

Revolt against Blairism

So, round one to Livingstone, then.

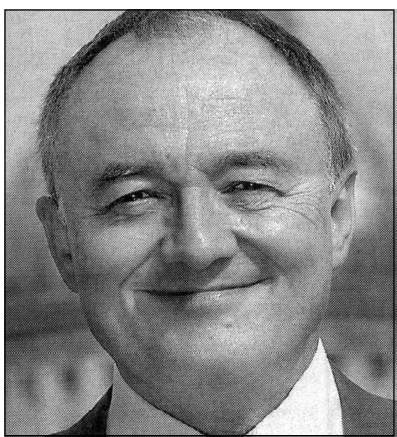
The mere fact that the man has cleared the formidable number of hurdles cynically placed in his way by the Labour Party apparatus simply to appear on the shortlist for Labour's London mayoral candidate is a blow against Blair. The whole format of the arduous selection procedure and the following tripartite electoral college is a crude attempt to block Livingstone. The convoluted lengths to which Millbank is having to go to spike 'Red Ken's' candidacy underline that he represents for something more than just a nakedly ambitious career politician: ie, himself.

If the man did not have behind him a mass left sentiment amongst the Labour rank and file as well as broader society, the machine hacks and time-servers would have unceremoniously told him to bugger off long before now. As Livingstone's November 19 letter to his supporters notes, "For over a year Labour Party members, trade unionists and thousands of members of the public have been urging that I should be on the ballot paper for Labour's selection of a candidate for mayor of London. Yesterday we achieved that objective. *It would have been impossible without your help.*"

Having come this far, the Livingstone campaign has built up a real head of steam and must stand a good chance of securing the official nomination. Palpably the other two hopefuls lack conviction, pazzaz or even a real London-specific programme of any kind.

Dobson's campaign only took off - if that is the right phrase - late last Friday, after frustrating weeks of "being stalled in procedural wrangles over Ken Livingstone's eligibility to stand" (*The Guardian* November 20). His politically inept first rallying cry for the capital's population was his commitment "to fight crime on the London Underground". Giving advance warning of the type of moronic campaign he intends to run, he snottily added for Livingstone's benefit that "extra trains and frozen fares would be worthless without more security".

The 'security' that most London commuters would like to enjoy when travelling along the capital's creaky transport infrastructure is the confidence that they will not be involved in a rerun of the Paddington and Clapham disasters. Not being ripped off by some stropky adolescent or impoverished east European refugee is certainly a consideration, but comes much lower on the list of commuter priorities. This is why Livingstone's opposition to the break-up and sneaking privatisation of the tube strikes a real resonance with millions of people. Whatever the limitations of his alternative, it is in tune with the mass revulsion against the effects of the unbridled market on the basic fabric of our society and the ugly greed of



blatantly parasitic capitalist enterprises such as Railtrack.

The problems of the official Labour apparatus go much deeper than the distinct lack of sparkle of the bumbling Dobson, however. Blair's despotic conduct has handed the banner of democracy to Livingstone. In a Labour Party which seems to remain stubbornly unBlairised at grassroots level, there is a growing sense of hostility to the so-called 'modernisers', widely perceived as a credit-card-thin layer of pushy pups in the organisation. The resentment felt by wide swathes of ordinary members was given expression in the vote for the Grassroots Alliance at this year's Labour Party conference. This saw three lefties elected onto the NEC.

The best outcome that Millbank and the Blairites can hope for now is a 'Welsh' one. The political editor of the *Western Mail* comments in connection with the London mayoral contest: "There's something of a sense of *déjà vu* about the Labour Party's problems." He detected "uncannily striking parallels" between the sordid machinations in the capital and "the election contest between Alun Michael and Rhodri Morgan for the leadership of the party in Wales" (November 19).

Morgan, the popular choice of ordinary Welsh Labour Party members, was stitched up by the control-obsessed Labour Party centre. "Morgan won every democratic vote in the Welsh Labour movement, but lost the rigged election" - as Nick Cohen puts it in *The Observer* (November 21). However, the resulting disillusionment of members and Labour's electoral base was not long in being expressed. Labour in Wales won 54% of the vote in the 1997 general elec-

tion. In the 1998 assembly contest, its support slumped to a third of the votes cast. Blair's imposed candidate - Alun Michael - now leads a minority government in Cardiff and even has to make semi-nationalist speeches about the future of devolution in order to secure Plaid Cymru support for his shaky administration.

Dobson would not fare much better. The popular perception of him as an imposed stooge will not dissipate for most Londoners, even with the campaigning period now lengthened to allow him to gather some sort of credibility - perhaps space for contempt to breed a form of familiarity. Dobson was even struggling to keep pace with Jeffrey Archer before the public disgrace and subsequent fall of the seedy Tory fantasist.

The fragility of Millbank's hold over the party is confirmed by the problems Blair has been having with even his 'safe' candidates. Both Jackson and Dobson have expressed opposition to the crude gerrymandering on show during the selection panel fiasco. Dobson went as far as to announce that he would withdraw if Livingstone were not allowed onto the short list, although this clearly had less to do with a real commitment to democracy: more a basic survival instinct. Obviously, the man did not want to be tainted with the opprobrium of such a blatant stitch-up. Similarly, it is hard to say whether Livingstone's overtures to Jackson to run as his deputy will be successful. If they were, such a team would be well nigh unassailable.

The furore in London is part of a wider fluidity in mainstream politics. The Labour Party itself has been in a process of change, with a disturbance in the relationship between the bourgeois and working class poles of what is still a *bourgeois workers' party*. Despite the Livingstone controversy Labour has been becoming more of an outright bourgeois party over the past period. Indeed, this Livingstone crisis could be an important moment in actually precipitating official Labour cutting its links with the workers' movement and relaunching itself as a pure 'third way' organisation, purged of all its association with trade union politics and state socialism.

However, the very fact of Livingstone's challenge and the huge problems it is causing Blair underlines that this process is not yet complete,

no matter what a sect like the Socialist Party has to tell us in order to justify its own relatively recent departure from Labour. The SP reckons 80% of trade union members would vote Livingstone given the chance. His success "will show an enormous union revolt against Blair and his policies", *The Socialist* correctly notes (November 19). So why does the SP leadership not openly and unambiguously call for a Livingstone vote if he manages to beat Millbank and secure official nomination?

In the red-baiting article in the London *Evening Standard* of November 15, the political commentator Peter Kellner comments that the Communist Party supports the candidacy of Livingstone in service of our real agenda - "wrecking the [Labour] Party". He is quite right. A Livingstone challenge for London mayor contains that potential. It poses the possibility of a mass political movement either breaking to the left from Labour, or perhaps provoking the expressly bourgeois wing of the party to kick out the left. Either way, the flux created would offer the opportunity for communists to intervene, to fight for the labour movement to assume very different political forms from the past.

This is what must dictate our tactics. While our strategic aim of overcoming Labourism remains constant, by definition tactics employed to achieve this will be infinitely flexible. If they are not, frankly they stop being tactics. Thus, some of our critics featured in recent letters - members as well as friends of the Party - are very wide of the mark when they suggest that our backing of Livingstone is a "flip", an about-turn designed to support the Labour Party so beloved of much of the rest of the left until very recently.

For instance, Michael Farmer (*Weekly Worker* November 11) asks if we will now "support 'critically' any other Labour left mouthing some socialist-sounding platitudes who manages to get some support". We can easily turn the tables on comrade Farmer by *concretising* the question.

We are faced not with a dream scenario where an abstract 'left' Labourite has "some support". The active majority of the rank and file of the Labour Party in London are revolting against Blairism - the form that the expressly pro-capitalist pole of this bourgeois workers' party currently

takes. Beyond that, the incipient rebellion strikes a cord with mass democratic sentiments in wider society and - crucially - with militant transport unions in the capital, some of whom are already seriously considering standing GLA candidates against Blair's nominees.

Mass discontent and restlessness has found a hero in the form of Ken Livingstone, a man with a long history on the left of the party. Conscious of this, the right of the party has thrown everything but the kitchen sink at the man to prevent him from standing. Paradoxically, this blatant gerrymandering and manipulation has probably *increased* his support, as tens of thousands, possibly millions across the country, have found themselves alienated from New Labour's contempt for democracy.

It is these *concrete* - and potentially highly favourable - conditions which dictate our support for Livingstone. A vote for Livingstone is a revolt against Blairism. It is the job of communists to intervene vigorously to push such a rebellion forward, while at the same time exposing the limitations of Livingstone's reformist politics. Another phrase for the same process is to *merge the communist programme with a mass movement in society*. The alternative is to reduce communists to stallholders for *passive propaganda* for socialism and communism.

The situation is thus qualitatively different to the general election of 1997. Our opposition to Labour then - including to those on its left who refused to differentiate themselves from the programme of Blairism - was absolutely correct. People did *not* vote for New Labour as an act of elementary rebellion against the explicitly pro-capitalist wing of the workers' movement and the damage the market is inflicting on them, their families and communities. The illusions that filled people's heads in 1997 were mainstream bourgeois illusions - that Blair and Labour would be 'better' than the Tories, or perhaps that they 'could not be as bad'. In other words, they were an expression of the standard cycle of illusion and disillusion that dictate the alternation of governmental parties in the 'normal' model of a two-party capitalist system. The United States provides a good example of this Tweedledum-Tweedledee safety valve which serves the system of capitalism so admirably.

The illusions that Livingstone articulates and personifies are *left-leaning* and express an alienation from Blairism. This alone dictates that our attitude to them must be more sympathetic, more partisan. Communists in the capital will intervene energetically in any Livingstone candidacy for mayor. We will fight to take any movement it precipitates way beyond the politics of 'Red Ken' •

Mark Fischer



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

London mayor

Urgent message for Phil Rudge - you have nothing to lose but the "material boundaries" of your comfy armchair! (Letters *Weekly Worker* November 11).

