

LSA slate for London elections

Taaffe pulls out

The Socialist Party has withdrawn from the united campaign to be mounted by the London Socialist Alliance in June's Greater London Authority elections. The January 18 LSA meeting saw the SP present a resolution calling for the alliance in effect to abandon its London-wide challenge in the face of the refusal of the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation to reach an electoral agreement.

The key passages of this lengthy resolution state: "This meeting recognises the significance of the decision of the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation (CATP) to stand in the London Assembly elections this year. There is growing anger towards New Labour's anti-working class policies, which is reflected in the support for Ken Livingstone, who is perceived as a radical alternative to Blairism.

"We recognise that the Labour Party no longer in any way represents the interests of workers. In its now open pursuit of Thatcherite policies, Blair's New Labour places the profits of the millionaires before the health, education, safety and pay of millions, making it an openly bosses' party.

"... the victory of Tommy Sheridan ... in Scotland, Dave Nellist and Karen McKay for the Socialist Party in Coventry and, importantly for us, Ian Page for the Socialist Party in Lewisham show that where a credible candidate with a proven record stands, with a good campaign, a layer of people are prepared to vote for a socialist alternative.

"These victories will be a beacon and can be used to encourage others to also stand against Labour. We are likely to see more examples such as the Tameside careworkers, RASP campaigners in Killamarsh and victorious NHS campaigners in Kidderminster. The decision of the CATP to stand is also significant in this respect ...

"The CATP's decision to contest the GLA elections is significant because it represents the first tentative steps of a section of the trade union movement to stand against the Labour Party, albeit on the single issue of transport ...

"Given both the significance of the CATP and the desirability of presenting a broad socialist programme it would be wrong for the LSA to stand a slate against the CATP list. The London Socialist Alliance therefore agrees to support the CATP list for the London Assembly elections and only stand LSA candidates in the 14 constituencies, which is where we can best build support for socialist ideas."

While the debate to the motion revealed a variety of approaches among the component elements of the alliance, a broad consensus on the need for the LSA to press ahead was clear. John Rees of the Socialist Workers



Livingstone: will SP back him as Labour candidate?

Party correctly pointed out that restricting our campaign only to local London constituencies would mean that it was "considerably diminished". Greg Tucker, LSA chair and member of Socialist Outlook, reminded the meeting that - despite recent rebuffs - LSA pressure on and engagement with the CATP continues. The motion was therefore "premature". Speaking for the Communist Party, Marcus Larsen recalled the LSA collapse before Scargill in the European elections of last year. That had been a mistake. To fold now in front of the CATP would be to seriously "compound the errors" made last June.

For the SP, Paula Mitchell suggested limiting our intervention to the local constituencies would be to concentrate "on where our strength is". These low horizons point, in fact, to the crumbling of the SP's own aspirations, not to any concern for the wider needs of the movement across London. Which left group has any real mass local strength anywhere? The SP's Ian Page is hardly a well known figure amongst Lewisham workers outside Pepys ward, where he was originally elected as a Labour Party councillor.

The resolution - predictably - was defeated by a show of hands of all comrades present, with five for, 11 against and no abstentions. The SP then asked for a vote by organisation. Just three groups supported the resolution - the SP itself, plus the small Workers International League and the representative of the practically defunct Independent Labour Network (although subsequently the comrade has indicated that given the importance of the LSA initiative, he will accept and work for the majority position - a principled stand). Against - the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, CPGB, ISG (SO), Socialist Workers Party and Workers Power.

Having lost the vote on this, the SP comrades read a prepared statement. This regretted the decision of the LSA to stand firm and outlined the group's rationale for retreat:

● The working class is "politically disenfranchised" following the transformation of Labour into an "openly bosses' party". However, the development of a viable alternative would be a complex process that is impossible to predict in detail in advance.

● "Elements" of this process can however be discerned in the growing sup-

port for a distancing of some unions from New Labour; the development of single-issue campaigns and "last but not least" in the electoral successes of comrades Sheridan, Nellist, Page, etc.

● The building of Socialist Alliances is "one part of the process" of building a new workers' party.

● "Unlike some" in the LSA, the SP has been "consistent" in support for the alliance. This is because it believes that socialist alliances have an important role to play in the development of this new workers' party, "providing of course they have a correct programme and a correct approach to building support for socialist ideas".

● The Socialist Party will continue to be part of the LSA and participate in alliance work in the constituencies, particularly in Lewisham and Greenwich, where comrade Page is standing as the constituency candidate. "However, given the decision to stand against the CATP list, the Socialist Party will not participate in the LSA slate".

This is an important mistake on the part of the SP. While it will not greatly affect the preparations of the LSA - the SP has probably been the most reticent of the participating organisations despite the statement's snipes at others - it weakens the bloc. In fact, its intervention at the January 18 meeting appeared to have more of the character of an attempt to bring coherence to the position of the SP itself rather than a genuine attempt to shift the bloc as a whole. The inclusion in the resolution of the SP's untheorised and patently false characterisation of the Labour party as a purely "bourgeois" organisation - a position the comrades are well aware is shared by no other organisation in the alliance - plus the emphasis on its own marginal successes reinforces this impression.

Also, it should be noted that the SP has actually had a comrade intimately involved in the CATP throughout this period - he is now included on the campaign's provisional slate. Unlike tubeworkers associated with the AWL, there has been no evidence of this comrade positively agitating for electoral unity with the LSA. The localist approach now adopted by the SP in the capital could be seen as yet another expression of its growing loss of confidence and organisational decline. Active supporters of the LSA who have recently left the SP have speculated about Taaffe losing more members because of the latest about-turn.

Most comrades at the January 18 meeting energetically criticised the SP representatives for this collapse. Political developments in the capital remain very fluid, not least because of the challenge of Livingstone and the political space that will create. If the

LSA followed the SP lead by pledging an unconditional vote to the CATP now, it would mean the left in the capital effectively making itself irrelevant to those potential developments. Why negotiate or strike a deal with forces that have just folded in front of you?

Despite the understandable reluctance of SP reps on the night to be drawn on the question, in this resolution and its associated statement Taaffe's organisation has officially stated that it will vote for the CATP slate against that of the LSA.

As leading comrades from the Socialist Workers Party pointed out on January 18, this could put SP activists in a pretty invidious position on the ground. I have highlighted the fact that, given the new restrictions applied to this election on free postal distribution of organisations' manifestos, having activists on the ground is at a premium (*Weekly Worker* January 13). In these circumstances, the distinction between the propaganda and work for local campaigns and that of the London-wide list will inevitably become pretty blurred.

Local candidates will also have to make clear their attitude to the London-wide contest in their constituency literature, in public meetings and the local press. Which slate will LSA constituency candidates who are also in the SP recommend?

Given SP practice in the past and its current feebleness, we anticipate that it will respond to such a difficult question with silence. However, this latest turn risks further splits and fragmentation. Boycotting the LSA slate will save the SP money, but nothing more.

The CATP is important. However, at present it does not equate to a mass convulsion from below, with new political leaders thrown forward as representatives of the whole class. If we were dealing with a movement that had the momentum of the miners in 1984-5 or 1992, which was now moving into the electoral field, there could be no argument. Anyone who then quibbled about offering anything other than support would be a hopeless sectarian. The situation is different with the single-issue CATP. The LSA majority is right to stand firm.

The LSA has now provisionally named five candidates out of 11 for its London-wide slate - Paul Foot (SWP), Janine Booth (AWL), Mark Steel (SWP), Greg Tucker (SO) and Kate Ford (Workers Power). However, our collective approach remains flexible and alive to political developments, particularly within the Livingstone camp. Some inevitable frictions aside, the LSA is illustrating through its work that principled and inclusive left unity is not simply a nice thought: it is the practical task of the day ●

Mark Fischer



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

Republicanism

Understandably, there may have been some confusion as a result of Tom Delargy's article on the meeting of Scottish Socialist Party factions convened by the Republican Communist Network (*Weekly Worker* January 13).

I have no wish, nor do I have the time, to deconstruct Tom's particularly imaginative spin on events at what was an extremely positive and successful meeting. However, for comrades' information I enclose the complete text of the motion on republicanism which was agreed after a comradely and constructive discussion (not the intense questioning suggested by Tom). The motion was aimed to strengthen the SSP's position on republicanism. There was no question of the Campaign for a Federal Republic backing down on its commitment to fight for a federal republic, an argument we have had and will continue to have within both the RCN and the SSP:

"This conference congratulates Tommy Sheridan for making a defiant, proletarian and republican gesture when forced to repeat an oath of allegiance to the queen prior to taking his seat in the Scottish parliament. Given that the 1999 SSP conference had taken a decision not to refuse to take the oath and organise a republican campaign on that basis, Tommy Sheridan's gesture was extremely important and helped to define the kind of party the SSP is; not only in Scotland but across the world. Given the positive response to the SSP's overt declaration of republicanism, it is important for us now to develop our position further.

"Within the SSP there are various shades of republicanism represented, from those who simply want to get rid of the monarchy, to those who fight for and advocate a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales and those committed to a Scottish workers' republic. As true fighters for democracy, we believe that as a party we stand in the tradition of revolutionary republicanism which arose with the Chartists and was developed by Marx, Engels, Connolly and Maclean.

"Most parties on the left have avoided this question and have adopted passive or abstentionist approaches. The years of Thatcherism and the attacks on the working class resulted in a new republicanism being born through communities of resistance: for example in the great miners' strike or during the poll tax revolt. Many people wrongly believe the SNP to be a republican party when in reality they have tied themselves to retaining the monarchy. Although republican tendencies were present in the Labour Party and the SNP, working class republicanism had no party to voice its aspirations.

"The first months of the new Scottish parliament has seen David Steel proclaim Elizabeth 'Queen of Scots' and seen parliamentary time taken up with discussion on whether the heir to the throne should be allowed to marry a catholic. These are distractions from the main democratic question of the abolition of the monarchy, the House of Lords and all hereditary title and privilege. We recognise the ability of the monarchy to 'reinvent' itself and its attempts to 'modernise'. These devices are designed to guarantee the continuation of the British monarchical system well into the 21st century.

"In the SSP, we are committed to the abolition of the constitutional monarchy and believe that this is a central question if we are to have real political and social progress both in Scotland and in other parts of Britain. The SSP is therefore committed to opening up the potential for republican politics further. We can be the party that gives voice to the aspira-

tions of working class republicans. At the same time, we must continue to take our republican agitation south of the border and to other parts of Britain and beyond. We should seek to seize every opportunity to raise republican slogans and demands. These political and democratic demands should be at the heart of our work when communities are in struggle and should form an important part in our intervention in the trade union movement. We should link with other republican organisations in the UK and participate in joint work and campaigns where possible or feasible. We are determined that Tommy Sheridan's act of rebellion should become more than just an image on a T-shirt: it should be a living struggle.

