as a 'labour aristocracy' is fine by me, but dismissing them as "landlords" would suggest less than the firmest grasp of the entire situation or, alternatively, polemics gone

mad (a little bit of Conradism, perhaps). I would also question Lenin's assessment of the ease with which the resistance of the British-Irish could be quelled. Nevertheless, on the essentials, it is clear that it is Jack, not me, who has the problem.

Lenin was not so ignorant of the situation in Ireland at the time to fail to notice that there existed hundreds of thousands of British-Irish. Indeed, his opposition to a referendum held separately in Ulster can only be explained by his appreciation that it would, or could, be lost due to the preponderance of the British-Irish inside that particular province. For Lenin it is clear that this labour aristocracy can be granted no right to self-determination if the exercise of it gives them an effective veto, when it comes to the liberation of the whole of Ireland. Lenin is revealed here as no less prepared than I am to 'force' the British-Irish, to some extent against their will, into a united Ireland. Here, in this passage, Lenin also identifies the (mysterious?) political agency, or one of the political agencies (along with the Irish working class) capable of putting into practice the Leninist project of uniting the whole of Ireland. So, Jack, was Lenin himself an advocate of a "new form of slavery"? It is back-to-the-drawing-board time.

Jack has repeatedly suggested that if his critics get their way communists will be perceived as advocating the driving of the British-Irish into the sea! This is nonsense. It is equally nonsense to suggest that any of Jack's critics would advocate the British-Irish becoming second class citizens in a united Ireland any more than we think he advocates second class citizenship for the catholic population inside his "British-Irish entity", independent or otherwise. But the numerical preponderance of the British-Irish inside any part of Ireland clearly could not (as far as Lenin was concerned) give them rights to be used by British imperialism as a pretext with which to frustrate the attempt by the Irish people as a whole to take control of the most productive part of Irish industry, precisely where the British-Irish were concentrated.

If Jack fails to understand this much, then he fails to understand that, for Lenin, the right of nations to self-determination was all about supporting the struggle for freedom of oppressed nations. Lenin supported this right both for its own sake (because it could make the struggle of the proletariat for supremacy within the new state less complicated and, therefore, easier) and for the effect such a struggle has in educating the proletariat of the oppressor nation as to who its true allies are. Each and every defeat for the bourgeoisie of an oppressor nation cannot but bring forward its overthrow by its gravedigger: not the oppressed nation, but its own proletariat.

Jack really ought to ponder on the following quote from Lenin: "From their daily experience the masses know perfectly well the value of geographical and economic ties and the advantages of a big market and a big state. They will, therefore, resort to secession only when national oppression and national friction make joint life absolutely intolerable and hinder any and all economic intercourse" (my emphasis, VI Lenin *The right of nations to self-determination* Moscow 1979, p34).

In this pamphlet Jack can find as

much proof as he could possibly require that whenever Lenin refers to the right of nations to self-determination, this is short hand for the right of oppressed nations. Self-evidently the reason why Lenin was opposed to the self-determination of the British-Irish is because they fail to qualify, on the grounds that they have never suffered any oppression at the hands of the Irish people. Possibly uniquely of Jack's critics I concede that, inside a united Ireland, elements of such oppression might rise to the surface. If this was to occur, the consequent unanticipated friction would necessitate the search for new solutions.

But the central point is that oppression does not exist today, nor is it likely to do so within a united Ireland. This is important because all our perspectives ought to focus upon the real situation rather than the less likely scenarios. To do otherwise is to descend into what Marx dismissed as "purely scholastic questions". And even in the unlikely event of elements of oppression appearing, before Leninists could grant the British-Irish the specific right to a separate state, certain conditions would have to be put in place. Regrettably, there remains enormous equivocation on Jack's part as to whether or not he is offering unconditional support for the British-Irish to opt for a state of their own, and on whether he is prepared to tolerate the secession in turn of the catholic minority from his British-Irish state.

Jack insists he is opposed to the oppression of catholics inside the existing orange state and would tolerate no such oppression inside a new British-Irish state. I believe him. But the guarantee he insists upon in thesis 15 is unconditional, and that is the problem. All the evidence available to us suggests that, whereas there are realistic (if far from guaranteed) prospects for the existence of a secular united Ireland, one in which no community suffers any oppression, the borders Jack has drawn up for a British-Irish entity are likely (other things being equal) to give Paisley, Trimble *et al* everything they want. If the armed wing of the British-Irish resistance to a united Ireland make plain their intention to draw up borders similar to those advocated by Jack and to declare UDI, just where will Jack stand?

This is the question to which we most urgently need an answer. Given that the Irish will, perfectly reasonably, fear that they are witnessing a rerun of history, there will, inevitably, be armed resistance inside catholic-dominated areas to any such scheme. They will no more be satisfied with any 'autonomy' delegated to them by the existing political leadership of the British-Irish than the East Timorese were satisfied with the kind of 'autonomy' promised by the existing Indonesian state.

Jack might want to question my insertion above of the caveat, "other things being equal". This is a reference to the political realities in Ulster today. If Jack supports immediate withdrawal by the forces of British imperialism, then he has to take into consideration the political consciousness of the British-Irish as they are today, not as they will be on the eve of a successful socialist revolution.

Because the working class is, regrettably, not on the verge of taking power today (neither in Britain nor Ireland), everything Jack says about

the national policy of the Bolshevik government, when Russia was a workers' state, is entirely besides the point. And even if a workers' republic was immediately on the agenda in Ireland, comparison between the British-Irish and the Cossacks is unhelpful.