Out there in the very *real* material world, Phil, thousands - perhaps even *millions* - have been disgusted by the petty, anti-democratic vendetta conducted by the Blairites against 'Red Ken'. The support being generated for his bid to become London mayor has the potential to humiliate the Blairite leadership, maybe even split the London Labour Party. Most surely a "living manifesto", which communists and socialists should take an energetic part in helping to shape and push in a revolutionary democratic direction.

But not our Phil. He is aghast at such politics, which for him represent the emergence of a "new world without principle". Instead Phil hankers after the certainties of his 'old world with principle'. But our good comrade is perfectly entitled of course to luxuriate in his 'principles'. On his own. In his armchair.

Eddie Ford
Middlesex

No change

The CPGB's 'policy flip' on Livingstone exists entirely in comrade Michael Farmer's head (Letters *Weekly Worker* November 11).

As a Leninist, not ultra-left organisation, the CPGB has *always* had a policy of critically supporting and encouraging left splits from Labour - not to mention an active engagement with *all* genuinely progressive and democratic movements in society as a whole. What has changed?

Presumably comrade Farmer thinks the CPGB should have ignored or condemned the Socialist Labour Party from birth, told the Socialist Alliances to take a running jump, refused to collaborate or work with Militant/Socialist Party, etc. All these organisations originated in some shape or form from some variety of Labourism. Comrade Farmer implies that the CPGB should also be indifferent as to whether 'Red Ken' or Dobbo secures the Labour nomination for London mayor - and to who actually ends up becoming mayor.

This is not serious politics. It is a bit distressing to learn that the height of comrade Farmer's ambition is for the CPGB to become a permanently irrelevant sect - along with all the rest. Just what the working class needs.

John Dart
Bristol

British-Irish

I have been following the 'British-Irish' debate with its constant cycle of thesis/antithesis, in which Conrad's narrative stands counterposed to that of his critics. A recurring theme catches my attention - ie, the ease in which unionists are re-labelled 'British-Irish' and repackaged as a kind of misunderstood population, neglecting the sinister aspects that have shrouded their state security system and all its machinations.

The 'British-Irish' label is a disguise to hide the inadequacy of socialism to re-emerge from partition as a unifying factor. It symbolises the retreat from socialist aims by each respective community as the hunt for the 'national question' took hold. Things got polarised - Catholics are equated with nationalism and protestants with unionism; black/white distinctions seem to be possible - the 'them against us' syndrome. Politicians were thrown up who claimed to represent each community or religion, not class.

On a final point, in the *Weekly Worker* (November 11), it is noted by

your correspondent that "[Billy Hutchinson] was a good speaker and went down well with the audience" - this is vintage Hutchinson as 'one of the lads'. I wonder, did any of the audience think to question the credentials of this self-professed 'socialist', and ask basically what tenet of Marxism could lead a person to become the apologist for a gang of cut-throats, who kill Catholic working people. The ironic thing is that he has got away with it for so long.

Pat Carlin
Derry

Nationalists

A principled and consistent position on the national question, imperialism and democratic rights appears to be beyond the abilities of Gerry Downing, John Stone, *et al* (*Weekly Worker* November 18).

Argentinean dictator Galtieri's invasion of the Falkland Island brought him into conflict with British imperialism. *Ergo*, viva Galtieri! Presumably the democratic rights of the "2,000 Kelpers" were immaterial.

Perhaps the comrades could explain how this motley band of sheep farmers clinging to a storm-lashed rock deny the Argentine people their nationhood? The only principled position for Marxists during the Falklands war was revolutionary defeatism and self-determination for the Falkland Islanders. Anything else is surely nationalist crap.

The comrades "hope the CPGB will re-examine its position" on the KLA. We have always been clear that our support for this petty-bourgeois nationalist army is *critical*. As was our view - and support - of the IRA. The KLA were fighting a democratic war of national liberation. Within the disputed territory there is (or was) a Serbian (oppressor?) minority. Like us, Gerry, John, *et al* are concerned at the expulsion of this minority: ie, the reversal of the poles of oppression. Strangely their concern does not extend to the (oppressor) community of Northern Ireland. There's consistent democracy for you.

Andy Hannah
South London

Withdrawal

It seems you are once again getting your collective leftist knickers in a twist over the national question: to wit your 'British-Irish' debate. Perhaps I may be of assistance.

The root cause of your problem lies in your unyielding allegiance to the 'right of self-determination of peoples'. This abstract right rapidly becomes nonsensical on any close examination.

First, we have to look at what a nation is: despite some of your comrades enumerating Stalin's symptomatic approach, I think the question has never been adequately addressed in your columns. Substantively, we could define the nation as being the extent of the domination of a hegemonic elite: the extent to which one 'selected tradition' is accepted among a group of people, based on the material control of the means of communication and transport, backed up with - and this is an important part - a monopoly of the means of violence by the dominant group. Hence, it has been rightly said that the state makes the nation, not the nation the state.

In other words, a nation is the extent of the domain of the ruling class, the demarcation of their natural and human property resources. Thus, self-determination for a people simply becomes the self-determination of the ruling class of that people - no one living under a master can have self-determination, regardless of whether that master shares a language, a skin tone or a religion with

them. In supporting national self-determination, you are simply supporting the right of the ruling class to rule.

Instead of the abstracted right of self-determination for *a* people, you should be supporting self-determination of *people*, which in the current state of the world can only be synonymous with socialism itself. Before, in your letter columns, I called for a working class withdrawal from Britain, and I was serious. Likewise I would call for a working class withdrawal from Ireland. The business of drawing lines on maps, of allocating areas for our masters to rule, is not our business. The nation state is simply a unit of property. We are the opponents of property, so we should oppose nationalism, in all its varied forms.

Bill Martin
SPGB

False radicalism

In general one would be in favour of protests against US imperialism, such as the recent anti-Clinton riots that were apparently organised by the Greek Communist Party, since the US is the most powerful and hegemonic of the enemies of the world's working class.

However, US imperialism is not the *only* enemy of the working class internationally, and the particular motives for the KKE's action are something I am more than a little suspicious of. Some would think that such an action, which I understand was primarily a protest against Nato's war against Serbia over Kosovo (and thus a continuation of the movement that erupted during the actual war), is in some way reflective of a qualitatively superior radicalism of the Greek left in comparison with other countries, where the anti-war mobilisations were much smaller.

However, I think this is an illusion, and in mobilising against the Americans in this *particular* context, the Greek Stalinists are in fact acting as chauvinist spokespersons for their own ruling class, and not opponents of capitalism and imperialism at all. Not that there is anything unusual about that for Stalinists, of course, right from the days when the American CP cheered for the atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the French CP leader Thorez called on every Frenchman to 'get a Kraut' at the end of the last world war.

Key to this today in the Greek context is the Macedonian question, which for Greek nationalists is very explosive, and goes to the root of the stability of the Greek state. The coming into existence of an independent Macedonia caused apoplexy in Greece, because the historic territory of ancient 'Macedonia' includes wide areas of Greece, including the major city of Salonika. Greek nationalists have historically denied the existence of the Macedonians as a people (the Macedonians being a Slavic people who speak a language that appears to be basically a dialect of Bulgarian, but who tend to regard themselves as a separate people from the Bulgarians).

The break-up of Yugoslavia meant that Yugoslavia's Macedonian republic became a separate state - and the Greeks successfully blocked with the Serbian government in bullying Macedonia into *not* using 'Macedonia' as the name of their state. So now you have a small independent state in the Balkans that is internationally and officially known by the peculiar name of 'FYROM', which is an acronym for 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'.

The Greek government's squalid little alliance with Serbia is at the root of the protests organised by the Greek Stalinists - the reasoning being that anything that weakens Serbia also weakens Greece. They are not directed against US imperialism (Greece

is in fact a full member of Nato itself), but against ... Macedonia. This is the chauvinist and reactionary motivation behind the pseudo-'anti-imperialist' demonstrations in Athens.

Ian Donovan
London

DSP mote

Weekly Worker readers could be forgiven for thinking Australia's Democratic Socialist Party a crude economist sect like the (Cliffite) International Socialist Organisation or (Stalinist) Communist Party of Australia - if they are only going on Marcus Larsen's misrepresentation of our politics *vis-à-vis* the republic referendum: "We don't need to act around constitutional issues, goes their refrain, as they do not concern workplace pay and conditions" (*Weekly Worker* November 11).

I can't speak for the ISO or CPA, but maybe *Weekly Worker* readers would like to see just what the DSP was really saying (including how we criticised the ISO and CPA). You can read our various statements about the republic referendum farce at <<http://www.dsp.org.au/ds/referendum/index.html>> and make up your own mind.

Larsen's articles being lampooned? How about removing the mote from your own eye first?

Ben Courtice
Melbourne

Website purge

It is a sad irony that Karl Marx should have been voted 'thinker of the millennium' in a BBC poll just as his portrait was being removed from the CPGB's internet website.

The poll result comes as no surprise, but its significance should not be underestimated. The signs have been present for some time that the bourgeois intelligentsia would like to 'poach' Marx. The 'end of history' theories with their brash assertion that 'this is where it has all been leading' are widely recognised as unsatisfactory. They lack motivational force. Human beings are not going to be easily mobilised for realising the survival struggles of capital by the assurance that heaven on earth has arrived, that we are living in paradise. Marx minus the working class on the other hand - the relegation of communism to a utopia - has potential.

The trashing of communism is rarely the starting point of astute bourgeois ideologues. 'Communism is a good idea, but ...' is far more useful. Marx after all is famous for praising the progressive character of

capitalism and, as to rendering Marx a safe reformist, well, the foundations of that work had already been laid down earlier this century by leading 'Marxists', before the 'aberration' of the Russian Revolution and Bolshevism. What better weapon against Lenin could there be than ... Marx!

It is nothing less than tragic then to witness the CPGB handing Marx on a plate to the capitalists. Without a word of explanation, the pictures of Marx and of Lenin have been expunged from the Party website and replaced by some innocuous pop art symbols. I anticipate the riposte that symbols are unimportant, that it is the politics that matter. This would be unconvincing for two reasons.