The SSP is committed to the abolition of the monarchy and all crown powers without recourse to any referendum, to campaign for a genuinely democratic workers' republic free from all vestiges of feudalism."

Comrades will be aware that this will be moved at branches within the context of an organisation that has a policy of an "independent socialist Scotland" and is currently committed to a referendum on the monarchy.

Mary Ward
Dundee

Federal republic

Tom Delargy cites me in opposition to the CPGB's position on a federal republic. Unfortunately for comrade Delargy, I remain a supporter of not only the slogan for a federal republic, but, importantly, the method behind its formulation.

Comrade Delargy's attempt to recruit me as an ally for his eclectic economism shows once again his failure to appreciate the explanatory power and necessity of a Marxist minimum-maximum programme.

He claims that I am for a proletarian republic. True, but not in the sense that he believes. This is for propaganda: it is not a minimum or immediate demand, and nowhere - neither on the AWL website nor in the *Weekly Worker* - have I junked the *political* struggle under capitalism for his abstract and deracinated workers' republic.

Our slogans must be about training the working class to gain mastery over politics under capitalism in order for it to take democracy to the point where, in a revolutionary situation, it moves as a mass to constitute itself a ruling class of freely associated producers. This is socialism: the self-liberation of the working class.

The slogan for a federal republic in Britain is thus a call for the working class to become the most consistent advocate on all democratic questions, including the national question. Communists say that a federal republic is not a matter of completing the bourgeois revolution or removing "vestiges of feudalism" - Menshevik nonsense. We can best fight for democracy through workers' councils and an armed working class. Under such favourable circumstances, the life span of a *bourgeois* federal republic is reduced to zero.

But that is not the only way that a federal republic can be achieved. The bourgeoisie could under pressure introduce a federal republic in its interests through parliament, through bourgeois democracy and the armed bourgeois state.

Thus posing the call for the working class to lead the fight for the federal republic is to concretely pose that the working class become the leading political class in society. It necessitates taking the class struggle under capitalism from the economic to the political sphere.

Comrade Delargy's call for a workers' republic is all very admirable, but is a maximum demand. I do not know where the comrade thinks I have

called for a workers' republic - as opposed to a federal republic in Britain, or a centralised republic in Australia - as an immediate demand. There is, comrade, no revolutionary situation. The art of politics is to go from where we are now to the point of power. That is why we need a minimum-maximum programme

Marcus Larsen
London

Tailist

Once again the *Weekly Worker* spins a large-scale pro-Livingstone spiel out of the most trivial dross about Red Ken allegedly forcing Blair and co to drop Railtrack from the company candidates to take part in Labour's public-private partnership plans for renewing the London underground.

"All this makes one thing abundantly clear: Blair is facing a huge crisis, which threatens not only to undermine his control over the whole New Labour project," chirrup the CPGB (*Weekly Worker* December 9).

'Forget about imperialist system crisis,' declare these middle-class 'revolutionaries' in effect. 'Just watch Red Ken's nimble-footedness bring New Labourism crashing down.' In reality, few in the working class will be fooled - Livingstone populism is very middle class to start with. And alternatives to Blairism *within* New Labour have all the appeal of a new century of anaesthetic-less teeth extractions.

The suggestion that a new 'left' of Labour will re-form around Livingstone, regardless of his reactionary opportunism, and that such forces can be "helped made into an independent anti-capitalist movement" (*Weekly Worker* December 9) is just feeble tailist impressionism. How many such 'left' Labourites are there and what sort of people are they?

Early pro-SLP enthusiasm started with a serious hope for a real anti-capitalist development. Bloated anti-Blairism inside New Labour, on the other hand, is just more wretched middle class opportunism.

Royston Bull
former SLP vice-president

CATP

The Campaign Against Tube Privatisation was set up by the regional committee (London Underground workers) of the RMT some 18 months ago to broaden the campaign against the Labour government's privatisation plans.

From the outset CATP meetings were open to all who opposed privatisation of the tube. Its activities are carried out by a whole range of people: trade unionists, old age pensioners, environmentalists, Labour Party and some other political activists.

After some months CATP became independent of the RMT regional committee. It continued in the form of a kind of support group for the tubeworkers who were leading the battle for their industry and the safety of passengers, for their jobs and for trade union rights.

Meanwhile national newspapers constantly ran stories of tube-users' overwhelming opposition to privatisation and more and more examples of the danger to the public, the corruption and the gigantic profits within the privatised national rail network. Even before the Paddington rail crash it was clear that opposition to the privatisation of London's tube was the central question in the London mayoral and assembly elections. This was and is the main plank of Ken Livingstone's campaign.

It was therefore a welcome and perfectly natural development that leading RMT members would ask the CATP to enter the GLA election to take forward the tubeworkers' fight.

It was with enthusiasm that the various activists from many political and trade union backgrounds seized the possibility of a united campaign under the leadership of an important section of workers. It was especially encouraging to receive a report that there was no shortage of RMT branch officers and committee members who had led strike actions against privatisation and who were now ready to come forward and stand as candidates against Labour.

It is a development that should be welcomed with open arms by every socialist organisation worthy of the name. What better way to achieve a *real* unity of the working class and the 'left' in these elections? What better way to challenge *every* reactionary policy of the Labour government? For the breaking up and handing over of London's tube system to private contractors - profit before people - is the *essence* of this pro-capital Labour government.

A stand by leading trade unionists in a major union to lead the break with the Labour government is of historic significance. This year the Labour Party will celebrate its centenary. But it was established by the trade unions to represent their political interests, and now leading trade unionists in a major trade union are coming forward to stand against it.

Taken together with the stand of the six sacked Tameside careworkers against Labour in local elections, the Kidderminster campaign against hospital closure which defeated Labour locally, and other such examples, this marks the beginning of the end of the special relationship between Labour and the working class. It opens a new period when the need for the working class to have its own new independent party for socialism is firmly on the agenda.

However, because this development does not take place along the lines prescribed by his group, Mark Fischer (*Weekly Worker* January 13) stamps his foot and points his finger in anger.

A number of left political groups have been meeting over the past six months as the London Socialist Alliance, with the aim of standing a united slate of candidates in the GLA elections. I have regularly attended these meetings and consider it to be an important step forward. However, it is one which should complement and not replace the actual developments in the working class.

Fischer thinks otherwise. He describes these underground workers and the people from the many different trade unions, campaigns and political groups in the CATP as a "threat to left electoral unity" and as having a "blinkered determination ... to press ahead with standing its own independent list". Disgracefully he apes the right wing with his "exposure" of the "mixture of motives behind the CATP's narrow-minded intransigence".

In the manner of the gutter press he tells his readers that the elected secretary of the RMT regional council, Patrick Sikorski, and some other named individuals are in the Fourth International Supporters Caucus (Fisc) which is "well *ensconced* in the CATP". Presumably the Greater London association of Trade Union Councils and other trade union and campaign organisations are similarly *ensconced*? But it does not suit Fischer's determination to rubbish the RMT regional leadership.

It is doubtful whether Fisc exists. Never mind, Fischer goes even further into vitriolic hatred: "Fisc, much like the viral pest, the flu bug, has mutated historically. Its current guise as a component part of the CATP is to be regretted to the extent that it undermines principled attempts to bring the left together for electoral work in the capital." I can imagine that

an article will appear in the gutter press likening the "historical mutation" of Mark Fischer and leading members of other groups which comprise the London Socialist Alliance to "the viral pest, the flu bug".

On the other hand Fischer describes as "brave" the attempts of his current friends - the Alliance for Workers' Liberty - to broaden the CATP's political platform. Unfortunately the AWL did not so much evince bravery as effrontery. Disgracefully, AWL members turned up in force to the December CATP meeting (most of them for the first and only time) not to listen to what tubeworkers had to say, but to vote to turn over their decisions. They complained bitterly when chairman Oliver New prevented them from doing so, insisting that the purpose of the meeting was to progress already decided actions.

The CATP should have been able to rely on the LSA forces and their resources, but Fischer adds a get-out clause to the well-known guidelines in the *Communist manifesto* - that the communists "have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole" - *so long as the workers keep their place!* According to Fischer, "building the working class alternative to Blair's New Labour" is the job of the left political groups, not the working class itself.

Basing himself on a report from LSA members of their "*impression* gained from discussions with leading CATPers", Fischer says that "the focus of their (the CATP's) fight for votes *seems* almost to be tubeworkers themselves - some 7,000 of them - rather than the six million population of London as a whole" (my emphasis). Whatever Fischer's impressions, the standing of CATP candidates in the London election represents a development of the strike actions, the lobbying, the pickets and the resolutions through the labour movement which have been mainly limited to tubeworkers and their supporters. The election gives the chance to take the campaign more concretely to the millions of London voters.

Dot Gibson
London

Praxis

Delphi's erudite letter (*Weekly Worker* December 2) is still unable to tackle the essential problems of a praxis perspective.

Delphi praises the law of value in order to bury it. His philosophical standpoint cannot accept the possibility of law-governed processes. Formally Delphi does acknowledge the objective laws of social and historical development, but the logic of his philosophical stance effectively denies the validity of these unspecified laws. Essentially Delphi is arguing that human activity transcends historical laws, and reality is nothing more than the lawless conflict of contending class forces. Thus Delphi abstracts out alienated labour from the operation of the law of value.

Delphi wants to realise an ethical classless society, but viable ethics cannot be constructed on the basis of idealist aspirations: instead ethics have to be located in existing material social relations. So Delphi's idealist praxis approach is in conflict with the elaboration of a revolutionary ethic that can guide the struggle for world communism. Dialectical philosophy represents the self-criticism of the transformation of Marxism into authoritarian religious ideology, and so is critical of the utopian instrumental logic of the praxis approach.

