



weekly worker

**SWP's Rob Hoveman
debates the euro with
the Communist Party**

■ European Social Forum
■ Stoke and BNP
■ Hackney and Foot
■ Socialism and dictatorship

No 451

Thursday October 10 2002

Towards a Socialist Alliance party

www.cpgb.org.uk

50p/€0.85

Neither pound nor the euro, but active boycott

This weekend's special conference on Europe is an important opportunity for the Socialist Alliance to once again reassert its potential to unite the left on the basis of a genuine, programmatically-based and *public* debate around a key question of socialist politics today.

The position that socialists should adopt in relation to the emergence of Europe's single currency - no longer a theoretical construction, but a tangible, everyday reality - is not something we can afford to take lightly. We certainly cannot afford to rush into a knee-jerk stance of crude rejectionism that will divide the British labour movement from the working class of France, Italy, Germany, etc, for whom the single currency is now not a matter of dispute.

Taken in isolation from the real contradictory relationships between British capitalism and the capitalism of the euro zone, and the context of the likely referendum itself, the arguments of the 'no' motion (proposed by Will McMahon, Alan Thornett, John Rees, Rob Hoveman and Weyman Bennett; supported by the Socialist Workers Party and International Socialist Group comrades, among others) would have much to recommend them. Socialists and communists should and do, of course, oppose every anti-working class aspect of the Maastricht and single currency project - from the limits on public spending and borrowing (growth and stability pact) to the "imposition of draconian immigration controls" on a European scale, to the project of a European imperialist army. But in the context of the referendum to come, however, none of these questions will be on the ballot paper.

We will not be able to vote against public spending limits, any more than we will be able to vote against draconian immigration controls, or imperialist militarism. On the contrary - all we will be asked to do in practice is to choose between one bourgeois currency and

another: euro or pound. That is, we will be asked to take sides between one wing of the British ruling class - that wishes to cling ever more closely to the coat tails of the United States and the myth that this 'special relationship' will somehow guarantee British capitalism's prosperity and allegedly great influence in the world - against the wing that simply wants to reap the benefits (and profits) of European political and economic integration and fears getting left behind, the more euro entry is delayed.

In reality, in current conditions, a rejection of the euro project simply means the victory of anti-European sentiment and rightwing little Britishism. There is no shortage of that about. Take the question of immigration, for instance. One of the main activities of the rightwing British Eurosceptic press in recent years has been agitation against refugees and asylum-seekers who travel to Britain through the euro zone countries. This of course, has been taken up by the Blair government with a vengeance, out of eagerness to please and mollify the Thatcherite reactionaries, and this pressure has resulted in the closure of Sangatte - allegedly the source of much cross-channel illegal immigration.

How would a victory of the pound elements - often the very same people making the most noise over asylum-seekers - mitigate the draconian immigration regime under Schengen? In reality, under Thatcher, Major and Blair, it has been Britain that has often been the most proactive in toughening up the immigration regime in Europe, as evidenced most graphically in Jack Straw's recent proposals to change the UN convention to eliminate (through a changed definition) the rights of many of today's refugees.

Then there is the question of the growth and stability pact. In recent weeks, the prolongation of the cyclical economic downturn has become apparent in Europe (so much for Gordon

Brown's one-time claim to have done away with cyclical economic downturns). Thus the deadline for the implementation of the pact has been postponed for two years, simply because a number of major European powers, including most notably Germany, have proved unable to meet it. The anti-European wing of the British bourgeoisie have been doing a little dance of triumph over this, proclaiming that this proves that the euro is built on sand, is not a viable currency, etc. In reality, it means nothing of the sort - there is of course nothing that unusual about governments being forced to violate the supposed norms of economic 'prudence' by borrowing money to see out an economic downturn.

This moving of the goalposts by the European bourgeoisies in the face of the capitalist trade cycle merely shows that the stability pact is something of a paper tiger - in reality it is an aspiration of neoliberal economic orthodoxy that, like other economic aspirations within more conventional national frameworks, is prone to be thrown out of the window as soon as it becomes an obstacle to the pressing demands of expediency.

So the simple equation of the euro with austerity and the growth and stability pact is, to say the least, overstated. The two are no more synonymous than other forms of economic orthodoxy are synonymous with maintaining the stability of more conventional national currencies - such as sterling. A vote against the euro (and therefore implicitly for the pound) is not, then, necessarily a vote against austerity measures, such as the stability pact. It could just as easily be the other way round - a rejection of the euro in this way could prove to be a vote for some other kind of austerity plan, aimed at preserving the stability of the pound as a currency backed by much smaller resources, in the face of giant rival currencies.

As opponents of capitalism, of

course, socialists cannot endorse the project of the reactionary integrationist European bourgeoisies. Our reasons for opposing this are similar - virtually identical in fact - to the reasons why we oppose also the nationalist projects of the anti-Maastricht, anti-European reactionary bourgeois opponents of the euro. If a federal United States of Europe were to come about in the continued absence of democracy and with the working class confined to the old nation-states - it would simply be another predatory agency for the oppression of the world proletariat and the bulk of humanity by capitalism. It would mean exploitation of the working class, militarism, the oppression of immigrants: in short what we have now in a different form.

For the SA to endorse a 'no' campaign would be to blunt the edge of our opposition to both these capitalist alternatives - and to adapt to the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and the left Labourite national reformists who ally themselves with the Eurosceptic wing of British capital against the euro. This is why we urge support for the resolution, submitted by comrades Marcus Ström, Mark Hoskisson and Martin Thomas (CPGB, Workers Power and Alliance for Workers' Liberty respectively), that has been composited with a similar resolution from South Manchester SA. This urges an active boycott of the referendum on British membership of the euro. The SA should uphold the principle of working class independence from all wings of

capital by adopting this consistently anti-capitalist policy.

We do not, however, present this as an ultimatum. If the 'no' resolution wins, we would consider that to be a programmatic setback for the SA, a retreat from the correct and principled stance laid out in *People before profit* - our manifesto for last year's general election. But the unity of the Socialist Alliance can only be strengthened through honest debate.

Obviously we will have to revisit the issue anyway, not least because the immediacy of the referendum is rapidly receding. The expected date is now *after* the next general election, under a third-term Labour government. Between then and now much can and will change. Not only in Britain but in Europe too class relations and political alignments are in flux. So, while the October 12 conference can cast an indicative vote on the principle involved, the Socialist Alliance will clearly have to continue debating the issue before finally honing our intervention when the date of the referendum is announced. When that final decision is taken, we in the CPGB will of course uphold our right to criticise shortcomings, but we would not obstruct the democratically decided priorities of the SA.

Rather, the CPGB would campaign critically to ensure the SA makes the best possible impact in the widespread political ferment that would undoubtedly accompany a referendum on this key question in British and European politics ●

Ian Donovan

SA euro conference

Socialist Alliance national conference on Europe, Saturday October 12, 11am. Registration from 10am. South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1 (nearest tube - Euston). £10 waged, £6 unwaged. Crèche available.

LETTERS



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

Auto-SPD

I would like to reply to Ian Donovan's letter (*Weekly Worker* October 3). In politics context is often of vast importance. In a period when the level of struggle is low and the confidence of workers in their abilities negligible, revolutionary policies can seem utopian and absurd. The opposite may apply in a period of high struggle and revolutionaries may find themselves counselling caution. Thus it was amusing to find comrade Donovan taking my comments concerning the recent German elections out of context.

The comrade claims to have discovered in my letter a principle which, in the manner of your group, is named "auto-SPD" - a curious and sectish term unique to the 'CPGB' - where no such principle was avowed. Rather than make claim to such a dubious principle, by which I understand you to mean the automatic electoral support of reformist parties, I actually argued for electoral support to be given to such parties despite their politics as a principle. But nowhere and at no time have I advanced the position that revolutionaries always, "automatically", vote for bourgeois parties such as the SPD or the Labour Party.

Further, your comrade writes that "some like comrade Pearn support the reformist bureaucratic apparatus", which is nothing but a slander. The position I have advanced at every election since 1979 has been one of critical support with regard to those bourgeois workers' parties participating. Therefore even in 1997, when campaigning as a member of the Socialist Labour Party, I continued to argue that workers should vote for the Labour Party where the SLP was not standing. This alone proves comrade Donovan's comments concerning my so called auto-Labourism to be a nonsense.

Rather revolutionaries must critically support bourgeois workers' parties such as Labour or the SPD where and when these parties command the continued allegiance of masses of organised workers - this is a general rule, but not something automatically to be assumed. There are, as with any rule, exceptions to this practice. For example, it may be the case that revolutionaries may find it advisable to call for abstention from elections totally or they might find themselves in a position of calling upon their supporters to vote for a formation such as the SLP or Socialist Alliance due to their membership of such sects. Electoral support of a mass party such as the SPD remains, however, the general rule and cannot be described as a principle.

However, what is a principled method is that on which revolutionaries critically support such bourgeois workers' parties as the SPD or Labour. For comrade Donovan the SPD is to be supported due to Schröder's reluctance to engage in Bush's Iraqi adventure. This is seen by comrade Donovan as being the crucial issue of the day, and so it is. Revolutionaries in Germany have the duty then of explaining to supporters of the SPD that Schröder's statements are mere demagoguery, given his continuing support for imperialist aggression in the Balkans and elsewhere. Electoral support of Schröder and the SPD is therefore correct despite their actions, including their domestic politics which comrade Donovan fails to discuss, and not because of a few treacherous statements made by such a renowned trickster as Schröder.

Let us look at the question from another perspective. Imagine for a moment Britain is facing a war and the depth of feeling against the war is such that minor and even major openly bourgeois parties verbally oppose it. Do we then critically support such parties? Given

that comrade Donovan argues that support for the SPD is dependent on its opposition to the war, if the answer is 'no' one must note that the comrade's criterion is inadequate at best. Clearly revolutionaries can never give any support to openly bourgeois parties, regardless of this or that position they adopt.

Or perhaps we might look at the history of the German workers' movement, which holds many lessons. As the comrades will know, a war broke out in 1914 and the SPD, contrary to all its teachings and principles, supported it. The response of revolutionary socialists at the time is instructive: they denounced the war and remained within the ranks of the SPD. The reason being that they sought at all times to maintain contact with the most class-conscious sections of the working class - and they were to be found within the SPD despite its leadership and policies. In fact the most experienced leaders of the revolutionary movement were reluctant to break from both the SPD and its leftwing breakaway, the Independent SPD, for fear of their supporters launching themselves on a sectarian binge in the name of building an independent party.

Given the history of even the early years of the Communist Party of Germany, it is hard not to conclude that there was much in the fears of Rosa Luxemburg. Revolutionaries today must support the reformist workers' parties, despite the lack of even the vaguest promise of working class reforms, in order that those organised workers who support those parties come to understand that the likes of Blair and Schröder are as much their enemies as Stöiber and whatsisname of the Tory Party. But such support is always despite their policies of the day and is a function of the class contradictions which are still the foundation of those parties. It is in this contradiction that is to be found the basis of differences between the bourgeois leaderships and the working class membership; and it is this contradiction revolutionaries seek to exploit.

That on occasion revolutionaries will vote for, or even join, parties which stand to the left of the mass reformist parties is true, but these are exceptions to the general rule that when there is no mass revolutionary organisation it is mandatory to vote for the reformist parties. One exception is the Socialist Alliance, but even here let us not pretend that this reformist electoral bloc can command anything but the support of those handfuls influenced by the far left. It is then a sect or collection of sects, and support for it is exceptional. As mentioned above, there are other circumstances when it may be needful to abstain, but the general rule stands.

Always such critical support is delivered despite the policies of the reformists and not because of this or that policy they momentarily advocate for opportunist reasons.

Mike Pearn
email

Pro-unity AWL

I want to reply to a couple of things written in Mary Godwin's account of the CPGB aggregate. Mary wrote: "While the AWL calls in the abstract for the unity of the revolutionary left, such a notion does not guide its practice - and certainly not its participation in the Socialist Alliance" (*Weekly Worker* October 3).

Is this true? I don't think so. The first words on our website are vaunting the SA debate on the euro: "The debate on the euro, for a workers' Europe. In the Socialist Alliance over the next two months there will be the first major debate - on the euro - within a common organisational framework, that the left has had for over 30 years. *Solidarity* has produced a special mini-pamphlet, tracking our view of the background to and history of this critical debate on Europe."

That doesn't sound like indifference to revolutionary unity to me.

But even if you believe it to be true, how can you not see the absurdity of following it, as though this were proof, with: "At the SA national conference on December 1 2001 the AWL took an anarcho-liberal position, standing against steps that would take the alliance in a partyist direction and instead voting for a loose form of organisation in a futile attempt to prevent the Socialist Party in England and Wales walkout"? I will make several points about this:

● Perhaps the attempt to stop the Socialist Party walking out was futile - in the interests of revolutionary unity, we genuinely hoped it was not. That's why we made the attempt. If the attempt was futile, we are either very stupid, not seeing the writing on the wall (possible), underestimating the boneheaded, sectarian nature of the Socialist Party (impossible!) - but then you cannot accuse us of being indifferent to or hostile to revolutionary unity, just mistaken in how we tried to serve it that day. Or we are Machiavellian: the position we took at the national conference was a pose. We masked our hostility to the (real) project of revolutionary unity (the partyist motion you and the SWP backed) with the appearance (a mirage, you insist) of being the 'nice guys', knocking heads together in the interests of ... revolutionary unity! That way, when we lost the vote, hey, at least we looked good (to the idiots present, those people who thought revolutionary unity could best be served by keeping the revolutionaries in the same room. Not to you - or we - who know better).

● The AWL's position on that day, arguing for the Socialist Party - revolutionaries - and the SWP - revolutionaries - to stay, however uncomfortably, in one organisation, united, for a while longer and continue engaging in some common activities (minimally - and, on an honest assessment, perhaps maximally as well - grunting at each other in front of a wider audience) ... that's hostility or indifference to "unity of the revolutionary left"? It's a lot less like indifference, I say, than the CPGB backing a resolution you knew would make the Socialist Party walkout more likely.

● I don't plead for the Socialist Party - I don't think they should have walked. I have no illusions about them (what a shame that they are not here now to defend themselves). I've seen with my own eyes, in the civil service, their offensive, self-serving, philistine dismissal of other decent leftists. Yet, it would have been better for the SA project, for revolutionary unity, had they stayed. And walking wasn't all down to them being sectarian.

● Have you illusions about the SWP? Whatever it was that made them take the stand they did at the national conference, it was not backbone against anarcho-liberalism. (Obliquely, partly it was, of

course. But precisely there I would rather be described as being anarcho-liberal than being like the SWP.) Perhaps, partly, they were motivated by a wish to have a 'more party' Socialist Alliance; if so, what have they done with their more party SA since? And did they want a more party SA in order to hasten revolutionary unity? Almost certainly, partly, they enjoyed the chance to rub the Socialist Party's nose in the fact of the SWP's greater size - not very unpartisan. Partly, perhaps, they couldn't actually care less what constitution the SA adopts. At the end of the day, it's my guess, they believed that the more party constitution would give the centre of the SA - the SWP - more power over the periphery.

Socialists should not dismiss lightly with adjectives like "futile" our cherished and, between comrades we have to trust, sincerely entertained projects. Perhaps your attempt to turn the SA into the embryo of the Communist Party is futile - you genuinely hope it is not. That's why you make the attempt. If you are going to build the beginnings of a Communist Party from the bits and bobs of the revolutionaries around the Socialist Alliance, you had better start by looking at what bits and bobs they are and thinking how best to work with them. We did that at the national conference better than you.

