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Safety not profit



On Friday of last week the RMT called off the strike of its guard members as a result of an injunction obtained in the high court by three train operating companies (TOCs), led by Virgin. The strike, due to take place on October 29, was over changes to their safety functions, introduced via amendments to the rule book. These amendments put the driver in charge of the train instead of the guard, with sole responsibility for protection. The guard's role becomes one of looking after the passengers' general well-being.

The RMT leadership had been looking for a way out. Union bureaucrats do not see their role in times of low working class combativity as one of leading and facilitating a fightback. Rather they seek to divert and defuse disputes, regarding the eventual acceptance of the employers' latest demands as inevitable, while they can only hope to limit the damage.

So the 'campaign' to oppose the rule changes was half-hearted and marred by poor organisation and lack of communication. Members complained of having to rely on the bourgeois press for information, including in some cases regarding official notification of the strike. In areas where the right wing dominated the leadership - for example East Anglia and the south-east - the ballot was lost as a result. Members were advised that, since there was no immediate threat to jobs, it would be best to keep their powder dry. However, in other areas there was an overwhelming majority in favour of action.

The issues of safety and job security are in fact closely linked. The

changes would heap more and more responsibility on drivers - often overburdened already by long hours and a heavy workload. But for the profit-hungry TOCs safety comes a poor second in the unceasing drive to shed labour and thereby cut costs. By introducing greater flexibility future job losses would be facilitated. The changes were brought about after pressure from the Association of Train Operating Companies, the trade body of the 25 companies. The idea is eventually, through further rule amendments, to remove the operating functions from the guard altogether, with all operating responsibility placed on the driver. The role of guards would be reduced to that of ticket collectors or Kit Kat sellers. Little safety training would be required. This would allow the TOCs to contract out. This has already happened with ticket collectors, who - to give one example - have been transferred to Burns Security by First Northwestern on considerably worse pay and conditions.

There is nothing the companies would like more than the generalisation of guardless trains, at present restricted to suburban and local services. Here one-person operations are run only with the help of numerous safeguards - CCTV, mirrors, automatic doors, etc. On high-speed, inter-city services this would be more problematic, though not impossible. Technically of course, driverless trains are possible too, as the Dockland Light Railway demonstrates. But the safe, comprehensive introduction of such a system would involve a complete reconstruction of the network, with investment cost so prohibitive as to

rule it out for the foreseeable future.

So the rule changes threaten both jobs and safety. Protection of trains involved in accidents, to give an extreme example, is vital. This includes the placing of detonators on the line half a mile behind and in front of a disabled locomotive. Any delay can result in another train colliding with the disabled train or ploughing into passengers escaping across the tracks. Train crew have almost automatic reactions in such circumstances, with the guard immediately protecting the rear and the driver the front. Under the new rules the driver and guard are supposed to consult each other before deciding what needs to be done. This is a recipe for confusion and fatal delay. Railworkers were absolutely correct to oppose these changes.

The high court decision came as little surprise, as the TOCs were claiming that as the rule book is a Railtrack responsibility, and they have to implement it, the industrial dispute is with Railtrack and not them. The guards however cannot strike against Railtrack, as they are employed by the TOCs. The high court has therefore deemed the strike to be secondary action, illegal under the trade union laws. This judgement has seemingly removed the right to strike from any railworkers employed by TOCs whose conditions are changed via the rule book. This has to be challenged - not in the high court, but by defiance.

With careful preparation and a campaign of mobilisation the strike could have gone ahead, no matter what the judges say. But defiance of the anti-union laws was the last thing on the

mind of the RMT tops. An alternative tactic, still relying on the involvement and initiative of the rank and file, would be to frame the union's demands in such a way that separate disputes could be legally declared against the individual TOCs. Such a development is still possible, but would be disastrous without careful coordination.

Both rail unions have prominent members of the Socialist Labour Party on their leadership. Bob Crow is assistant general secretary of the RMT and Mick Rix is general secretary of Aslef. Comrade Crow is currently standing for re-election against a strong rightwing candidate, Mick Cash. However, in view of Crow's high profile in the current dispute, his chances have been boosted considerably. But he has not publicly called for defiance of the union legislation - something which for Arthur Scargill (and therefore the SLP) is almost a matter of faith.

There are other SLP members and supporters on the executive of the RMT. Jim Connolly did make the call to defy the judges - before the NEC meeting which called off the strike - only to fall strangely silent afterwards. In general neither he nor Danny Birmingham can be considered leftwing in terms of RMT politics. Both supported the witch hunt against former executive member Patrick Sikorski - then an SLP 'comrade' of theirs. John Leach and Paul Burton are considered more leftwing by many.

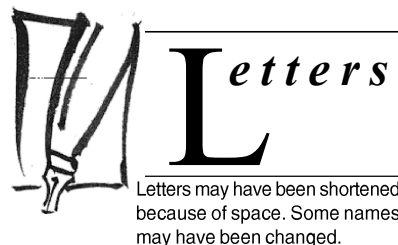
In fact the SLP's response to the whole safety issue has been predictably inadequate. Far from attempting to coordinate a fightback (as far as its

declining influence allows), it contented itself with issuing a press release expressing its "deepest sympathy" for the victims of the Ladbroke Grove disaster. It condemned "the previous Tory administration for hiving off our rail and other services to the public sector", and the present government for "its refusal to return them to public ownership". The question of *workers' control* is not mentioned. *Socialist News* refers vaguely to "democratic control and accountability" - clearly secondary to state ownership in its eyes.

Railworkers are angry at the way the TOCs and Railtrack have put profits before safety. They know that if the running of the industry was placed under their direct control safety would be a priority. They want to hit back. This anger could be turned against those who promised much, but delivered defeat, including SLP members on the leadership.

Not only the RMT, but Aslef too are in an excellent position to gain widespread support on this issue of rail safety after the furore over Ladbroke Grove. The TOCs and the government would have a public relations disaster if they dragged the RMT into court and sequestration. In fact rail safety in such circumstances is just the sort of issue which could spark a revival of working class combativity, transforming a simple trade union dispute into a *political* fight directed against the anti-trade union laws and a Blair government which openly fawns before multi-millionaire capitalists like Richard Branson ●

Steve Johnson



One-sided

Jim Cullen (*Weekly Worker* October 21) expresses anger that my review of the IBT's book raised *some* criticisms of the IBT and dogmatic 'orthodox' Trotskyism that had previously been expressed by his own grouping in the IBT. Jim makes the seemingly damning allegation that "... despite the remarkable similarity between what we said in 1997 and what [Ian Donovan] 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."

I am not convinced that I was on the 'wrong' side of the 1996-7 dispute with comrade Cullen, since I still consider that the IBT majority, at least in formal political terms, was to the left of comrade Cullen's grouping in its stated view of the revolutionary potential of the proletariat and its anti-chauvinist position on Maastricht (a position essentially the same as the CPGB), notwithstanding their muddled theory and their torpor and hide-in-the-corner fear of political debate. Comrade Cullen is however to be congratulated for writing his political reply - I am not holding my breath waiting for the IBT.

Comrade Cullen argued during the dispute that the 1960s radicalisation was "petty-bourgeois" and further: "Proletarian revolution is normally conceived of as an affair in which an insurgent proletariat pulls sections of the petty bourgeoisie in its train. Here the reverse happened, as the proletariat became swept up in the rebellion of petty-bourgeois youth" (document, November 14 1996). It is true that comrade Cullen added: "Was it possible that at this juncture power could have passed into the hands of the French proletariat? I see no strong reason not to think so" - which shows that my recollection of his position, dimmed by the passage of time, was not precise.

Yet I was not far off the mark - comrade Cullen also wrote that: "Despite fond memories of that year, I am convinced that it, as well as the entire post-war period of which it was the apex, was an aberrant moment in historical time, unlikely ever to return." If comrade Cullen is complaining about being misunderstood, perhaps that is partially his own fault, due to his somewhat murky and contradictory statements.

Thus, though it would not be absolutely fair to say that comrade Cullen's position was that "proletarian revolution was not possible in the period of the French May 1968 general strike", it *would* be fair to say that comrade Cullen's position was that in general proletarian revolutionary struggles were not possible in the "aberrant" post-war boom. This is hardly a ringing endorsement of the revolutionary potential of the working class in such a period, and therefore, incidental errors of detail aside, my characterisation of comrade Cullen's current as fundamentally liquidationist still stands.

The core of his argument is 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."

In fact, in periods of labour shortages and high employment/prosperity, the social power of the proletariat is *stronger*, and its role in the economy more indispensable than ever. Both types of situation reflect different moments in the struggle between capital and labour, and it could equally be argued that economic crises (and particularly mass unemployment) under capitalism are often seen by the bosses as opportunities to inflict

long-lasting and historic *defeats* on the proletariat, thereby blunting its revolutionary potential.

The relationship between consciousness and the power of the working class movement is a complex one, and in truth the real significance of the May 1968 mobilisation was *not* that the proletariat had been pulled behind a mobilisation of another class. Rather, it was that the struggles of petty bourgeois *and* working class student youth triggered off a much more powerful explosion in the organised working class in conditions of relative economic prosperity. This is where comrade Cullen's views are one-sided.

His letter is to my knowledge the first substantial public political pronouncement he has written on any question since the immediate aftermath of his split from the IBT. Comrade Cullen appears to have largely dropped out of political activity as a result of his 'perspectives', a fact which, in common with the IBT majority, I do not find that surprising.

Ian Donovan
London

Livingstone

The *Weekly Worker* has provided an interesting and thoughtful coverage of the saga of Blair, Livingstone and the New Labour candidacy for the London mayoralty. It is a pity then that I had to read in last week's paper a front page lead in which comrade Jim Blackstock advocates the Communist Party's taking up a 'Back Livingstone' position, even if 'Red Ken' were to obtain the New Labour franchise. Comrade Blackstock's position is a collapse into shabby opportunism and it should be roundly rejected by the Party.

The outlines of a principled communist position with respect to Livingstone and the mayoralty were very competently set down by comrade Maurice Bernal (*Weekly Worker* June 24). The comrade stressed that of course the Communist Party should support Livingstone's democratic right to seek nomination and stand for Labour against the Tories, if that is what the Labour membership in London wants.