Phil Sharpe
Nottingham

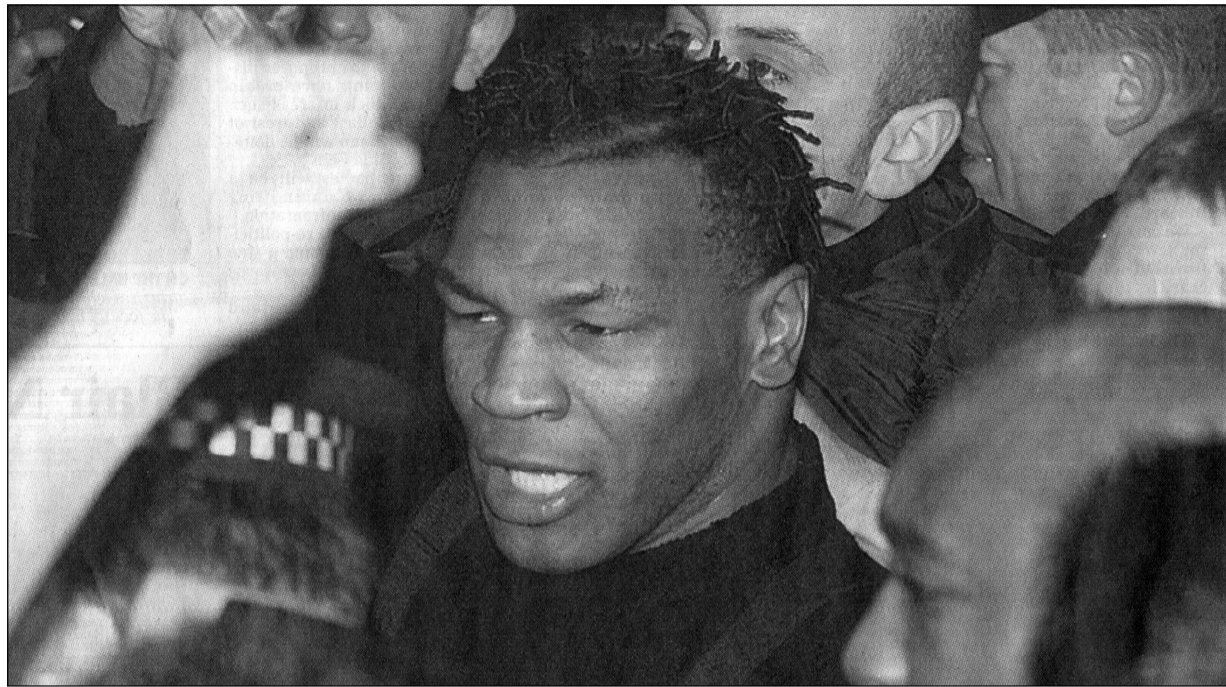
Tyson - in or out?

Jack Straw has been dominating the headlines over the last week or two. It would be fair to say that many of his recent decisions as home secretary have left him unpopular with many.

First he decided to allow Augusto Pinochet to return to Chile on medical grounds, while refusing to disclose the contents of the doctor's report. Then there has been the steady rumble of discontent over his attempt to effectively sabotage the Freedom of Information Bill (by turning it into its almost exact opposite) and his handling of the Konrad Kalejs case - the alleged Latvian pro-Nazi war criminal who legged it back to Australia under the threat of deportation. On top of all this, Straw attacked "woolly liberals" - particularly lawyers - who live in leafy Hampstead. As part of the "forces of conservatism", the "woolly liberals" of Hampstead and elsewhere object to Straw's proposals to severely restrict the right to trial by jury in the magistrates' courts - ie, to the erection of an *explicitly* two-tier justice system.

Now we have Mike Tyson. Infamous for biting off the ear of an opponent, Evander Holyfield, in the boxing ring, Tyson was convicted of rape in 1992 and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. It was widely presumed that his scheduled January 29 bout in Manchester with British heavyweight champion Julius Francis would not be allowed to go ahead. British immigration rules prevent anyone who has been sentenced to 12 months or more for a crime that would carry a similar sentence in this country from entering the UK. Tyson's entry would not be conducive to the "common good", as the rules put it, and hence he would be classified as an "undesirable".

But this was not to be the case. Using his executive powers, Straw issued a dramatic 11th-hour edict which enabled Tyson to slip into the country. He avoided reporters and protesters at Heathrow. Straw declared that the "exceptional circum-



A suitable case for treatment

stances" surrounding the Tyson case meant it would be "invidious" for an individual immigration officer to have to weigh up the considerations involved and confront Tyson on the day. Normally such "exceptional" decisions are made on compassionate grounds. In defence of his stance, Straw also maintained that the "common good" law is applied inconsistently and needs urgent reviewing.

Naturally, Straw provoked outrage. Julie Bindel, representing the radical campaign group, Justice for Women, went to the high court on Monday in a bid to challenge Straw's ruling. Justice for Women claims that Straw acted outside the remit of immigration rules by giving Tyson permission to enter the country because of "exceptional circumstances". Bindel's application for a judicial review of the home secretary's decision was rejected. Summing up his position, judge Sullivan stated: "The fact is that Mr Tyson is here. The fight is due to take place on Saturday week. Clearly a great deal of arrangements will have been made by his opponent and by third parties. The court would be bound to have regard to the interests of innocent third parties, along with many thousands of people who have bought tickets. It would be inconvenient that the fight should be cancelled."

The whole affair left Justice for Women fuming. "The government has made it very clear that they take violence against women very seriously," and Bindel, "so this was a huge surprise. The man is a disaster." It is not entirely clear if Bindel is referring to Straw or Tyson. *The Observer* editorial echoed the views of Justice for Women, declaring that Straw was "wrong to overturn the rule of law in the Tyson case to protect commercial interests" (January 16).

It could hardly be argued that "commercial interests" did not account for Straw's legal *volte-face*. All 21,000 tickets to the Tyson-Francis match in Manchester have been sold - a lot of potential angry customers. Yet is hard to believe that Straw and Blair are *that* worried by the financial distress that might be caused to hot dog vendors if the bout were cancelled. Rather, the Blairites are surely far more concerned at the prospect of upsetting very powerful friends - Rupert Murdoch, to name one, and his BSkyB TV network empire. BSkyB has exclusive rights to screen the match. We know that Blair has been assiduously courting Murdoch for

years now. So much so that the two had a cosy rendezvous in Singapore in 1997 just before the May general election - which saw *The Sun* backing New Labour. Given Murdoch's reach and influence, which looks set to expand, not retract, it is a very good idea to keep on his good side. Do not cancel *his* Tyson match

The reaction of London mayoral hopeful Glenda Jackson was predictable. She declared, "It would be very good if Tyson were thrown out of the country." Harriet Harman, former social security secretary opined: "For the government to use its discretion to flex the immigration rules to allow in Mike Tyson, despite his convictions, undermines their stance against violence against women and sends out the wrong signals."

For these bourgeois feminists it is "grossly unfair" to allow Tyson entry when thousands of black and Asian people were not allowed into the country for occasions such as family weddings or funerals. Therefore to be consistent, as Glenda and co see it, Tyson should be refused entry alongside the thousands of black and Asian people desperate to enter the UK. Neat, tidy, logical - and of course utterly chauvinistic and reactionary.

Tyson seems to be mentally scarred and often out of control. His conviction for rape seems sound. He has

joked about how some of his best punches have been aimed against girlfriends. Many a true word ... He delights in making sexist and misogynist comments - on Tuesday he attacked his female critics as "frustrated" people who really "want to be men". Communists of course think that rapists should go to prison and, crucially, be helped. If Tyson committed further acts of violence against women, he would deserve to be put away again.

However, that does not mean we join the chorus to 'kick out Tyson' or want to tighten up the immigration rules. As internationalists we are opposed to *all* immigration controls - which only serve the interests of nationalism, the bourgeoisie and profit. Jack Straw should have no right to refuse entry to anybody, nor to kick anybody out - irrespective of whether or not they have served a prison sentence. Once they are released, convicted criminals should be as free as anyone else.

We look forward to the day when Straw, along with the class he serves, is swept away by an international revolution. Only then can we create a genuinely human world, as opposed to the violent and alienated world we live in now which regularly throws up mini-Mike Tysons in every village, town and city ●

Danny Hammill

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Fighting fund

Reliable

After a slow start, our first *Weekly Worker* fund of 2000 has been boosted by two magnificent donations: £70 from CR and £50 from MS.

In addition three comrades have taken out a standing order - special mention must be made of JK, who has committed himself to £15 per month. Excellent news, comrade. SOs provide us with a reliable means of regular income, and are also very useful for comrades who already donate frequently,

saving on the cost of a stamp and avoiding the possibility of forgetting your monthly cheque.

Thanks also this week to FJ (£30), PC (£10) and RO (£10). The January total stands at a healthy £240. But let's not get complacent - just 10 days left to make our £400 target ●

Robbie Rix

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

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday January 23, 5pm - 'Self-emancipation from below', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* as a study guide.

Sunday January 30, 5pm - 'Karl Marx and crisis after the 1850s', using Simon Clarke's *Karl Marx's theory of crisis* as a study guide.

Manchester: Monday January 23, 7.30pm - 'Social degeneration and developing general crisis', in the series on crisis. E-mail: CPGBMCR@aol.com.

■ Brent SA

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

■ Lambeth and Southwark SA

Organising meeting: Monday January 21, 8pm, Hope and Anchor, 123 Acre Lane, Brixton, SW2. Nearest tube Brixton.

Public meetings: Thursday February 10, 8pm, Bread and Roses, 68 Clapham Manor St, SW4. Nearest tube Clapham Common. Tuesday February 15, 7pm, Walworth Road Methodist Church, Camberwell Green, SE5.

■ Bloody Sunday March

Saturday January 22, assembling at Victoria Embankment (Embankment or Charing Cross tube) at 12 noon.

■ Mumia Abu-Jamal

January 26 National demonstration in London.

January 28 'Rage Against the Machine' concert, Wembley.

February 4 Mumia Awareness Day.

February 5 Mass leafleting and publicity stunt at US Embassy.

March 4 National demonstration in London.

March Asian Dub Foundation benefit gig.

Next organising meeting on January 27 at 7.30pm and then every alternate Tuesday and Thursday at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. For more information contact mumia@callnetuk.com, www.callnetuk.com/home/mumia.

■ Against Police Brutality

On March 15, socialists demonstrate all over the world against police brutality. For more information contact JusticeUK@appleonline.net.

■ Tameside

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

■ Republican communist

Quarterly discussion journal of the Republican Communist Network. £2.50 inc p&p. One year (four issues): £10 inc p&p. From RC, c/o PO Box 6773, Dundee, DD1 1YL. Cheques payable to 'Record of Letter'.

■ 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 write to: PO Box 6773, Dundee DD1 1YL.

Over the course of the last five months debate has raged to and fro in the *Weekly Worker* over the British-Irish question. I think we are now at the stage where it would be useful to sum up. Since we first published our theses on 'Ireland and the British-Irish' a wide variety of comrades have taken the opportunity to present their considered opinions (*Weekly Worker* August 26 1999). However, from the start two distinct camps were clearly visible. On the one side that of the consistent revolutionary democrats, which went on to win for itself a big majority of CPGB members. On the other side a veritable mélange, whom I am obliged to categorise as either inconsistent democrats or revolutionary non-democrats.

We consistent democrats have reaffirmed our determination to equip the working class with a fighting programme to achieve a united Ireland. Within that we argue for a British-Irish province - one county and four half-counties - which exercises self-determination. Advancing this demand serves to overcome the historic disunity of the working class in Ireland, and in the British Isles as a whole, and is based on the theory and best practice of Leninism. In other words our Ireland has nothing to do with realising the dreams of misty-eyed green nationalists. Irish unity is for us entirely subordinate to the worldwide struggle for communism, which in terms of means *necessitates* democracy and the *voluntary*, not forced, union of peoples. Choose different means and the ends become the opposite of what is subjectively intended.

