

Back Livingstone

The contest for London mayor will open up possibilities for the left

New Labour's plans to stitch up the party nomination for London mayor looked to be in serious trouble earlier this week.

With opinion polls showing Ken Livingstone as overwhelming favourite for the job amongst Londoners, Blair was banking on the unions toeing the Millbank line and throwing their weight behind former health secretary Frank Dobson. But three of the big four - Unison, the TGWU and the GMB, together accounting for around 40% of the London trade union membership - are to ballot their members, with the TGWU recommending a vote for Livingstone. The unions as a whole will cast 33.3% of the total vote.

Blair was hoping for a repeat of the balloting in Wales, which saw Alun Michael defeat local favourite Rhodri Morgan for the Welsh assembly leadership with the help of the union bureaucrats. He had already loaded the dice in favour of Dobson by allocating one-third of the total vote to just 75 people - London's 57 Labour MPs, four MEPs and 14 adopted candidates for the Greater London Authority. Many of them, including all the MEPs and GLA candidates, were of course hand-picked in the first place. Livingstone will be lucky to pick up half a dozen votes from among these.

The remaining one-third in the electoral college system will go to individual London members. With the race just beginning, Livingstone was boosted by two opinion polls last weekend. The *Evening Standard* survey showed that 50% of Labour supporters would back 'Red Ken' if they had the chance, with only 17% preferring Dobson. A further 16% supported Glenda Jackson, with seven percent opting for Trevor Phillips. No doubt prompted by such soundings, and urged on by Dobson and Blair personally, Phillips agreed to stand down earlier this week. His reward is to be placed at the head of the Labour list for the GLA election and to run alongside Dobson as his deputy. Jackson is expected to follow his lead.

The poll found that 63% of all voters (including almost one in four Tories!) would back Livingstone if he was the official Labour candidate. If Dobson won the nomination he would be backed by a much lower percentage - 46%, although this figure shows that Labour would be likely to romp home whoever it selected. This clearly gives Blair some leeway: even if his party loses London support as a result of successfully stitching up Livingstone, Dobson should still win enough votes to defeat Jeffrey Archer on second preferences under the single transferable voting system.

But that assumes that Livingstone would not stand as an independent.

If he did so, the same poll showed that he would get 43%, as against 25% for Archer and 23% for Dobson. These findings will gladden Livingstone's heart, while sending shivers down Tony Blair's spine. A Mori poll for the *Mail on Sunday* came up with almost identical figures.

So Blair is now banking everything on a Dobson victory in a semi-democratic contest over Livingstone. After these opinion polls and the TGWU's announcement in support of the Brent East MP, it is hardly possible to keep him off the short list. In any case, that would only provoke the former leader of the Greater London Council into throwing his hat in the ring as an independent. 'Red Ken' as Independent Labour mayor would be an even worse option for Blair than allowing him to win as the official Labour candidate.

So Millbank is still finalising its plans for the selection process. In the Welsh contest each union declared all its votes for one candidate - either the bureaucrats gave their own preference or announced support for one candidate or another after a membership ballot on a winner-takes-all basis. There is talk of the Labour NEC allowing a proportional distribution according to the votes cast for each candidate in union balloting. Such a system would boost support for minority candidates (in this case for Dobson) and is clearly more democratic. Not that democracy is Blair's concern of course - all that matters is that Livingstone is defeated. But the drawback of such a change would be that it would more or less oblige all unions to ballot, and that would provide a big Livingstone majority without the aid of obfuscatory block votes.

The union tops would dearly like to deliver a Dobson vote, but such is Livingstone's popularity that almost all will be forced to at least go through the motions of consulting their members.

Blair's difficulty must be our opportunity. Unions not yet committed to balloting must be inundated with resolutions from their London branches, insisting on the members' right to decide. Furthermore, the left must give critical but enthusiastic backing to Livingstone's campaign - support which must be continued should he find his name on the ballot paper for the mayoral election next spring.

If Blair through heavy-handedness succeeds in excluding his *bête noire*, and Livingstone makes his break from Labour to stand as an independent, that would be the best outcome from the point of view of working class advance. It would signal a left split not only in London, but one with na-



A thorn in Blair's side

tional repercussions. It would provide communists with fertile soil for planting the seeds of a new mass workers' party.

But even if Livingstone ends up as the official Labour candidate - in the teeth of an all-out pro-Dobson Millbank campaign - we should mobilise for his candidacy, but *against* New Labour. In such circumstances he would certainly be encouraged to assert a much greater degree of political and organisational independence - the very thing Blair fears.

One other possibility remains: a convincing Dobson victory for the Labour nomination in an open contest, Livingstone being forced to accept the result and back his rival. The

same outcome could arise if Blair is able to buy off the Brent East MP with an offer of a government job - although it is now probably too late for that to occur. In that case the London Socialist Alliance must press ahead with plans to for a united left challenge. However, this possibility is receding and the LSA ought now to consider how best to provide critical backing for Livingstone.

No doubt there will be many who will point to the man's history as a loyal servant of Labourism and imperialism - notably his whole-hearted backing for bomber Blair in Kosova, as well as other occasions when he has placed himself firmly on the side of reaction. Livingstone is a Labour-

ite reformist, albeit a mercurial one - of that there can be no illusions. But to allow that to prevent us from doing everything we can to encourage an organisational break from Labour would be to indulge in the most abject moralism.

Last weekend Neil Kinnock, declaring himself four square behind Dobson, the official Blairite candidate, described Livingstone as "the man who invented the loony left and everything that went with it". Others can be expected to follow suit, as Millbank pulls out all the stops to ensure Livingstone's defeat. Blair is worried. We must do all we can to make his worst nightmare come true ●

Jim Blackstock

SWP conference

The three-day annual conference of the Socialist Workers Party - currently the largest revolutionary organisation in Britain - starts on November 6. The deliberations of the SWP matter to the workers' movement. Despite the overblown membership figures that leading SWPers occasionally toss out, there is no doubt that Tony Cliff's organisation unites several thousand good activists. While it is true that the SWP has never achieved anything like the serious implantation in the class of the Communist Party (or even Militant/Socialist Party fleetingly did), the mere fact of its size makes it of some importance to us.

With this in mind, the state of internal debate and thought revealed by its first *Pre-conference bulletin* is truly frightening. This slim document is the first of just three bulletins that will be produced by the SWP centre in the lead-up to November 6. (The SWP has no regular internal bulletin and, of course, no open discussion in the pages of its press). The bulk of it is taken up by three reports produced by the SWP central committee - 'The new world disorder', 'How we build' and 'Finance and membership'.

'The new world disorder' is essentially an attempt to rescue the myopically upbeat perspectives the SWP has lumbered itself with over the last period, while making sure that cadre actually operate with some degree of rationality.

Thus, internationally the 1990s are characterised as "a decade of slow recovery in working class consciousness and combativity" (*Pre-conference bulletin* No1, p5). There "has been no return to the working class offensive of the 1968-74 period", but at the same time we have seen "no repeat of the defeats of the 1980s". Thus, the document talks of the "depressed level of the class struggle in Britain", the class struggle narrowly equated with the levels of strike activity, of course. This, however, contrasts with the emergence of a "radicalised consciousness", which is apparently composed of a minority that is "more or less clearly anti-capitalist and a majority who reject Blairism in the name of reformist or left reformist ideas" (*ibid*).

Thus, on one side there is ongoing "trench warfare" with the trade union bureaucracy. On the other, an "often hidden degree of radicalisation" which "presents a challenge" to the SWP, posing the need for it to grow and become influential. Struggling for a definition of the political patchiness, the SWP leadership defines the period as having a "mosaic nature", expressed "more in consciousness than in struggle, more partial struggles than sustained struggles, more campaigns than industrial action" (p6). Special mention is therefore made of issues such as "GM foods", the "Drop the Debt demonstrations, arms sales and June's Carnival in the city" (p7).

These reflect the "very favourable" conditions, an opportunity for the SWP to move to answer "the massive ideological crisis" affecting British society ('How we build', p6). The SWP has charted the "revival in working class consciousness" throughout the 90s, yet paradoxically this leads to no "generalised upturn in the struggle", in particular in the workplace (*ibid*). We are thus "neither in an upturn nor a downturn. There is not an audience out there for us on the picket lines. Nor are there the big single-issue campaigns that dominated the first half of the 1990s ..." There is a "growing audience" for SWP ideas, but this is because "we are relating to people's consciousness rather than to struggle ..." (p7).

This is an interesting time for the SWP. It has been forced by the pressure of circumstances to revise its long-standing practice of an automatic Labour vote come election time. Yet nowhere in any of the central committee documents is there an assessment of the experience of standing candidates against Labour, apart from the throwaway comment in 'The new world disorder' that "credible votes for the left, including SWP members, shows the potential for providing disillusioned Labour supporters with a socialist alternative" (p5). The leadership concedes that they are in the business of recruiting ones and twos, yet are anxious to maintain the fiction of imminent breakthrough, of big possibilities looming, that has sustained its cadre for over a decade now.

The strains seem to be showing. If anything, the circumstantial evidence from these documents points to a *dilution* in already low-quality levels of SWP recruits. 'How we build' focuses on retention and activating the membership. This is supposed to be a two-pronged strategy - "getting them *Socialist Worker* each week and getting them to make a commitment to the SWP by taking out a standing order ..." (p7).

The notion that it is a key task of a revolutionary party's cadre to service the inactive membership with the paper and cajole them to take out any type of financial commitment to their 'party' is frankly a joke. The SWP leaders actually suggest that their thoroughly Menshevik approach to organisation is in line with the "Bolshevik tradition". The fact that such substantial parts of these three central committee resolutions are devoted to the issue of finance, of resolving the situation where "every member was not getting the paper each week" (p8) and large swathes not even paying dues, illustrates how hollow the claim is.

The SWP is a sect *par excellence* - it has little or no rationale for its existence *apart* from its existence. It lives to recruit, in other words. In the current period of reaction, with few struggles propelling people in the direction of political activism, many new members appear to be individuals that happen to be touched by the SWP because it is relatively big. Cliff's officers are "winning ones and twos - often after lengthy argument" (p7).

So these are pretty inert recruits in other words, which explains the constant battle to get them to rise to even the most basic levels of commitment. This is also being illustrated in the pre-conference discussion on the ground. In each district, aggregates are being convened, supposedly arranged to allow "members from across the district [to] get a chance to discuss together for longer than a branch meeting allows" (p2). In fact, the aggregates have confirmed what anyone with any experience of the SWP will tell you: membership is *increasingly* passive and frighteningly ignorant.

