

Ken ups tempo

So much for the tactical brilliance of the control freaks at Millbank. As the electoral college stitch-up - their supposedly fool-proof answer to the problem of Ken Livingstone - shows signs of unravelling, the question of who actually wins the fight to become the Labour Party's nominee for London mayor takes on an almost secondary character. Whatever the outcome, it is likely to spell bad news for the party's leadership and its myrmidons.

If, as still seems most probable, Frank Dobson manages to secure the nomination, it will be on the basis of the sort of bureaucratic gerrymandering that shows an arrogant and brazen contempt for democracy. Such a Pyrrhic victory would offer the people of London a flawed and to some extent already discredited candidate; it might even induce Livingstone, as the moral victor who enjoys overwhelming support among London Labour members, to go it alone. If, on the other hand, Livingstone springs a surprise and wins the nomination contest, his victory will have been achieved in the face of immense obstacles and will represent a resounding defeat for Blair and Blairism, demonstrating more eloquently than anything else the fact that, for all the media hype, New Labour as an ideological construct remains an amorphous, superficial and largely elitist phenomenon, lacking deep roots in the Labour Party and the labour movement generally.

The question that is of primary interest to us as communists and revolutionary democrats is this: does the campaign for Livingstone - let alone the possibility of his victory - offer a realistic channel for a revival of class-conscious activity and an interest in real socialist politics among the passive and demoralised mass base of the Labour Party in London and beyond? We believe that the answer is yes, and that it is consequently our duty to give qualified and critical support to the Livingstone campaign, even if he emerges as the official Labour candidate for mayor. We take this position in full knowledge of the dubious political record and chameleon characteristics of the man himself.

Some comrades are inclined to view this stance as opportunism or tailism towards Labour, an abdication of our responsibility to unite with others on the left in order to fight for a real socialist alternative candidate. They contend that support for Livingstone conflicts with the position previously argued by *Weekly Worker* writers earlier this year.

Their charge rests on a failure to understand the qualitative changes that have taken place in recent months. For example, back in June Maurice Bernal wrote that "Whatever the outcome [of the ballot for the La-

bour nomination] it is essential for the left to prepare itself to fight for an authentically *socialist* mayor of London ... In the event that Blair bites the bullet and allows Livingstone to stand 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" (*Weekly Worker* June 24).

What has changed since the comrade wrote these words? Essentially two things. In the first place, it needs to be remembered that our attitude in June was adopted in the political context of a *possible* (even if highly *improbable*) compromise between Blair and Livingstone, whereby the latter would toe the New Labour line in return for the 'gift' of nomination. Far from having 'bitten the bullet', however, as everyone knows, Blair has used every means at his disposal to thwart Livingstone's ambitions. So Livingstone would not be New Labour's tame representative in the mayoralty. Indeed a victorious Livingstone would now constitute a living manifesto against everything that Blair represents and would become the focus for exactly the sort of grassroots opposition that we, as communists, seek to make the audience of our *own* politics.

Secondly, and no doubt to some extent in the light of these developments, some organisations on the left, such as the Socialist Workers Party and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty have recently drawn the same conclusions as we did before them and have adopted a position of critical support for a Livingstone candidacy. As was demonstrated only too clearly by the London Socialist Alliance's ignominious collapse before Scargill prior to the June EU elections, it was in any case doubtful whether the LSA election bloc would stay the course. The commitment of most of the participating organisations - particularly the SWP - was questionable, to say the least. In effect, therefore, earlier and very tentative plans for a united left intervention in next May's election have been abandoned in all but name. Though it may still meet, the LSA is dead so far as this question is concerned.

What comrades need to grasp is that the central issue raised by the Livingstone campaign is one of *democracy*: the democratic right of London's 70,000 Labour Party members to vote for Livingstone, if that is their wish; the democratic right of millions of Londoners to elect as mayor the man whom, according to every poll, they want to see in charge of their city. Democracy is a weapon we can wield against Blair and New Labour.

The Millbank machine has failed to learn any lessons from previous attempts at telling the party's member-

ship how to vote, such as the debacle in Wales, where foisting Alun Michael on an unwilling Welsh electorate actually cost Labour its expected majority in the Welsh assembly. Millbank's novel form of OMOV ('our man, our voting system') represents a flagrant perversion of democracy, giving vastly disproportionate influence to that one third of the electoral college comprising the payroll vote of London MPs, MEPs and those ever so carefully selected (but unelected) candidates for the Greater London Authority, each of whom will cast votes equivalent to those of nearly 1,000 rank and file members or nearly 6,000 trade union members.

From the outset it was obvious that the payroll vote would do what they were told. Indeed, so enthusiastic have some of them been in their support for Dobson that they have reportedly fallen foul of the Data Protection Act by giving Dobson's campaign team access to constituency membership lists. The legal niceties of this question are of no interest to us, but it has certainly had political consequences in terms of deepening the distrust and anger felt by many Labour Party members in London.

It was equally obvious from the beginning that a majority of ordinary members of the London Labour Party would vote for Livingstone if given the chance. The decisive factor, therefore, would be that third of the college composed of trade union votes. Here the arrogance and political miscalculation of Millbank is most glaringly apparent. They evidently assumed (perhaps with some justification) that the unions' leaders, servile as always in their relationship with the Blair administration, would cast their block votes in favour of his preferred candidate. Where Sir Ken Jackson of the AEEU is concerned, their calculations were, of course, correct. Despite pressure from his members, Jackson is still adamant that he will cast the AEEU's block vote for Dobson, securing him some 10% of the union vote and in the process effectively disenfranchising some 50,000 trade unionists. What Millbank clearly did not reckon with, however, was that, thanks to the vigorous demands of their members, every other major union in the capital will be balloting. This is undoubtedly a major setback, with potentially fatal consequences for Dobson's chances of getting the nomination next month. It is also clear evidence that the grassroots in the labour movement, provoked by the undemocratic manipulation of the party's centre, may at last be shaking off its passivity and torpor.

The general revulsion and anger felt by many Labour Party activists and ordinary members in the capital should not be underestimated. It made itself felt, for example, at the October

30 rally organised by the 'Livingstone for London' campaign and attended by some 500 people in the Camden Centre. Speaking from the platform, both Ruth Clarke, a CLP secretary from south London, and Lucy Craig, a Haringey councillor for the last 10 years, denounced the electoral college system as an abuse of democracy which made rank and file members feel disenfranchised and marginalised. Craig insisted that any democratic method of selecting the party's candidate should take account of the views of the more than 1,000 councillors working in the capitals' local government. They, at least, have been *elected*, unlike the 'safe' GLA prospective candidates. Both spoke of the widespread anger and frustration in their respective organisations caused by the machinations of the party centre. To stormy applause, Craig demanded, "Give us back our party".

The issues which, to judge by this meeting, London Labour Party members feel most strongly about are transport, racism and the metropolitan police - especially transport, which dominated Livingstone's 30-minute speech. Alone among the potential candidates, and in tune with two thirds of Londoners polled on the subject, he is opposed to the privatisation of the underground by means of the Public Private Partnership, which would hand over large tranches of the tube's infrastructure to none other than Railtrack, probably the most despised company in the entire country. Vowing to maintain the underground as a unified service in the public sector, Livingstone told the meeting that he intended to fund the revitalisation of the tube by a bond issue and to use the projected congestion charge as a means of shifting resources into the bus sector as a priority. Promises to restore conductors on the buses and guards on the underground were very enthusiastically received by the audience.

On the subject of racism, Lee Jasper of the Black Alliance and anti-racism campaigner Kumar Murshid both commended Livingstone's anti-racist initiatives during his time at the GLC, during which time more than 20% of the GLC's workforce was recruited from ethnic minorities. Livingstone accepted the speakers' demand for the full implementation of the McPherson report and for greater metropolitan police accountability.

Livingstone's carefully crafted speech, largely devoid of any direct criticism of his rivals and of the government, predictably gave no clues whatever as to what he will do in the event of being blocked from the short list on November 16 (a highly unlikely but not impossible contingency) or being defeated by Dobson as a result of the skewed electoral college. But active efforts to recruit people to

the Livingstone campaign (with potential supporters limited to Labour Party members and those who belong to *no* other political organisation), while ostensibly a fund-raising initiative, will provide him with a database of potential support for an independent challenge. On this question we say to Livingstone that in the event of defeat in the Labour Party contest he *must* demonstrate his sincerity and determination by standing as a London Independent Labour candidate for mayor.

As I said, both the SWP (*Socialist Worker* October 30) and the AWL (*Action for Solidarity* October 29) have come out in support of Livingstone's campaign. The poor cadre of the SWP must be mightily confused. Having been urged to support the 'Let Ken stand' initiative earlier in the year, they were later told that Livingstone's support for Nato bombing of Serbia debarred him from receiving the SWP's support and constituted a 'line in the sand' which the SWP would not cross. Evidently the line has been washed away by the tide of events. Similarly, the AWL leadership appears to have overcome, to some extent, its chronic aversion to Livingstone, which dates back nearly 20 years. It justifies its turn by a comparison with the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, which fought for the re-election of the Callaghan government because the alternative was even worse: ie, lesser-of-two-evils. The AWL now proposes a Socialist Campaign for a Livingstone Victory, along similar lines, rightly drawing attention to the damage which such a victory could inflict on New Labour and its potential as a force for renewed working class mobilisation from below.

By contrast, the position taken by the Socialist Party is a lunatic paradox. Since, according to the SP's 'theorists', Labour is now a fully-fledged party of the bourgeoisie, to support Livingstone as Labour's official candidate for mayor would be unthinkable. Nonetheless, the SP backs his efforts to win the ballot: ie, to become precisely the candidate whom they cannot support.

As we have said before, the Labour Party's change, dictated from above, from being a bourgeois party of the working class to being a bourgeois party of the bourgeoisie has certainly gathered pace since Blair's election victory. But the 'Blairisation' of the Labour Party as a whole is a still a myth, a Millbank pipe dream. So long as the Labour Party retains its mass base in the working class and is reliant on workers' votes, these class forces can and will make themselves felt. Livingstone's campaign to become mayor of London could galvanise these forces. That is why we support him ●

Michael Malkin

Party school

Over the weekend of November 13-14, the Communist Party is organising a school on 'The national question on the British Isles: lessons of the October revolution'. An educational around this time has become an annual event for our organisation, something we stage to mark the greatest blow for human freedom in world history so far, the Russian Revolution of 1917.

What is the best way to celebrate this event? We believe with a school that brings together communists to *openly* discuss their differences, to learn from each other and to fight for a collective understanding of their tasks. This is a common method we share with the Bolsheviks, without whom a successful revolution in Russia would have been impossible. It is a graphic expression of our understanding of democratic centralism.