What of our critics? Overwhelmingly these comrades are for a united Ireland too. Whether their Ireland can *temporarily* remain dominated by the capitalist mode of production, or whether unity can only be countenanced if it carries a 'socialist' or 'workers' state' guarantee is a moot point. Either way, British-Irish self-determination cannot be sanctioned. Hence in the name of the territorial unity of Ireland, or an abstract socialism, or both, the British-Irish would be frog-marched into a unitary state - perversely this is excused in the name of championing the rights of the oppressed.

The British-Irish are supposedly an inherently sectarian and pro-imperialist people or identity. According to this almost racist designation it follows for our critics that the British-Irish cannot be trusted with even the *possibility* of establishing their own independent state. To leave no chance whatsoever of any renewed oppression of the catholic-Irish the British-Irish are either to be totally denied any rights as a distinct people or at most they are to be granted local autonomy along the lines of a German *Land* or a US state. Naturally the proponents of *involuntary* union claim that this approach is the one that furthers the cause of socialism. The British-Irish are variously categorised - most narrowly as a mere religion. But - it is agreed by both sides - the British-Irish are neither a full nor an oppressed nation. This is a clincher for our inconsistent democrats. The comrades believe they have the full weight of Marxist orthodoxy behind them when they solemnly pronounce that self-determination only applies to *full* nations which are also *oppressed* by imperialism.

As shown by the contributors, this camp is extremely heterodox. Those arguing against consistent democracy in Ireland have included John Pearson (CPGB), Steve Riley (ex-CPGB), Delphi (SLP), Ruri McCallan (IRSP), Ivor Kenna (Stalin Society), Dave Norman (Stalinite), Bill Martin (SPGB), Dave Douglass (Class War), Alan Armstrong (left nationalist, left communist and SSP), Gerry Downing (freelance Trotskyite and Labour Party), Barry Biddulph (freelance Trotskyite), José Villa (ex-Workers Power), Tom Delargy ('state capitalist' and SSP), the

Trotskyist Unity Group (Phils Sharpe and Walden) and Dave Craig (RDG).

In the course of our debate these comrades have between them fielded a whole army of misconceived, half-baked and, frankly, reactionary arguments in order to excuse their programme for the *forcible* incorporation into a united Ireland of an historically constituted people. But the long and short of it is that the British-Irish should humbly accept the will of the majority. If the British-Irish refuse to accept minority status, in the event of resistance, these "scabs" (comrade Craig's phrase) are not only to be forced in but if necessary kept in by coercion. Such is what passes for democracy in the anti camp.

Within the bosom of a united Ireland the British-Irish will discover themselves as true sons and daughters of Erin. In the meantime they can jointly determine the fate of the country through an enlarged Dáil. Of course, this line of reasoning echoes what Ulster Unionist prime ministers and British secretaries of state have been telling the catholic-Irish population in the Six Counties since 1920. Within Northern Ireland, or failing that the United Kingdom, the minority ought to respect the will of the majority as expressed in parliament. It is also what Margaret Thatcher, John Major and William Hague told the Scots and Welsh. Instead of calling for self-determination they should settle for common British rights under the monarchy and through representation in the House of Commons.

Our critics desperately try to evade the central point at issue. Namely that as a matter of principle the drawing of state boundaries must take *full account* of the sympathies of all those concerned. If we stand for the equality of nations and nationalities which have a clear geographical dimension, then, where antagonisms exist, there must also be a democratic constitution which enshrines the right to self-determination up to and including the right to secede. On such firm foundations a rapprochement can take place and divisions and mistrust be overcome.

To excuse their unwillingness to include the British-Irish within that category of peoples who, given their concrete circumstances, necessarily ought to have the constitutionally enshrined right to self-determination we have seen the anti camp try to conjure the British-Irish out of existence by linguistic trickery. If the issues before us were not so serious, such political voodoo could be dismissed as mere childishness.

They amount to the same thing, but any number of spells have been invented. Steve Riley pretends that the British-Irish are "not a distinct community", but a "religious faction" (*Weekly Worker* September 2 1999). Tom Delargy similarly would have it that the British-Irish "can only be clearly defined in religious terms" (*Weekly Worker* October 14 1999). Dave Craig adds a variation to the cack-handed sorcery: "The British-Irish are not a nation, but the Anglo-protestant part of the Irish nation" (*Weekly Worker* September 16 1999). For José Villa the British-Irish "are a privileged section of the Irish nation" (*Weekly Worker* September 30 1999). Perhaps most banally Alan Armstrong simply maintains that the British-Irish once existed but have become Ulster-British (*Weekly Worker* October 28 1999).

To begin with, no one in the anti camp expressed any objections to examining nations and national questions broadly under the headings systematically presented in Stalin's famous 1913 pamphlet *Marxism and the national question*. But, having seen where such an approach inexorably took us, a number of objections came forth. None serious.

Take comrade Downing. For him the fact that in later life Stalin expressed vile anti-semitic sentiments must in-

British-Irish

validate his early work. He conveniently ignores other, more pertinent, facts. Eg, that *Marxism and the national question* comes highly recommended by, and was probably written under the close supervision of, Lenin, and that as a succinct textbook it educated a generation of proletarian revolutionaries.

Then there is comrade Villa. He disagrees with Stalin that nations are defined by a single common language. There "could be one or more languages", as for example in "Wales and Ireland", he writes (*Weekly Worker* September 30 1999). I objected and fielded a wide variety of Marxist authorities on the subject. In reply comrade Villa assures me that he finds his authority in Lenin. "It was Lenin," he breezily says, "who described Switzerland as an example of a multilingualistic nation" (original emphasis *Weekly Worker* October 14 1999).

Unfortunately comrade Villa supplied no references and still refuses to do so. No matter. In terms of our overall method, while giving the utmost attention to outstanding theorists like Lenin, we should avoid descending into scholasticism and crude quote-mongering. If Lenin did write of multilingualistic *nations*, then frankly, in my opinion, his formulation was either hasty or plain wrong.

The primitive evolution of nations is synonymous with uniting territories whose populations speak, or come to speak, a common language - something triggered or consolidated with a standardised print-language. Language is the most important medium of human communication. A common language is a huge advantage in establishing and developing a flourishing home market. Without a single language the business of buying and selling (including buying and selling labour power) is greatly hindered.

Presumably that is why Lenin is convinced that for the "complete victory of commodity production, the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, there must be politically united territories whose population speak a single language" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 20, Moscow 1977, p396). As to Switzerland I have not trawled every reference in Lenin's *Collected Works*. Nevertheless in his *Critical remarks on the national question* he mentions Switzerland as an "exception in that she is not a single-nation state" (*ibid* p40). There are five languages: ie, German, French, Italian and the two dialects of Romansh. Switzerland, has a single market, but, as I have argued, is a multinational state. Other examples come to mind. South Africa, Canada, Belgium, Spain, Iraq, China, Indonesia, etc.

We have also been informed by comrade Armstrong, and trailing him comrade Craig, that Stalin is inadequate because he failed to take into account the vital role of democracy in forming and sustaining nations. By implication that would make all nations and nationalisms progressive. Evidently untrue. However, our duo's contention is woefully ahistorical. It completely overlooks the way autocratic state regimes cohered and coloured the *archetypal* nations of continental Europe. Eg, France. It was given form and substance just as much through the Bourbon dynasty and then the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte as it was by the brief flowering of democracy between the overthrow of divine right in 1789 and the onset of monocratic dictatorship in 1799. A similar observation can be made about Germany. There was the pale revolu-

tionary democracy of 1848. But let us not forget the royal socialism of Bismarck, nor the national socialism of Hitler. That is why instead of equating nations with democracy we should instead stress the *populist* aspect; put another way, the necessity of a "common culture", as delineated by Stalin.

So I make no excuse for the continued use of Stalin's seminal pamphlet. Stalin, readers will recall, argued that nations have five essential "characteristic features". Firstly, and "primarily" a nation is a definite, stable, community of people; secondly, nations must share a "common language"; thirdly, they possess a "common territory"; fourthly, they have an internal economic bond to "weld the various parts into a single whole"; fifthly, they have a collective "character" which manifests itself in a "common culture" (JV Stalin *Works* Vol 2, Moscow 1953, pp303-307).

Of course, Stalin's five-fold definition must not be treated rigidly. Nevertheless it can be used to shine a light onto the British-Irish phenomenon in order to reveal its broad outlines. So let us once more discuss Stalin's five characteristics in respect to the British-Irish and see what conclusions follow.

It is correct to say, as comrade Villa's formulation implies, that the majority of protestants in Northern Ireland have throughout the 20th century constituted a labour aristocracy (not a religious, but a politico-economic category). They have sought to preserve their relatively meagre privileges at the expense of catholics by initiating and buttressing sectarian discrimination from below and by appealing above to the Northern Ireland and British states. However, the British-Irish are not *simply* a labour aristocracy.

The British-Irish are a stable community of people who have continuously inhabited parts of what is now Northern Ireland since the early 17th century. They were settled in Antrim and Down as a mass of 'strong farmers' - from England, as comrade Craig's "Anglo" formulation suggests, but mainly, in a ratio of five to one, from Scotland. The plantations were designed to pacify the most rebellious part of Gaelic and Anglo-Irish Ireland and hence "assure" it for an absolutist British crown that had recently redefined itself according to its nationalised version of protestantism: ie, Anglicanism. As was bound to be the case, the settlers quickly diverged from their origins and formed another - hybrid - *Irish* identity.

The Tudor, Stewart and Cromwellian drive for conquest negatively defined the Irish as Irish, both the Gaelic and Anglo-Irish - not in terms of language, but *church*. The Irish became a people-religion. The catholic majority were victims of *national oppression* as catholics and denied basic rights. The old English in Ireland were thereby excluded from the emerging British nation. By *remaining* catholic the Anglo-Irish *became* simply Irish. As a consequence the Irish national question and British domination both took the outer form of religion which so frustrates and perplexes saloon bar experts and blinkered economists alike.

Taking into account the last 400 years, it is ridiculous to describe the British-Irish exclusively or mainly in denominational terms. One might just as well do the same with the catholic-Irish in Northern Ireland, and for that matter the catholic-Irish population of Eire.

There are, as I have pointed out, striking similarities between Ireland and the south Slavs. The Croats, Serbs and Bosniacs live in the same part of south eastern Europe and speak a common language - true, there are still distinct dialects and they use different alphabets. Yet, due to a combination of factors - for example, incorporation by culturally antipathetic empires, Nazi divide and rule, and, capping it all, the malevolent disintegration of bureaucratic socialism - they are today ferociously and bloodily ethnically-nationally divided by *religion*.