The stresses and strains that are beginning to erode 'party' unity have yet to find organised expression amongst the rank and file. It can only be a question of time ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Forced to act

I have read your recent articles on East Timor on your website (nice website), after seeing reference to them in *Green Left Weekly*.

Apart from factual errors (the armed resistance is called Falintil, the National Liberation Armed Forces of East Timor, not Fretilin, which is a political party of which Xanana Gusmao, whose first name is not Jose, has not been the leader since 1983), your position on the sending of Australian troops is dead wrong. In a vital respect your comparison with Kosova is incorrect. Imperialism intervened in Kosova in large measure to disarm the KLA, but there was no such immediate imperative in East Timor.

You argue that, "Ending pogroms and a peaceful transition to independence with as little disturbance as possible is clearly in the interests of Australia." Well, yes, now that the Australian government has been forced to intervene. The overriding imperative for Australian imperialism has been and continues to be maintaining its alliance with the Indonesian regime, and minimising embarrassment to the Indonesian armed forces (TNI). That is why the Australian government continued to publicly support Indonesian's continuing occupation of East Timor right up until the August 30 vote. That is why, even though they knew about the plans for a pogrom for months before the vote, the Australian government downplayed the danger and insisted that TNI alone must maintain 'security' in East Timor. That is why they argued against and delayed the intervention for as long as possible. If they wanted to do it so badly, as you suggest, Australian troops would have been there on September 6, rather than September 20.

When it became clear by September 5 that a genocidal campaign was being organised by TNI, a wave of anger and disgust swept through Australian working people - against their own government. If socialists in Australia followed your policy, exactly what would we have urged the mass movement to demand of the Australian government? Nothing, apparently. You declare: "Rather than appealing to the Indonesian and Australian masses to take action, opportunist strategy is to demand that the government 'do something' in order to 'expose' it." What was the point of the "action" you called for?

I suppose it is "opportunist" to call, as we have for some years and continued to do during the recent campaign, for the Australian government to "do something" by cutting its military ties with Indonesia, reversing its recognition of the Indonesia annexation of East Timor and scrapping its Timor Gap Treaty, which divides the oil resources of the East Timorese people between Australia and Indonesia. Around 100,000 Australian people did take action in the streets and workplaces, mobilisations which we often initiated and in which our recent and past activity played an important role. These actions made the aforementioned demands, and the demand that the Australian government send troops. Masses of people learned in practice about the rotten role of the Australian government, and saw that they could do something about it. The government was in fact exposed before millions of people. Mobilisations in Indonesia led by the Peoples Democratic Party similarly called for Indonesian troops out, UN troops in.

The International Socialist Organisation have been bleating that the demand to send troops "demobilised" the movement. Presumably

they would have preferred the massacres to continue, so the movement to stop the massacres could continue. Of course the imperialist rulers are seeking to use the new situation to its advantage, but they are under important political constraints - which is why they are moving very, very cautiously in their plans to disarm Falintil.

Campaigning through mass action for the insertion of imperialist troops, as well as the other demands, was the only way for us to help prevent the extermination of the East Timorese national liberation movement, and perhaps of the East Timorese nation, and the most concrete way we could advance the struggle for socialism in East Timor, Indonesia and Australia. Any other policy would have isolated the socialists, delivered the consequently smaller and weaker movement to the real opportunists in the trade union leadership and the Labor Party, lost us an audience of tens of thousands to talk to about Australian imperialism, and quite possibly led to further delays to the sending of troops, which would have meant further destruction in East Timor and further losses among East Timorese liberation fighters and socialists.

These dangers greatly outweighed any loss of credibility among the dogmatic left.

Nick Fredman
Democratic Socialist Party
Lismore, Australia

Semi-dishonest

In his review of the International Bolshevik Tendency's newly released edition of Trotsky's *Transitional programme*, the editor of *Revolution and Truth*, Ian Donovan, is at least truthful enough to acknowledge that plans to publish this volume provoked a major faction fight and split within the IBT in 1997-98 (*Weekly Worker* October 7).

He fails to note, however, that the opposition (of which I was the leader) did quite a bit more than raise "some interesting points". In fact, nearly every criticism Donovan levels at the IBT was made, with varying degrees of emphasis, nearly two years earlier by us. We argued then, as does Donovan today, that the post-war boom made it virtually impossible to lead the working class on the basis of transitional demands, which were conceived by Trotsky as a response to what he believed to be the terminal crisis of capitalism. Like Donovan, we pointed out that many demands that Trotsky saw as constituting a 'bridge' to revolution have been realised to an extent under post-war capitalism.

The inability of Trotsky's dogmatic followers - Healy, Cannon and Robertson - to come to terms with post-war reality, and their attempts to preserve orthodoxy either by denying that any boom had taken place, or by distorting the meaning of transitional demands, was likewise one of our major themes. We attempted, as Donovan now does, to make the connection between the programmatic blindness of these 'orthodox' groups and their organisational degeneration.

And while we did not dwell at length on the Spartacists' trade union work during the 1970s (which the IBT now regards as overwhelming proof of the relevancy of the *Transitional programme*), we did point out in passing that their work was no more successful than that of many other leftist groups at the time. Even the title of Donovan's piece, 'Semi-religious method', was prefaced in our documents when we pointed to the tendency to treat the *Transitional programme* as "an article of religious faith".

Why, then, does Donovan give us



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

such short shrift? I think the answer may have something to do with his difficulty in explaining why, despite the remarkable similarity between what we said in 1997 and what he says now, he not only did not side with us in the IBT fight, but was firmly (if not enthusiastically) in the dogmatist camp of the majority. To rationalise this embarrassing fact, Donovan must attempt to discredit our views, even to the point of misrepresenting them.

So, for the sake of revolutionary truth, a few corrections. We never argued "that proletarian revolution was not possible in the period of the French May 1968 general strike ... because such proletarian struggles were not possible in the post-war boom". In fact, we stated the opposite: that, for a brief moment, the events of 1968 did open up revolutionary possibilities. We claimed only that these events contained a logic very different from the notions of revolutionary crisis elaborated in the *Transitional programme* and other Marxist classics, and that the circumstances that gave rise to May '68 are not likely to repeat themselves. This did not detract from our belief that, whenever the masses throw themselves into struggle on a broad scale, Marxists must attempt to bring that struggle to a revolutionary conclusion. This duty transcends all theoretical considerations.

We never contended that "Arthur Scargill's social chauvinist opposition to the European Union was 'right'", but that Scargill was right to oppose the treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam despite the British-parochialist slant of his opposition, and that the IBT was wrong to advocate neutrality regarding these thoroughly anti-working class covenants. People are sometimes on the right side for the wrong reasons. It is also interesting to note that the IBT's internal discussions on Maastricht are very similar to the exchange (over a year later!) between Workers' Liberty and Socialist Outlook on this same subject.

There is one larger point, however, on which Donovan does not entirely misrepresent us. While we argued that the objective conditions on which Trotsky based the *Transitional programme* ceased to obtain during the post-war period, we did not reject Trotsky's main methodological premise: that the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, and hence the whole question of programme, is integrally linked to the economic conditions of world capitalism. This does not mean that the proletariat can only make revolution "when it is staring pauperisation and starvation in the face", as in Donovan's crude caricature of our views. It does imply, however, that the class struggle tends as a rule to intensify, and revolutionary situations to become much more common, during periods of prolonged capitalist economic crisis (like the period between the two world wars); and that, on the other hand, the working class will be much less receptive to revolutionary ideas during periods of sustained prosperity (like the 50s and 60s). While revolution certainly does not follow automatically from even the most militant trade union struggles, neither can the revolutionary potential of the proletariat be divorced from its material circumstances. This, it seems to me, is not "economism", but Marxism.

Whether or not socialism is 'on' or 'off' the immediate political agenda will depend in large part on the broad character of the economic period through which we are living.

This, in turn, must be determined by serious analysis, not by spouting the slogans of 1938. There is little clarity about the economy today on the Marxist left or anywhere else. It is sorely needed. Among militants weaned in the Spartacist tradition, even the raising of such questions is dismissed as 'objectivism'. In Donovan's newly adopted political circle, they seem to be written off as "economism".

The documents of the 1997 IBT controversy are available from turbulo@aol.com.

Jim Cullen
New York

Antidote

One week we have Mark Fischer expressing his preference for the term 'shit-sheet' over "long pretentious meanderings and Delphic formulations" (*Weekly Worker* September 30) - the next we have Don Hoskins accusing Delphi of "overawing them [the working class] with big words".

As neither are noted as paid-up members of the Plain English Society, there must be other factors uniting them in this common plea for linguistic simplicity. Foremost is obviously Delphi's attempt to persuade the left to adopt a critical reappraisal of the Bolshevik tradition and the roots of Marxism itself. Delphi has committed the heresy of stating that Marxism-Leninism is not a science.

Dialectical materialism is not a science, but a philosophy, which addresses all the perennial speculative problems of the relation of thought to matter, the nature of objective reality and what constitutes being. Historical materialism, derived from this philosophy, has enabled analyses of the historical processes which have uncovered certain general laws about the dynamics of change and the nature of capitalism. But, in itself, historical materialism is also *not* a science. Whether Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxembour *et al* - for all they did to enlighten our understanding of imperialism, they also failed to predict either the course of its *actual* economic development or the class struggle.

To examine why they went wrong we need to examine the basic epistemological premises of Marxism. Don Hoskins may have been inoculated against this by the esoteric gobble-dygook which was served up in the WRP - not to raise the consciousness of members, but to reinforce the mystical authority of the leadership. To suggest, however, that workers are incapable of understanding philosophy is both reactionary and patronising. Delphi is working class (both by origin and present status), and self-educated on these questions. Perhaps that shows, and in the attempt to abbreviate the article some clarity may have been sacrificed. Perhaps also Delphi does express some of the 'pretentious' language of the autodidact.

Far from pronouncing the class war dead, my main criticism of Marxism-Leninism is not based on philosophical abstractions, but on the left's failure to draw theory from practical engagement in the class struggle. Vital to this engagement is the left's use of language. Addressing workers in a propaganda or agitational situation, Delphi obviously uses different language to that in a theoretical article in the *Weekly Worker*.

If the *Weekly Worker* wants articles peppered with *Class War* type expletives then Delphi could furnish these too. But Delphi does not consider the paper a 'shit-sheet'. In fact it is generally a welcome antidote to much of the anti-theoretical philistinism on the left, and I commend your feature on John Toland as an example of the wider knowledge Marxists should be embracing. Hopefully some of the issues raised by Delphi will be elaborated on by

your correspondents - without sinking too much to a 'wor-a-load-a-bollocks' level.

Delphi

All at sea

Gerry Downing has completely misread my article, 'Left numbers game' (*Weekly Worker* October 7).