The topic of this year's school has been prompted by the debate that is currently raging in and around the ranks of the Communist Party. The national question in the British Isles - and in particular, the dynamics of the revolution in Ireland - have caused real controversy over the last three months. Sparked originally by a single sentence in a front-page article in the *Weekly Worker* of July 1, the arguments of the two sides of this debate have been developed in tens of thousands of words in the pages of our open press. It is far from concluded. This debate has not simply involved our own members and supporters. Comrades from a variety of political traditions and organisational affiliations have taken part in the discussion: from orthodox Trotskyites to left nationalists.

Our school is informed by precisely the same - genuinely scientific - method as the *Iskraists/Bolsheviks*. For example, comrade Allan Armstrong of the Scottish Socialist Party and the Republican Communist Network will open a session on 'The break-up of Britain', a scenario the comrade believes that the forces of the working class should actively promote and one that is bound to provoke fierce opposition.

The contrast with the rest of the left could hardly be starker. We have extensively covered the dismal ceremonies that pass for 'schools' and 'educational' on the rest of the left over the years. Most consist of the dry-as-dust reiterations of a predetermined 'line' on a huge variety of political questions, ranging from the nature of the USSR to the social dynamics of human pre-history. In other words, they are nothing to do with 'education' at all. In fact, they bear far more resemblance to the deeply alienated process of socialisation that passes for education in mainstream bourgeois society than the genuine communist article.

We strive to introduce controversy and the clash of opinions. This is an attempt both to educate our comrades in a genuine sense - to train them as self-activating, critically-minded communist cadre - and also to fight for the truth. Thus - in contrast to the pig-ignorant comments of some of our opponents - the fact that we have a wide range of speakers presenting openings at our events is not a manifestation of our organisation's fight for a grand theoretical truce on the left. Far from it. Simply, it creates the best possible conditions - of light, air and *heat* - for the correct ideas to thrive, defeat mistaken views and become strong.

With this in mind, the second issue of the *Pre-conference bulletin* for the forthcoming conference of the Socialist Workers Party (actually on November 13, 14 and 15, not beginning on November 6, as I and *Pre-conference bulletin* No1 originally reported) is interesting - mostly because of how *uninteresting* it is. In subsequent issues, I will review the SWP conference itself and the dismal state it reveals of this, the largest revolutionary organisation of the British left. So far in the pre-conference discussion two contributions (out of a total of 13, with just *eight* from individual SWPers, the rest either from the central committee or 'party' apparatchiks - an incredible statistic) address anything of real interest (see p5 of this issue).

Take Paul Jenkins of Barrow-in-Furness. Here is a comrade who has already been threatened and browbeaten at branch/district level before he had the temerity to put pen to paper nationally. He begins his contribution with an apology. He implores SWPers to read his piece "with an open mind and not be immediately defensive". He writes his short contribution as "a Leninist", "not as a member of any 'faction', or anything else" (pp12-13). His tame suggestions for widening SWP democracy could be branded as a "critique of democratic centralism", something he rightly denies.

Mike Hames from Croydon branch, has a broader point to make. Essentially, he is complaining of "a 'party line' on too wide a range of issues" (p15). Again, the comrade is at pains to stress that his ideas present no open challenge to the SWP establishment: he wants a situation where "in a few relatively marginal areas there is no party line" (p15).

As Bolsheviks, our approach is totally different. We are after the open exchange of ideas. We do not believe in a 'party line' - if that means the inability of dissenting views to express themselves - not simply on "a few relatively marginal areas", but even on fundamental questions.

Our comrades are encouraged to speak out with boldness, to say what they think without worrying about who they upset or offend. The sessions at the school reflect this with thinking contributions not simply from comrades within, but also outside the ranks of our organisation.

Comrades are urged to attend, but are reminded that space is limited in the venue we have booked. Please let us know as soon as possible if you are able to come along ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Back Livingstone

I was delighted to read the *Weekly Worker* headline, 'Back Livingstone', who is rightly identified as a "thorn in Blair's side". This is a positive development on the CPGB's part.

However, there are certain inconsistencies here, comrades. Over a year ago the *Weekly Worker* claimed that "Labour is well on the way to transforming itself into a bourgeois party of the bourgeoisie" (October 8 1998). Is not it amazing that a party "well on the way" to becoming a bourgeois party has a membership overwhelmingly in favour of Livingstone, and affiliated unions that may well also vote for the left candidate? The week before this the *Weekly Worker* wrote an article about the success of the centre-left Grassroots Alliance in the Labour Party NEC elections. The election of four anti-Blairites, three of whom are definitely to the left of Livingstone, was dismissed. The oh-so-wise Mary Godwin told us that "neither the newly elected 'hard left' members of the NEC nor their platform have anything remotely to do with socialism" (October 1 1998).

Yet no one seriously involved with Labour politics can help but notice the tremendous similarities between the selection of Labour's candidate for mayor and 1998's NEC elections. Jim Blackstock noted last week: "Neil Kinnock, declaring himself four square behind Dobson, the official Blairite candidate, described Livingstone as 'the man who invented the loony left and everything that went with it'. Others can be expected to follow suit, as Millbank pulls out all the stops to ensure Livingstone's defeat. Blair is worried. We must do all we can to make his worst nightmare come true." This is all very true.

Yet last year the CPGB chose to ignore Neil Kinnock's rabid attack on the Grassroots Alliance in *The Guardian*. In particular, Kinnock reserved special hatred for Liz Davies, who was accused of being a "Trotskyist" and Militant supporter, regurgitating all the allegations made by Claire Short and co, when Liz was blocked from being a parliamentary candidate. However, Mary Godwin could not understand what he was on about, with Liz being accused of espousing "the warmed-up politics of Roy Hattersley".

Although she was generous enough to admit the "left wing of Labourism is not dead", Mary did not even welcome the victory once in the article! Yet now the CPGB is talking about supporting Livingstone, even if he stands as the official Labour candidate. Is this the same party that stood against Livingstone in the last general election?

It is time for the CPGB to admit that it has seriously overestimated the strength of the Blair project over the Labour membership and that of the affiliated trade unions. Since the 1997 election Blair's attacks on the working class have led to a virtual abstention in campaigning by the Labour membership in the Euro elections, a close-run Welsh leadership candidate, which only produced the success of a Blairite because of the obedience of trade union bureaucrats, and two NEC victories for the left.

Now we have the selection process for mayor of London. Livingstone is not the first "thorn in Blair's side". From the moment single-parent benefit cuts were introduced there has been increasing opposition to Blair amongst Labour's rank and file. This was proven again by the 1999 NEC elections. The MPs, when afforded the luxury of a secret ballot, elected Dennis Skinner showing that even the most rightwing of the sections of the Labour Party remained unconvinced of the 'project'.

The vote for the Grassroots Alliance amongst ordinary members also increased. Liz Davies and Christine Shawcroft - both members of the editorial board of *Labour Left Briefing*, the furthest left component of the Grassroots Alliance - were elected. The suc-

cess of Christine Shawcroft, blocked from being a candidate for the GLA by the Blairites, was particularly impressive, with her vote increasing by 5.77%. A person who stood on a platform not dissimilar to that of the SWP's lobby demanding renationalisation of the utilities and railways, full employment, a national minimum wage starting at half median male earnings, a comprehensive education system with decent student grants, pensions linked to average earnings, the retention of universal benefits and taxation of the rich was the fourth most popular candidate with Labour members.

Liz Davies, who also endorsed the SWP's lobby, did even better on a similar platform, which also contained opposition to the Asylum Act and the bombing of Iraq. More generally, the five Grassroots Alliance candidates who opposed the bombing of Serbia (on this issue they were to the left of the CPGB's new hero Livingstone) got between 36,956 and 52,644 votes, beating all the rightwing candidates bar Lord Sawyer, who topped the poll, and Michael Cashman and Diana Jeuda, who came below three CLGA candidates in fifth and sixth place respectively.

There can be no doubt that this also shows Mary Godwin's view that it was the support of *The Guardian* which saw success in 1998 as false. *The Guardian* was in fact hostile this year, but it made no difference. Anyway, comrades, if limited support from the bourgeois press means candidates have nothing "remotely to do with socialism", then surely you should not support Livingstone's candidature for mayor. At the recent launch meeting of Frank Dobson's campaign, Jonathan Steele of *The Guardian*, politically about as leftwing as the old SDP, stood up for Livingstone, as have many other people who have traditionally been enemies of the left.

It is undoubtedly right to campaign for Livingstone "against New Labour". But it is inconsistent with your traditional sectarianism towards the Labour Party and its left wing, which was shown best by your decision to stand against the man you are now supporting for mayor in the 1997 general election.

The decisive battles in the trade unions and Labour Party are approaching. It would be criminal for the left to isolate themselves. In the forthcoming period it will be decided if Blair will transform the Labour Party qualitatively, and also, if he does, if a future workers' alternative will have a mass base. The best way to ensure some success in the latter, if we cannot succeed in stopping the former, is to fight alongside Labour's membership which is increasingly angry with Blairism, so that these people, many of which are to the left of Livingstone, remain with us in the future.

Will Matthews
Cambridgeshire

Edinburgh debate

I expect that the *Weekly Worker* will carry a report on the Republican Communist Network day school in Edinburgh on 'international socialism'. I also expect that the argument as to whether this faction within the SSP (and beyond) should endorse the 'international socialism' slogan will echo inside the paper for some time to come.

This meeting was welcomed by all, especially once it became clear that there was a willingness to bring on board members of the Glasgow Marxist Forum and the AWL rather than to encourage the ghettoisation of potential factions. That said, there was a sense of incredulity, shared by Jack Conrad and myself, as to how there could be any doubt about revolutionary Marxists shouting their internationalism from the rooftops.

It has fallen to Allan Armstrong of the Communist Tendency to attempt to provide some theoretical justification. But his objections to the slogan 'inter-



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

national socialism' do not, I believe, make any sense. I would refer Allan to the section of the *Communist manifesto* entitled 'Proletarians and communists': "The communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only: (1) in the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality; (2) in the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole."

Point one makes explicit that communists are, by definition, international socialists and point two does so implicitly. Is it possible that Allan judges the *Communist manifesto* as mistaken, an immature work which Marx later disavowed? What about the *Critique of the Gotha programme*? It is in this less well read, but nonetheless important, work that Allan finds justification for his opposition to international socialism. Might I suggest that Allan takes some time out to reread his bible. Look at Marx's critique of section 5 of the *Gotha programme*: "Lassalle, in opposition to the *Communist manifesto* and to all earlier socialism, conceived the workers' movement from the narrowest national standpoint. He is being followed in this - and that after the work of the International!"

I challenge Allan to explain how to interpret this critique of the *Gotha Programme* as a critique of international socialism rather than of the detractors of international socialism. Could Allan also comment on the following extract from a letter, written by Engels to August Bebel (March 18-23 1875) published, alongside Marx's critique, in the pamphlet of the same name?

"Secondly, the principle that the workers' movement is an international movement is, to all intents and purposes, completely disavowed for the present day, and at that by people who have upheld this principle most gloriously for five whole years under the most difficult conditions."