Firstly, and obviously, it would be merely a response to my opposition to a change and, as such a deliberate evasion of the duty to explain the reasons for that change. The pictures of Marx and Lenin had been prominent on the opening page of the website since its inception. I am not going to accept that this fact had merely accidental status or significance.

Secondly, it is a fact that the liquidatory process, or - to give it one of its current euphemisms - 'modernisation', usually starts with the exorcism of symbols, then proceeds to the exorcism of names, and finally to the expungement of the concepts. I sincerely hope that this process is not what we are witnessing in the CPGB, an organisation I am proud to be a supporter of.

I have wracked my brain to try to guess what alternative explanation there might be. All I can come up with is ... lack of supervision. Perhaps there is a *laissez faire* attitude from the organisations of the whole Party towards the products of assignments to individual comrades or groups of comrades. This theory is maybe strengthened by the absence of explanation of the change on the website itself, or in any other Party organ I have seen.

It is clear that we face a struggle to retain Marx for the working class, and to use Marx, and his most accomplished realisers, Lenin and the Bolsheviks, as indispensable tools in *making* the working class. It should be equally clear that the restoration of the portraits of Marx and Lenin to the worldwide banner and organ of the Communist Party is an essential element of the affirmation of that task.

George Brooks
Stockport

Fighting fund

Breakthrough

It seems that the Christmas spirit has come early for some comrades this year. As a result our November fund is edging towards our £400 monthly target.

Donations this week include £20 from PH, £15 each from TF, SL and CM, and £10 from PL. A US reader sent us a cheque for \$100 to renew his year's subscription - a small tip included there, comrade. Altogether, we have £335, with a week still to go.

Dare I suggest that now is the

moment to break right through the £400 barrier in order to make up for the shortfalls earlier in the year? An extra £100 would do the trick - and it would also set us up for a small, but very welcome surplus for 1999. And believe me, comrades, we could use it!

Robbie Rix

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

Freedom for Aceh

Aftershocks from the revolutionary events of 1998 and the separation of East Timor continue to undermine attempts to stabilise capitalist relations in Indonesia. Economic crisis fuels political-constitutional crises which threatens to tear Indonesia into its countless 'national' units.

Just two weeks ago around one million - 20% of the population - demonstrated in Aceh, on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra, demanding a referendum on self-determination for the province. For more than a decade, an armed movement has fought for independence from Indonesia in the face of, at times, brutal oppression by central government.

The new president, Abdurrahman Wahid, known as Gus Dur, was forced to cut short an overseas trip and announced vague promises of some sort of referendum in around "seven months". But the newly elected house of representatives (DPR), dismissed this, insisting on the "integrity of the unitary state". Instead, the DPR has suggested increased autonomy and a "comprehensive trial of individuals responsible for human rights abuses" in the province. Large areas have been under effective military occupation, with reports of massacres and abuse emerging. Almost 300 people, including 88 Indonesian soldiers, have been killed in clashes in Aceh since late last year.

Subsequently, Wahid has said that the referendum will not be on independence, but on the introduction of *sharia* Islamic law. This statement outraged independence activists, who have given the government until December 4 - the 23rd anniversary of the formation of GAM (Free Aceh Movement) - to include independence in any referendum or face a three-day strike and the raising of the outlawed GAM flag.

In the aftermath of the East Timor crisis, regionalist and national tensions are emerging throughout the archipelago. Bourgeois commentators are beginning to contemplate -



Indonesia: archipelago of crisis

in fear - the real possibility of the break-up of Indonesia.

For decades, the centralising Javanese-dominated state apparatus around the dictatorship of the Suharto-Golkar regime had kept a lid on dissent through a combination of the iron fist and nationalist ideology. In May 1998, that system of rule collapsed and a vacuum was created which the divided ruling bloc has been trying to fill. So far they have been relatively successful, though the room for initiative from below has been dramatically increased.

With the election of Gus Dur as president, alongside the populist Indonesian nationalist Megawati Sukarnoputri as vice-president, the representatives of capital will be hoping that this alliance will lead to a stable civil society and a market-oriented consensus. But the centrifugal forces unleashed by the inability to rule in the old way, the democratic movement and the separation of East Timor are likely to get stronger.

The military and police are suggesting a 'limited' martial law in parts of Aceh in the lead-up to the promised pull-out by the army. But, according to general Roesmanhadi, national

chief of police, this was because police were "not prepared to take over from the combat troops being withdrawn". With such deep division and uncertainty obvious not only between president and parliament, but between the military and police, tensions are bound to increase. Such is the tinderbox nature of the situation.

A separate identity in Aceh dates back to before the successful war against the Dutch colonialists. However, after independence, the project of national unity became increasingly a process of the Javanisation of the 'outer islands'. When Suharto took power in 1966, the process became increasingly draconian and bloody, leading to the invasion and ultimately failed incorporation of Indonesia's '27th province' - East Timor.

Amien Rais, a leading opposition figure during the 1998 upheavals, has raised the flag of autonomisation, arguing that the maintenance of the unitary state will lead to its disintegration. By contrast to this solution from above, the working class and peasantry must fight for a revolutionary democratic outcome to the ongoing constitutional crisis. Central to this must be the fight for the unity of the working class throughout the archipelago, with the championing of the right to self-determination as a key issue.

The Acehnese themselves are divided as to what they want to come out of any referendum. Some want independence, while others want some sort of a federal structure. Previously, sentiment for increased autonomy (formally - though not practically - granted in 1959) largely rested on a separate religious culture. There have been calls for the implementation of Islamic law in the province - something shunned by the

secular-oriented military.

Since the discovery of natural gas and oil, the separatist sentiment has taken on an economic aspect, with a local elite wanting an increased say over local mineral wealth.

Aceh is now one of the richest areas in Indonesia. Much of the working class has been moved in from other areas, as there was an insufficient skill-base in Aceh itself for industrial growth. Indeed, some of the propaganda of GAM has had an aggressively chauvinist flavour to it, with some recent leaflets calling for non-Acehnese to leave.

It is highly unlikely that the Acehnese could be considered a nation. Clearly then, for inconsistent revolutionary democrats they should be denied self-determination. But the Indonesian state is threatening to step up repression. The response of revolutionary democrats must be to take up the call for *voluntary* unity - and that can only be based on each people with a clear territory and an historically established national antagonism or grievance having the right to secede. We have no need to create an endlessly elastic definition of nationhood in order to fight for the right to self-determination of the Acehnese - or for that matter the people of West Papua, East Kalimantan and Riau.

Whether we should advocate independence, autonomy or a federal solution in Aceh is an open question. But central to a democratic solution to the national question in Indonesia is the winning of the Javanese masses - the biggest national group - to the demand for self-determination and *voluntary* unity - and oppose the anti-democratic enforced unity that presently exists ●

Marcus Larsen

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday November 28, 5pm - 'The modern state, part 1', using Ellen Meiksins Wood's *The pristine culture of capitalism* as a study guide.

Sunday December 5, 5pm - 'Marx's study of money and credit, 1851', using Simon Clarke's *Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide.

Manchester: Monday November 29, 7.30pm - special seminar: 'Livingstone for mayor?' E-mail: CPGB2@aol.com.

■ Support Tameside

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

■ Red Room

'Leave to remain' by Leon London, Lisa Goldman (director) at Battersea Arts Centre, Lavender Hill, London SW11. Box office 0171-273 2223. November 24-December 12. Tickets £8 (£5 concessions).

■ Reclaim Our Rights

London campaign organising conference: 'The trade union rights bill'. Speakers include Tony Benn and John Hendy. Chair: Greg Tucker. Saturday November 27, 11am-5pm, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London. For more information, 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

■ Close down Campsfield

National protest, Campsfield Detention Centre, Langford Lane, Kiddlington, Oxford. Saturday November 27, 12-2pm. For transport details: London - 0171-701 5197; West Midlands - 0121-554 6947; North West - 0161-740 8206; Newcastle-upon-Tyne - CAGE@veggies.org.uk; Leeds - 0113-262 9365.

■ Against capitalism in Iran

Tuesday, November 30, 6pm, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square. Speakers: Iranian Workers' Left Unity, Cliff Slaughter, István Mészáros, Clive Bradley (Workers' Liberty).

■ Glasgow Marxist Forum

Public meeting - 'For a Scottish workers' republic?' Speaker: Allan Armstrong. Thursday December 9, 7.30pm, Partick Burgh Hall. All welcome.

■ 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.

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The Welsh road to

Tim Richards of Cymru Goch opened a discussion on the national question in Wales at Communist University '99



Just as bad for the Welsh as Thatcher

I have been a socialist since my early 20s, when I joined Plaid Cymru, believing it could be turned into a socialist party. I was wrong, but people used to believe the same about the Labour Party.

I left by 1980, and was then an independent socialist. I was chairperson of the Rhondda Valley Miners' Support Group in the 1984-5 strike. Then, we had three pits; now, of course, there are none. I was active in CND, in environmental agitation and against the poll tax. In 1987-88, we socialists formed Cymru Goch. It formed around the newspaper called *Y Faner Goch*, which means 'the red flag', which has been in operation since 1978.

It was originally the newspaper of the left inside Plaid Cymru, and then when we left we formed the Welsh Republican Socialist Movement - rather short-lived, as it could not make up its mind whether it was socialist or republican. The socialist element kept the newspaper going. That is how Cymru Goch came into being.

I think this bit of personal history may help explain how I came to the conclusion that there must be a Welsh road to socialism, a road that - I must emphasise - does *not* mean divorce from international struggle, but is an inherent part of it. I have been an internationalist since the days when I became a socialist and joined a group called Third World First, at a time when I started to become interested in third world struggles, colonialism, etc. On one occasion I was talking about liberation struggles in Angola, and a woman said to me, "You're Welsh. What about Wales?" I said, "I don't see it in that fashion", but I have changed my mind since.

When it comes to perceptions, Cymru Goch always had the problem of being seen by the left as non-internationalist. We are *not* nationalists, so why do we propose a *Welsh* road

to socialism? Is it really necessary, you may ask. But I ask you, what is actually so wonderful about the British road to socialism or to communism?