He writes: "Peter Manson says that we must be demonstrators and not lobbyists. It is useless to get Tony Blair to change his mind; the point was to influence the Labour left. To do what precisely?" Comrade Downing adds: "It is the dreadful counterposition of 'lobby' and 'demonstration/rally' that I find idiotic" (Letters, October 14).

This was precisely the point I was making when I wrote: "The attitude of working class partisans ought not to be coloured by such semantics." I agree with comrade Mark Fischer that, "Any bourgeois politician, of practically any regime, is sensitive to pressure from below" (*Weekly Worker* September 23). Lobbies and demonstrations are both valid tactics.

The reason I went to such lengths to point out that the SWP-organised 'lobby' of the Labour Party conference in Bournemouth was in fact more like a demonstration was in order to expose the sectarian hypocrisy of the Socialist Party in England and Wales in refusing to back it. SPEW's leaflet, handed out during the march and rally, stated: "It would have been better if the organisers of today's event had called it as a protest rather than a lobby."

But comrade Downing himself appears to be making an equally useless counterposition. He seems to imply that we should concentrate exclusively on pressurising the bureaucracy and forget about trying to influence the Labour left - as if the two are not interrelated. That is why presumably the SWP invited Labour lefts like Tony Benn to support the Bournemouth rally.

Gerry really is all at sea when he caricatures CPGB policy as 'Smash the monarchy and the House of Lords and keep capitalism'. We want workers to mobilise around democratic demands in order to prepare them for the smashing of capitalism - an example we have in mind that will also be familiar to Gerry is Russia 1917.

Peter Manson
London

Abstract WP

I have one disagreement with comrade Downing's excellent letter on lobbying Labour.

He says that Tony Blair "is popular with most workers". Whilst there certainly is not the frustration that the likes of the SWP claim, there is growing resentment against Blair inside the working class. This is shown in Labour's NEC election results and in the failure to mobilise the core Labour vote for the Euro elections.

In light of this, I would like to comment on comrade Fischer's remark in last week's 'Party notes', that Workers Power has an "abstract" paper which apparently only makes "general propaganda for socialism" (*Weekly Worker* October 7). This is more than slightly unfair, as WP often makes agitational demands of both an economic and political nature. A good example is their action programme for the Balkans. They also often have interesting articles on the trade unions.

However, a way in which WP is "abstract" is on the question of the Labour Party. The October *Workers Power* contains an article on the Labour Party conference which correctly rejects the ultra-left view that the grassroots membership has been Blairised. In addition to this, WP's 'Where we stand' column on the back page every month calls for the

building of a revolutionary tendency inside Labour in order to break workers from reformism.

From this many people might naturally presume WP did serious faction work in Labour, but they would be mistaken! This is "abstract", as WP fail to realise that voting for Labour and making demands based on a correct analysis is little better than the "left posturing" comrade Downing refers to if it is not backed up by a struggle inside the Labour Party for these demands against Blair. After all, would WP make demands on the leaders of trade unions, but refuse to actually work inside those unions?

Will Matthews
Cambridgeshire

Openness

Please find enclosed a cheque for £5 for your paper's Fighting Fund. Sorry it's not much - my weekly wage of £146 means that I can only make donations of the more modest kind.

I respect the *Weekly Worker's* genuine openness, and I am heartened by its non-sectarianism. I find your British-Irish theses somewhat bizarre, but once again you have opened your pages to criticism of the points it makes. It is for this democracy that I shall continue to support your paper. Along with *Red Action* your paper is the only 'left' journal worth reading.

Chris McDowell
Oxford

Why raise it?

I can't understand why the question has arisen as to whether the protestants should have self-determination in a united Ireland. If self-determination means anything it means that only a people themselves can determine whether they are a nation with the right to self-determination. Nobody else can say whether they are or are not a nation.

The protestant Irish have never raised the question of self-determination for the protestant Irish. So why raise it ourselves?

Ivor Kenna
London

Drift to right

I cannot help feeling that those who advocate we oppose Livingstone's candidacy for mayor of London are simply conflating our understanding with how the mass of the working class see the matter. The unions are overwhelmingly for Livingstone and it seems that only the AEEU will support Dobson because they will not ballot their members.

It is the alternatives I find problematic. Indeed a section of the vanguard has given up on Labour and is attempting to build socialist alternatives. It is indeed necessary to relate to these comrades and if possible and fruitful enter a group like the SLP that has thus formed. But always it will be necessary to argue for orientation to the mass of the working class who are reformist in consciousness and vote Labour. The most successful 'alternative' is Tommy Sheridan's Scottish Socialist Party. A real working class alternative for Scottish voters? I think not. Here are a few extracts from *Scottish Socialist Voice* by one John Palmer, reprinted in *What Next?* No11.

Headline: 'War in Kosovo: a victory for human rights'. It begins: "For all who struggle for peace, democracy and justice throughout the world (pass the sick bag!), the war in Kosovo marked a momentous milestone in the evolution of post-Cold War Europe." It can only get better after this. Palmer compares Milosevic to Hitler and congratulates Nato for having done better for the Kosovars than the Allies did for the Jews. Having attacked "fundamental theologians of the left" for sneering at plans

by the German Green foreign minister for Balkan reconstruction as 'mere reformism' (I would call it blatant pro-imperialist chauvinism), he concludes: "Of course socialists know this is no more than a tiny first step. We know that only building a world economic and political system which eliminates exploitation, poverty and grotesque inequality will guarantee an end to crimes against humanity. But here and now no serious socialist can but rejoice if the Kosovar Albanians are finally rid of their tormentors." There you have it. Having advocated socialism through parliament and nationalising the top 200 we now have socialism through imperialism courtesy of Wall Street!

Well now, how is this any better than anything Livingstone wrote (true, 'comrade' Palmer complains that the bombing of Serbia was a bit inaccurate and some civilians were killed, but did not socialists complain of the killing of German civilians during World War II while supporting the bombing of 'Hitler'?) Where among the left Labourites in the constituencies would you find support for this line? This is the preserve of the right and the fake careerist lefts like Livingstone. Livingstone was opposed in Brent East GC on this by the entire left and only the rights saved him from a humiliating defeat. The point surely is that where we work is a matter of judgement depending on what is moving and what is likely to move.

Making a fetish of Labour Party work is deep entryism. Making a fetish of not intervening in the struggles of the Labour Party (whether we want to employ the tactic of entryism or not) is sectarianism and no bar against Palmerism. The fact is that as long as there is no overall revival of the class struggle revolutionaries will be marginalised and squeezed, no matter where they work. Ideological pressures and consequent ideological capitulations are apparent inside and outside the Labour Party. But I think it significant that in general the Labour lefts (Livingstone was a notable exception) and the larger centrist groups (SWP and SPEW) had at least a line of opposition to Nato.

Many of us who attended the Outlook-AWL-Workers Press-Workers Power-Workers Action (WIL) joint meeting in London during the bombing were appalled at the pro-imperialist trajectory of the meeting and were galvanised to re-examine our work and reflect on the transitional method. Desperation makes strange bedfellows, to misquote Shakespeare.

How significant is it that those who have given up on the working class drift rapidly to the right? How many times must the *Weekly Worker*, as the WIL did, tell us that the working class is still on its knees as a rationale for adopting imperialist stooge groups like the loyalists and the KLA and not proffering a real helping hand to raise them up?

Gerry Downing
London

Words altered

I want your readers to know the letter to which you attached my name in the *Weekly Worker* of September 16 1999 is not the one I sent to you.

Some words have been altered - which on its own wouldn't be too bad, but important parts of the letter I sent were removed: for example, where I blame the *Weekly Worker*, as well as Steve Hedley, for smearing Mark Metcalf, as the headline 'Former Metcalf's infantile disorder' was your invention and most definitely not Steve Hedley's.

Such political censorship is surely the living proof the 'dead hand of Stalin' is still very much at the helm in the new CPGB.

Brian Higgins
Building Workers Group

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday October 24, 5pm - 'The peculiarities of English capitalism', using Ellen Meiksins Wood's *The pristine culture of capitalism* as a study guide.

Sunday October 31, 5pm - 'The principle of class self-emancipation', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* Vol 2 as a study guide.

Manchester: Monday November 1, 7.30pm - Series on crisis: 'World economic development from 1965'. 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.

■ Republican Communist Network

Day school: 'International socialism'. 12.15-4.30pm, Saturday October 30, CWU Club, Brunswick Street, Edinburgh.

■ Nominate Bannister

The Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison has chosen the Socialist Party's Roger Bannister as its candidate for the post of union general secretary. The CPGB is backing his campaign. For details on how Unison 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.

■ Stop privatisation

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

■ Scrap tuition fees

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

■ Hands off Colombia

Demonstration against US intervention - Friday October 29, 4-7pm, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1. Tube: Bond Street.

■ Raise your banners

Festival of political song: Friday November 12 to Saturday November 20, Sheffield. PO Box 44, Sheffield, S4 7RN. Tel: 0114 249 5185.

■ 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.

■ Party wills

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

Our discussion on the British-Irish has, it seems, reached a point where more light is being generated than fury. Excellent. Though some mental confusion, factual mistakes and secondary theoretical issues remain to be sorted out, the *main principles* and thus the *main lines* of demarcation have emerged cleanly from the curses and gnashing of teeth that initially greeted the 'Ireland and the British-Irish' theses (*Weekly Worker* August 26). Debate has moved on from Jack Conrad's supposed advocacy of a "protestant state for a protestant people", or my so-called plan for the "repartition of Ireland". Such unfounded and ill-considered nonsense has thankfully been left where it belongs - collecting dust in the archives.

Two distinct shades of opinion have emerged. On the one side stand the consistent revolutionary democrats. We want to equip the working class with a fighting programme for a united Ireland within which a British-Irish province - one county and four half-counties - exercises self-determination. This approach is based on the theory and the best practice of Leninism, and crucially a classless, countryless, moneyless vision of the future which in terms of means necessitates the *voluntary* union of peoples and taking democracy to its outer limits and beyond.

On the other side are inconsistent revolutionary democrats (in certain cases we have revolutionary non-democrats). These comrades are for a united Ireland too. However British-Irish self-determination is not to be countenanced. Everything is subordinate to the aim, not of working class unity and socialism, but the territorial unity of Ireland. The pro-imperialist British-Irish are therefore to be frogmarched into a unitary state and kept there if needs be by coercion - perversely this is excused in the name of championing the rights of the oppressed.