Engels goes on to cite the Franco-Prussian war as an example of Bebel's internationalism, an internationalism of which Bebel (or at least many of his comrades), for reasons which Engels could not begin to comprehend, appeared to be ashamed. For precisely the same reason, I would cite the position adopted by Allan (and the rest of the RCN) towards the war in Kosova as an expression of his/their international socialism.

I would also refer Allan to his 5,000-word article on the British-Irish (*Weekly Worker* October 28). On this question, we are both united against Jack Conrad's theses. We may or may not be right. But the fact that we believe we have responsibilities forcing us to take the trouble to draw up a position, and to vigorously defend it, a position which only indirectly relates to Allan's nation (the Scots), defies the logic of his stated anti-international socialist position. Allan might want to respond by pointing out that it does relate indirectly. That, Allan, is the whole point. As Marx insisted from the moment he became a communist (and as Lenin and Trotsky reiterated, over and over again), the struggles against exploitation and oppression the world over are all (at the very least indirectly) interrelated.

Any struggle for the emancipation of the working class in Scotland (or anywhere else) consciously abstracted from the struggle of the world working class, one which must to take advantage of the, entirely progressive, global division of labour, would lead (whatever our subjective desires) to a collapse of

the national economy and to a miserable lowering of the productivity of labour. As shortages grew, unemployment rose and working hours lengthened, all the 'old crap' would revive. It happened in isolated Russia and it would happen, sooner rather than later, in a proudly independent socialist Scotland.

Tom Delargy
Paisley

SSP

I approved of Bob Pitt's demolition of Gerry Downing's ignorance re the Scottish Socialist Party (Letters, October 21, 28). However, his urge to back the Labour Party, no matter what, leads him into similar confusion in 'Scottish facts' (Letters, October 28).

He accuses the SSP of failing to treat the Labour Party with the same relatively non-sectarian attitude it displays towards others. The claim is untrue. The SSP has repeatedly invited Labour Party members to debate with it but has almost invariably been turned down. Significantly, members of the Scottish National Party - Lloyd Quinnan, Margo MacDonald, etc - are much more willing to engage in public debate with the SSP than Labour is. True, the (leftish) Dundee Labour MP John McAllion is billed to speak at the SSP-sponsored event, Socialism 2000, in Glasgow this week (November 7-8). However, let us see if he turns up.

The SSP is alert for any signs of splits in the Labour Party, but thus far the Labour Party in Scotland is the SSP's bitter rival for working class support, as well as being a source of many attacks on the working class. The SSP has made some headway by comparing "New

Labour with old Tories". Perhaps Bob Pitt thinks we are being unfair to note that Tory anti-trade union laws have remained intact under Labour, and Scotland's few Tory councillors can calmly support minority Labour administrations because Labour carries out "good Tory policies" (the exact words of a Falkirk Tory councillor in June this year). Also, Labour in Scotland has many of the characteristics of a ruling party - complacency, cronyism and corruption. Supporting Labour is thus problematic, even if Bob Pitt does not think so.

Finally, Bob Pitt underestimates SSP support and organisational strength. While Glasgow remains its heartland, it has set up numerous branches in other parts of Scotland this year, many of them active, not least in things such as supporting strike action. Recent opinion polls in Scotland by System Three suggest that SSP support in the central Scotland region (ie, not Glasgow) is high enough to win a second list seat in the Scottish parliament, to add to Tommy Sheridan's Glasgow seat.

James Robertson
Linlithgow

On Delphi

"Dialectical materialism is not a science, but a philosophy, which addresses all the perennial speculative problems of the relation of thought and matter, the nature of objective reality and what constitutes being" (Delphi, Letters *Weekly Worker* October 21).

Well, Delphi, there was I thinking it was just using the dialectic in relation to stuff that exists rather than stuff that does not.

Dialectical thinking is a healthy scientific method: you have a theory, you inquire of that theory, contemplate an antithesis, arrive at what you think is a truth and go looking for some experiment that will prove or disprove your ideas. The experiment either proves or disproves your theory or the antithesis, or suggests that something else is needed - a synthesis (ie, a new theory to test).

That Marx and all those other folks Delphi mentioned failed to predict accurately what the future held is no surprise, for despite using a scientific approach to problems and questions Marx was as handicapped in making predictions as any politician. Politics is not a pure science, where astronomers can accurately predict the position of Mars at any given point in time and get it right. Politicians have a disadvantage: human beings are not as predictable as planets, mathematical equations or the effects of combining two or three chemicals. Conducting experiments to test your theories are a big problem as well. The only way to test Marxists' theory of the future development of capitalism is to wait for it to happen or not, as the case may be - we cannot run a simulation on a PC or ask everyone to kindly step into a lab for us. The factors we are dealing with are not particularly predictable: they are conscious creatures possessed with the ability to have different ideas of what is good or bad, as well as having a unique knack for reason.

A critical reappraisal of Marxism is not needed; understanding it as a methodology is. The left's failings in formulating theories from their experience is obviously a valid concern: those who do not end up liquidating or sitting around repeating themselves, never realising they are talking a load of bollocks. If you cannot learn from the class struggle, then natural selection will wipe you out!

As for Delphi's use of language, he/she/it can use whatever lan-

guage it likes, but in the long run keeping it plain and simple is the way to go. Long words might sound good, and give you a tremendous sense of well-being because you can use them, but there are usually two or three little words that are far more effective. For example, instead of "epistemological premises of Marxism", what is wrong with saying, 'the theory and methods upon which Marxism rests'? Then perhaps us mere mortals who are content to have ordinary pen names and refer to ourselves in the first person can engage in the great Delphi's crusade to persuade us to be critical of the Bolshevik tradition and the underground plant growth of Marxism itself.

Finally a note on Ivor Kenna's letter in the same edition - good point, Ivor. I share your bemusement at why this British-Irish thing has been brought up: perhaps Delphi or some mere mortal comrade can enlighten me.

Steve Green
Hertfordshire

British-Irish

Manchester comrades have recently been treated to some of the comments that the Alliance for Workers' Liberty have deigned to make on their website in connection with the CPGB's current debate on the British-Irish.

Martin Thomas, for example, "very much" welcomes that the CPGB majority feel it proper that the right of self-determination should be offered to the British-Irish (or the "Northern Ireland protestants", as our comrade chooses to call them).

Mark Osborne is somewhat more huffy with us, asking whether the CPGB "will comprehensively overhaul their Irish policy ... what are the c[omra]des around Jack Conrad now saying about the role of the IRA? Or about the role of the British troops?" Rest assured, comrade Osborne, the CPGB majority is certainly not making the treacherous equation between the republicans and loyalist paramilitaries that you would seek to foist on the working class; neither are we going to start equivocating on the 'progressive' role of the British state, something that seems to continually tie the AWL's collective tongue in public forums.

In any case we should not have worried: the CPGB is still very much beyond the pale for our comrade: "The CPGB could adopt a much more rounded, consistently democratic programme and the main, underlying problem with their organisation would remain untouched. They have no orientation to the working class, no policy for the labour movement." And what "policy" would that be then, comrade? Pandering to labour dictators in the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws (no politics please, we're socialists!)? Giving covert approval to witch-hunters in the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance? Shrouding yourself in minimalist 'transitional' demands at election time? You certainly know how to set us poor 'Stalinists' an example.

Not that comrade Osborne is the only one with problems in this. In introducing these remarks by e-mail, comrade John Pearson (of the CPGB minority) feels they are "pertinently prophetic". What my comrade means by this is that just because there has been a convergence between some CPGB and AWL comrades on the question of democratic rights for the British-Irish, it naturally follows that the CPGB will be forced to agree with the AWL's appalling position on the republican struggle.

Of course, comrade Pearson's

remarks do nothing more than exemplify the atrophied thinking that he and his co-thinkers have sought to impose on the debate. The majority of comrades in Manchester CPGB have approached this question through an essentially dogmatic filter which rules out tampering with 'core' constituents of the CPGB's politics - to do so is to take the high road to opportunism. Therefore the likes of comrade Pearson are essentially not interested in debating, or organising for, the winning the British-Irish to the cause of working class emancipation. Instead they merely give majority comrades an ultimatum: mess with this and you end up supporting the British state.

This method merely provides the cover for the erection of an abstract politics which does not allow the CPGB to address the concrete realities of the class struggle. In their own way the majority of comrades in Manchester mirror the dire spectacle of post-war Trotskyism with its bizarre narrative of orthodoxy and heresy hunts.

Phil Watson
Manchester

Machiavellian

The British-Irish debate in the *Weekly Worker* has highlighted the fact that in politics history is not so much about what happened in the past as a justification of a political programme.

Conrad's history calls for the Irish masses to settle the question of Irish unity. It relies on an optimistic view of human nature and suggests a method by which the protestant minority can be voluntarily incorporated into a united Ireland. There is no role for the British state in this process. The working class in Britain should fight for the British state's defeat in Ireland. The question is not exclusively an Irish matter, but requires international working class support.

Allan Armstrong's history reaches a different political conclusion (*Weekly Worker* October 28). Namely that "Ulster-Britishness is an identity which cannot be politically separated from the reactionary monarchist and unionist British state which has promoted it." Although a recent development, it is now an eternal relationship with nature and the human beings that fill its ranks have found their final resting place.

Even if this turns out to be the case, a democratic attempt to bring them around is not a waste of time. In a democracy everyone can say no, not just the Ulster-British. If the "repartitioned Ulster" is to be based on 'nullification of catholics' the majority can, if necessary, oppose this development by declaring war. Democracy does not mean pacifism.

The most disturbing aspect of comrade Armstrong's article is that he has no understanding of democracy, as demonstrated by his treatment of the Cossack question. I quote: "A basic feature of any materialist analysis should be to analyse what people do rather than be mesmerised by what they say." If I understand this correctly, Lenin was a liar, Lenin was right to be a liar, Lenin won because he was a liar; communists should learn from this.

Armstrong is not alone on this: most people think communists say one thing when they are weak and do another when in power - that is why they do not trust us. The comrade has been seduced by realpolitik. Politics is reduced to Machiavellian manoeuvre in which cynical but rational minorities control the destiny of the masses - for their own good of course.

Phil Kent
London

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday November 7, 5pm - 'The aftermath of 1848', using Simon Clarke's *Karl Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide.

Manchester: Monday November 15, 7.30pm - Series on crisis: 'The historical relationship between crisis, war and revolution'. E-mail: CPGB2@aol.com.

■ CPGB weekend school

The national question in the British Isles: lessons of the October revolution. Speakers include Allan Armstrong, Jack Conrad, Mark Fischer and Dave Craig. Central London, November 13-14. Call 0181-459 7146 for details.

■ 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 officially backing him. Already the minimum of 25 Union branches have nominated, but it is important that as many as possible add their support before the November 26 deadline. Call Glen Kelly on 0171-251 8449 for details.