What are the alternatives to a Welsh road to socialism? An international road. Of course, internationalism is vital to the success of socialism, for capitalism is international. Yet we have to recognise that the various 'internationalists' have withered: the international trade union movement, monopolised by the trade union hierarchies, seems to be there to do deals with the capitalists on our behalf. Furthermore, as regards the British road to socialism, we have been treading that road to Westminster for the whole of the 20th century.

What is Britain? Is it a country? Well, no, obviously not, because it is made up of three and a bit countries: England, Scotland, Wales and part of northern Ireland. Is it a state? Obviously yes, a capitalist state. Where did England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland come from? We can put down the existence of Wales to the Anglo-Saxon invasion of England, which drove the original Celtic tribes back to Cumbria, which has the same root as *Cymru*. Does anyone know what Wales means? It means 'foreigner' - *wallis* in Anglo-Saxon. So if I call myself Welsh, I am calling myself a foreigner in my own land.

How did Britain emerge? The old concepts of statehood are no good when you go back to early history. I think it was George III who first called himself 'British' and thus initiated a concept that became the 'British' state. That developed and expanded, and developed the British empire over the centuries.

I want to argue that we believe there is a Welsh road to socialism, because our analysis of Wales is that we are a *colony*. Wales was the first colony of England, conquered militarily in 1282. Before the conquest,

there was a Welsh set of laws, the laws of Hywel Dda, which give a fascinating insight into Celtic society, especially as regards the place of women in Welsh society. Women were recognised by Welsh law in their own right - they could marry, divorce, hold property, etc. After 1282 and the imposition of English laws, women became mere chattels.

The rebellion of Owain Glyndwr succeeded in establishing Wales as an independent state between 1400 and 1406, but the problem both before 1282, and the problem that Glyndwr had, was that Welsh society was not feudal - it was basically a form of settled tribalism, with various princes fighting each other. It was very rarely united. For a short period between 1400 and 1406, there was a Welsh parliament: emissaries were sent to Europe, deals were done, but it was pretty rapidly overcome by the larger and far stronger English foe.

Later, in the 15th century, Henry VII - himself of Welsh ancestry and with Welsh connections - raised an army in Pembroke and marched to Bosworth, where he defeated Richard III. It was this that drew the Welsh gentry into the mainstream of London life and the advent of the Tudor dynasty really locked them in. This development was encapsulated by the Acts of Union of 1536 to 1538, which formally incorporated Wales into the new medieval state of England created by Henry VIII. So from then on we were part of England. I can remember as a youngster looking at the books, and in the index reading that wonderful phrase, "For Wales, see England".

It is worth quoting from one of the Acts: "All justices shall proclaim and keep all courts in the English tongue. No person or persons that use the Welsh speech or language shall have any office within this realm of England, Wales or other of the king's

dominion, unless he or they use and exercise the English speech or language."

It was in the 16th century that Wales began to be transformed from a self-sufficient agricultural economy into a colonial economy; by 1690 coal production had risen tenfold since the Tudor ages. It was the ending of the monopoly of the royal mines between 1689 and 1693 that set the stage for a minerals rush to Wales. Everybody talks about coal in Wales, but they forget that there were many other mineral resources: silver, zinc, tin, copper, lead and iron. This natural wealth was largely exploited by *English* capital. From Cornwall and Macclesfield they came in search of copper; from Derbyshire and Cheshire for lead; from Staffordshire, Yorkshire, Northumberland and London for coal. The copper-smelting industry was the first capitalist industry in Wales, as in 1717 the Vivians from Cornwall, the Percivals from Bristol, and Robert Morris from Shropshire began to build large new works using capital from English trading families from Bristol, Birmingham and London.

The crucial difference between Wales and Scotland is that *Scotland always did have, and does have, a capitalist class*. That has always been lacking in Wales. Underlying the expansion of capitalist exploitation was the fact that Welsh labour was very cheap: in 1768, for example, agricultural workers in the home counties were earning ten shillings and nine pence a week, while labourers in Glamorgan and north Wales got a shilling a day or six shillings a week. In 1787, the *Manchester Mercury* reported: "In north east Wales, workers are superabundant, and wages very low." Yet by 1815 Wales produced a third of Britain's iron, and 90% of her copper.

Because the early coal mining was shallow, it did not need great amounts of capital, and Welsh capitalists did exist. But by the middle of the 19th century the mines went deeper and the amount of capital necessary increased, until it began to require limited liability companies. The last half of the century - the period of the 'black gold rush' - saw the end of the owner-manager capitalist.

Aside from economics, it is worth remembering that up to 1870, 90% of the people of Wales spoke Welsh. What happened? First, there was an offensive against the language, which began in 1845, with a parliamentary inquiry into the state of education in Wales. A commission of three young English barristers carried out an investigation which reported in 1847 that, "The Welsh language is a vast drawback to Wales, and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people." Confirming the fact that the landowners and capitalists were largely English, they found that, "Whether in the country, or among the furnaces, the Welsh element is never found at the top of the social scale." But, to add insult to injury, they concluded that, "Because of their language, the mass of Welsh people are inferior to the English, in every branch of practical knowledge and skill." Thus, it was officially decided that the Welsh language would have to go.

The report was naturally attacked in Wales, called the betrayal or treason of the blue books, but it was the beginning of a movement which was consolidated by the imposition of an English-language state school sys-

tem. The Education Act of 1870 was the main, though not the only, reason for the decline of the Welsh language. Children in state schools literally had Welsh beaten out of them. It would though be a simplification to blame *only* the educational system. Immigration also played a role.

The present century has seen a massive decline in the Welsh language, down to the point where we are talking about around 20 to 25% of people in Wales speaking Welsh. It is fundamentally still in west Wales and north Wales, and there are pockets of the Welsh language: for instance to the north of Swansea there is a staunchly working class area where the Welsh language is also strong. There has also been an educational movement to restore the Welsh language. My own two sons go to a Welsh-language-medium school. My father was a Welsh speaker - he wrote in Welsh, but I never understood it - so I always thought they ought to have the opportunity. I am married to an English woman who supports that. She also thinks it would be a good idea for them to learn different languages - she is a French teacher herself.

I believe the cultural and economic history of Wales reveals that Wales is not just a region. It is a *nation* that was the first colony of England, and remains a colony today. Only when we confront that fact can we move forward and consider a Welsh road to socialism. We in Cymru Goch want to make it absolutely clear that we are not nationalists like Plaid Cymru. We are socialists. So what is the difference? Well, simply that nationalism is not really an ideology at all. It is a position on the nation question and statehood. Nationalists want the nation to become a state, and fail to hold any class analysis because - for them - the nation comes first. Of course, that begs the question: if the nation were to become a state, which class would run that state, and in whose interests?

When it comes to Plaid Cymru, the answer is clearly that the new Welsh state would be run by the leadership of the nationalist party - Welsh-speaking, non-conformist 'liberals' with a small 'l'. The fact is that Plaid Cymru is a capitalist party, which still manages to sell itself as a socialist party in south Wales, and sells itself as a liberal party in mid to north Wales - a balancing act which I believe is going to go off the rails fairly quickly. They have managed it in opposition, because they have never had to actually do anything. But now they are running two councils in south Wales, with horrendous financial results.

When it comes to Cymru Goch, we are socialists, and we believe that the national liberation of our working class can only be achieved through a socialist state, led by the working class and run in their interests. But when we talk about the national liberation of Wales and Welsh workers, we do not see it in isolation. We are talking about autonomy within an international movement. Far from wanting to have Welsh trade unions, we must remain part of the British trade union movement, and should campaign for the internationalisation of the trade unions to reflect the global reality of domination by an increasingly monopolistic capitalist movement, which continues to consolidate into ever larger multinationals. I do not think British trade unionism is

socialism

enough. We have got to look beyond British organisation. It was absolutely correct to organise in that way at first because they were facing capital organised on a British basis. But anybody who believes that it is just on a British basis still is making a grave mistake. So I think part of the whole project, in fact, should be reinventing our internationalism.

Our position on the British trade union movement would be that we believe in organising from the grass roots up. We do not have much faith in hierarchies.

I probably would not be here talking to you today, had it not been for 20 years of Tory rule, dominated by Mrs Thatcher. That heralded the successful politics of English domination. What I mean by that is that the bulk of Mrs Thatcher's support was from England, including sections of the working class, particularly in the south east of England, and here policies were directed towards benefiting them. When it came to the coal industry, she delighted in destroying it for political reasons. The miners in northern England, Scotland and Wales had real political power, as she never forgot after she had been booted out of office by the 1974 miners' strike. The political thrust was to weaken the working class by repressive anti-trade union legislation, to cut public spending, and to bribe the electorate with tax cuts. But essentially it was a regional concept. It was: 'Sod Scotland and Wales. I don't need them. They never vote Tory anyway. Let's concentrate on winning over the working class through the right to buy their own council houses', etc.

What about the concept of centralisation? There are those who claim it means unity. Not for me. I have had decades of being patronised, and being told, 'Forget about it. Stick with Britain; stick with British politics: you'll get nowhere in Wales.' The working class in Wales spent a century being told that - 'Don't worry, we'll do it for you' (the Labour version was - 'We'll do it for you up at Westminster'); or 'You can't do that. What about the unity of the working class?' I must admit it sounds to me like having your cake and eating it: 'The only way you can get unity is on the basis of what we've described.'

What's more important, of course, is that nothing has fundamentally changed under Tony Blair. His landslide victory means he has so much support in England that he can afford once again to ignore Wales and Scotland. When it comes to devolution, the power of Scotland is meaningful, but so weak is the Welsh assembly that many working class people wondered whether it was worth having. Having said that, it is clear that it was the Welsh working class that delivered the assembly in the referendum - it was in the valley areas where the bulk of the support was found. In the end, it was a very close thing - Caernarfon brought in the final 'yes' vote. When I was campaigning for a 'yes', I said to people, "What if you were getting what was offered in Scotland?" They answered, "Well, we might be a bit more interested in that. What they are offering us here is a glorified council." I have got no particular problem with that analysis. The Welsh assembly, as I am sure you are aware, is only able to scrutinise legislation on the level of delegated legislation and pass statutory instruments - no primary law-

making powers, and of course no tax-raising powers. I am tempted to say that Wales was given an assembly because we are a nation, but not given any powers just in case we decided to act like one.