The British-Irish are demonised as inherently sectarian. It follows that such an unsound people cannot be trusted with even the *possibility* of establishing their own independent state. To prevent any renewed oppression of the catholic-Irish the British-Irish are either to have no special rights as a community whatsoever or at most local autonomy along the lines of a German *Land* or a US state. Naturally the proponents of *involuntary* union claim their approach as genuine Leninism. The British-Irish are variously categorised - most narrowly as a mere religion. But - it is agreed by both sides - the British-Irish are neither a full nor an oppressed nation. This is a clincher for our inconsistent democrats. The comrades assume they have the full weight of Marxist orthodoxy behind them when they solemnly pronounce that only *full* nations - who are at the same time *oppressed* - have the right to self-determination.

Here, albeit sketchily, is how things lie with the inconsistent democrats, as represented by the latest letter of José Villa, formerly a leading member of Workers Power, and the articles by Tom Delargy of the Scottish Socialist Party, and Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group (*Weekly Worker* October 14). In the course of our debate these comrades - not forgetting Steve Riley - have repeatedly raised certain testing questions for Marxism in their attempt to "trash" the 20 theses on the British-Irish. So in this, my latest reply, I feel obliged to recapitulate a number of arguments. Nevertheless I shall also attempt to move the debate onwards by fielding more illuminating facts and figures, and above all by conclusively showing that on national and ethnic questions Marxism as a body of thought is far richer, far more flexible and thus far more powerful as a weapon of class war than the brittle caricature we are presented with by the various economic and bureaucratic schools of socialism.

British-Irish debate

Two approaches

Critics of the Communist Party's 20 theses are inconsistent democrats, writes Jack Conrad

Let us begin by again asking ourselves, who are the British-Irish? According to Steve Riley they are "not a distinct community" but a "religious faction" (*Weekly Worker* September 2). Dave Craig employs a slightly different formulation: "The British-Irish are not a nation, but the Anglo-protestant part of the Irish nation" (*Weekly Worker* September 16). José Villa regards the British-Irish as "a privileged section of the Irish nation" (*Weekly Worker* September 30). Tom Delargy is persuaded that the British-Irish "can only be clearly defined in religious terms" (*Weekly Worker* October 14).

None of the four protagonists mentioned above have expressed any objections to examining nations and national questions broadly along the lines systematically presented in Stalin's famous 1913 pamphlet *Marxism and the national question*. Stalin, it will be recalled, argued that nations have five essential "characteristic features". Firstly, and "primarily" a nation is a definite, stable, community of people; secondly, nations must share a "common language"; thirdly, they possess a "common territory"; fourthly, they have an internal economic bond to "weld the various parts into a single whole"; fifthly, they have a collective "character" which manifests itself in a "common culture" (JV Stalin *Works* Vol 2, Moscow 1953, pp303-307).

Of course, Stalin's fivefold definition must not be treated too rigidly. But it can be used to shine a light on to the British-Irish phenomenon in order to reveal it in all its intrinsic complexities. So let us once more discuss Stalin's five characteristics *vis-à-vis* the British-Irish and see what substantive conclusions follow.

It is correct to say that the majority of protestants in Northern Ireland have throughout the 20th century constituted a labour aristocracy (not a religious, but a politico-economic category). They have sought to preserve their relatively meagre privileges at the expense of catholics by initiating and buttressing sectarian discrimination from below and by appealing above to the Northern Ireland and British states. However the protestants are not *simply* a labour aristocracy.

The British-Irish are a stable community of people who have continuously inhabited parts of what is now Northern Ireland since the early 17th century. They were settled in Antrim and Down as a mass of 'strong farmers' - from England, as comrade Craig's definition suggests, but mainly, in a ratio of five to one, from Scotland. The plantations were designed to pacify the most rebellious part of Gaelic and Anglo-Irish Ireland and hence "assure" it for an absolutist British crown that had recently redefined itself according to its nationalised version of protestantism: ie, Anglicanism. As was bound to be the case, the settlers quickly diverged from their origins and formed another - hybrid - *Irish* identity.

The Tudor, Stewart and Cromwellian plantations and drive for conquest negatively defined the Irish as Irish, both the Gaelic and Anglo-Irish, not in terms of language, but *church*. The

Irish became a people-religion. The catholic majority were victims of *national oppression* as catholics and denied basic rights. The old English in Ireland were thereby excluded from the emerging British nation. By *remaining* catholic, the Anglo-Irish *became* simply Irish. The bitter divisions between the Anglo-Irish and Gaelic feudal cultures "gave way ultimately to a sense of common catholicism" - the highly fragmented Gaelic-Irish slowly merging with and forming a new "subordinate" English speaking culture "in the polity of Ireland" (H Kearney *The British Isles* Cambridge 1995, p170). As a consequence the Irish national question and British domination both took the outer form of religion.

Taking into account the last 400 years of history, it is ridiculous, to say the least, to describe the British-Irish exclusively or mainly in denominational terms. One might just as well describe the catholic-Irish in Northern Ireland, and for that matter the catholic-Irish population of Eire as a mere "religious faction".

There are, as I have pointed out before, striking similarities between Ireland and the south Slavs. The Croats, Serbs and Bosniacs live in the same part of south eastern Europe and speak a common language - true, there are still distinct dialects spoken and different alphabets. However, due to a combination of factors - for example, incorporation by culturally antipathetic empires, Nazi divide and rule, and, capping it all the malevolent disintegration of bureaucratic socialism - they are today ferociously and bloodily ethnically-nationally divided according to *religion*.

Those who would dully pronounce that the Croats are "not a distinct community" but simply a "religious faction" are spectacularly wide of the mark, not to say spectacularly stupid. The Croats are *ethnically-nationally* defined by their catholicism. One must in other words go beyond the superficial appearance of things. The same goes for muslim Bosniacs and orthodox Serbs. It is pure muddled-headedness to dismiss Bosniacs as "not a nation", but the 'muslim part of the south Slav nation'. It would be equally blundering to insist that Serbs are no more than 'a privileged section of the south Slav nation'.

Nations have to be grasped in their movement. They are not static purely qualitative phenomena. So the world is not neatly divided into nations and non-nations. While there is undoubtedly a qualitative side, there is a constant sociopolitical, quantitative dynamic of being and becoming which produces countless black to white gradations of grey. In other words, nations are difficult phenomena which defy the common sense approach of turning to an atlas or official history text and classifying every country, state or kingdom as a nation. Nations, once they can be said to exist in history, are without exception undergoing a process of convergence with or divergence from other nations. Dialects can be submerged into a common, print-based language - Scots English into English English. Or dialect can

used politically as the basis of a separate nation-state identity - as was the case with Sweden and Norway (conservative Norwegian nationalists chose as their 'official national language' *Nymorsk*: ie, an archaic dialect which was most distant from Danish, after the political divorce from Sweden in 1905). Religion can lose its power as a social agent and become a purely private concern, as for example in most of England and Wales. Or it can be reinvented as a virulent *national-ethnic* medium whereby nationalist elites divide-cohere people into new nation-states (eg, ex-Yugoslavia).

Anyway, as argued above, the British-Irish have constituted a "stable community" for nearly four centuries. Due to their similar conditions of existence in northeastern Ulster the British-Irish have over the generations developed customs, an outlook and character peculiar to themselves (Stalin's points one and five). The work ethic, blunt speaking, a collective memory of King Billy, 1688, July 12 and the battle of the Somme, the union jack, rival protestantisms, orangeism and hostility to republicanism and popery all mark out the British-Irish in terms of their self-image.

This is manifested in a British-Irish ethnic-national identity which is completely at odds with the catholic-Irish who inhabit the same state territory. When asked who or what they are in national terms, 82% of protestants described themselves at Ulster-British, 15% as Northern Irish and only 3% as Irish. In contrast the figures for catholic-Irish are almost the same ... except reversed. Strangely, at least to my mind, 10% called themselves British-Irish, 28% Northern Irish, while a majority, 62%, viewed themselves as Irish (*Northern Ireland social attitudes 1995-6*, p37).

That subjective British-Irish "common psychological make-up" has been a material force that has visibly shaped Ireland for at least the last hundred years (in different forms and manifestations for the last 400 years). Because it is distinct from, and counterposed to, the catholic-Irish identity hardened under the weight of *national* oppression, the ideologues of mainstream Irish nationalism have experienced the greatest difficulty in coming to terms with the British-Irish.

Completely opposite assessments of the British-Irish are held by Irish nationalists. On the one hand there are those who exclude the British-Irish as an alien element akin to the "Saracens in Spain" (O MacDonagh *States of mind* London 1983, p19). On the other hand, no matter how they psychologically, culturally and politically think of themselves, the British-Irish are claimed as an "integral part of the Irish nation", albeit, in the words of Arthur Griffiths, as "perverted" Irish people. Either way for mainstream Irish nationalism the British-Irish, as outside aliens or "perverted" Irish, have no right to call "into question" the "integrity and authority of the nation" (cited in C O'Halloran *Partition and the limits of Irish nationalism* Dublin, pp36,37).

Our inconsistent democrats arrive at exactly the same conclusion. They too

take as their principal starting point not class and class interests, but fixed and indivisible nations, symbolised for them by Ireland. Comrade Craig boldly declares that: "The 'nation' is the sovereign political constituency in the modern world" (September 19). He, and the other inconsistent democrats, are therefore convinced, as a matter of faith, that Ireland has an almost metaphysical oneness, that the British-Irish are either pro-imperialist outsiders or a religious minority. Consequently, he and his allies reason that, as there is a single Irish nation, minorities - ie, the British-Irish - should abide by the will of the majority. They should be content with minority rights in a unitary state (a mirror image of what mainstream British and British-Irish politicians say to the catholic-Irish minority in Northern Ireland). If the British-Irish refuse to accept minority status, in the event of resistance these "scabs" (comrade Craig's analogy) are to be forced into a united Ireland and if necessary kept there by coercion. Such a travesty for comrade Craig and his co-thinkers is democracy.

But we must not run ahead of ourselves. We are still exploring the ethnic-national identity of the British-Irish in terms of the essential criteria outlined by Stalin. What then of Stalin's point two, language? Alone, no doubt for his own reasons, José Villa, disputes that nations are defined by a common language. There "could be one or more languages", as for example "Wales and Ireland", he writes (*Weekly Worker* September 30). I disagree and fielded a wide variety of Marxist authorities on the subject to back my original contention. In reply comrade Villa assures us that he bases himself on Lenin: "It was Lenin," he says, "who described Switzerland as an example of a multilingualistic *nation*" (original emphasis *Weekly Worker* October 14).

Comrade Villa supplies no references unfortunately. But in terms of method, while giving the utmost attention to outstanding theorists like Lenin, we should avoid descending into scholasticism and crude quote-mongering. If Lenin did write of multilingualistic *nations*, then frankly, in my humble opinion, his formulation was either hasty or plain wrong.

