

SLP abolishes annual congress

CPB in merger talks

Socialist Labour last weekend took another step towards the complete obliteration of any trace of independence or initiative. Members voted to voluntarily relinquish their theoretical right to exercise sovereignty over the party through annual congress, and agreed to Arthur Scargill's demand to replace the annual gathering with three-yearly congresses. So the SLP's third annual congress, held on Saturday November 6 and Sunday November 7 in London's Conway Hall, was also its last.

At first it seemed that Scargill would have a fight on his hands. A section of the membership - concentrated in particular in the North East - was vehemently opposed to the move. These comrades put up posters around the venue, including in the congress hall itself, demanding, "No three-yearly congresses". This led to some bitter scenes, as, on Scargill's instructions, they were removed, only to be put back in position by a North East member, loudly proclaiming that the SLP was not "fascist" yet.

These oppositionists made their first move on the Saturday morning, when they challenged the fact that Scargill intended to force through these changes late on Sunday afternoon in a special congress held immediately after the annual event. Why was it that the NEC "chose not to put a constitutional amendment to this congress?" demanded Ken Hall from Redcar. The last-minute call for a special congress had not allowed branches the time to discuss the implications of the change, and the North East comrades stated they had already arranged to return home early Sunday afternoon. This meant they would have no say in the removal of their rights.

However, comrade Hall's challenge to the chair was made on technical, not political, grounds. He claimed, wrongly, that only annual congress, not a special congress, could change the constitution. Only 20 delegates or so out of around 140 backed this move. The opposition petered out almost before it began, since many delegates did not bother to return the next day, when attendance was reduced to about 90.

Scargill had justified the change by falsely counterposing the need to get involved in "campaigning work" to "day-to-day administrative work" (circular, October 25). Speaking in Sun-

day's debate, he complained of all the wasted "time, effort and energy" needed to organise congress - "a nine-month bureaucratic nightmare". However, he said, "this is not being done to stifle democracy." Of course not. It was perfectly normal for workers' organisations and communist parties to hold their congresses only once every *four* years - he cited the Communist Party of Cuba, whose representative, Teresita Trujillo Hernandez, had been given a rousing ovation the previous day.

The SLP general secretary went on to mount a philistine attack on internal discussion, which he condemned as "navel-gazing". Only around half the motions congress had discussed over the weekend concerned SLP policy, he said, as opposed to party organisation: "If we're going to have this debate all the time one against the other, we're not going to build this party. Let's stop the internecine warfare in here." And why complain, Scargill went on, when the constitution already prohibits the same motion being proposed in two consecutive years in any case?

In parallel with the proposal to abolish annual congress, the membership was asked to vote in another change - giving the NEC the power to coopt replacements, as well as allowing it to "invite representatives in an observer capacity from regions as necessary". In a breathtaking display of effrontery the whole package was described by Scargill as "an extension of democracy". You see, he intended to expand the executive in this way immediately, rectifying underrepresentation in certain regions by asking four additional comrades to attend NEC meetings. Delegates reacted to these outrageous insults to their intelligence with either stoic resignation or positive appreciation.

Some spoke against the changes. Mark Holt from Liverpool said he had always had reservations about whether the SLP was truly democratic. "It's going to look bad, Arthur. Don't do it," he implored. "You're going to wreck the party - people will leave."

In reply Scargill pointed to the lack of democracy elsewhere: "Other left groups either don't have congresses or have secret meetings and hand down tablets of stone." Besides, if people left, where would they go? This rhetorical question from the labour dictator just about sums up the

present state of our movement. Scargill knows only too well that, with workers' combativity and belief in their own power of self-liberation at an all-time low, there is indeed for the moment no genuinely emancipatory anti-capitalist alternative. He was backed by ultra-Stalinist NEC youth section representative Ranjeet Brar, who blithely remarked that "you can't measure the democracy of an organisation by the frequency of its congresses".

Scargill declared that the impotent regional conferences would still be held annually - where, clearly, members can argue the toss until they are blue in the face, as far as Arthur is concerned. What is more, the change does not prevent the NEC from calling a special congress whenever necessary - and he went on to give an example of an occasion when the executive might have used this power. He revealed that the SLP had been approached last year by the Communist Party of Britain, who proposed that the two organisations should enter into negotiations with a view to joining forces, and that the *Morning Star* and *Socialist News* should also "merge". However, Scargill reported, "after fruitful discussion" the CPB withdrew its proposals.

This disclosure too was greeted with an apparently apathetic indifference. But such a reaction is par for the course in today's SLP - where changes of potentially fundamental significance are casually let slip as an aside long after the time for debating them has come and gone.

The change to three-yearly congresses was endorsed by 3,531 votes to 90. But this apparently overwhelming card vote was deceptive. Among the votes in favour were not only the phantom North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association, accounting for 3,000, but the block votes of at least one of the other trade union affiliates (there are four altogether, with a total membership of 3,750 - down by 25 from last year), plus the youth and women's section. Discounting all these, it must have been touch and go whether the necessary two-thirds majority would have been obtained from delegates representing individual members alone.

Since only two of these union affiliates have ever been named (the NWCCMA and Sheffield Ucat), and since Scargill considers the size of the block votes to be confidential information, of no concern to the membership, delegates can only guess at the various totals. The number of votes cast by Constituency SLPs is also for-

bidden territory, for such information would enable us to gain a more realistic picture of the size of the individual membership, exposing Scargill's grossly inflated figures. That is why, in the NEC elections for the constituency section, only the votes received by the seven successful candidates were announced. Unsuccessful candidates were told they were not entitled to know their own support!

The results we were allowed to hear were: Liz Screen - 227; Bridget Bell - 207; Brian Gibson - 190; Harpal Brar - 184; Dave Roberts - 180; Jim McDaid - 152; Sohan Singh - 105. All were current NEC members who had placed themselves on their own recommended list, announced by Scargill on Saturday morning.

There was no official recommendation in the election for vice-president. But Scargillite branches were informed via the loyalist grapevine that the candidate to plump for was Linda Muir. She received 478 votes to Harpal Brar's 131, the NWCCMA declining to cast its 3,000 votes, as it did last year. In an unexpected turn of events Scargill read out correspondence concerning the third vice-presidential candidate, Imran Khan. Comrade Khan had been proposed by Lewes CSLP, but he informed Scargill that he had "never allowed my name to go forward". Indeed, although his dues were paid until the end of the year, he had "resigned from the party" because of "your unconstitutional and undemocratic control".

Scargill read out the whole of his own reply. This willingness to reveal every last detail of the exchange was most uncharacteristic. There have been many such resignations from disenchanted members, but the general secretary has usually done his best to keep them under wraps. In this case, however, it seems that Scargill had hoped to keep such a prominent figure on board. It is said that he was delighted when he saw comrade Khan's nomination papers and was backing him for the vice-presidency.

Scargill himself was opposed by a token candidate from the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, Jim Dooher, who picked up nine votes. Our general secretary scraped home with 3,605. Frank Cave was unopposed as president.

Despite Scargill's best efforts at concealing the actual membership figure, it was pretty clear that numbers have further declined by about a third, as compared to last year. At the November 1998 special congress each Constituency SLP was entitled to just one delegate, and about 100 turned

up in Manchester. Last weekend each CSLP could send three representatives, but only 140 came to Conway Hall. Last year the complete figures for the NEC elections were announced (much to Scargill's regret) and so it was possible to estimate that the CSLP delegates cast votes representing around 450 members.

The total vote for the seven successful candidates in 1998 was 1,713. In 1999 it was 1,245. Furthermore, the unsuccessful candidates last year gained an additional 992 votes. But this year there was no serious challenge, as there was from the Fourth International Supporters Caucus and its allies as at Manchester. (Fisc has, by the way, resurfaced in the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation, and there is talk of the CATP standing a slate of candidates in the London assembly elections.) The 10 losers this time could hardly have won more than 200 votes between them. If my estimates are correct, then only about 1,450 constituency votes were cast this year, while there were 2,705 in 1998. All but a handful of CSLPs must have voted for comrade Screen, who gained 227, and the total number of individual members represented must have been less than 300.

This contrasts somewhat with the membership figures given in the NEC report. For Scargill there is only one way they can go, and that is up - irrespective of the truth of course. In his introduction to the NEC document he goes into more detail than ever before, finally admitting, if only implicitly, that his previous figures had been falsified. So, as well as the figure for 1999 of 2,514, in which he includes every comrade who has ever applied to join (less those who have bothered to resign formally), we now have a rather smaller figure for "fully financial" members, which he puts at 921.

These figures add up mathematically, but not logically. If, for example, there was, as he claims, a net membership gain over the last 12 months of 249, how come the "fully financial" figure has only gone up by 14? And how come less than a third of even the paid-up membership were represented at congress?

It is no coincidence that these figures are contained in a section of the NEC report dealing with the "evil" of entryism, which takes up more than a page. No wonder Scargill is furious with comrades like myself, a founder-member of the SLP, for forcing him, bit by bit, to come clean, and with the *Weekly Worker* for giving me the space to do so ●

Simon Harvey

Party notes

Opportunity

Livingstone's London mayoral candidacy in 2000 offers a window of opportunity to the left. Speculation is now rife that Blair's rigged selection board will block him.

Even at this late hour, however, some members of the carefully chosen 13-strong selection board are meant to be wavering. They are being strong-armed by Blair's closest advisors, who are pointing to an 18-year history of Livingstone's congenital dissent and trouble-making, expressed most recently in his attacks on the prime minister and calls for the sacking of Gordon Brown.

Labour's apparatus is clearly very jittery. It is anxious not to even allow Livingstone to get as far as the electoral college, which gives equal voting weight to London Labour Party members, the MEPs, MPs and assembly candidates, and trade unions.

The controversy surrounding Dobson's privileged access to membership lists and financial backing also underlines the Blairites' vulnerability. The contempt the apparatus is showing for democracy is recognised by Labour members - and clearly deeply resented by them. Commenting in *The Guardian* of November 8 on the flimsy explanations initially offered by the Dobson campaign camp as to how it came to obtain London membership records, Chris Willis was intrigued: "Frank Dobson claims the addresses were given to him by sympathetic MPs," he noted. "Funny, that. I've had two letters from him, and my MP is Ken Livingstone."

Both sides are clearly playing high risk politics. A crude exclusion of Livingstone from the electoral college stage poses the real possibility of a substantial split in the capital's 69,000 Labour members. On the other hand, if the man makes the short list, there is no guarantee of the Millbank gerrymandering working and Dobson romping home as winner.

Livingstone himself has indicated that he will "mobilise a campaign" if excluded from the shortlist. He is sufficiently astute and sophisticated to understand that a failed attempt to run for London mayor as an independent - in the absence of major working class struggles or political unrest - could spell the end of his career in bourgeois politics.

There is no question that at this juncture any Livingstone bid for mayor must be enthusiastically backed by the left. We must pledge ourselves to do this whether he stands as an independent or formally as the 'official' Labour candidate. Surely it must be obvious to anyone that if 'Red Ken' wins the nomination, it will be a blow against Blairism. In its own distorted and inarticulate way, this will at the same time be a manifestation of mass discontent and disillusionment with the Labour government and its attacks on living standards and democratic rights.