Comrade Bernal was furthermore correct when, in considering the unlikely scenario of a blocked Livingstone breaking from the Labour Party and standing as an independent, he assessed that many thousands of Labour Party members, not only in London, but throughout Britain might be drawn into support for such a challenge, and that, "In such circumstances, we believe that it would be the duty of communists and revolutionary socialists not just to engage polemically with such a new grouping, but to struggle within it." I would add that such a struggle should be built around a campaign to win the independent candidacy to a manifesto based upon a minimum platform of working class democratic demands.

The comrade concluded his argument with the statement, "Whatever the outcome, it is essential for the left to prepare itself to fight for an authentic *socialist* mayor of London ... In the unlikely event that Blair bites the bullet and allows Livingstone to contest the election as Labour's official candidate, we argue it is the duty of the left to fight for a *socialist* mayoral candidate: ie, a candidate endorsed by a united front of socialist organisations."

Now we have comrade Blackstock proposing, "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". Apparently the question of what manifesto Livingstone would be standing on is

an irrelevancy to comrade Blackstock. He goes on to describe the scenario which he believes should lead the London Socialist Alliance to press ahead with plans for a united left challenge: ie, Livingstone's acceptance of "a convincing Dobson victory for the Labour nomination in an open contest". What a miserable perspective! We who held out against the London Socialist Alliance's collapse in the face of Arthur Scargill's candidacy in the recent European elections should be the champions of a 'Back Livingstone' collapse this time around!

This is not communist politics. We are for furthering working class political independence. We are for communism, not Labourism. We struggle to build a Communist Party designed to self-liberate us from capital. The thought that we should enter the 21st century supporting a fight for 'old Labour' against New Labour is almost nauseating.

John Pearson
Manchester

Scottish facts

Gerry Downing's readiness to leap to the defence of what he perceives to be Marxist principles may be well-intentioned, but he has an unfortunate tendency to launch into polemics against his political opponents without bothering to check the facts. His attack on the Scottish Socialist Party (Letters *Weekly Worker* October 21) is an example of this.

Gerry objects to the SSP publishing an article by John Palmer of *Red Pepper* which supported Nato's bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. Gerry seems to be labouring under the misapprehension that Palmer is a member of the SSP and that his views represent the position of that party. Is he really so ignorant of the SSP's politics that he believes it *supported* Nato's war?

John Palmer's piece was published alongside another article by an SSP member vigorously opposing Nato's war. I assume the SSP did so because it recognised that Palmer's response, of 'humanitarian support' for Nato intervention, was shared by many within the reformist left, and that it was necessary to involve these comrades in debate rather than simply to denounce them as stooges of imperialism. This was certainly why, as editor of *What next?*, I reprinted John Palmer's article.

The reason why *Scottish Socialist Voice* is one of the liveliest papers on the left (just compare it with the Socialist Party in England and Wales's dreary publication *The Socialist*) is that it has a broad editorial policy and is willing to discuss with people who do not agree with the SSP's political line. If Gerry Downing wants to take issue with the SSP, in the context of a letter opposing sectarianism towards the Labour Party, he would be better advised to criticise the fact that there are some people the SSP does *not* want to discuss with.

For although it has engaged in dialogue with opponents of Scottish independence (who form a minority in the SSP itself), with members of the Scottish National Party and even with 'left' loyalist Billy Hutchison, *SSV* shows no interest in a dialogue with anti-Blairites inside the Labour Party.

To pretend that Labour has been purged of any working class content and transformed into a purely bourgeois party may be helpful in persuading some hundreds of individuals to join the SSP, but it is an extremely short-sighted tactic. The SSP is a small political grouping which lacks any substantial popular base outside a geographically limited area around Glasgow. It is highly unlikely that a mass socialist party can be built by recruiting in ones and twos to such an organisation. A real mass party will

almost certainly emerge out of developments in the existing workers' movement, which in Scotland as elsewhere in Britain still includes the Labour Party.

Bob Pitt
London

SSP rebuttal

Gerry Downing says the Scottish Socialist Party is not a real working class alternative. I would like to offer a rebuttal.

Scottish Socialist Voice has a relatively open editorial line. (Strangely enough, some left publications do.) It often publishes articles holding different points of view. Incidentally, a Socialist Labour Party activist in Scotland (they can be counted on the fingers of two hands at best) recently decried the range of opinion to be found in the SSP. However, it is a strength, in my opinion.

Gerry's viewpoint appears to be just the kind of barren sectarianism which explains why the left in London is so weak. He says the SSP is not the alternative in Scotland? Does *he* have one?

The SSP is the best thing going in Scotland, warts and all, and I have worked hard for its success. Anybody who is resident in Scotland, calls him or herself a socialist/communist and is not a member of the SSP is a sectarian. That is the reality that Gerry's ignorant comment fails to express.

James Robertson
Linlithgow

A tad rich

Comrade Gerry Downing is certainly all at sea, as his latest letter graphically illustrates.

Gerry talks about those revolutionaries who oppose Ken Livingstone's candidacy for London mayor, complaining that they "are simply conflating our understanding with how the mass of the working class see the matter". Quite right of course.

However, it is a tad rich for Gerry to accuse the CPGB of abandoning the working class merely because we support the right of the British-Irish to self-determination in a united Ireland. The comrade's dark rumblings about the CPGB "adopting imperialist stooge groups like the loyalists" (and apparently the KLA) amply demonstrates that he is "simply conflating" the protestant *working class* into orangeism.

Eddie Ford

Middlesex

Royal puzzle

I am puzzled by Gerry Downing's politics. He mocks the CPGB's republicanism, even though it is obviously revolutionary and not Huttonesque. For Gerry Downing the policy of the CPGB is summed up by the slogan, 'Smash the monarchy and the House of Lords and keep capitalism'.

Would it then be fair to summarise the politics of comrades like Gerry Downing as, 'Keep the monarchy and the House of Lords and smash capitalism'? Also, why is republicanism fine and dandy in Northern Ireland, but not in England, Scotland and Wales?

John Dart
Bristol

Jewish rights

Mary Godwin's report of the October 17 CPGB aggregate describes John Pearson as being "alarmed" by Jack Conrad's comments about the Jewish population in Israel (*Weekly Worker* October 21). Jack Conrad remarked that there is an "historically established Jewish population" in Israel, and "that they should not be driven into the sea".

Does comrade Pearson actually *deny* that there is an "historically established Jewish population" in Is-

rael? Or maybe he thinks that we should all have the decency to keep quiet about it, as it is too inconvenient to think about. Or could it be the case that comrade Pearson thinks that this is a 'problem' which needs to be sorted out by applying force against 'the oppressors'? Does he really expect the Jewish population to simply forget their Jewishness if we threaten to *forcibly* incorporate them into a new Arab/muslim-dominated Palestine?

Comrade Pearson is quoted as saying that the idea of Jewish self-determination ("national rights") within the existing territory of Israel would be "an abomination". This is also exactly the view of Islamic medievalist groups like Hamas.

Brian Dee
Birmingham

Conned good

I note Mary Godwin's assurance that there is to be no suppression of debate on the British-Irish, even though Jack Conrad's theses have been voted through. Personally, I have my doubts.

Anyway, I would welcome an early opportunity to explain that Jack is mistaken about the identity of view between the Second International and the Bolsheviks on the application of self-determination to oppressor nations. Has Jack forgotten that the latter collapsed as the social-imperialists, social-opportunists and left centrists in Russia, France, Germany, Britain, etc took issue with Lenin, arguing that the main enemy is not at home but is, rather, in those other nations lining up to infringe 'their' nation's right self-determination?

I would also like to put Jack straight on another point. Jack is wrong about the UVF attitude to a united Ireland. Jack argues they "sought to maintain a united Ireland under protestant ascendancy ... through the continuation of British rule". Translated into plain English: the UVF sought not a united Ireland but a United Kingdom. When the hired thugs of British imperialism woke up to the fact that they could no longer enslave the whole of Ireland by sheer brute force, they and their masters fell back upon the partition option, drawing up borders which allowed them to exploit the Ulster protestants as a 'democratic' pretext.

There are many question I approach from a point of view similar to that of the AWL, the organisation I take to be the inspiration behind Jack's latest brainwave - principally on the attitude to the workers' movement, once derided by the CPGB as 'economic'. However, on the national question, especially as applied to Ireland (and Palestine), I think they are disastrously mistaken. In a brief exchange between Martin Thomas and Mark Osborn on the AWL website, the latter was less than enthusiastic about Jack's theses. Unlike Martin, Mark is withholding congratulations until the CPGB abandons the conditions Jack claims to place on British-Irish self-determination.

Unfortunately (for me), I fear that the reference to the necessity of "voluntary" reunification of Ireland can only mean that the two "conditions" that are said to be placed on British-Irish self-determination are, probably, not worth the paper they are written on. They constitute, in my opinion, nothing more than a piece of cynical spin-doctoring, a lie deemed necessary to finesse his theses past a sceptical audience and onto the CPGB statute book.

Well done, Jack. You conned them good.
Tom Delargy
Paisley

Criminal justice

Three-pronged assault

Quite a flurry of new home office proposals greeted us at the end of last week. Determined to maintain his reputation as tough on crime, home secretary Jack Straw launched three new initiatives with negative democratic implications.

Readers will recall that last month the government tackled the 'causes' of crime by announcing the planned introduction of blanket drugs testing of arrested persons (see 'Blair's new drugs offensive' *Weekly Worker* September 30). Only a few weeks later, this sledgehammer approach is being widened in a further explicit challenge to democratic rights. Now, after the announcement of mandatory drugs tests, *The Sunday Telegraph* tells us, "ministers wish to extend this to include alcohol levels, regardless of whether the offence is drink-related. Those who fail will be refused bail" (October 24).

As justification, Blair's government alleges that half of all 'street crime' (presumably consisting mostly of robberies and assaults) is carried out under the influence of alcohol. It expects, for some unexplained reason, that such offences will soar in the next few years. So like good boy scouts they intend to 'be prepared', patronisingly warning the rest of us that drinking 'over the limit' will get us into trouble. Should we be unfortunate enough to be arrested, whether for offences



Jack Straw: adding to the causes of crime

against the person or against property, we will be denied bail and put in the cells even if we have only had a couple of pints and would otherwise be given police bail and sent on our way.