The primitive evolution of nations is synonymous with uniting territories whose populations speak, or come to speak, a common language - something triggered or consolidated with a standardised print-language. Language is the most important medium of human intercourse. A common language is a huge advantage in establishing and developing a flourishing home market. Without a single language the business of buying and selling (including buying and selling labour power) is greatly hindered. Presumably that is why in his pamphlet *The right of nations to self-determination* Lenin is convinced that for the "complete victory of commodity production, the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, there must be politically united territories whose population speak a single language" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 20, Moscow 1977, p396). As to Switzerland, I have not trawled every reference in Lenin's *Collected Works*. Nevertheless in his *Critical remarks on the national question* he mentions Switzerland as an "exception in that she is not a single-nation state" (*ibid* p40). There are five common languages

es

east-west axis with Britain strong.

It is on such foundations of history, territory, language, culture and economy that Jack Conrad had concluded that the British-Irish are more than a "religious faction" (an aspect of culture). They have enough commonality, objective and subjective, to characterise them as a semi-nationality or a semi-nation. In terms of a nought-to-100 index of non-nation to full nationhood I have scored them at 75 for purposes of illustration.

We have chided comrade Craig and others for adopting a check list approach. This has caused some misunderstanding. He takes it as a rejection of a scientific, rational, definition of the nation. As evidenced above, that is hardly the case. So we need not waste time on my definition of a nation which supposedly I keep "hidden" (*Weekly Worker* October 14). No, my criticism of comrade Craig is not that he has a definition of the nation. My criticism is that he approaches living ethnic-national conflicts with clipboard in hand, ticking off who is and who is not a full nation. He substitutes a check list for what actually requires political thought and political solutions. Like a doctrinaire, comrade Craig has his answer in advance. He will only allow self-determination for full nations.

He gets himself into a total mess, telling us that the "British nation is not homogeneous, but a multinational state" (*Weekly Worker* September 16). Monstrously he concludes that Britain as a nation - not a ruling class state formation - is "reactionary". Presumably he considers the linguistic, territorial and economic unity of tens of millions of people, the formation of a big home market and the birth of a modern working class a backward step. Worse comes. England, Wales and Scotland are the real nations "struggling to breathe, struggling for air, struggling to get out in the open". And the comrade expresses hurt surprise when I warn him about straying into nationalism!

These intellectual contortions are entirely due to comrade Craig's check list approach and derive from his arse-about-face logic. He rightly rejects the mathematical majority of Britain and stands by the right of the "scabs" in Scotland and Wales to self-determination. *Ipso facto* Scotland and Wales, for comrade Craig, must be full nations because only full nations can have such a democratic right. His proof that Scotland is a full nation? Firstly, what people in Scotland think. Second, a Lenin quote from Engels. Engels, you see, once spoke about four nations in the British Isles.

We can start by dismissing Engels' use of the word 'nation'. Before the 20th century the word carried much wider, looser connotations than today. Engels might just have easily spoken of four *races* in the British Isles.

That the British Isles in Engels' time was the common territory of the United Kingdom state I cannot deny. Nor do I deny that it originated with the dynastic-state merger-takeover of three kingdoms and one principality. However, with the advent of universal education in Victorian times a "so-called" four nations history became the standard paradigm in schools, which was projected retrospectively into the ancient past. Here, it must be stressed, we have not real history, but "a means of inculcating the virtues of patriotism" (H. Kearney *The British Isles* Cambridge 1995, p2). That is why I have suggested that the origins of modern-day England, Scotland and Wales are in the 19th century ideological imagination.

As to Lenin, he used the terms 'England' and 'Britain' interchangeably. The thing to lay hold of in the writings of both Engels and Lenin is their principled stand alongside the oppressed Irish and their demand for Irish self-determination. This was solidly based on consistent democracy, not quality control (full nationhood has always been a nationalist aspiration). Engels

and Lenin, like Marx, were primarily concerned here with politics. As praxis the national question belongs not to economics, linguistics or history, but - as Lenin puts it - "wholly and exclusively" to the sphere of political democracy (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 22, Moscow 1977, p145). To achieve and build socialism the working class must seek the revolutionary unity of all nations and peoples - such unity can only but be voluntary.

According to this aim and these means Marxists derive and take their stand on self-determination. Communists do not invent or exacerbate national or ethnic antagonisms. We have no time for anarcho-bureaucrats who chatter on about self-determination for Cornwall, Yorkshire or Moss Side. Our aim is to positively overcome living national and national-ethnic conflicts according to the principles of consistent democracy. We want peace between nations so as to bring forward and heighten the class war. For us therefore the key practical task is not inventing an *a priori* check list of who has and who has not the right to self-determination. Where national antagonisms and national movements *concretely* exist we must bring forth definite political solutions. That is why the CPGB is for an England, Scotland, Wales federal republic. The existence of real popular resentments in Scotland and Wales decides our programme, not a check list, no matter how rigorous, as to whether or not Scotland or Wales are full nations.

Hence I am the last to deny the importance of what people think. As shown above, the British-Irish neither act nor imagine themselves as Irish. Of course, identity is never singular. Scottish people might today primarily define themselves as Scottish. Secondly, many have a British or more local identity. A hundred years ago middle class and university-educated Scots prided themselves as being north British. So what? For us, however, it is the existence and growth of a *national movement* - which is, according to all surveys, much broader than those who vote SNP - that demands answers. Communists are for renewing the unity of the people and the working class in Britain at a higher level. This will be achieved under the banner of democracy and a federal republic - through which we will open up the road to socialism.

In previous articles I have shown that the Bolsheviks fought for and after the October Revolution granted self-determination to all manner of peoples, some of which might at a stretch have qualified as full nations: eg, Poland and Finland. Yet there were others, who by whatever serious objective criteria one chooses, fell well short: eg, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan. Their economies were medieval, there was mass illiteracy and in general mainly clan and family identities. Needless to say, despite that, they all became constituent parts of the Soviet republic with the right to self-determination. We have also exhaustively brought forth evidence that the Bolsheviks had an exemplary attitude towards the Cossacks - a people-caste which formed the military backbone of tsarist and white counterrevolution. Their Soviet Republic on the Don voluntarily joined the federal republic centred on revolutionary Petrograd and Moscow in 1918.

As an aside I must answer Tom Delargy on the Cossacks. Why do I go on about them? They represent for me the Bolshevik programme tested to its limits. Here we have Bolshevik advocacy of the right of self-determination *in extremis*. The Cossacks were privileged Russian settlers on the frontiers of the tsarist empire. A military caste with a vile tradition of anti-semitic pogroms and general mayhem and slaughter. Daftly comrade Delargy accuses Jack Conrad of "insulting" the British-Irish because I draw a parallel between them and the Cossacks - the

Cossacks, you see, were peasant-soldiers; the British-Irish are an "integral component" of the Irish working class. Interestingly, Engels writes of the British-Irish as "Scotch protestant military colonists" (F Engels *Ireland and the Irish question* Moscow 1978, p443). But this is not the thrust of my argument. Comrade Delargy is not only wrong to imply that the British-Irish are exclusively working class: he is, poor man, unable to grasp my observation that as a people they and the Cossacks were both oppressed-oppressors.

What of comrade Delargy's main charge that Jack Conrad "fails to understand" that for Lenin "the right of self-determination was all about supporting the struggle for freedom of oppressed nations" (*Weekly Worker* October 14)? Comrade Villa makes a similar claim. Again, we have a terrible misreading of Marxism as a whole and Lenin in particular. It leads our inconsistent democrats to completely undemocratic conclusions. Oppressor nations in their book are presumably without rights and are therefore to be subject to the most draconian measures. A case in point being the British-Irish who, having been designated as pro-imperialist, or pro-oppressor, are to be forced into a united Ireland.

True, in the writings of Lenin (and his commissar for nationalities - Stalin-Djugashvili) there are constant and countless references to the necessity of the working class defending the right of *oppressed* nations to self-determination. In a world divided by the great European empires the overwhelming majority of humanity was nationally oppressed. The Bolsheviks, along with the 2nd International, advocated self-determination as a general principle (not as a panacea). But that did not mean that they sought the national oppression of the Great Russian, French, British and German nations. It should hardly need saying, but these oppressor nations had no problem with self-determination. For the benefit of our inconsistent democrats, let me explain in one short sentence the content of self-determination for *oppressed* nations. It is a demand for the formal *equality* of nations. Here is an example. In March 1914 the Bolshevik's duma faction introduced the 'national equality bill' in order to highlight the oppression of non-Russians, above all the Jews. Its first clause reads: "All nationalities inhabiting Russia are equal before the law" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 20, Moscow 1977, p173). So the goal of communists is not some perverse denial of rights or a reversal of the poles of oppression.

Did Lenin oppose self-determination for the British-Irish? Comrade Delargy tell us he most emphatically did. Triumphant he produces a quote from March 1914. Lenin is cited in quite a long passage as rubbishing the protestant "rebellion" in Ulster against Irish home rule legislation that the Liberal government had tabled against stiff Conservative opposition. He mocks them as "black hundreds" and a "handful of hooligans". These Ulsterites - Lenin calls them "English-born protestants" as distinct from the "catholic Irish" - raised a hue and cry against being ruled by an "alien creed". But Lenin is of the opinion that their armed rebellion would "melt away" and "disappear" if the Liberals "appealed to the people of Britain, to the proletariat" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 20, Moscow 1977, p150).

If I were a biblical Leninist I would be deeply embarrassed. Thankfully I do not believe that every word of Lenin is gospel truth. My Leninism is rooted in the most advanced theory and experience of the Russia Revolution, something I seek to generalise by an active and constant process of criticism. For example, Lenin opposed federalism for a revolutionary Russia even during World War I. In 1917 he became a convert. I am not paralysed by Lenin's writings condemning federal con-

stitutional arrangements as being unnecessary or retrogressive. Instead, I think.

In all honesty in comrade Delargy's quote Lenin reveals a rather startling ignorance of Ireland for someone who spent periods of exile in London. Gaffs about the "English-born" protestants and Carson's huge militia being nothing but a "handful of hooligans" are easy to mock. However, let us not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Lenin's article contains a passage which comrade Delargy did not notice or decided to omit. It is rather inconvenient for his case. The Liberal's home rule legislation provided for an Irish parliament. Lenin notes that its powers would be "determined by *British law*". There was then no danger of such a sop parliament "oppressing" the British-Irish (*ibid*). The objections of Carson and co were entirely spurious.