Until now, this discontent has taken the form of a weary resignation and an alienation from politics in general, rather than militant action. A Livingstone candidacy could provide the catalyst. There are already plans from some - particularly in transport - to support alternative candidates to those of new Labour. At a meeting on November 9, the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation took the initial decision to stand a slate in next year's Greater London assembly elections.

There is no question that Livingstone's politics are simply inadequate from the point of view of the working class. Comrades who make this the beginning and end of their assessment are fundamentally mistaken, however.

The mass of people who voted for Ken - especially after an intense struggle with Blair administration - would have qualitatively different illusions to those of 1997, when a massive mandate was delivered. Whatever foolish notions cluttered their heads, they would be registering a *left* protest against the government and against the ravages of the market that New Labour is so keen to promote. More than that, Livingstone could provide the focal point to move millions into political action.

Given our severely weakened state, the left - inside and outside Labour - has no ability to influence the outcome of the struggle now taking place in front of us. But any revolutionary or communist who did not do everything in their power to promote such a development, to merge with any movement that resulted from it in fact, is a sectarian and useless to the class.

On a deeper level, the furore over Livingstone raises once more the question of the nature of the Labour Party itself. Over the last few years, we have speculated about its changing nature. This is a highly complex question, so those of our critics who have mocked us for not producing neat definitive answers reveal nothing but their own theoretical shallowness.

Labour - as a bourgeois workers' party - evolved in a century that has seen the progressive political integration of the proletariat. The organisational vehicles for this have primarily been the Labour Party and 'official communism'.

After the cataclysmic defeats of our class in this terrible century, culminating in the ignominious collapse of bureaucratic socialism in the USSR and eastern Europe, we have seen the disappearance of the working class as any sort of independently organised political entity on the contemporary scene. The examples of this are legion - the demise of the Communist Party, the ongoing liquidationist crisis drowning the left, the removal of clause four from the constitution of Labour being just some of the most dramatic.

Historically, the relationship between left and right in the Labour Party has been essentially symbiotic. The right has presented the 'reasonable', 'moderate' and fiercely British face that has made Labour part of the political mainstream. The left has worn a more radical reforming visage, one with a more expressly 'class' appeal. It was this which anchored the party to its mass base - the working class. Now that the working class has temporarily disappeared, the right wing - which always had more coherence and weight in bourgeois society - no longer feels the immediate need for the left. Foolishly therefore, Blairite commentators such as *The Guardian's* Hugo Young are actually urging Livingstone to stand independently, as he has no "more than a nominal connection with what [New Labour] stands for" (November 9).

It has been an enormous strength of bourgeois politics that the left wing of social democracy has been able to divert proletarian anger and aspirations for change into the safe channels of the Labour Party. Politics are ever changing, as evidenced by the looming Livingstone challenge. For revolutionaries, this creates the possibility that a mass working class movement, independent of Labour, could rise and take very different political forms from the past. This is not something to observe passively. If we are communists, we will be active, fighting agents in the process ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Entryism

Thanks to Bob Pitt for correcting my error on the political home of John Palmer (letters, October 28).

However, he and other objectors misunderstand, or seek to avoid, the main point I made. That is that Marxists employ both long-term strategy and short-term tactics in seeking to build a revolutionary party to lead a socialist revolution. Comrade Bob does not agree that a revolutionary party of the Bolshevik type is necessary to make a socialist revolution, if indeed he still believes in the necessity for a socialist revolution in the first place, a matter he needs to clarify. Hence his method is fundamentally at odds with the Marxist method.

An open debating paper like the *Weekly Worker* or *Scottish Socialist Voice* is of course very useful in debating with backward opponents like John Palmer and is far better than most sectarian far left party publications. However, the content of this preference in Bob's case is his aversion to Leninism.

It is always necessary to orientate to the ranks of the Labour Party and thus to the reformist consciousness of workers who vote for it, as Bob advocates. But, forgetting the Marxist purpose of this, he lapses into deep entryism, where propaganda for revolutionary socialism to educated new layers of workers' leaders to build a Marxist party is entirely abandoned. I do insist that when a large layer of the vanguard of the working class has understandably taken a sectarian option, like the SLP or SSP, then it is entirely necessary and productive for Marxists to relate, work with and join these groups, in order to teach them to relate back to the mass of workers.

However, I do not believe that these groups are or will become revolutionary Marxist parties. The political confusion is too great, not least Scargill's obscene bureaucratic Stalinism, while the Militant tradition's line on the state and Ireland continued their classical fudge on a parliamentary enabling bill to introduce socialism, as opposed to revolution. These are left reformist parties and therefore no substitute for revolutionary socialist, Bolshevik-type parties.

So no apologies to James Robertson. The SSP might be "the best thing going" in Scotland, but it does not meet the objective requirements of the Scottish working class. None to Eddie Ford and the CPGB PCC over their pro-loyalist turn and none to John Dart over the equally confused 'democratic revolution' stageist position which prepared the latest right turn.

Gerry Downing
London

British-Irish

In his letter (*Weekly Worker* November 4), Steve Green shares the bemusement of Ivor Kenna as to "why this British-Irish thing has been brought up". I am more than bemused.

Formulating a self-determination programme for the Irish by the 'CPGB' of the oppressor nation at this time has little to do with 'critical' internationalism. Put forward under the cover of a debate on 'The national question in the British Isles', it is at best a display of intellectual arrogance. At worst, it is nothing less than disruptive, couch chauvinism.

Dave Norman
London

Lenin's lie

Clarity is a precondition for our being in a position to persuade. Phil Kent's letter, by contrast, went for Allan Armstrong's jugular, and did so in the most ham-fisted manner possible (November 4).

According to Phil, "The most disturbing aspect of comrade Armstrong's article (*Weekly Worker* October 28) is that he has no understanding of democracy, as demonstrated by his treatment of the Cossack question." These words are put in Allan's mouth: "Lenin was a liar, Lenin was right to be a liar, Lenin won because he was a liar; communists should learn from this." Poor Phil. Had he used his noggin, he could have worked out that Allan could not possibly have supported Lenin's 'lie' to the Cossacks. Because if he did, then he obviously would be supporting, not opposing, Jack Conrad's theses on the British-Irish as an entirely justified but cynical subterfuge.

Allan holds the exact opposite opinion of Lenin to the one Phil supposes. He openly solidarises with those left communists (Pannekoek, Gorter, Pankhurst, Maclean, etc) who were expelled from the Comintern.

I disagree with Allan on how to assess Lenin's mistakes. For me, Leninists today need to be open about the fact that the Bolsheviks were wrong to repeatedly make a virtue out of necessity. The creation of a one-party state, one-man management, the ending of factions inside the single legal party, the crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion ... on these questions, and many more, my criticism of the Bolsheviks (easy with the benefit of hindsight) is that these tragic departures from the socialist norm were often not so much justified by objective circumstances so much as they were lauded as exemplars. While Lenin was far less guilty than others of doing this, even he is not above reproach.

Allan's criticisms are far more fundamental. He locates the root cause of the tragic history of the Russian Revolution in mistakes of (or even betrayals by) Lenin and the Bolsheviks. This is an entirely idealist perspective. Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin and the rest went into the October Revolution every bit as committed as is Allan to democratic planning by the working class, to transcending the law of value.

The soviets were indeed degraded into empty shells. But this did not happen as a result of inadequate study on the part of Lenin. Far less by any pernicious plan. The working class were given no choice but to leave the factories and to take up arms to defend the revolution. The defeat of this revolution was, in other words, not caused by errors of the revolutionaries in Russia, but by the betrayals of so-called revolutionaries in the heart of the capitalist system - Germany, Britain, the US.

Allan needs to be forced to face up to his refusal to explain the defeat of the Russian Revolution from the perspective of international socialism. This is crucial because, as a consequence of the pointless search for an explanation on exclusively Russian soil, he lets off the hook the real villains: the Kautskys.

Accusing Allan of holding the opposite views to his real ones does not help one iota. It gives him an excuse to withdraw from debate, something which is not in his interest any more than it is ours.

Tom Delargy
Paisley

Kosova

I am afraid there is something seriously awry with comrade John Stone's politics, to judge by his distinctly economic and sometimes disembodied polemic against the CPGB over the recent Balkans war ('Independence - against the KLA' *Weekly Worker* October 21).

Comrade Stone refutes the CPGB's position, best summed up by the slogan, 'Nato out of the Balkans - Serbia out of Kosova'. The comrade thinks the CPGB should have taken up a pro-Serbian defence stance. To justify his defence, comrade Stone informs us that "sometimes you have to side with an oppressive regime against the nationalists of an oppressed nation once they become imperialist puppets".

What is this but just a convoluted way of embracing the decidedly non-Marxist notion of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'?

Don Preston
Brighton

Policy flip

The front page of the *Weekly Worker* (November 4) makes interesting reading. It would seem that the policy regarding the Labour Party and Livingstone has been subjected to a severe spin causing it to 'flip'.

It seems that a decision has been made that if Livingstone manages to get the official Labour nomination for London mayor the CPGB will lend critical support. The CPGB will have a position of 'Vote Livingstone, but ...' Now this is a turn-up for the books, having previously argued vigorously against those on the left who cannot let go of the Labourite coat tails and have supported the Labour Party during elections no matter how 'critically'.

What has brought on this change? Is it that Livingstone has managed to breathe some life into the corpse of the Labour left? If so, does this now mean that the CPGB will support 'critically' any other Labour left mouthing some socialist-sounding platitudes who manages to gain some support? Does it now mean that the CPGB will oppose those who stand against Labour left candidates in future elections, or is this just opportunism?

Michael Farmer
Rochdale

Dead Ken

Michael Malkins' sentence, "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" (November 4), is the most stupid that we as communists have ever read. In the last week.

What about Ken Livingstone writing a living manifesto? Or am I still living in a place where things and people have material boundaries and not in this new world without principle where a written declaration can morph into a man's head?

Phil Rudge
Hackney

Simon Harvey of the SLP

Back to obscurity

Last weekend's congress of the Socialist Labour Party marked a complete turnaround in the fortunes of the supporters of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*.

To think that it was just a year since Royston Bull, editor of the *EPSR*, had been voted in as vice-president. He owed his election to the fact that Arthur Scargill had used him purely as a means of deposing the sitting incumbent, Patrick Sikorski of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus. Nevertheless the Bullites persuaded themselves that their day had come.

There was a different story this year. Bull is not only no longer in office: he is no longer a member, having been 'lapsed' for non-payment of membership dues. He decided to cut his losses in the belief that he was about to be expelled in any case - for refusing to close down his little cut-and-paste weekly.