Vicki Morris
AWL

Misleading

I would like to correct one comment in your report on the CPGB aggregate. You say: "at a fringe meeting on the SA paper, jointly organised with the AWL and the RDG at the SWP's Marxism 2002, the AWL refused to provide a speaker".

This is simply wrong and misleading. The AWL did not refuse to have a speaker on the issue of an SA paper. There were three meetings sponsored by the AWL, CPGB and RDG. There was some misunderstanding by the CPGB as to whether the RDG was sponsoring the meetings and putting up speakers. There was some concern that the CPGB might be resistant to having RDG speakers. This proved not to be the case.

As this error was being sorted out, the AWL suggested, instead of being top-heavy with 'additional' speakers, each group would stand down a speaker, perming two from three. Because Chris Jones, chair of the Merseyside SA was in attendance for the meeting on the SA paper, we agreed that AWL would 'stand down' in favour of Chris.

The RDG put up two speakers and chaired the third. The AWL did the same. The RDG did not put up a euro speaker and the AWL did not put up a speaker on the SA paper. But it was always clear that the AWL would speak from the floor on the SA paper and be one of the first up to speak. There were a number of AWL speakers on the SA paper (includ-

ing Martin Thomas, I think). Your report seems to imply that the AWL ducked the issue. This was simply untrue.

One final comment. I support Martyn Hudson's motion because it was basically correct, not least because it was seeking to go forward. I think the reported comments by Lee Rock summed up the situation correctly - opposed to fusion now "but a bloc with the AWL would be more useful and more likely than a joint paper". I can't see anything in the motion that was passed, except to confirm where we are. Stuck in the mud, blaming the AWL.

Perhaps this is why comrade John Pearson, who is fearful of the AWL, was relieved and reassured by the PCC line?
Dave Craig
RDG

Platform

I am surprised Martin Thomas requires further explanation of the September 20 Leeds meeting (Letters *Weekly Worker* October 3). He has discussed the matter - at some length - with not only myself, but our national organiser, Mark Fischer, too.

So, for the benefit of readers, what happened? Ray Gaston - in his capacity as vicar of All Hallows church in Leeds - organised a three-way exchange on 'Marxism and religion'. Invited were Sean Matgamna, of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty-*Solidarity*, Ken Leech, a well known Anglican theologian and supporter of many leftwing causes, and - as a 'star' draw - Mike Marqusee, once a Socialist Alliance executive member and now the Stop the War Coalition's leading media spokesperson.

However, at the last moment comrade Marqusee says he was shocked to discover that Sean Matgamna was due to speak alongside him. He objected. Being automatically branded an anti-semitic, he says, is beyond the pale. Certainly anyone who proposes the conventional one-state solution for Israel-Palestine is guilty of anti-semitism, according to AWL polemicists. But that should be a matter of calm debate, not petulant ultimatums.

Comrade Gaston - a recent recruit to the CPGB - decided to get another speaker. Perhaps he should have simply told Mike Marqusee that dictating who spoke - apart from himself, of course - was unacceptable. Bowing before Mike Marqusee's ultimatum sets a bad precedent. But comrade Gaston was determined that the debate must go on. He rang Mark Fischer, explained the situation, and asked him to suggest a replacement. That is where I came in. Mark Fischer contacted me. I agreed to speak - reluctantly.

For those tempted to conjure up a CPGB plot, let me make one thing perfectly clear. I was under the impression that Sean Matgamna had, at the last moment, simply dropped out - as he did at this year's Communist University. That is why the *Weekly Worker* advertised Jack Conrad as "replacing Sean Matgamna". Only after having arrived in Leeds, on September 20, did I find out that the problem lay with Mike Marqusee. Comrade Gaston told me he had phoned Sean Matgamna. No Sean - but an answer-machine and Ray recorded a long message of explanation. Comrade Gaston had also promptly contacted the local AWL group in Leeds.

The meeting went ahead. Comrade Matgamna arrived just as proceedings were about to start. He said - so I am told - that he knew nothing of any message nor Mike Marqusee's objections. Comrade Gaston volunteered to pay his travel expenses in full. Leeds AWL must have decided on a boycott - although one of their comrades, Jane Astrid Devane, who is also a member of the All Hallows congregation, chaired the meeting.

Comrade Matgamna must have decided against intervening from the floor.

Where to get the *Weekly Worker*

■ **London**
Bookmarks Bloomsbury Street, WC1
Centreprise Bookshop 136-138 Kingsland High Street, E8 2NS
Dillons Bookshop Queen Mary College, 329 Mile End Road, E1
Housmans 5 Caledonian Road, N1
Index Books 16 Electric Avenue, SW9
New Beacon Books 76 Stroud Green Road, N4 3EN
Politico's 8 Artillery Row, SW1P 1RZ
■ **Bristol**
Greenleaf 82 Colston Street, BS1 5BB
■ **Cardiff**
Rebecca Books 131 Crwys Road, CF2 4NH
■ **Edinburgh**
Word Power 43 West Nicolson Street, EH8

■ **Glasgow**
Barrett Newsagents 263 Byres Road
■ **Hull**
Page One Books 9 Princes Avenue
■ **Leicester**
Little Thorn 73 Humberstone Gate, LE1 1WB
■ **Liverpool**
News from Nowhere 98 Bold Street, L1 4HY
■ **Manchester**
The Bookshop 441 Wilmslow Road, Withington, M4 4AN
■ **Northampton**
Blackcurrent Books 4 Allen Road, NN1 4NE
■ **Southampton**
October Books 4 Onslow Road, SO2 0JB

He departed without approaching either myself or Jane Astrid Devane. Introducing the meeting, comrade Gaston tactfully chided those on the left who were unwilling to debate with each other and who thereby bring our movement into disrepute.

Some are gleefully using the Leeds meeting as an excuse to attack the CPGB and put an unofficial Socialist Alliance paper on hold. There is dark talk of an underhand CPGB plan to silence the AWL. Such irresponsible nonsense is to be regretted. On the other hand those who are genuinely interested in CPGB-AWL rapprochement and building left unity will file this unfortunate incident under ‘cock-up’, not ‘conspiracy’ - and move on to more important things.

Jack Conrad
London

Inspire

I too read the Muslim Association of Britain newspaper *Inspire* and was struck by the collision of outlooks it presented (*Weekly Worker* October 3).

Beside the contributions you mention, I also noted a number of other pieces with which it would be much harder for socialists to find favour. The front-page article makes reference to Israel, the “so-called 1948 war of independence” and the thousands of Palestinians made refugees by that event, but does not mention the significant numbers of jews driven out of Arab countries at the time and in the following years.

A second article stresses the significance of a large, peaceful demonstration, but does so entirely from a standpoint innocent of any class perspective. It uses such vague formulations as “the cycle of change” to attempt to explain historical events and justifies the demonstration because it will “pressure our government to adopt a totally ethical policy at home as well as abroad”. The newspaper includes in an ‘Opinion’ column the view that, “The insanity of Sharon and those who elected him to office is a clear indication that Israel is a diabolic entity that cannot be trusted”, contains veiled approval of suicide bombings and devotes a page to arguing for “Boycotting Israel for Palestinian rights”. This article names Sainsbury’s among many other companies as a target for the boycott, and yet several pages later the newspaper carries an advert for, amongst other companies, Sainsbury’s.

Significant space is given within what seems to be the presentation of an islamic world view to the justification of Sharia-based policies and to discrimination in islamic states against non-muslims, specifically over who may hold political office. No socialist could accept the view stated in this article that, “When a person chooses not to embrace islam, then he or she would have - in order to acquire the right to citizenship - to express loyalty to the state and recognise its legitimacy so that he or she does not engage in any activity that may be construed as threatening to its order.”

These and other examples from the newspaper perhaps indicate the opportunist as well as self-contradictory nature of the publication, whose differing perspectives are at root so divergent that they must break apart under more than a moment’s scrutiny or pressure. It does no service to the working class, in my view, to obscure the ultimate incompatibility of a socialist and a religious (any religious) outlook, nor to imply that, whatever its declared aims, the MAB can accommodate to (far less be accommodated by) an independent working class political current of the kind the CPGB and the AWL hope to help shape.

Patrick Yarker
email

Defend Iraq?

In response to the letters last week from Charlie Pottins and Sacha Ismail, I feel I should clarify a few points (*Weekly Worker* October 3).

I find little to object to in comrade Pottins’s letter. Indeed if working people formed shuras and the regime armed the masses I would welcome any attempt of such bodies to lead the masses and hold on to the weapons. The main issue that I was arguing was that in the event of an imperialist onslaught it would be suicidal for the masses to turn their guns against the Iraqi troops, as this would only lead to a US victory, followed by an occupation of ‘peacekeepers’ and, as the comrade points out, a more pliable dictator.

As for comrade Ismail’s letter, he made an interesting point referring to defeatism. He also agrees that it is a principled position to give military support to indigenuous forces fighting against imperialist conquest, regardless of the character of their political leadership. However, where he differs from me is his belief that the war against Iraq is not a war of conquest. It is more than an attempt to patch up the fabric of the capitalist world order, as he asserts. It is true that imperialism no longer rules by direct colonial methods, but it has other means. One only has to look at the UN ‘protectorate’ in Bosnia, for example, to see this, where the ‘supreme high representative’ is none other than Lord Ashdown. The western military presence in the Balkans is still alive and well, and it also is in Afghanistan. Therefore who can say how long the US-UK forces will remain in Iraq after they succeed in their mission of deposing Saddam?

Rather than go to the expense, however, of setting up a direct colonial administration, imperialism today finds it cheaper to use stooges - either puppet dictators or IMF-based pseudo-‘democracies’. This does not make this form of neo-colonialism any less oppressive to the masses or any less a violation of national self-determination than direct and formal colonialism. If one believes it is, one is swallowing the imperialists’ own propaganda.

As for oil, Iraq has huge reserves. Surely Esso, one of Bush’s largest donors, must realise this? Oil reserves are not unlimited, and to imply that US imperialism is not interested in Iraqi oil is naive, to say the least. While it is not the only reason for the upcoming invasion, it is no doubt one of the main ones.

I also fail to believe that Iraq is a “powerful, independent capitalist state”, as the comrade asserts. The country has been wrecked by 10 years of sanctions, so it is far from powerful, besides the fact that its army is in disarray. It is precisely Iraq’s independence, however, that is at threat from imperialism and its drive to make it into a neo-colony. This is why I choose to stand for giving military support to the Iraqi troops as they fight against the imperialist hordes.

Liz Hoskings
London

Lenin and defeatism

Commenting on Sacha Ismail’s letter to the *Weekly Worker*, I do think Hal Draper is being a bit picky regarding Lenin’s defeatist formulations. True, they can be interpreted as being for the victory of the other side, but Lenin was against the war and was opposed to the German and other working classes taking the side of their national ruling class in any war and not just inter-imperialist wars.

In 1914-15 Lenin was depressed and thought he would never live to see revolution, as the European working class was completely swallowed up in their various national chauvinistic fantasies. In the event of German armies defeating the tsar’s armies, revolutionaries in Russia would not have lifted a finger to save that regime and they would have been right. They had a visceral hatred of tsardom, but unfortunately western European communists for the most part felt less alienated from their states. Lenin was not directing his polemics into a void, but toward Russian communists.

As to what they would have done -

this depended on the circumstances and the political condition of the working classes in the contending countries at that time. They would not have raised the slogan for national self-determination under the tsar. The right to national self-determination is a right for peoples, not for autocrats, and was not a possibility in Russian conditions until 1917. Under an autocrat you do not have the right to self-determination even in your own country: you determine nothing.

Revolutionaries in the east regarded Russia as being more reactionary than Austria and Germany and in the event of the working class being marginalised and unable to positively affect the outcome of the war they would have hoped for the defeat of Russia as the best prospect for uniting the working class when its fortunes revived.

This is assuming of course that revolutionaries were incapable of doing anything. However, the Bolshevik policy was not to meekly accept chauvinism and reaction, but to challenge it, although it brought unpopularity. The key to working class power was consciousness of what was necessary and the ability to act on it, not what seemed possible in the circumstances or what was the lesser evil.

In the worst-case scenario, where the tsar’s armies prevailed, this did not mean that in the last instance the Austro-German workers should prop up their own bourgeoisie against the Russians as the lesser evil, but that the penalty for class collaboration was disaster and in not challenging their ruling class they would have utterly failed in their tasks. As it happened, this last scenario did not come to be or it would have received considerable polemical attention. There was a lot more to revolutionary defeatism than the bare slogan, which is probably why it did not create any confusion amongst Russian revolutionaries at the time.

By 1917 the position had changed dramatically. Lenin’s contention that the defeat of one’s own side creates the best conditions for revolution was confirmed. The war that the Bolsheviks had opposed from the beginning had destroyed the tsar and the Bolsheviks were able, in turn, to overthrow the bourgeois regime of Kerensky, create an embryonic workers’ state, hopefully opening the door to world revolution.

It is hardly surprising that his slogan of defeatism was not mentioned at this time, but the victory was still the concrete application of that very slogan. The practice was realistic and flexible, when applied to concrete situations in Russia. The problem since then is that the slogan has been used to justify anti-Bolshevik political agendas and the theory has become distorted.

On one point I disagree with both Sacha Ismail and Liz Hoskings: on the subject of colonial occupation being different in kind to locally created despotisms. The working class task is to get rid of both forms of oppression by taking advantage of the antagonisms between the two poles of power. Tactics need to be flexible, but the strategy remains the same. The question would of course be changed if Iraq were a democracy.

The working class must have a clear line: no support for your own ruling class, no support for reactionaries, no support for imperialism; for an independent, democratic working class programme.

Phil Kent
London

Gospel

According to Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, “violent revolution lies at the root of the entire theory of Marx and Engels”. “The suppression of the bourgeois state by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution” (VI Lenin CW Vol 25, Moscow 1977, p405).

Barrie Biddulph
Stoke-on-Trent

ACTION

CPGB London seminars

Sunday October 13 - no seminar. All comrades are invited to our day school (see p11).

Sunday October 20, 5pm - ‘New pluralism and the politics of identity’, using Ellen Meiskins Wood’s *Democracy against capitalism* as a study guide.

Palestinian rights

Protest on the steps of St Martin’s in the Fields, Trafalgar Square, every Wednesday, from 5.30pm to 6.30pm.

Immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories. For an independent Palestinian state with the same rights as Israel. For the right of both peoples to live in peace in their own territories. Condemn Israeli state terrorism, and islamic terrorism against Israeli civilians. Organised by Justice for the Palestinians. Supported by Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, Communist Party of Great Britain, Worker-communist Party of Iraq, International Federation of Iraqi Refugees, Worker-communist Party of Iran, International Federation of Iranian Refugees, International Campaign for a Referendum for Kurdistan.

Marxism and education

Day seminar, ‘Renewing dialogues’: Tuesday October 22, 9.30am-5pm, room 642, School of Education Foundations and Policy Studies, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, WC1.

Sessions on ‘Lifelong learning - the dialectical method’; ‘Neoliberal strategies and counter-strategies’; ‘Mentoring: a Marxist-feminist critique’; ‘Education - postmodernism or Marxism’; ‘Postmodernism and the dynamics of reproduction’; ‘Commodification of teacher training’; ‘Making and meaning of humanisation’.

Speakers: Tony Green, Glenn Rikowski, Shahrzad Mojab, Les Levidow, Helen Colley, Amir Hassanpour, Elizabeth Atkinson, Mike Cole, Rob Willmott, Paula Allman.

Admission free, but entry tickets required, as places are limited.

Glenn Rikowski: rikowski@tiscali.co.uk; 020 8514 1069.

No more custody deaths

For an independent public inquiry into deaths in custody.