At the moment, bail is a right and can only be refused on specific grounds related to ensuring the accused's appearance in court, preventing further offences or inhibiting interference with witnesses. Refusal of bail, which under this proposal would be on the say-so of a police station desk sergeant after a positive breath test for alcohol, cannot at present legitimately be used in such a punitive manner against those who, under the law, are presumed innocent until proved guilty. The proposals to deny bail on the basis of drugs and alcohol in a person's bloodstream are a strong and dangerous attack on the presumptive right that exists at present.

Once someone has been through the courts and been found guilty of an offence, once that person has had to face up to the penalty imposed, bourgeois jurisprudence might formerly have considered them to have 'paid for their crime' and learnt a salutary lesson that ought to prevent re-offending. But no more. Not if the Blairites get their way: they are overturning such views and instead are trying to impose a harsher, more punitive system, with consequent serious ramifications for the working class and democratic life in general.

And there is another string to their bow. Police have just completed a £450,000 pilot scheme in Kent which involved putting up posters bearing photographs of those convicted of theft, burglary, and handling stolen goods in their areas. An unattributed home office source subsequently stated: "The feedback from Kent is positive and measures like this could really cut petty crimes" (*The Sunday Telegraph* October 24). So now the home office wants to expand the scheme onto a national canvas, with the possibility of even relatively petty convicted offenders like shoplifters and those who evade car tax being included in this public rogues' gallery. Names of offenders are to be included with their pictures, though there has so far been no proposal that offend-

ties in favour of nihilistic, individualised punishment that corrodes society. A similar 'naming and shaming' system in the USA has led some of those thus publicly humiliated to commit suicide.

Just in case having one's picture flaunted for the neighbours to gawp at is not sufficient discouragement for those who fail to pay their television licence fee or renew their car tax disc, Straw has pulled another rabbit out of the hat. And this, he undoubtedly thinks, is quite a clincher. To ensure that fines are paid, and paid quickly, legislation is planned to give courts powers to take large chunks, or indeed all, of the welfare benefits of those who have to claim them to exist. To date the state has been careful not to deduct more than a minimal amount from those receiving benefit or on low wages, for example, when 'attachment of earnings' orders are applied.

Probation officers are aghast at the idea that grossly sub-minimal benefits may be grabbed in this way, as are many others in the criminal justice system. The implications are grotesque. Already the magistrates' courts find it next to impossible to collect fines imposed on people who are claiming benefits. Tens of millions of pounds currently outstanding bear witness to the difficulties many of those fined have in paying even a paltry £2 a week out of the measly state provision. Harry Fletcher of the National Association of Probation Officers, quoted in *The Independent*, makes the seemingly obvious point that, "someone who has been fined [and seeing] a huge chunk of their benefits cut or withdrawn ... would be likely to go and steal. It would be self-defeating" (October 23 1999).

Communists do not view those who commit crime as *simply* anti-social. Most, particularly the poor and marginalised, are alienated victims too. However, when those on the fringes of society are *forced* to steal in order to live by the actions of the state, then it is the state, not its victims, that we condemn. Straw's latest moves are typical of a ruling class confident of its right to rule in the absence of any kind of working class self-assertion. Unchallenged, the state will continue to impose its control at the expense of our rights and liberties. Consistent democrats decry the degradation of humanity that capitalism is constantly producing ●

Jim Gilbert

Website

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

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Fighting fund

Thin week

A thin week for donations has seen this month's fund stall at £334 - well short of our £400 target. Comrades, the task of re-forging our Communist Party can never be the project of the few. It requires the active intervention of all partisans of the class.

While Party supporters - and many detractors - recognise the invaluable role the *Weekly Worker* has played and continues to play in that struggle, hard cash is what keeps our flag flying. More of you need

to follow the example given by of RW of Carlisle last week and dig deep into your pockets. Comrade RW gave £25 he could ill afford towards our fighting fund.

Thanks this week go to WR, IP and HR who each donated £20 ●

Robbie Rix

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

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: 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.

■ A Labour mayor for London

Public rally. 12 noon, Saturday October 30. Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1. Organised by 'Livingstone for London', PO Box 20052, London NW2 5ZH.

■ Nominate Bannister

The Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Union 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 Union branches can nominate call Glen Kelly on 0171-251 8449.

■ Support Tameside

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

■ Ireland conference

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

■ Stop privatisation

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

■ 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.

■ 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 SA

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

■ Brent SA

To get involved, contact Galaxy News, Box 100, 37 Walm Lane, London NW2 4QU, or ring 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.

Despite the awe in which Jack Conrad is held by the producers of the *Weekly Worker*, to others his 'British-Irish' therapy appears like a quack remedy.

The first thing which needs examining is Conrad's diagnosis of the origins of the 'British-Irish', "an historically constituted and distinct community of people". "The British-Irish have continuously inhabited parts of what is Northern Ireland since the early 17th century. They were settled in Antrim and Down as a mass of 'strong farmers' - from England, but mainly from Scotland - to pacify the most rebellious part of Gaelic and Anglo-Irish Ireland and hence ensure it for an absolutist British monarchy that had redefined itself according to its nationalised version of protestantism: ie, Anglicanism" (*Weekly Worker* September 9).

So, let us begin by examining these claims of a continuous British-Irish identity going back to the 17th century. There is considerable confusion here, both theoretically and historically. Conrad denies the existence of any manifestations of nation or nationality at such an early period as the early 17th century - well, except when it suits him. He has dismissed fellow therapist Dave Craig, in the *Weekly Worker* (September 23). Craig's "whole approach reeks of petty nationalism" because he has the temerity to suggest that there may be such things as "English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish nations". To Conrad these are nothing other than "crude Victorian inventions, designed to mystify the past and divide the working class." Yet fully two centuries before, Conrad has the presumably 'non-national' Scottish and English settlers "quickly stop[ping] being Scottish or English as they formed another - hybrid - Irish [nationality] identity" (*Weekly Worker* September 9).

If Conrad can push his chosen 'British-Irish' nationality back to the 17th century, he cannot convincingly attack others who point out, with a lot more justification, that the English and Scottish had many of the features of a nationality, and England and Scotland many of the features of a nation, during the same period. The notion and reality of nationality (a cultural group) and nation (the people in a given territorial area) arose alongside each other, with nation states becoming the dominant political form as capitalism extended its influence.

Indeed, it was precisely the strength of national identity, already reached in Scotland by the end of the 17th century, which ensured that the United Kingdom, formed by the 1707 Act of Union, was a union state which recognised the existence of subordinate nations. The UK was not a federal state like the future USA or a unitary state like post-revolutionary France, neither of which recognised other national constituents. The union state form was further underscored at the time Ireland joined the UK under the 1801 Act of Union, because of the still remaining strength of national feeling, despite the defeat of the 1798 United Irish Rising. Therefore we can see that the UK state form preserved the English, Scottish and Irish nations (all at different stages of development) within it, and even allowed the emergence of a new Welsh nation, Wales having previously 'disappeared' as a political unit, under the 1535 Act of Union.

Certainly a nationalist or quasi-nationalist intelligentsia did develop strongly in Victorian times, peddling all sorts of national myths, but the real reason for the increasing political re-emergence of Irish, Scottish and Welsh nations was the extension of the franchise to the 'lower orders'. They felt these national identities more strongly than the Welsh gentry or the Scottish and Irish landlords and merchants, who had acquiesced with different degrees of enthusiasm to the

Confused and inconsistent democracy

Allan Armstrong of the Scottish Socialist Party and Republican Communist Network slams the CPGB's position on the British-Irish

respective union treaties and helped eventually to form a real British ruling class.

What of Conrad's 'British-Irish', with "antecedents" going back to the 17th century? There was no British 'nation' (never mind 'British-Irish') in the 17th century. 'Britain', under the union of the crowns of 1603, was a dynastic term, which did not extend to Ireland. With separate parliaments and churches in England and Scotland, most people would then have described themselves as English or Scots (or belonging to particular denominations, localities or even kindreds), but not British.

Next we have to deal with Conrad's poor history. Those in Ulster who came from Scotland were very mixed. Gaelic-speaking Macdonnells from Scotland's western islands and Kintyre had long been settled in Antrim, and along with the 'native Irish' Gaels had eliminated Norman lordly and later English kingly control in this area. Far from considering themselves British, they were hardly reconciled to thinking themselves as Scottish, seeing no contradiction in having a continuous Gaelic-speaking realm stretching across the North Channel.

When lowland Scots were first planted in County Down, it was as part of a deal which involved the king, the undertakers (those licensed to 'plant') and the local Irish Gaelic lord, Conn O'Neill. However, as their numerical strength grew, the rapacious undertakers and merchants either displaced the 'native Irish' or forced them into servitude. The Scottish settlers these undertakers brought across were a mixture of Presbyterians (including Gaelic-speaking Campbells), potentially troublesome catholic recusants and very definitely troublesome Border outlaws, who were forcibly transplanted (or fled) once James VI had blocked their usual escape route into England, through the Union of the Crowns. Far from quickly forming a "British-Irish" identity, some of these Scots intermarried and merged with the Irish. The majority, however, did form a distinct, but largely Scotch-Irish Presbyterian culture, which was often in opposition to the union state, and in particular to the established (Anglican) Church of Ireland.

Furthermore, just as there was some absorption of Scottish settlers by the 'native Irish', so there were conversions of 'native Irish' to Presbyterianism and intermixing of the descendants of Scots and English settlers in Ulster too. And of course, as the penal laws against catholics took their toll after 1690, there was widespread 'native Irish' conversion to Anglicanism (since Presbyterians in Ireland still suffered political disabilities) and changing of Irish names to English forms. The myth of the longstanding division between the "protestant-British-Irish minority" and the catholic Irish can be illus-

trated by looking at the very Scottish (and English) surnames of Danny Morrison, John Hume and Gerry Adams on the Irish nationalist side and the very Irish surnames of former Stormont premier Sir Terence O'Neill, current Ulster Unionist spokesperson Ken Maginnis and Lenny Murphy, the 'Shankhill Butcher', on the British, Ulster Unionist and loyalist side! The lines Conrad wants to draw are not so hard and fast, and there has been plenty of change-over in identity, not just the stable 'British Irish' community Conrad claims.