His demise caused Bull to

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switch from abject sycophancy to the Scargill leadership to hurling vitriolic insults. Suddenly the SLP was no longer the "historic break from the Labour Party at a time of capitalist crisis". Now it was completely written off and Scargill was nothing more than a dictator. But this line change caused a split within Bull's own ranks, personified by the differing perspectives of the two *EPSR* NEC members who were elected into office on the anti-Fisc bandwagon last year. Sohan Singh went along with the new line, but Dave Roberts preferred to stick with Scargill.

It was comrade Singh who was openly handing out Bull's leaflet, 'The SLP is going the wrong way', on Saturday morning. This condemned "the mistakes and small-mindedness of Scargillism, ruling through censorship and expulsion". Like comrade Roberts, however, he was on the NEC's self-perpetuating recommended list. He had clearly not been sticking his neck out too much at executive meetings.

Of course it is quite correct that the whole episode should have been debated. How was it that someone could be voted into high office and then within six months be disciplined, informed he was to be expelled and then ousted for a different reason altogether? Bull's withholding of subscriptions was not a clever move. It gave Scargill the excuse to dismiss the entire question. Bull was no longer a member and that was that.

But the *EPSR* tactics at the congress were pathetic. It was almost as though the plan was to stage a provocation, hoping to have one of the gang physically ejected. The quartet of Jim Dooher, Adrian Greenman, Rod George and Singh himself raised the question of Bull's removal at every opportunity, no matter what was being discussed, with Greenman in particular constantly resorting to heckling.

If they wanted to hit Scargill where he was weakest, surely the abolition of annual congress was the question to exploit, linking his attempt to censor Bull with his

attacks on members' rights in general. But no, the *EPSR* chose to strike where the general secretary was strongest - the emergency motion on rail safety and public ownership.

This was Scargill's showpiece opening for the congress. Dave Rix, Aslef general secretary, proposed the motion, while Bob Crow, the RMT's assistant general secretary, replied to the debate. Greenman was one of the first to speak, describing the call to renationalise the railways as "a fraud on the working class - the whole thing stinks". Hardly the best way to go about winning over this particular audience. He even managed to bring Bull into his speech. Dooher, the *EPSR*'s candidate for general secretary, was a little more tactful, suggesting that while the motion was put with good intent, it was wrong.

Yes, nationalisation has never guaranteed safety. Yes, it is not a step towards socialism. And, yes, Blair will not do it anyway. But it is perfectly correct to demand that the state acts. What was missing from the motion was a call around which to mobilise workers - a call for them to take direct action to bring the industry under *their* control. The motion was passed overwhelmingly, with only the four Bullites voting against.

The next move came with Sohan Singh's objection to the exclusion from the agenda of a motion which called for the "immediate reinstatement of the vice-president" (an hour before a new one was to be elected) and for the *EPSR* and *Lalkar*, Harpal Brar's bimonthly, "to take central positions in developing SLP education". Again only the same four voted in favour of allowing the motion to be discussed. Singh, in making the challenge, attempted to play down the closeness of his association with Bull's rag: "I read the *EPSR*, but so do lots of other SLP members. Others read the

Weekly Worker or *The Guardian*." Nevertheless it was clear enough - for those poor souls that did not know already - that he was in with the other three. Yet, when it came to the NEC elections, enough Scargillite branches voted for him to ensure he was re-elected. He was after all on the recommended list. How were they to know it was not what Arthur wanted?

By Sunday the constant interruptions from Greenman and Dooher were not only causing party president Frank Cave to threaten their removal, but had succeeded in provoking many delegates. Dooher dared the stewards to come and get him, but Scargill was alive to the situation, knowing that a violent struggle would both play into their hands and alienate those delegates who are looking for a nice, peaceful home for disenfranchised leftists. "Don't touch them," cried Arthur. "They're not members of this party." At this point comrade Greenman put on his coat and announced, "I'm going." It got the biggest cheer of the day.

Last year the *EPSR* was flavour of the month, thanks to Scargill. No fewer than three members of what had been an obscure little group were comfortably elected. At the weekend not a voice was raised in their support. Scargill is sure to move soon against comrade Singh, and the whole bunch will fade back into obscurity.

Of course the fate of the Bullites is in itself of no importance. They are one of the most unpleasant and unhinged sects you are ever likely to come across. But their rise and fall says a lot about the SLP itself, not least in relation to the remaining membership. There is hardly anyone of any quality left in the party. Only Stalinites, social misfits and no-hopers - all of them prepared to go along with Arthur's every whim.

Fighting fund

Valuable

A *Weekly Worker* seller outside Conway Hall, the venue of last weekend's SLP congress, tells me he was taken aback by the action of one delegate.

Striding purposefully towards him, the SLP member appeared at first to have aggressive intent. Our comrade took a step back, but then realised that the young man was holding nothing more dangerous than a £10 note.

"If you see Simon Harvey, give him this," he said. "I don't like his snide comments, but at least he lets us know what's going on." Thanks, comrade, but I'm sure Simon wouldn't mind if we put your tennor in the fighting fund. Comrade Harvey is of course not the

only member of a left group other than the CPGB who writes for the *Weekly Worker*. Which is one of the reasons why it is so valued.

And its value is more than proved week by week, through the donations sent in by readers. This week they include £30 from comrade BH, £15 from FC and £10 from TR, lifting our November total to £115. But things are still going slowly, comrades. To reach our £400 target we need you to show what you think of us too! ●

Robbie Rix

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

action

■ 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.

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday November 21, 5pm - 'The modern state', using Ellen Meiksins Wood's *The pristine culture of capitalism* as a study guide.

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

■ London mayor

Debate: 'The future for transport in London'. Ken Livingstone, Frank Dobson, Glenda Jackson. Jointly organised by Aslef, RMT, TSSA. Friends Meeting House, Tuesday November 16, 7.30pm.

■ Nominate Bannister

The Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison has chosen the Socialist Party's Roger Bannister as its candidate for the post of union general secretary. The CPGB is officially backing him. Already the minimum of 25 Unison 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.

■ 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.

■ 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

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

■ Stop tube privatisation

Rally with speakers and music. Tuesday November 30, 5-7pm, Euston station. Phone 0171-281 4621

■ Defend public services

Public meeting to launch a joint borough campaign and discuss the standing of a candidate for the GLA Greenwich and Lewisham seat. Thursday November 25, 7.30pm, Deptford Albany, SE8. Organised by Greenwich and Lewisham People Against Cuts. Phone Nick Long: 0181-314 5961.

■ Satpal Ram

Public meeting: Wednesday November 17, 7.30pm, House of Commons. *Social:* Monday November 22, 8pm, The Scala, Pentonville Road (Kings Cross).

■ 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. www.duntone.demon.co.uk/CPGB/

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Armstrong's weak

Jack Conrad discusses the CPGB's stance on the British-Irish in the light of history

Our position on Ireland and the British-Irish is now well known and can be summed up in terms of three basic and easily understood demands. Demand one: the Communist Party of Great Britain fights for the immediate abolition of Northern Ireland and the withdrawal of all British forces. Demand two: we support a united Ireland. Demand three: within a united Ireland there should be a transitional federal arrangement whereby a British-Irish province in north-east Ulster exercises self-determination. These are the politics of Marxism and Leninism as applied to the Irish question.

Within our small but steadily widening circle there is no disagreement about demands one and two. Yet though demand three is equally straightforward and flows from the elementary principles of consistent democracy that inform demands one and two, we have been subject to all manner of unwarranted attacks and unfounded accusations.

Simply by spelling out the historically constituted existence of the British-Irish and advocating their democratic rights in a united Ireland the CPGB - and Jack Conrad - has found itself charged with effectively favouring the repartition of a metaphysical Ireland, siding with imperialism against the oppressed and being pro-Paisley and pro-UDA.

Such nonsense has been comprehensively answered. To the unjaundiced reader we have proved in a series of articles that none of the above charges hold water. Not that everyone is convinced.

Sometimes, especially in this debate on the British-Irish, I feel I am engaged in a labour of Sisypheus. Debating with friends like Tom Delargy, Steve Riley, Dave Craig, John Stone, José Villa and, last and by no means least, my own fellow CPGB members in our minority is like trying to nail down jelly. In defence of fossilised, not to say sacred, assumptions they steadfastly refuse to listen to, or even mentally register, the most reasoned arguments, statements of elementary facts, let alone replies.

What divides us? I believe it has nothing to do with the CPGB retreating before the tide of Blairism or worries about appeasing the camp of reaction. What divides us is the *consistent* application of democratic principles.

The CPGB majorityists - by an overwhelming margin - seek a working class solution in Ireland. Unity of the working class is infinitely more important than the territorial unity of the island of Ireland - ie, a mere geography. We communists do not start with the bleached abstraction of a single and, to all intents and purposes, unproblematic Irish nation. On the contrary the palpable existence of deep historical ethno-religious antagonisms must be overcome positively, by the dichotomised peoples themselves, above all the self-activating working class. A goal which necessitates an emphasis on *voluntary* union and is inextricably linked to the communist project of human self-liberation.

In terms of *Weekly Worker* contributors, this approach has been supported by Jack Conrad, Mark Fischer and Ian Donovan. In September the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB voted for the 20 theses on 'Ireland and the British-Irish'. Afterwards, in the following month, we secured a whopping majority for them at the CPGB's membership aggregate.

Our opponents are in the main inconsistent revolutionary democrats (in certain cases revolutionary non-democrats). These comrades advocate, or are quite prepared to countenance, the *forcible* unity of Ireland's people. Because the British-Irish are either nothing but a mere "religious faction" or fall short of full nationhood, this supposedly inherently sectarian and

reactionary community cannot be allowed to exercise self-determination. Such arguments have been presented by Steve Riley, Dave Craig, Gerry Downing, Tom Delargy, José Villa, John Stone and now alas Allan Armstrong - the comrade is a well known member of the Scottish Socialist Party and the Republican Communist Network.

Much of the dispute that has raged in the pages of the *Weekly Worker* for the last three months inevitably centres on the exact nature of the British-Irish. Comrade Armstrong's contribution is no exception ('Confused and inconsistent democracy' *Weekly Worker* October 28). According to our friend, Jack Conrad gets the British-Irish wrong in terms of history. He also contends that the Northern Ireland protestants have an altogether different identity. Nowadays they are not British-Irish, but Ulster-British.

Frankly, most of his facts are to my knowledge beyond dispute. At the same time they are either fielded somewhat dishonestly - that is, for the purposes of obfuscation, not clarity - or they are entirely secondary. Put another way, in spite of comrade Armstrong's intentions they do nothing whatsoever to disprove my historical thesis or counter my political conclusions.

Instead of repeating once more the whole argument let us discuss what is more or less original in comrade Armstrong's contribution and answer him in the form of a conversation. That way we can test our case and see if it can counter his best criticisms. I will quote comrade Armstrong's actual words as liberally as space allows and do my utmost to avoid putting stupid formulations into his mouth.

Allan Armstrong: Those in Ulster who "came from Scotland" were not exclusively English-speaking. Nor were they exclusively protestant. The Macdonnells from Scotland's western islands and Kintyre "had long been settled in Antrim". Along with the native Gaelic-Irish these settlers "had eliminated Norman lordly and later English kingly control in this area". They did not think of themselves as British; nor did they even think of themselves as "Scottish", seeing "no contradiction in having a continuous Gaelic-speaking realm stretching across the North Channel".