There is no doubt that what happened in the assembly elections is that a very disillusioned section of the working class, who traditionally vote Labour, voted Plaid Cymru, basically to give the Labour Party and Tony Blair a kick up the arse. I was on the ground, campaigning as a united socialist candidate, in Caerphilly, Ron Davies's constituency. I heard time and time again: "Tony Blair is a rightwinger, a Tory. I'm voting Plaid Cymru". And I would say, "They're just as bad." It needed no great political prescience to see that Plaid Cymru would do well. I pointed out three years ago, when we got the left together in Cardiff at a Welsh socialist forum, that when Labour got in Plaid Cymru would get a good vote. The same thing happened in the 1970s, when they took councils, and increased the number of their MPs from one to three. And in the 1960s Plaid Cymru first made a breakthrough during the Labour government. It has always been the case.

What is the Welsh road to socialism about? What are the various traditions? Obviously the dominant tradition of socialism in Wales is Labour. There has also, of course, always been a traditionally strong Communist Party in Wales. There is no real Trotskyist tradition. The Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party are essentially coastal-based - Newport, Cardiff and Swansea. I like to think that Cymru Goch is the Heineken party. We reach the parts of Wales that the rest of the left can't reach, because we have members throughout Wales.

On one level, the Welsh road to socialism is not really fundamentally different to your position. We are all in defensive mode, are we not? We really have got to go back and invent the wheel. We have to fight the class struggle all over again. Strengthen the trade unions, and try to get organised against the rolling back of the welfare state. I want to emphasise that, even though we talk about the Welsh road to socialism, we will join in any campaign right across Britain, because we are all up against the same problem - the British state, the New Labour government.

During the Welsh assembly elections, having formed a Socialist Alliance on the basis of joint discussions held last November, we put together an election platform. We are not copying the Scottish Socialist Alliance (now the SSP) - this is a different situation - but there are similarities. Perhaps the biggest difference is that in Scotland there is no equivalent of Cymru Goch. Essentially, the Welsh Socialist Alliance stitched together an electoral platform with the SWP. That was an experience and a half, as you can imagine. But we managed it. Tempers did get frayed occasionally. At one point, I directed the party election broadcast, and had an up and downer with the SWP organiser as we were talking.

There was no future in it. They thought of course that they were going to zoom ahead in the elections, but they discovered that in fact they were at the same level as us - their results were no better than ours. In fact our votes were rather pathetic on one level. But it has to be taken into

account that we were very late in starting. We did not have the electoral platform stitched up until eight weeks before the election. We won about one to two percent of the vote, which is credible - no more than that. We did not stand for the Welsh assembly thinking we were going to gain socialism through it. Of course not. It remains the case that extra-parliamentary activity, and trade union activity, will continue to be very important.

I suppose there is an irony, in that on one level we believe that it is necessary for the left to unite, certainly in Wales, but on the other hand people might accuse us of fragmenting an all-Britain movement. But I do not see it in that fashion. I see it as autonomy. I see it as very much maintaining our links with what is happening in Scotland and England - and any part of Europe, to be honest.

Where Europe is concerned, what about the concept of the British state? Is it not a bit old fashioned these days, now we are moving to the European federal state? In simple terms, if you analyse the single European market and the trend towards federalism in Europe, they are fundamentally the policies of the European round table of industrialists. They invented the single European market, European monetary union - it is their policy. They then persuaded the European commission to take it on. The European round table of industrialists consists of the 45 largest European multinationals - their chief executive officers form this lobbying body. And one begins to wonder, these days, in or out of Emu, whether perhaps, to a certain extent, even our talk about states is starting to lose importance. We are seeing the power of the multinationals to shift across borders, which of course is what Europe is all about, so maybe we need to start rethinking the importance of the state. It would be a mistake to just focus on Wales. I think there is a process going on, whether you like it or

not. The question is whether you can actually come to terms with it and recognise that it is objectively happening. If we are Marxists, we look at these questions and deal with them accordingly.

In Wales we have higher unemployment, lower wages and greater poverty than in England, and we are rapidly moving towards the economy of the third world. I find it absolutely fascinating that Ronson, the multinational corporation, which makes among other things cigarette lighters, decided to move their operations from South Korea to south Wales, because our labour costs were lower. There is a fascinating joke going around the Welsh assembly at the moment, that we are going for 'objective one' European funding. That means we get huge sums of money from the European Union - millions of pounds. In order to qualify for objective one, you have to have a standard of living which is 75% of the European average or below. And we have succeeded. You get Labour politicians saying, 'Wonderful, we've got the European funding.' And what they are celebrating of course is our poverty.

What then is the Welsh road to socialism?

First, we are republicans. I am damn sure I do not want a socialist monarchy. But, let us not forget, republicanism is a position *vis-à-vis* the crown. It is not an ideology. There is a Peoples Republic of China, there are republicans in America. Personally I cannot believe that there is a serious socialist or communist who is not a republican.

Does the Welsh road to socialism mean 'accommodating' to the demands of nationalist politics? As far as I am concerned, I am fighting on two fronts: I am fighting the Labour Party because they pretend to be socialist, and I am fighting Plaid Cymru because they too pretend to be socialist. But I have to do it in a Welsh context. Does that mean I accommodate? I do not think so.

In Wales, we have what you can only really describe as a series of industrial villages. The nearest I can find to it is parts of the north east and north of England. As a result there are strong communities - not *despite* our poverty, but *because of* our poverty. In a working class community you pull together, and therefore we are in a situation where working on a

community basis as well as in the workplace becomes a strong option. Very often you find that local community questions are class issues in the broadest sense of the word, in the more modern sense. For instance they can be environmental. There are plenty of minor environmental disasters dotted around south Wales, which the communities have fought against. And when you are fighting that kind of struggle you are fighting class struggle.

And finally there is a fundamental difference - the cultural difference. The fact that the Welsh-language exists. The fact that for instance in the valleys where I live there is a Welsh-language primary school. The vast majority of people who send their children to that school are working class. They want their children to have the opportunity that their own parents or grandparents had: to speak the language.

The language struggle is one aspect, but for us there is a broader question. There is a cultural socialism in south Wales. It is not an abstract concept. It is something which has been fought over for decades throughout the century. So, believe it or not, Cymru Goch does something rather unusual: I think we are the only political party in Britain to publish poetry - The Red Poets Society. We publish monthly. We see the importance of using humour and poetry as political weapons. We see it in a much broader fashion - a kind of organic road to socialism.

Objectively a certain process is occurring in Wales. What do you expect us to do? Ignore it? No, we cannot. It is a process towards increasing nationalism, which I think is inherently incredibly dangerous. But if people are thinking in terms of national identity, then we have got to combat that. You cannot combat it with Britishness. It has failed. That is the whole point: it would not be happening if Britishness were succeeding. Plaid Cymru would not be winning votes and becoming more of a threat. The way to combat it is through *Welsh socialism*. I have no problem with a federal solution and I am not in any shape or form in favour of any kind of isolationism. But we have to combat nationalism.

We are living in Wales: we are up against it and, as I say, what is the alternative? ●

James Robertson

Fear of darkness

Daniel Myrick/Eduardo Sanchez **The Blair Witch project** USA 1999

Despite a massive amount of hype, this is a good, authentically frightening film, operating at the level of psychology rather than 'splatter'.

Heather (Heather Donahue), Michael (Michael Williams) and Josh (Joshua Leonard) go off into some woods in western Maryland to investigate the 'Blair Witch', said to have been behind eerie and bloody happenings in the area of Burkittsville over the past few centuries. Note that the characters make use of the actors' real first names. This was an important part of the film hype, because an attempt was made to convince people that the three actors really did disappear, their footage being found later. The fact that all three are 'unknowns' helped in boosting the pretence.

Stumbling around with their camcorder, the three become lost in the woods, and start hearing eerie

noises at night outside their tent. The film's turning point is when they discover strange bundles of sticks tied to trees, suggestive of witchcraft. The nerves of the three begin to fray, and the primitive and jerky images resulting from the hand-held camera emphasises the disintegration of the characters. At one and the same time they huddle together for protection against the unknown threat outside and turn on each other as well.

Fear of the dark is well exploited in the film. Everybody remembers it from childhood, and in wartime it has been employed as part of a psychological tactic, most recently in World War II, and the Korean and Vietnam wars. US forces were particularly targeted by NLF in this way - the lavish use of firepower could be negated by guerrilla or semi-guerrilla opponents who attacked at night.

The next thing is that Josh disappears, but the other two hear strange screams in the darkness which may be Josh being tortured. The next morning something bloody is found outside their tent, and Heather and Michael go almost insane with fear. At the film's end, they go to an abandoned house, thinking they hear Josh. Something attacks them inside, and the camcorder is abruptly shut off.

The film is crude, as the roughly \$40,000 spent on it would suggest, but it has been gigantically profitable. In an era when blockbusters often cost hundreds of times as much to make, a success like *The Blair Witch project* is an authentic horror for Hollywood economics. Why pay Demi Moore or Bruce Willis two million dollars when three unknowns can bring it off better with a camcorder? ●

British-Irish debate

‘Trotskyist’ incoherence

The ‘Statement on British-Irish’, signed by Gerry Downing, Chris Edwards, John Stone and Dave Brown, has almost a comical quality, insofar as it constitutes some kind of appeal to the members of the CPGB not to go down the road to eternal damnation by embracing a programme that accurately reflects the political reality of the communal divisions in Ireland (*Weekly Worker* November 18).

The authors counterpose their own semi-nationalist version of Trotskyism, which they seem to believe reflects some kind of authoritative revolutionary tradition. Yet, far from even producing a coherent argument against Jack Conrad, the authors have merely produced a set of theses that contains many howling absurdities, that assumes much that remains to be proven, and contains arguments that contradict each other so flagrantly that it is difficult to imagine how the authors can advocate them while keeping a straight face. But that would be to underestimate the crystallised confusion of the various strands of middle-of-the-road ‘Trotskyism’ that the individuals concerned come from.