■ 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: Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance, 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.

■ AWL day school

'Socialism - past, present and future'. 12 noon, Saturday November 6, Caxton House, 129 St John's Way, London N19. Nearest tube - Archway. £10 (£5 concessions). Organised by Alliance for Workers' Liberty. For details contact 0171-207 3997; e-mail: office@workersliberty.org.

■ Open forum

'Prospects for a new workers' party'. Speaker: Tommy Sheridan MSP. Sunday November 14, 12-6pm. Sefton Room, St George's Hotel, Lime Street, Liverpool. £5 waged, £2 unwaged. Enquiries: Peter Dunne (0151-283 7673). Organised by North West Socialist Alliance.

■ Reclaim our Rights

'The trade union rights bill' - London campaign organising conference. Speaker: Tony Benn MP. Saturday November 19, 11am-4pm, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London. Registration - £5. For an agenda and registration, contact London Reclaim our Rights, 10 Weald Close, Rotherhithe, London SE16 3ET.

■ Party wills

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

■ Hackney Socialist Alliance

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

■ Brent Socialist Alliance

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

Website

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

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We have to congratulate the CPGB for its very democratic, open and instructive debate on the Irish question. Its main leader, comrade Conrad, is not only showing a great degree of tolerance and dialogue, but also a vast political culture. He has written several two-page articles responding to different criticisms on that subject. Unfortunately we have not read in the *Weekly Worker* the position of the CPGB's minority, something that would help the discussion.

Nevertheless, I am not the only person to point out that Jack has not attempted to tackle a central point in the debate. There are two rights which are completely antagonistic: the right of self-determination for the Irish nation as a whole, and the right of its unionist layers to oppose this and to keep British rule in a part of that nation. Comrade Jack is trying to do the impossible with this mix of oil and water. In his efforts to be a consistent democrat regarding a privileged minority he is sacrificing the rights of the oppressed majority.

The Irish nation has fought for many decades to achieve unity and complete liberation from foreign imperialist monarchical rule. These bourgeois democratic-revolutionary tasks have not been fully achieved in Ireland. One third of the Irish live under the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland the anti-unionist population are subject to discrimination and harassment. Communists have to be the champions of this unfinished democratic goal and explain that only the working class, irrespective of ethnicity, can fully emancipate Ireland from imperialism and the monarchy.

Jack is saying that in order to attain an Irish republic we need to make some democratic concessions to the British unionists - to whom he has given the status of a semi-nation called the 'British Irish' - and allow them the right to secede. However, what he does not grasp is that, in allowing the pro-British to separate, he is endorsing a new partition and the continuation of their reactionary veto against the right of self-determination for the Irish nation as a whole. Jack thinks that the best way of winning support amongst protestant workers is by becoming the best fighter for its right to create a federal or sovereign state.

There are several problems with this formulation. First, national self-determination is a demand without resonance among the unionists. Why should we try to impose it on them? The loyalists do not want to secede from the United Kingdom, to unite with Ireland or even rule only in the areas in which they are a clear majority. Unionism does not fight for self-determination or against a foreign power, but to keep its own oppressive domination.

Secondly, the unionists and anti-unionists are not two different nations or nationalities. They are two interpenetrated communities from the very same nation, inhabiting the same territory. Despite the presence of distinct historic, religious and even linguistic inclinations in some layers of both communities, their main difference - as comrade Armstrong has described - is around political inclinations. There have been pro-British Catholics, and former union supporters in the Twenty-six Counties have never demanded any special status. A pro-British, self-governing territory would be a centre of reaction, segregation and loyalty to the crown.

Thirdly, the model that Jack proposes - a new repartition of Northern Ireland, allowing one entire county and four half counties to each side - is something that is not going to satisfy anybody. Unionists and nationalists would both see it as a surrender to the other side. Loyalty would lose at least half its statelet and anti-unionists would not achieve Irish national self-determination and unification.

Defending revolutionary democracy

John Stone insists that the British-Irish can have no right to secede

Even worse, this is a recipe for *increased* communal division - one that would encourage ethnic cleansing.

Fourthly, the best way of gaining an audience amongst pro-British workers and winning them away from their loyalist leaders is through championing their *class* rights. We need to struggle alongside them for better wages, jobs, housing and living conditions and encourage common demonstrations and strikes organised jointly with anti-unionist workers. Supporting a 'national' right for an oppressor community simply reinforces loyalism. The problem with Jack is that he is not putting forward a strategy for socialist revolution and a republic. Rather he gives priority to purely political, democratic demands, because he wants to limit the aims of the movement to the completion of a first, bourgeois democratic, stage in the revolution.

Jack has argued that communists should follow the example of imperialist Germany in the way it convinced the East German *Ossis* to voluntarily abandon their state and accept absorption within a federal state: "Surely, if a dull conservative like Kohl recognised the need to proceed with care and caution, taking full account of the wishes of the *Ossis*, should not communists approach the British-Irish problem as consistent democrats, not ham-fisted nationalists?" (*Weekly Worker* September 9).

The German and Irish questions are quite different. Germany was divided along class lines and social models. In the east the capitalists were expropriated while in the west they managed to expand and become Europe's main economic power. Eastern Germany collapsed as a result of the new Cold War and the collapse of Soviet bureaucratic planning and totalitarianism. The west was able to 'voluntarily' annex the east for many reasons. There was no foreign power attempting to maintain a separate eastern state; the special 'socialist' ideology and system that sustained the DDR was defeated internally; and the *Ossis* were massively bombed by propaganda which convinced them that they would be better off thanks to an injection of billions of Deutschmarks. The shift towards a market system would end scarcity and provide a democratic parliament.

We cannot emulate that process because we are not one of the world's mightiest powers. On the contrary, the main enemy that we have is a powerful imperialist country and its supporters. Instead of attempting to unite Ireland through money, our method is to achieve that goal through *revolution*. An argument constantly put by Jack is that the loyalists are heavily armed and that we need to convince them to come to a nonviolent arrangement in which everybody would be satisfied: there would be a united Ireland and a self-governing British-Irish territory. This utopia shows the in-

creased influence that all the propaganda about the advantages of peaceful negotiations and democracy is achieving. Jack arrives at such a position because he is applying a different methodology than the one used by Lenin. He believes that *all* nations and even many *non*-nations have the right to secede. For example, regarding pro-colonialist communities in colonial outposts he wrote that "those who are historically rooted in these territories should have self-determination" (*Weekly Worker* October 7).

Lenin had a very different understanding. For him: "The focal point in the social democratic programme must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the *essence* of imperialism... It is from this division that *our* definition of the 'right of nations to self-determination' must follow... the social democracy of the oppressor nation must demand that the oppressed nation should have the right of secession" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 21, Moscow 1977, p409). Lenin only fought for the right of self-determination for *oppressed* nations, and against *oppressor* nations. Our friend Jack does not base his analysis on that dichotomy. Comrade Conrad is for the right of self-determination of *oppressor non-nations* against *oppressed* nations.

Who are the oppressor and oppressed in Ireland? Ireland was London's first colony and the North is its last significant colony. The anti-imperialist community in the Six Counties has lower incomes, higher levels of unemployment, worse housing and suffers constant hostility from the RUC, Orange Order and paramilitaries. Jack is not guided by 'consistent democracy', but an abandonment of revolutionary democracy. Why should an oppressed nation have to voluntarily limit its own democratic, republican and self-determination rights in order to conciliate a community which has accumulated privileges that oppress and divide?

The Ulster unionists are not the only example of a community heavily backed and armed by a foreign ruling power to resist a revolutionary anti-colonialist movement. In Latin America, East Timor, Algeria, southern Africa, Palestine and many other former colonies the imperialists created a privileged section that fought alongside them against progressive pro-independence movements. In the process of expelling the imperialist rulers it would be an act of inconsistency or even betrayal to try to win the pro-colonialist layers through offering them their right to keep their special status dividing the country.

During the Chinese revolution we critically supported Mao when he invaded some imperialist enclaves, and would have done so had he taken places like Hong Kong, Macao or Taiwan, even against the wishes of many people. In South Africa or Palestine we cannot support the right of the

oppressor nation to secede. Jack tried to dodge that point by saying that he does not want to drive the Jews (or unionists) into the sea, and that there is no significant area in which white South Africans are a majority. We do not recommend massive deportations. In Palestine we are in favour of a non-confessional, multi-ethnic, democratic workers' state in which all their inhabitants would have equal rights. We would not accept a new partition in which the Arab native population ends up with the poorest areas and limited sovereignty, and would in effect have to accept the legitimacy of their previous expulsion from their former lands. We are against building a Jewish nation or state, based only around a religion and hostility to the Arabs.

In South Africa's Transvaal and Orange Free State there are many areas which have a clear Afrikaner white majority. When black rule was gaining ground, many white separatists launched the idea of self-government. The Boers, unlike the pro-British Irish, are a completely different nation and race with a very distinctive history and language. Even more, they were one of the first peoples this century that fought vigorously against British rule and they were subjected to the first concentration camps. However, we cannot accept their right to violate majority rule in order to keep their privileges and create a state under reactionary segregationist rules.

Jack's methodology in Northern Ireland is also applied to the Malvinas and other imperialist outposts. For him we have to defend rights of its 2,000 inhabitants to self-determination against "the military dictatorship of the butcher general Galtieri" (*Weekly Worker* October 7). We would certainly not support an imperialist state like Spain in any conflict with Britain around Gibraltar. However, when it comes to the Malvinas, we are obliged to support a semi-colony in its attempt to recover its former islands. Thatcher's victory in that war allowed her to defeat the Labour left and later to launch heavy attacks on the miners and other unions, and it also helped imperialism to impose its conditions and IMF austerity measures on Latin America.

The only way in which Argentina could have won the war would have been through transforming it into a massive anti-imperialist struggle. Millions of Latin Americans were being mobilised in the streets, and a mass wave of occupations of imperialist embassies and multinational corporations would have given a huge boost to the anti-imperialist movement worldwide. An Argentinean victory would not only have been a devastating blow against Thatcher, but would also have produced progressive radical change inside Argentina. As we saw in the case of Yugoslavia or Iraq, when dictators are beaten by imperialism, a worse sce-

nario is imposed on the people. Jack prefers to sacrifice the anti-imperialist struggle of tens of millions of Argentines and Latin Americans in order to defend a colonial outpost's tiny loyalist population.

Lenin defended oppressed nations when they fought against imperialist enclaves. My friend Jack has the opposite idea: to defend the rights of the Kelpers and unionists within those enclaves in opposition to the oppressed nation. Jack also has a mechanical conception of nation. It is based on Stalin's book, which was never used by Lenin or Trotsky as a source of reference. If a people does not fit Stalin's check list, he would deny its character as a nation - but it does not matter, because Jack advocates the right of *ethnic communities* to have their own state.