Vigil: for international day of protest, October 22, 5pm, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London (nearest tube: Bond Street).

Procession: Saturday October 26. Assemble 1pm, Trafalgar Square. Silent procession along Whitehall followed by noisy protest at Downing Street! All welcome - please wear black. Bring your group’s banner, but no placards, please.

Called by United Families and Friends Campaign - 07770 432439.

Artists against the War

Postcards - 50p each.

- artistsagainsthewar@hotmail.com
- www.artistsagainsthewar.org.uk
- wwwstopthewar.org



Party wills

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

RDG

To contact the Revolutionary Democratic Group email rdgroup@yahoo.com

European Social Forum

Fly with the CPGB contingent to Florence for the European Social Forum. Depart Wednesday November 6. Return Sunday November 10. £160 - places limited.


For more information contact esf@cpgb.org.uk

By train organised by ESF mobilising committee:
Depart Tuesday November 5. Return Monday November 11. £150.
www.mobilix.org.uk

www.cpgb.org.uk/action

Join the Socialist Alliance

I enclose a cheque or postal order for £24 (£6unwaged)



Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____ Phone _____

Email _____

Socialist Alliance, Wickham House, 10 Cleveland Way, London E1 4TR. Cheques and POs payable to Socialist Alliance

EURO DEBATE

Time to decide

Should the Socialist Alliance campaign for a ‘no’ vote in a referendum on the euro? Or should we insist on the independent working class stance of an active boycott? Communist University 2002 featured a lively debate between leading representatives of both positions: **John Bridge** from the CPGB and SA national secretary **Rob Hoveman** of the Socialist Workers Party

John Bridge

Many comrades are prepared to concede that once upon a time capitalism had a progressive side to it. For an example, take Marx’s writings on Germany from the 1840s up until unification. While he was very critical of Bismarck’s social monarchy, there was no doubt that he welcomed the fact that the German people, albeit excluding German Austria and German Switzerland, had been united into a nation-state. Not only would a united Germany stimulate economic development. It would also provide the wide political space on which the working class can alone educate itself and raise itself to the position of that of a ruling class.

That is all very well and good, comrades say, for the progressive, competitive phase of capitalism, but we now live in the epoch of imperialism. We have all read Lenin to the effect that capitalism is now decadent and moribund. For his part Trotsky said that capitalism is unable to develop the productive forces and is approaching terminal crisis. Once the working class resolves its crisis of leadership, power will fall into our laps.

I agree that today socialism is immanent. But that should not lead anyone to dismiss what I still think we could legitimately describe as capitalist progress. For the first time in history wage workers form the biggest class on the planet. There exists the material wealth and human agency which makes socialism and communism a feasible project. And what distinguishes Marxists from others who desire

human liberation and human freedom is that our anti-capitalism is not negative but positive. We do not want to reverse capitalism, but to take advantage of capitalism and what it is doing.

I am of course well aware that capitalist progress is accompanied by untold human suffering and enormous waste. Look at virtually any ‘third world’ country and you will see the horrors capitalism is responsible for. But Marxists, as opposed to leftwing moralists, recognise that within the hugely problematic progress of capitalism there grows the answer. Capitalism, to use an old phrase, produces its own gravedigger. And it is in that light that I would approach the question of the euro.

Comrades who advocate a ‘no’ vote are very fond of telling us what the euro means as far as the bankers, big capital and Tony Blair’s government are concerned. We agree. What they have in store for us is smaller pay increases, cuts in services and an unaccountable central bank that can punish the working class by triggering interest rate hikes. That is why we cannot vote ‘yes’. But what are we voting for if we put our cross in the ‘no’ box? People can have any number of ideas in their heads. You can vote ‘no’ and imagine you are voting for socialism. But, in the real world, if we somehow manage to tilt the balance, we know what the Blair government, or a future Tory government, would have to do.

We would get Britain as it is now, only worse. Let us take a country that did vote ‘no’ - Denmark. The left actually played a not insignificant role in winning the ‘no’ vote. Yet today Denmark has perhaps the most right-wing government in Europe with the left suffering marginalisation. The Peoples Party - which campaigned for a national chauvinist ‘no’ vote from a position of hostility towards migrants and all outsiders - now drives government policy. Denmark has adopted anti-immigrant measures that make Tony Blair look like a tender, caring liberal. What is more, it has *stricter* monetary controls than those that operate within the euro zone.

In other words, if it is a question of a simple choice - ‘yes’ or ‘no’ - as far as our rulers are concerned, it will be highly unpleasant for us either way. We are being asked to choose the lesser of two evils.

However, nothing is preordained. If the ‘yes’ camp wins it does not automatically mean that Blair gets his way, or that the European central bank is given *carte blanche*. When they try to impose cuts, does that mean workers have to accept them? Will they say: ‘You won the vote and we will play by your rules’? Some comrades appear to be buying into Ferdinand Lassalle’s ‘iron law of wages’. That a ‘yes’ vote means not only inevitable neoliberal attacks but inevitable neoliberal victories. It seems that, for them, since we are in the eurozone capitalism’s mechanisms will just inexorably grind us down: if we strike for higher pay, that simply means that unemployment goes up and wages go back down again. But we know, from the history of the 19th and 20th centuries, that the working class has its own political economy, its own interests, and is quite capable of taking on capitalism. We may not yet have been able to finally defeat capitalism, but we have certainly been able to produce a situation where the living standards and democratic rights enjoyed by the working class have qualitatively and more or less consistently improved over a sustained period.

Let us ask a simple question. What are the best conditions for the working class to continue to make inroads in the fight with capital? The narrow space of the UK or the wide space of the EU? I do not think it is difficult to work out. Indeed as a general principle, we fight for the working class to be organised in the largest possible units. Before we arrive at communism we envisage a world socialist state. To achieve that goal certain means necessarily suggest themselves. It is in our interest to fight for the kind of state we want here and now, under capitalism. I am certainly not numbered amongst those who indifferently say, Nazism, Tony Blair, Swedish social democracy - what does it matter to us?

I have already referred to Marx. He considered that the best conditions for the political making of the German working class under capitalism would be a German nation-state. Engels actually talked about German unification being one of the building blocks for a possible European federation. He was not, of

course, talking about a *socialist* federation at this time.

We can also learn from the writings of Karl Kautsky. It is certainly not my view that he was *just* a renegade. Before 1914, whatever his many faults, Kautsky was a Marxist. Even after 1914 what he wrote has value, but that is a separate question. The point is that Kautsky, faced with a Europe galloping towards a horrendous war, urged a working class solution. He put forward the democratic perspective of the working class fighting for a republican United States of Europe. The Bolsheviks initially adopted that position in World War I, and only subsequently abandoned it as either being impossible or reactionary.

However, Trotsky, far from abandoning the slogan, continued to use it, sometimes adding the word ‘socialist’, sometimes not. Into the 1920s, he wrote of a “united socialist states of Europe”, a “workers’ and peasants’ Europe”, a “united soviet republic of Europe”, but he also undeniably viewed a bourgeois “united Europe” as progressive.

Why? Firstly because World War I Balkanised Europe and its working class. Germany had been weakened, territory sliced away, and France had sponsored the break-up of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires in its own narrow state interests. And Trotsky believed, I think quite reasonably, that the European revolution would occur before the American revolution, and that only European unity would prevent America leading a counterrevolution against Europe.

Like Trotsky we fight for the unity of the European working class and the European peoples. But that does not lead us to advocate a ‘yes’ vote. That would not only be tactically ill advised, but also unprincipled. However, in my opinion those who favour a ‘no’ are following a worryingly wrong course. There are those who want to break up the EU, as there are those who want to break up Britain. One might just as well propose breaking up the monopolies and giant transnationals of today’s capitalism into corner shops and backyard factories. This is anti-capitalism. Reactionary anti-capitalism.

So what position to adopt? Certainly not what comrade Alan Thornett calls an “abstention”. The word reeks of a passive approach. Now, if I was advocating that workers sat at home on referendum day and refused to advance a political prospective, then his designation would be valid. But we don’t and that is why we employ the term, ‘active boycott’, not ‘abstention’.

When I think of the word ‘boycott’ the first thing that springs to my mind is the Bolsheviks. In 1905, under the leadership of Lenin, they organised what he called an “active boycott” of the tsar’s дума. And, as it turned out, the дума was reduced to an empty shell. It was stillborn - killed by the active boycott. It is true that we are not in a revolutionary situation or anything like it. Nevertheless there is a huge potential in terms of the class struggle. Strike statistics may be the lowest in history, but the fact is that there is huge anger, latent discontent below.

Another example. France was offered the non-choice - “a fascist or a thief”. According to the rules you could vote for Chirac, who is up to his neck in corruption, or you could vote for Le Pen. That was the choice that official society offered. Faced with this, the right choice was to argue not for a passive position, but for an active boycott. Organise the masses who had taken to the streets in their millions against the undemocratic Fifth Republic and for a democratic Sixth Republic.

What would an active boycott be like? I do not know. But we should commit ourselves to the most militant boycott tactics that objective circumstances allow. It could involve meetings and demonstrations, agitating through posters and in our press. Perhaps it would not go beyond writing ‘For a workers’ Europe’ across your ballot paper. The main thing though is establishing and fighting for our independent working class politics - not choosing between two evils ●

Rob Hoveman

I want to thank the CPGB for inviting me to come and debate the question of the euro. It is a very good development that we in the Socialist Alliance have now reached a level of maturity where we can have very serious, vigorous and clarifying discussions

and, I hope, remain in the same room and the same organisation afterwards. And the debate so far has been conducted in a principled way.

I would like to make one thing clear about those of us who support a ‘no’ position. I have no desire to save the pound. I actually have strong views about the parasites of the house of Windsor and I want to see the queen’s head off the currency. The only other view I have about the pound as a currency is that I would like more of it in my pocket and in the pockets of the working class. It is also true, although it is not to my mind particularly germane, that there are many people who travel around Europe who are attracted to the idea of a euro, not least because you would not then get ripped off by the banks every time you exchanged your money.

But, as far as I am concerned, that is not the real issue. We are engaged in a serious debate. I do not know what the outcome will be: I believe this is an open issue and there are hearts and minds to be won. Whatever the outcome, the constitution of the Socialist Alliance makes it clear that those who feel uncomfortable with the decision - whether it is in favour of a ‘no’ vote or an active boycott - will be under no obligation to participate in the subsequent campaign - indeed there is a right under the constitution not to participate. You could argue whether it is right in terms of building the Socialist Alliance not to do so, but that is another question. We are not a democratic centralist organisation, although of course it is the right of organisations that support the Socialist Alliance to operate according to the principles of democratic centralism if they so desire.

I think we have to be quite clear that the European Union project, from its very inception, was about the strengthening of capital based essentially in Europe. The European Steel and Coal Community, established in the early 1950s, and then the establishment of the Common Market in the late 1950s were both about strengthening capital in Europe against the working class. The current proposals to expand to the east are about doing the same on the basis of cheap labour and the exploitation of the working class in eastern European countries. The whole project is about strengthening capital. It is not about serving in any sense the interests of the working class.

Now, Britain of course has been more ambivalent about the question of the European Union project than other European states over the years. That is why Britain was late getting in and why it has lagged behind in many respects. And of course there is an economic reason for this - British capitalist interests have been more diversified than European capitalist interests. There has been very substantial investment in the United States and other parts of the world, and that has made sections of capital in Britain look to protecting those investments and not necessarily strengthening the European Union.

However, things are shifting. By and large British capital, with some exceptions, is in favour of strengthening the EU and getting into the euro. In the year 2000 the assets held by British transnational corporations in the European Union area doubled to £360 billion, whereas investment in other areas of the world declined in the same period. So there is a clear move towards European integration.

The European Union is characterised by a massive lack of democracy, even relative to the limited democracy of the British state. It is a European Union that is essentially dictated to by a bunch of commissioners, unelected and unaccountable to anyone, but thoroughly in the pockets of the multinational corporations. It is not even the national governments who determine many of the issues. There is a so-called European parliament that is more like a consultative assembly, more like the very limited bourgeois democracy of the 19th century. This is also a European Union in which there are increasing attempts, encouraged by the Americans with some ambivalence, to develop a European state with a capacity to deploy, in the interests of European imperialism and western imperialism in general, a European defence force.

The Americans are slightly ambivalent about it because they would not like to see this putative European state acting too independently. What they really want to see - and they have made this quite clear - is that holidays in the European Union should be cut, people should work for lower wages, there

should be less spent on the welfare state and much more spent on ‘defence’ in the interests of the ‘war on terror’ - in other words, the war to defend capitalism across the globe.

It is also a European Union utterly committed to keeping out large numbers of people from around the world who would like to come to the EU in order to work, in order to improve their lives. This is the European Union of fortress Europe, of the Schengen agreement. Of putting a barbed wire fence around Europe in order to keep out those whom they do not want in. Of course it is a European Union utterly open to capital movement. The rich can come in and out of Europe at will, but not so workers from outside the European Union area. So the idea that somehow the European Union project is about breaking down national barriers, racism and so forth is completely untrue.

I agree with John Bridge. I do have preferences for particular capitalist states. Of course, like him, I would like to see the capitalist state overthrown. I would like to see socialist revolution and the working class of the world taking power over society and planning it to meet needs rather than profit. But, short of the revolution, there are choices to be made. I am much more in favour of welfare state capitalism than I am of neoliberal capitalism. Back in 1988 Jacques Delors came and persuaded the TUC, virtually overnight, to become pro-European, when those trade union leaders who had left the workers defenceless against the ravages of Thatcherism suddenly thought that they could have social democracy through the back door of Brussels. They thought, relative to Thatcher, the European Union was progressive.

To be honest, the argument might have been more difficult back in 1988. But this is 2002. We now have a European Union where Berlusconi is in power in Italy, Aznar is in power in Spain. There is a conservative government committed to a neoliberal agenda in France, and there is Tony Blair, often looked to by those extremely rightwing people as an example to follow for the kinds of policies they want to put through in their own countries. There is a Blair-Aznar-Berlusconi axis for the liberalisation of capital, flexible labour, weakening the trade unions and dismantling the welfare state.

I have to say that in the context of all of this I do not see the European Union at all as a unifier of the working class across Europe - something which, like John, I am very interested in seeing promoted. I think greater unification has been stimulated by the global anti-capitalist movement, which came onto the world scene in Seattle and has rocketed around the world. It is an anti-capitalist movement that has seen millions on the streets in Spain and Italy. And it is an anti-capitalist movement that has begun to feed into the organised working class.

I was in Seville quite recently for the general strike and anti-capitalist demonstrations. And there was little doubt that there was a considerable cross-over: each was taking confidence from the other in the process of opposing the European Union summit and the proposals for dismantling the welfare state, attacks on the working class and so forth. So unification is occurring, but it is not occurring in the context of the bosses’ Europe, which is what the euro and the European Union is all about.

Of course none of this is to suggest that somehow Britain is a paragon of democratic virtue. But what the debate is about is British sovereignty being undermined by the gnomes - not now of Zurich, but of Brussels and of Strasburg. Clearly the British state is deeply undemocratic: we all recognise that. It is a state which is run by people who are extremely well paid in order to work for the interests of the ruling class and of the rich. It is a state which preserves the rule of capital, which means that a tiny minority of individuals make the decisions that affect the lives of the vast majority who are the real wealth creators.

It is not my argument either that there would not be the same forces for privatisation which Britain has seen over the last 20 years, the same forces to weaken the trades unions, run down the welfare state and so forth. Those pressures are global pressures generated by capitalism, which is trapped in a severe crisis of profitability, and they would not go away if there were not a European Union. However, the euro is part and parcel of the means by

which they seek to push through their restructuring, to push through the attacks on the working class, to improve the condition of capital against labour.