Those who duly pronounce that the Croats are "not a distinct community" but simply a "religious faction" are spectacularly wide of the mark, not to say spectacularly stupid. The Croats are *ethnically-nationally* defined by their catholicism. We must in other words go beyond the outer appearance of things. The same goes for muslim Bosniacs and orthodox Serbs. It would be pure muddle-headedness to dismiss Bosniacs as "not a nation" but the muslim "part" of the south Slav nation. It would be equally incorrect to insist that Serbs were no more than the "privileged section" of the south Slav nation.

Nations have to be grasped in their movement. They are not static, purely qualitative phenomena. The world is not neatly divided into nations and non-nations. While there is undoubtedly a qualitative side, there is a constant socio-political, quantitative dynamic of being and becoming, which produces countless black to white gradations of grey. In other words, nations are complex phenomena which defy the common sense approach of turning to an atlas or official history text and equating every country, state or kingdom with a nation.

Nations, once they can be said to exist in history, are without exception always undergoing a process of convergence with or divergence from other nations. Dialects can be subsumed into a common, print-based language - Scots-English into English-English. Or dialectics can be used politically as the basis of a separate nation-state identity - as was the case with Sweden and Norway (conservative Norwegian nationalists chose as their 'official national language' *Nymorsk* - ie, an archaic dialect which was most distant from Danish - after the political separation from Sweden in 1905). Religion can lose its power as a social agent and become a purely private matter, as for example in most of England and Wales, or it can be reinvented as a virulent *national-ethnic* medium for dividing people and simultaneously propagating new nation-states (eg, ex-Yugoslavia).

Anyway, as argued above, the British-Irish have constituted a "stable community" for some 400 years. Due to their similar conditions of existence in north-eastern Ulster the British-Irish have from generation to generation developed customs, an outlook and character peculiar to themselves (Stalin's points one and five). The work ethic, blunt speaking, a collective memory of King Billy, 1688, July 12, and the battle of the Somme, the union jack, rival protestantisms, orangeism and hostility to republicanism and popery - all mark out the British-Irish in terms of self-image.

This is manifested in a British-Irish ethnic-national identity which is completely at odds with the catholic-Irish who inhabit the same state territory. When asked who or what they are in national terms, 82% of protestants de-

debate summed up

scribed themselves first and foremost as Ulster-British, 15% as Northern Irish and only 3% as Irish. In contrast the figures for catholic-Irish are almost the same ... but reversed. Strangely, at least to my mind, 10% called themselves Ulster-British, 28% Northern Irish, while a majority, 62%, viewed themselves as Irish (*Northern Ireland social attitudes 1995-6*, p37).

That subjective British-Irish "common psychological make-up" has been a material force that has helped to shape Ireland for the last 400 years. Because it is distinct from, and counterposed to, the identity hardened under the weight of *national* oppression, mainstream Irish nationalism has experienced the greatest difficulty in coming to terms with the British-Irish.

Completely opposite assessments are held. On the one hand there are those who would exclude the British-Irish as an alien element. On the other hand, no matter how they think of themselves, the British-Irish are claimed, in the immortal words of the founding father of the Free State, Arthur Griffiths, as "perverted" Irish. In or out, the British-Irish have no right to call "into question" the "integrity and authority of the nation" (cited in C O'Halloran *Partition and the limits of Irish nationalism* Dublin, pp36,37).

Our antis peddle the same approach. They too take as their principle starting point not class and class interests, but fixed and indivisible nations and national groups. Speaking like an engrained nationalist, comrade Craig declares: "The 'nation' is the sovereign political constituency in the modern world" (*Weekly Worker* September 19 1999). He is wrong. Communists work for highly centralised - ie, sovereign - democratic states which include within their borders any number of voluntarily merging and merged peoples.

What then of Stalin's point two, language? Obviously the British-Irish speak a common language. Of course, this is shared by the catholic-Irish (we need not quibble here with comrade Villa about Gaelic). Does a common language mean we therefore have a single and unproblematic nation? Again the south Slavs can be cited. The Croats share a common Serbo-Croat language with the Bosniacs and Serbs. Yet even under Tito with his drive for Yugoslavisation from above they were organised into distinct republics (formally with the right to self-determination). Now, after a series of brutal civil wars, they are divided into hostile and ethnically 'pure' states and in the case of Bosnia statelets.

We can easily cut the Gordian knot *vis-à-vis* language and the British-Irish. Unlike their Dutch, Afrikaner, German, Swiss, Norwegian, Danish and Swedish co-religionists - ie, fellow low church protestants - they, the British-Irish, have their own "common language". Again, we prove beyond any doubt that they cannot be defined simply by religion.

What of a common territory (Stalin's point three)? There is a sizeable, 42%, catholic-Irish minority imprisoned within Northern Ireland who have a palpable cultural-political affinity with the south. But the British-Irish are not scattered throughout Ireland or for that matter Northern Ireland. They are certainly not the equivalent of the Jews - a people-religion - in tsarist Russia. There is a one-county, four-half-counties area containing a clear British-Irish majority. This forms a geographic whole broadly comprising of county

Antrim, north Tyrone, south Derry, north Armagh and north Down - some council districts have massive majorities. In both North Down and Carrickfergus 91% of the populations are British-Irish, in Castlereagh it is 90%, Ards has a 88% British-Irish majority and Newtownabbey 87% (Northern Ireland 1991 census figures).

Lastly in terms of Stalin we come to the economy (point four). There are two factors that need highlighting. Firstly, and most importantly, north-eastern Ulster had an advanced capitalist economy throughout the 20th century. This fixes its proletarianised people into a single metabolism and leaves behind the isolation, parochialism and self-sufficiency that characterises traditional rural societies. Secondly, while there is no British-Irish economy as such, Northern Ireland has evolved along its own economic pathway, making it distinct from the rest of Ireland. Till the mid-17th century Ulster was generally regarded as the poorest of the Irish provinces. The industrial revolution changed that. North-eastern Ulster developed in a way that had far more in common with Liverpool and Glasgow than the rest of Ireland. Belfast in particular was an industrial city that served not Ireland, but the worldwide British empire. Furthermore capital in Belfast was mainly personified by protestants. Protestant control and industrialisation "gave the political economy of north-east Ulster its unique character" (L Kennedy and P Ollerenshaw *An economic history of Ulster* Manchester 1985, p65). Today the north-south axis remains weak, the east-west axis with Britain strong.

It is in the light of studying history, territory, language, culture and economy that Jack Conrad had concluded that the British-Irish cannot be characterised simply in terms of religion (an aspect of culture). They have enough commonality, objective and subjective, to lead me to characterise them a semi-nationality or a semi-nation. In terms of a nought to 100 scale of non-nation to full nationhood I have scored them at 75 for purposes of illustration.

Of course, as practice the national question belongs not to economics, linguistics, history, or naught to 100 scales, but - as Lenin rightly puts it - "wholly and exclusively" to the sphere of political democracy (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 22, Moscow 1977, p145). To achieve and build socialism the working class must seek the revolutionary unity of all nations and peoples - such unity can only be voluntary. According to this aim and these means Marxists derive and take their stand on self-determination.

That is why, unlike some of our more light-minded critics, we do not invent national or ethnic questions. We have no time for those who play with demands for Cornish, Moss Side and East German self-determination, or those who advocate not the overthrow of the UK state, but its weakening and the break-up of existing working class unity in the name of a romantic and completely abstract Scottish or Welsh workers' republic. Our aim is to positively overcome actual national-ethnic conflicts and antagonisms according to the principles of consistent democracy. We want peace between nations so as to bring forward and heighten the class struggle. So for us the key practical task is not inventing an *a priori* check list of who has and who has not the right to self-determination. Where national antagonisms and national

movements *concretely* exist, we bring forth definite political solutions. That is why the CPGB is for an England-Scotland-Wales federal republic. The existence of real popular resentments in Scotland and Wales decides our programme, not a check list, no matter how scientific, as to whether or not Scotland or Wales are full nations.

Hence I am the last to deny the importance of what people think. Of course, identity is never singular. Scottish people today primarily define themselves as Scottish. Secondly, many have a British identity. A hundred years ago many middle class and university-educated Scots thought in terms of being north British. What decides the matter for us is the existence and growth of a national movement which according to all surveys is much broader than simply those who vote SNP. We communists are for renewing the unity of the people and the working class in Britain at a higher level through consistent democracy.

In articles published in the *Weekly Worker* I have shown that the same spirit moved the Bolsheviks. They fought for, and after the October Revolution granted, self-determination to all manner of peoples, some of whom might at a stretch score as full nations: eg, Poland and Finland. Yet there were others, who, by whatever serious objective criteria one chooses, fell well short of full nationhood: eg, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan. Their economies were mediaeval, there was mass illiteracy and in general mainly localised clan and family identities. Needless to say, despite that, they all became constituent parts of the Soviet republic with the right to self-determination. After the experience of tsarism there existed a deep-seated mistrust of the Russian state and Great Russians. Self-determination was the Bolshevik solution to bring about trust, reconciliation and eventual merger.

We have also exhaustively shown that the Bolsheviks took a consistently democratic approach to the Cossacks - a people which formed the military backbone of tsarism and white counterrevolution. Their Soviet Republic on the Don voluntarily joined the federal republic centred on revolutionary Petrograd and Moscow. As an aside I must answer comrades Villa, Downing, Armstrong, Delargy, etc, on the Cossacks. Why do I go on about them when their specific soviets were dissolved by decree in 1920? They represent for me the Bolshevik programme tested to its limits. Here we have Bolshevik defence of the right of self-determination *in extremis*. The Cossacks were privileged Russian settlers. A military caste of oppressed-oppressors with an unpleasant tradition of anti-semitic pogroms and general mayhem and slaughter.

The Bolsheviks did not begin by asking themselves whether or not the Cossacks constituted a full nation or for that matter whether or not they were an oppressed nation. They certainly did not try to 'disappear' the Cossack question through the idiotic device of pretending that they did not exist; that they were an integral part of the Great Russian nation. Till the storms of the civil war tore them apart Cossacks were an historically established commonality and as such had to be handled with respect and sensitivity.

The newly established Soviet government did everything within its power to reassure the Cossacks that it would not threaten their "land" or their "liberty". They were called upon to join

the new order and urged to create "your own" soviets ('From the Council of People's Commissars to the toiling Cossacks', cited in J Reed *Ten days that shook the world* Harmondsworth 1970, p346). The strategy was to divide the ordinary Cossacks from their atmen, generals and landlords. It is then of more than just historic interest that the highest constitutional body in the country actually retitled itself: ie, it became the Soviets of Cossacks', Soldiers', Workers', and Peasant Deputies.