In Jack's latest article (*Weekly Worker* October 7) he described the Cossacks as "an historically privileged caste of peasant-soldiers who served as the counterrevolutionary terror troops of tsarism". He then went on to pose and answer the following question: "Is there a qualitative difference between the Cossacks and the British-Irish? Surely not." Jack is here insulting the British-Irish. They are no peasant soldiers: on the contrary, they constitute an integral component of the working class in the north east of Ireland. And, as Jack himself stressed, the income differentials between the two component parts of the working class in Ulster is minuscule when compared to similar labour aristocracies like, say, the white South African working class. From an objective point of view, the overwhelming majority of the British-Irish (quite unlike the case of both the white South Africans and the Cossacks) have, even in the short term, nothing to gain and everything to lose by any continuation of support for oppression.

In his first attack on my position (or what was inaccurately presented as my position), Jack wrote: "Comrade Delargy is convinced that the antagonism cleaving the British-Irish and the catholic-Irish cannot be resolved, even partially, under capitalism. I profoundly disagree." Do you know what I find most extraordinary about this sentence, Jack? It is that in it everything is back to front. While I would prefer a united Ireland to be a workers' republic from day one of its existence, and while I insist that no stable (ie, permanent) solution to the British-Irish problem is possible otherwise than in a workers' republic, it is incorrect to say (as Jack himself acknowledged elsewhere in his article) that my support for a united Ireland is conditional on the working class raising itself to political supremacy.

When I wrote (*Weekly Worker* September 16) that thesis 16 contained some relevant points, what I meant is that a federation of two workers' republics might solve the problem posed by the British-Irish permanently and definitively rather than merely partially and in an unstable manner, this being all I anticipate under capitalism - a position with which Jack, sometimes, seems to concur. One of my several objections to Jack's theses is their reference to the solution of the various national questions in Soviet Russia. Such references must mean (if they mean anything at all) that it is Jack, not myself, who is making his support for a united Ireland conditional on its being born as a workers' republic. While such ultimatum 'solutions' might suit the purposes of loyalist paramilitaries, they have no place in a Leninist programme.

If, on the other hand, theses 9 and 16 were not intended as an ultimatum excuse for refusing to endorse the immediate reunification of Ireland, then Jack must be peddling the myth that a voluntary, peaceful and stable settlement can be enshrined in a capitalist constitution and guaranteed by the forces of the capitalist state. If this is Jack's position, then he is a demonstrating mind-boggling naivety ●

Not a country, but a battle cry

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group argues that the British-Irish must accede to the wishes of the majority

Democracy implies force, though not necessarily violence. It requires the minority to go along with the decision of the majority

Every democrat must support the right of the Irish people to self-determination. This has been and must remain at the core of the communist policy on Ireland. But this right stands in stark contradiction to the 'right' of the British-Irish to self-determination. At the heart of the Irish national question is the threat and use of force by the British-Irish minority against the democratic rights of the majority. It is reflected in the struggle between the forces of Irish republicanism and British-Irish loyalism.

Irish nationalists and democrats in England, Scotland and Wales support the right of the whole of the Irish people to self-determination. Opposed to this are successive British governments, the Labour Party, the Tory Party and various parties of Irish unionists. When the Labour Party called for a united Ireland, they did so on the basis of the 'consent' of the British-Irish. This 'consent' means recognition of the so-called right of the British-Irish to self-determination, otherwise known as the 'protestant veto'. All those backing British imperialism solemnly declare that the British-Irish should not be 'forced' into a united Ireland against their will. A united Ireland must be voluntary.

Consistent democrats defend and support the right of the Irish people to self-determination. We must totally oppose the bogus pseudo-democratic arguments of the protestant veto. This means concretely that we are for an all-Ireland referendum to settle the question of the British presence. This democratic demand must be central to communist agitation, whether the IRA is engaged in armed struggle or not. But British Marxists have tended to ignore this democratic demand either by simply supporting the armed struggle or supporting the consent of the British-Irish.

We have the example of the 1918 general election as a substitute referendum. It showed very clearly the will of the Irish people. British imperialism overturned that decision and divided the country by the violent use of military force. The orange state has been nothing less than an institutionalised rebellion against Irish democracy by the British-Irish with their 100,000 legally held firearms and the support of the British army. Even without a formal vote, democrats are entitled to claim, over 80 years after the 1918 general election, that the majority of the Irish people are in favour of British withdrawal from Ireland. But we are always ready to repeat the call for an immediate all-Ireland referendum to put the matter to a democratic test.

I am in favour of a united Ireland with a transitional federal structure, which gives a wide degree of local autonomy within the framework of a democratic secular constitution, based on full equality for all citizens. I won't repeat here the arguments previously advanced (*Weekly Worker* September 16). This position does, however, agree with Jack Conrad's thesis 13. But that is subordinate to an all-Ireland referendum and British withdrawal.

Unfortunately the 20 theses from Jack Conrad, now supported by the Provisional Central Committee, fails to mention the right of the Irish people to self-determination, even once (*Weekly Worker* August 26). This is not simply an oversight. It renders the theses seriously flawed.

Thesis 10 says that the CPGB is "not for expelling Northern Ireland from the union". But the CPGB is "for the immediate - ie, unconditional - withdrawal of the British state and British troops from Northern Ireland". If the British state withdrew from Northern Ireland, then the Six Counties would no longer be under the political, military and legal jurisdiction of the state. Then Northern Ireland would be expelled, unless it has a choice in the matter. But thesis 7 says: "There can be no right of present-

consider self-critically. At the moment I see no more than a crude attempt to rubbish what I am saying by slinging some mud. A spade should be called by its name. But for me these must be political labels, justified as such, and not just casually slung around.

Let us consider the charge of "nationalism". Since Jack does not bother to explain this serious allegation, we can only guess at what he means. We have to presume I am charged with Irish nationalism. Naturally I refute this. The only substance to this, as far as I can see, is the fact that I support the right of the Irish people to self-determination. Irish nationalists also support this. But to claim that because of this I am an Irish nationalist is silly. I support this right as a consistent democrat.