When the revolutionary pulse in Europe quickened in the late 18th century, many of the Presbyterian Scotch-Irish, still remaining in Ulster, joined with numbers of the dissenter Anglo-Irish, a small but significant number of the Anglican Anglo-Irish and large numbers of catholic Irish to form the republican United Irishmen. The Irish nation became politically visible. It was at precisely this time that the hybrid identity of 'British-Irish' really emerged in opposition to the revolutionary challenge of the United Irishmen and to the united nation (people) of Ireland.

The initially Anglican-led Orange Order opened its ranks to Presbyterians, the better to create a common British sectarian front. The revolutionary Irish faced the counterrevolutionary British-Irish. It was the defeat of the former which led to the wholesale shift amongst the majority of Irish protestants towards a 'British-Irish' identity in the 19th century. However, even significant numbers of the better-off catholics adopted this identity too, at the official urging of their church. The catholic church wanted them politically mobilised, not just to abolish any remaining penal laws, but to remove the political and economic disabilities their co-religionists still faced 'on the mainland'.

Therefore, during the 19th century, British-Irish identity was not synonymous with protestantism, but enjoyed catholic Irish support, with largely catholic Irish regiments in the British army building the empire. But old class divisions still remained strong enough for the British-Irish to be divided for much of the century between Whig and old Liberal on one side and Tory and Conservative on the other. When the widening franchise permitted the 'lower orders' to vote, these political alignments were increasingly displaced by the division between Irish Home Rule Party and the Irish Unionists. Yet some protestant Irish supported Irish home rule in opposition to the large protestant (and small and declining catholic) majority of British-Irish who supported direct British rule from Westminster.

The high point of the British-Irish coincided with the heyday of the British empire between 1850 and the 1880s. From then on two new challenges began to have a mass influ-

ence. The longer-term influence of the revolutionary Fenians, combined with the extension of the franchise first to the male 'lower orders', led to Irish nationality displacing this relatively new 'British-Irish' nationality, primarily, but not exclusively, amongst the catholic Irish.

The landlord-led Irish Unionists (who remained British-Irish), now increasingly looked for 'mainland' allies amongst the reactionary British Tories and the British officer class to compensate for their shrinking social and political weight in Ireland itself. But as the Irish national democratic challenge grew in strength, culminating in the Irish Revolution of 1916-21, British-Irish identity faced a different challenge, this time from within, leading once more to a wholesale shift of identity. This new identity was Ulster-British and its leadership was an alliance of industrialists and landlords. Although they once more mobilised the old cross-class Orange Order, this in itself was not sufficient in the new world of mass politics. Hence the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force.

Just as British-Irish identity had initially been forged in the counterrevolutionary assault of the Orange Order, Irish militia and British regiments on the United Irishmen of the 1790s, so the new Ulster-British identity was forged in the counterrevolutionary assault of the Ulster Volunteer Force, the later British Black and Tans and what was to become the Royal Ulster Constabulary on the Irish democratic movement from 1912 to 1921. Although the Unionists hesitated, when the British government offered them a devolved 'Northern Irish' parliament (preferring direct rule from Westminster), those from Ulster soon saw the possibilities of creating a 'protestant parliament for a protestant people' and of drawing a new line to uphold British and protestant supremacy.

Therefore, the Irish-British (including the unionists living in the three counties of Free State 'Ulster') were largely abandoned to their fate, which, for the large majority who did not emigrate, meant within one or two generations becoming Irish. As for those "million British-Irish" whom Conrad has identified still living in the "one and four half-counties" of north-eastern Ireland, they are increasingly a figment of his imagination. By 1968, only 20% of Northern Ireland protestants considered themselves Irish, with eight percent opting for British-Irish or Anglo-Irish identities. Instead 32% thought of themselves as having an Ulster identity. By 1990 protestants considering themselves Irish (including only three percent specifically British-Irish) had declined to seven percent whilst 26% gave themselves a 'Northern Irish' (the official sectarian statelet name form) or Ulster identity. With the abolition of Stormont in 1973, those claiming British identity rose from 39% in 1968 to a high of

77% in 1984, just before the introduction of the detested Anglo-Irish Agreement, which prompted a decline of a simple British identity back to 66% by 1990 (J McGarry and B O'Leary *Explaining Northern Ireland* p110).

The current British government policy of restoring Stormont will most likely have the effect of increasing Ulster-British identity, once more largely at the expense of a mainly British identity, especially with the leadership of the republican movement giving *de facto* legitimisation to partition.

But here is the catch. If the Irish democratic movement regains its currently lost momentum, these Ulster-British are not miraculously going to re-emerge as Conrad's British-Irish. Another wave of Irish revolutionary democratic struggle in Ireland will produce another counterrevolutionary response. The outlines of yet another identity change are already being debated. The Ulster Defence Association has already discussed their 'doomsday scenario' of a final British 'betrayal', if the British state did seem to be about to abandon 'Ulster'. They propose to achieve their repartitioned 'Ulster' (with boundaries very similar to those suggested by Conrad!) by a process of 'nullification' of catholics (and other 'disloyal elements'): ie, ethnic cleansing.

It is clear from this analysis that the 'British-Irish' have a much shorter historical existence than Conrad maintains and the strength of this identity is directly related to the strength of the UK imperial monarchist state, with its maximum support at the high point of the British empire. At that time those of a British-Irish identity included catholics, so historically protestantism cannot be considered an exclusive cultural marker. And it is worth re-emphasising that the Irish national democratic movement cannot be exclusively identified with catholics either. There has always been some contribution from those of a protestant background.

Whenever the Irish national democratic movement took on a mass revolutionary form, British-Irish identity was central to the counterrevolutionary forces. However, any counterrevolutionary future lies not in British-Irishness, because it has already been largely displaced by Ulster-Britishness. And of course this Ulster-Britishness still plays exactly the same counterrevolutionary role as before, as 'the troubles' of the last 30 years have demonstrated.

Conrad, having to his satisfaction diagnosed 'the British-Irish' as "an historically constituted and distinct community of people ... continuously inhabit[ing] parts of Northern Ireland since the 17th century", now comes up with his therapy. Communists should support the right of the British-Irish to territorial self-determination. And presumably, since Conrad's 'British-Irish' are a bit thin on the ground today, he would extend this demand to the majority of 'actually existing' British in Northern Ireland - the Ulster-British, who do indeed form quite a considerable political and cultural force.

He would be quite wrong to do so, since Ulster-Britishness (like British-Irishness before it) is an identity which cannot be politically separated from the reactionary monarchist and unionist British state which has promoted it. In contrast, and indeed in opposition, the Irish nation was built up from below, initially under the leadership of the popular classes. This left the task of trying to unite Ireland primarily to the popular classes amongst the oppressed in the 'Six Counties'. Both Connolly and Larkin showed that it was possible to unite catholics and protestants, even in such barren territory as Belfast, particularly when republicanism was linked to social demands. Hence the significance of the 'workers' republic' slogan.

Conrad is, of course, quite right to

point out the difficulty of maintaining large-scale catholic and protestant working class unity on a sustained basis. Countering this has been the effect of growing residential segregation, particularly in working class areas. Similarly, whatever cross-border cooperation Irish and 'Ulster' businessmen find profitable, economic forces alone will not achieve unity for the working class. The task remains a political one, however difficult. But the best of such unity that has been achieved has been by protestants joining with their catholic brothers and sisters in both the Irish republican and Irish socialist movements.

Conrad attributes Steve Riley's refusal to support territorial self-determination for the 'British Irish' as being "like a dyed-in-the wool Irish nationalist ... resigned to an unchanging British-Irish population" (*Weekly Worker* September 9). Actually, it is the other way round. Conrad can not conceive of such change. In the past, the 'British-Irish' have changed to both Ulster-British or Irish identities, mainly depending on which side of the partition line they ended up living. Yes, for many there was a degree of reluctance in making such a change, but the most consistent class fighters amongst the protestants joined Irish republican, socialist and communist organisations. If we are to achieve Irish unity from below, then this must be by revolutionary democratic methods, which means that our class must hold its Irish workers' republican banner high. There can be little doubt that this struggle to achieve Irish working class unity will, as in the past, be a struggle against the British state and all political forms of British identity.

Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of the 'Conrad therapy' is he argues that his 'British-Irish' should only have the right to territorial self-determination after all of Ireland has broken from the union. Why should the 'British-Irish' practise a democratic self-denying ordinance to join with their Irish comrades, brothers and sisters to win Irish unity and expel the British state (their best guarantee of continued 'Britishness'), and then suddenly feel 'British-Irish' enough to want to exercise their right to have local referenda, in which of course, following Conrad, they will vote against secession? Conrad does not want communists to be tied to formal logic, but we can surely expect some connection between Conrad's 'logical' treatment and any likely reality!

Now some of Conrad's shell-shocked comrades have looked to 'dubious' external political forces - eg, Sean Matgamna (AWL) and Dave Craig (RDG) - to explain his latest turn. A much more likely reason is the CPGB-PCC's political retreat in the face of Blair's 'new unionist' offensive. This is clearly shown in Conrad's insistence that, after quarter of a century of high-cost conflict, the capitalist class in Britain and Ireland "do have a manifest incentive to deliver a peaceful solution". Conrad is right not to rule out the possibility of capitalism finding a 'solution' to their problem - which is the existence of 'communities of resistance' providing infertile soil for capitalist exploitation. However, the trajectory of the Good Friday agreement is not towards an imperially imposed united Ireland, but to an imperially imposed reorganisation of partition. If the republican leadership can lower political expectations and force the acquiescence of the 'communities of resistance' to becoming super-exploited enclaves of low-waged labour, then the British state will permit a 'peaceful' solution. But, just in case that fails, the UK state does have a plan B - which is why the British Army is not 'decommissioning' and is readmitting convicted killers to its ranks!

Steve Riley has rightly pointed out the first hints of a new view in Conrad's writings. Despite Conrad's shrill

insistence on maintaining his commitment to Irish unity, there is a suggestion that maybe the national democratic struggle no longer has a progressive role to play: "The antagonism between the British-Irish and catholic-Irish is not a 'theoretical' abstraction nor an invention of Jack Conrad's. On the contrary it has dominated Irish politics for the last hundred years. The poles of oppression would in all probability be reversed in a united Ireland not brought about by the leadership of the working class" (*Weekly Worker* September 23).