Jack Conrad: Allan, this is pure sophistry. No one in the CPGB has claimed that *all* settlers in Ulster originating from Scotland were English-speakers or protestants.

From prehistoric times there has been a constant population exchange back and forth between what we now call north-eastern Ireland and Scotland. The historian Michael Lynch writes - uncontroversially - on the subject: "The sea, always in early history a conduit for mutual contact and influence rather than a barrier, is as likely to have linked the different Pictish peoples of Caledonia with Ireland" (M Lynch *Scotland* London 1992, p8). Indeed the ancient 'Picts' of Scotland were part of a culture *united* by the Irish Sea. Pictish nobles ruled northerly parts of Ireland till at least the 8th century. On the other hand the very name 'Scotland', as every school student knows, has Irish antecedents. The *Scoti* were an Irish 'tribe' - more likely a warrior elite - which successfully ventured into 'Scotland' and eventually gave it their moniker.

What about your Macdonnells? You admit that their folk movement from one side of the Irish Sea to the other predated the plantations. For the Tudor and Stewart monarchies they were part of the problem, not part of the solution. Such lawless types helped make Ulster one of "the most rebellious parts of Ireland" ('Ireland and the British-Irish', thesis 2). So I have not the least problem with the Macdonnells being Gaelic and not even Scottish in terms of ethnic-national consciousness. It is a mildly interesting fact. It adds another historical detail to the overall picture I have painted. Nothing more.

Allan Armstrong: The early 17th century settlers planted in Ulster from Scotland were a "mixture" of people. Not only were there English-speaking protestants. Some spoke Gaelic and there were even a smattering of catholics. Settlers - from Scotland and England - also "intermixed" with the native Irish. Moreover, there were native Irish "conversions" to protestantism, especially the established Church of Ireland, and intermarriage. The "lines" between the "protestant-British-Irish minority" and the "catholic Irish" "are not so hard and fast" as Jack Conrad suggests. There has been "plenty of change-over in identity", not just "the stable 'British-Irish' community" you claim.

Jack Conrad: Again, Allan, I have no difficulty with what you say in terms of historical facts. Writing of the British-Irish as a stable community in no way negates fluidity or fuzziness. I have never written of the "lines" between the catholic-Irish and British-Irish being "hard and fast". Let me explore the theme using the example of Afrikaners - who, I am sure you would agree, *in relative terms*, have "hard and fast" lines of language, skin colour, religion and culture which separate them from other South Africans.

As evidenced by the so-called 'coloured' community, the *kleurlinge*, there has been considerable intermixing between the 'races', not least extra-marital sex (often rape). The early Calvinist Dutch masters thereby crossed the 'line' between them and their imported slaves and the Nama natives and sired a new people. The Afrikaner population also mixed with the later British (and Irish, Jewish, etc) migrants, albeit on more equal terms. That said, such intermixing does not negate the historically established existence of an Afrikaner-speaking white population, which originated with the Dutch settlers some 300 years ago.

The British-Irish, as with any people, have to be grasped as a *collectivity* in movement in relationship to other peoples, above all the catholic-Irish. Again, let me remind you, I have never claimed fixed or uncrossable lines, only a stable, historically established community. Northern Ireland has parallels with apartheid. From birth to death human beings are classified - officially or unofficially - as possessing or not possessing certain rights. Yet, no matter how entrenched religious sectarianism may be, there is the possibility for some of altering, blurring or swapping of one's identity.

At the edge of virtually every ethnic group there are examples of individuals gaining entry or whole groups converging, including full merger, as well as divergence and departure.

Migrants to Britain sooner or later leave behind their specific origins and become British (thereby changing Britain). Eg, the sons and daughters of Caribbean migrants from the 1950s and 60s often nowadays ethnically describe themselves as black-British. The same goes for the Asian-British. **Allan Armstrong:** "The majority" of the 'British-Irish' "did form a distinct, but largely Scotch-Irish Presbyterian culture, which was often in opposition to the union state, and in particular to the established (Anglican) Church of Ireland."

"The 'British-Irish' identity really emerged in opposition to the challenge of the United Irishmen and to the united nation (people) of Ireland." The height of this identity was in the 19th century and was not "synonymous with protestantism", but "enjoyed catholic Irish support". Some protestants supported home rule.

However, the British-Irish identity is now a thing of the past. "Increasingly" it is "a figment" of Jack Conrad's imagination. Here, proving my point, are some survey figures and trends. "By 1968, only 20% of Northern Ireland protestants considered themselves Irish, with eight percent opting for British-Irish or Anglo-Irish identities. Instead 32% thought of themselves as having an Ulster identity." By 1990 protestants who considered themselves Irish or British-Irish had declined to seven percent. In contrast 26% thought of themselves as Northern Irish while "those claiming British identity rose from 39% in 1968 to a high of 77% in 1984".

Jack Conrad: I will ignore the slip in your 1968 figures. Here, Allan, we have the crux of our disagreement on British-Irish identity. We differ not only over semantics, but methodological approach. Firstly, in my opinion British-Irish identity is historically established, is undergoing constant change and exists today. Secondly, identity is multiple and never singular, as you naively appear to believe.

The very fact that you can, and in all seriousness must, discuss the protestants of north-eastern Ulster in terms of a "distinct" continuum as a commonality from the early 17th century to the 1990s is surely enough for any intelligent person to *confirm* that they constitute an historically established community. Of course, in terms of the degree of antagonism between this minority and the catholic-Irish majority, and what attitude the British-Irish took to the British state and Britishness, there has been a constant rearticulation. Something repeatedly stressed by me.

Nations and nationalities are not static, purely qualitative phenomena. The world is not neatly divided into nations and non-nations, nationalities and non-nationalities. While there is undoubtedly a qualitative side, there is a constant socio-political, quantitative dynamic of being and becoming which produces countless black to white gradations of grey. In other words, national identity is a phenomenon which defies the common-sense approach of turning to an atlas or standard history text and putting an equals sign between every country, state or kingdom and the category of nation.

That in the mid-19th century "some" catholic-Irish - no doubt in the main commercial capitalists, shopkeepers and minor state officials - thought of themselves as west British does not

detract from my thesis. Nor does the fact that, from the 1890s to the 1920s, a layer of southern protestant intellectuals - eg, WB Yeats, Douglas Hyde, Ernest Blythe, Belmer Hobson, Countess Markievicz and Maude Gonne - sided with the nationalist cause.

Of course, the protestant community in north-eastern Ulster has defined itself differently over the course of the centuries. What was in terms of identity ideologically imagined as primary becomes secondary and vice versa. Use of the *generic* term 'British-Irish' allows me to discuss the sectarian divide that has existed in Ireland since the early 1600s. A phenomenon undergoing constant rearticulation, but one with a definite history. To deny change would be to fall into error. Likewise denying continuity is to make exactly the same mistake, only for different reasons.

The term 'British-Irish' encompasses the Presbyterian identity of the first plantations. My argument, with which you seem to concur, but whose veracity you refuse to admit for the sake of pig-headed polemic, is that the "settlers quickly diverged" from their Scottish and English origins and formed "another" identity. Was this identity simply Irish? No, it was a hybrid *Irish* identity, ethnically opposed to the other, catholic-Irish, identity. The British-Irish were, yes, also alienated from the Anglican ascendancy. Again, I have referred on many occasions to the antagonism that existed between the Presbyterian 'strong farmers' in Ulster and the established Church of Ireland. As a generic term 'British-Irish' is not contradicted by the exclusion and then the incorporation of the Protestants into what was the Anglican ascendancy.

Nor am I foxed by the medley of replies given by protestants in Northern Ireland when it comes to primary identity as recorded in the neat boxes of opinion polls. 'Ulster-Scots', 'Scots-Irish', 'Ulster', 'Ulster-British', 'British', 'Anglo-Irish' or 'Northern Irish' are simply different manifestations of a common identity which, for the want of anything better, I call British-Irish.

Identity is many-layered like a Russian doll. Be that as it may, due to their similar conditions of existence in north-eastern Ulster the British-Irish have over the 400 years of their existence as a "stable community" developed customs, an outlook and character peculiar to themselves and formed a commonality now completely at odds with the catholic-Irish who inhabit the same state territory.

Allan Armstrong: You give the "catholic-Irish" a religious label. This suggests that the British-Irish "have risen above sectarianism" and slides very close to the "warring tribes" approach peddled by Peter Taaffe's Militant/Socialist Party.

Jack Conrad: Allan, this really is scraping the bottom of your polemical barrel. Who ignores the presence of the British state? Stop playing games. As you are well aware, the CPGB has a proud record of campaigning - on the streets, in propaganda, in elections - for the immediate withdrawal of all British forces. Why do I use this generic term 'catholic-Irish'? The answer has nothing to do with any failure to recognise that modern Ireland contains Jews, atheists, Muslims, etc, besides Catholics. Nor is it a devious way to flatter the British-Irish (or, if you really want, Ulster-

polemics

protestants). The answer is rooted in history and how Irish national identity was forged.

The Tudor, Stewart and Cromwellian plantations and drive for conquest *negatively* defined the Irish as Irish, both the Gaelic and Anglo-Irish, not in terms of language, but *church*. The Irish became a people-religion. The catholic majority were victims of *national oppression* as catholics and denied basic rights.

As a consequence the Irish national question and British domination both assumed the outer form of religion. What appears to saloon bar bigots and Peter Taaffe's CWI alike as a primitive or irrational conflict between religions is in essence a national antagonism involving real material sectional and class interests (just like the religious wars of the 15th-17th centuries).

Allan Armstrong: Jack, you deny "the existence of any manifestations of nations or nationality at such an early period as the early 17th century - well, except when it suits". My old RDG comrade Dave Craig is chided for having the "temerity to suggest that there may be such things as 'English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish nations'". To you these are nothing other than "crude Victorian inventions, designed to mystify the past and divide the working class". Yet fully two centuries before, you have the presumably 'non-national' Scottish and English settlers 'quickly stop[ping] being Scottish or English', as they formed another - Irish [national] identity".

In my view Britain has a common ruling class. However, there is no British nation. What exists in the British Isles are English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish nations: ie, four different cultures with a common territory. Nations and nationalities "arose alongside each other". The long established national identities came to the surface with the advent of mass suffrage in the second half of the 19th century.

Jack Conrad: Allan, it is your unwillingness to really think, that results in the muddle you attribute to me. Let us start with nations and nationality. Suffice to say, I disagree with your virtual equation of the two categories. Far from arising "alongside each other", nationality considerably predates the emergence of nation. I have described the Homeric Greeks as a "proto-nationality". Divided though they were into many states, and as Aeolians, Ionians and Dorians, the Greeks shared cultural attributes, including a basically common language. Separate dialects were not entirely broken down by the invention of a written language.