Of course if I am 'marching' side by side with Irish nationalism, it is worth pointing out that Jack is marching side by side with British nationalism. In fact many fear that Jack is not merely marching side by side with British nationalism, but is merging with it. It is Jack that has been at pains to prove the existence of a British nation and the non-existence of the Scottish and Welsh nations. He seems offended by the fact that I have insulted the British nation by calling it reactionary. He is more than a little upset that I am proposing that a section of the British people in Ireland "would have no more rights than one of the 51 states in the USA or a German *Land*" such as Saxony. As far as Jack accusing me of "reeking of nationalism", the words 'pot', 'kettle' and 'black' spring to mind.

Let us now consider the political category of 'nation'. I am prepared to accept that there is a British nation formed from above. This is a peculiar nation, because it was formed as, or developed into, a multinational state. In 1917 in *State and revolution* Lenin quotes Engels' views on the federal republic. He refers both to 'Britain' and the four nations that comprise it. He says that a federal republic "would be a step forward in Britain, where the two islands are peopled by four nations and in spite of a single parliament three different systems of legislation already exist side by side" (VI Lenin *SW* Vol 2, p289). It should be obvious that the "four nations" referred to are England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The only factor that has changed has been the partition of the Irish nation in 1922. Engels and Lenin were not mistaken in observing the national composition of these islands. Neither have these four nations disappeared since.

We do not need Stalin's theory of nations to tell us what is staring us in the face. But equally these nations do not contradict his theory. Jack then tries to argue that I have "fixed categories" and a "check list approach". Of course I have a category of 'nation' and consider that Stalin's theory is the best on offer. This does not distinguish me from other Marxists. But my view of nations is ruled out

because, according to Jack, it is a "check list approach".

In my article I rejected the idea of a check list. I referred to Stalin's work as "guidelines". We have to apply these guidelines to real and complex situations with real people, where it is not always clear-cut. Is it not Jack who has come up with a "check list approach", which he very generously decides to label me with? It reminds me of José Villa, who continuously claims that I have a category of bourgeois democratic revolution, because he has that category and can see nothing else. Could it be that Jack Conrad has a check list mentality, which is all he can see when he looks at others?

Let us take the case of Scotland. Engels and Lenin recognised Scotland as one of the four nations in the islands. We can delve a little deeper by applying Stalin's theory. When it comes to the Scottish people themselves, they are in no doubt that they are a nation with a long cultural history. On a number of different levels there is no doubt about it.

But Jack is armed with his own secret check list - we are not entirely sure what is in this, because he keeps it hidden in his back pocket. He has proven at least to his own satisfaction that Scotland is not a nation. He says to the Scottish people, 'You may think you are a nation, but my secret check list proves that you are mistaken, all five million of you.' Mary Godwin, a close ally of Jack, echoes this. She accuses me of being a "formalist" for daring to think that Scotland is a nation. She declares rather grandly that my "mechanical logic" (thinking that Scotland is a nation) puts categories first and the complexities of real life second (*Weekly Worker* August 19).

I think declaring Scotland is not a nation is putting a fixed category first, and is out to lunch as far as the real life of Scottish people is concerned - or is it the North British? I am reminded of the anarchists who oppose all leadership whilst busily introducing their own secret leadership. Now we have those declaring their opposition to everybody else's fixed categories and mechanical logic, while introducing their own fixed categories and steam-powered illogic via the back door.

Jack and myself are agreed in one respect: the British-Irish are not a nation. Neither for that matter is Texas or Saxony. I do not know whether the "check list" that led him to that conclusion is the same or different to mine! They are not a nation. Indeed the very label that Jack has given them tells its own story. They are part of the Irish nation and part of the British nation. There is no Ulster nation and no significant forces claiming that there is. However, I think that we would get more clarity in this debate if we spoke of an Ulster nation. Perhaps Jack is speaking of self-determination not for the British-Irish but for a future Ulster nation?

On the question of the Scottish na-

tion, Jack attributes views to me that I do not hold. He says that nations are a modern invention. He then states that I am claiming the existence of an "ancient Scottish nation". He says: "If the British nation was 'forged' in the 17th century, as comrade Craig contends, what then of his pre-modern or ancient English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish nations?" (*Weekly Worker* September 23). What indeed? Since my article makes no reference to these "ancient" nations, Jack is exposing a contradiction of his own making.

Scotland has a history as a feudal dynasty. It was not a nation any more than England, Wales or Ireland. As Jack himself has pointed out, nationalists view their nation as extending backwards into the mists of time and incorporating dynastic Scotland. Nation is a relatively modern concept and is tied to the question of citizenship and democracy. To a certain extent nations were created by the political processes unleashed by the English, American and French revolutions.

According to Jack, the Scottish nation was invented in the 19th century - "crude Victorian inventions". Was the invention of the British nation crude? Is Jack claiming some sort of superiority for his favoured nation? In any case I tend to think that it was earlier than that: in the 17th and 18th centuries, although it might be later in the case of Wales. But it does not greatly matter. I am quite happy to be corrected by those who have studied this more. The point is that the Scottish nation was invented, like every other invented nation. It was therefore a real nation, or as real as any other. This is why Engels identified it as one of "the four nations" of these islands.

Jack does not acknowledge the significance of defining a nation as a political or democratic category. If we are going to speak of democracy, then we must have an idea of the voting constituency and division of that constituency into a majority and minority. Democracy implies force, though not necessarily violence. It requires the minority to go along with the decision of the majority. We cannot speak of democracy as the absence of force. That is an anarchist way of looking at democracy - every individual does their own thing.

The highest form of democratic advance is the democratic revolution. This is not some pacifist rally, but the mass use of force for democratic ends.