Nevertheless, it is good to hear the comrades’ arguments, in the interests of furthering political debate and programmatic struggle, and it is worth taking up their theses point by point. **Thesis 1** The comrades assert that “Lenin only fought for the right of self-determination of *oppressed* nations”. A flagrant nonsense, that implies that Lenin was indifferent to the national rights of the peoples of every imperialist country. Any honest reading of Lenin’s writings on the nature of the first imperialist war will reveal that Lenin’s critique of the social-patriotic actions of the social democrats was not based on the view that the nations whose bourgeoisies were now imperialist had no rights, but rather that their wars, in the concrete in this epoch, were aimed at the oppression of other nations. Therefore any legitimate national questions that arose for such peoples as the French or Germans, which taken in isolation would be legitimate, concretely were inevitably subsumed under the imperialist, predatory character of the war.

To assert that Lenin took the view that *only* peoples who were not in any way oppressors had rights is sheer nonsense - on the contrary, a good part of Lenin’s critique of imperialism was based on its *denial* of those rights to the overwhelming majority of humanity, a critique that was based on the denial of equality, that presupposed *as a matter of course* that all nations had the same rights, including the right to self-determination. The peculiar assertion of the comrades that “Lenin did not defend the rights of *oppressor non-nations* to self-determination” implicitly concedes this. So what about oppressor nations, comrades?

Obviously, Leninism, they implicitly concede, defended the rights of *all* nations. So the argument immediately shifts to whether peoples who do not constitute fully developed nations have rights as peoples. The assertion that they do not would rule out any national rights for a whole range of peoples whom the Bolsheviks verifiably granted national rights to, including many of the undeveloped peoples of central Asia, who at the time of the revolution had barely developed the rudiments of a national consciousness.

Thesis 2 “Northern Ireland or the loyalist community is not a nation, but a part of the Irish nation. Supporting the right of self-determination of the Irish people as a whole is incompatible with supporting the right of secession of its pro-UK population.” This is not an argument, but simply assumes what has to be proved. The comrades tell the protestant population that they are part of the Irish nation, irrespective of their own views on the subject, and assert that anyone who dissents is violating the rights of the majority of the Irish people. Such a method is outrageous, and a form of national chauvinism. If I were to use this method, I could assert that the Welsh people are part of the ‘English’ nation, and equally assert that anyone who declares otherwise is violating the right of the English people as a whole to self-determination. But such an argument would be dismissed with contempt by any democrat, and rightly so. There is no reason to be more charitable to the same arguments when they come out of the mouths of those who claim to speak for the currently oppressed.

Thesis 3 is ridiculous, as it equates the demand for self-determination for areas with an overwhelmingly dominant majority of British-Irish with the demand for the rights of the white American slavocracy to exploit black slaves in the name of self-determination. What an absurd comparison.

In fact, what the comrades do not say is that in the 1930s, their hero, Leon Trotsky, advocated that the US southern black population, in areas they were overwhelmingly dominant, should have the right to separate from the white population and form their own state in the black belt. It goes without saying that, in the event of such a separation being realised, it would not only be the black population that would have exercised self-determination, but the white population outside the black state’s putative borders would also have had their ‘own’ state, and thereby in a sense would have exercised ‘self-determination’. In fact, Trotsky was acting on mistaken facts in this instance, as the black population was in reality so dispersed throughout America as to make such a separation utopian.

The vast bulk of the comrades’ remaining examples consist of situations in which in their view there was a fundamental difference of social system between one state and another: West Germany v East Germany, North Korea v South Korea, North Vietnam v South Vietnam, China v Taiwan, etc. The comrades seem to have somehow slipped into implying that the Irish republic of Bertie Ahern is some kind of workers’ state, and that the protestants are in some way equivalent to various counterrevolutionary holdouts against putative social revolutions. The use of such analogies only reveals the comrades’ confusion and lack of understanding of elementary differences between the class nature of states, as well as their utter incomprehension of the national question.

Thesis 4 “The demand for self-determination for Ulster unionists does not have any support and it is wrong to try to impose it in Ireland. The best way of winning unionist workers to our side is through a programme of revolutionary socialist transformation.” Since the comrades apparently believe that the desire of Ulster protestants to live in a separate state

from the Irish Republic “does not have any support”, then, taking their analogy with West and East Germany a little further, they could perhaps assert that the protestants are only prevented from leaping over some sort of metaphysical ‘Berlin Wall’, and thus emigrating to Eire, by the sinister machinations and coercion of British imperialism. Such a view would be pretty hallucinogenic, but it is in fact only the ultimate logic of another variation of imperialist economism. The need to address the real and existing communal divisions cannot be wished away by “a programme of revolutionary socialist transformation”, which is ironic, given the comrades’ ultra-rejectionist green nationalist standpoint. It sounds like the kind of argument you might hear from the Socialist Party. Common methodologies make strange bedfellows, even when the programmatic impulses differ.

Thesis 5 “It is ridiculous to expect a republic to allow a part of its own nation to be ruled by a foreign monarchy under a segregationist regime that oppressed, harassed and ghettoised the oppressed people, those who favour a one-nation republic.” This passage falsely assumes that in the event of this option being realistically offered to the British-Irish by a revolutionary movement in Ireland, the whole status quo as it exists today would be unshaken in the rest of these islands. A ridiculous, sterile view of social struggle and dynamics. But behind this is a profoundly pessimistic view, which basically assumes that the protestant people are irremediably reactionary, and that, even in the face of a militant determination of the currently oppressed to ensure there is no reversal of the terms of oppression, the protestants will remain completely unshakeable in their monarchism and anti-catholic bigotry. With such a view of the possibility of any change in the consciousness of this layer of the proletariat, there is indeed nothing else to do but to drive them into the Irish Sea (which is the only logical conclusion one can draw from the comrades’ arguments).

Thesis 6 The comrades register with shock that “Lenin advocated self-determination as the best way to remove national obstacles preventing working class unity. If the workers of the oppressor nation defended the right of the oppressed nation to secede, it would build bridges with the workers of the oppressed nation. The new CPGB position would mean asking anti-imperialists and Irish republicans to become the champions of the loyalist right to have their own state.”

Yes, comrades, Lenin defended the right to *secede*. Secession means the *separation* of territories where different peoples are dominant, in order to defuse national antagonisms and facilitate a later *voluntary unity* of the same peoples. It is the signatories of this statement who do not defend the right to secede, indeed they positively *advocate* as a virtue the involuntary unity of two peoples, by the simple device of denying that they *are* two peoples. This is not defending the right to secede, and there is no way that the involuntary unification of such peoples can ever defuse national antagonisms. The fact that secession would give a distinct territory to a currently oppressor people is often implicit. But the idea that in this case the protestants might have a small fragment to call their own of-

fends the Irish nationalist sensibilities of the comrades.

Thesis 7 The comrades assert that the secession of *any* part of the holy island of Ireland to provide a protestant state under *any* circumstances would mean the death of working class unity and massive pogroms, etc. This only underlines their pessimism about the possibility of winning this people to working class politics. With such a view, one can only envisage driving such an irredeemably reactionary people out of the ‘oppressed’ territory altogether.

Thesis 8 The comrades generalise their New Left, semi-Stalinist position on the national question by attacking those who refused to back the bloodthirsty Argentinean dictatorship’s diversionary 1982 seizure of the Falklands/Malvinas (a territory that had *no* Argentinean population) as being “defenders of imperialism”. This only signifies that they are simply disarmed before ‘revolutionary’ forms of class collaboration with the ‘anti-imperialist’ bourgeoisie. In this way they reflect the influence of third world bourgeois nationalism, and show their political susceptibility to the phenomena that led to the overtly nationalist and reformist positions of the Latin American Stalinists and Morenoite ‘Trotskyists’ in backing various of these reactionary regimes, from Peron to Videla to Galtieri.

Thesis 9 hardly stands up as worth responding to on its own, simply repeating earlier points, but **thesis 10** makes the ‘shocking’ point that the CPGB believes that the Irish question can be resolved without a proletarian revolution: “The CPGB is not proposing to achieve Irish national self-determination through a socialist revolution and a workers’ republic. They seek a pure bourgeois democratic solution without fundamentally challenging capitalism in a futile attempt to convince unionists that they would be better off in a bourgeois ‘binational’ federal Irish republic.”

The comrades’ ultimatum that any solution to the national question must be under a ‘socialist’ republic is another piece of imperialist economism. In other words, again, a methodology fundamentally the same as the Socialist Party. It sits very uneasily with their recognition (in thesis 6) that the national question is an obstacle to working class unity, and hence to revolution. If the national question is an obstacle to revolution, then in order for a revolution to take place, the national question must be solved, at least as much as is possible under capitalism, otherwise the ‘obstacle’ remains in place and the revolution will not happen.

This is not ‘stageism’, but elementary Leninism, and only proves that the comrades’ tailing of the nationalism of the oppressed gives rise to similar methodological flaws - primarily economism - as those who more straightforwardly tail after the nationalism and chauvinism of British social democracy. Notwithstanding the different specifics, what they are both capitulating to is *an aspect of the status quo*, and hence despite superficial differences a common method can be discerned.

Thesis 11 shows that the comrades, for all their self-proclaimed sagacity, have no consistent or logical approach to the national question at all. They simply put a minus where the imperialists put a plus at any given time. Thus their pro-Serb apologies over Kosova, with their attempt to

somehow equate the CPGB’s position on Kosova with their position on the British-Irish.