The Greek mainland has very poor agricultural and mineral potential. Trade and war are the ancient alternatives to poverty. From about the middle of the 8th century BC Greek colonists began to fan out and establish cities and trading outposts over the Mediterranean and Black Sea coastal regions. Syracuse in Sicily, Marssila on the mouth of the Rhone, Saguntum in Spain, Heraclea in the Crimea, Ephesus in Asia Minor and specially allocated quarters in pharonic lower Egypt. In the wake of the epic conquests of Alexander in the 4th century, Greek civilisation spread throughout the Middle East all the way to the borders of modern India.

The Greeks outside Greece continued to be Greek in custom, language and religion. "Men away from home" is how they called themselves. Hellenism survived as the dominant cul-

ture of high society in the eastern Mediterranean till the Arab-muslim expansion of the 8th and 9th centuries and the final snuffing out of the Eastern Roman empire by the invading Turks in 1453. The Greeks of Athens, Constantinople, Alexandra, Pergermum and Antioch spoke a common language, but did not inhabit a common territory. Nor were they held together by a common economy.

Broadly, a similar observation can be made about the ancient Jews. They were a nationality, not a nation. The nomadic proto-Jews - one of the 11 tribes of Israel - settled themselves in Judea and stepped forth as an historical people in the 5th century BC after the return of the elite from their Babylonian exile. However, like their hated rivals, the Greeks, Jewish commercial colonists established themselves throughout the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world (Jewish settlements were found as far afield as India). Alexandria became as much a Jewish as a Greek city. At the time of Jesus there were as many Jews living outside Palestine as inside. Palestine too was a poor country.

Aramaic - a Syric language - was adopted by Jews in Palestine during classic times. Hebrew was maintained for sacred purposes. Elsewhere Hebrew was likewise relegated while a wide variety of lingua francas were adopted. Despite that the sense of Jewishness remained strong. Merchants are typically the most internationalist and national of the classes in the ancient world. What linked Jewry, what made it a nationality, was a common culture based on a freemasonry of trade, a sacred language and the cult of Jehovah.

Karl Kautsky makes a telling point, one that is highly relevant to our present debate. After all many of our critics still stubbornly insist that the British-Irish cannot have any national characteristics, because they are a mere "religious faction". For the ancient Jews, says Kautsky, religion and nationality were "equivalent" (K Kautsky *Foundations of christianity* New York 1972, p248). Religious practices and taboos and frequent pilgrimages to Jerusalem for major festivals kept them as a commonality.

What of Scotland and Wales? Scotland was founded as some sort of a united kingdom in the 11th century. Till it was conquered in its entirety by the English crown in high feudal times Wales never possessed any sustained political unity as Wales. However, the moot point is that neither in Scotland nor Wales do we see a single nationality: ie, a historically constituted people with a common culture and common language.

Scotland had a long-standing Norse cultural presence, especially in the isles. Shetland was incorporated into the Scottish kingdom only in 1468. To this day many Shetlanders do not consider themselves Scottish. That aside, the kingdom had in its development a widening and far more fundamental cultural-linguistic fault line. In the lowlands, Scots or Lallans - a dialect of English - dominated. By the end of the 7th century Saxon warrior-colonists controlled areas as far north as the Forth, and they brought with them their language. British and Saxon petty kingdoms overlaid and stood on both sides of the present border.

The highlands are a contrast. Here was a slowly retreating Gaelic culture and language that still survives in pockets today. Lowlands Scots typically viewed the highlanders as uncouth barbarians and thieving savages. That is, until their final de-

feat at Culloden in 1746. After which it became eminently safe for the genteel folk of Edinburgh to romantically ape highland ways - the kilt, tartan and whisky were reinvented and commodified.

Wales too has had a deep north-south, English-Welsh cleavage. However, Wales was historically far more 'Celtic' than Scotland. Even in the 1880s three out of four still preferred to speak Welsh. English amongst the lower orders was at that time largely confined to Radnor, Monmouthshire, Glamorgan and parts of Pembroke. Either way, such elementary divisions make it impossible to - rationally - talk of a single Scottish or Welsh nationality or nation.

Nations are modern, not ancient. Nations arise not alongside nationality, but the creation of a home market associated with the coming of capitalist social relations. A common economy sweeps aside local exclusiveness and dialects and brings into existence what Otto Bauer called a "community of destiny" (O Bauer 'The nation', G Balakrishnan (ed) *Mapping the nation* London 1996, p51).

My argument is that this occurred from the 16th century onwards and that the first capitalist country, England, also had a Scottish and Welsh dimension - by 1700 England accounts for over 50% of exports from Scotland. In other words though capitalism begins as English "agrarian capitalism" - with a landlord, tenant and labourer triad - it matured as *British* industrial capitalism (E Meiksins Wood *The origin of capitalism* New York 1999, p93).

The accession in 1603 of James VI to the English throne as James I and the later merger of the English and Scottish parliaments in 1707 thereby proved not to be a fleeting union - such as those with Spain under Mary Tudor, the Netherlands under William and Mary, and Hanover under George I, II, etc. The British nation was defined by its common language (English), a common territory, culture (protestantism) and economy.

Why do I trace our *modern* England, Scotland and Wales to Victorian times? There was, of course, as every standard history book tells us, a kingdom of England going back to Saxon times. The reality was, however, of high Wessex kings ruling over smaller kingdoms: Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Northumbria, etc. The 11th century 'English' king Canute, or Cnut, was Scandinavian and also king of Denmark and overlord of Norway. The English emerged negatively as a rather vague, servile and highly fragmented proto-nationality under the brutal heel of Norman - French-speaking viking - conquistadors. Even in the early middle ages monarchs of England were not nationally English, but feudal lords with other kingdoms and fiefs.

Henry II held vast tracts of France. Normandy and Brittany from his mother. Anjou, Main and Touraine from his father. Aquitaine from his wife. He is thus better described - to evoke the spirit of the age - as Henri II. Often he spent the good part of the year in France. The same goes for Scotland and its Robert VIII de Bruce. Here was a feudal aristocrat, not a nationalist patriot. I am not surprised therefore to read that at the time of the act of union Englishness, Scottishness and Welshness were altogether uncertain notions, undercut by "strong regional attachments" and all manner of "loyalties to village, town, family and landscape" (L Colley *Britons* London 1992, p17).

What the majority of the people who inhabited the United Kingdom of England, Scotland and Wales had in common was protestantism and, from the act of union in 1707 to the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, a common enemy in the shape of France - catholic and then revolutionary. Linda Colley writes of the "absolute centrality of protestantism". Whilst readily admitting the con-

flicts and tensions between Anglicans and non-conformists in England and Wales, and episcopalians and presbyterians in Scotland (not forgetting baptists, quakers, congregationalists, methodists and so on), she is insistent that they should "not obscure what was still the most striking feature in the religious landscape, the gulf between protestant and catholic" (*ibid* pp18,19).

Till 1829 no catholic was allowed to vote and they were excluded from both houses of parliament and all state offices. There were also prohibitions barring them from carrying arms. In effect catholics were treated as aliens and potential traitors. Britain was never a confessional state. Nevertheless fear and loathing of catholics cemented the majority in England, Scotland and Wales into a commonality that can usefully be labelled British. "Protestantism," states a perceptive Colley, "was the foundation that made the invention of Great Britain possible" (*ibid* p54).

With the advent of mass education, and, yes, the beginnings of universal suffrage, in the late 19th century, the paradigm of Britishness was gradually shifted from protestantism to a national version of history which was projected back into the mists of the past by paid persuaders.

Allan, you put this shift down to a grudging recognition of the prior existence of antedeluvian nationalities and nations. My view does not preclude various heraldic or pre-modern English, Scottish and Welsh modes of consciousness, nor a host of competing regional or local sub-cultures. However, it is obvious that our *modern* idea of these 'nations' with their 'national' kings and queens and associated myths and legends is in the main the product of Victorian historians and served to incorporate the newly enfranchised low church chaple and catholic (adult male) congregation.

National history was sponsored from above and taught in elementary schools "as a means of inculcating the virtue of patriotism" (H Kerney *The British Isles* Cambridge 1995, p2). Libraries and bookshops now automatically put histories into 'English', 'Scottish' and 'Welsh' pigeon holes - a reflection of present-day common sense. As was the classification of learned works on history in mediaeval monasteries into the lives of the saints and the genealogy of the noble families. In our day national history is axiomatic. Henri II thereby fights the 'French'. Robert de Bruce beats the 'English'.

Such history was in general unproblematic in the late 19th century and for three-quarters of the 20th century. There was no national movement in Scotland or Wales worth the name (unlike Ireland). Despite the myriad battles and dynastic conflicts of yore official history saved itself by being teleological. It inevitably arrives in due course at the glories of empire, the white colonies and the mutual rule and exploitation of countless inferior peoples in India and Africa by the English, Scots and Welsh. It is only with the end of empire and the unmistakable political and economic decline of Britain that this national history has switched from being a brilliant means of patriotic enchantment to something problematic for our rulers.

The rise of national movements in Scotland and Wales, not ancient nations, is what causes the CPGB to call for Scottish and Welsh self-determination and a federal republic. We communists are for renewing the unity of the people and the working class in Britain at a higher level through democracy and a federal solution which overthrows the monarchy system and opens the road to socialism.

Allan Armstrong: The "Ulster British" are not a "distinct nation". Rather they are "an ethno-religious group", a particular form of "nationality" that

applies to groups of people, "not territories". Therefore the "Ulster British" should have minority rights as a nationality, not the national right to self-determination. They are in this way similar to the Jews in tsarist Russia and Poland. Yet Jews in Poland "could claim territorial majorities" in several parts of Poland. As a persecuted people these Jews "had a far better claim" than your "British-Irish" to self-determination.

Jack Conrad: Until the 17th century the Jews were *scattered* throughout Poland in *shtetls*: ie, exclusively Jewish town or mini-cities. These settlements were self-administering and under royal protection. The Jews constituted a people-religion fully integrated as an estate in the Polish social formation. They worked as artisans and acted as tax collectors operating as intermediaries between the serfs on the one hand and the aristocracy and monarchy on the other.

Though they were concentrated in their *shtetls*, there was a Jewish zone which formed something like a continuous territory. Some authorities calculate that here they constituted "70% of the population" (I Halevi *A history of the Jews* London 1987, p108). However the old order in Poland crumbled with the dissection of the country by Prussia, Austria-Hungary and Russia (which got the lion's share). Poland was moreover economically the most advanced part of the tsarist empire and the Jews - previously an estate - were amongst the first to be affected by the rise of capitalist social relations.

Jews became urbanised capitalists and proletarians. This *class* contradiction gave birth to the Bund, a trade union organisation of Jewish wage workers who faced Jewish bosses. The Bund went on to transform itself into a political party - with branches in other parts of the tsarist empire. It programmatically advocated cultural-national autonomy for the Jews. An incorrect formulation that does, nevertheless, reflect the transformation of Jewish life. Not least the fact that they no longer formed a majority in any significant territory.