When the southern confederate states of America decided to secede and form an independent state, Marx opposed this and was in favour of the use of force against the Confederates. As he said, "If the north and the south formed two autonomous countries like England and Hanover, for instance, their separation would be no more difficult than was the separation of England and Hanover. 'The south' is neither geographically clearly separate from the north nor is it a moral entity. It is not a country at all, but a battle cry" (K Marx *Surveys from exile* London 1981, p344).

Jack seems to have come up with the universal principle that force can never be used and everybody should have the freedom to secede ●

Tory lurch to right

After Blackpool the Conservative Party under Hague looks unelectable, argues **Michael Malkin**

"Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad." Had Euripedes been at Blackpool last week, he would have pointed to the Tory conference as eloquent proof of his maxim, for what we witnessed was a political party, once a mighty force, losing touch with reality.

With a pre-conference poll indicating that William Hague's party was scraping the bottom of its post-1997 lows (Labour 52%, Conservatives 25%) and that his own popularity ratings - even among Tory supporters - were measurable only in minus quantities, Hague was confronted by a formidable task: to win back the millions of middle and working class voters who defected to Blair in 1997 by restoring some semblance of confidence in his leadership and in the Conservative Party's electability as a viable and coherent alternative to New Labour. In both respects he failed dismally.

Only two years ago in the same hall, in the aftermath of its catastrophic performance in the general election, Hague blamed defeat on the "arrogant, selfish and conceited" nature of his party, which was, in his own words, perceived as "harsh, uncaring and greedy". The age of "caring conservatism" was inaugurated (*The Guardian* October 5). It was time for the 'Listen to Britain' campaign. Two years and dozens of 'focus groups' later, the product of this implausible conversion to humility and compassion was unveiled. *The common-sense revolution* - a fatuous oxymoron - turns out to be little more than a ragbag of neo-Thatcherite, supposedly populist nostrums. This bombastic, bloated and intensely backward-looking document, with its "five guarantees to the British people" and its 60 policy initiatives, laughably endows all the most prejudiced and reactionary opinions of the home counties saloon bar ideologue with the status of political wisdom.

Take Europe. The renewed outbreak of civil war in the party on this question, set ablaze last week by the triumphant return of Thatcher - more rabid than ever - to the centre stage of Tory politics, calls to mind a striking historical parallel with 1906. Then, as now, the Tories were reeling from electoral catastrophe and wracked by internal divisions. It spent the best part of 16 years tearing itself apart in a vicious internecine conflict between free traders and protectionists. A similar, protracted and bitter struggle over the EU and the single currency now seems inevitable. This alone is enough to make the party unelectable for the foreseeable future. It is premature to speak in terms of a split, but nonetheless it is true that there are *de facto* two Tory parties.

In retrospect, the party leadership's decision to seek Thatcher's personal endorsement of its lurch to the right and to have her anoint Hague as the chosen one will surely be seen as a profound mistake. It was entirely predictable that allowing Thatcher to speak - even at a fringe meeting - would mean that she effectively hijacked the conference. Anyone who doubts the divisive impact of Thatcher's inter-

ventions on Europe and (even more disgustingly) on her friend "Senator Pinochet" should take a look at the *Evening Standard* of October 7.

In a signed article, the paper's editor, Max Hastings - previously head of *The Daily Telegraph* and long-standing proponent of one-nation Toryism - launches a vitriolic attack on what he calls the "freak show" and "xenophobic circus" at the Winter Gardens, an event that had "shunned the real world". Describing himself as "a sad and bitter ex-Tory", Hastings denounces Thatcher's "semi-crazed chauvinism" and "jingoistic crudities" and openly describes her as someone "who had to be removed from office because she went mad". Lamenting "the wreck of a great political movement ... held captive by the lost legions of Thatcher, talking only to a few thousand other lost souls of the same persuasion", Hastings tells us that if a general election were held tomorrow, he "would have to vote Labour because Mr Blair is an effective leader running a competent government with a realistic view about Europe". This is a measure of how serious things are for the Tories in the wake of Blackpool.

Turning to the detail of some of *The common-sense revolution's* proposals, let us begin by examining the most eye-catching of Hague's "five guarantees": ie, the "tax guarantee", whereby the party pledges that "tax will fall as a share of the nation's income over the term of a parliament under a Conservative government". Despite abundant evidence that what primarily concerns the electorate today is an increase in public investment to enhance the quality and accessibility of services such as health and education, Hague's Tory Party - casting a nostalgic eye back to the 'golden age' of 1980s Thatcherism and still wanting to fight yesterday's battles - remains fixated on tax. The "guarantee" itself is astounding. Given the exigencies of the economic cycle, no chancellor in their right mind would or could make such a pledge, yet shadow chancellor Francis Maude goes further and proposes that stringent controls on public spending and borrowing should be enshrined in a new balanced budget act, which would make it illegal for a government to borrow money in order to finance higher spending without raising taxes. At the same time he says that a Tory government would make it a priority to reduce the 40% rate of income tax currently paid by the well-off.

In some senses, this approach is Blairism taken to the extreme, in so far as it turns Gordon Brown's much-vaunted 'prudence' into an iron and inflexible instrument of fiscal policy. Its implications for our class are especially serious, for, if the "tax guarantee" is carried out regardless of economic circumstances - which, if it is to be credible, it *must* be - then in relation to public spending it presages a potentially massive attack on the living standards of all those who are most dependent on public provision: ie, the working class.

Maude has the gall to suggest that any suffering that results from the



Hague: for Pinochet and the pound

application of his balanced budget act will be made good by an increase in donations to charity. Liberated from the 'excessive' burden of a 40% top rate of tax, the better-off will, he assures, feel more inclined to be generous to those less fortunate, because "the growing weight of the state has affected both our ability and our natural willingness to help others" (*The Independent* October 6). The reality behind this pernicious nonsense is vastly different. When challenged as to how the "tax guarantee" could be made affordable, spokesmen candidly pointed to an expected steep fall in the social security budget under the next Tory government: ie, a blitz on benefits.