Now, having said all that, I absolutely appreciate that there are many comrades who are very concerned that if we took the position of opposing the euro we would inevitably end up tail-ending the little Englanders, the racists, the fascists, even the BNP. That these are going to be the people who really call the shots in any campaign against the euro. I have to say, comrades, that if that were the case we would have to think very seriously about any involvement. Personally, as a member of the SWP, I think the Socialist Alliance should be absolutely committed not to go anywhere near the conservative and reactionary forces which will no doubt be running such a campaign.

For me the campaign against the euro has to have a number of crucial elements. In the motion that I am supporting at the conference, these elements are in place. First of all, it has to be an independent campaign, with no question of getting involved with whatever reactionary forces there are in the campaign: with conservatives, with little Englanders and all the rest. We will not appear on their platforms, we will not support their campaign, we will not support their literature. We have to carve out a quite independent, progressive and, I would argue, socialist campaign against the euro.

Secondly the campaign has to be internationalist. That is to say, we have to make sure that involved in our campaign are leading figures in the socialist and workers’ movement from other European Union countries. If we are able to persuade comrades from Rifondazione, from the progressive movements in other parts of Europe, to appear on our platforms, that will be a tremendously positive thing and will give the lie to any claim that this is simply about British backwardness or inwardness.

It has to be, thirdly, an anti-racist campaign. It has to be committed, in all of its literature and all of its slogans, to opposition to fortress Europe, to open borders, to the right of anyone to come into the European Union to work or to live. In particular of course, a central element must be a campaign to defend the rights of asylum-seekers, throughout the European Union.

Fourthly, it has to be an anti-imperialist campaign. I think we are not very far away from a war on Iraq. This is a highly unstable part of the world, and the fear of course, among all the corrupt Arab ruling classes in the area, is that a war would trigger a huge movement and destabilise the area as a whole. Nonetheless, the impulse to war is clearly very strong within the White House. Again, in any campaign against the euro, opposition to war in general, and war against Iraq in particular, has to be absolutely central. Opposition to the development of a European defence force, and the increased military spending that is now on the agenda throughout the European Union, has to be a central element.

Lastly, it has to be an anti-capitalist campaign. It has to be a campaign which quite clearly says that we are for a workers’ Europe rather than a bosses’ Europe, and that, when we oppose the euro, it is for a transformation of the situation of the working class in relation to capital that we are really campaigning.

Now, John quite rightly mentioned the situation in Denmark. I was recently at a conference in Madrid where there was a representative of the Red-Green Alliance, which played a significant role in supporting the ‘no’ campaign in Denmark. But it is quite clear that they had a blind spot in relation to nationalism, that they did not establish an independent, principled and socialist campaign there. This has left them bereft after the referendum defeat - they were really relatively disarmed against the emergent rightwing forces.

So I recognise the dangers absolutely. And I sympathise very much with comrades who are feeling very uncomfortable about all of this because they fear we would be playing into the hands of the right. But I am very optimistic about the possibilities of developing the kind of campaign I have outlined.

My bet would be that we will not see a referendum until after the next general election - the five economic tests will not be passed until the focus groups and the opinion polls show that Blair can win such a referendum. And they will have to show that over a pe-

riod of months. There is no sign of the opinion polls going in his direction on this issue. So I do not think we are on the eve of a referendum, but it is very important that we have this debate and resolve our position now, in order to be in the best situation tactically when that referendum comes around.

If the forces of the Socialist Alliance were isolated I think we might have some difficulty having an impact, but I do not believe that this is the situation. John again rightly points to renewed confidence and higher strike levels. Moreover, at the last election there was certainly a significant abstention rate - I do not know if it was an active boycott, but certainly large numbers of people did not vote. The reason for this was that they could see no difference between the parties. Far from this being a shift towards the right, it had the potential to be a shift towards the left. And on the left I see a number of very significant allies available to any independent internationalist, socialist and progressive campaign.

The crucial thing, if the Socialist Alliance does take what I regard as the right position, will be our ability to fashion a campaign of the left. Although there are things I certainly disagree with Tony Benn about, in the way he has put the argument in the past, he will lend himself to an independent and socialist campaign. There are other Labour MPs and Labour lefts who will come on board such a campaign. The Communist Party of Britain - much smaller, much less significant, of course, than it once was, but still not to be ignored - is already committed to such a principled campaign. Some CPB elements at one point flirted with the opportunistic slogan, ‘Save the pound’, which we will have absolutely nothing to do with. But Rob Griffiths’s recent pamphlet, while it has limitations, is nonetheless relatively principled in its opposition to the euro.

The public sector unions are lining up against the euro. It is no longer the situation in the trade union movement that you have people either abstaining or even being in favour of the euro and the European Union. With Derek Simpson’s election in the AEEU, the euro’s strongest supporter amongst trade union leaders has just bitten the dust in the form of Sir Ken Jackson.

There are also the greens. Now I know again there are some people who are very hostile to the greens, and I have profound disagreements - particularly with the more rightwing greens, but even with so-called green socialists. Nonetheless I think the greens will come out against the euro.

That is quite a formidable range of forces, but it is just for starters - we do not know how far we can go with this if we take the right position.

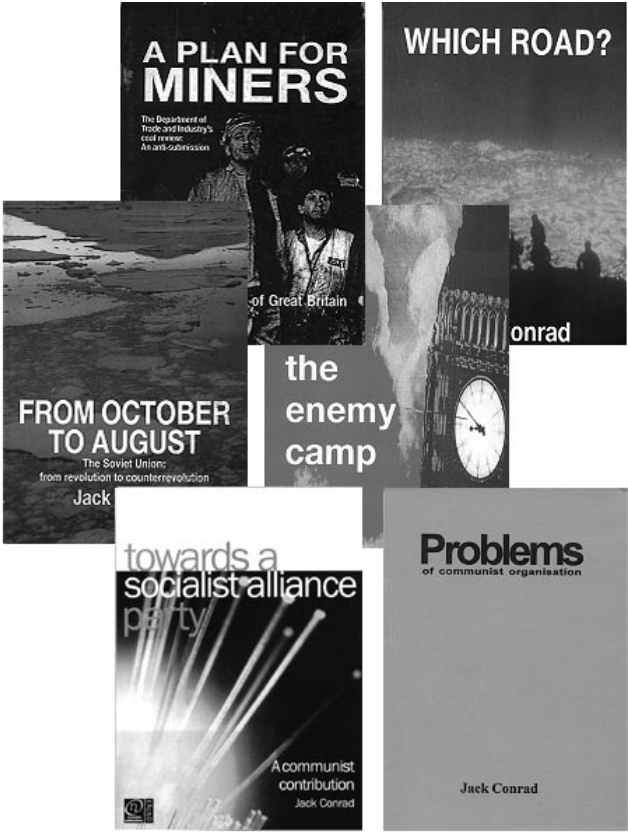
We know that the working class, again as John has pointed out, is deeply disillusioned and does want an alternative. But part of that disillusionment can and I think will be directed against the euro, which will be very closely associated with Blair’s neoliberal agenda. And there would be a very real danger in vacating this ground either to the right or to that part of the left which does not put principled socialist arguments at the very heart of its campaign. There are a huge number of people to win, if we take a ‘no’ position, if we engage with them in order to pull them to the left, to a broader range of anti-capitalist and socialist policies.

So, comrades, for those reasons, I am strongly in favour of the Socialist Alliance adopting a ‘no’ vote, a ‘no’ vote based on socialist principles. I do not believe that we could be nearly as effective through an active boycott. As John has said, he is not quite sure how it would be put into practice, and I do not think we have the forces to make a real impact in such a campaign.

It would be the wrong position to take in terms of where the Socialist Alliance needs to go - how it can grow, how we can really begin to build the forces of socialism. It is my view that objectively capitalism is ripe for its overthrow. It has developed the productive forces, developed its gravedigger, to the point where the working class could take control and begin to plan production to meet need rather than profit.

Objectively, that is the situation. Subjectively, neither the working class has the confidence, nor do socialists yet have the organisation to precipitate that kind of overthrow. But I believe that the Socialist Alliance is a crucial vehicle in developing that confidence and that organisation ●

Communist Party books



■ Which road?

The programmes of ‘official communism’ were designed to serve those in the workers’ movement who had no interest in revolution, those who preferred compromise with capitalism rather than its destruction.

Jack Conrad also deals with the reformist programme of Peter Taaffe’s group and lays the groundwork necessary for drafting a revolutionary programme.

£6.95

■ From October to August

Articles by Jack Conrad, charting the rise and demise of the USSR from Stalin’s monocratic dictatorship to the twists and turns of Gorbachev’s perestroika and Yeltsin’s counter-coup. Throughout there is a stress on the necessity of democracy.

£6.95

■ In the enemy camp

Examines the theory and practice of communist electoral work. Particular attention is paid to the Bolsheviks’ anti-boycottism and their strategy for revolution. Vital for Socialist Alliance activists.

£4.95

■ Problems of communist organisation

What is the correct balance between democracy and centralism? Jack Conrad explores this thorny issue in his historically significant argument against a disgruntled minority who deserted the CPGB in 1992.

£4.95

■ A plan for miners

The Communist Party’s ‘anti-submission’ to the Tory government’s 1992 coal review. The case is made for working class self-activity and socialism. Arthur Scargill famously disowned it.

£1.00

■ Towards a Socialist Alliance party

The CPGB’s latest book argues for the Socialist Alliance to move to a higher organisational and political stage. Drawing on an extensive study of history, this work presents the ways and means of arriving at that end.

£7.00

Buy all 6 books for £23 and save £8.80
Delivery free within the United Kingdom

Please send me a copy of:

- Which road?** ☐
- From October to August** ☐
- In the enemy camp** ☐
- Problems of communist organisation** ☐
- A plan for miners** ☐
- Towards a Socialist Alliance party** ☐

I enclose a cheque, payable to CPGB, for £_____

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Please return to CPGB address

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM

Workshops sidelined

Discussion of workshops fell off the agenda at the weekend. Not for time reasons, however. Although it was decided previously that the meeting in Barcelona would take final decisions on the number and subjects of workshops, the main organisers from Italy were not able to bring a list with all the proposals on where these workshops will actually take place.

This is a serious problem, as workshops are the only forums in which political parties can officially participate in the ESF. The ‘Charter of principles’, written and decided by the Brazilian majority in the World Social Forum, stipulates that political parties cannot participate at all. It does not matter if it is Tony Blair’s Labour Party or the CPGB.

In reality, this simply encourages and rewards dishonesty. There are to be a number of SWP speakers on various platforms and dozens of members of Rifondazione Comunista are booked for seminars and conferences - not, however, under the names of their organisations. SWP members, for example, will speak as delegates from the Stop the War Coalition (Lindsey German), Globalise Resistance (Chris Nineham) or, in the case of Alex Callinicos, “a lecturer”.

In the WSF, the Brazilian Workers Party has effectively been running the show. They financed and organised it - and were able to use the forum for their own political purposes. In Italy, the region of Tuscany and the city of Florence both have centre-left governments, where the Democratic Left (DS) has donated hundreds of thousands of euros to the running of the ESF. The castle, where most of the meetings will take place, has been offered free of charge. Hundreds of translators are being paid by the regional government. Dozens of local schools and halls have been provided as free accommodation. The DS and Rifondazione both aim to make political capital out of the occasion.

This would be perfectly acceptable if the comrades were honest about it. But they hide their party affiliation and pretend that they are simply ‘part of the movement’. In reality, they are instrumental in *running* the movements in their particular country.

The workshops therefore provide the only platform for honest political organisations. And even this might now not happen - there might be too little time to find enough appropriate venues near the city centre. Comrade Alessandra Mecozzi, speaking on behalf of the Italian organisers, has already warned the meeting that “the locations for the workshops might be very decentralised”.

Also, as agreed at previous meetings, workshops must feature in the official programme to be handed out in Florence. If, however, insufficient venues are found in time, they might miss the deadline for inclusion.

Only 250 workshops had been registered by October 2, the official deadline. Not all of them came from political parties, of course. There are single-issue campaigns, NGOs and trade unions - who will all be sidelined if the workshops cannot be organised properly. If two workshops share one venue (morning and afternoon sessions) there will only need to be a maximum of 50 venues near the city centre. Surely, this could be resolved easily enough if it were just a question of organisation ●

Tina Becker

In the build-up to Florence, November 6-10, Tina Becker and Anne McShane report on last weekend’s final ESF preparatory meeting held in Barcelona

Chris Nineham: victim of an unprincipled attack?

The final organising meeting before the European Social Forum - to be launched in Florence from November 6-10 - took place in Barcelona last weekend. Only 150 or so people participated, which is less than half of the normal attendance. This seems to be mainly down to the fact that none of the political organisations on the Spanish left have taken on the task to build mobilisation for the ESF. Izquierda Unida, for example, is keeping its distance. So it was up to four individual comrades, some of them linked to the Socialist Workers Party’s sister organisation in Spain, to build this last organising meeting.

Also, there was the distinct feeling that most of the decisions have already been made - mainly by the Italian organisers. This is of course natural, seeing as they deal with the day-to-day tasks of building the ESF. However, a number of comrades complained, in the words of a comrade from the Communist Party of Greece, that “a lot of decisions seem to have been made behind closed doors by an inner circle”. This criticism is not without foundation and we have to make sure that we build our movement very democratically. The Italian comrades in particular were sometimes a little stressed and impatient when they had to explain something for the umpteenth time, because they sit through so many meetings where matters have already been discussed. These minor issues could, of course, be resolved with the election of a democratic and accountable leadership.

Britain was represented by eight SWP comrades from Globalise Resistance, two from Workers Power and two members of the CPGB. The meeting began on the Saturday with Chris Nineham of the SWP in the chair. Introducing himself simply as a representative of GR, he explained that the aim of the meeting was to democratically agree the final arrangements for Florence. All participants with ideas should raise them in the relevant group and unresolved matters would be brought back to the plenary sessions on the Sunday.

However, nothing was as open and straightforward as comrade Nineham made it appear. There was no written agenda for the two-day event and no clear idea of how to put forward proposals and make decisions. There was a lot of time wasted on the

first day, with the meeting beginning over an hour late and then adjourning for a two-hour lunch break - which in effect became three hours. Then we divided into four workshops. There was no timetable for these groups and, with some finishing sooner than others, many comrades hung around for several hours, not knowing what was to happen next. Even comrades from the Italian contingent (in effect the organisers) had to admit that the day was a mess.

Sunday was better, as the Italian comrades realised the need for them to give a stronger lead. Overall, however, this is a political problem. The ESF needs an elected leadership, which is accountable and can take decisions. It needs clear structures and written agendas. There were numerous instances over the weekend where a final decision could not be made by consensus and was remitted back to the Italian organising committee rather than having a vote. We need written proposals, which can be amended and voted on by the meeting, with the leadership accountable for the implementation of these decisions.

Despite these problems the timetable for Florence was almost settled by the end of the weekend. There will be six conferences each morning, covering the themes of neoliberalism, war, and participatory democracy. In the afternoon there will be seminars - or “windows to the world” - where groups and individuals can speak to “the movement”.

There is only one ‘window’ where political groups are allowed to openly speak on behalf of their organisation, entitled ‘Movements and political parties’. The draft had Chris Nineham down to speak on behalf of Britain in this seminar. Anne McShane from the CPGB argued that the Socialist Alliance should in fact be the group representing Britain. This caused some consternation among the organisers. We were informed that it had been decided at a non-public meeting of the programme committee two weeks earlier to invite half of the speakers from parties and half from movements. From the response of others in the meeting it seemed that this decision was news to most people.