How about the British-Irish? By the end of the 19th century there were some 900,000 protestants in Ulster, "of whom 670,000 lived in Belfast and its hinterland". Within a "65-mile radius of Belfast" the British-Irish constituted "75% of the population" (H Kearney *The British Isles* Cambridge 1995, p212). Surely a territory by any reasonable reckoning.

And today? There is a sizeable, 42%, catholic-Irish minority imprisoned within the Northern Ireland statelet who have a palpable cultural-political affinity with the south. But the British-Irish remain concentrated roughly in the same area as at the end of the last century. There is a one-county, four-half-counties area around Belfast containing a clear British-Irish majority. This forms a geographically coherent whole broadly comprising of country Antrim, north Tyrone, south Derry, north Armagh and north Down - as I have pointed out, some council districts have massive British-Irish majorities. In both North Down and Carrickfergus 91% of the populations are British-Irish, in Castlereagh it is 90%, Ards has a 88% British-Irish majority and Newtownabbey 87% (Northern Ireland 1991 census figures).

As an ethno-religious nationality with a common territory the British-Irish should be given the right of self-determination in a united Ireland. Those who deny British-Irish self-determination must, logically, stand for the involuntary unity of peoples. Such a stance, and if realised in practice, would reverse the poles of oppression, and is alien to the spirit of working class socialism and communism. It is, Allan, to fall into vicarious Irish nationalism and adopt the means of bureaucratic socialism ●

Australian referendum

New opportunity

In this referendum, the monarchists had to give ground on what for them is a cherished truth - that Elizabeth Windsor has a right to rule by birth alone

Australians have conclusively rejected the republican model offered to them by monarchist prime minister John Howard. However, there are no signs of a movement posing a genuinely democratic alternative to the two bourgeois camps fighting over the details of the constitution.

With polls showing that only nine percent of electors actively want a monarch at the pinnacle of the constitutional structure, this result must be seen as a remarkable victory for Howard and his 'back to the future', 1950s-style ideological agenda. In a country with a decidedly republican sentiment, he has managed to steer his way through a referendum which kept his treasured monarchy intact.

Nevertheless, the message is far from simple. While Kerry Jones, leader of the Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy, has claimed the outcome as a resounding vote of confidence in the constitution and for conservative stability, those voting 'no' have done so for mixed reasons. Up to one third did so not to defend the existing constitution, but in order to reject *one particular* republican model. The referendum would not have gone down if it was not for these republicans, who

nevertheless placed themselves in the monarchist camp and thus, unwittingly, on the side of reaction. In essence, what was on offer was widely seen as a 'politicians' republic' - that is, a republic from above, with no democratic content from below.

With almost 84% of the vote counted, 54.65% were 'no', 44.45% 'yes' and 0.90% informal (ie, writing a different message on the ballot paper). Not one of the six states returned a 'yes' result, with only the public service-dominated Australian Capital Territory voting 'yes'. The ACT is not a state and holds no weight in referenda in the Australian constitution. Victoria had the highest 'yes' with 49.95% - it is also the state which returned the highest informal vote.

In opinion polls leading up to the referendum, around two thirds of the electorate stated that in any plebiscite where the choice was between a republic and a monarchy, they would opt for some form of republic. So while the 'no' result is a victory for Howard and the monarchists, the establishment Australian Republican Movement and its leader, millionaire merchant banker Malcolm Turnbull, are quite clearly culpable when it

comes to the defeat of their own undemocratic model.

Throughout the seven years or so of the ARM's existence, it has proposed a 'republic' that actually entails the barest minimum by way of constitutional change - an agenda which has failed to fire the imagination of the predominantly republican working class. Their defeat is not the defeat of consistent democrats and revolutionaries.

Chastising Howard for his obfuscatory role in the referendum, Turnbull said: "Here is a Liberal prime minister who had the chance to shape an inevitable transition and to shape it in a conservative and moderate way. All he has done is given the republican issue - a very popular issue - back to the Labor Party."

Turnbull has now resigned as head of the ARM. Yet the agenda for official republicans remains the same: minimal 'change' from above to prevent real, thorough-going democratic change from below.

In this context, we have not witnessed a victory for Queen Elizabeth II, but Howard. Yet the question is still open and in a way it has also opened up the republican issue in Britain.

In this referendum, the monarchists

had to give ground on what for them is a cherished truth - that Elizabeth Windsor has a right to rule by birth alone. Here we have monarchists admitting the admissibility of 'democratic' consultation on the question, relinquishing their presumptions of hereditary 'right' - a factor which could lead to their downfall. Republicans - in Australia and the UK - must take full advantage of this unwitting concession to democracy.

Already the budding king Charles III has said he would be prepared to seek approval in a referendum. Republicans must press for this vigorously from below. And this week, the contradictory nature of the constitutional monarchy was further exposed when the queen, fresh from her 'electoral victory' in Australia, lectured Ghana's parliament on the necessity of democratic accountability.

So in Australia the republic issue is far from dead. Already, the Labor Party has started debating its position for the 2001 election. Opposition leader Kim Beazley says he favours a plebiscite, before then moving to vote on the *nature* of any republic. The influential Labor state premier in New South Wales, Bob Carr, has expressed

Social-imperialism or working class independence

Simon Stevens of the Communist Party of Australia in Perth and Nick Fredman of the Democratic Socialist Party in Lismore have taken umbrage at recent *Weekly Worker* articles I have written on the Australian republic/constitutional referendum and on imperialist intervention in East Timor.

Firstly comrade Stevens. He has written about me in the CPGB's *Weekly Worker* and the DSP's *Green Left Weekly*. Good. However, rather than engaging in sober debate, he has merely attempted to lampoon my articles. Bad.

In *Green Left Weekly* he writes: "Apparently we should follow his [Marcus Larsen's] command and not support any UN peace-keeping force in East Timor, but instead demand the abolition of those reactionary bulwarks of anti-democracy, [Australia's six] states. Don't laugh; this man is serious."

I do not equate East Timor and the democratic centralist republic, as comrade Stevens suggests. I wrote about them in separate articles. Nor do I counterpose a fight around one against the other. Poor Simon exposes his utter lack of political imagination and an inherent economism by mocking my demand for the abolition of the federal monarchy system in Australia. My goodness. I will be calling for socialism next!

Of course, the recent referendum exposes the inherently undemocratic role the states play. Had the outcome on November 6 been a nationwide majority 'yes' vote to the monarchical republic, but with a 'no' vote in Queensland, Tasmania and West Aus-

tralia, this would have meant that the proposals would have fallen. The current states system allows a conservative minority to block the progressive majority. Intolerable for any democrat.

To call for the ending of the states system is neither an irrelevance nor some wild flight into leftism. It is achievable under capitalism, but it extends democracy and thus the room for initiative and manoeuvre by the working class. And if abolishing the states is so nutty, then how does comrade Stevens explain that it was on the policy books of the Australian Labor Party for years?

East Timor. Both comrades Fredman and Stevens (from Trotskyist and Stalinist backgrounds respectively) unite behind imperialism's intervention in East Timor.

Their stance reminds me of the position taken by the then International Socialists (now SWP) in Britain over Northern Ireland in 1968. The IS said that the entry of British troops provided a 'breathing space' for the republican community, and for that reason welcomed imperialism's role. However, unlike our friends Fredman and Stevens, the IS never actually demonstrated on the streets to back its assessment.

Comrades Fredman and Stevens argue that Australia was forced into East Timor by public pressure and that the DSP played a role in mobilising that pressure. I would argue that, then and now, the main factor driving imperialist intervention was not opinion at home, but strategic interests and the stability of the region - though these factors are not mutually exclusive. The mass spontaneous feel-

ings of solidarity and sympathy for the people of East Timor were effortlessly incorporated into the ruling chauvinist consensus. The DSP tagged along with a ruling class-orchestrated propaganda campaign.

Comrade Fredman argues: "The overriding imperative for Australian imperialism has been and continues to be maintaining its alliance with the Indonesian regime, and minimising embarrassment to the Indonesian armed forces (TNI)."

This is only a part of it. Australia's alliance with the regime is subordinate to regional stability and continued imperialist access to Indonesian markets and cheap labour. Look around the world over the past 10 years or so. Imperialist policy after the cold war has clearly shifted to one of favouring the peaceful replacement of 'third world' dictators with stable liberal bourgeois democracies. Witness El Salvador, the Philippines, Haiti, Chile, South Africa, South Korea, etc.

The problem with such an imperialist-sponsored transition in Indonesia has been the complete absence of civil society outside the Suharto/Golkar system. This has now changed, opening the way for the liberal bourgeoisie ... but also offering the possibility of democratic revolution.

Supporting Australian/UN troops in East Timor meant one of two things: Either you advocated that the Australian/UN forces should cooperate with the Indonesian armed forces (as they did), or you advocated war against Indonesia.

According to general Feisal

Tanjung, Habibie's coordinating minister for political affairs and security at the time of the referendum in East Timor, Habibie came close to declaring war against Australia and allegedly would have, had John Howard's government followed the DSP's advice. The claim came in the retired general's biography, where it is reported that Habibie said: "If we have to go to war our nation will stake everything it has, because East Timor remains part of us. Our country loves peace, but loves freedom and sovereignty more."

Perhaps the Australian army should not have stopped at the East-West Timor border? Perhaps it should have gone all the way to Jakarta, creating 'space' for the Indonesian democratic movement? Such are the illusions of democratic imperialism.

Comrade Fredman writes: "If socialists in Australia followed your [CPGB] policy, exactly what would we have urged the mass movement to demand of the Australian government? Nothing, apparently." Not true. Read my article and the follow-up letter in the *Weekly Worker*.

It is quite correct to call on the Australian government to break all links with the Indonesian military. It is quite correct to call on the Australian government to immediately recognise East Timor's independence and revoke the Timor Gap Treaty. But it is wholly another thing to advocate an imperialist adventure against Indonesia, substituting the active role of the working class and its allies for the armed might of imperialism to gain your objectives. This is social-imperialism.

There is another string to comrade Fredman's weak bow. Australian intervention was the only thing that could stop the genocide. This is liberalism *par excellence*. Should Nato invade Russia to save the Chechens? Should Nato have bombed Serbia to save the Kosovars? Did you support the US invasion of Haiti in 1993 (as did Noam Chomsky)? I hope not. Why is East Timor a different case?

Comrade Fredman worries about losing the 'ear' of the masses. This is reminiscent of the centrists and social-imperialists in World War I. These elements collapsed into defence of their own states against the supposed 'worse evil' of their enemies. Snowden, David, Plekhanov and co were afraid of losing the 'ear of the masses' too. And it is true that the revolutionary internationalists were isolated in August 1914.

A final point for comrade Stevens (from whom I bought many a book at the CPA's New Age bookshop on Pitt Street, Sydney when I was in the Young Socialist League). He claims my main target is not capitalism or imperialism, but the DSP. By the same measure, the main targets of Marx and Lenin were not capitalism or tsarism, but Lassalle and Proudhon, or Martov and the Mensheviks.