Following Stalin, Jack writes: "Up to now Marxists - till the arrival of comrade Villa, that is - have insisted that nations must share a common language" (*Weekly Worker* October 7). It was Lenin who described Switzerland as an example of a democratic nation based on four languages. He also always described bi-linguistic Belgium or Netherlands as nations. In the 1860s Marx described the Italians as a nation and supported its unification, even though only three per cent spoke Italian. At least 80% of the world's nations are based on more than one tongue. Sometimes that contradiction is resolved through adopting one or more official lingua franca.

The danger of Jack's position is that he allows the possibility of splitting the Irish, Scottish and Welsh nations according to language. Those that speak Celtic tongues could be considered separate nations, despite the fact that there is a common consciousness between English-speaking and Celtic-speaking peoples that they belong to the same nation. He might also accept further divisions of these nations on religious grounds or because of allegiance to the UK.

Jack also insists that Yugoslavia is "today ferociously and bloodily divided by religion" (*Weekly Worker* October 7). He insists that religious communities could have the right to create their own state. However, the Balkan and Irish peoples are not mainly divided by interpretation of the bible. Croats and Serbs share a similar language, but they are divided by more than a 1,000 years of separate history, culture, and territory, as well as being ruled by different powers.

Jack's mistake is that he transforms self-determination into a panacea. Not only nations, but also communities united around religion or political allegiances could be supported in creating their own states. Lenin considered self-determination as a bourgeois democratic right that has to be subordinated to the struggle against imperialism and linked to the idea of making a socialist revolution. The CPGB does not put forward a strategy for socialist revolution and workers' republics. Its goal is first to achieve a capitalist federal republic.

A solution *à la* Germany would not convince either unionist or anti-unionist workers. In trying to transform a bourgeois democratic principle into an absolute one, Jack has ended up championing democratic rights for a privileged minority (unionists) and violating the democratic rights of the majority (the Irish nation as a whole). In trying to build a bridge to the unionist workers he creates even more confusion and the possibility of increased communal division.

The right to self-determination for a pro-imperialist community is completely rejected by everybody. The only way to win unionist workers to our side is by raising *class* and not *communal-separatist* demands, and by raising the strategy for an Irish united secular workers' republic, linked with Britain and Europe through a socialist federation ●

SWP conference

Here we reprint short extracts from the first two of the SWP's *Pre-conference discussion bulletin*. We have chosen the most interesting, or more accurately, the least dull, passages. For an organisation that got the Soviet Union wrong - the USSR was supposedly the "highest" form of "capitalism" - that voted New Labour in 1997 and for Arthur Scargill's SLP in 1999, which said it would never support Ken Livingstone for mayor because of his backing for Nato's Balkans War, which fielded independent candidates in the Scottish and Welsh elections, the SWP is amazing for its lack of critical thought and theoretical self-examination. That there are no serious voices of dissent from below is a product of a stifling regime: ie, bureaucratic, not democratic centralism. The SWP conference meets over November 12, 13 and 14 in London

New world disorder

The 1990s have been a decade of slow recovery in working class consciousness and combativity internationally. There has been no return to the working class offensive of the 1968-74 period, but by the same token there has been no repeat of the defeats of the 1980s. In Britain this recovery has largely been a question of radicalised consciousness, consisting of a more or less clearly anti-capitalist minority who reject Blairism in the name of reformism or left-reformist ideas ...

Blair too, as the council elections, Welsh assembly and Scottish parliament elections and the Hamilton South by-election show, is facing a powerful current of disillusionment. The nationalist challenge has exacerbated the crisis of Labourism in Scotland, but the creditable votes for the left, including SWP members, shows the potential for providing disillusioned Labour supporters with a socialist alternative ...

Disillusionment in the straightforward sense is only part of the crisis of Labourism. As well as union reps, Labour Party members and voters who are desperate to vent their frustration with the modernisers, there is also another reaction to the failure of the government. The movement against the Balkan War, the summer's massive Cancel the Debt demonstrations, the weekday Carnival Against Capitalism, the anger around East Timor all point to a politicisation which does not necessarily take the failures of Labourism as its initial point of departure, although few on these demonstrations have much faith in Blair either. This reaction is particularly marked in the colleges, but many trade unionists and Labour Party members are among those who are filling the vacuum on the left with protests different in kind to the traditional Labour left organisation.

The shedding of illusions in Blair has mostly led to a leftwing consciousness - but it is far from inevitable that this will always be the case. Neither is it currently true that the generally leftwing mood means that there is a leftwing mood on all issues. The refugee scare is enough to remind us that the Labour right (and the Tory right and the far right beyond them) will want to use those issues on which their views command support to turn the general tide against the left. This was the pattern in Labour Britain in the late 1970s. This does not mean that it is inevitable it will happen again; merely that it will require active political intervention to create the socialist alternative which can block such developments.

The sporadic and partial nature of the revival in struggle, the often hidden degree of radicalisation in consciousness, presents a challenge to revolutionaries. On the one hand, there are great opportunities. To lead the rest of the left in three successive years' lobbies of the Labour Party conference, to be the organisational and intellectual centre of the anti-war

movement during the Balkan War, and to have led the way in solidarity for the Indonesian Revolution are all great achievements - but they simply would not be possible without the revival in working class consciousness which we have charted throughout the decade.

But in so far as this radicalisation does not result in a generalised upturn in struggle - and nowhere is this more the case than in Britain - the workplace struggle remains difficult territory and the trench warfare with the union bureaucracy remains a fact of life. Consequently, SWP branches must of necessity combine highly political intervention with a routine of organisation and politics which conserves the gains of one intervention for the next.

The nature of the period requires a great stress on subjective leadership and strong organisation. In the downturn emphasis on theory was combined with tight organisation. But the patterns of the struggle - and of course there were struggles - was almost universally in one direction. Whatever its other drawbacks, such a pattern allowed us to perfect a certain method of dealing with defeat. An upturn could provide a momentum to the organisation which would (as it did in the 1970s) cover all manner of faults, so long as we correctly related to the general struggle. But the mosaic nature of the current revival - more in consciousness than in struggle, more partial struggles than sustained struggles, more campaigns than industrial action - requires different strengths.

First and foremost it requires a high level of applied politics. Not just knowledge of Lenin and the national question, but also how it applies to the Kurdish PKK and East Timor. Not just permanent revolution, but also how it applies in Indonesia today. Not just the historic crimes of Labour, but a specific analysis of Blairism. Not just a general critique of the market, but how it imposes debt on the third world and neo-liberal austerity measures at home. Getting the analysis right and applying it in an anti-war meeting or at a debt demo is difficult in itself. But it becomes 10 times more difficult if the organisational structure of the branch is allowed to decay either during a campaign (because "there is so much going on") or between campaigns (because "there is nothing to help us in the outside world").

This is why the current perspective argues not only to combine a high level of politics with a high level of intervention, but also to combine both with a great stress on strengthening the organisational infrastructure of the SWP, most importantly the branch. In the first instance this means concentration on *Socialist Worker* sales and finance, but it also means fighting for sales of *Socialist Review* and *International Socialism*, for a good bookstall, for political meetings with good speakers who turn up, for looking after the new members, and so on. Without this combination

of intervention, politics and organisation, the crisis of Labourism will continue, but it will not result in the building of a revolutionary alternative to reformism.

Central committee

How we build

In an upturn, like that of the early 1970s, we were able to pull people round *Socialist Worker* and then recruit them. In a downturn like that of the 1980s we were winning ones and twos - often that involved lengthy discussion.

Today we are in neither an upturn nor a downturn. There is not an audience out there for us on the picket lines, nor are there the big-single issue campaigns like those that dominated the first half of the 1990s, from the poll tax to the Criminal Justice Bill ...

Once we establish that the way to build is through addressing the ideological turmoil out there, we have to set out ways in which we can build a bigger audience for our politics.

The way we keep and involve people in the party centres on two things - getting them *Socialist Worker* each week and getting them to make a commitment to the SWP by taking out a standing order to pay subs.

The sad reality is that too many people are not asked for subs. That means there is no sense of commitment, and too often they are not seen regularly or do not get *Socialist Worker* weekly ... Over the coming months we have to fight within the party for comrades to relate to the ideological crisis. We need to explain to comrades why, in September, petitioning round arms sales to Indonesia was the key to building in the workplace or anywhere else.

And we have to fight to rebuild the organisation of the branch. If that is not in place and not working, everything else falls. The branch is the key building block of the organisation. And key to the branch is the basic task of getting *Socialist Worker* to each member each week and getting every member to pay subs by standing order.

Central committee

Finance and membership

Every year we recruit hundreds of new members, who could be central to building more dynamic and political branches. Yet all too often their subs are not sorted out or, if they are, a nominal amount of cash subs is put down which is never collected.

The effect of this as that every year at re-registration time they end up on the list of unregistered members.

Something like 80% of unregistered members are down as cash subs payers. The reality is that cash subs = no subs = no member, but, more than this, it creates a cynicism about recruitment. When Lenin argued to "open the gates of the party", he did not argue for a revolving door policy in which we lose the potential of this new layer of comrades by chucking

them out the other end from the branches.

Most of these people who joined wanted to see a different world. They would have seen our brilliant interventions and believed we were a well oiled political machine. The possibility of them seeing us as a real alternative will have been knocked by the fact that we do not take them seriously. We don't even bother sorting out or collecting their subs, a simple process which makes them feel part of something. We therefore want to fight to get as many of our members onto standing orders as possible ...

Central committee

Reformism and class polarisation in Europe

Ten years ago, at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, most of the far left in Europe agreed on one thing with mainstream social democrats and conservatives alike. The collapse of the old eastern bloc, they all agreed, was an enormous setback for the left and for the class struggle. This was, for instance, the perspective both of Ernest Mandel, the major theoretician of the Fourth International, and of Lutte Ouvrière in France.

We argued, by contrast, that we were entering a new period of instability in Europe and worldwide, characterised by radicalisation both on the left and on the right. This was already shown in the late 1980s by a then very limited revival of the class struggle and the left in West Germany and by a stronger growth of Le Pen's fascists in France, as analysed in Alex Callinicos's article, 'Crisis and class struggle in Europe', in *International Socialism* 63 (summer 1994).

The first half of the 1990s were a clear vindication of our analysis. ...

Conditions are easier for revolutionaries today than they were in the 1930s, but that does not mean that workers moving to the left are automatically going to come to a correct understanding of how to fight. Whether they do so or not depends on the ability of revolutionaries to agitate ideologically and politically as well as over economic issues. And the whole experience of the workers' movement over the last two centuries is that there is a bitter price to be paid for not understanding how to fight ...

Central committee

Suggestions

I urge comrades reading this to do so with an open mind and not to be immediately defensive. I write these suggestions as a Leninist, not as a member of any 'faction', or anything else. This is not a critique of democratic centralism.