However, it was accepted. But, as the party spaces were already taken up by Rifondazione Comunista, the social democratic Parti Socialiste of Belgium, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire from France and a representative from the Christian Democrats, there was no room for another party. Chris Nineham was successful in convincing the organisers that Globalise Resistance is a ‘movement’, despite admitting a few months back that GR has “less than 100 members” (*Weekly Worker* July 18). So, no room for the Socialist Alliance, because “it seems to be more a party than a movement”, as comrade Salvatore Cannavo, vice-editor of Rifondazione’s *Liberazione* and chair of this particular meeting, put it.

You might have expected that the SWP, which already has a number of individual comrades speaking as part of the main programme, would have pushed for the Socialist Alliance to speak in this forum. But the reaction of leading SWP members after the meeting showed how wrong you would be. An irate and agitated Alex Callinicos berated us for launching an “unprincipled attack on Chris Nineham” and informed us that we were “unaccountable and opportunist sectarians”. He then rushed off, refusing to discuss this with us, and we were blanked by the SWP for the rest of the weekend. Chris Nineham had said in his introduction at the beginning of the day that this was an open process, where all ideas could come forward. In the obviously naive belief that this was the case we proposed the

Socialist Alliance. The response was telling.

The ‘Role of religions in the critique of globalisation’ also caused some controversy over speakers. Tariq Ramadam, an academic in Islamic studies in Geneva, was put forward by the English mobilising group for the ESF. On the ESF email list it had been argued by George Waardenburg, a member of Attac in Switzerland, that Ramadam advocates the Sharia law and is strongly linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. Naima Bouteldja of GR in Britain replied that he should be included, as “His work is orientated towards a reflection on Islam in contemporary and western society and on the necessity for fundamental reform” (ESF email list, October 4).

The debate continued in Barcelona with Eric Decarro, leader of the Syndicat de Services Publics in Switzerland, asserting that Ramadam is a reactionary anti-imperialist. Ramadam’s brother advocates female lapidation and Ramadam himself has never come out against such practices. Decarro, who is also a member of the Solidarity group, argued that we are an alliance for the future and therefore should not allow Ramadam onto an ESF platform. Chris Nineham heckled that “Ramadam is a progressive”. This did not seem to be accepted by Alessandra Mecozzi, who was leading this session, but she resolved the issue by proposing that another Muslim representative should be invited to “put forward more progressive views in order to counter Ramadam”. This was accepted.

Other seminars planned include Palestine, Latin America, Africa, Asia and Afghanistan. Trade union struggles, non-violence and institutions will be also be discussed. An overall problem is that there are on average six speakers per seminar, which will not allow much time for debate.

The Sunday meeting ended with a general report from Raffaella Bollini of the trade union organisation Archie, which is linked to the Party of the Democratic Left (DS) in Italy. She said that the ESF’s relationship with the World Social Forum was still “very, very sensitive”. Political parties are still not allowed to officially participate in the ESF and “we had to find a way around this, because in Europe it is not possible to totally exclude all parties”. She reminded comrades that the leading body of the WSF, the international council, is very unhappy about the European compromise, which allows parties to organise workshops.

Still, most representatives from across Europe seem to adhere to this undemocratic ruling by the unelected IC - almost without exception they chose to hide their political affiliation. Comrades from Rifondazione spoke as trade union representatives. SWP members wore their Globalise Resistance hats. And the majority of participants did not mention their name or affiliation at all. Exceptions were representatives of the communist parties in Greece, Portugal and Italy and of course the CPGB.

For the same reason, the CPGB was the only organisation that was visible with a stall. Comrades from Workers Power and the Spanish section of the International Socialist Tendency simply left their papers on a table. Our leaflet on the way forward for the ESF was distributed widely and well received, with many agreeing with the need for an elected leadership body. Unfortunately, however, there is currently no other organisation that is prepared to *openly* fight for the need to make the ESF and the WSF more accountable, more democratic and more effective. The Italian comrades on the international council of the WSF have started to challenge the ‘Charter of principles’ and the ineffective nature of the body (see *Weekly Worker* September 12) - without, however, tackling the real organisational and political problems of the ESF.

The ESF will be an interesting experience. It is bound to be the case that, despite the best efforts of the WSF, the left will dominate. Hopefully the left and the workers’ movement in Europe will begin to recognise through this process the need for the highest degree of political unity ●





Not condemning George Bush?

Opposition to war

There was more controversy over a proposed statement on the planned US-UK attack on Iraq. At the last preparatory meeting of the ESF in Brussels a month ago, comrade Chris Nineham from the SWP and Leo Gabriel, an independent Austrian comrade, presented a statement which originally contained the formulation, “This war will be a catastrophe first for the people of Iraq, second for the Palestinian people.”

It was pointed out by an Italian comrade that a war might be a catastrophe for the re-emerging Israeli peace movement as well. A brief, but very heated debate broke out, in which

comrade Nineham showed his contempt for the Israeli people *as a whole*: “I refuse to mention the Israelis at all,” he declared. “I’m sure a war would actually be good for the Israeli people, because the big majority of them support the war and the oppression of the Palestinian people.” As a compromise the formulation “the people across the Middle East” was then adopted (see *Weekly Worker* September 12).

It seems that was not the only criticism comrades had about the statement. Apparently, together with some Italian comrades, comrade Nineham revised the document and

presented it again in Barcelona. This time, a new controversy broke out, when comrades from France quite rightly raised the need to criticise Saddam Hussein’s regime. Supported by Leo Gabriel, who helped draft the first statement, they insisted on inserting a formulation mentioning the Iraqi regime.

Jonathan Neale from the SWP (in his Globalise Resistance disguise), however, defended “the need for a statement which can be accepted as the absolute minimum. This statement does not condemn Saddam Hussein and it does not condemn George Bush,” he claimed absurdly - the whole statement is a condemnation of Bush’s war drive.

“The one thing we have learned from the anti-war movement in England [sic] is that we cannot condemn both sides. We got 400,000 people on last week’s demonstration, because we refused to do so. We want the pacifists on our marches, we want the religious people and we want people who support other wars, but not this one,” he said. “In countries where the movement has condemned both sides, the demonstrations are very small. In countries where only one side was condemned, the demonstrations have been huge. That is what we have to learn.”

This approach seems pretty dubious to me. As far as I know, the Italian left, for example, condemned both the imperialist attack on Afghanistan and the brutal and reactionary Taliban regime. Yet they mobilised hundreds of thousands of protesters onto the streets.

Also, it surely matters what kind of movement you are actually building. Yes, we want to have religious people, liberals and pacifists on our marches - after all, it brings them into direct contact with the ideas of the ‘hard left’. An ideal opportunity to convince them of the need for a consistently democratic and secular programme. However, the comrades from the SWP seem happy enough to leave these people as they are. Whereas reactionary chants and slogans go unchallenged by the SWP, organisations that openly criticise Islamic fundamentalism are excluded by the comrades: In November 2001, the CPGB and Alliance for Workers’ Liberty were removed from the Stop the War Coalition for this reason only.

So the fight over this statement is hardly over semantics or “the minimum we can all agree on”. It shows that the comrades from the SWP have a different, tailist approach to politics in general.

French comrades suggested inserting a rather tame sentence that at least mentions Saddam Hussein. This suggestion seemed to have the support of most comrades present, although the SWP members looked disgruntled. Eventually, it was decided not to vote on the final draft, but to present it to the ESF in Florence, where “the movement” will decide in a series of meetings ●

Tina Becker

Call for Socialist Alliance paper

An appeal for a regular Socialist Alliance newspaper has been launched by three leading members, **Dave Church, Marcus Ström** and **Martin Thomas**. To add your name to the appeal please email your support to: marcus.strom@ntlworld.com

We, the undersigned, believe that the Socialist Alliance must launch a regular, campaigning newspaper as an urgent priority. This publication should:

● **Fight to build the agreed actions of the Socialist Alliance, maintain our public profile between elections and give news, analysis and practical guidance to our activists on the ground.**

● **Reflect the diversity of views in our alliance. A Socialist Alliance paper must have space for the open exchange of ideas, for comradely polemic and the presentation of minority views. Wherever possible, we should afford the right of reply in our paper.**

● **Strike a balance between agitation and propaganda in its pages. Working class readers should not be patronised or talked down to. Our paper must carry longer theoretical pieces, as well as snappy, factual, socialist reportage.**

If the majority of the SA continues to block an official publication, the minority should fight for the launch of an unofficial paper.

Additional signatories

Nicola Bent (Lambeth)
Janine Booth (Hackney)
John Bridge (Camden)
Alison Brown (Sheffield)
James Bull (Teesside)
Peter Burton (SSP)
Matthew Caygill (Leeds)
Jane Clarke (Bedfordshire)
Steve Cooke (Teesside)
Lawrie Coombs (Teesside)
Tim Cooper (Nottingham)
Chris Croome (Teesside)
James Cunningham (South Birmingham)
Mathew Danaher (Southampton)
Mervyn Davies (Colchester)
Ian Donovan (Southwark)
Arthur Downs (former mayor, Tower Hamlets)
Jim Drysdale
Laura Duval (Bedfordshire)
Pete Edwards (Bedfordshire)
Mark Ferguson (Bedfordshire)
Alf Filer (Brent)
Janice Fowler (Southwark)
Steve Freeman (Bedfordshire)
Ray Gaston (Leeds steering committee)
Darrell Goodliffe (Cambridgeshire)
Andy Gunton (Lambeth)
Billy Hodson (Teesside)
Chris Jones (chair, Merseyside)
Eryk Karas (Bedfordshire)
Sarah Lawlor (Bedfordshire)
Terry Liddle (treasurer, Greenwich)

Ron Lynn (Lambeth)
Lesley Mahmood (executive committee, coordinator Merseyside)
Rob Marsden (Leicester)
Laurie McCauley (North Yorkshire)
Anne Mc Shane (chair, Hackney)
Sam Metcalf (Nottingham)
Duncan Morrison (Lewisham)
Paul Nicholson (Southampton)
Harry Nugent (Bedfordshire)
Dave Osler (Hackney)
Dave Parks (Exeter)
Harry Paterson (Nottinghamshire)
Mike Perkins (Southampton)
Peter Pierce (Greenwich)
Phil Pope (Southampton)
Charlie Pottins (Brent)
Peter Radcliff (Nottingham)
Daniel Randall (Nottingham)
Lee Rock (Waltham Forest)
Mike Rowley (Oxford)
Dave Spencer (Coventry)
Alan Stevens (chair, Greenwich)
Danny Thompson (Bedfordshire)
Steve Turner (Bedfordshire)
Mike Wagstaff (Colchester)
Pete Weller (Lambeth)
Geoff Wexler (Cambridge-shire)
Paul Willoughby (East Kent)
Jay Woolrich (Leicester)
Patrick Yarker (Norfolk and Norwich)

Draft ESF statement To all citizens of Europe

**Together we can stop this war!
We, the European social movements, are fighting for social rights and social justice, for democracy and against all forms of oppression.**

We stand for a world of diversity, freedom and mutual respect.

We believe this war, whether it has UN backing or not, will be a catastrophe for the people of Iraq [proposed insert: who are already suffering under the sanctions and Saddam Hussein], and for the people across the Middle East. It should be opposed by everyone who believes in demo-

cratic, political solutions to international conflicts because it will be a war without resolution with the potential to lead to global disaster.

There is massive opposition to war in every country of Europe - hundreds of thousands have already mobilised for peace.

We call on the movements and citizens of Europe to start coordinated, continent-wide resistance to war with a day of mass demonstrations on November 10 to demand: ‘Don’t attack Iraq’.

Fighting fund

E-lusive readers

Last week I reported how our website is going from strength to strength. This week we chalked up an impressive number of hits. 7,130 individual sessions accessed 23,457 pages. Our e-readership spans the globe. It ranges from USA (2,400 sessions) to Colombia (seven sessions).

On average, 2,000 pages are accessed each and every day of the year. Unfortunately, though, the growing army of e-readers has yet to make itself felt in terms of a significant contribution to the fund needed to produce our paper in the first place. In fact this week donations - from

whatever source - have been rather elusive.

Nevertheless, thanks are due to comrades WT (£20), SU (£15) and FB (£5), who weighed in with £40. But this still leaves us a long, long way from our £450 monthly target. So, come on, all you e-readers: help ensure that we are able to continue making our weekly appearance in both print and electronic form ●

Robbie Rix

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

ELECTIONS

Stoke-on-Trent Opposing BNP with lesser evil

A part from the contest in Hackney, where Paul Foot is standing for the Socialist Alliance, October 17 will also see the election of presidential-style mayors in Stoke-on-Trent, Bedford and Mansfield.

Unfortunately, however, in none of the latter three will there be an SA candidate - or indeed any other candidate of the left. In Bedfordshire and Nottinghamshire there is an alliance presence, but in neither Bedford nor Mansfield did the comrades feel able to mount a challenge. In Stoke-on-Trent there is no active SA, largely because the Socialist Workers Party consists of just a handful of students in nearby Keele University.

The Socialist Party is the largest left-wing force in Stoke, but it too did not seriously consider standing. Instead it launched the North Staffs Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (Norscarf) and set up a local branch of its front organisation, Youth Against Racism in Europe, in order to oppose, Anti-Nazi League style, the British National Party's candidate, Steven Batkin. The SWP/ANL - for the most part from outlying areas - is also campaigning against Batkin.

Although Norscarf's 'Stop the Nazi BNP and fight for free education, homes, and jobs' might be considered an advance on the ANL's discredited 'Don't vote Nazi' slogan, the content of the two are hardly different. Just what are Stoke voters supposed to do on October 17 - apart from not voting BNP, of course?

Clearly no support can be given to Labour's George Stevenson, the MP for Stoke-on-Trent South. Stevenson is an obscure backbencher who claims his greatest achievement since 1997 is an "innovative" private finance initiative deal to open up Stoke's schools to increased profiteering. Then there are a range of independents of various political hues - no fewer than eight in fact. The most prominent is Michael Wolfe, the former boss of Stoke's citizens' advice bureau and the man who headed the campaign for an elected mayor in a referendum on the issue in May. The Tory candidate is Roger Ibbs, the council's current deputy leader.

The result of the poll could be very close, with both Wolfe and Batkin expected to push the two mainstream candidates, picking up the votes of those

The Socialist Party does not offer any advice when it comes to the October 17 mayoral elections. **Phil Hamilton** reports

disillusioned and disenchanted with both New Labour and the Tories. Wolfe, who is standing for the non-existent 'Mayor 4 Stoke Party', can hardly be described as a socialist, yet the SP seems to have been toying with the idea of backing him - leading local comrade Jim Cessford is said to be very close to him. Presumably the Mayor 4 Stoke Party is one of the new working class forces the left must relate to.

However, a rally/pop concert organised by the SP's Norscarf on October 6 stopped short of endorsing Wolfe, who, although he turned up towards the end of the meeting, did not speak. Alan Weaver of the regional TUC ambiguously advised those present to give their first and second preference votes to those candidates "best placed to beat the BNP" and this was not challenged by SP speakers, who offered no advice.

The event, held in the city's Jubilee Hall, saw just under 130 turn out for four hours of politics mixed with music. Encouragingly, well over half those present were youth - no doubt attracted more by the music than the politics. Unfortunately there were only one or two from the local Asian community - comrade Cessford ventured the opinion that local community workers had been leading a "whispering campaign", urging Asian youth not to attend.

Neil Dawson, a local Labour councillor, began the afternoon of speeches by attacking the BNP for "spreading vile rumours" and thriving on the "culture of blame" whipped up by the mainstream press and politicians. He called on the audience to convince friends and work colleagues that the BNP is not only wrong, but a fascist party as well.