This leads us to another of Hague's pledges, the "can work, must work guarantee". The party's document makes much of launching a crusade against "scroungers and shirkers", with total removal of benefit from all those who decline to take up just one job or training offer. Job centres will be contracted out to the private sector, and paid by 'results'. These agencies will be given new investigative, quasi-police powers, akin to those of the tax inspectorate. No mention is made of the costs entailed in recruiting the small army of bureaucratic snoopers needed to enforce such a draconian war on claimants, but in its own perverse way it should lead to a further reduction in the unemployed. Again, rather than representing a new initiative, this "guarantee" merely takes to extremes the existing arrangements already put in place by New Labour. Shorn of its pretensions to "common sense", it is meant to be the long desired revenge of 'middle England' against the 'layabouts' whom decent tax-paying folk keep in a life of idle luxury.

Turning, finally, to "the sterling guarantee", we reach the nub of the matter. On the face of it, this pledge that the Tories "will oppose entry into the European single currency at the next general election" sounds rela-

tively innocuous and on one level merely restates the party's existing commitment to keep out of the euro "in this parliament and the next". *The common-sense revolution*, however, and particularly Hague's own conference speech, marks a qualitative development in policy. Euroscepticism is no longer enough. Frank, indeed proud xenophobia is now the order of the day. Tory apparatchiks assure us that Hague's speech, larded with adulatory references to Churchill, calling for a new "battle for Britain" and replete with cringe-making references to nasty European food, dirty European lorries and thieving European fishermen, was written before the conference got underway. Nonetheless, it accorded perfectly with Thatcher's absurd denunciation of all things foreign in general and European in particular: "In my lifetime all our problems have come from mainland Europe and all the solutions have come from English-speaking nations who have kept law-abiding liberty alive for the future" (*The Daily Telegraph* October 6).

Hague's speech underlined the essential message behind the party's policy document towards Europe - in effect, a threat to sabotage the EU by vetoing the forthcoming Maastricht-style treaty that is to be negotiated in a series of inter-governmental conferences over the next two years: "When we're in government the next new EU treaty must contain a flexibility clause or else I tell you there will be no new treaty" (*The Guardian* October 8).

What Hague refers to as a "flexibility clause" means that the British government must be given the right to opt out of any and all European legislation that is not to its liking: ie, *Europe à la carte*. If, by some miracle, Hague were elected in 2001 and proceeded to implement his threat, one of the paradoxical outcomes of such a stance would probably be to render unworkable the enlargement of the EU, to include eastern European countries, on which hitherto even

Tory Eurosceptics have set such store. Furthermore, as Hague's own talk about "the value of nation in the modern world", his vision of "an independent Britain" and his bathetic promise to "give you back your country" suggests, what now amounts to a rhetorical flirtation with the idea of British withdrawal from the EU could become explicit Tory policy.

What can one say of a bourgeois party that has so clearly lost touch with mainstream bourgeois opinion - especially big capital - about Britain's future in Europe, and about much else besides? Rather than giving it a platform on which to base itself as a viable party of opposition, Blackpool has set the Conservatives on the way to becoming a backward-looking, Europhobic sect, talking only to its own ageing and dwindling membership, and for the moment effectively marginalised. 'Clear blue water' may separate the post-Blackpool Tories from New Labour, but this also constitutes an ever-widening gulf between the party and an electorate which overwhelmingly takes as common sense not defence of Pinochet and the pound, but its interests as wage workers and consumers of public services. The task of this Blackpool conference was to try to recapture the middle ground so successfully expropriated from them by Blairism, the ground where elections in this country are won and lost. Instead, obsessed by the dream of recreating the glorious Thatcherite past, they have done the exact opposite.

Small wonder, therefore, that the Tories are increasingly inclined to try and mobilise forces such as the Countryside Alliance - dominated by its own supporters - and such campaigns as that launched by *The Daily Telegraph* to 'save' the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Given his impotence both in parliament and in the country, Hague has little choice but to engage in wrecking tactics wherever the opportunity arises of doing damage to the Blair project. This is what makes the party's abandonment of bipartisanship on the question of Northern Ireland, in itself paradigmatic of the whole process characterised by extra-parliamentary agitation, so significant.

It is also the reason why this paper and our organisation have devoted so much time and effort to a thorough theoretical analysis of the problems posed by the democratic rights of the British-Irish population of the Six Counties. Some comrades, indulging more in logomachy than rational argument, maintain that the category 'British-Irish' has no content, and that the whole question is in some sense a digression or diversion from more pressing matters. On the contrary, as the Tories' stance on the matter amply illustrates, it is, and will remain, a central question of British politics.

That the Tory Party is (for the time being at least) incapable of winning a general election, is a commonplace. It is true that nothing short of an economic or political cataclysm looks capable of unseating Blair at the next election. Nonetheless, the lessons of history suggest that it would be foolish to write off the Tories in the long term, just as it was foolish in the 1980s to talk of the death of the Labour Party and the onset of an epoch of one-party government.

The task of communists is to fight against all the forces of reaction, whether in their Blairite manifestation, or in the weird guise taken on by the Conservative Party at Blackpool ●

Michael Malkin

Hero and criminal

Mike Marqusee **Redemption song: Muhammad Ali and the spirit of the sixties** London 1999, pp310, hbk, £17

Everyone above a certain age has a favourite memory of Muhammad Ali. My own is from the 1974 'Rumble in the jungle' - the 32-year-old Ali's attempt in Zaire to regain boxing's world heavyweight title against a supposedly unstoppable George Foreman. In one of the most mythical moments in sport, Ali, after soaking up cruel punishment throughout the match, moved off the ropes with 30 seconds to go in the eighth and hammered the tiring champion to the floor with a lightening two-hand combination.