This is sliding very close to the 'warring tribes' approach peddled by Militant/Socialist Party, with the role of British imperialism and the UK state airbrushed out of history. Furthermore, it is the "catholic Irish" who are given a religious label, suggesting that the British-Irish have risen above sectarianism. If all we can see is a reversal of "the poles of oppression", then perhaps the continuation of partition is the lesser of possible evils and perhaps indeed we should forge ahead with a partitionist CPUK! Conrad's new turn is unstable and has not yet reached a settled point, but it undoubtedly represents a political retreat. We have already seen the notion of a CPUK aired in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*, with its acceptance of partition (part of a long accommodationist tradition within official communism inside Ireland itself).

It is not entirely clear in Conrad's prescription, but the logic of some of his arguments would appear to be that communists should take up the 'British-Irish' right of territorial self-determination because the capitalist class could bring about Irish unity in a counterrevolutionary manner from above. Perhaps he is not ruling out the possibility that the combined forces of the British, Irish and US governments and the EU want a politically united Ireland and this could be imposed on the Ulster-British - Gerry Adams, dream on! But for Conrad such a 'solution' would leave his 'British-Irish' as an oppressed minority. This scenario would prompt the Ulster-British to become 'Ulster' nationalists, refusing the 'Irish union' for their four-county 'Ulster confederacy'. We could then expect to see a local version of the Ku Klux Klan, which shares many of the features of extreme loyalism. It certainly would not be very auspicious territory for communists to intervene in.

Now, if Irish unity was imposed in such a manner from above, then, yes, it would be the duty of communists to win support for the victims of such repression. However, in answer to another unlikely scenario, invoked by Tom Delargy, of a "victorious republican movement" successfully uniting Ireland by militarily defeating the British and imposing "a powerful reactionary gang exacting revenge against the protestant people as people", (*Weekly Worker* September 23) we get the following response from Conrad: "Does protestant blood really have to flow down the Shankhill Road in order to get you to propose self-determination?" Well, protestant blood did flow down the Shankhill Road, as a result of the IRA bombing in October 1993, but Conrad did not raise such a demand then! For Conrad, self-determination and freedom from bombing and flowing blood are only on offer after Irish unity. Does Conrad seriously think such a line of argument will win over his 'British-Irish' now, or in the future?

Communist support is for the oppressed in the here and now. It is the nationalist population of the 'Six Counties' which needs our support, not some putatively oppressed 'British-Irish' group in the future, especially given the oppressing role of unionism and loyalism past and present.

But of course communists must offer their programme for the future as

well. Communists make their plans, not on the basis of capitalist success, but on the basis of mobilising revolutionary democratic opposition. And, as long as Irish unity - first and foremost the unity of workers - remains central to our immediate programme, then we have to look to how to achieve this. The reason we still want Irish unity is to unite an imperially divided Irish working class and to weaken and destroy a major imperial state, the UK, by working class-led democratic struggle throughout these islands.

So, if we are appealing to Conrad's 'British-Irish' as communists and revolutionary democrats, what are we asking them to give up and what do we offer? It has already been made clear that 'British-Irishness' and 'Ulster-Irishness' are intrinsically linked to the British state. This 'Britishness' has to be combated politically.

There was a time when the CPGB-PCC liked to put forward the slogan, 'For the IRA, against the British army'. Applying the same principle, we could adopt the slogan, 'For the Irish nation, against the British state'. Like the first slogan, this is conditioned by the nature of the struggle in progress. For what we want to see is the mobilisation of all the revolutionary democratic forces of Ireland (atheist, agnostic, catholic, protestant, Jewish and others, for Ireland is now more mixed than in the past). This will of necessity bring them into confrontation with 'Britishness' in all its political forms, since it has no democratic content. However, a revolutionary democratic mobilisation will also come into conflict with the Irish state and therefore with reactionary Irish nationalism. The willingness of Connolly and Larkin to hit southern Irish capitalists and their Irish nationalist apologists hard is one reason they could make some impact on protestants in Ireland. This is a further reason why communists should remain united in Ireland (and not divide on partition lines) since to win over the best protestants today the one communist organisation must be seen to confront the existing Irish state and catholic reaction in the south.

Naturally, if your communism is of an abstract propagandist stripe, then this championing of Irish national democracy against British 'national' reaction will be viewed as merely capitulation to nationalism. However, this would be rather like saying that you opposed workers striking for higher wages, since all that did was confirmed the existence of wage slavery and hence capitalism. Communists cannot just step outside the existence of the nation-state system and therefore have to relate to the democratic and socialist traditions within each nation, drawing a distinction between the oppressor and oppressed.

Deprived of their 'Britishness', protestant workers can still be shown their own democratic and socialist contributions both to Irish national liberation and to confronting capitalism. In both the north and the south, catholicism and protestantism are becoming increasingly a cultural marker, with fewer people holding strongly held, specifically religious convictions (although religious adherence remains considerably higher than over here). There is also considerable intermarriage and other relationships between catholics and protestants.

However, Conrad himself outlines a thesis which for once does put forward a principled democratic demand in relation to protestants: "There must be no discrimination against protestants. They must be at liberty to practice their religion." But to this Conrad adds the demand that they must be "encouraged to freely develop the progressive side of their culture" (thesis 11 *Weekly Worker* August 26). The problem is, if you award the 'British-Irish' the freedom to exercise territorial self-determination, then as a "consistent democrat"

you have to allow them to freely develop the reactionary side of their culture!

The answer here, of course, is that protestants, or the Ulster British in Ireland for that matter, are not a distinct 'nation', but an ethno-religious group (a particular form of nationality - a category that applies to groups of people, not territories). Therefore the appropriate democratic rights which are extended in such cases apply to groups of people, not to territories. Conrad opposes this fundamental point. (We are tempted to say he departs from the "ABC of Marxism", one of his own favourite phrases. However, Marxism is not a formula which can be learnt by rote and applied externally. Conrad's rather frequent resort to the "ABC of Marxism" is more designed for internal CPGB-PCC consumption, to establish orthodoxy and silence any possible critics.)

But since Conrad holds up the 'holy texts', let us examine how Lenin dealt with the issue of nation and nationality as part of the minimum (or immediate) programme. In the RSDLP proposals to the Second International socialist conference in March 1916, Lenin wrote the following: "The Russian socialist who does not fight for freedom to secede for the Ukraine, Finland, etc, against the war over Poland, the Italian socialist who does not fight for freedom to secede for Tripoli, Albania, etc, the Dutch socialist who does not fight for freedom to secede for the Dutch East Indies, the Polish socialist who does not fight for full freedom and equality for the Jews and the Ukrainians oppressed by the Poles ... is a socialist and an internationalist in name only."

Now, why is Lenin making a distinction between "freedom to secede" and "full freedom and equality"? The answer is because Lenin sees the Ukraine, Finland, Tripoli (Libya today), Albania and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia today) as actual or potential nations, whereas the Jews and the Ukrainians are national minorities (nationalities) within a mixed-nationality Polish nation. Certainly the Jews of Poland were every bit as much "an historically constituted and distinct community of people" as Conrad's 'British-Irish' and could claim territorial majorities in several parts of Poland (and some Jewish socialists did just that). Moreover, they had a far better claim than Conrad's 'British-Irish' to exercise their right to self-determination since they were a long oppressed and persecuted nationality. Yet, in this case Lenin quite rightly stuck to principle. Nationalities have the right to full freedom and equality - exactly what communists should demand for the protestant Irish within a united Ireland!

In a desperate corner, Conrad states that, "Soviet Russia and then the Soviet Union were constitutionally founded as federations of soviet republics. Amongst them was the Don Republic (ie, the land of the Cossacks). The Soviet Republic was established as a 'voluntary union of the peoples of Russia' - something for Lenin which 'should fully reassure the Cossacks'. His optimism was not misplaced. The 1st Congress of the Soviets of the Don Republic ... 'regarded the Don Republic as part of the RSFSR' and 'declared the working Cossacks' readiness to defend Soviet power'. The Cossacks, it should be noted, were an historically established privileged caste who served as the counterrevolutionary terror troops of tsarism. Is there a qualitative difference between the Cossacks and the British Irish? Surely not" (*Weekly Worker* September 9).

Surely not, indeed! So, let us go through that again. Lenin, writing here in 1918, was no longer writing about the minimum programme, in which, despite his many writings on the nations and nationalities question in the Russian empire, support for Cossack self-determination never appears

once! This may just be something to do with the Cossacks being "the counterrevolutionary terror troops of tsarism". He was writing about the maximum programme, once the working class (and their peasant allies) had taken power. Today's analogy would be that the 'British-Irish' had formed soviets in east Antrim, which were faced with imminent attack by British unionism and its allies. Faced with a scenario where, say, workers in the east Belfast-Ballymena-Larne triangle strike out and establish workers' councils, it would indeed be the duty of Irish communists to encourage these councils to federate in an east Antrim soviet republic "in agreement with the population of the neighbouring zone" and, perhaps we should add, in consultation with the local 'Irish-Irish'! But is Conrad seriously asking us to ditch a principled immediate programme for a maximum programme based on fairytales?

Let us look a little closer to what happened to the real, not the paper, Don Republic. The new "Soviet regime ... attempted to supervise the establishment of Cossack soviets, stressing they did not plan de-Cossackisation - ie, the ending of separate Cossack identity - and that 'working Cossacks' should form their own Soviets ... In the summer of 1919, when the Soviet state faced a serious threat from the south, it reiterated its claim that it did not aim at ending a separate status for the Cossacks. But once the Red Army had won back this region, the Soviet state no longer needed to make such concessions ... A decree March 25 1920 then abolished the separate Cossack Soviets that had been announced in 1918" (H Shukman (ed) *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution*). A basic feature of any materialist analysis should be to analyse what people do, rather than be mesmerised by what they say. And by Conrad's "consistent democratic" standards the Bolsheviks fell somewhat short of upholding the principle of "voluntary union" in practice!

Conrad's 'Iron Law of Britness' has already cost his organisation the loss of its entire Scottish membership and a drastic loss of influence amongst socialists in Scotland compared to the early days of the SSA. The CPGB-PCC's refusal to recognise Scotland as a nation, but to opportunistically acknowledge those of a Scottish nationality the right to territorial self-determination, ended up with the CPGB-PCC having the same position in Blair's 1997 Scottish plebiscite as the racist Scottish Separatist Group. Both recommended stay-at-home abstentionism on the actual day of the ballot.