This need to 'expose' the BNP set the tone for most of the other contributions. Raph Parkinson of the Unison NEC said that the BNP was against black and white workers' unity and argued that effective anti-fascism can come only through union involvement and policies focussed on welfare, not warfare. He believed that this sort of campaign had defeated the BNP's electoral ambitions in Bradford -

as if the whisker by which they missed a seat is cause for celebration.

Comrade Cessford of the SP, speaking as Norscarf president, recounted Stoke's history of workers' unity from the Chartists to the mass non-payment of the poll tax. But this unity had been undermined in recent years thanks to the collapse of the pottery industry, poor housing and health, and a cuts-obsessed city council. The far right has been using this backdrop to whip up hatred against the small group of asylum-seekers living in the city and the local Asian community.

He noted that the BNP is gaining an ear in Stoke and expressed concern that it could pick up council seats next May. The immediate task for Norscarf, the comrade concluded, was not only to convince others about the true nature of the BNP, but to launch a 'charter for change' aimed at addressing the real working class concerns the BNP seeks to tap into.

Naomi Byron, national secretary of the YRE, urged a 'no-platforming' of nazis. She performed a near-impossible balancing act between not calling for a state ban on fascists and arguing that they should not be allowed to "abuse democratic rights" by taking advantage of existing laws. Again she called for an exposure of the BNP's Nazi core, while fighting in the community against the conditions on which they thrive.

Alan Weaver talked about the fight against the BNP in the unions and called on all to oppose BNP shop stew-

ard candidates whenever they stand. We also heard from 'Shaffy', an Afghan refugee, who talked about the appalling housing that immigrants face - he himself has to share accommodation with 16 others. He called on those present to support asylum-seekers and get involved in anti-deportation campaigns.

Finally, Dave Nellist took to the microphone and characteristically delivered a storming speech. He attacked the BNP for seeking to divert attention away from the real causes of poverty, unemployment and poor services by scapegoating asylum-seekers and ethnic minorities. The real divide is between the rich, together with the government that serves

them, and the rest. What we must provide, the comrade continued, is a socialist political alternative that unites communities against cuts and thereby undermines the BNP.

From the floor, Martin of the ANL argued for a campaign that exposes the BNP as Nazis - presumably working class support will then miraculously drop away as it has done in Bradford, Burnley, etc. Reflecting the 'official optimism' typical of the ANL, the comrade reported that former BNP Fuehrer John Tyndall had set up his own website, a sign that the far right was "splintering" under the "pressure". Steve (SWP) called for united community action that, armed with the "arguments heard here today, will put the BNP in the bin of history".

Writing in *The Socialist*, Andy Bentley of Stoke SP comments: "Unfortunately, some working people could vote for the BNP as a protest at New Labour's anti-working class policies nationally and locally. Temporarily, some mistakenly see the BNP as an alternative.

The need is clearly becoming urgent to build a new mass workers' party to replace the now openly capitalist New Labour" (October 4).

Clearly the achievement of a "mass workers' party" will require something rather more concrete than the negative 'lesser evilism' on offer from both Norscarf and the ANL. The place to fight for a working class party is the Socialist Alliance - abandoned by the SP last December. And if the left is able to mount a campaign against the BNP, why was it not possible to stand a united left candidate?

Nevertheless, perhaps we should not be too critical. This was the largest leftwing meeting seen in Stoke for a considerable time and Norscarf does have some potential to reactivate working class politics in the city ●



Lewisham SWP rebels defeat Hoveman

A rebellion by members of the Socialist Workers Party will allow Lewisham Socialist Alliance to contest a forthcoming council by-election.

On October 8 Lewisham SA voted by nine votes to five, with one abstention, to stand a candidate in Downham ward on November 7. The votes of the SWP rebels - in opposition to the arguments of SA national secretary Rob Hoveman, who was present at the meeting - were decisive. Three SWPers joined with two comrades from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and four independents in voting for an alliance contest, while another SWP member abstained.

The reasoning put forward by comrade Hoveman, and echoed by the SWP majority, was that the Socialist Alliance is set to score a good vote in Hackney,

where Paul Foot is standing for mayor on October 17. But another poor return - such as in a recent by-election in Tower Hamlets, where the SA scraped together only nine votes - would be a disaster. The possibility that success for comrade Foot would have a knock-on effect does not seem to have been considered by comrade Hoveman.

This seems to signal a move by the SWP away from the position it accepted at the time of the general election - that we should aim to contest as widely as possible. Now, it seems, the line is that only those seats where we can be confident of a good vote should be targeted.

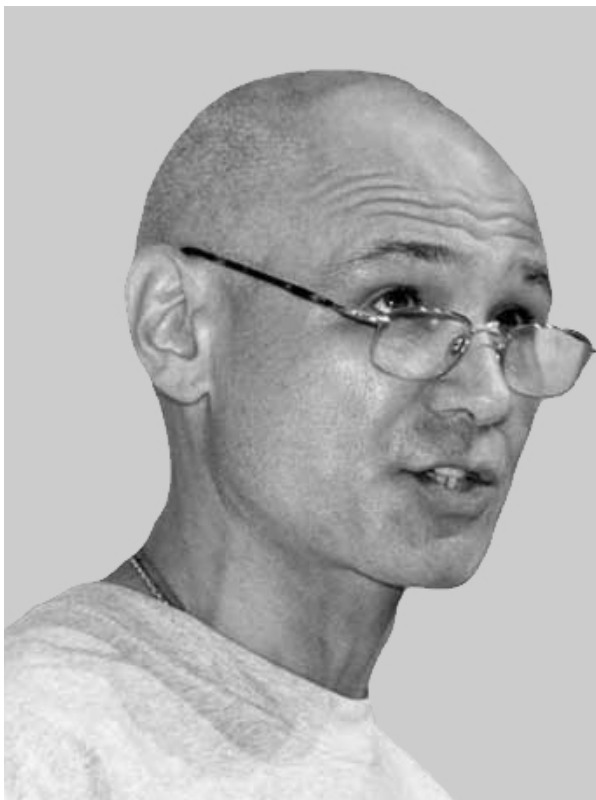
Comrade Hoveman was so convinced of the foolishness of standing in Downham that he had spent a good deal

of time on the telephone beforehand trying to persuade independent comrades of its inadvisability. In fact there have been three leftwing contests in this part of south Lewisham over the past few years (although boundary changes means the ward is no longer the same): by the Socialist Labour Party, Nick Long's independent socialists and the AWL's Jill Mountford - all achieved modest but by no means derisory results.

Let us hope that this incident is just an aberration on the part of the SWP. The need remains to put the SA more firmly on the political map.

Inevitably there will be some poor results, but there will be no possibility of advance if we are afraid to run the risk of failure ●

Peter Manson



Mayoral contest Hackney: building a base

There were two results in the May 2002 local elections in Hackney. First there was a 'landslide' victory for Hackney New Labour. Second, by 60% to 40%, the voters decided that they wanted an elected mayor. All on a turn-out of just over 30%.

The vote on the mayor was required by local government legislation. None of the main parties campaigned for it, but clearly there were enough people in the borough who think that an elected mayor might be able to sort Hackney out in a way that none of the traditional politicians had not been able to in the past. Thus, a mass 'common sense' vote, produced by popular frustration at any party's ability to deliver, may have opened the door to a social catastrophe for many of the poorest people in the borough.

As for the 'landslide', it was not quite as it seemed. As was noted by an unsuccessful challenger to eventual Labour candidate Jules Pipe, Labour's percentage of the vote edged up only by a few percentage points in a context where the Liberal Democrats had more or less abandoned the borough to successfully defend their fortress Islington. The Liberals lost 12 of their 15 seats (the three seats remaining in just one ward) in Hackney, and the Greens - who ran a very leftist campaign - lost their two councillors. The Tories won nine seats (down three), with Labour taking the other 45. The fact is that Labour in Hackney is no more popular than it was a year ago, but the opposition has become more fragmented.

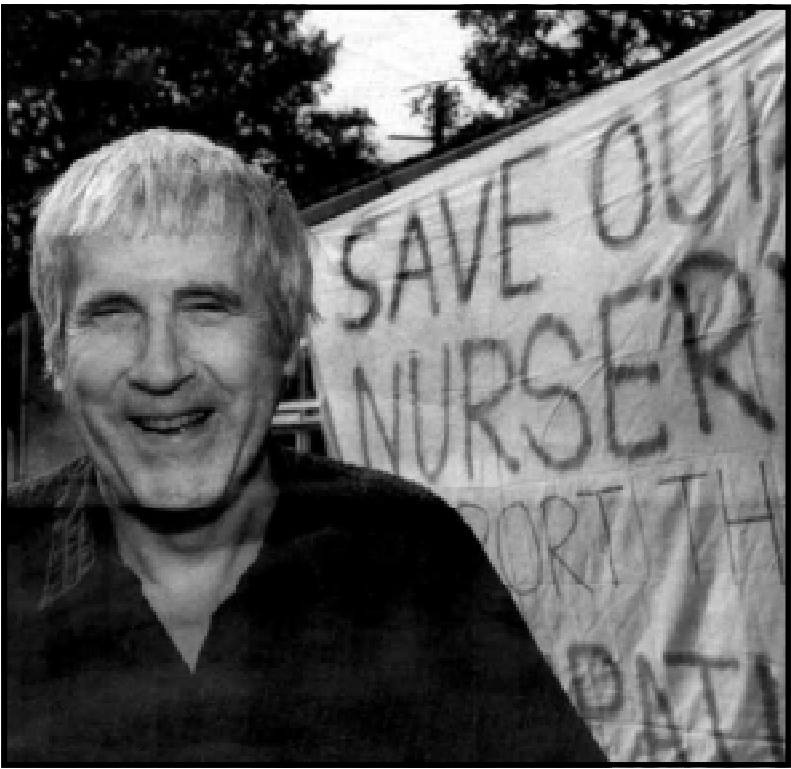
The Socialist Alliance has played a key role in this fragmentation. Neither the

Greens nor the Liberal Democrats can now expect to be the repository for left working class votes that are opposed to Labour. The signal for this was the October 2000 Wick by-election, where the Liberal Democrats lost a seat to Labour they expected to win and where the SA candidate, Diana Swingle, gained 12.7%.

The decision by the Liberals to decamp to Islington in May and the Greens to run a mayoral candidate who is clearly from the right of their party (both to hold on to the Liberal voters they won over in May and to distinguish themselves from the SA) is indicative of the political space that the SA has carved out since the 2000 Greater London Authority elections.

The Greens, who understand that they cannot deliver a knockout blow to the organisation that is challenging its left flank, has opted to attempt to replace the organisation to its immediate right - the Liberal Democrats. Crispin Truman, the Green Party candidate, wants everyone to think of Hackney as a nice place and believes that his management skills, honed at a small NGO that recently won the best charity of the year contest, will resolve problems on a 'common sense' basis.

Mayoral elections are notoriously difficult to predict - Hangus the Monkey and Robocop are evidence of that - so I hope that readers will understand that a week before the close of polls it would be unwise to make any kind of prediction in print about the vote the Socialist Alliance's candidate, Paul Foot, might achieve. What I can do is set out some of the parameters of the possible.



Paul Foot: excellent campaign

The election will be held over two rounds. After the first round of voting if no candidate gets more than 50% then the top two go into a run-off decided by all the second-preference votes of the other candidates. If, for example, Labour get 40% in the first round, then Tories, Liberals, Socialist Alliance, Greens and

three independent candidates will be dividing the remaining 60% between them. A vote of 15% may well be enough to assure a place in a second-round run-off.

Hackney SA's lowest vote in May was seven percent. Its highest was that of Paul Foot himself - over 20%. These

votes were gained when voters could vote for three candidates and in a system they had used before and understood. This time they have two votes.

During the election campaign 85% of houses have had both a leaflet and a tabloid from the Socialist Alliance; Paul Foot has spent every evening and many days in meetings with subjects ranging from local transport policy to the war on Iraq, and from a street meeting to get-togethers with the Turkish and Kurdish communities. He has fought an excellent election and will have a personal vote resulting from his many years of campaigning and writing for *The Mirror* and *The Guardian*.

Of all the parties only the SA has been fighting New Labour ward by ward across the borough in a campaign that has involved over 100 people and has garnered support from local alliances across London and some from further afield. The Socialist Alliance has played a key role in many of the campaigns to defend local services that has seen those who have voted Labour fight their own council for resources. New Labour in Hackney has been engaged in a massive cuts and closure programme for the last two years.

After the votes have been counted and the result dissected there is one fact that can be stated in advance of election day - Hackney Socialist Alliance is slowly but surely building a base for socialism in this borough and it is here to stay ●

Will McMahon
chair, Hackney SA

Thornett agonistes

Alan Thornett **The socialist case against the euro** International Socialist Group, September 2002, pp35, 80p

Poor old Alan Thornett. The comrade has clearly been in considerable pain over the question of Europe for some time now. In his feeble attempts to counter the arguments of those within the Socialist Alliance who argue for an active boycott of the forthcoming referendum on the euro (a tactic he stubbornly insists on calling an "abstention"), comrade Thornett, a leading figure in the International Socialist Group, has been reduced to blustering incoherence.

Sadly, the evidence for the extent of this irrationality is all too clearly illustrated in this shoddily produced, shoddily argued little pamphlet.

Such as it is, the core of comrade Thornett's argument seems to consist of this idea: "We have to ask, therefore, in whose interests this powerful new entity is being built and whose interests does it serve? Is European integration under Maastricht and the single currency a benign reorganisation of European capital, to which we can be neutral, or is it an anti-working class project which we

should therefore oppose?" (p3).

This is bordering on the moronic in political terms. Capital is an exploitative *social relationship* with the alienation of the direct producer from the product of their labour at its very core. It can never - by definition - be "benign", compassionate or benevolent, in whatever political form it organises its exploitation.

Perhaps the author is actually charging the supporters of an active boycott with being *neutral* in relation to the European bourgeoisie's plans for a "neoliberal Europe designed to increase profitability, maximise job flexibility and run down the welfare state" (p3). Comrade Thornett suggests this is foolish, as the introduction of the euro will *inevitably* be attended by attacks on our class.

So, for the umpteenth time, let us make our position clear.

Advocates of an active *boycott* (not an abstention) do not view attacks on our class 'neutrally'. However, whether they are successful or not is decided by struggle - their outcome not inevitable, in other

words. The first prerequisite of successful proletarian struggle is that our class is able to elaborate an *independent political line* on all questions facing contemporary society.

The voluntary coming together of Europe, even under capitalism, is an *objectively progressive* development. Our programme is to fight on that terrain and organise the working class in the EU to the highest level. We demand extreme democracy in the EU and a republican United States of Europe. This is the only road to socialism and anything else is to descend into reactionary phrase-mongering or puerile utopianism.

The task of the working class is therefore not to attempt to maintain the status quo, still less to hopelessly attempt to turn the wheels of history backward and call for a British withdrawal and a return to the franc, mark, etc. Thus, asked to choose between the anti-working class pound and the anti-working class euro, we say the best tactic is a boycott - we are not afforded any official means of expressing our own independent approach. But this is an *active*, political engagement, not an *abstention*. We should fight - using the most militant methods allowed by the objective conditions - for our class to raise an independent political agenda.

Comrade Thornett's frail polemic against the active boycott tactic can be summarised under three main charges:

- The call for an active boycott is "strange", "something of a contradiction in terms". For, "whatever spin you put on it, an abstention remains an abstention in real terms. It means you have decided not to vote 'yes' and not to vote 'no', but, yes, to abstain: actively or not" (p30).