What happened next was remarkable. At home in a small South Wales village, a room full of my (very) white, working class family - including communists, borderline racists and uncles who actually had money on Foreman - leaped to their feet and bounced round the furniture, punching the air in triumph. This book goes a long way to explain why they too felt they had won something when Foreman hit the canvas.

On February 25 1964, Cassius Clay defeated Sonny Liston to become heavyweight champion of the world, a shocking upset of the form book. After the contest - in defiance of the traditions of the fight world - Clay spent a quiet evening in private conversation with Malcolm X, the singer Sam Cooke and awesome American footballer Jim Brown. The next morning, Ali met the press:

"I believe in allah and in peace. I don't want to move into white neighbourhoods. I don't want to marry a white woman ... I'm not a christian any more. I know where I'm going, and I know the truth, and I don't have to be what you want me to be. I'm free to be what I want" (p8).

This was a startling act of transformation. Although he had been a secret member of the black nationalist Nation of Islam since 1962, for much of his career before the fight the image of Clay was essentially unthreatening to mainstream society. He was simply "brash and bold, an entertaining eccentric" (p10). Clay had been one of the US successes at the Rome Olympics. Asked by a Soviet reporter about the conditions of American blacks, he had snapped back: "To me, the USA is still the best country in the world, counting yours." In those days, he was even proud of his name, something he was later to reject as only worthy of a "slave": "Don't you think it's a beautiful name? Makes you think of the Colosseum and those Roman gladiators" (p47).

If anything, the hapless Sonny Liston was still identified in 1964 as the 'uppity' black man in the public's eye, with Clay almost an honorary 'great white hope'. This had begun to change subtly in the lead-up to the 1964 clash, much to the consternation of the fight establishment and Clay's entourage. His then publicist, Harold Conrad, despaired: "The whole sales pitch for the fight had been Clay against Liston, white hat against black hat, and now it looked like there'd be two black hats fighting" (p77).

This book attempts to explain the remarkable metamorphosis of the impish and playful Cassius Clay into Muhammad Ali, at one time the embodiment of alien menace for the establishment. Fundamentally, Marqusee sees this as both a prod-



Ali: someone who belongs to us

uct of the personal qualities of this remarkable athlete and human being, but also the social, political and cultural context of that equally remarkable decade, the 1960s. He focuses on an historical juncture that supplied the hidden "raw materials from which [Ali] invented himself, the collective experiences crystallised in that self-construction" (p4).

United States-born writer Marqusee is the author of a number of political studies of sport, including the well regarded *Anyone but England: cricket and the national malaise* (1994). He is one of the few - and in my opinion one of the very best - contemporary left writers to regard sport as a worthy subject of critical study. The book has as its stated intention to "reclaim" Ali, the "greatest figure of resistance in the history of modern sport" (p4). It is brilliantly successful.

The mature Ali that emerges is an intuitively intelligent manipulator of his own image, a man constantly aware of his world role and iconographic status. But as Marqusee puts it, "It could have been different":

"... as we retell Ali's tale, we cannot allow ourselves to be so seduced by its hero that we forget the confusing conditions in which his story unfolded ... Doubt and contradiction, misjudgement and compromise contribute as much to the making of a hero ... as single-minded determination and clarity of purpose. At the core of the Ali story is a young man who made daunting choices and stuck to them in the face of ghastly threats and glittering inducements" (p6).

It could have been different in all sorts of ways. Alongside that young man at the core of the narrative are the 1960s themselves. A decade which revealed not only the profound revolutionary potential in the societies of advanced western capitalism, but also the abject failure of the parties that claimed to be revolutionary alternatives to give shape to, and win hegemony over, movements such as that for black civil rights. In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that amongst blacks many of the most militant - like Ali - found themselves drawn to the ranks of vociferous separatism, explicitly rejecting the

assimilationist projects of the mainstream protest movement led by the likes of Martin Luther King.

Of course, this had its progressive side. In early 1966 an administrative readjustment of the percentage pass mark in the army intelligence test (Ali had already failed once) made the heavyweight champion of the world

eligible for service - fit for combat. Inundated by press inquiries, Ali blurted out the immortal line - "Man, I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong." This sentence was to become one of the most resonant of the 60s. In that essentially personalised rejection of a war which 'white' society wished him to fight on its behalf we see the deep alienation of Ali and a whole swathe of young black Americans from a society that despised them. It is a sentence that reverberates with revolutionary potential.

Marqusee writes of this period with sensitivity and insight: "His assertion of his personal prerogatives led him to embrace a universal cause. Like [Malcolm X], he emerged from the cocoon of nationalism to spread his wings as an internationalist. But he did so under the pressure of circumstances - the war, the draft, the heavyweight championship, the pull of alternative constituencies. It was Ali's capacity to embody so many of the underlying trends of the time ... that made him a representative figure, a hero to the insurgents and a criminal in the eyes of the state" (p192).

The last irony is that this great man - once reviled, stripped of his honours, hounded, denied his citizenship and access to his very livelihood because of his brave political stand and rejection of a society he detested - is today a "genial 90s icon of harmony and goodwill" (p3). Like Malcolm X, Ali has had his political teeth extracted by the establishment.

The great merit of Marqusee's excellent book is his refusal to accept this, to let them have someone who belongs to us ●

Ian Mahoney

Vote apple or orange

Alexander Payne **Election USA 1999**

This excellent film is possibly the last superlative American one of the 20th century, though perhaps I will be surprised

The basic plot involves a high school election for president somewhere in the Midwest. The young actress, Reese Witherspoon, plays Tracy Flick, described by *Sight and Sound* as a "foot-stamping, cupcake-baking overachiever ... a little monster". Her character is revealed by an early statement - "It's like my mom said: the weak are always trying to sabotage the strong." Tracy is also the favourite to win, and is indeed the only candidate in the beginning.