1) Any documents/bulletins produced prior to party councils/national meetings do not seem to give scope for the membership, in addition to the centre, to make contributions beforehand. Such a document, like the *Pre-conference bulletin*, should exist. This could also help the branches

shape the actual agenda of national meetings, which appear to be limited to certain things.

2) The choice of who is actually allowed to speak at such events appears, at least, to be somewhat arbitrary. If this is the case, then a 'first come, first served' principle should be applied instead.

3) I have known of comrades in other districts who are not entirely happy with the behaviour of their district organisers. This is often the case, yet while the central committee is elected at conference, comrades are at best unaware of what they can actually do about this. Therefore, branches/districts should be entitled to take a vote of confidence/re-elect district organisers. The same principle should be applied to the likes of student organiser and similar posts.

4) Elections within the party in general should be on the basis of individuals and not slates.

5) As has previously been suggested, there should exist a 'right to reply' facility at conference for members who make contributions in the *Pre-conference bulletins* but who have not been elected to go to conference. Even if these members have not won the argument within their own branch, they should still have the opportunity - their arguments may strike a chord with comrades in other branches. In any case, without this opportunity, there is a danger that the voice of some comrades will not be heard.

Strong chairing and disciplined procedure should ensure that not too much time is wasted.

6) The party should issue an official statement concerning our attitude to other organisations on the left. Too often we seem to dismiss them as "sectarian" for no other reason than they are smaller than we are. This is wrong.

7) An end to the 'top ten' paper-selling branches list. Party members should sell papers out of political commitment, not to beat other branches. The impression the top ten gives is, I feel, the latter.

To comrades who are automatically defensive to these suggestions, please realise that it is possible to accept all these criticisms while keeping the party's Leninism intact.

Paul Jenkins
Barrow-in-Furness

International fund

I have noticed from the list in *International Socialism* that our sister organisation in France is no longer listed in our tendency. Alex Callinicos, in his report to conference in 1997, suggested that revolutionary socialist organisations have to find the most favourable milieu to work in. It may be that this sister organisation still exists and is working within a milieu which makes it difficult to list its existence openly, or it may have ceased to exist. In the proposed report, issues such as this could be brought to contributors' attention ...

Ian Thomas
Newport branch

Scargill and Scargillism

Dave Osler discusses the lessons he draws from two years of SLP membership

I was a member of the Socialist Labour Party during its heyday, during the two years when it was possibly a viable force in working class politics. For everyone on the left who wants to see some sort of party of regroupment - and there is an increasing realisation that we all *should* be in such an organisation - there is a need to take on board the lessons of the SLP.

It was a promising project for the construction of a socialist party in Britain, but has reached a dead end. I use the term 'dead end' rather than 'dead', because, as both the Greens and the UK Independence Party have illustrated recently, it is not actually essential for a party to have a mass membership, or even large financial backing, to be at least minimally electorally viable. It is also quite apparent that the SLP is not going to shut up shop tomorrow. It was Trotsky who remarked upon the capacity of some of the worst sects to become ossified and survive for decades in splendid isolation.

So the SLP is still going to be with us. But, that said, it is certainly shrinking numerically very rapidly, and there is now zero prospect of any trade union affiliating at a national level. I would also suggest that, even if there was some sort of split from New Labour, or for example the expulsion of the left wing of the parliamentary Labour Party, the vast majority, perhaps with a handful of exceptions, would not see the SLP as a political home.

However, it would be wrong to demonise Scargill as an individual regarding what happened to that party. There are other people who must take the blame for some of that, including some past comrades of mine from the Fourth International tradition, who played a major role in stymieing the development of the SLP.

In fact Scargill has very many positive characteristics. He is willing to engage in and lead class struggle. His personal courage (as opposed to his political judgement) in the 1984-5 miners' strike is beyond question. That certainly sets him qualitatively apart from any other trade union bureaucrat in Britain today. The tragedy was that during the 1992 pit closure crisis Scargill was adapting to public-opinion-shaping tactics. Whatever his political courage, he has not set about the task of systematically constructing some sort of opposition to past collaborationism within the trade union bureaucracy, largely of course because he is himself a bureaucrat.

Let us then look at what Scargillism is, what it represents. Politically it has been shaped by three main strands: Stalinism, syndicalism and the Yorkshire National Union of Mineworkers tradition. Another considerable factor is his own personal characteristics, which include an ego not much smaller than the Yorkshire coalfield itself - and a not inconsiderable capacity for self-delusion.

First Stalinism. I think Scargill has probably been embarrassed by the *Weekly Worker's* revelations of comrade Brar's little Eurostar jaunts to the Belgium Maoists. But politically he would not dissent from the content of the remarks Brar makes. It might be inopportune at a time when he is trying to distance himself from Stalinism, but, based on some conversations I have had with him, yes, he is very much a Stalinist of the old school -

.....
He seems totally untroubled by self-doubt, and will not brook any criticism whatsoever

they don't make them like that any more. His political apprenticeship in the Young Communist League left him with a vision that is essentially a reformist road to an authoritarian state. His support for Jaruzelski and the crackdown on Solidarnosc in 1982 proves quite conclusively that he does not cavil at the idea of using tanks to smash mass workers' uprisings.

Stalinism gave Scargill his broad left orientation within the trade union bureaucracy. His own rise was premised on almost a lifelong project to capture the apparatus of the NUM. The essence of this is the achievement of a left bureaucracy instead of a right one. It is actually counterposed to an orientation of socialism from below, one of seeking to unite the rank and file against the bureaucracy itself. Paradoxically, initially at least, Scargill's own bureaucratic project entailed actually organising the rank and file as a pressure group on the trade union bureaucracy. This came about in the shape of the Barnsley Miners Forum, which was the basis of Scargill's subsequent rise. This was a group in the 60s informed by Stalinism and syndicalism, but not actually a Communist Party front organisation.

So, if the man is a Stalinist, why then the organisational break? He never actually joined the CP - his career stopped in the YCL. Why was that? The CP was in the 60s arguably a viable party, if deeply flawed politically. It still had an independent and powerful existence. It was seen as a party that an aspiring careerist in the trade union movement could join - probably no hindrance; possibly even a help in some unions.

This is where we see the influence of syndicalism - the belief that trade unions, in and of themselves, are an adequate vehicle to take on capitalism. I think Scargill looked upon the NUM, which at that time had hundreds of thousands of members, as almost a party. In comparison the CPGB was small beer. What he saw was a Scargillite cadre force with a large bank account, a mass membership and socialist influence across wide areas of Britain.

In 1966 Scargill joined the Labour Party, while retaining CPGB politics - the *British road*, based on the perspective of electing a leftwing Labour government. In the meantime he had placed himself at the head of what was essentially a spontaneous upsurge in miners' industrial activity in the late 60s and early 70s, particularly in Yorkshire. The apex was Saltley Gates in

1972, which catapulted Scargill very much onto the national stage, at least in terms of the media. Subsequently he was able to capture the Yorkshire presidency of the NUM and, on the retirement of Joe Gormley in 1981, the national presidency.

Scargill's finest hour was undoubtedly the miners' strike of 1984-5. It has to be said that he never betrayed the strike - where he was culpable was in lacking a strategy to bring the dispute to victory. This flowed from his inability to break from the trade union bureaucracy, to appeal for solidarity to the rank and file, if necessary illegally. One of the key turning points was when the dockers came out over a separate issue. Instead of appealing to them to deepen and intensify their action, thus breaking with the leadership of the Transport and General Workers Union and the TUC, Scargill actually went on television and stressed that the disputes were separate.

It later emerged that whole sections of the TUC leadership were in active collaboration with the Tory Party and the right in order to weaken the strike - most notably Bill Sirs of the ISTC, who was in receipt of honorariums from Tory-linked trusts to try to buy off steelworkers, signing local deals with regional NUM officials to undermine the dispute.

Scargill went wrong because he did not break with the bureaucracy throughout the course of the dispute. Since then we have lived through the consequences of that defeat: the isolation of the left as a whole within society, as well as the isolation of Scargill himself within the labour movement. He was a victim of a vicious witch hunt in the national press and socialists were quite right to defend him. It was possibly one of the most sustained media campaigns to blacken an individual's name in British post-war history - quite remarkable in its way.

This must have cost him a lot of support amongst his own constituency within the coalfields. If you throw enough shit, some of it does stick. Eventually Scargill did lose his seat on the TUC general council and by 1992 we saw the man who had led a mass class struggle less than a decade earlier basically reliant on a popular frontist, media-driven strategy against pit closures - marches of hoteliers in Cheltenham, sharing platforms with bishops.

By 1993 Scargill was making speeches effectively calling for the foundation of a new political party. Much of this occurred in the form of the 'Unshackle the unions' campaign, in which the Sikorskis and Brian Heron were officers. This was in effect, even at this stage, the nucleus of what was to become the SLP, launched formally in 1996.

Right from the start - and I know many people have personal experience of this - the SLP was, to say the least, marred by a certain lack of internal democracy - a reflection of left social democratic politics. Political confusion, though, did reign within the party. Scargill would often make rhetorical nods towards Marxism. However, I remember being with him in Newport East during the 1997 general election campaign. While he was stopping to talk with an elderly couple, somebody started talking about revolutionary socialism and class struggle. He knocked them down. Later I had a private word with him. I said, "Come on, Arthur, you're a Marxist, for god's sake. Why have you got a problem with people using Marxist terms?" He replied: "Yes, but not in front of our Rene."

The Marxism is only for the internal consumption of the SLP elite. The rest are handed the left social democratic platitudes in the official party policy statements.

Within 18 months the atmosphere had actually become too poisonous for those accustomed to even the most minimal degree of labour movement democracy. There has been a substantial outflux of the best elements of the membership and we are left, effectively since the 1997 congress, with the rump we see today.

As well as these political influences, Scargill's personality can fairly be described as authoritarian. He seems totally untroubled by self-doubt, and will not brook any criticism whatsoever, with the resulting ossification of the SLP - a small sect with little clout and even poorer prospects. Perhaps in a way it is reminiscent of the SPGB, who constantly reassure us that they have several hundred members, but, because they fail to intersect with the rest of the left and society as a whole, we have no way of knowing that. Maybe that is the fate of the SLP as well.

That said, I think the CPGB's characterisation of the SLP as "red-brown" is a polemical exaggeration. Scargill's strategy is nationally based and little Englander, but no more so than the CPGB as was. Certainly there is no evidence of collusion with anti-semitic or fascist elements, for instance. The phrase does not just denote socialism in one country: it has been used specifically to refer to the links between the Russian CP and Zhirinovskiy-type elements. It is an unfair grenade to lob at Scargill - let's face it, there is enough other ammunition.

To conclude, after the historical experiences of the 20th century, I am more and more of the opinion that we have to stress that socialism is an emancipatory project rather than an authoritarian one. We do need party regimes based on internal democracy. We do have to get as far away as we possibly can from the disastrous legacy of Stalinism, both in its organisational forms and even in its symbolism and its speech.