Lastly, this bring me to comrade Delargy's worst and weakest argument. He says that because Jack Conrad advocates the voluntary, as opposed to the forced, unity of the peoples of Ireland - he has only just discovered it - I "align" myself with Ian Paisley and David Trimble. British-Irish self-determination is equivalent to what is today called the 'protestant veto'. More than that, comrade Delargy rhetorically tells me that I should in "retrospect" recognise as "legitimate freedom fighters" organisations like the UDA, etc, which have in the "past taken up arms in order to prevent the creation of a united Ireland" (*Weekly Worker* October 14).

Comrade Delargy appears to know precious little about history. Sir Edward Carson and his Ulster Volunteer Force did not take up arms to prevent a united Ireland. Carson sought to maintain a united Ireland under the protestant ascendancy ... through the continuation of British rule. The comrade confuses form and content. Carson's Ulster Unionist Party - without Carson himself - agreed with the British government to dissect Ireland in 1920. But not according to the principle of British-Irish self-determination. On the contrary, they maximised the territory around the British-Irish Belfast-Antrim-north Down heartland. In so doing some 500,000 catholic-Irish people were permanently imprisoned as an oppressed national minority within the Six Counties. That gerrymandered oppression is what loyalist and unionist parties and armed gangs have fought to perpetuate and reinforce ever since: ie, the right to oppress the catholic-Irish minority. None of them actually stand for British-Irish self-determination. That is the real content of loyalism-unionism, not comrade Delargy's fantasy world, where UDA thugs are fighting for my programme.

Unbelievably comrade Delargy finally asks whether or not Jack Conrad's support for British-Irish self-determination is "unconditional". If the comrade actually took the trouble to read and digest the 20 theses, he would have his answer. No, my support for British-Irish self-determination is premised on two *conditions*. One: "There can be no right of present-day Northern Ireland to self-determination ... We do not, and cannot, support the right of the British-Irish majority in the north to oppress the catholic-nationalist minority" (thesis 7). Two: "The CPGB is for the immediate abolition of the United Kingdom ... We are for the immediate - ie, unconditional - withdrawal of the British state and British troops from Northern Ireland ... and a united Ireland" (thesis 10).

Put another way, the CPGB supports British-Irish self-determination in terms of agitation *after* the withdrawal of Britain and the abolition of the Northern Ireland statelet. Yes, a united Ireland must be brought about voluntarily, something facilitated, but nothing more, by the democratic offer of a one-county, four-half-county British-Irish province ●

During the Nato bombardment of Yugoslavia, many leftwing groups demanded arms for the Kosova Liberation Army. After its victory, and in the light of what the KLA is doing in government, it might be useful to re-examine some previous characterisations and positions.

I appreciate comrade Michael Malkin's compliments (*Weekly Worker* September 30) and the fact that the CPGB has a policy of opening its pages to critiques of its line. I agree with comrade Mark Fischer that the CPGB is a *thinking* and democratic organisation. I hope that this article might push my CPGB friends towards a *re-think* of their support for the KLA.

Michael wrote a one-page response to my short letter. Perhaps because he has not read our more detailed material, he has not understood our positions. We do not oppose Albanian self-determination, we do not think of the Serb president as the "beloved Milosevic" and we did not defend Yugoslavia because we imagined it to be a type of workers' state.

Before Nato prepared its attack, both the LCMRCI and the CPGB were in favour of Kosovar independence from Serbia. Nevertheless, when the largest and mightiest imperialist alliance ever seen attempted to militarily destroy a small country, we said that, despite our mortal opposition to the reactionary regime of this incipient bourgeois state, we were obliged to defend it. In the proper interest of the Albanian, Serb and international working classes we had to demand united action against Nato. As supporters of Kosovar self-determination we have to be *against* an organisation which has become Nato's tool for imposing a neo-colonial 'protectorate'.

Michael wrote that if the KLA adopted a "subsidiary, internal security role as a local gendarmerie, helping to police a Kosovar 'protectorate' ... and particularly if the KLA indulges in ethnic cleansing on its own account, then it would clearly cease to merit support as a force for Kosovar liberation, and really would become what others on the left now say that it already is: that is, a tool of imperialist interests" (*Weekly Worker* May 6).

Five months later it is crystal clear that this is *the actual reality*. More than 2,000 Serb and gypsy children, elderly people and civilians have been murdered. The overwhelming majority of the non-Albanian population has been driven away. This is a repetition of the method the KLA's commander, Agem Ceku, employed when he was one of the leaders of the Croat army that wiped out all the Serbs from Krajina, transforming it into the first post-war European republic from which an entire population was expelled. Kosova is today probably Europe's most ethnically cleansed and homogenised country.

The Albanian mafia, one of Europe's most powerful, is making a lot of profit in Kosova. One of its 'businesses' consists in expelling non-Albanians and later reselling their abandoned farms and houses. New capitalist bandits are being encouraged to dismantle some nationalised companies and to create a new class of rich Albanians.

Kosova is and will remain for some years a Nato neo-colony. Like in Macedonia, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Bosnia and the Czech lands, its forces will be there to guarantee the best conditions for capitalist restoration and accumulation against any resistance from the masses or from other disobedient countries. The KLA is encouraging Kosovar workers to attack their Serbs neighbours and to place their trust in the emerging Albanian bourgeoisie and world imperialism.

An article in the *Weekly Worker* predicted that for Serbia, "Defeat in war, can lead to conditions of social fluidity and instability which provide op-

Kosova

Independence - against the KLA

John Stone of the LCMRCI calls on the Communist Party to reassess its position

opportunities for the advance of progressive forces. Wars produce crises which can lead to socialist revolution" (April 22). However, it is one thing for an imperialist power to be defeated in the middle of an imperialist war (like Russia 1917) and another for a new semi-colony to be defeated by all the imperialist powers. The Serb working class is demoralised and dispersed after so much destruction: the pro-western rightwing opposition or Seselj's fascists are the best placed to capitalise on anti-Milosevic discontent. On a world scale imperialism feels very confident. It has already sent troops into East Timor and is preparing an invasion of Colombia. During Nato's war the right wing won a majority in the European parliament for the first time. Everywhere IMF austerity measures and the multinationalals have been boosted.

Michael described the KLA as "freedom fighters" and "nationalist revolutionaries" (*Weekly Worker* May 6) and compared it with the Algerian FLN and the East Timorese Fretilin. The latter were petty bourgeois revolutionary nationalist guerrillas who fought against imperialist domination of backward capitalist colonies, for agrarian reform and democratic rights. Their victory weakened the planet's bosses and encouraged proletarian demonstrations in the 'third world' and in the imperialist heartlands.

The KLA never fought against a single imperialist power. On the contrary, it became the loyal puppet of all of them. It never fought against capitalism and servile forms of production. On the contrary, it is working to liquidate all possible remnants of a planned economy in order to develop semi-colonial backward capitalism. It is wholeheartedly supporting the establishment of an imperialist protectorate and a permanent Nato base in an area where it had no presence for around 50 years.

Michael dedicated two thirds of his article to an attack on the way in which I described Yugoslavia. For me it was a degenerate form of a workers' state which never achieved any form of socialism (or 'bureaucratic socialism', as the CPGB suggests), but whose planned economy was a progressive step against capitalism. Such states are non-viable in the long term. When the system collapsed, as happened in eastern Europe, the bureaucracy opened the way to capitalist restoration. Only its overthrow via an internationalist political revolution based on workers' soviets could have prevented such a reactionary outcome.

Michael does not provide us with any positive characterisation of the class nature of Yugoslavia. There is no such thing as a classless state. We entirely agree with the CPGB when it says, "Tito's Yugoslavia certainly had progressive and positive characteristics: the bourgeoisie and big landowners were expropriated, factories were nationalised and nominally run by workers' councils" (*Weekly Worker* April 22). That is why we were obliged to fight against its ruling nomenclature, while defending such progressive conquests against reactionary

movements. On which side of the barricades did the KLA stand? It openly attacks 'communism' and proposes to dismantle all such conquests. It intends to 'liberate' Kosova from multi-ethnicity and 'oriental communism', aiming to create a western-controlled, capitalist semi-colony.

At the beginning of 1999 the CPGB wrote: "The struggle of the KLA is a struggle for democracy" (*Weekly Worker* January 28). "Imperialism cannot and will not accept that the war of the KLA is a just war" (February 4). In fact imperialism armed and supported the KLA, considering them fighters for 'justice' and 'freedom'. The KLA, instead of achieving democracy and national liberation, is imposing a pro-imperialist, ethnically cleansed protectorate.

Michael says that my characterisation of the KLA "is just fantasy": "Go back only a year or so and you find that the KLA's ideological hero and model was the Stalinist Enver Hoxha" (*Weekly Worker* September 30). However, Pleurat Sejdiu, the LPK-KLA's London representative, put this in context in an interview with the paper: "Sejdiu claims that the LPK took on its Enverist political complexion merely because it needed the support of Albania, which was ruled by Enver Hoxha. He volunteered that the LPK would have looked for support from Albania even had it been fascist ... The KLA refused an offer from the Iranian government ... Instead, says Sejdiu, 'We want to be part of Europe', and therefore the KLA looks only to Nato for arms ... it aggressively supports the idea of Nato ground troops and accepts as inevitable that a protectorate would then be established under Nato tutelage" (*Weekly Worker* April 29). At the end of this article readers are encouraged to visit the KLA's website - where no doubt the KLA would show that it was more pro-Nato than Nato itself.

The CPGB has made many mistakes which I would like it to think about. First, it departed from its traditional line on Afghanistan, Croatia and Bosnia. There the CPGB was not in favour of making a military bloc with anti-communist and pro-imperialist 'national liberation' reactionary forces. In Croatia and Bosnia we rejected Serb atrocities, but we did not call on imperialism to arm the other side, which was equally committed to cleansings and capitalist restoration. As in Kosova we call for multi-ethnic militias to fight against pogroms.

Secondly, it equated the KLA with the Kosovar Albanians. The overwhelming majority of Kosovars voted for Ibrahim Rugova as their president. The KLA rejected him and was backed by a minority. The persecuted Albanian dissident and former KLA public spokesman, Adem Demaci, broke with the KLA because he could not accept its call for a Nato protectorate. The KLA had Albanian military rivals. Sejdiu recognised that Nato was not giving the KLA enough weapons because it was worried that the KLA might use them against the official Rugova constitutional government army.

Thirdly, the CPGB puts the bourgeois democratic principle of self-determination above the interests of the anti-imperialist struggle. Lenin said that, taken in isolation, he would have defended Serbia and Belgium against German and Austrian invasions, but since these conflict were part of a global confrontation he subordinated the legitimate right of self-determination of the occupied nation to a policy of revolutionary dual defeatism worldwide.