Yes, the *Weekly Worker* has an editorial policy which promotes open debate and exchange of ideas on the left. This includes polemic. I recommend it to comrade Stevens. Of course, he will not be allowed to rebut me in the CPA's *Guardian*. So why not try writing a *serious* article for the *Weekly Worker*? ●

Marcus Larsen

staunch opposition to the direct election model for president.

After their defeat, the official republicans are looking decidedly shaky. Yet the very fact of the referendum has exposed the constitution as pliable - and increasingly open to change from below. This is ringing warning bells in the establishment camp.

Perth businesswoman and prominent 'yes' campaigner Janet Holmes à Court pointed to the underlying instability in the new situation. She said: "I suspect that we won't get a republic now unless there is a major rethink of our current system. Our system has worked fantastically well for the past 100 years." It is for this reason that establishment republicans such as Bob Carr favour minimal reforms, to ensure that constitutional change can be controlled, and is kept out of the hands of the masses.

Decidedly patrician bourgeois politicians have sat in both camps. The monarchists proclaim the monarch as representing the constitutional stability of the nation, while establishment republicans hope to achieve a presidential system to perform the exact same role.

A real thirst for democratic change exists only outside the rival establishment factions. Unfortunately, with no campaign to galvanise them, they split between the 'yes' and 'no' camps, with only a tiny minority opting to reject both undemocratic alternatives and registering an informal vote - by writing, 'For a real republic' across the ballot paper. While this constituency is ripe for the politics of revolutionary democracy, the old left is content to leave the entire republican agenda in the hands of the ruling class.

The issue of a new constitutional arrangement under some form of republican model is emerging as a potentially hegemonic idea in Australian politics. The victory of the monarchists this time could be their last hurrah. But with the defeat of a most undemocratic form of republic, the issue is far from settled. Who will take the lead on the republican issue now? Given its track record during the referendum campaign, the Australian left will have to shift strategic tack 180 degrees for it to take up the challenge.

At present the Democratic Socialist Party, the International Socialist Organisation and the 'official' Communist Party of Australia wait for the Labor Party to take the lead. We don't need to act around constitutional issues, goes their refrain, as they do not concern workplace pay and conditions. Yet without a working class programme for real constitutional change, it will be the ruling class which continues to decide how we are ruled.

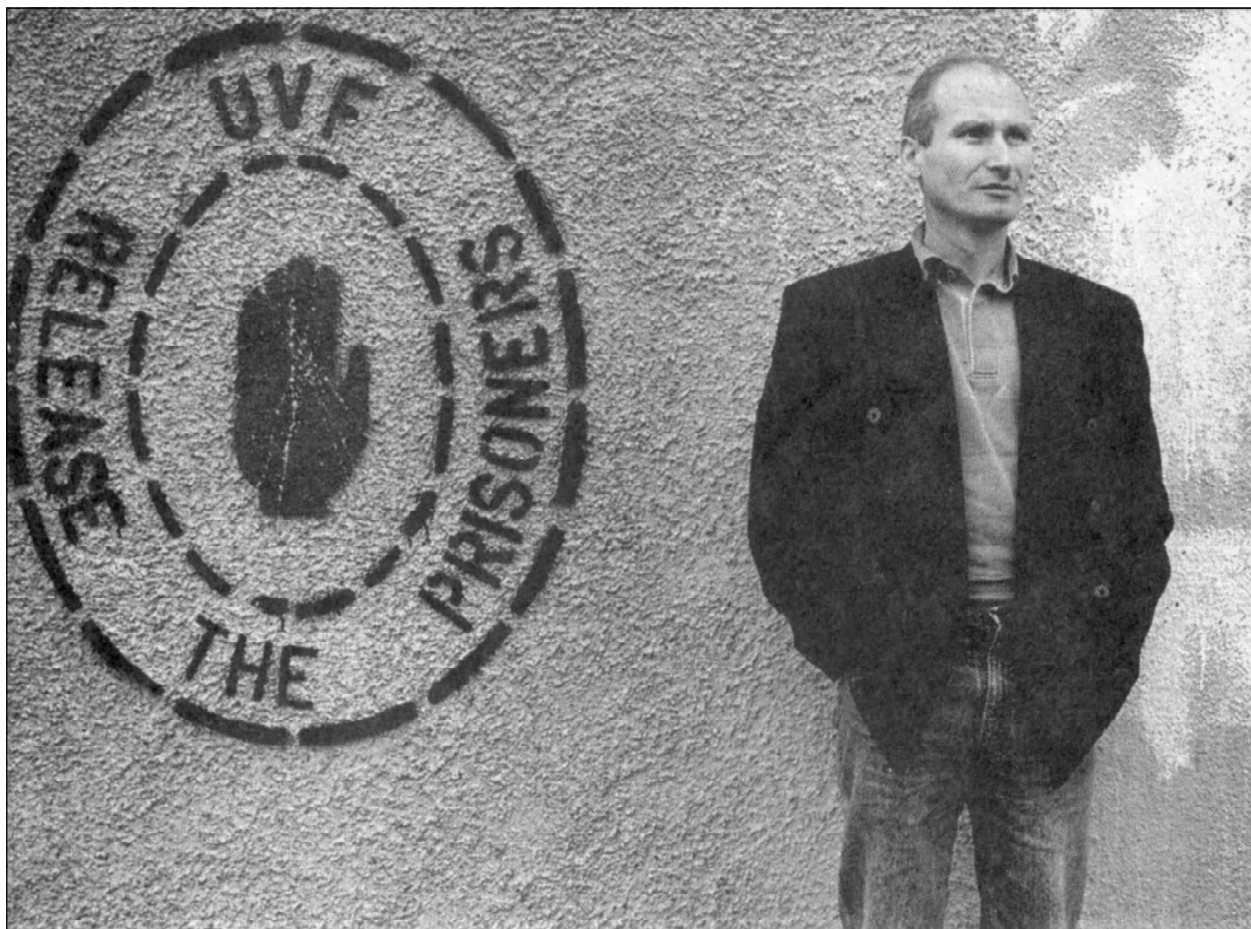
Despite the left's disdain, a desire for radical change is gathering pace - and predominantly in working class areas.

At present, this feeling expresses itself in the form of a demand for a directly elected president with reserve powers. Yet, for communists, it would be an abrogation of our duties to merely go along with this. Presidentialism *per se* is counter-posed to real democracy from below.

With no mass campaign on the ground, the challenge is clear. It is up to communists to set a new agenda ●

Marcus Larsen

Hutchinson addresses SSP



Billy Hutchinson: national socialist

'Socialism 2000' - organised in Glasgow's Caledonian University by the Scottish Socialist Party over the weekend of November 6-7 - was well attended with 200 to 250 people coming along. As a whole it illustrated some of the strengths but also some of the weaknesses of the SSP. As did the most important debates: socialism and nationalism, drugs, Ireland and the question of whether you have to be red to be green.

The 'Socialism and nationalism' debate involved Alan McCombes, editor of *Scottish Socialist Voice*, Labour MP John McAllion and the Scottish National Party's Kenny McAskill. McAllion said there was still a left in the Labour Party, and seemed to give the impression that he might consider the SSP if his position in Labour became impossible. I felt he was merely playing to the gallery. For his part, McAskill symbolised the rightward shift in the SNP in what he said. "Old-time religion" is all well and good, but most people favoured a "property-owning democracy", according to him. Alan McCombes said nothing particularly startling, but did attack what McAskill said more than the statements by McAllion.

By far the most contentious debate was Ireland. This was mainly because Billy Hutchinson of the Progressive Unionist Party was on the platform and rank and file pressure - including agitation by Phil Stott - forced the leadership to include an anti-peace process speaker (John McNulty of Socialist Democracy in Ireland was chosen). Hutchinson gave a pretty hard-line display of loyalism. He stressed his 'British' identity and quoted the slogan, 'Ready for peace, prepared for war', which is apparently the kind of thing the Ulster Volunteer Force paints on gable-ends in the North. He said he was a "socialist", though he did not claim the same for the PUP. He was a good speaker and I fear he went down well with much of the audience.

The Sinn Féin speaker, Daithi Doolan, was from the South, and not a very senior figure. For much of his speech one would have thought SF was a Dublin-area anti-drugs pressure group. Towards the end he did call for a British military withdrawal from Ireland.

Linda Walker (Women's Coalition) was very pro-peace process and specifically said the Women's Coalition was not socialist, while Peter Hadden (Socialist Party in Ireland) said there was a basis for a "new politics", which had long been the SPI's cherished hope.

John McNulty made some valid points in the workshop afterwards. He said that Hutchinson was the commander-in-chief of the UVF and that if it became normal for the SSP to invite people like him onto its platforms, there was a danger of the SSP going over to reaction. If the Quinn brothers (Catholic children killed by loyalist arsonists)

had been Asians murdered by racists, he wondered, would the SSP have given a BNP leader a platform?

Mingling with grassroots SSP members, I detected little sense of disapproval for the fact that Hutchinson had been allowed to speak, though a couple of visitors from the French section of the Committee for a Workers International had misgivings about it, which I found to be a healthy response. I think this one will run and run.

The range of opinion to be found in the SSP is positive. The trouble of course is that this mess of pottage contains some nourishment, but is also marred with some filthy weeds. It is up to the left in the SSP to organise better and counteract the influence of the right, or Hutchinson's variety of 'socialism' will come to be seen as normal - and perhaps on more than the Irish question ●

James Robertson

CWI split rumours

Peter Taaffe has recently been up in Scotland doing a speaking tour. He is not being promoted by the Scottish Socialist Party, but is here on his own initiative and attended a special conference and a series of hush-hush meetings.

Via the Committee for a Workers' International Taaffe is formally the power behind the scenes. A red moriarty. Tommy Sheridan (convenor), Alan McCombes (*Scottish Socialist Voice* editor), Richie Venton (industrial organiser) and most of the SSP's regional organisers are CWI members through the semi-clandestine group International Socialism.

However, driven on by the logic of nationalism and as a gesture towards social democratic elements in the SSP

leadership - Hugh Kerr, Bill Bonnar and Alan Green - the majority of the CWI leadership in Scotland are proposing to liquidate their organisation completely.

In other words comrade Taaffe has been attempting to save Scotland for the CWI. He has just lost the Merseyside region of his Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Pakistani Labour Party. To lose Scotland would be the last straw.

The only significant support he managed to garner has been Phillip Stott - the SSP's north east organiser. Comrades Sheridan, McCombes, Venton and co are determined to make the break from Taaffe's crisis-ridden sect for what they believe is the big time around the corner in Scotland ●

Jimmy Gordon

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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Hands off Chechnya

If war, as Clausewitz tells us, is nothing more than the continuation of politics by other means, then what kind of politics lies behind Russia's invasion of Chechnya?

Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, the Russian prime minister and heir apparent to Boris Yeltsin, would have us believe that his forces are engaged in a crusade against the scourge of Islamic terrorism. The name of Osama bin Laden is invoked as justification for a campaign that, by implication, is not merely in Russia's interest but that of the entire 'international community'.