The experience of the collapse of eastern Europe has left Stalinism comprehensively discredited, so I do not believe we will see *new* mass Stalinist formations or any sizeable socialist organisations that are authoritarian. There are of course thriving Stalinist formations in the third world. If a new

Livingstone formation turned out to be an SLP mark II, then it would stay small. Similarly if people like John Nicholson and Dave Nellist continue down the road that they seem intent on following, then that too will kill the potential for growth of the socialist alliances.

We do have to take on board the insights of feminism and environmentalism. To some extent environmentalism is where anti-capitalism is at, especially as far as young people are concerned. To put it in stark terms, the far left must start recruiting young people or it will be dead in a couple of generations. There is now a noticeable age gap - there are precious few people under 30. Young people are getting involved with activities like destroying GMO crops, targeting nuclear-carrier ships. We should be looking to recruit from those layers. We need to explain how our ideas as Marxists complement their ideas, and the role of capitalism as the system that is destroying the planet. This is as sensible as an orientation towards students and popular music was in the past. I make no apologies for saying this.

The party of recomposition is no more a pipe dream, no more something to be invented, than the future mass Communist Party. It is a viable project to work for. Of course I would be in the forefront of those arguing for the freedom of revolutionary Marxist currents to exist within it. We have the good example of Bandiera Rossa, who exist as a Trotskyist current within Rifondazione Comunista, openly affiliated to the Fourth International, with its own journal and with leadership comrades elected on a Bandiera Rossa ticket. That provides a model of how a party of recomposition could function democratically with a revolutionary Marxist-Trotskyist current within it.

Those seriously arguing for a Bolshevik-Leninist democratic centralist formation are very much a minority. On crucial questions, yes, the membership has to act together. What we in Socialist Democracy do not like is the way democratic centralism has operated in party regimes in the past. Personally I think that the term is indelibly stained. We should be a democratic organisation and leave it at that.

That will mean moving away from such formations as the SLP, towards the building of a broader party of recomposition - a socialist party in Britain ●

Fighting fund

Word and deed

Disappointingly, October's fund fell short of our monthly £400 target, finishing with £354. Comrades, we *must* reach this total consistently, not only to continue providing the kind of quality our readers have come to expect, but also to expand and improve the *Weekly Worker's* contents still further.

For instance we are intending to carry extra pages in our pre-Christmas edition this year, but such plans can only be implemented and built upon with your help.

Why is it that so many readers

and contributors commend us for our openness and honest striving for the truth, yet fail to back up their words with deeds to match? To be frank, comrades, you need to put your money where your mouth is.

We start November's fund with £45, including an excellent donation of £25 from HG ●

Robbie Rix

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

Australian referendum

Grasp the nettle

The constitutional referendum in Australia looks set to be a cliff-hanger. Recent polls suggest a slim majority nationwide will vote 'yes' to the republic on offer on November 6. Unfortunately for the 'yes' campaign this will be distributed unevenly amongst the country's six states. As well as requiring a majority of voters, successful referenda in Australia also require a majority in a majority of states.

Polls are putting the 'yes' vote at around 49% with the 'no' camp recording about 47%. However, while the most heavily populated states of New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria are likely to vote 'yes', the peripheral and more conservative Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia look set to vote 'no'.

Importantly, the question is not whether Australia should be a republic, but whether you approve a republican model with a president with reserve powers appointed by parliament. Polls suggest that if the republican model on offer was for a president directly elected by the people, then more than 60% would vote 'yes'.

This situation has split the mainstream republican camp, with a significant minority advocating a 'no' vote. The question, set by monarchist - and Liberal Party - prime minister John Howard, after recommendations from a partially elected constitutional convention, has been cynically designed to split the republican camp.

However, in all debates, what has been lacking is the third choice in this referendum. It can, though, still be created, using the referendum as a springboard. While voting is compulsory in Australia, the ballot is secret. Each elector may do what they like to their ballot paper.

On November 6, Australians are being offered a false choice. They are being asked to choose between the unelectable and the unacceptable. No one who cherishes genuine democracy wants anything to do with the monarchy, an institution which symbolises privilege, inequality and unaccountability. Yet what a 'yes' vote would mean is a continuation of a monarchical system in presidential form. Such a minimalist constitutional change is designed to keep ordinary Australians as removed from the real political process as they are today. It

will be change to prevent further change.

Most Australians recognise the false debate taking place. From the monarchists who refuse to mention the monarchy, the republicans who refuse to discuss what sort of republic, to the supposed 'radical republicans' who, amazingly, will vote for the continuation of the status quo - the entire debate has been one of shadows.

The 'no' republicans at least realise that there is a stitch-up. Yet they are making themselves indistinguishable from the monarchist 'no' camp. Ted Mack, Phil Clearly and the other 'no' republicans hope that by defeating the establishment of an undemocratic republic, they will force a vote on a democratic one. Yet their 'no' votes will be indistinguishable from John Howard's and other monarchists' come November 6. They have no way of making their voice heard. They will force nothing.

Democratic republicans cannot vote 'yes' either, as this will be endorsing a most undemocratic form of republic. Hidden in this campaign is the fact that the president will retain the powers of the royal prerogative. For instance:

- The president will have the power to sack the government of the day and call elections without the approval of parliament or the prime minister. The constitution has a proposed new section 70a. It reads: "Continuation of prerogative: ... in particular, any such prerogative enjoyed by the governor-general shall be enjoyed by the president."

- Ultimate political power will be in the hands of the president, not the people. The proposed section 59 of the constitution, 'Executive power', makes it clear: "There shall be a Federal Executive Council to advise the president in the government of the Commonwealth, and the members of the Council shall be chosen and summoned by the president and sworn as Executive Councillors, and shall hold office during the pleasure of the president." Legislation cannot become law unless passed through this presidential royal court.

- The president will be able to reject parliamentary bills. The president will be able to reject laws passed by parliament.

For a real republic

At the Australian High Commission in London the CRR has been distributing leaflets calling for an informal 'democratic republic' vote. It has hit a real chord among expatriate electors - 22,000 are expected to turn up at Australia House.

Individuals previously supporting either the 'yes' or 'no' campaigns have been so impressed by our arguments that they have actually begun to hand out CRR leaflets instead. The response is extremely encouraging. The spokesperson for the CRR in London, has been interviewed by Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* and Brazil's *Falho de Sao Paulo*. This week, campaigners will be leafleting at Australia House and at the London perform-

ance of Yothu Yindi, Australia's best known predominantly Aboriginal band. Their hit song, 'Treaty', calls for a democratic treaty between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia - one of the CRR's demands.

People are genuinely relieved that there is a third choice, that they do not have to be corralled into either of the mainstream bourgeois campaigns for 'yes' or 'no'. It is the way to be heard through the ballot box. An informal vote is not a wasted vote.

Democratic republicans in Australia campaigning around the CRR's slogans will be able to claim the informal vote as theirs and go on to cohere a fighting organisation demanding real constitutional change from below ●

- There is no power to impeach. Only the PM can sack the president ... if the reverse doesn't happen first. An indirectly elected president who retains 'reserve powers' is the worst of both worlds. With both the president and the prime minister retaining power to sack each other, in the event of a constitutional crisis it will be a case of who draws first.

In this referendum there is, however, the inkling of the third choice that establishment politicians dare not mention. Voters are being urged by the Campaign for a Real Republic to refuse to answer a loaded question and instead write 'democratic republic' across the ballot paper.

A mass of voters in Tasmania employed a similar tactic in 1982 when 38% of them wrote 'No dams' across their ballot paper. The next year, the Franklin-below-Gordon River wilderness area became a protected World Heritage site.

On the night of November 6, there will be three piles of votes counted: 'yes', 'no' and informal. Revolutionary democrats such as the CRR want to see the highest possible informal vote; at the same time the CRR is campaigning for a constitutional convention with full powers to abolish the monarchical system and replace it with a genuinely democratic centralist republic.

If Australia is not a republic now, switching to an undemocratic form of presidentialism will not make it a fully democratic republic later. A democratic republic can only be a society where power is invested in the fully mobilised people, headed by the working class, not a political or economic elite. The current proposal is not a 'step in the right direction', as the left of the 'yes' campaign suggests. It is more of the same truncated bourgeois democracy in different form.

In an amazing display of shortsightedness influenced by worse theory, the left in Australia is letting an excellent opportunity pass it by. The Democratic Socialist Party and the

rump of the Eurocommunists in the Search Foundation have politically equivalent, yet separate calls, to vote 'yes' but, like Oliver Twist, meekly ask for more. True to form, the DSP is capitulating to the populist mood by actually endorsing a directly elected president - an anathema for Marxists who oppose all presidential systems whereby one individual can claim to speak on behalf of the whole country. The DSP campaign has even less gumption than the 'no' republicans, who also favour a directly elected head of state. The DSP pathetically calls for a 'yes' vote, alongside the plaintive epithet, "elected by the people".

The International Socialist Organisation advises a 'no' vote, lacking the courage or imagination to call for an active informal vote. The ISO's slogan, 'Stuff the bosses' republic: fight for real change', is ultra-left economism. It crudely counterposes phoney *political* change from above with 'real' *economic* change from below. The 'official' Communist Party of Australia is uncritically calling for a 'yes' vote.

Trapped by economism and the Menshevik 'theory' of bourgeois democratic revolution, the left has been content to leave the debate to the bourgeois and political elite. A united left grabbing hold of this political chance could have fought for and won a real place in Australian political life. Instead, the sects seem content to remain on the fringe. As the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's Martin Thomas puts it so succinctly, "Why not vote 'yes' - on the obvious grounds that we prefer a republic to a monarchy - while saying that we want radical democratic reform?" But do we prefer *this* republic to a monarchy? There is nothing concrete in comrade Thomas's position, just poor Menshevik theory. ('We obviously prefer the tsar's duma to no duma at all'.) We've heard it all before. ●

Marcus Larsen

RCN debates

Saturday November 30 saw the Republican Communist Network debating 'international socialism' as a slogan. The school was the first in a number of educationals looking at the slogan from various perspectives with a view to deciding whether it should be included in the RCN platform.

The meeting was made up of RCN members plus visitors from various organisations. Papers were presented from Dave Craig (Revolutionary Democratic Group), Allan Armstrong (Communist Tendency), Jack Conrad (CPGB) and Mary Ward (Campaign for a Federal Republic) to open the debate. Only Allan Armstrong's paper argued against the inclusion of 'international socialism' as a slogan, while Dave Craig argued for an alternative wording of 'international socialist revolution'.

All present accepted the need for any revolution to be internationalised if it were to be successful. The crux of this particular debate centred around the question of how

far any workers' state could go in terms of uprooting the law of value.

Debate was fraternal and at a high level, although many comrades still had genuine difficulty in understanding why members of the Communist Tendency found the slogan unacceptable, given that they clearly rejected any notion of socialism in one country. Allan stated that such a slogan could be used to prevent workers from taking action: forcing them instead to wait for the working class in other countries to catch up.