Fourthly, it does not understand that sometimes you have to side with an oppressive regime against the nationalists of an oppressed nation once they become imperialist puppets. For example, we defended the Ukrainians, Tartars and Chechens against Stalinist massacres and deportations. However, during the war against German imperialism we were obliged to critically side with Stalin - who killed millions of communists - against Hitler and the Ukrainian, Chechen and Tartar popular-based, armed nationalists who collaborated with Hitler. In Afghanistan we sided with Moscow's army, despite its atrocities, against the pro-CIA clerical-feudalists who demanded national self-rule. In Nicaragua we were in favour of self-determination for the Miskito and Rama, the most oppressed Indian nationalities; but when they made a bloc with Somoza's Contras we were obliged to coordinate with the Sandinistas.

In all of these circumstances we sided with the non-imperialist country attacked by imperialism and we called on the Ukrainians, Tartars, Chechens, Pashtu, Indians or Kosovars to enter an anti-imperialist united front against the world's bosses, because they were even worse than their Stalinist or nationalist oppressors. The defeat of imperialism would provide the best route towards achieving their national and social liberation. If they supported Hitler or Washington they would be enslaved even more.

Fifthly, you can still be in favour of Albanian national self-determination and unification while siding with Yugoslavia against imperialism. For instance, during World War II a Greater Albania was founded, incorporating Kosova and Albanian areas in Montenegro, Macedonia and Greece. It was a Mussolini puppet regime. The Stalinists wanted to destroy Greater Albania and reincorporate Kosova into Yugoslavia. Kosova was the main area which resisted Tito's partisans. However, we were obliged to side with the Yugoslav 'communists' against a fascist Greater Albania, despite advocating a socialist united Albania as a part of a Balkan federation, because we must subordinate a just, bourgeois democratic, principle (self-determination) to a more important class principle (the defeat of imperialism and reaction).

Sixthly, supporting the KLA was incompatible with the CPGB's correct call to "defeat Nato". In such an unequal confrontation between *all* the rich and imperialist powers on the one hand and a poor and crumbling state on the other, dual defeatism meant pro-

imperialist neutrality. If you advocated victory for what was Nato's main pawn you were indirectly advocating a Nato victory. The CPGB correctly said: "There used to be, and still are, two types of countries in the world: bombable and non-bombable ones" (*Weekly Worker* April 1). In consequence you have to defend these "bombable" countries and not help the imperialist puppets which were Nato's eyes and ears.

Seventhly, this position led to the strengthening of Milosevic. As the example of Iraq shows, when imperialism defeats an oppressed nation, the dictatorship of such a country is able to stay in power, claiming to be the leader of heroic resistance. On the other hand, had imperialism been defeated, working class confidence would have received such a boost, it would have been able to mobilise and impose a new regime.

Eighthly, the same position created the illusion that a reactionary movement was democratic, revolutionary and for national liberation. The struggle for Albanian national and social liberation demanded the most determined opposition to a Nato-armed movement which advocated the transformation of an oppressed province into something even worse: an imperialist enclave.

For the CPGB a "Greater Albania - incorporating Albania, Kosova and the Albanian parts of Montenegro and Macedonia - would be under the domination of KLA revolutionary nationalism" (*Weekly Worker* April 29). Where was the KLA's revolutionary character? Which landlords or capitalists were affected? The KLA, instead of advocating agrarian reform or measures to protect nationalised property, is in favour of privatising factories and land. It offers its services as the best supporter of multinational investments and IMF capitalist programmes. The KLA are heroes with Washington and its military and intelligence apparatus. It is one thing to support the right of the Albanians to secede and to reunite in a single country, but another to claim a revolutionary content for a movement that wants to expel other ethnic communities and establish its Greater Albania under the hegemony not only of Rome or Berlin, but in particular of Washington.

The CPGB wrote: "Nato arms in the hands of a rejuvenated KLA would not be a cause of condemnation. The KLA must be free to obtain its arms from any source. Our support for the democratic demand for Kosovar independence is not dependant on where its freedom fighters manage to get their guns, ammunition and other military material" (*Weekly Worker* April 15).

Again it is one thing to support the right of anti-imperialists - who are rooted in a revolutionary struggle - to seek arms anywhere. But it is quite another to encourage a movement which was completely dominated ideologically and militarily by Nato to ask for more weapon from their bosses. Where are these weapons now, CPGB comrades? Some have been returned to Nato, while the rest are being used by the new Kosovar corps or militias to repress discontent on Nato's behalf and to expel Serbs and Roma.

I hope this friendly, albeit critical, reply will provoke a rethink on the part of CPGB comrades. If you want to be the most resolute fighters for democracy and national self-determination, if you want to defend Kosovar workers, you need to fight *against* the KLA.

During the war Albanian communists were obliged to appeal for a broad struggle against the imperialist bombardment, while organising communal self-defence against Serb pogroms. Now that the war is over, we need to fight for the expulsion of Nato's troops and for a workers' independent Kosova - against the KLA ●

Socialist Network

Right liquidationism

A new stage in the degeneration of the Socialist Party was marked by last weekend's Socialist Network conference attended by a layer of members and disillusioned former SP members.

The meeting, sponsored by the Merseyside Socialists, saw around 85 invited co-thinkers, fellow travellers and sympathisers gathering in Liverpool on October 16. In my opinion it represented the most extreme manifestation yet of the liquidationist cancer slowly eating away at the political heart of the Socialist Party. Its most active agents are undoubtedly comrades Dave Cotterill and Mike Morris. Comrade Morris was the last remaining Liverpool full-timer until the entire Merseyside regional committee was suspended - effectively expelled - last year. Comrade Cotterill had already resigned from Taaffe's organisation in protest at being asked by the EC for details of his paid employment and whether it related to his political work. The 'suspended' comrades went on to form the Mersey-side Socialists grouping.

These comrades, including also Cathy Wilson and former Militant parliamentary candidate Lesley Mahmood, together with their local contacts, made up a large part of those attending. In addition three former local leaders from Manchester - Margaret Manning, Moirag Allen and John Killen - came along with a couple of followers. Another ex-SP comrade present was Roy Davies, formerly a leading member in Wales renowned for his support for the 'Scottish turn' who has now col-

lapsed into Welsh nationalism.

The Socialist Democracy Group - itself consisting in part of former SP members, had only three comrades in attendance, including John Bulaitis and Duncan Chapple. International support came in the shape of an elderly member of the French Ligue Internationale Trotskyiste who resides in Britain, while a representative of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty appeared to be the only member of an organisation honoured with the status of observer. Some half dozen current SP members were present, although, understandably, none of them wished to have their names publicised.

Billed as a "meeting for socialists that come from a particular tradition to have an open exchange of ideas", it most emphatically rejected the concepts of Partyism and democratic centralism. Comrade Anne Banister, who chaired the opening session, invited those present "to be as heretical as you like". In the manner of daytime talk show hosts the world over we were assured that, "You don't have to be afraid: say anything you like". Continuing in this vein, Dave Cotterill stressed that there was "no collective opinion on anything" and that it was important for all present to feel comfortable, no matter "how heretical" the contribution.

The day's events comprised eight workshops, including 'identity politics', 'new technology' and 'colonialism and racism', sandwiched between two longer sessions, the last being a discussion on 'How should socialists organise today?' Speaking priority

was accorded to "comrades from the Socialist Party tradition", although most did not take up the opportunity. Indeed it was a remarkably low-key affair with fewer than a dozen people intervening in the main sessions. A Merseyside comrade was heard to comment after the meeting that she considered the event to be highly successful, inasmuch as there had been next to no conflicting opinions - in my view the open clash of ideas provides evidence, on the contrary, of a healthy dynamism and the search for truth.

An almost palpable fear of organising or deciding anything pervaded the proceedings with the almost automatic rider, "If that's okay with you", attaching itself to the most harmless of requests. An example of this lethargy (dressed up as enthusiasm for an energetic new beginning) came with comrade Morris's most tentative of proposals for the establishment of a magazine. Some comrades worried whether this was really appropriate, because, after all, 'we are not really an organisation, are we?'

Indeed the final session might more accurately have been entitled 'How socialists should *not* organise', since the few contributors to the debate could only approach the subject negatively, in the main restricting their comments to the 'failed and outdated' methods of the past. Consequently, the politics on display were a revolting amalgam of anarchism, liberalism, petty bourgeois diletantism and out, loud and proud liquidationism.

The final proof of the political bankruptcy of "those from the Socialist Party tradition" came in the final ses-

sion, when Merseyside Socialists comrades replied to an earlier intervention from one of the SP members who spoke. This comrade actually had the brass neck to speak in defence of democratic centralism! Comrade Mike Morris, scenting Taaffeite blood, was quick to heap scorn and derision on to the head of this hapless Marxist. Did he not know that democratic centralism was totally discredited, utterly finished and completely irrelevant to the working class?

Interestingly and encouragingly the SP comrade drew a distinction in response between the bureaucratic centralism of the Socialist Party and genuine democratic centralism. Those present were implored not "to throw the bath out with both the baby and the bathwater". John Killen finally sought to counter this disgraceful display of Leninism, with a skilful blend of ridicule, mockery and insult.

Other highlights? John Bulaitis: "some have described us as liquidationists. I suppose I am." You just couldn't make it up.

Seriously though, this grotesque aberration that passes itself off as working class politics and, nauseatingly, "Marxism for the new millennium" (I kid you not) must be thoroughly and openly exposed and then politically destroyed. We are (or should be) in the business of raising our class to the status of a ruling class. For that we need a correct revolutionary programme from which flows the need for a vanguard party and, yes, it must be a democratic centralist party. Anything else might go down a storm on Merseyside, but it is not Marxist or anything like it.

Finally, what of the Socialist Party? On one level the Liverpool gathering contained very little of political substance, even by the SP's own opportunist standards. Rather the unifying thread was a reaction against the essentially autocratic and bureaucratised Socialist Party regime, as it goes into meltdown. Unfortunately, however, the opposition is overwhelmingly rightist. Liverpool was merely the latest manifestation of the liquidationism spawned by Taaffe's own fundamentally opportunist method.

What the Socialist Party needs is a principled left opposition. Given the events outlined above, this now assumes even greater urgency ●

Terry Fenton

Death warrant signed
Act to save Mumia

On October 13 the governor of Pennsylvania signed a death warrant for Mumia Abu-Jamal, currently languishing on death row after an imprisonment of 17 years. The execution is due on December 2.

Born Wesley Cook in 1954, Mumia became politically active as a teenager, at 15 helping to found the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panthers. After its collapse, Mumia found work as a radio journalist, where he quickly gained a reputation as an articulate opponent of capitalism and an outspoken critic of police brutality, defending the Rasta-inspired MOVE collective against police brutality.