Such an approach to the Cossacks completely contradicts the assumptions of our antis. Namely that for Lenin and the Bolsheviks "the right of self-determination was all about supporting the struggle for freedom of oppressed nations" (*Weekly Worker* October 14 1999). Here we have a terrible misreading of Marxism as a whole and Lenin in particular. It leads our inconsistent democrats to completely undemocratic conclusions. Oppressor nations are presumably without rights and are therefore legitimately to be subject to the most draconian measures. A case in point being the British-Irish.

True, in the writings of Lenin (and his commissar for nationalities - Stalin) there are countless references to the necessity of advocating the right of *oppressed* nations to self-determination. In the age of the great European empires the majority of people on the planet were nationally oppressed. They had no independent states. The Bolsheviks, along with the 2nd and then the 3rd International, advocated self-determination as a general principle (not as a panacea). But that did not mean that they sought the national oppression of the Great Russian, French, British and German nations. It should hardly need saying but these oppressor nations, as nations, had in general no problem with national self-determination. For the benefit of our inconsistent democrats let me explain in one short sentence the actual content of the slogan of self-determination for *oppressed* nations. It is a demand for the formal *equality* of all nations.

Did Lenin oppose self-determination for the British-Irish? Comrade Delargy tells us he most emphatically did. Triumphantly he holds aloft an article from March 1914. Lenin is quoted in quite a long passage rubbishing the protestant "rebellion" in Ulster against Irish home rule legislation that the Liberals had tabled against stiff conservative opposition. He mocks them as "black hundreds" and a "handful of hooligans". These Ulsterites - Lenin calls them "English-born protestants", as distinct from the "catholic Irish" - raised a hue and cry against being ruled by an "alien creed". But Lenin is of the opinion that their armed rebellion would "melt away" and "disappear" if the Liberals "appealed to the people of Britain, to the proletariat" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 20, Moscow 1977, p150).

If I were a biblical Leninist I would be deeply embarrassed. Thankfully I do not believe that every word of Lenin is gospel. My Leninism is based on the most advanced theory and experience of the Russian Revolution which I seek to generalise through an active and constant process of criticism. Eg, Lenin opposed federalism for a revolutionary Russia even in World War I. In 1917 he became a convert. I am therefore not paralysed by Lenin's writings condemning federal constitutional arrangements as being unnecessary or retrogressive.

In all honesty Lenin displays a rather startling ignorance for someone who spent periods of exile in London. Gaffes about the "English-born" protestants and Carson's huge militia being nothing but "handful of hooligans" have to be dismissed as nonsense. However, let us not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Lenin's article contains an observation which comrade Delargy did not notice or decided to leave out. It is rather inconvenient for the antis. The Liberals' legislation provided for an Irish parliament. Lenin notes that its powers would be "determined by *British* law". There was no danger whatsoever of such a sop parliament "oppressing" the British-Irish (*ibid*). The objections of Sir Edward Carson and co were entirely spurious.

Lastly, this brings me to the most dishonest argument of the antis. Virtually all the elements within this camp claim that to advocate the voluntary, as opposed to the forced, unity of the peoples of Ireland is to "align" oneself with Ian Paisley and David Trimble. That British-Irish self-determination is equivalent to what is dubbed the 'protestant veto'. Moreover our critics insultingly tell us that in effect we should support the UVF, UDA, UFF, etc. Comrade Douglass speaks for the lot. From British-Irish self-determination "it must follow" that they "have the right to fight against being part of a 32-county state and those fighting to take them into one" (*Weekly Worker* January 13 2000).

He and other such comrades appear to know precious little about history. Carson and his UVF did not take up arms to prevent a united Ireland. Carson wanted to maintain a united Ireland under the protestant ascendancy through the continuation of a British-dominated Westminster parliament. Not surprisingly then, when the Ulster Unionists and their masters in London agreed to dissect Ireland in 1920, they did so not according to the principle of British-Irish self-determination. On the contrary, they sought to maximise UK territory around the Belfast-Antrim-north Down heartland. Hence some 500,000 catholic-Irish people were permanently imprisoned as an oppressed national minority. That is what loyalist armed gangs have fought to perpetuate and reinforce ever since. We "do not, and cannot, support the right of the British-Irish majority in the north to oppress the catholic-nationalist minority" ('Ireland and the British-Irish', thesis 7). Suggestions that we do, or should do so, are as misdirected as they are feeble.

Sinn Féin and the IRA often appear more democratic than our antis. After all the republican movement does on paper recognise the principle of gaining consent. However, this consent is from Northern Ireland and not the British-Irish. Demography, not democracy, will for Gerry Adams eventually decide the issue. Communists must therefore continue to support what is progressive, criticise what is equivocal and steadfastly oppose what is undemocratic in the republican movement. The communist programme is clear and unambiguous. We are for the "immediate - ie, unconditional - withdrawal of the British state and British troops from Northern Ireland ... and a united Ireland" ('Ireland and the British-Irish', thesis 10). At the same time we fight for a one-county, four-half-county, British-Irish province in that united Ireland which constitutionally enshrines self-determination up to an including the right to secede ●

Jack Conrad

All power to Putin?

As we go to press, Russian headquarters in Mozdok has announced that "the decisive phase in the liberation of Grozny has begun". Nearly four weeks after the first 'final' assault - in which a combination of poor combat-readiness and tactical ineptitude, on the one side, and fierce guerrilla attacks, on the other, resulted in a steep rise in Russian dead and wounded - another 'decisive' engagement is announced. Perhaps this time they will succeed in taking the city, but only at the cost of hundreds, perhaps thousands more young conscripts' lives - and even if the assault is successful, it will be the end of a battle, but by no means the end of this dirty war.

The second Chechen war has been the making of VV Putin: it has brought him a level of unprecedented popularity, ensured him the acting presidency and created the prospects for success in the March 26 presidential elections. But if this campaign has taught us anything, it is that Chechnya will not easily be subdued and held. In the long term Chechnya could be Putin's nemesis, but fundamental changes in the balance of political forces signalled by the December 19 duma elections - changes that look likely to set Russia on a new course - should guarantee that he becomes the second president of the post-Soviet Russian Federation.

The lessons of recent weeks have much to tell us about what still might go wrong. On January 7 the general staff announced a temporary suspension of the Grozny offensive. Confused and contradictory explanations for this surprising development were given: Putin attributed it to respect for the Russian orthodox Christmas and the muslim feast of Eid al-Fitr and suggested the pause was intended to safeguard civilians trying to flee the capital. Military spokesmen said that chemical weapons allegedly being deployed by Chechen "terrorists" had turned Grozny into an "ecological danger zone", and that in any case it was necessary to shift the focus of operations to the mountains south of Grozny in order to destroy rebel strongholds.

The real reason was that front-line forces needed to regroup after sustaining unacceptably high casualties. On January 14, the official figure of dead stood at 741, whilst on the same day *Pravda* put the figure at around 1,300. The true figures are probably somewhere around those reported by Valentina Melnikova, a member of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, speaking on January 16: namely some 3,000 killed and 6,000 wounded.

Further confusion was created by the announcement that lieutenant-general Gennadiy Troshev and major-general Vladimir Shamanov - commanders respectively of the eastern and western battle groups - had been relieved of their commands. Troshev confirmed this, saying that "It is time to give others a chance to show what they can do" (*The Independent* January 10). Other military spokesmen spoke of a "routine rotation" of commanders, as if this were quite normal in the middle of a vital operation. Putin flatly denied that Troshev and Shamanov had been sacked at all. Colonel-general Viktor Kazantsev later told the media that the officers had been "reinstated". Only an acute crisis of confidence in the conduct of the war and consequent tension between the political and military leadership could have produced such muddle, and it is un-

The second Chechen war has been the making of VV Putin: it has brought him a level of unprecedented popularity

likely to be the last.

In the meantime, Chechen guerrilla formations took advantage of the situation to seize the initiative. The Russians' failure to seal off Grozny meant that thousands of fighters were able to break out and form small, lightly armed and highly mobile units to launch damaging counterattacks in Gudermes, Argun, Shali, Urus-Martan, Chervlennaya and Mersky-Yurt. In a change of strategy confirmed by the Chechen defence minister Magomed Khambiyev, Chechen forces have moved from defensive positional fighting to full-scale partisan warfare, attacking behind the Russian lines in order to pick off units piecemeal, and disrupt lines of communication and supply. The Russian response after the resumption of the bombardment of Grozny has been to commit 40,000 more troops to the theatre, bringing their total forces to somewhere approaching 150,000. It is, however, very doubtful whether sheer weight of men and material can do anything to bring a quick end to the war.

Given the deteriorating situation, it is not surprising that some sections of the Russian media - hitherto unanimous in its support for the war - have begun to voice strong criticism. The state-owned TV station ORT still plays down Russian losses and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, owned by the media mogul Boris Berezovsky, exults in the "end of geopolitical retreat after 10 years". The influential NTV commercial station, however, which was instrumental in turning public opinion against the 1994-1996 war, has begun to focus on military funerals and speaks of a "sudden and unpleasant turn of events", while charging the military with attempts to harass and gag its reporters. *Izvestia*, a paper that backed Putin in the recent elections, devoted the front page of its January 10 issue to a bitter condemnation of military incompetence and stated: "There can no longer be any talk of successful special operations in Chechnya." Where the media leads, politicians are never far behind. The former prime minister Sergei Stepashin has warned the Russian public to expect a "long, drawn-out and painful terrorist war" and Anatoly Kulikov, a former interior minister who commanded Russian

forces in Chechnya in 1995, told reporters that "This will be our Ulster" and could last for years.

It is against this background that we must assess Putin's prospects in the presidential elections and his recent policy pronouncements. Those who see the second Chechen war as posing a potentially fatal threat to Putin's chances in the March presidential poll need to bear two things in mind: first, the outcome of the duma elections; secondly, the absence of any other credible candidate for the office. They might also take note that his popularity rating among the Russian people is still around 75%.

So far as the duma is concerned, half of the lower house was elected on the party list system and half on the basis of individual mandate constituencies. Only six of the 26 party blocs that contested the election succeeded in clearing the five percent barrier required to gain seats, and the results - on a turnout of 62% - were as follows: Communist Party of the Russian Federation: 24.29%, 67 seats; Unity: 23.32% - 64; Fatherland/All Russia: 13.33% - 37; Union of Right Forces: 8.52% - 24; Zhirinovskiy Bloc: 5.98% - 17; Yabloko: 5.98% - 16.

Taking into account the fact that many of the 225 seats in the single constituency section were fought by independents, who have the right to join any duma faction of their choice, a period of negotiation will take place before the final composition of the duma is known, but on the basis of projections by NTV, the distribution of seats will look something like the following: Communist Party of the Russian Federation: 150-160 seats; Unity: 120-130; Fatherland/All Russia: 65-70; Union of Right Forces: 30; Yabloko: 25; Zhirinovskiy Bloc: 18.