The feature both organisations share in common is that they define Scotland by ethnic criteria. If you are giving the Scottish nationality status instead of giving multi-ethnic Scotland nation status, then logically voting in any referendum should be confined to ethnic Scots - exactly what the Scottish Separatist Group advocated. Of course, if we maintain the difference between ethnic group and multi-ethnic nation, then it is the latter which is entitled to territorial self-determination and any ballot should be extended to all registered residents. The CPGB-PCC long remained embarrassingly silent when challenged over this. Furthermore, those they invited into their 'Party' front, the Campaign for Genuine Self-Determination, were not allowed to help determine the campaign slogans.

Confused and inconsistent democracy seems to be the hallmark of CPGB-PCC practice ●

The full version of this article can be read on the CPGB's website - <http://www.duntone.demon.co.uk/CPGB; or in Republican Communist No1, RCN, PO Box 512, SWDO, 4 Falcon Road West, Edinburgh EH10 4AB, £2.50, including postage>

In living colour

Walking with dinosaurs BBC1, Monday's, 8.30pm

The BBC is internationally well known for its excellent documentaries on living species. Now it has become the first company ever to film an entire documentary on how *extinct* species lived, fed, moved, mated, reproduced and developed their day-to-day life.

In Dave Attenborough's 'The life of birds', the BBC used computer-animated shots of prehistoric animals. The six programmes in the 'Walking with dinosaurs' series are based almost entirely on excellent animatronics and electronic animation, in which it is hard to believe that the animals we are watching had been artificially designed. The creatures' shadows, reflections in the water and impact over the terrain look so real. Tim Haines recreates the old world, and for many he opened a new world as a result.

The flora and fauna shown in 'Walking with dinosaurs' is founded on good scientific evidence. The six episodes describe six different periods of evolution. Haines's team travelled to the most distant places on earth - from southern Chile to New Caledonia and New Zealand - in order to find vegetation without grass and flowers, to match that which existed during the age of the dinosaurs.

The programme represents a slap in the face to the creationists who are for banning the teaching of the theory of evolution; in Kansas they have proved successful. It shows from episode to episode how radically different our own planet was from period to period. In fact everything is in constant movement and change. The continents are drifting, splitting and colliding. In the process new weather systems, topographies and seas are constantly being made and unmade. At one time most of the mass of the land was hot desert; at others lush forests spread from pole to pole.

We humans have only existed for less than one per cent of the period of our planet's existence. More than 99% of the species that have ever been are now extinct. We are newcomers whose presence on this globe is temporary. Sooner or later we are destined to evolve or perish. Species have to adapt to face changes in the ecosystem, and if they cannot evolve they disappear.

The vacuum left in an ecological niche could be filled by other species or even a whole class of new plants or animals. In 'Walking with dinosaurs' it is possible to see that the ecological niches which today are dominated by sea mammals - whales, dolphins, seals, etc - were filled by marine reptiles, or that the big plant-eating mammals and great cats of today have a similar relationship to the herbivores and carnivores which dominated the dinosaur era.

'Walking with dinosaurs' represents a double achievement. On the one hand traditional scientific documentaries on dinosaurs were based on filming excavations and fossils and interviewing palaeontologists. On the other hand in popular films dinosaurs were used as pulp fiction which muddled species - including humans - and did not contain a single worthwhile scientific fact.

The Haines series combines the best animation techniques with a serious effort to be guided by objective scientific evidence and interpretation. Extinct animals are gone and it is impossible to know in detail many things about them. Palaeontologists have found some traces of dinosaurs' skins or feathers, but nobody has

.....
*We are
 newcomers
 whose
 presence on
 this globe is
 temporary.
 Sooner or
 later we are
 destined to
 evolve or
 perish*

seen their colours or heard the sounds they produced. The latest science believes today that dinosaurs were related to birds and that in all probability they had multicolour vision. Like their modern relatives dinosaurs could therefore have used vivid colours to distinguish themselves, intimidate enemies or attract mates.

Analysing dinosaur footprints and skeletons, palaeontologists can deduce how fast and in what position they walked or ran. Current theories have abandoned the old paradigm which portrayed them as slow, lizard-like creatures. Dinosaurs did not sprawl or have legs partly tucked under their bodies like crocodiles. They walked on straight legs, and some were capable of very fast spurts like today's ostriches or lions.

When it comes to the diving four-flipper marine reptiles or the flying reptiles hauling themselves about on land, there is no precise equivalent nowadays, and the series had to rely on guesswork using scientific methods.

The BBC producers acknowledge that they employ some techniques used in 'Jurassic Park'. However, the BBC have made a much more serious film. Steven Spielberg's mega-dollar blockbuster had the merit of presenting dinosaurs as living creatures with levels of intelligence and agility more akin to the 'warm-blooded' birds than sluggish, 'cold-blooded' reptiles, as previous films inaccurately portrayed them. But Spielberg introduced a lot of fantasy. In his dinosaur theme-world we saw creatures in reality separated by tens of millions of years. Most of the dinosaurs presented in his film did not live in the Jurassic.

The T-rex, which was portrayed as an animal without a sense of smell and became the symbol of 'Jurassic Park', actually lived in the late Cretaceous, around 65-67 million years ago. The Jurassic (138-205 million years ago) was very different - no flowers, a different atmosphere, etc. As to Spielberg's dilophodon, this bore no relation to the large carnivore discovered by palaeontologists, but is an

imagined monster - a combination of an Australian lizard and a venomous spitting serpent.

Haines has been criticised for using too many Latin names. Yet he could not do otherwise. The alternative would have been to invent 'popular' nicknames creating far more confusion. Some of his story lines are based on valid hypothesis, such as when he suggests a symbiotic relation between some flying reptiles and a diplodocus: certain birds today live on or around elephants or hippopotamuses. However, what we can criticise Haines for is that he sometimes departed from strict scientific criteria and conceded too much to unfounded speculation. Haines presumably did this in order to gain audience appeal, but in so doing he handed ammunition to the creationists.

Some examples. Well documented evidence exists about how the maiasaurus incubated eggs in nests. However, this dinosaur is not mentioned in the series. Haines preferred to invent a dichotomy. So we have the T-rex and leaellynasaura as carers who laid their eggs in leaves (Haines even tells us how many days they were with their mothers), while in the case of the diplodocus he showed a turtle-like creature who abandons her young to fend for themselves. Likewise, purely an act of imagination, he decided that a proto-mammal like the 220 million-year old cynodont lived in burrows, coupled for life, had fur and produced milk. Probably Haines was trying to invoke sympathy for an extremely distant relative by suggesting that they had human-like social qualities.

The fourth episode centres on the transcontinental flight of the 12-meter-long ornithomimid. The creature travels from 'Brazil' to 'Europe' for its annual mating ceremony. This is something that does not have the slightest scientific evidence supporting it. The same can be said regarding the leaellynasaura (the main creatures in the fifth episode) which Haines claims hibernated and was ruled by a leading pair. Nevertheless, this episode has extraordinary merit in that it shows that dinosaurs could survive polar weather, but it also mistakenly portrays a modern Amazonian coati as a contemporary inhabitant - 106 million years ago. Actually this placental mammal only arrived in the relatively recent past.

Haines dedicated the last episode to the most popular dinosaur (the T-rex). Palaeontologists are still debating whether the T-rex was a big carrion-eating animal or one that killed for itself. Haines decided to go with the latter interpretation. But he did so in an extremely free and easy way. He gives us a lonely female who does not eat for months while she tends her eggs. When a mate eventually arrives with an offering there are three days of mating ritual before the female attacks and expels him. In fact, the study of 'Sue', the most complete T-rex skeleton and most expensive fossil ever, reveals that this female suffered so many terrible injuries that she could only have survived with the assistance of others. This suggests that these were not the solitary animals portrayed by Haines.

Overall the series is highly informative, and I would recommend the accompanying book. However, future documentaries on extinct flora and fauna should be more rigorous in their scientific accuracy ●

José Villa

Cornered poets society

Bob Dixon **More agitation: political satires and other poems**
 Artery Publications 1999, pp60, £3.50

This is a lively collection of agit-poems which primarily aims for immediacy and transparency of meaning. The book's credo is inscribed in the very first poem, 'From me to you', which militantly declares: "I want my words to say what I think ... I don't want to mean many things, to many people."

Bob Dixon is an artist and writer whose passionate commitment to revolutionary change shines through every line. He is angered by the deleterious, streamlined and commodified capitalist educational system - a system which reinforces social conformity and is fundamentally antagonistic to the development of *real* individuality, whatever the popular ideologues of the day may say.

The stunting effect that capitalism - and its attendant alienation and substantive inequality - has on children and young adults concerns Dixon in particular. The pseudo-education served up to the young for generations is definitely bad for your mental and intellectual health, he says. His previous studies on this important matter have been published by Pluto Press in the two-volume set entitled *Catching them young (Sex, race and class in children's fiction and Political ideas in children's fiction 1977)*. The iniquitous effect of a narrow and egotistically competitive educational approach is summed up in Dixon's "notice" at the beginning of the book: "I'd like these poems to be read, or presented, in schools and other places of education, but I don't want them used, ever, in connection with any examination, test or competition." Down with the edu-crats who have been immersed from birth in the spirit of joyless pedagogy. If they got their way they would impose the 11-plus system on children - from eleven months *old*, that is.

Dixon's optimistic vision of the future, and his faith in the revolutionary potential of this and the next generation, is poignantly displayed in the very last poem in the collection, called 'Eyes', which reads: "I see the children in the park/From their eyes, my longing for children cry to me/The demonstrators throng the street/From their eyes, there shines a world that is to be."

Therefore it is all the more diabolical that the edu-system actively sabotages this "world that is to be". In 'The sleepers of Stockwell College speak', we hear: "We don't want to know about racism, unemployment, poverty, socialism, class, capitalism, communism, colonialism, oppression, change, hunger, exploitation, war, fascism, disease, misery, anarchism, slavery, ignorance - we came here to be educated."