In the early hours of December 9 1981, Mumia witnessed a police officer attacking his brother. The events that followed are somewhat confused, partly due to the state's willingness to tamper with the evidence. What did clearly emerge was that a police officer - Daniel Faulkner - was shot dead and Mumia was critically wounded by a bullet from Faulkner's gun.

The events surrounding the trial clearly indicate that political motives took absolute precedence for the police and courts. The nature of the evidence and the subsequent means by which Mumia was to be convicted of murder were secondary matters. Thus the police failed to perform ballistic tests to determine whether Mumia's licensed handgun had even been fired. Suspects picked up in the immediate vicinity were forced to undergo tests for gunshot residue on their hands.

Mumia was not. The medical examiner adjudged the fatal bullet to be .44 calibre. Mumia's handgun fired .38. Part of the bullet shard extracted from Faulkner's corpse was conveniently 'lost'. Put quite simply, Mumia Abu-Jamal is the victim of a frame-up.

The prosecutor at Mumia's original trial was blatant about the motives of the state, committing a procedural violation by citing membership of the Black Panther Party as 'evidence' of Mumia's guilt. By attempting to liquidate its critics in this manner, the state attempts to give an unequivocal message to any potential rebels - fighting back is not permissible. This is so-called 'justice' in modern-day capitalist society.

The fact that Mumia has been incarcerated for 17 years is in itself a damning indictment of the US system. Yet this "cruel and unusual punishment" is almost the norm in a country whose jails are overflowing with two million prisoners, overwhelmingly poor, black or working class.

British workers have their own examples of a 'fair play' legal system. The conviction of Winston Silcott, the so-called 'Birmingham bombers' and many others give us a graphic picture of the manner in which the state is willing to frame those it feels are a threat. Workers must organise, on an international scale, in opposition to such abuses.

Save Mumia Abu-Jamal! Free all political prisoners! ●

Will Parker

Organising meeting
Thursday October 28,
7.30pm, Conway Hall.
National rally Saturday
November 6, 2pm, Trafalgar
Square.
Mumia Must Live campaign
mumia@callnetuk.com.

Fighting fund

Stingy

"Long live the shit sheet!" writes comrade RW from Carlisle - who goes on to apologise for his "measly" cheque of £25. If only there were more readers as stingy as you, comrade.

Other 'scrimping' donations this week include two £20 gifts from comrades TI and SL, while JG from Walthamstow comes up with a downright miserly £30! All more than welcome of course, if the Weekly Worker is to continue to debate, report, analyse and think.

Only philistines or those ashamed of their own actions can describe this as 'scandal-mongering'.

Thanks to these and other readers who boosted our October fund with a magnificent £125 this week. The total now stands at £259 with just over a week to go to reach our £400 target ●

Robbie Rix

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

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Living Marxist theory

The October aggregate of the CPGB took place in London on Sunday October 17. After five hours of productive and stimulating debate on the controversial British-Irish question, comrades voted by a substantial majority for an amended version of the 20 theses on 'Ireland and the British Irish' (*Weekly Worker* August 26).

Two amendments were agreed: a passage from the Manchester majority alternative theses - based on the CPGB *Draft programme* - was incorporated; and the words, "not expelling Northern Ireland from the union", were deleted from thesis 10. The discussion was conducted in a comradely and constructive spirit, and all comrades learned from the exchange. It was acknowledged by both sides that the vote for the 20 theses does not mean an end to debate, which can continue within the Party and openly in the *Weekly Worker*.

The 20 theses were submitted to the aggregate as a motion from the Provisional Central Committee. An alternative motion, 'Irish freedom and socialist revolution', drafted by comrade John Pearson was submitted by the Manchester branch majority. Part one of the Manchester motion quoted the paragraph on Ireland in the CPGB's *Draft programme*, and it was an amended form of this section that the meeting voted to accept as a preamble to the 20 theses. Part two of the Manchester motion discussed Marx's writings on Ireland, part three analysed the material basis for sectarianism in Ireland, and specifically the role of British imperialism; and part four called for working class leadership of the national liberation struggle and insisted, "It is vital that the Communist Party does not retreat into opportunism. The primary immediate political task is the reforging of Communist Parties of Great Britain and of Ireland."

After quoting the *Draft programme* on Ireland, the Manchester motion stated: "This formulation remains an accurate and adequate statement of the tasks of the working class in relation to the Irish question. It requires no revision." Comrade Jack Conrad said he agreed with most of the section, but proposed deleting the words, "It requires no revision", and substituting: "in as far as it goes. However, as with all programmatic formulations, it requires elaboration and further development. This is especially so in relationship to the British-Irish." It was in this amended form that part one became the preamble to the 20 theses. Parts two, three and four were defeated.

Proposing his amendment, comrade Conrad said that to claim any programme "requires no revision" fails to understand the nature of a Communist Party programme. It is the bare bones of principle expressed in a highly condensed form, frequently needing substantial elaboration or development according to different circumstances. The comrade said this



Loyalists at Drumcree: the task of communists is to win them away from reaction

is especially true of the section on Ireland in our *Draft programme*: it is acceptable as far as it goes, but fails to even mention the British-Irish question.

Introducing the motion submitted by the Manchester branch, comrade John Pearson described as "worrying" some of the things written by comrade Conrad in recent issues of the *Weekly Worker*. For example, in 'Bolshevism and consistent democracy' (October 7) comrade Conrad estimates that "on a nought-to-100 index, from non-nation to full nation, the British-Irish would score, say, 75". This, said comrade Pearson, is just a baseless assertion with no evidence to support it, and contradicts the Leninist heritage of thought. Specifically it also contradicts comrade Conrad's own supplements on Ireland published in *The Leninist* in 1984, which contained substantive and elaborated Marxist analysis proving Ireland is one nation and not two. Comrade Pearson was also disturbed by the implication that the Party should accept the protestant veto on Irish unity contained in the article, 'British-Irish once again' (*Weekly Worker* September 23): ie, that Jack Conrad would countenance a British-Irish province on condition that "the statelet of Northern Ireland has been democratically abolished". Nothing more is said about how it should be democratically abolished - it implies that the British-Irish, or as comrade Pearson and his co-thinkers prefer to call them "orangeists" or "loyalists", should agree to it. Comrade Pearson wondered where the Party would go next if these theses were accepted. He was most alarmed by comrade Conrad's remarks about the "histori-

cally established Jewish population" in Israel - that they should not be driven into the sea. To advocate national rights for Jews in Israel would be an abomination, comrade Pearson said.

Turning to the Manchester motion itself, comrade Pearson reiterated that in his view the CPGB *Draft programme* is an expression of Marxism-Leninism and to change it would be opportunist. It includes the line, "We communists in Britain unconditionally support the right of Ireland to reunite". If the PCC theses were accepted, comrade Pearson argued, this would have to be changed. He said the quotes from Marx and Lenin in the Manchester majority motion demonstrated that for them democracy was important but did not override socialism or the interests of the working class. Comrade Pearson reiterated what he said at the September aggregate: that where Lenin uses class-laden terms the leadership of the CPGB prefers terms free of any class content. Constant emphasis on democracy, and playing down socialism, communism and class, has frequently been a precursor to liquidationism. The comrade said he hopes this is not the case with the CPGB.

Comrade Jack Conrad proposed the PCC motion, noting how the debate on the British-Irish question has moved forward since it began at Communist University '99. He summarised and replied to many of the arguments CPGB members and other comrades have made against the 20 theses in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. These arguments included claims that only full nations should have the right to self-determination, that only op-

pressed nations should have this right, that the advocates of the Conrad theses are siding with Paisleyite reaction, and that the British-Irish are just a religion. Comrade Conrad answered those charges, and reiterated that our aim as communists must be working class self-liberation, and the voluntary union of people. Communists who start with the good intention of coercing historically constituted peoples into unity, supposedly in order to further the cause of socialism, will soon change into their opposite and become bureaucratic socialists.

In the debate, there were some minor doubts expressed about the PCC theses. Comrades questioned the real extent of the progressive side to the protestant tradition (thesis 4), and also how precise and definite the exact geographical area which should be granted the right of self-determination ought to be (thesis 15). However, the only amendment put forward to the theses themselves was from comrade Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group - who has speaking, but not voting rights at CPGB aggregates. It was he who argued for the deletion of the words, "not expelling Northern Ireland from the union", from thesis 10.

Most of the debate explored themes flowing from the Manchester motion. Several supporters of the PCC theses claimed that the Manchester motion reiterates perceived existing truths rather than dealing with concrete realities. But crucially the Manchester motion, and the 1984 supplements from *The Leninist* which it quotes approvingly, fail to seriously address the question of the British-Irish.

Comrade Marcus Larsen said that

those who see a contradiction between the goal of a united Ireland and the right of the British-Irish to self-determination fail to allow for the possibility of British-Irish workers being won away from reactionary sectarianism. Comrade Peter Manson said that what is being written now, in and about the 20 theses, is a substantial advance on what was written in the supplements 15 years ago, but does not radically depart from it. Comrade Michael Malkin said the Manchester motion is antiquarian in method: "We cannot take categories from 80 or 150 years ago and simply impose them on current reality," the comrade said. Such an approach was unscientific and undialectical, and the very opposite of Marxism. To claim, as the Manchester theses do, that it is neither "proper" nor "permissible" to describe the protestants of the north of Ireland as anything other than "an integral part of the Irish nation" was plain wrong. The question is whether the British-Irish, objectively and subjectively, constitute a collectivity. The comrade claimed that they do, and that the fundamental fault in Manchester's approach was a failure to differentiate between orangeism and the protestant working class as a whole. Our task is to win the mass of the British-Irish working class away from reaction. He denied the charge that the Party is taking a liquidationist turn, reassuring comrade Pearson that "not talking about socialism with every breath does not mean you are about to turn into the Democratic Left".

Supporting the Manchester motion, comrade James Frazer said he was not convinced that the British-Irish are objectively a nation even if they think they are subjectively. He claimed that comrade Conrad has not proved anything to justify his change of mind.

Comrade Phil Watson - a minority in Manchester - defended the CPGB majority against charges of opportunism. He argued against turning the works of Marxism into a lifeless heritage museum. Similarly, comrade Conrad said our ideas constantly develop and we should critically examine everything, not least what he wrote in 1984.

The comrade said there was far less confusion than at the September aggregate and therefore he proposed voting on the 20 theses as a whole. An overwhelming majority of comrades voted for the theses as amended, including the addition of the preamble derived from section one of the Manchester motion with comrade Conrad's amendment.

After the debate on the British-Irish question the aggregate heard a brief report on the work of the new Party cell which has the special task of updating and radically extending the Party's website and associated electronic communications. At the end of the meeting, James Frazer presented a cheque for £1,000, raised by the Manchester branch in support of the Party's election work.

Mary Godwin