At first glance, it might seem that the CPRF vote held up well - in fact it raised its share of the party list vote by two percentage points. But this would be an illusion. The result represents a serious setback for them in two respects: its former duma allies, the Agrarian Party and Popular Rule, failed to win anything, and, more significantly, an alliance between Unity and the Union of Right Forces, together with an already sizeable number of opportunist defectors from Fatherland/All Russia to Unity, the putative 'party of government', means that the CPRF will no longer be able to dictate the duma agenda. However much CPRF leader Gennadiy Zyuganov may try to put a brave face on the outcome, his long-term prospects look far from secure. His party is likely to face an identity crisis, and a split cannot be ruled out. The election was similarly disappointing for the so-called 'centre-left' bloc, Fatherland/All Russia, headed by Moscow's re-elected mayor Yuriy Luzhkov and former prime minister Yevgeniy Primakov, who seem to have lost millions of voters to Unity.

The performance of the newly-formed Union of Right Forces, led by former prime minister Sergei Kiriyenko, who presided over the rouble's massive devaluation in 1998, and backed by Anatoly Chubais, Boris Nemtsov and Yegor Gaidar, was surprisingly good, given the fact that these were the architects of the economic 'reforms' and the rigged privatisations which have left nearly half the Russian population living below the official poverty line.

It is, of course, the astounding success of Unity that constitutes the most significant aspect of the duma election. Lacking a programme and

having no infrastructure whatsoever, Unity (known in Russia as *Medved - Bear*) cannot be called a party at all. It was created only a few months ago, under the leadership of Sergei Konstantinovich Shoigu, the emergencies minister and Yeltsin favourite, purely as a vehicle to defend the Kremlin 'family' interest. The money and media muscle came from Boris Berezovsky - now a member of the duma and hence immune for the next four years from prosecution on charges relating to massive corruption. Unity's success in the poll, coming within one percent of the CPRF's list vote, is the clearest indication that the election, though free, was certainly not fair. In the days before the December 19 voting, Russian TV output amounted to little more than one long party political broadcast in favour of Unity. Putin's endorsement of the 'party', though he himself is not a member, was probably decisive.

Small wonder, in the light of the above, that international capital, as represented by *The Times*, expressed its satisfaction with the election results and described "the prospect of constructive dialogue between the executive and the legislature in Russia" as "a very welcome development" (December 21). All parties in the new duma, including the CPRF, have declared that they are in favour of further economic reform: ie, yet another attempt to establish and consolidate some kind of viable capitalist system. Putin has already announced far-reaching structural reforms of the law concerning land and property ownership.

Whatever the outcome of current operations in Chechnya, it seems certain that the new disposition of political forces in the duma will safeguard Putin from a vote of no confidence in his premiership and acting presidency in the run-up to the presidential elections in nine weeks time. His prospects are further enhanced by the field of candidates who have so far indicated that they will contest the election. On any measure, Zyuganov cannot be expected to win. Zhirinovskiy, even though he has mellowed somewhat from the days when his grotesquely misnamed Liberal Democrats promised free vodka for all Russian men and free men for all Russian women, is a rank outsider. The only 'serious' contender was the 70-year-old Yegenyiy Primakov of Fatherland/All Russia, but even before his party's poor performance in the parliamentary elections, his ill-health and associations with the Soviet era were being avidly seized upon by opponents and he has now suggested that he would prefer to stand for the post of speaker of the duma, which leaves the 'centre-left' without a candidate.

Given the overwhelming probability of a Putin victory, we already have some clear indications of just what kind of state he hopes to build. Abroad the emphasis will be on a nationalist, if not xenophobic, and much more aggressive and confrontational stance towards US imperialism and Nato. At home, it will be on an authoritarian, centralised state, reining in the power of the country's 89 regional governors and instituting further market reforms while trying to pacify the demoralised and impoverished people with populist measures focused on an attempt to root out corruption and improve basic living standards. It need hardly be said that many aspects of this policy stance are mutually contradictory.

Presidential decree No24, issued last week, has, not surprisingly, aroused concern in western capitals, as it enshrines a fundamental redraft of Russia's defence doctrine. The document describes the combat-readiness of Russia's armed forces as "critically low" and promises an increase of almost 60% in defence spending. At its core is the determination to rebuild a "great, powerful and strong" Russian state that, in alliance with such countries as China, India and other 'third world' countries, will act as a 'multipolar' counterbalance to the 'unipolar' domination of the world by the United States, unequivocally seen as a hostile power. The policy of "expanded nuclear containment" envisaged by the decree implies the abandonment of the so-called 'partnership for peace' that underlay the country's defence doctrine under Yeltsin.

Whereas the old doctrine determined that nuclear weapons would only be used "in the case of a threat to the very existence of the Russian Federation as a sovereign state", the new document postulates that they could be employed "to repel armed aggression if all other means of resolving a crisis situation have been exhausted or turn out to be ineffective". Russian military spokesmen were quick to qualify the implications of the new position and perhaps it is, after all, no more than part of Putin's electioneering platform, but it must nonetheless be taken seriously. What we have here is the reaction to 10 years of arrogant and woefully short-sighted western foreign policy - especially the eastward expansion of Nato to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic - that has aroused deep-seated fears of another 'encirclement'.

At home, Putin's endorsement of a new "security concept" - ie, the fundamental restructuring and enlargement of the intelligence and security organs purportedly to deal primarily with "terrorism", but also with organised crime and corruption - suggests a measure that, while aimed at winning popular appeal, is objectively directed towards the creation of a police state. As Putin put it in a speech to senior intelligence officers at the Lubyanka on December 20, anniversary of the foundation of the Cheka and formerly known in the USSR as KGB Day, "A few years ago we fell victim to the illusion that we have no enemies. This cost us dearly. Russia has its national interests and we have to defend them" (*The Times* January 13). In this context, comments by the secretary of the Kremlin security council, Sergei Ivanov, that the Putin administration was considering placing curbs on the media should be taken as a clear warning signal.

Another populist measure in the shape of a 20% wage increase for all public sector workers is hard to take seriously, as they are still owed billions of roubles in wage arrears and have little prospect of ever receiving them. The doubling of the oil price over the last year has given Russia some much needed revenue, but the drain on resources created by the Chechen war, plans for increased defence spending and the need to meet debt repayments to foreign banks will soon exhaust the country's increased income. As always, it will be the Russian working class that ends up paying for Putin's Great Russian chauvinist dreams ●

Michael Malkin

If Tom Delargy's report (*Weekly Worker* January 13) is correct the meeting of Scottish Republican Communist Network members sounded like a session of the Spanish inquisition (Monty Python version). You may remember that Python's victims were tied up in a comfy chair and beaten with cushions and tickled until they gave in. This appears to have been the fate of the Campaign for a Federal Republic (CFR).

Apparently two members, Mary Ward and Nick Clarke, were ambushed and interrogated. "Under relentless questioning" Mary eventually gave in and signed a confession. Nick was more resistant, but eventually he cracked as well. He duly abandoned his previous views rather than suffer the humiliation of being on his own. Perhaps this is what happened, perhaps not. It is not how Nick remembers it.

Tom Delargy implies that now Nick and Mary have given up their fight for federal republic. He says: "While I am over the moon that the CFR were persuaded to make this historic concession to their critics [on a workers' republic], I suspect that Dave Craig and the CPGB (PCC) might need some convincing." Before we accept the idea of "historic concessions" or decide whom, if anybody was brow-beaten, let us examine the motion that was actually passed (see also Letters, p2 - ed).

The RCN motion says: "The SSP is committed to the abolition of the monarchy and all crown powers without recourse to referenda and to campaigning for wider political democratic demands, and to a genuinely democratic workers' republic free from all vestiges of feudalism."

This motion is ambiguous. One interpretation starts from the first sentence, which says, "The SSP is committed to the abolition of the monarchy and all crown powers". If this happened we would have a bourgeois republic. This republic might include "wider democratic demands" which the Scottish Socialist Party would be fighting for. This is quite consistent with what we have called a minimum programme - that is, a republican and democratic programme. However, the SSP should not rest content with a bourgeois republic, but fight for a "genuinely democratic workers' republic".

None of this contradicts the positions of the Campaign for a Federal Republic whose platform supports a federal republic and a workers' republic. Everybody in the Republican Communist Network supports a workers' republic. If there is controversy and compromise it is likely to be over the question of the bourgeois republic. So it is here that we must focus the argument. It is important to remember that the RCN does not yet have a position on this matter except for the slogan 'Republicanism', which is as yet undefined.

Abolishing the monarchy means creating a bourgeois republic. This is confirmed by the fact that the motion does not call for the immediate abolition of parliament. Of course some people want to abolish the monarchy, but are frightened to admit this is a bourgeois republic, for fear of damaging their 'street cred'. But in politics we need to call a spade by its name.

The Marxist case for a bourgeois republic has a number of aspects. Like the case for votes for women or an increase in wages, it is a reform, indeed a democratic reform, that does not of itself abolish capitalism. Indeed after a bourgeois wage increase, even in a bourgeois republic, the class struggle will continue. Consistent ultra-lefts oppose both on the grounds that all reforms compromise the working class, and should be opposed. But that is anarchism, not Marxism.

However, a bourgeois republic is not simply a democratic reform. The theory of permanent revolution sug-

On the bourgeois republic

gests that achieving a bourgeois republic can open the way to a workers' republic. This is especially the case if the new republic has the characteristics of dual power. We can cite the examples of this process in Russia 1917, Germany 1918, Spain 1930, Portugal 1974, etc. Consequently the argument is between those who see the bourgeois republic as a transitional demand, and those who believe it is a reactionary demand to be opposed. The latter, despite their good intentions, simply undermine opposition to the monarchy.

This leads to a third point. The exact character of a bourgeois republic cannot be determined in advance because it is product of class struggle. The formation of a bourgeois republic is a process and will depend crucially on whether it is handed down from above or won by mass struggle from below. Anybody who claims that a bourgeois republic will be like the French fifth republic or the American republic of 1999 rather than the Russian dual power republic of 1917 has a static, not a dialectical, view of the world. The class struggle will decide, which is why a workers' party must act as a leadership.

In the United Kingdom the modern British monarchy has 300 years of tradition. It has been a great source of stability for the state. Despite its origins in feudalism, it has long since been transformed into a *bourgeois* monarchy. The queen is the head of state in a bourgeois democracy, supported by the bourgeoisie. The British constitutional monarchy has given the capitalists many advantages. So whilst in the abstract they could do without the expense of a monarchy, the institution is preserved and supported.

At the same time the working class does not have the consciousness or political organisation to rid society of this parasitism and bureaucracy. The monarchy stands as an historic symbol of the strength of the ruling class and the weakness of the working class. Abolishing the monarchy is not about destroying this symbol, as idealists think. It is about class struggle and changing the balance of class forces. When the monarchy is abolished the whole of society will know that something significant is happening. It will mean that the working class has begun to flex its political muscles, even if as yet it is not sure which direction to go.