The truth is very different. You do not need an entire army - the 58th, based in Vladikavkaz - with 200 aircraft, 400 tanks, thousands of armoured personnel carriers in a force comprising tens of thousands in order to liquidate a few hundred "bandits". What we are dealing with here is a dirty colonial war, the strategic political objective of which is to destroy Chechnya's three-year-old *de facto* independence, subjugate the country and bring it back under Russian domination. Control of the Caucasus, which has been a powder keg ever since the implosion of the USSR, is vital to Russia's geopolitical goals. Economic factors also come into play, since Chechnya was one of Russia's biggest oil refining centres, with pipelines to Makhachkala on the Caspian and Tuapse on the Black Sea.

From the outset this has been Putin's war. In his first speech to the duma he pledged to strengthen the military and warned that "Russia's territorial integrity cannot be an object of discussion" (*The Independent* August 17). Incursions by Islamic Wahhabi fighters - allegedly based in Chechnya - and under the leadership of the Chechen 'warlord' Shamil Basayev, into the territory of Dagestan back in August, were a godsend to Putin. Terrorist atrocities that left more than 300 people dead in Moscow and Volgograd the following month created the perfect climate of popular hysteria, anger and the thirst for vengeance. Putin blamed these horrific bombings on Chechen separatists, but to date there is not a shred of evidence to substantiate the claim. The four men named in the Russian media as being wanted in connection with the bombings are not Chechens, but Karachai - another Caucasian people with grievances against Moscow dating back to the 1940s, when, like the natives of the Chechen-Ingush republic, the Karachai were deported en masse to central Asia on Stalin's orders, because of their alleged collaboration with the Germans.

Putin has evidently learned the lessons of Russia's humiliating debacle in the Chechen war of 1994-96, when more than 6,000 Russian soldiers, many of them young conscripts, returned to Russia in coffins. This time there has been no frontal infantry assault but a seven-week campaign of relentless and totally indiscriminate aerial and artillery bombardment. A defining moment came on October 22,

when a dozen short-range missiles struck the main market in the Chechen capital Grozny. The attack left 163 civilians dead and more than 400 wounded. Putin immediately denied responsibility. Colonel-general Valery Manilov, deputy chief of the general staff, claimed that the explosions were the result of a "clash between two bandit formations" (*The Independent* October 25). Yet on the same day the chief press officer of the North Caucasus military district, Alexander Veklich, told the media that "our intelligence discovered a market ... where arms and ammunition were sold to terrorists. The market was destroyed in a special operation" (*The Guardian* October 23).

Current estimates suggest that more than 200,000 Chechens - nearly a quarter of the entire population of the country - have fled their homes and sought refuge in neighbouring Ingushetia. Refugees have been attacked by Russian aircraft. On October 29, for example, some 50 civilians were killed and hundreds injured when a Russian plane fired missiles at their convoy near the town of Samashki. In another incident, a red cross convoy was bombed at Shami-Yurt, west of Grozny, resulting in 25 deaths and more than 70 wounded. The Russian official response is again a blunt denial, or the claim that the vehicles involved contained "bandits".

The response of the west has been predictably muted. Just as in 1994-96, the Chechen war is seen as Russia's internal affair, a view which echoes the stance taken by the Russian government itself. US secretary of state Albright describes the situation as "deplorable and ominous"; Clinton speaks of his "deep concern"; deputy secretary of state Strobe Talbot expresses the pious hope that Russia will "turn to political levers as soon as possible" and "find a way to minimise civilian casualties" (*The Guardian* October 30). In reality, there is little that the imperialist powers can do, even if they wanted to. Military intervention is out of the question for obvious reasons. Economic pressure - such as the suspension of negotiations to reschedule the next tranche of debt repayment - could easily provoke a politically motivated Russian default, which would have an immensely destabilising effect on global markets. Even routine diplomatic pressure - which would be seen in Russia as 'bullying' by the west - would only serve to strengthen the rightwing and official 'communist' parties in next month's parliamentary elections.

Grozny, still little more than a heap of ruins since the last war, is now surrounded, lacking basic utilities and suffering a severe food and water shortage. It looks like a soft target, but the Chechen army has not yet been deployed and the Russian general staff no doubt remember the heavy casualties they suffered in house-to-house fighting when they took Grozny in 1996. The logic of Putin's position is that he must not only take the capi-

tal itself, but occupy and subdue the whole country for an indefinite period. Public opinion in Russia is firmly behind him at the moment, but that would change in the event of serious losses among ground forces.

In the eyes of Russia's military leadership, their defeat in the last Chechen war was the result of a stab in the back by politicians, and the mere suggestion of a possible negotiated political settlement to the present conflict was enough to bring about a crisis in relations between the Russian government and military last week. General Anatoly Kvashnin, chief of the general staff, apparently threatened to resign in the event of a political solution, and rumours suggested that many senior officers were ready to follow him. Kvashnin's deputy, Manilov, issued a statement saying that "Chechnya is our territory and we must not give it away. Losing Chechnya would lead to a dangerous disintegration of Russia ... Without Russia Chechnya will become a terrorist state." Vladimir Shamanov, a top military official with Russian forces in Chechnya warned that "Many officers, including some generals, are ready to resign if military operations are stopped" (*The Sunday Times* November 7).

It is significant that Yeltsin himself flew back to Moscow from his dacha in Sochi for urgent consultations with Putin. The outcome was a remarkable joint statement from Kvashnin and the Russian defence minister Igor Sergeev, stating that "with the help of lies, slander and disinformation, attempts are being made to cause a rift between the state and military leaderships" (*ibid*). Against this background of heavy and public pressure from the military, it would seem that Putin has little room for political manoeuvre. His future is entirely dependent on success in the Chechen campaign and he cannot afford to forfeit the support of the military leadership in the middle of a war.

Principled communists must resist any temptation to comfort themselves with the illusion that the events in Chechnya are merely a reflection of post-Soviet Russia's capitulation to bourgeois ideology and its return to a pre-Soviet, tsarist policy of empire-building and colonialism. Painful as it may be for some of us to acknowledge, the truth is more complicated and centres on the fact that for much of the Soviet period, from Stalin onwards, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in theory committed to socialist internationalism, was in fact suffused with that Great Russian chauvinism which Marx, Engels and Lenin so violently detested.

The history of Chechnya is a good example. In the great days after the Bolshevik revolution, the territory of the Chechen and Ingush peoples was accorded the status of autonomous regions. "Soviet Russia," said Stalin in 1920 as commissar of nationalities, "is a torch which lights the path to liberation from the yoke of the oppressors for all the peoples of the world"

(JV Stalin *SW* Vol 4, Moscow 1953, p408). It was. However, by 1936 Soviet Russia had become its opposite and Chechnya and Ingushetia were merged from above to form the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic. With the mass deportations of 1944, referred to above, the republic was dissolved and not re-established until 1957, when Khrushchev allowed those exiles who had survived to return to their homeland.

Like the USSR's other supposedly 'autonomous' republics under bureaucratic socialism, the Chechen-Ingush Republic had no real autonomy whatever. They were, in essence, colonial possessions of the Soviet state. Any aspirations they may have had to really autonomous self-government, let alone self-determination, were denied.

So long as the Soviet Union existed, it served to suppress, though not to eradicate, nationalism and separatism in its empire. The break-up of the USSR inevitably unleashed these forces in Chechnya as elsewhere. Dzhokhar Dudayev, a former Soviet air force general carried out a coup against the Soviet administration in Chechnya in August 1991. In October of that year his election to the presidency was followed by the voluntary separation of the Chechen-Ingush republic into two separate states. When Dudayev's aggressive anti-Russian nationalism and mismanagement led to Chechnya's increasing isolation and impoverishment, he dealt with the growing opposition by dissolving parliament. Repeated attempts by armed opposition groups, funded and supplied by Russia, were made to depose Dudayev, who was eventually killed by a Russian missile.

Post-Soviet Chechnya, like some other Caucasian states, has been bedevilled by corruption and banditry in the form of hostage-taking and the like, but the fact remains that the current president, Aslan Maskhadov, another former Soviet officer, who led Chechen resistance to the Russians in the 1994-96 war, was elected in polls that western observers described as fair. He therefore has a democratic mandate to maintain the country's *de facto* independence. Maskhadov himself is no lover of Islamic militancy or separatism, but the refusal of Moscow to engage in any negotiations with the Chechen government has left him isolated and powerless.

The repercussions of the Chechen war on Caucasian nationals living in Russia have been serious. More than 2,000 have been arrested and deported from Moscow since the start of the fighting. With the duma elections now only a few weeks away, most mainstream politicians seem to be vying with each other not just in terms of Russian jingoistic chauvinism but in expressions of outright racism. Yuri Luzhkov, mayor of Moscow, whose Fatherland-All-Russia looks to be the likely victor in the elections, has given his backing to deportations, stating that Muscovites need to "cleanse" their city of these "guests". The in-

creasingly strident xenophobia and racism in Russian politics is exemplified by the leading newspaper *Izvestia*, owned by the powerful Unexim business and banking group. In the wake of the September bombings in Moscow, the paper reported with approval the fact that the mood of ordinary Russians was "changing from fear to hatred. The slogan 'For each house in Moscow - a village in Chechnya' is becoming popular."

Viktor Ilyukhin, a leading member of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and head of the duma security committee, has accused the authorities of loosening control over the influx of Caucasian nationals into the capital and expressed his party's support for the deportations and the war. Ilyukhin came to notice some months ago for his virulently antisemitic views. For all its pretensions to represent all nationalities living in Russia, the CPRF itself has become more and more openly racist. Readers will recall that last December, the party's leader, Gennady Zyuganov blamed "Zionists" for Russia's desperate economic plight, and demanded that the country's Jews should decide where their loyalties lay - with Zionist Israel or mother Russia. This kind of lurid and disgusting antisemitic claptrap, totally alien to anyone calling themselves communist, is what characterises the principal 'communist' party in Russia today.

It should, of course, be condemned outright and in this connection we are left to wonder what our own 'official communists' in the CPB have to say about a party with whom they still maintain fraternal links. A few months ago, we noted interesting signs in the CPB's journal *Communist Review* that at least some members might be engaging in serious thinking on the subject of the USSR (*Weekly Worker* August 26). A glance at the *Morning Star*, however, is enough to confirm that old habits die hard. Comrade Brian Denny, that inveterate fan of Slobodan Milosevic during the Balkan war, merely restates Moscow's pretext for the "advance" into Chechnya and lards his report with repeated references to "rebels", "separatists", "bandits" and "terrorists". While hundreds of innocent civilians are being killed and maimed in Grozny and right across the country, Denny relays Putin's facile assurance that Russia's only purpose is "to create peace and to re-establish order in Chechnya as quickly as possible" (November 2).

Communists must unreservedly condemn the vicious, colonial war being waged against Chechnya. We also have no truck with the reactionary aims of the small and unrepresentative bunch of Islamic fundamentalists who may come to exercise growing influence as the Russian offensive intensifies. The Chechen people must have the right to self-determination. In view of Putin's murderous assault, that today can only mean the right to independence. ■

Michael Malkin