Civics teacher Jim McAllister (Matthew Broderick) decides this cannot be allowed to happen. Tracy had had an affair with a friend of McAllister's, another teacher, who was sacked for having sex with a minor, though Tracy did not suffer as a result. Mindful of this past history, McAllister decides to stop Tracy running unopposed and gets the genially dumb Paul Metzler (Chris Klein) to stand. On polling day, Paul will vote for Tracy because he thinks it unfair to vote for himself.

McAllister persuaded him to run for the sake of the democratic process - "Do you want an apple or an orange? That's democracy."

A third candidate enters the lists - Paul's lesbian sister Tammy (Jessica Campbell), who is upset because her girlfriend has taken up with Paul. She runs on a 'who cares?' platform of nihilist indifference, which goes down well with the atomised voters. In the end, she is expelled and sent to an all-girl catholic school - just what she wants.

The tone of the film is acidic. There are no 'ideal' characters. McAllister is the closest approach to one, but he is a rather seedy figure who watches pornography in the basement and cheats on his wife. A satire on the US political process, *Election* ends with adult 'politics' intruding, because by the film's end Tracy is an assistant to a Republican congressman.

This is not a feel-good film and will probably not do too well at the box office. But if you like sharp observation of society and a dash of vinegar, you will enjoy this film very much ●

James Robertson

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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Liquidationist step

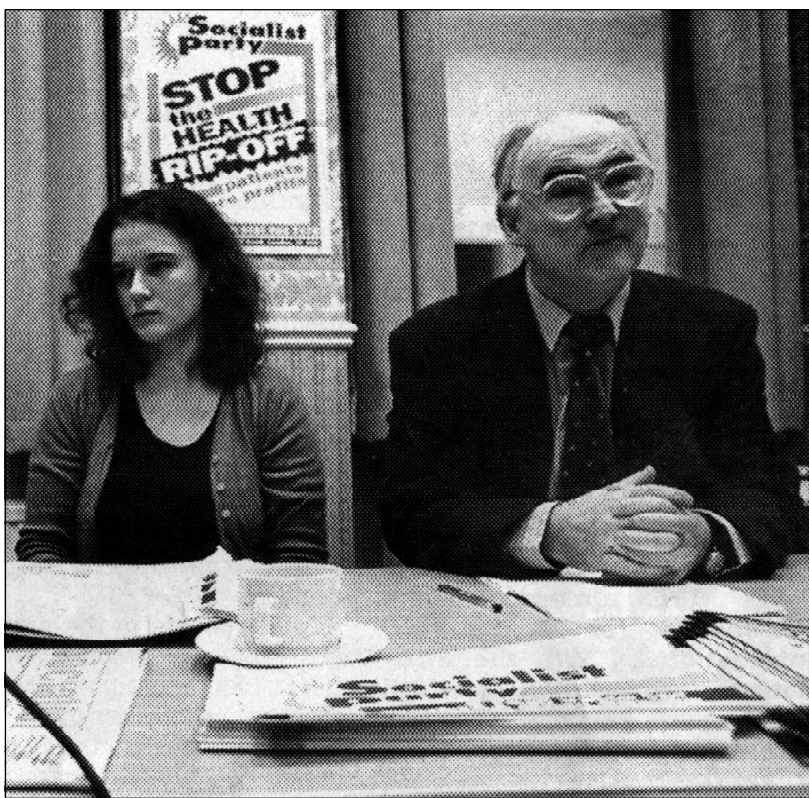
Writing in the *Weekly Worker* of October 7, London Socialist Alliance chair Nick Long sprang the mild surprise that his organisation - the Socialist Democracy Group - was "no more". Apparently, the SDG had already dissolved itself in order to enter a new grouping - namely, the Socialist Network, scheduled for launch on October 16 in Liverpool.

Comrade Long pushed this initiative as open to "all those who support the need for a new Marxist politics and are willing to examine and reassess how socialists should organise". A line or two later, he flatly contradicted this when he crudely gloated that the Communist Party would be explicitly excluded from the event.

Comrade Long's bumptious article prompted a sharp retort from the hosts of the event, the Merseyside Socialists (see below right). In particular, Anne Bannister - whose telephone number comrade Long publicly advertised as the contact point for the event - reacted cuttingly. At a North West Socialist Alliance meeting on October 9, she in effect made a statement of rebuttal.

Quoting this particular excerpt of Nick Long's *Weekly Worker* article, the comrade made clear that Liverpool is *not* an open event. It is private, intended for comrades from the SP tradition alone and a few privileged guests who share "similar views", as the statement puts it.

Nick Long's *Weekly Worker* article had stated: "... the SDG is no more. We have resolved to liquidate our organisation and put our resources at the disposal of a much larger group of comrades and help facilitate the development of the Socialist Network". Comrade Bannister made it clear that she regarded this statement as "ludicrous". She indicated that the meeting to be held on October 16 is not one at which the liquidation of organisations into the Socialist Network is



Peter Taaffe (right): facing disintegration

appropriate or called for.

This seems to flatly contradict Nick Long's ebullient announcement last week. Both comrade Bannister's intervention and the Merseyside Socialists' statement seek to play down the October 16 gathering and pooh-pooh any idea that it is a launch event of any new, or recently augmented, Socialist Network. On the face of it, this apparently leaves comrade Long's SDG in an awkward position. After all, the comrades seem to have "liquidated" into an organisation that does not want them. Perhaps they should reconstitute themselves until they find something else to liquidate into. Given the track record of some of the SDG comrades, that should take the

best part of a week.