In reality our positions on these two questions, in complementary ways, show that we consistently defend the democratic rights of *all* peoples, whether at any given time they are in favour or out of favour with the imperialists. All the comrades’ ‘principles’, of allegedly defending the rights of oppressed majorities, go out of the window with their position on Kosova, of defending the right of the Serbian overlords to rule Kosova against the will of the overwhelming majority of its overwhelmingly Albanian population, just because the imperialists hypocritically took up the Kosovar cause. Thus these ‘revolutionary democrats’ (don’t laugh!) end up giving ‘military, not political’ support to the Serbian equivalents of the Shankhill Butchers and UVF in Kosova, with their ‘national’ legends of Prince Lazar and the Serbian wars of the 14th century that closely resemble the orange mythology around William of Orange and the 17th century - ‘historical’ justifications for systematic oppression in the contemporary world.

Of course the CPGB opposes and condemns the brutal reprisals against the Serb minority (and indeed other minorities, such as the Roma) that have been perpetrated by Albanian nationalists since the war. Though if comrades Downing and co were consistent in their position on the national question, in defending the rights of an oppressed majority to suppress the entire ‘oppressor’ population, then they should be *applauding* the actions of the Albanian nationalists against the Kosovar Serbs, and recommending it to Irish republicans as the way to deal with the British-Irish ‘oppressors’. But the comrades’ knee-jerk ‘anti-imperialism’ takes precedence over any consistency, even in their claim to always side with the oppressed against the oppressor - to the extent of effectively applauding the *chauvinism* of almost anyone, oppressor or oppressed, who claims to be against imperialism.

As for the assertion that the current Russian bombing of Chechnya is simply an imitation of the western bombing of Serbia, and the Russia bourgeoisie is being ‘encouraged’ to imitate the imperialists by the western triumph, one wonders who the comrades thought the Yeltsin regime was imitating in its *previous*, 1994-6, war against Chechnya? The real point being that Russian nationalists do not have to look westwards to gain ‘inspiration’ for such acts of chauvinist barbarity - the history of tsarism, and indeed of Stalinism, provides ample ‘inspiration’ for such things. And of course, Russia’s smaller imitators, such as the Serb ultra-nationalists, in turn gain and give inspiration in such brutal matters as with Kosova. This attempt to make an amalgam between communist defenders of Kosovar rights, the imperialists, and the Yeltsin regime is pretty desperate.

Thesis 12 The obligatory ‘orthodox’ appeal to all the workers of all nationalities to unite and form a socialist federation, is completely abstract and simply contradicts all the reasoning in the preceding theses. Taken together with its classically economic *counterposition* of socialism to democratic demands, this is not consistent democracy, comrades. This is a shambles ●

Ian Donovan

Bukharin is an enigma for many revolutionary Marxists. Before Lenin's death Bukharin was a proletarian internationalist and intransigent supporter of world revolution, but he became the most sophisticated defender of socialism in one country, and was Stalin's ally and opponent of Trotsky and the Left Opposition.

When Stalin split with Bukharin between 1929 and 1930, Trotsky was opposed to a united front with Bukharin versus Stalin because he considered Bukharin to be pro-kulak and an accommodator to pro-capitalist restorationist forces. This evaluation has generally been unquestioned within orthodox Trotskyist circles. To my knowledge only Richard Price has tentatively argued that a united front between Bukharin and the Left Opposition was possible and principled on the basis of upholding inner-party democracy.

Possibly the most plausible explanation of Bukharin's changing theory and practice is outlined in the approach of the SWP. Bukharin was the theorist and defender of the degenerated workers' state. On this basis he supported the New Economic Policy and the proletarian-peasant alliance, and was cautious about the prospects of world revolution, but he was serious about theory in contrast to Stalin's expediency and pragmatism. Thus conflict developed between Stalin, the leader of the ascendant bureaucratic class, and Bukharin, the right centrist defender of the decaying workers' state. Hence despite Bukharin's vacillations in the struggle against Stalinism he was still a personification of Marxist theory and culture, and an opponent of Stalin's attempt to destroy and suppress revolutionary Marxism.

In his useful introduction to Bukharin's semi-autobiographical novel Stephen Cohen explains that the novel was one of four manuscripts written whilst Bukharin was in prison, and undergoing interrogation by Stalin's secret police. The other three manuscripts tackle the issues of philosophy, politics and culture. The philosophical document seeks to address Lenin's criticism that Bukharin had a non-dialectical approach, and is apparently an important addition to Marxist philosophy. Obviously this work should have been translated before the novel, but it has not been due to a post-modern indifference and hostility towards Marxist theory, and an increasing emphasis on the role of novels as a better expression of ideas (more expressive, flexible and non-disciplined) than philosophical works.

Nevertheless despite this complaint I have to agree with Cohen that Bukharin's novel is a brilliant use of the genre in order to develop an analogy between tsarism and Stalinism at the level of culture, ideology, state repression and human behaviour. Bukharin uses his childhood experiences in order to show the brutal, banal, conformist, and bigoted nature of the tsarist state. Yet despite this suppression of the questioning, rational and enlightened aspects of the human spirit the potential for revolution constantly develops. No wonder Stalin put Bukharin's novel in his vaults, thinking that it would never be read!

With regards to the quality of his novel, Bukharin's vocabulary is impressive, and his descriptions of people and events is detailed and enthralling. His approach is probably summed up by the comment that, although life can be tragic and bewildering, it is possible to overcome problems and realise our childhood potential: "Children, like grown-ups, have their superstitions, prejudices, heartfelt dreams, ideals, and unforgettable incidents in life, which are stored in the memory forever and which suddenly, at terrible or tragic moments in life, come swimming into conscious-

Time to forgive

Nikolai Bukharin **How it all began** Columbia University Press, 1998, pp345, £13.95

ness, surprisingly vivid, in full detail, down to the wrinkles in somebody's face or a spider's web illuminated by the evening sun. The world of childhood is vast and multifarious. But with every day it grows bigger; the naive eyes of the child are wide open to everything; and with little souls devour with tremendous avidity all the colours and sounds, the light and the shade, and all new forms and objects as they make their way into the secret caverns of existence or stroll through its sunlit meadows and woods" (p41).

In the novel Bukharin outlines vivid descriptions of the agonies of developing adolescence, which involves intense feelings of love, jealousy and the desire to impress the opposite sex. The difficulties of childhood are summed up by the experience of learning about sex from our peers rather than our parents, and this leads Kolya (Bukharin) to develop an awkwardness in relations with girls. He does not trust his parents so much because they deceived him about the technical nature of sexual intercourse.

But Bukharin's novel is not just about individual experience: rather he uses the individual narrative in order to develop an ideological approach. Progress is defined by the world of books, learning and opposition to prejudice, such as the need to oppose anti-semitism (is this an implicit call for unity with Trotsky?). Reaction is defined by crude behaviour, instrumental promiscuity, drunkenness, corruption, religious dogma, and prejudice (a reference to Stalin's contempt for theory, and his regular drinking parties?).

Kolya outlines the sad decline of his father from being a humanitarian freethinker who changes into a conformist. This is connected to regular drinking parties that are used to impress local dignitaries. But this intellectual decline is also theoretical. Kolya knows that it is necessary to go beyond his father's humanitarian liberalism in order to be consistently critical of religion and support science. In this context Kolya refers to the importance of Hegel, dialectics and philosophy as being necessary for challenging reactionary ideas (an acknowledgement that Lenin is right about the significance of Hegel and dialectics?).

Bukharin's novel has a starting point that emphasises the importance of intellectual freedom. A dispute occurs between the headteacher of Kolya's school and Ivan Antonych, who is Kolya's father. Ivan is essentially protesting against ignorant and nihilistic authority. The headteacher is a bully who beats his son and represses his cultured and sensitive wife (Stalin's tragic wife who commits suicide in the early 1930s?). Ivan is forced out his job as a teacher and has to become a provincial tax inspector, and despite his efforts to ingratiate himself with local dignitaries he also loses this job because he is "soft on the Jews" (p103). Bukharin seems to be making an analogy between the reactionary racist ideology of tsarism and that of Stalinism, and commenting on the connected denial of diversity, pluralism and political freedom.

Whilst in the Russian provinces Kolya observes the misery and poverty of the peasants, and so he starts to develop a social conscience. This terrible situation seems to represent

an analogy with the misery brought about by forced collectivisation. Through describing the poverty of the peasants in vivid detail, Bukharin is able to show how Kolya interprets social reality in terms of the division between rich and poor. However, it is Kolya's intellectual development which allows him to redefine the conflict between rich and poor in historical materialist terms of the class struggle. Kolya also learns from his experience to distrust liberalism as an elitist attempt to uphold feudal domination, whilst claiming to want to improve the conditions of the peasantry. In general terms Bukharin's references to nature and the countryside suggest the importance of using but not exploiting resources, and above all the need to work with and not exploit the peasants who know the land.

The unemployment of Kolya's father results in the family going back to Moscow. Kolya now has greater access to public libraries and his diverse reading of literature, religious works and philosophy helps to consolidate his process of radicalisation. In various visits to art galleries Kolya is fascinated by the insanity of Ivan the Terrible (an obvious reference to Stalin). Bukharin also refers to the ideological importance Pushkin has for the tsarist state. The conflict between the tsarist state and Pushkin is glossed over in order to sanitise and celebrate the works of Pushkin. In other words, Stalin attempted to deny his growing conflict with Lenin so that Lenin can be utilised in order to bestow ideological legitimacy upon the reactionary system of Stalinism.

Kolya's intellectual inspiration in analytical thinking is his best friend Tosya (Bogdanov?). Tosya is an invalid, and so his sole pleasure is reading. This means he has a high intellectual and cultural level, and he introduces Kolya to Marxism and scientific socialism. In contrast tsarism suppresses intellectuals like Tolstoy, and carries out anti-semitic pogroms. Furthermore Kolya is not allowed to establish a cultural school magazine, because it may become subversive. Even the circus is closed because of the reciting of subversive poetry by circus performers.

These observations about the anti-cultural and totalitarian character of tsarism have obvious comparisons with Stalinism.

Bukharin discusses whether experience or book learning is the best way to develop socialism and support working class struggle. He comes to the conclusion that theory and intellectual development is primary for the encouragement of class struggle. Thus in order to prepare for revolutionary class struggle it was necessary to develop ideological conflict with the aristocracy, feudalism, bourgeoisie, Narodniks, etc: "The great issues of life were resolved in advance as theoretical problems" (p191). Lenin (Ulyanov in the novel) was serious about defeating the arguments of opponents in order to create the ideological and political conditions for developing the revolutionary party.