But the edu-bureaucratic system is more tenacious and perniciously elastic than perhaps Dixon suggests here. Subjects like racism, colonialism, slavery, etc are virtually compulsory, especially in inner-city schools - you could even argue that an inordinate amount of time is spent on 'anti-racist' studies. Why? The bourgeoisie as a whole want to *appropriate* the discourses around racism and anti-racism, and then turn them into an emotive intellectual weapon which can be turned against *us*. The liberalistic multi-culturalism and politically correct anti-racism preached in the schools and colleges of this land are not progressive, as some on the left insist on telling us, but are actually divisive in that they help to fudge and obscure *class* interests and class politics. 'We are all anti-racists now - come and join us as supplicants', say the bourgeoisie.

In case you think a 'higher' education is an escape route from the intellectual straightjacket, think again, warns Dixon in 'The liberal academic speaks'. Our 'liberal academic' recommends the following lifestyle: "I always took the middle course clear of each warring faction/I carefully bestrid the fence abjuring vulgar action", concluding that "I opted out of vulgar life on either side, drew equal breath till, in my box, I now embrace the strict neutrality of death."

Thankfully Dixon is not suffused with his own historic self-importance, as some leftists are inclined to be on occasions. We see this in his self-deprecating 'The poet, in capitalist society, speaks' - a poem which also contains an insight into how capitalist society marginalises with amused contempt any artist whose name is not Andrew Motion, John Hegley or Bono: "I am a poet and they've put me in a corner/as they usually do. I want to be in the headlines or the editorial or even just in the news, anywhere - but they put me in this corner, the Poetry Corner, my usual place." Our poet adds: "I didn't expect that, at the People's Festival at the Ally Pally, they'd put me in a corner of the park, next to the electric generators - which drowned my voice/The people couldn't hear what I had to say - at the People's Festival/It's hard being a poet in capitalist society, but I tell you this: a cornered animal can be very dangerous."

In this gloomy age of monarchist poets, introverted poets and media-pet poets, let us fight for the day when poets and artists will be "very dangerous" again - playing a *real* educational and spiritual role in the struggle for a truly human society ●

Danny Hammill

Russian workers fightback

The assault began at 2am on October 14. It was carried out by a 30-strong detachment from the elite 'Typhoon' unit of interior ministry special police, wearing their trademark balaclava hoods and armed with kalashnikovs, pistols, tear gas and cudgels. Their target was not a terrorist incident or a prison riot, but a paper factory that for the last 18 months has been occupied and run by its workers. Their mission, in the words of Grigory Dvas, deputy head of the Leningrad regional administration, was "to cleanse the territory of those who illegally took over the mill and prevented the true owners from running it".

At first the operation went smoothly: the ground-floor windows of the administration building were smashed and the worker-guards on patrol were bludgeoned to the ground. But the 'heroes' of 'Typhoon' had not reckoned with the courage and resourcefulness of the workforce. Within minutes, alerted by a shrill blast from the factory locomotive's whistle, some 600 workers ran from their homes and converged on their plant. Faced with this overwhelming mass, the invaders lost their nerve, grabbed seven hostages and retreated to the second-floor canteen, where they covered behind a makeshift barricade. In the course of the ensuing stand-off, two workers were shot and all the hostages badly beaten, but in the end the police were withdrawn and the factory remains (for the time being, at least) a 'people's enterprise' in the hands of the workers.

The ongoing story of the Vyborg pulp and paper mill is worth telling, because it has much to teach us about the real nature and impact of privatisation and 'capitalism' in post-Soviet Russia. Situated in the Sovietsky settlement (Vyborg district, Leningrad region), the factory not only gives work to around 2,160 local people, but also provides the residents of Sovietsky with electricity, hot water and central heating. In Soviet times it produced more than half the Leningrad region's requirements for a range of paper products. Since the fall of the USSR it has had three owners, all of them foreign investment companies.

The first company, American Cellulose, evidently cherry-picked the mill's most accessible and valuable assets, ran it into the ground and then auctioned it off to its second foreign owner, the Cyprus-based Nimonor Investments in 1996. The new owners promised to maintain the existing workforce, pay some £5 million of wage arrears and tackle the accumulated £50 million of federal tax debt in order to put the plant on a viable footing. None of the promises were kept. Nimonor was just another asset-stripper, with an eye on the mill's machinery. In February 1998 the workers effectively locked out the Nimonor management, occupied the works and democratically elected their own plant director. Production resumed some 14 months ago.

In the meantime, a controlling interest in the factory was bought from Nimonor by Alcem UK Ltd, a shadowy London-based company with links to the alcohol and aluminium sectors, both of which are among the favourite territory of the Russian mafia. It was on behalf of Alcem that the 'Typhoon' squad, backed up by the acting governor of the Leningrad region, Valeriy Serdiukov, and the deputy head of police for the Leningrad region, Yuriy Gavrilov, launched its action. An almost identical assault took place on July 9 this year, following Alcem's failure to bribe the workers' leaders into calling off the occupation, and ended with similar results. Alcem's two listed directors are both British, one of whom, Bryan Webb, would only say: "I am not the right person to talk to about this" (*The Times* October 15). His comment strengthens the suspicion that Alcem

is just a front company for other business interests, perhaps in Russia itself.

A number of factors made it possible for the Vyborg workers successfully to resist the state's latest attempt to restore their factory to its 'rightful' owners: intense local support from the entire population of the Sovietsky settlement; a strong work collective, whose sense of solidarity has been deepened by the experience of real democracy and control in the workplace; consistent support from local and regional unions; and finally, the strategic border location of Sovietsky itself - straddling the main 'Scandinavia' highway and close to the principal rail link to Finland. Last year's 'rail wars' have made the authorities fearful of the disruption to trade and transport that can be caused by workers' blockades of vital arteries.

The future of the Vyborg mill is now in the hands of a state commission and the law courts. The workers themselves are trying to launch a legal challenge to the initial privatisation, which they claim sold the plant to American Cellulose for a ridiculously low price, only 12% of which was ever actually paid by the buyer.

In so far as they reported it at all, our own media concentrated on the difficulties for western capital which the case highlights. *The Independent's* Moscow correspondent, Helen Womack, for example, bemoans the "wild environment" for foreign businessmen and the fact that "Alcem now risks losing its investment". She informs us that "only under president Boris Yeltsin ... were foreigners able to buy the factories that had failed under communism" (October 15). These remarks contain some entirely characteristic distortions. In the first place, Alcem's "investment" represents little more than a gambling chip intended to facilitate a classic asset-stripping exercise, whereby the plant's machinery and land will be flogged off and the workers cast out to fend for themselves. Secondly, Womack's implicit suggestion that the Vyborg mill was a Soviet "failed" enterprise is simply untrue.

As even a superficial survey of the matter will reveal, talk of 'the restoration of capitalism' in Russia is highly misleading. Capitalism in the accepted Marxist sense - ie, the purchase of labour-power in order to extract surplus value from the production of goods and services and their sale - seems to be the exception rather than the rule. True, there are a number of showcase ventures funded by reputable western companies, like the Coca-Cola bottling plant run by Inchcape in the Urals, and Procter and Gamble's domination of the market in hygiene products (both cited by Womack), but the overall experience of privatisation has been quite different. For the old ruling elite and the new mafia, privatisation provided a means of effortless self-enrichment. The majority among them lack the knowledge, experience and flair to engage in real capitalist entrepreneurship, and given the fact that, under Yeltsin, wholesale theft, fraud and corruption have been so easy, it is hardly surprising that the relatively risky business of making money from production has been eschewed in favour of the fast bucks to be made from criminal enterprise. In any event, it is difficult to speak coherently of capi-

talist relations of production in an economy still dominated by barter, where millions of workers go unpaid, and where the currency hardly constitutes real money at all.

Politically, as the Vyborg case illustrates, workers' collective efforts to protect themselves from the depredations of foreign and domestic exploitation are still largely confined to economic struggles. Their main demand, that the mill should be returned to state ownership, while on the one hand making a correct demand that the authorities, not the workers, should pay for the failures of the market, on the other is in fact driven by nostalgia for old certainties. This demonstrates that the experience of democratic control of production by the direct producers themselves has still not imbued them with sufficient confidence to look at a more radical, political approach to their situation. This is in part a reflection of wide-scale, and understandable, disillusionment and cynicism with politics in general. Certainly, anyone who imagines for a moment that struggling workers can look to the 'official' Communist Party of the Russian Federation for support is living in a dream world.

There is, however, another case in which a struggle fought by Russian workers initially over economic demands has borne much more promising political fruit, a case in which the reactionary role of the CPRF is also fully exposed. The town of Yasnogorsk (Tula region), south-east of Moscow, has a population of some 20,000 and is dominated by the Yasnogorsk machine-building plant (YMZ), employing some 4,200 workers. Here the course of post-Soviet privatisation was different from that in Vyborg. YMZ became a joint-stock company, with a majority of the shares being held by the workforce itself.

In the face of chronic bureaucratic mismanagement and incompetence by the old administration, retained after YMZ's change of status, and in response to the acute suffering caused by wage arrears, in September 1998 the workers of YMZ held a general meeting at which they voted to dismiss the existing management. Two workers were democratically elected as directors and the factory became in effect a real workers' collective, with a factory committee exercising democratic control over production, sales, finance and wages, and at the same time doing its best to ensure that Yasnogorsk as a whole was fed during the hard winter of 1998-9.

The workers' initiative was opposed at every level by the CPRF-dominated regional authorities under the governor, Vasily Starodubtsev, a leading member of the party at national level. With the backing of the CPRF, the old administration used the law courts to have YMZ declared bankrupt as a prelude to removing the workers' committee and resuming control of the plant. A month after the 'Workers' Collective Soviet' took control, the two directors were arrested and held in prison for two months, where their health rapidly deteriorated. The soviet's chairman, Andrey Guan-Tin-Fa, was hauled before the regional prosecutor and threatened with long-term imprisonment if he did not use his influence to call off the occupation. Another militant member of the YMZ soviet, Vladimir Kuznetsov, was visited by

officers of the FSB (formerly the KGB) who threatened him and his family.

Anger over the imprisonment of the directors Dronov and Roschenia and the campaign of threats and intimidation against other workers' leaders finally boiled over in December 1998, when some 10,000 people, half the town's population, led by the workers of YMZ marched to blockade the main railway line to Moscow. Declaring, "This is our revolution", the workers launched a general strike calling for the release of the imprisoned directors and pressing a range of demands. The YMZ soviet became the core of a protest movement and established links with other strike and workers' committees across Russia, and with the embryonic revolutionary proletarian organisations that are crystallising around the strike movement.