RCN members made it clear that this organisation gives theoretical discussion a high priority, but this must also be linked to practice - particularly at this stage: our work in establishing a communist pole of attraction within the Scottish Socialist Party.

The debate goes on, but so too does our fight against political opportunism and sectarianism ●

Mary Ward
Secretary, RCN

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Simon Harvey of the SLP

Arthur's coup d'état

Socialist Labour's membership is this weekend faced with a proposal to give the last vestige of democratic control over our organisation's affairs.

Immediately after the business of the 3rd Congress has been completed on Sunday, there will be a special congress with the sole purpose of amending the SLP constitution to make this the final annual gathering in our party's short history. General secretary Arthur Scargill looks set to achieve his aim of doing away with the party's sovereign body and having the national executive committee's proposal for three-yearly congresses rubber-stamped.

Scargill first aired this change over a year ago at the September 1998 meeting of the NEC, but was outvoted by a clear majority. Even after ridding the executive (and subsequently the party) of followers of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus (Fisc) at last year's special congress, he had apparently been unable to carry the new NEC wholeheartedly behind this blatantly undemocratic move.

When motions and constitutional amendments for this weekend's congress were circulated to branches 12 weeks ago, quite remarkably they contained not a single proposal from the NEC itself. This was because it would not agree to Scargill's demands. Even for those elected on a 'Campaign to support Scargill and the national leadership of the Socialist Labour Party' slate, the three-yearly proposal seemed to be a step too far.

Yet Scargill now reports, in a circular to branches received a week ago, that the October NEC "unanimously agreed" the change. Of course similar unanimity was declared last year when the 1998 annual congress was "postponed" and replaced by a special congress, but this masked the schismatic divisions that later came to light. Be that as it may, Scargill has now, by fair means or foul, imposed his will on the NEC. As usual, he dreams up a militant-sounding excuse for this latest intensification of his dictatorship. By reducing the "bureaucratic day-to-day administrative work" the abolition of annual congresses would, he claims, free up the party for more effective action. You see, the SLP must be "a campaigning party, not just an administrative party".

But NEC agreement came too late for the annual congress. However, a special congress may be called by the NEC at any time. Constitutional amendments require a two-thirds majority. But, even if most Constituency SLPs vote against the proposal to remove their rights, it can if necessary be forced through using the 3,000 votes wielded by the delegates of the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association. The NWCCMA is a retired miners' club funded by the National Union of Mineworkers, whose officers include Scargill's loyal lieutenants, NEC member Paul



King Arthur: ruling nothing

Hardman and Billy Kelly.

Along with the NWCCMA, Sheffield Ucat is still affiliated (my statement last week that the national union leadership has forced the branch to disaffiliate was not accurate - Sheffield is still holding out against the wishes of the Ucat tops). These two organisations determine the seven trade union representatives on the NEC and this year have proposed Chris Herriot of Unison and Ron Sinclair of Ucat to replace John Hendy and Linda Muir. Comrade Hendy has unsurprisingly decided to call it a day in view of Scargill's riding roughshod over the constitution he had helped draft with such loving care, while comrade Muir is standing down from the NEC in order to contest the vice-presidency.

She has a three-cornered fight on her hands, being opposed by both Harpal Brar and Imran Khan. Interestingly the NWCCMA has not proposed any of the candidates. In all likelihood comrades Kelly and Hardman intend to abstain, withholding their 3,000 votes, as they did last year in the contest between Fisc's Patrick Sikorski and Royston Bull, editor of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*. However, in 1998 Sheffield Ucat backed the winner (Bull) and this year has proposed comrade Muir, who is, incidentally, currently seeking nominations to contest the general secretary's post of Unison - in opposition to the candidate of the united left, Roger Bannister.

Unlike Muir, comrade Brar is also standing for the NEC constituency section, indicating the relative confidence of the two main candidates for the vice-presidency. Comrade Khan is proposed only by Lewes CSLP and, although he can be expected to pick up votes from branches up and down the country, has no chance in view of his past association with Fisc.

President Frank Cave is unopposed, but Scargill himself is challenged by EPSR man Jim Doohar, who is backed by Liverpool Walton alone, while our current leader is proposed by no fewer than 25 CSLPs, along

with the NWCCMA and Sheffield Ucat.

The EPSR of course split over its attitude to the SLP. When comrade Bull was hauled before a disciplinary panel for refusing to close down his cut-and-paste journal, and was finally 'lapsed' last April for non-payment of dues, most of his followers fell behind their guru's new stance of vitriolic hostility towards Scargill. But a minority, including current NEC members Dave Roberts and Sohan (Paul) Singh, continue to view the SLP as a splendid vehicle for advancing their own peculiar form of Stalinism.

As a result the 'Campaign to support Scargill' slate for the NEC constituency section is still intact, backed by a hard core of 10 CSLPs. It includes not only comrades Roberts, Singh and Brar, but sitting members Brian Gibson, Bridget Bell and Jim McDaid. Darran Hickery, who is not seeking re-election, looks like being replaced by another Scargill loyalist, Liz Screen. They are opposed by a left-liberal alliance of Imran Khan, John Hayball, Nathan Parkin, Geoff Palmer, Dave Walker and Katrina Howse.

Comrade Brar will have the support of three close followers on the new NEC - Amanda Rose and Ella Rule, representing the national women's section, and his son, Ranjeet, for the youth section. All three are unopposed.

A total of 55 CSLPs have been involved in the pre-congress nomination and proposal procedure. Only 28 branches proposed motions or constitutional amendments, of which eight were ruled out of order. Amongst the latter are two EPSR rants, demanding amongst other things the "immediate reinstatement of the vice-president" (ie, Bull).

The excluded motion from Coventry North West also calls for the establishment of an SLP theoretical journal based on the "central positions" of the EPSR and *Lalkar* (officially the organ of the Indian Workers Association, edited by comrade Brar). The role of the proposed new publication would be to "unleash a resolute polemical confrontation against all the defeatist, anti-communist confusion" put out by, amongst others, the SWP, Socialist Party and *Weekly Worker*.

Tooting CSLP is less keen on *Lalkar*, but stresses the key role of the EPSR - "run by the staunchest SLP supporters" - in "political education". Both motions are deemed unacceptable by the NEC, because "it is impossible to call for the reinstatement of a vice-president who ceased to be a member of the Socialist Labour Party", and because they call for "a journal not under the control of the party" to become "an organ for promoting the party".

Also excluded are two other bizarre motions. Brigg and Goole calls mysteriously for the employment of "the democratic centralist method" in

party elections, as opposed to "the OMOV so beloved of our enemies". We will never know what the comrades mean, as Scargill has ruled that the motion cannot be allowed, since it has "the aim of instructing the NEC to produce a completely new system of voting" without attempting to amend the constitution. Finally an identical motion from three Merseyside CSLPs is simply declared to be "contrary to the SLP's constitution". It reads: "That the executive of the SLP initiate an amalgamation of all socialist parties currently registered within the party." Pardon?

Among the other motions that do make it onto the congress agenda is a call from Barnsley West and Penistone for a show trial of Blair, Cook and Robertson (by whom?) because of their role in Nato's air assault on Yugoslavia. But Ealing and Southall's amendment wants to combine pacifism at home with support for terror abroad: "Nato troops should leave Kosovo". But in the absence of any mention of the Kosovar Albanians, the call "to allow the Yugoslav people to determine their own internal affairs" is actually a coded invitation for Milosevic to restart his brutal programme of ethnic cleansing.

The motion from Hackney North and Stoke Newington on 'Britain and Europe' reads like a compromise reached between comrades of opposing views. It starts promisingly by noting, "Whether in or out of their European Union, the capitalist class will attack the rights and the living standards of the working class and oppressed throughout Britain." Absolutely right. But in diametric contradiction to this statement, the motion calls for a "campaign for withdrawal from the European Union, while equally opposing a capitalist Britain standing alone". Talk about confusion. But Scargill will be quite happy to go along with it, as demonstrated by an amendment from the Scargillite Bristol East CSLP, which leaves the Hackney text intact, while congratulating the NEC on standing a full list of candidates in the EU elections, and on "an excellent SLP TV broadcast".

Amazingly, I find myself in almost total agreement with a motion from an EPSR branch - possibly because it is commendably, but uncharacteristically, brief. Wansdyke CSLP condemns import controls as "a reactionary imposition on the workers' movement, playing into the hands of the ruling class". Another motion I have no hesitation in supporting is Huddersfield's call for "a comradely dialogue with others on the left". From a position of loyalty to Scargill it suggests: "Agreements could be reached in local, assembly and general elections for socialists not to stand against each other."

Bootle is "appalled at the decision to disband the Merseyside regional party" taken earlier this year. The branch blames the closure, precipi-

tated by Scargill himself, for the "poor vote for the SLP in the recent [EU] elections, when the BNP achieved a higher percentage vote". In fact the SLP's return in the North West region (just over one percent) was the third highest in the country. It is correct to oppose Scargill's bureaucratic control politics, but with the present virtual absence of working class self-activity his antics have next to no effect on electoral support.

Two motions ask for *Socialist News* to be published more regularly, while Birkenhead believes that the key is to get the paper into "the hands of the non-voting public". The trump card of Lewes CSLP, coordinator of the left-liberal opposition, is the demand for a regular internal discussion bulletin, providing a forum for "the open exchange of debate and ideas". Comrades from nearby Brighton Pavilion, by contrast, think that a better idea would be an SLP "think-tank".

A long motion from Colne Valley commends the advisability of "uniting people from different traditions" and tolerating a "diversity of views". This also means "avoiding sectarian ideas and methods in our dealings with fellow socialists ... both inside and outside the party". The Wansdyke EPSR comrades attempt to 'correct' this motion with the help of an equally lengthy amendment, extolling the virtues of "Marxist science" and "recognising the achievements of the workers' states, past and present". The amendment praises the SLP for "striking together" with others in events such as anti-Nato demonstrations and the Reclaim Our Rights campaign, but condemns any electoral alliances with the same forces as "opportunists". It does, however, call for the "active encouragement of polemical exchange within the columns of *Socialist News*".

Erewash CSLP attempts to amend a seemingly unconnected motion on Socialist Labour's work relating to local authorities with the "request that all members of this party be recommended to withdraw trade union political levy from the New Labour Party". Such a move by a couple of hundred individuals would be worse than useless. The aim must be to break from Labour in an *organised*, positive way. Why cut yourself off from the furor within the AEEU, for instance, over the union's refusal to ballot the membership over Labour's candidate for London mayor?

These motions - along with other more mundane, less controversial proposals - demonstrate clearly that even within the declining force that is the SLP there is a desire to debate, fight for one's view and influence the course of our movement.

In order to further cement his rule as labour dictator Scargill wants to stifle any trace of independent initiative. It is absolutely guaranteed that he will drive away yet more members in the process ●