However, despite the attempts to talk down the event, the Liverpool meeting is clearly not without some political significance. It is another development of the seemingly inexorable decline and disintegration of the Socialist Party. In this sense, the event is undoubtedly an expression of the whirlpool of *liquidationism* that is sucking the SP under.

The stated position that this is an attempt to rally just comrades who have "come from" a Socialist Party tradition is at best a little disingenuous. We know of many instances up and down the country - London, Wales, Manchester, the Midlands and Coventry - where *current* members of the SP are being mobilised to attend, head-hunted for what are perceived to be their 'dissident' opinions. Moreover, observers such as Nick Long are being invited on the basis of perceived "shared views". He was never a member of Militant/SP to my knowledge. A more accurate assessment is that this meeting represents a gathering of the rightist, liquidationist SP 'opposition in exile', some courted malcontents who remain inside Taaffe's organisation for the time, plus a rag-tag bunch of various disorientated centrists and left reformists they have drawn in their puny wake.

Clearly, such a clot will be defined by many divergent tensions. For example, practically every member of the SDG you speak to will give you a different interpretation of what the meeting is all about. In contrast to that jolly witch-hunter Nick Long, several have assured us that they would protest against any attempts to exclude us from the meeting.

However, despite the mild spat between the SDG's Nick Long and the

Merseyside Socialists, there are clear - *right liquidationist* - themes to the event that certain political forces find attractive.

First, there is its political narrowness and sectarianism. Unprompted, comrade Bannister underlined that, whatever her other disagreements with Nick Long's interpretation of the nature of the meeting, he was spot on when he boasted about its sectarian political agenda:

"After discussion with other comrades we are not offering an invitation to the *Weekly Worker* or the CPGB to attend the event in Liverpool on October 16. We do not think that your attendance would assist us to develop an open and honest exchange of ideas, when it would be likely that the discussion would be misrepresented in the next issue of the *Weekly Worker*. Nor do those attending want their names printed in the *Weekly Worker*" (e-mail, October 11).

We can dismiss the smokescreen about the printing of comrades' names. One, because it seems inconceivable that the leadership of the SP will not have its own mole at the meeting, taking careful note of who attends and who says what. Two, because while this paper is certainly in the business of exposing opportunists' real *political* identities, it has never knowingly set anyone up for a witch hunt - unlike some of the participants on October 16, I am afraid.

Furthermore, the perennial squeak of opportunists outed in this paper - 'I've been *misrepresented!*' - almost defies comment. If there is one place where 'misrepresentations' can be openly contested by those attacked - often at considerable length and over an extended period - it is in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*.

In other words, the comrades' political project is too weak to defend openly: it needs the cover of darkness to have even a chance of survival.

Yet again, we are faced with an attempt to cohere political forces - theoretically or organisationally - *behind the back of the movement they are meant to be serving*.

The second point is that, however much they present themselves as a break with the past, as new, fresh, open politics, the rancid smell of the Socialist Party's terminal crisis hangs in the air. The Merseyside Socialists have set the pace and agenda, pulling the likes of the hapless SDG behind them. This small circle in Liverpool was the latest limb to drop off Taaffe's England and Wales 'party', typically without any serious political or theoretical struggle.

Third, where has been the honest attempt to openly come to terms with the Socialist Party "tradition", to explain how the comrades have broken from it and why? In fact, the SP claims continuity with a longer tradition, going back through Trotsky's Fourth International to the Bolsheviks. Of course, we dispute this lineage from the left - we say today's SP has nothing 'Bolshevik' about it: it is a right-leaning *centrist* organisation. But it is clear that SN comrades regard themselves as having broken with the SP tradition and - by implication - the whole 20th century history of revolutionary working class organisation. What exactly do they think socialists and revolutionaries should put in its place today? Their eclectic agenda reeks of petty bourgeois diletantism.

The Liverpool meeting offers nothing new. Its significance lies in the negative lessons it teaches about the nature of political struggle in Peter Taaffe's dwindling organisation. Overwhelmingly, the opposition to the dull bureaucratic centralism of the SP apparatus is right-leaning and liquidationist. Unless the SP generates a principled left opposition, its days are cruelly numbered.

Mark Fischer

No more walk-outs

Alec Walsh of the SP comments

What is the point of this October 16 meeting in Liverpool? Is it advocating more splits from the SP? If so, this should have been openly called for and the political basis of any split made clear. I would vigorously oppose more walk-outs from the SP - if comrades have principled differences, they should openly fight for them, but not breezily split a working class organisation. If there is no split, why are SP comrades being mobilised for it?

And on what political basis are some socialist organisations being excluded and others included? Haven't we learned the lesson that any political group that starts with bans and proscriptions is useless to us?

We need open, inclusive and - if needs be - sharp debate on the crisis facing our movement and how to overcome it. That's why the agenda of the meeting - which splits up the audience for long periods into eight different 'workshops' - identity politics, youth, colonialism and racism, new technology, etc - should be rejected. Only at the end of the day do we get onto the nub of what we should be discussing - 'How should socialists organise today?' Only two hours are devoted to this key question. It is bound to be squeezed for time at the end of the day. This raises doubts about the sincerity of the organisers - do they actually want an honest exchange of views about the crisis facing us or not? ●

Statement from Merseyside Socialists

There seems to be a misunderstanding about an event organised by former members of the Socialist Party from Merseyside, Manchester and London to take place in Liverpool on October 16. This meeting is for socialists that come from a particular tradition to have an open exchange of ideas. Other groups that have similar views are being invited to send an observer.

We welcome the discussions and debate with socialists that have

been taking place in other arenas, such as Socialist Alliances, Liberty Hall, etc. We will continue to participate in and initiate the development of such forums for the exchange of ideas amongst all socialists. However, it was never intended that the Socialist Network meeting on October 16 was to be the launch of a new organisation that would cut across these developments. In fact the event has not been 'advertised' as the launch of anything.