For months there was a tense stand-off, with repeated attempts by the 'communist' authorities to break unity between the YMZ soviet, the workforce and local people, but all to no avail. The breakthrough came in July this year, when the eight-month strike and protest ended with a real victory for the workers. Under the terms of an agreement drafted by the YMZ soviet, all the workers' demands in regard to wage arrears, pay increases and conditions were met in full, and work was resumed under a new management structure which gives the workers' committee the power democratically to control the plant administration. As a statement from the Moscow Union of Marxists, a group of left radicals, put it, "It is an unprecedented case hardly imaginable not only in Russia but in any developed country of the world."

Certainly this victory was notable, but it is also fragile. Nobody can expect the Yeltsin regime or, for that matter, an administration led by the CPRF to accept such an outcome in the long term, because Yasnogorsk represents a dangerous example of what workers can achieve, even under Russian conditions. In some sense, the extremely violent approach taken at Vyborg can be seen as a response to this threat to the stability of the new 'capitalist' property relations.

The most heartening aspect of the Yasnogorsk case is that the YMZ soviet and workforce have drawn clear political conclusions from their experiences over the last year. They intend to stand a workers' candidate, on a revolutionary socialist platform, in December's elections to the state дума. As a spokesman for the YMZ workers put it, "It will be difficult to win the election. The lack of money is the biggest problem - bourgeois candidates have everything; we have nothing except for ourselves. But we will challenge them and do our best to win this small battle in order to make the next step on the road to revolution" ●

Michael Malkin

ISWoR

For information on the struggles of Russian workers, visit the website of International Solidarity with Workers in Russia: <http://members.aol.com/ISWoR>; e-mail: ISWoR@aol.com; land mail: ISWoR, Box R, 46 Denmark Hill, London SE5 8RZ

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.

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Simon Harvey of the SLP

Faithful few gather

The 3rd Congress of the Socialist Labour Party will take place next weekend, November 6-7, in London's Conway Hall. In view of the "postponement" of the 1998 annual congress, and its replacement by a one-day meeting where no membership motions were allowed, it will be the first full gathering of our party's sovereign body since December 1997.

At the November 1998 special congress in Manchester each Constituency SLP was entitled to send one comrade. Just under 100 CSLP delegates attended, representing around 450 paid up members. This was in sharp contrast to official claims - made by president Frank Cave at the congress - of an individual membership figure of 2,265 in 345 parliamentary constituencies.

Since then there has been a further catastrophic loss, as scores more have left in disgust. Those influenced by the Fourth International Supporters Caucus of Patrick Sikorski, Brian Heron and Carolyn Sikorski have either been 'lapsed' for non-payment of dues, announced their resignation or, in most cases, simply walked away. Similarly most - but, reflecting a schism in its ranks, not all - supporters of Royston Bull's *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* have now abandoned the SLP, Bull himself having also been 'lapsed'. The *EPSR* editor replaced Pat Sikorski as vice-president at the special congress, an event which threw the party into crisis and led to bitter feuding between the two factions. Within a few weeks general secretary Arthur Scargill decided to ditch the lot.

The haemorrhaging in membership has left Scargill with a problem in 1999: how to conceal the organisation's sad decline, while continuing to claim ever-increasing growth. The solution? This year each CSLP, irrespective of size, is entitled to three delegates. In fact, in many constituencies where we still have members, there is no functioning branch, so individuals will be representing only themselves. Just about every remaining half-active member who wishes to attend will be able to do so as a delegate. As a result there will be at least the appearance of a functioning party - although comrades who remember the bustling scenes in the large meeting hall at the same venue two years ago will no doubt be struck by the contrast this time.

Non-SLP members are invited to apply to observe the proceedings for £5.

Blocked out

For the last two years the national leadership has attempted to cover up the plummeting membership figures not only by counting as current members all those who have ever applied to join, but by lumping them together with affiliated organisations, which



Scargill: no inkling of his own failure

last year claimed to speak for 3,775 people. Apart from the phantom North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association, which accounts for 3,000 of these 'members' (and incidentally 3,000 votes at congress), a handful of union branches have also affiliated. Typically in these cases, the decision to sever links with New Labour and join the SLP is taken by a poorly attended branch membership or committee meeting, with most union members unaware of the SLP's existence.

It will be interesting to see how this issue is handled next weekend. For example, will Scargill admit that Sheffield Ucat, whose block votes helped to secure comrade Bull's election in 1998, has now been forced to disaffiliate after the union leadership intervened earlier this year?

The individual membership loss is pretty consistent everywhere. In Scotland the SLP had to 'import' party names from south of the border for May's elections to the Edinburgh parliament. Even in Yorkshire, considered by many to be Socialist Labour's heartland, many branches have folded completely. For instance 18 months ago there were 19 members in Bradford. Today there is no organisation in the city.

Well before the Fisc-*EPSR* fiasco

disillusionment had set in. In Bradford members were shocked when a candidate was parachuted in for the May 1997 general election in the shape of Abdul Khan, who claimed to represent the Kashmiri Workers Party in Britain. He was foisted on the Bradford West constituency without any consultation with the local branch. In fact 'comrade' Khan had previously been a Conservative Party member. The 1,551 votes he won for the SLP came overwhelmingly from his personal supporters. Today he has disappeared from the scene. For Bradford comrades, as for so many others, Scargill's use of the NWCCMA 3,000-vote sledgehammer in 1997 and his sponsorship of Bull in 1998 were the two final nails in the SLP's coffin.

Party theorist

In London - not only the capital but the city with the densest population and highest working class concentration - a membership numbering hundreds in 1997 has dwindled to a couple of dozen. Even the token leadership elected last month has been unable to hold itself together under ultra-Stalinist president Harpal Brar. Soft Trotskyite Steve Cowan, a former Labour councillor, has resigned as regional secretary after the briefest ten-

ure. He is replaced on an acting basis by John Hayball, who was elected vice-president just six weeks ago.

The reason given by comrade Cowan is pressure of work as a Union official. He excused himself in the same way when he withdrew from the London committee a year ago. A hard-pressed comrade Hayball has been thrown in at the deep end, just as his Kingston-upon-Thames council by-election campaign is reaching its climax. He is trying to snatch a seat in Cambridge ward, where most commentators seem to think the contest is a two-horse race between the Tories and Liberal Democrats. He has been canvassing heroically for the October 28 poll ... practically unaided in this daunting task. Clearly neither Cowan nor Hayball are greatly enamoured with comrade Brar.

In the latest *Socialist News* comrade Hayball - hyperactive in SLP terms - has two articles (October-November). The first reports on the involvement of the Kingston branch (ie, comrade Hayball himself) in the Ricky Reel campaign. But the second reads as an attempt to counter the increasing influence of the likes of the London president. "When I think of Marxism," writes comrade Hayball, "I do not think immediately of communism and the Soviet Union." He goes on to refer favourably to a certain Leon Trotsky, who he says foresaw the possibility of the USSR's collapse.

Trotsky's main tool was "the science of Marxism", which for comrade Hayball is, like a close friend, "an ever-present help in times of trouble". Warming to his theme, our John lists the "three tenets" of Marxism as "the labour theory of value, historical materialism and the *Communist manifesto*". He describes how, as a student, he was "greatly attracted to the idealism of the theory". Hmm.

Comrade Hayball's new role as party theorist has been facilitated by the absence from the pages of *Socialist News* of those ardent exponents of "the science of Marxism", comrades Bull, Hoskins *et al* of the *EPSR*. Together with the Fiscites of course, they have now been completely expurgated from the SLP paper. Strangely though, apart from a Cuba interview conducted by Amanda Rose in the August-September issue, the Brarites are unrepresented too.

True, the Brar family have access to other publications. Harpal is editor of *Lalkar*, officially the organ of the Indian Workers Association, while son Ranjeet runs *Spark*, paper of Socialist Labour Youth, and daughter Joti is at the helm of *Women for Socialism*, journal of the SLP women's section. But why are they so shy when it comes to *Socialist News*, with its larger circulation? Or has Nell Myers been told to keep them out?

Either way, the absence of factional articles - even if you had to be able to

read between the lines - that previously brought at least a little life to its pages has now made the paper a very dull read indeed.

Forlorn call

Socialist News now has very much of an 'NUMist' feel to it, with local reports and snippets of opinion from such contributors as Mick Appleyard, Tony Horsfield, Zane Carpenter, Trevor Bolderson and Jim Arnison. No fewer than six articles refer to the National Union of Mineworkers or coal mining.

The paper also contains an interview with Dave 'Mick' Rix, general secretary of Aslef, the train drivers' union, and one of the SLP's remaining big names. Unfortunately for the editorial team, the interview was conducted *before* the Ladbroke Grove disaster, and comrade Myers did not have the gumption to either update it or hold it over. Embarrassingly, comrade Rix refers only to the Southall accident and talks mainly of union demands and union politics. Ladbroke Grove is left to comrade Cave in his tiny, front-page piece. *Socialist News* is settled into its bimonthly routine and does not even attempt to respond seriously to sudden developments ... even on the rails where it has RMT's Bob Crow besides Aslef's Mick Rix.

Page two articles refer to last month's Wigan and Hamilton South parliamentary by-elections, where the SLP gained around 1.5% in both constituencies. Socialist Labour's vote in Hamilton South "shows the party's potential", according to the anonymous writer, who goes on to list - without comment - the full results: eg, 238 for the SLP and 1,847 for the Scottish Socialist Party.

Comrade Scargill's own article claims that many Labour Party members were "clearly stunned" by Tony Blair's remark at the Bournemouth conference that "the class war is over". I somehow doubt it. But for king Arthur it came as no surprise, in view of "the complete abandonment of socialist principles in 1995". He repeats his increasingly forlorn call for Labour lefts to follow his example: resign from Blair's party and join the SLP.

Our general secretary appears to have no inkling of his failure. The initial enthusiasm for the SLP was soon dampened and eventually completely smothered by his own bureaucratic, anti-democratic actions. The SLP hardly evokes any interest at all less than four years after its birth. For example, there have now been just 1,200 visits to our website since it was set up earlier this year. By my calculation hits are continuing to limp along at around 150 a month - on average only five internet-users from all around the world bother to take a look at the site daily. Hardly surprising, considering its sparse contents. Others on the left - the CPGB for instance - regularly record over 1,500 hits a month ●