Bukharin develops a brilliant reconstruction of the differences between revolutionary Marxists and Socialist Revolutionaries in order to show that he had not become a Narodnik and peasant socialist. Consequently he still upheld the working class as the

primary revolutionary class and leader of the peasants in the struggle against tsarism and capitalism, and in the building of socialism. The problems in his dialogue are, firstly, that he upholds determinist historical inevitability against Narodnik subjective voluntarism, and, secondly, that he conceives of revolution in stageist terms - of bourgeois democratic revolution followed by socialist revolution. Thirdly, he does not adequately answer the Socialist Revolutionary view that Marxism leads to ideological conformity (barracks socialism) and the elitism of a party led by the bourgeois intelligentsia.

Bukharin repeats Lenin's views outlined in *What is to be done?*, that the spontaneous consciousness of the working class is not revolutionary, but bourgeois. Yet he does not elaborate Lenin's approach in the context of showing why the party does not necessarily have to degenerate into counterrevolutionary Stalinism and authoritarianism. Instead of developing an analysis against Stalinism Bukharin prefers to hint that multi-party democracy (the Narodnik and Bolshevik dialogue) shows how the revolutionary party can avoid becoming repressive. However, it could be argued that Bukharin is primarily concerned to show that theory is what is required in order to defeat Stalinism. Kolya is not able to understand Kant. In other words, it is necessary to learn philosophy in order to help solve problems about reality, including the problem of Stalinism.

Bukharin in his novel does seem to be self-critical about his support for Stalin in the mid-1920s. Firstly, he implies that Stalinism was always a form of anti-working class politics. He outlines the common aims of the tsar and kaiser for imperialist expansion, and the suppression of revolution and social democracy. This observation seems to represent a warning against the potential for a Hitler-Stalin alliance against the international working class. Furthermore, the development of police socialism by tsarism, in order to maintain state regulation of the proletariat, is virtually an explicit reference to Stalinism and its repression of the working class.

Secondly, in his description of the fragility and finality of human mortality, the uncertainty and changeability of the human condition, and Kolya's sense of guilt about the death of a brother, Bukharin seems to refer to his own guilt about facilitating the triumph of Stalin and causing the death of the Bolshevik Party. Bukharin argues that he has no more belief in an omnipotent god (Stalin?), and the only way to establish real human love is through rejecting the false love of god.

In conclusion: Bukharin's novel may not be as profound and elegant as the work of Gorky and other political Russian novelists, but, given the terrible conditions under which he had to construct it, it is a work of genius. Obviously Bukharin could not openly criticise Stalin in his novel, for that would have meant certain death for the rest of his family. However, there are enough implicit references to the reactionary nature of Stalinism to suggest that Bukharin died as an intransigent opponent of Stalinism.

It is time for Trotskyism to forgive him ●

Phil Sharpe

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Simon Harvey of the SLP

Against Livingstone

Arthur Scargill has indicated that the Socialist Labour Party will contest next year's London mayoral elections, despite the probable fact that Ken Livingstone will be a candidate.

Speaking on radio's *Any questions?* last weekend, the SLP general secretary declared that Livingstone would be standing on a capitalist programme, since the only major difference he admits to having with Tony Blair is over tube privatisation. Scargill stated that 'Red Ken's' plans for a bond issue to finance the London underground was not in any way anti-capitalist.

This is of course correct: Livingstone himself says that his scheme, based on that of the New York transport authority, is "hardly revolutionary". But to dismiss his candidacy on that basis misses the point entirely. Surely it is obvious to everyone that the intervention of the former leader of the Greater London Council is causing New Labour the greatest of difficulties, to put it mildly. Blair has said that he will allow a revival of Livingstoneism "over my dead body", yet Ken is odds on to win the official Labour nomination. And if Blair steps in with some kind of last-minute fix, then it is more than likely that Livingstone will stand as an independent. Either way, a huge crisis for Blairism is looming, and a left split - one of much greater significance than the one led by Scargill himself - cannot be ruled out.

In these circumstances those claiming to be socialists should do all in their power to achieve such an outcome. At the very least the SLP ought to announce here and now that it will not oppose Livingstone. Yet Scargill even appears to be ruling this out as a possibility. What a contrast to his attitude in May 1997, when his unspoken policy was one of giving selected Labour lefts a clear run. When the Brent East Constituency SLP took the initiative to stand in the general election against Livingstone, Scargill was furious. He even went so far as to declare that his party's candidate was "not a member of Socialist Labour" and tried to persuade the returning officer to declare his nomination invalid.

In fact there was no reason not to oppose the Labour lefts on May 1 1997. All of them, including Livingstone, not only stood on the official New Labour manifesto, but were tolerated by Blair. They were not part of any oppositional movement. There was nothing to be gained by unconditionally backing them, nor giving them tacit support. They had to be presented with a minimum platform - if they accepted it, they deserved support; if not, then it was right for socialists and communists to stand candidates. Today's situation is quite different.

However, for Scargill everything is determined by one thing and one thing



Harpal Brar and Arthur Scargill united against the Livingstone revolt

only: advancing the narrow, sectarian interests of 'his' party. Thus in 1997 he still had misplaced hopes that the likes of Livingstone would come over to Socialist Labour. In 1999 even Arthur knows they will not. And, since in Scargill's world the SLP alone is 'the answer', all those who are not for it (and in particular cannot stand his autocratic internal regime) must be against it.

This policy is not only divisive, but short-sighted in the extreme. Imagine how the potential for the left could have been transformed if, from the start, the SLP had encouraged every break from Labour, and every left decision to stand against Blair's party, irrespective of whether the individuals involved were likely to join the SLP in the short term. An SLP formed on the basis of forging unity would undoubtedly have been well placed to gain hegemony over the whole left. A figure with Scargill's militant, intransigent reputation would have been the natural leader of such a potentially powerful movement.

In 1996, when the SLP was founded, that reputation was largely unsullied. Today, thanks to his own actions, Socialist Labour is viewed as a sectarian irrelevance. There is next to no chance that a left break from Labour (such as any split that is triggered by the crisis around Livingstone) would eventually end up in Scargill's camp. So he intends to oppose it, putting up a candidate for mayor himself and thus taking votes, however few they turn out to be, from Livingstone.

Whenever any voice in favour of left unity has been heard within our

party, Scargill has sought to discredit it by linking the question of alliances to that evil of all evils - a "federal party". This of course ignores the fact that the constitution makes clear - without actually using the words - that a federal party is what the SLP officially is. How else can you describe an organisation that allows for and encourages autonomous trade union affiliates? As Scargill has demonstrated so clearly, he is perfectly able to control the existing federated bodies. But the affiliation of left groups would be another thing altogether - except for neo-Stalinist sects such as Harpal Brar's Communist Workers' Association and (until recently) Roy Bulls EPSR. If Scargill accuses you of advocating *that* sort of federalism, he is all but stating that you are member of another political organisation yourself - the equivalent in the SLP of being damned to eternal hellfire.

That is why those who propose unity have to tread carefully. At the last annual congress earlier this month Huddersfield CSLP put forward a motion in favour of reaching agreements "in local, assembly and general elections for socialists not to stand against each other", and calling for a "comradely dialogue with others on the left". Not surprisingly the comrade who proposed this prefaced his remarks by stating that he was "not a member of any faction", and went so far as to condemn all those SLP members who had "attempted to seize control in the past". He did point out, however, that the constitution lays down as one of its

objects "to cooperate with all socialist organisations".

In reply to the debate Scargill nevertheless denounced Huddersfield for moving "one of the most dangerous motions - arguing for a federal structure". And, just in case anyone had any doubts, he repeated his well worn sectarian stance: "This party will have nothing whatsoever to do with alliances." Needless to say, the motion was overwhelmingly defeated, as was a proposal from Colne Valley, which, among other things, called for the avoidance of "sectarian ideas and methods in our dealings with fellow socialists and democratic and progressive forces both inside and outside the party".

This brings me to the article by Delphi in last week's *Weekly Worker*. The comrade took issue with Dave Osler (*Weekly Worker* November 4) for his "attack on Scargill's 'ego'", which Delphi described as a "red herring". He went on to state: "Only a leader with immense determination, conviction and sense of purpose could have mentally survived the onslaught which Dave acknowledges has, and continues to be, mounted by the state and media. Scargill often uses Stalinist methods, but his ideology is basically utopian, even romantic" (November 18).

How can Scargill's "ego" be so inconsequential, when it leads him not only to sabotage all moves towards the type of all-embracing, "emancipatory" party the working class so desperately needs, but also to effectively denounce those who advocate unity as agents of some outside force?

Delphi has written cogently on Stalin's legacy, exposing the reign of terror that was his apology for 'socialism' in the Soviet Union. Can there be any doubt as to the nature of the regime Scargill himself would instigate, should the working class make the fatal mistake of handing him the power to install his own particular version of bureaucratic national socialism? What reason is there to believe that the regime he has imposed on the SLP in order to stifle every last trace of democracy and membership initiative is some sort of aberration?

What of Stalin's own ideology? Surely it too was "basically utopian, even romantic"? That was why he persuaded himself that it was possible to introduce 'socialism', from above, in a single, backward, country. It was Stalinist bureaucratic socialism, not Bolshevism, which "suffered its historical failure" in the USSR. Bolshevism can only be said to have failed in that it allowed itself to be perverted and turned into its opposite from within. The Bolsheviks knew that without international revolution failure was inevitable. The fact that it did not happen - despite all the signs to the contrary and the valiant attempts in the first months following the October revolution - does not disprove the Bolshevik method.

Despite comrade Delphi's throwing out the Bolshevik baby with the bathwater, and despite the distance he likes to put between himself and the likes of Harpal Brar, his faith in Scargill risks leading him, in practice, despite the best of intentions, down the same old well trodden path ●