Challenged in various forums, comrade Thornett has professed to understand not even the *concept* of an active

boycott. In doing this, he blithely admits he is bewildered by the history of Bolshevism. But the comrade clearly does not have to delve into the distant past to help him grasp the idea. In a recent edition of this paper, we featured a telling article from Socialist Democracy, comrade Thornett's fraternal organisation in Ireland. Polemicising directly with Alan and comrades in France over the call to vote for Jacques Chirac in the second round of the French presidential elections, SD makes some crushing points in opposition to Alan's arguments against the idea of an active boycott.

Comrade Thornett argues that an abstention on that occasion means that "ultimately ... you were prepared to see Le Pen elected". Correctly, the Irish comrades point out that "'ultimately' the issue is strengthening the independence of the working class". In this context, such independence could only come if the workers in France "had consciously decided that they would not be blackmailed into voting for the chief representative of capitalism and wished to record their opposition not only to both candidates but to the very legitimacy of the whole contest" (*Weekly Worker* September 19).

And, as for Alan's stupid insistence on dubbing the tactic an "abstention", SD observes that "abstention is an individual protest, while boycott is a collective political statement", citing its own calls for boycotts of attempts by the British establishment to introduce measures to stabilise its rule.

- The key "difficulty" faced by the active boycotters is "to define what the active part of such a campaign can be. It is hard to be militantly in support of, well, doing nothing". In trying to address this particular conundrum, the CPGB has made "wild proposals", including "mobilising the workers to burn the ballot

boxes" and calling for strike action "in favour of, yes, an abstention in the referendum!" (p31).

Of course, the CPGB has not put forward the concrete demand that "workers burn the ballot boxes", as Alan well knows. We have called for the working class to be mobilised to boycott the referendum using *the most militant tactics objective conditions allow*.

This can range from protest meetings and a national campaign involving a minority of militant workers, to protest strike action up to generalised stoppages. And yes, perhaps along the way, a few ballot boxes might see a match or two. But the intensity of opposition to the referendum is left open-ended. Alan's cheap shots against us convince no one. Not even himself, I suspect.

- In tune with this attempt to present an active boycott as a call for passivity, Alan dubs it as having "nothing to say" about what is a "huge issue" in European politics. If you are not calling on people to set out on the morning of the referendum to register their vote one way or another, "what is there to campaign about?" (pp30-31).

Again, Alan's own comrades in Ireland effectively blow this nonsense out of the water. They observe that a boycott of the French presidential elections could have been used to "inflict as much damage as possible on the regime and to popularise the need for a democratic alternative based on a constituent assembly dedicated to resisting the neoliberal offensive".

Concretely, then, Alan, we would utilise agitation around a boycott of the euro referendum to advance a full programme for the democratisation of the European Union and the advance of the interests of the working class And that is saying something isn't it? ●

Mark Fischer

DEBATE

Russian means and the dictatorship of the minority

In the fourth of his series of articles **Jack Conrad** examines the background to Lenin's use of the word 'dictatorship' and the role played by the Mensheviks

Many Marxists regard the dictatorship of the proletariat as something of a touchstone. Certainly since the days of Eduard Bernstein it marks us out as revolutionaries from the reformist project of gradually transforming capitalism into socialism. But what is meant by the term? Typically the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is used not to refer to the rule of the working class. Unlike Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels what modern-day Marxists mean is violence, denial of rights and a disregard for democracy.

In my last article we showed that the origins of this failure, or stubborn unwillingness, by Marxists to understand Marx-Engels dates from the late 19th century. However, there can be no doubt that the sorry mess was compounded by revolutionaries in Russia. This was especially so after the 1917 October revolution.

The Bolsheviks, above all Lenin and Trotsky, were catapulted from exiled obscurity into a position of unequalled world historic authority by the events of 1917. Their every pronouncement was given an almost religious significance and treated as manna from heaven. Their practice - no matter how it had been forced upon them by dire circumstances - became the model which must be emulated. Inevitably the dictatorship of the proletariat featured prominently. Those who stood by the embattled Soviet republic - within and without - and defended the draconian measures enacted during the civil war justified themselves with reference to the dictatorship of the proletariat. By the same measure those - like Karl Kautsky, the former pope of Marxism - who recoiled from the fundamental task of making revolution in their own country did so by counterpoising dictatorship to democracy. The title 'renegade' was apt.

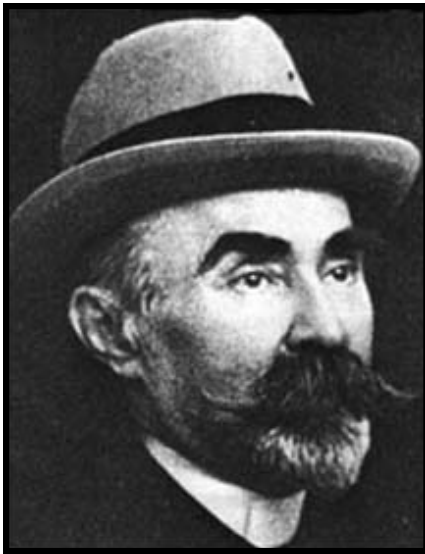
We shall fully discuss the contradictory impact of the Russian Revolution in the next article. Meantime here I want to simply set the scene by describing the background: ie, the different ways Marxists in Russia deployed the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', as handed down to them by history.

There is a common myth that Lenin and Trotsky revived the Marx-Engels use of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. This is doubly untrue. Georgi Plekhanov - founder of Marxism in Russia and later the foremost Menshevik thinker - had written and spoken of the dictatorship of the proletariat ever since he made the transition from Narodism to Marxism. Furthermore what he - and later Lenin and Trotsky - meant by the phrase bore only an occasional or passing resemblance to Marx-Engels.

Whereas Marx-Engels consistently used the word 'dictatorship' simply to denote 'rule', Plekhanov understood special measures of repression and, if need be, minority rule by the party. Put another way, Plekhanov held an outlook not dissimilar to the elitism of Auguste Blanqui and those who advocated an educative dictatorship.

Plekhanov's contribution can be appreciated by considering the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party's 2nd Congress in 1903. He acted as rapporteur on the programme and this included a passage on the dictatorship of the proletariat: "To effect its social revolution, the proletariat must win political power (*the class dictatorship*), which makes it master of the situation and enables it to surmount all obstacles" (quoted in VI Lenin CW Vol 6, Moscow 1977, p68).

Only a single vote is recorded as being cast against the programme - and this had nothing to do with the inclusion of the dictatorship of the proletariat. What interests us is the brief debate. The minutes have Trotsky conventionally talking of the dictatorship of the proletariat as an act of the "overwhelming majority" and not a "little band of conspirators"



Plekhanov: all means justified

(quoted in H Draper *The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' from Marx to Lenin* New York 1987, p69). However, another delegate, VE Mandelberg (party name: Posadovsky) - a future Menshevik - threw the cat amongst the pigeons over what he said was not a "dispute over details", but general approach:

"Should our future policy be governed by certain basic democratic principles, admitted to have absolute value, or are all democratic principles to be governed exclusively by what is profitable for our party? I definitely declare for the latter. There is no democratic principle that we should not make subservient to the interests of our party [*interruption* - Even inviolability of the person?] Yes! Inviolability of the person as well! As a revolutionary party striving towards its ultimate goal - that of a social revolution - we must regard democratic principles exclusively from the point of view of the speediest possible achievement of that goal, from the point of view of our party's interests. If one or another demand does not turn out to our advantage we shall not use it. Therefore I oppose any amendments that are likely in future to narrow our freedom of action" (quoted in *ibid* pp69-70).

Mandelburg was essentially saying what the majority thought but preferred not to say. Given time restraints, only one delegate rose to speak in support of him. His first name was not Vladimir but Georgi. Universal suffrage should be advocated, but not converted into a "fetish" said Plekhanov. He mused about the possibility of the party coming out against universal suffrage by, for example, depriving the bourgeoisie of basic rights, including the vote. Warming to his theme, Plekhanov told delegates that if on a wave of revolutionary enthusiasm the people elected a good parliament then the party would try and ensure that this proved to be a long parliament. Yet if the people elected an "unfavourable" parliament then the party would try and dismiss it - "not in two years, but if possible in two weeks".

Lenin eagerly fell upon this passage in 1918. It served to flay those Mensheviks who indignantly protested against the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly.

For Plekhanov the highest principle is the "success of the revolution". Hal Draper comments that, translated into everyday language, this is a rather crude form of the "end determines the means" fallacy. Such an approach ignores the "dialectical consideration" that means condition ends and a given 'end' also points to the means that really lead to that end (*ibid* p70).

Lenin reports in *One step forward, two steps back* that Plekhanov's speech was greeted with applause and hisses. But he is quite clear that on the whole the *Iskra* delegation fully identified with the Mandelburg-Plekhanov

viewpoint. It was the centre and right which objected - they prioritised economic struggles and dreamt of one day sitting in a tsar's duma as respectable and responsible legislators.

So those who believe that advocacy of the dictatorship of the proletariat is a distinguishing feature of Bolshevism are mistaken. Plekhanov took the initiative of including the phrase in the programme - the Russian party was the first to do so.

Indeed after the split of the *Iskra* bloc at the 1903 London congress the Menshevik faction continued to regard the dictatorship of the proletariat as unproblematic. Under conditions of tsarist autocracy such language could be regarded as a measure of revolutionary *élan*. However, even at their 1922 congress the Mensheviks kept the term but were careful to distinguish themselves from Leninism. Their dictatorship was said to be "the violence organised by the state" against the capitalist minority, "to the extent that the latter tries to resist the social revolution". It would never be imposed upon the working class or the majority.

With hindsight the Menshevik leaders, Jules Martov and Theodore Dan, maintain that their wing of the party did not want to be associated with revisionists such as Bernstein and Jaurès. They certainly inhabited a political space on the far left in the Second International. But the fact of the matter is that they were a much looser and softer political trend than the Bolsheviks. They imagined themselves orthodox Marxists but, prone to conciliation, were repeatedly dragged to the right.

Effectively, in 1903 Plekhanov thought and acted like a Bolshevik. He and Lenin voted in unison on every key issue at the London congress. Only after the Bolshevik-Menshevik split was complete did he take fright and jump ships. Politics has a cruel logic. By 1914 Plekhanov had moved to the extreme right wing of Menshevism and advocated full-blown social chauvinism. The tsar's Russia was preferable to the kaiser's Germany because of its democratic French and British allies.

Hal Draper touches upon the pre-1917 Trotsky and his dispute with the Bolsheviks. Basically Trotsky argued for an anti-tsarist revolution in Russia which would put in power the proletariat *supported* by the peasantry. A minority regime - the workers made up no more than five percent of the population. His dictatorship of the proletariat refers to repressive measures to be meted out against reaction but is also an indication that the revolution would immediately have to proceed towards socialist tasks. Something which for Draper involves making "inroads on private property" (*ibid* p76). However his main subject is Lenin.

Leninism

Lenin emerges into the revolutionary milieu when the term 'dictatorship' was already taking on many of its modern, anti-democratic, connotations. What Marx and Engels had written was widely known but more or less universally misunderstood.

Nevertheless Lenin repeatedly stressed that socialism was inextricably bound up with the advance of democracy - political, social and economic. Read his 1905 pamphlet *Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution*: "We are convinced that the emancipation of the working classes must be won by the working classes themselves; a socialist revolution is out of the question unless the masses become class-conscious and organised, trained and educated in an open class struggle against the entire bourgeoisie. Replying to the anarchists' objections that we are putting off the socialist revolution, we say: we are not putting off the socialist revolution; we are not putting it off, but are taking the first step towards it in the only possible way, along

the only correct path of a democratic republic. Whoever wants to reach socialism by any other path than that of political democracy will inevitably arrive at conclusions that are absurd and reactionary both in the economic and the political sense" (VI Lenin CW Vol 9 p29, Moscow 1977, p29).

So, far from having an "equivocal" attitude towards democracy, Lenin was convinced that on the contrary socialism depends on the "fullest possible achievement of democratic transformations". Tsarism must be overthrown through a people's revolution and replaced by a democratic republic. Lenin had no aim of establishing a bourgeois republic along the lines of the USA, France or Switzerland, where the masses vote every four or five years for who will oppress them. That though is how the Mensheviks increasingly defined themselves.

Lenin had no wish to sanctify the bourgeois order. His minimum programme relies on a provisional government in which the workers' party would enthusiastically and vigorously participate in order to drive the revolution forward *against* the bourgeoisie and broaden its sweep to the maximum degree so that not a trace of tsarism remains.

Yet, though we find in Lenin's writings, as in Rosa Luxemburg's, references to the dictatorship of the proletariat which simply equate it to the conquest of political power by the working class, his usual way of employing the term was no different from that of Plekhanov and his contemporaries. 'Dictatorship' is used in the context of overcoming class resistance - and not only of the bourgeoisie and landed aristocracy, but the peasant masses too.

The whole thing is in danger of descending into a hopeless muddle. Marxists support the maximum extension of democracy because only such means lead to the socialist goal. At the same time they threaten to cut across these necessary means if resistance arises to socialism from amongst the peasant masses.

Plekhanov solved the dilemma by recourse to a vulgar evolutionism. Capitalism and the growth of bourgeois social relations is said to go hand in hand with democracy. A contention supported with empirical references to France, Britain, Belgium, the US and other advanced capitalist states. The fact that democracy in these countries owes everything to the lower orders - crucially the working class - and nothing to the capitalists is completely ignored.

Armed with such a schematic theory, the Menshevik right naturally gravitated towards bourgeois liberalism. The coming revolution in Russia was to be bourgeois. By which they meant a revolution supported by the working class that would place the bourgeoisie firmly in political power and thereby enhance capitalism's economic dominance. That alone provides conditions for democracy and allows the productive forces to expand in an unfettered manner. The subsequent rapid growth of the working class finally puts socialism onto the agenda.

Lenin presented another solution. In the 1905 year of revolution he came out with the famous algebraic formula: the 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'.

What did this long sequence of words mean? 'Revolutionary' is easy. Overthrow tsarism and act in a bold, energetic way that ensures that the revolutionary conflagration spreads into Europe. 'Democratic' refers to the revolution and the subsequent government representing the mass of the common people, not least the peasantry. The revolution is a genuine people's revolution, not a Blanquist minority coup. Democracy carries the immediate programmatic pledge to introduce extensive rights and measures of popular control from below. Eg, national

self-determination, women’s equality, workers’ militia, land redistribution. But the implication is also there that the revolution cannot yet proceed to directly socialist tasks such as the abolition of the wages system and money.

‘Dictatorship’ is more problematic, as we have already seen. Lenin often used the term ‘revolutionary government of the workers and peasants’, so we can take the word ‘dictatorship’ to mean ‘rule’. On the other hand it is clear that, following in the footsteps of Plekhanov, he envisaged ‘dictatorial’ violence crushing opponents of the revolution. What of ‘proletariat’ and ‘peasantry’? That is straightforward. The revolution has two distinct prongs. One urban, working class and anti-capitalist. The other rural, peasant and anti-landlord. This two-pronged revolution must find a united expression in the post-revolutionary regime.

For those sentimentally attached to what passes for Trotskyite profundity this formulation of Lenin’s presents two big problems. Though something of a detour from the main trust of our discussion, I think they are worth reproducing and rebutting.

Firstly, Draper has already told us by implication that one of the flaws with Lenin’s strategy is that it did not involve making the inroads into private property that Trotsky posited as a necessity. But this contention is simply wrong.

Lenin did indeed envisage making radical inroads into private property. He insisted that all land must be nationalised by the revolutionary government. The landlords, for their part, were to be completely expropriated. Their great estates were not to be broken up into numerous peasant smallholdings, but maintained as model farms which employed the latest technology and latest techniques. That way cooperation amongst the peasantry could be encouraged and petty individualism combated. Needless to say, Lenin never proposed anything like the forced collectivisation brutally carried out by Stalin and his clique after the 1928 counterrevolution within the revolution.

True, Lenin believed that the development of capitalism would, under Russian conditions, be progressive. But this capitalism was to be strictly controlled. Standing guard over capitalist relations of production was to be the workers’ and peasants’ state with its popular militia and all manner of other restrictions on capitalist exploitation - the eight-hour day, powerful trade unions, broad political freedoms, etc.

Crucially the Russian revolution was never pictured as an isolated national event. The overthrow of tsarism is understood by Lenin as initiating, and being an integral part of, the European *socialist* revolution. Extreme democracy and the leading, or hegemonic, role

of the working class in Russia is dependant on the working class coming to power over advanced capitalism in the west. In step with the forward march of the world revolution, workers in Russia uninterruptedly move from the tasks of the minimum programme to those of the maximum programme.

Secondly, how can there be a dictatorship, or rule, of two classes? Apparently such a proposition runs counter to Marxist theory. I humbly beg to differ. Life is complex and Marxism constantly strives to reflect and fully grasp that complexity through developing its theoretical categories.

History reveals many examples of two classes - often riven with conflicting interests - ruling society for relatively long periods. Take Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was ruled by a bloc of two classes: the landed aristocracy and the industrial bourgeoisie. That found expression in the existence and institutional rivalry of the Tory and Liberal parties. The Tories were led by aristocrats and traditionally represented landed interests. The Liberals were likewise led by aristocrats. However, this party acted in the main on behalf of the industrial bourgeoisie.

Marx and Engels commented upon the phenomenon on countless occasions. Eg, Marx predicted the demise of the Tory (aristocratic) party and the rise of a Labour (workers’) party that would challenge the Liberal (capitalists’) party.

What is possible for two exploiting classes is surely not impossible for two exploited classes whose interests are complementary in the short term and certainly not antagonistic in the long term. Marxism stands for universal suffrage and the rule of the majority. We are for representative institutions that embody executive as well as legislative powers. As a sure concomitant of that principle we expect at some future date to see the rivalry - including those of opposition and coalition - of various political parties which base themselves programmatically and practically upon different sections of the popular masses: eg, the working and middle classes.

Class and party are, however, never a simple given. Suggestions to the contrary are ahistorical and mechanical. The unity between a particular party and a particular class is a process and is established over time and, once established, has to be renewed at every major political turning point. Therefore in all probability there will be all manner of different governmental combinations and oppositional coalitions of socialist parties at various stages of any genuinely revolutionary overthrow of capitalism from below. Only under communism - the final or higher phase of socialism - would we expect political parties to finally die out, as the democratic semi-state gives way to general freedom.

Lenin’s abstract formulation was given flesh and bones in 1917. The popular masses created soviets of workers, peasants and soldiers. And within the soviets there was a profusion of rival socialist parties - the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, Right Socialist Revolutionaries, Populist Socialists, the Bund, Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, etc.

The coalition government of soviet parties proposed by Lenin over the months April-June and in September 1917 would have been a concrete expression of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. As it was, a peaceful road proved impossible. Nonetheless the first soviet government was a coalition between the Bolsheviks - whose support base was overwhelmingly urban and working class - and the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party, which predominantly rested upon the poorer peasants.

Two Lenins

However, Lenin’s use of the term ‘dictatorship’ remains full of ambiguities that were to bear bitter fruit under the weight of counter-revolution and isolation imposed upon Russia after October 1917. It is almost as if there were two Lenins. There is the democratic Lenin and his dictatorship (rule) of the workers and peasants. Then there is the Blanquist Lenin.

This, the other Lenin, admits that there is a problem with the common understanding of the word ‘dictatorship’. In 1906 he readily agrees that people who hear Marxists using the term ‘dictatorship’ for the first time are often perplexed. They are accustomed to dictatorship to mean “only a police dictatorship” and the idea that a government without any police “seems strange to them” (VI Lenin CW Vol 10, Moscow 1977, p245).

But his explanation can only have added to the confusion. The dictatorship this Lenin has in mind recognises “no laws, no standards, no matter by whom they are established”. Dictatorship is authority that is “unlimited, outside the law, and based on force in the most direct sense of the word”. He then defines dictatorship ‘scientifically’ as meaning nothing more nor less than “authority untrammelled by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatsoever, and based directly on force”.

This Lenin confidently rounds off by declaring that the term ‘dictatorship’ “has no other meaning but this”. And ominously he stresses that the dictatorship will be the “dictatorship of the *revolutionary* people” - as distinct from those who are “physically cowed and terrified”, those who are prevented from fighting by “prejudice, habit, routine”, those inclined to hold aloof “from intense struggle”, those who hide themselves away from getting mixed up in the fight because they are afraid of getting hurt (*ibid* p246-47).

This kind of restricted, narrow, definition was going to be repeated again and again. Leave aside the Marx-Engels “other meaning” of ‘dictatorship’: Lenin’s definition is far from satisfactory even in its own so-called scientific terms. In the midst of a pitched battle our forces surly recognise authority, a line of command, and apply moral standards. We are not anarchists or mindless thugs.

And what about after the revolution? Do our elected representatives not enact binding laws and rules which the entire population is expected to obey? As to the dictatorship of the “revolutionary” people and the exclusion of those deemed non-revolutionary, the implication is clear. Lenin is dispensing with the concept of *class* dictatorship and opens the door to a minority dictatorship wielded by revolutionary activists - that is, the revolutionary party.

Naturally the party wants to “explain” things to the people. It seeks to “enlist” them and would never think about “shunning” the “whole people” (*ibid* p247). But this Lenin’s dictatorship is in reality a Russian echo of Jacobin communism. As Draper is at pains to point out, there is nothing characteristically Leninist here. Plekhanov and his attitude to democracy has already been cited. Lenin’s virtue lay in honestly spelling out what others simply assumed. Substituting the revolutionary rule of the people for the revolutionary rule of the party was “not his invention” (H Draper *The ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ from Marx to Lenin* New York 1987, p93) ●

What we fight for

- Our central aim is the organisation of all communists, revolutionary socialists and politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without such a party the working class is nothing, with it everything.
- The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many leftwing ‘parties’, but in reality most are mere confessional sects. Those who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through the fullest, most open debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support democratically agreed actions, members have the right to form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists are committed to building the Socialist Alliance in England and Wales and the Scottish Socialist Party into a single revolutionary party. Communists advocate the principle, ‘One state, one party’. We oppose every manifestation of sectionalism.
- Communists are internationalists. It is an internationalist duty to fight for revolution against the existing state. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state, then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions, a Socialist Alliance of the EU and a Communist Party of the EU.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with pollution, exploitation, crisis and war. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist ‘socialism’ are reactionary and anti-working class.
- Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away through a parliamentary vote. They will resist, using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be readied to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither exploitation of person by person, nor wars, classes, countries or nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.
- All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.

— celebrate the october revolution —
PEACEFULLY
IF WE CAN...

Come to the CPGB’s dayschool to celebrate the 85th anniversary of the October revolution. Through two openings and full debate we will explore what constitutes a working class revolution, the role of democracy and force, and the nature of socialist society itself. Cost for the day - £5 (£3 concessions). Contact the CPGB to secure your place.



11am-1.30pm: ‘The Past’
Mark Fischer looks at the nature of revolutions in the 18th and 20th centuries, centrally the Russian. What role did force play - and how did this differ from the counterrevolution? How did democracy develop under the dictatorship of the proletariat? What was the nature of socialist legality?

2.30pm-5pm: ‘The Future’
Jack Conrad discusses moribund capitalism and how this will affect our own revolution. How will the process of proletarianisation affect our prospects? How important is the unification of the European working class?

SUNDAY OCTOBER 13, 11AM
Causton House, St John’s Way, London N19 (Archway tube station)

Communist Party of Great Britain, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, Tel 020 8965 0659, office@cpgb.org.uk, www.cpgb.org.uk

Become a
Communist Party
supporter

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Age _____

Email _____ Date _____

Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

weekly Worker

Paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain

www.cpgb.org.uk

50p/€0.85

Pre-emptive move against Sinn Féin

Reid stages provocation

The British government has, it seems, decided to provoke a pre-emptive crisis in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin claims that the raids on its members' homes and especially on its offices in Stormont were staged for dramatic effect in order to carry through the already inevitable suspension of the Northern Ireland executive in a way which shows the party up in the worst possible light.

The arrest last week of Denis Donaldson, Sinn Féin's chief administrator at the Stormont assembly, along with three other SF members, on charges of possessing documents that could be "useful to terrorists in planning or carrying out acts of violence" and the notion that the Sinn Féin office was somehow being used not for organising interventions in and around the assembly, but as some sort of IRA command centre, are, to say the least, hard to credit.

The nature of SF's intelligence-gathering is alleged to be twofold: firstly personal details of up to 2,000 politicians, senior police and army officers, and others, including MI5 agents, were supposedly in their hands; secondly hundreds of confidential security and political documents, including minutes of conversations between the prime minister and Northern Ireland secretary John Reid, and other political parties, had been obtained by Sinn Féin.

So what? While of course there is no doubting that SF would be more than pleased to get their hands on such information, the same is true for every other political grouping. Does anybody doubt that the Ulster Unionist Party has moles in the Paisley camp and vice versa? What about the British and Irish governments? Surely they have their spies within Seán and in every other Northern Ireland party. Stormont is in fact a nest of intrigue, where stealing documents and bugging conversations is a way of life. But what is going on is political espionage, not military preparation. That William Mackessy, the messenger accused of gathering much of the information, was able to wonder around Stormont, photocopying at will, says it all. Most of what he allegedly took, while useful, was doubtless routine and humdrum.

You would, of course, expect government ministers normally to be entitled to receive restricted information about the police, army and even security services. But of course Northern Ireland is hardly normal - the political faction associated with an army that fought a bloody war against the state now has two ministers. However, as Reid and the unionists well know, Sinn Féin has no intention of using whatever information it can garner for the purpose of launching another IRA war.

The raids also gave British security the opportunity to resurrect allegations that the IRA had been behind the break-in at Castlereagh police station last March, when information about Special Branch

officers who handle informants was stolen - it was claimed that new evidence had been uncovered 'proving' republican involvement in what most commentators had come to dismiss as an inside job.

Reid claims that the government knew about the 'spy ring' for over a year (the IRA 'threat' arising from its alleged activities had not previously been considered worth worrying about) and that the timing of the October 4 operation - carried out by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the 'non-sectarian' body that replaced the hated Royal Ulster Constabulary - had nothing to do with him. It just so happened that it was executed the day after Reid made his 'even-handed' speech on Northern Ireland at Labour's conference in Blackpool.

He told republicans that he welcomed "the steps you have taken and we know how difficult it was for you". But he demanded further 'normalisation': an end to IRA punishment beatings and shootings and enforced exiling of 'undesirable elements' from republican/nationalist communities.

He also addressed the unionists in his speech. Nationalists, he said, "need to know that you are really committed to power-sharing, and that, every time it is established, genuine concerns about paramilitary activity are not simply an excuse to raise the bar once again."

So what is going on? Why adopt such a conciliatory tone when Reid knew that the following day a chain of events would be set in motion that would surely lead to the suspension of devolution within a few days? There was no way the executive would survive after last Friday (the publicity surrounding the beginning of the trial of three Irish republicans in Colombia, charged with training Farc guerrillas, was another factor that is being cynically exploited to seal its fate).

The speech had two purposes: firstly it attempted to give the impression that Reid had no idea that the PSNI was about to act: the police raid was an "operational matter" carried out without his prior knowledge - or so we are meant to believe. Secondly, although Sinn Féin is to be forced out of its ministerial positions through the ending (temporary, he hopes) of power-sharing, he is putting out the message that the peace process itself will not end and that SF/IRA is an integral part of it - how could it be otherwise?

Reid and Blair decided to give the PSNI the go-ahead because he knew that the executive's days were numbered in any case. The Ulster Unionist Party decided last month that it would pull out its ministers, provoking a collapse, if the IRA had not completely disarmed and disbanded by January 18 2003. Some hope, you might say. But the ultimatum was not made in the expectation of such an IRA surrender: it simply gave notice that

the UUP leadership, under intolerable pressure from its own rejectionist wing and from Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, was going to pull the plug.

The DUP is continuing to eat into UUP support - just as Sinn Féin is continuing to gain ground amongst the catholic-nationalist population at the expense of the Social Democratic and Labour Party. For power-sharing to work, Blair needs the 'moderate' wings of both unionism and nationalism to be dominant. Yet, with elections to Stormont due next May, the possibility of SF and the DUP returning more members than the SDLP and UUP respectively was very real. However, a suspension of devolution and the re-introduction of direct rule would obviously rule out this scenario - no assembly, no elections.

There are certainly tectonic fault lines not only in the Ulster Unionist Party but within the British establishment too. Many high-ranking cadre in the state regard the Good Friday deal as akin to treachery against queen and country.

However, Reid hopes to use the furore over Sinn Féin 'spying' - along with the claims that the gathering of security information implies a threat to resume the IRA's armed struggle - to force SF to make more concessions and thus not only ease tensions within the establishment but also make life easier for UUP leader David Trimble. There has been speculation that only some IRA 'grand gesture' - such as the verifiable destruction of most of its remaining weaponry - can save the peace process. That will not happen, but there is no doubt that the events of the last week will put Gerry Adams under pressure to give ground.

The blackening of Sinn Féin will, it is hoped, also be useful in weakening the 'no' campaign against the European Union Nice treaty in the October 19 referendum in the Irish Republic. SF is a major component of the alliance against Nice and a second rejection would cause



Gerry Adams: eyes on bigger things

further delays in the project, supported by the Irish and British governments alike, for EU expansion.

It must be stressed once again that, although the peace process is certainly in crisis, in present circumstances there is no threat of a return to war. Northern Ireland exists therefore in a state of neither war nor peace. As for Adams, his eyes are on bigger things than a couple of ministries in the artificial and unworkable Six Counties statelet - the presidency of a united Ireland (to be achieved through natural demographics), for example. According to a recent opinion poll, he is already the second most popular man in the country. Putting all that at risk through a resumption of war is the last thing he is contemplating. Like Michael Collins, Arthur Griffiths, Eamon deValera and Cathal Goulding before him, he has irreversibly swapped guerrillaism for bourgeois constitutionalism.

Sinn Féin, like the British government, is aiming for a solution imposed from above. It wants to enforce its aims on a

minority population - in its case on the British-Irish of the Six Counties by doing deals with the UK and US governments.

What is needed to further the interests of the working class and the cause of socialism is something different. A democratic solution is needed which embodies the voluntary unity of Ireland's two historically constituted but bitterly divided peoples - the catholic-nationalist majority and the protestant British-Irish minority. Under present circumstances that means a united, federal Ireland within which a one-county and four-half-counties British-Irish province would exercise self-determination up to and including the right to separate.

A solution based on such a programme - to be fought for from below using militant methods - would challenge both the unionists and nationalists and would certainly provide the most feasible basis for working class advance in Ireland ●

Jim Blackstock

Subscribe!

Subscription £ _____ € _____

Donation £ _____ € _____

Cheques and postal orders should be payable to 'Weekly Worker'

	6m	1yr	Inst.
United Kingdom	£15/€24	£30/€48	£53/€85
Europe	£20/€32	£40/€64	£70/€112
Rest of world	£40/€64	£80/€128	£140/€224

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Email _____

Telephone _____ Date _____

Special offer for new subscribers

3 months for £5

Return to: Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, United Kingdom