The abolition of the monarchy - the bourgeois republic - is a class question. It is a question of which class can force the issue. Even if it seems contradictory, the working class will bring the bourgeois republic and the bourgeoisie will oppose it. The party of the bourgeoisie stands for the defence of the monarchy and the party of the working class for its immediate destruction.

The monarchy is like a barricade built across the road to socialism. We have to smash that barricade and drive our forces through the gap. In doing so we open up new possibilities for advance. That is how the theory of permanent revolution and transitional

demands must be applied. Whilst the working class does not have the consciousness or political organisation to smash the monarchy, it will remain in place.

The Republican Communist Network work in Scotland was correct to make a priority of winning the SSP to fight for a bourgeois republic. We want to win the SSP to take up a militant and revolutionary struggle for the immediate abolition of the monarchy. The Network has two huge advantages in this. First the SSP is already formally republican. Secondly analysis of popular consciousness points to over 50% of the Scottish people in favour of abolishing the monarchy.

The question is, what is the SSP doing about it? Is popular opinion being galvanised and organised into a political struggle? The answer is no. Only the most token lip service is paid to republicanism. The SSP is hoping that the bourgeoisie will abolish the monarchy on their behalf. It is no coincidence that Sheridan takes the oath of allegiance for his seat in parliament.

If the SSP were a genuine republican party of the working class, it would already have made the campaign for a republic one of its central demands. But this should be done under the understanding that a bourgeois republic is the beginning of the struggle, not the end. The SSP would make clear that it was opposed to Blair's constitutional 'settlement'. Only by developing democratic rights to their limits can the Scottish people begin to exercise control over economic and social life.

It would be a mistake to underestimate the opposition to republicanism. We have seen the monarchist movement in Australia and the mobilisation of the Countryside Alliance for extra-parliamentary struggle in England. The idea that Scotland should go it alone would play right into the hands of these reactionaries.

A Scottish republic would be painted as nationalist, anti-English, and against the interests of the English and Welsh people. The issue of democracy would soon be lost in the political rhetoric of Scottish nationalism and English chauvinism. This is why republicans in Scotland should openly appeal to the people of England and Wales to join them in a united federal republic. We must be absolutely clear that the workers must unite across the border for a common democratic political objective - the federal republic, based on the principle and practice of national self-determination.

The CFR is therefore quite right to put forward the demand for a bourgeois republic if the aim is to put the leadership of the SSP on the spot. Unfortunately, looked at from this angle, the motion does not really do the bull by the horns and call the abolition of the monarchy exactly what it is - a bourgeois republic. This is a compromise or fudge with leftism.

However, calling for a bourgeois republic is not sufficient. It would mean tail-ending the SSP and the majority of the Scottish people. The vanguard cannot be content with proposing

what most people are already in favour of. We have to come up with a plan about how to abolish the monarchy. The motion says nothing about tactics except to rule out a referendum. We are not going to tell the workers what to do, only what not to do!

At this stage campaigning for a referendum could be a valid democratic tactic. There may be many other means of carrying out anti-monarchist and pro-republican agitation. But why limit our ambitions to this? If the SSP is serious about a republic, the party has to campaign for a constituent assembly. What differentiates the SSP and the SNP from the Tories, Labour and the Liberal Democrats is that the latter are claiming that devolution is a final constitutional settlement. This is something that must be fiercely rejected from every platform, in every election campaign and during every strike.

The SSP must establish its reputation as a militant anti-constitutional party. However, the agitation for a constituent assembly in the Bolshevik tradition is combined with the demand for a provisional republican government. The SSP must have the ambition to stand candidates and mobilise the working class behind a struggle for a provisional republican government. Such a government must aim to take power, convene a constituent assembly and take action against fascism and counterrevolution.

A motion, limiting itself to a general call for a bourgeois republic, without any tactical orientation, except opposing a referendum, is not sharp enough to put pressure on the SSP leadership. It lets them off the hook. In general terms the SSP leadership can agree with a bourgeois republic, as long it is not a serious commitment to action, and as long as they can pose left by calling it a 'socialist republic'.

Let us now turn to the alternative interpretation of the motion, which is presumably how Tom sees it. Here the abolition of the monarchy is the act of the workers' republic. This gives up totally the fight for a bourgeois republic. This would be a major error. It would mean forgetting the immediate struggle for a constituent assembly and a provisional government in favour of abstract propaganda for a workers' republic. At a time when major constitutional changes are taking place in Britain, for socialists to limit themselves to propaganda for a workers' republic confines communism to the very fringes of politics. Of course we are on the fringes already, but the point is to develop politics that puts us into the main field of political battle.

We must be clear on the relationship between the immediate task of abolishing the monarchy and the strategic aim of a workers' republic. Calling for a workers' republic is pie in the sky, when there are no soviets and the working class is on the defensive. It is especially so if communists cannot get right how the fight for a bourgeois republic should be conducted in the here and now.

This brings us back to different interpretations of the motion. If the motion was silent on the bourgeois republic and only advocated a workers' republic it would be quite wrong. It would mean forgetting about the immediate political struggle. On the other hand the motion appears to point to both. But it neglects to identify the need for a constituent assembly, provisional republican government, the central role of the working class and the need for unity with England and Wales in a federal republic. Of course the national dimension is avoided altogether. In the circumstances of the new Network this was perhaps inevitable. Still, if the bourgeois republic is included, it is Tom that has made the historic compromise, not Nick and Mary.

Dave Craig

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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In the first of two articles Peter Manson reports on South Africa

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SACP crisis looms

Last week, long-serving National Party stalwart Pik Botha announced that he had applied to join the African National Congress. Apartheid foreign minister for almost two decades, Botha was one of the mainstays of a regime that ruthlessly and brutally suppressed every trace of opposition in a life and death struggle to keep South Africa safe for the bloc of English-speaking capitalists, Afrikaner bureaucrats and big farmers, white labour aristocrats and international finance capital.

"I want to break with the racist attitudes of the past," he now says. "Afrikaners, whites, should support the ANC." He went on to explain that president Thabo Mbeki's government had proved itself a supporter of market-orientated economic policies: "We are lucky that we have leaders like Mandela and Mbeki." The ANC said it would be "receptive" to Botha's application and thought he could play a "meaningful role in building the nation".

This exchange speaks volumes about the nature of the current administration. Highly commended by the liberal bourgeoisie and most sections of South African and international capital for his Thatcherite cutbacks and fiscal prudence, epitomised by the wondrously misnamed 'growth, employment and redistribution' policy (Gear), Mbeki now presides over a state of affairs that the apartheid rulers could only dream of achieving: the complete negation of the revolutionary situation of the 1980s and the imposition of a new stability, albeit no doubt a temporary one.

What is more, the ANC still enjoys the support - less enthusiastic and more grudging, it is true - of a majority of the population. For a time it looked as though its electoral support would drop in last year's general election - two million fewer voters registered than in 1994 - but, despite the lower turnout, there was a large swing to the ruling party, which failed by just one seat to win a two-thirds majority.

No wonder the white elite is duly grateful and even such arch-reactionaries as Botha are beginning to knock at the ANC's door. But their most heartfelt gratitude, even if it remains unspoken, is not directed towards the governing party itself, but towards the least visible component of the ANC-led tripartite alliance, the South African Communist Party. It is the SACP, wielding the enormous prestige it won through its role in the great anti-apartheid upsurge that ended a decade ago, which is primarily responsible for cooling the masses' revolutionary ardour and handing them on a plate to the ruling class.

Using the language of revolution and class struggle, the SACP has up to now succeeded in persuading the hundreds of thousands of workers it leads and influences not only that their interests are being served, but that South Africa is firmly on the road to socialism. It plays a prominent role at all levels within the ANC and six of

its members sit in Mbeki's cabinet. During last year's election campaign the SACP softened its already muted formal opposition to Gear ("We all agree ... that fiscal discipline and care are required"), and trumpeted the rather dubious achievements of the ANC's first five years: according to the party's increasingly infrequent paper, "more than 700,000 houses have been built"; "we have connected two million households to electricity, brought water to three million people, and provided three million new phone lines" (*Umsebenzi* March-April 1999).

The reality is rather different. The 1994 reconstruction and development programme (RDP) actually promised *one million* new houses, which it admitted would do no more than keep pace with demand. The number of homeless and squatters has actually increased over the last five years. But the quality of these tiny, box-like 'homes', funded by the government but often constructed by cowboy builders, is pathetically low. Earlier this month 17 RDP houses collapsed, blown over by what the South African Weather Bureau called a "moderate breeze". Another 551 out of 600 at the same site were declared unsafe. The unqualified 'builder', Heinrich Kilpert, claimed that he had been forced to put up less stable houses than were budgeted for. The 30-square-metre hutches, for which he was paid R8.5 million (£850,000) from RDP funds, were "too big" (Johannesburg *Sunday Times* January 9).

As for electricity and water, in a disarmingly frank assessment of ANC "transformation programmes", the SACP admitted that millions could not pay for their power and had not been connected or had been cut off, and quoted the *Sunday World* to the effect that more than half of all water schemes were ineffective: "1.5 million people are not getting regular supplies of clean water" (*African Communist* 2nd quarter, 1999). While the RDP promised greater access to colleges and university, the same article confesses that "in 1999 there are actually fewer black students overall in tertiary education than a few years ago".

While the SACP feeds the masses with headlines such as "An anti-capitalist class struggle" in the populist *Umsebenzi* newspaper (August-September 1999), in its more rarefied publications it openly admits to the class-collaborationist nature of its "national democratic revolution" (NDR): "In many respects the last five years within SA have been marked by a strategic convergence between all forces committed to some kind of post-apartheid change in our country (ranging from the US state department, big capital inside SA, through to the liberation movement). This strategic convergence has been useful (indeed crucial), in that it has given us breathing space to consolidate the victory over apartheid, and to isolate the most reactionary forces completely opposed to even limited de-

mocratisation and deracialisation" (*African Communist* 2nd quarter, 1999).

With masterly understatement the article concludes this way: "While there have been important popular victories and a major process of change has been underway in our country over the last five years, it is not so clear whether these changes have strengthened the popular forces more than the key strategic opponent. Unless we are prepared to be honest and self-critical, the danger is that changes will be unstrategic (change, but not transformation), confined to marginally improving the lot of an impoverished majority, while actually entrenching the power and privileges of a partially deracialised elite." It is perfectly clear which forces have been strengthened, and the "danger" the SACP claims to foresee is in fact the actual reality.

In what passes for SACP 'theory', the party pretends that its active support for a government which is daily adding to the toll of jobless and forcing through yet more cutbacks is all part of "advancing, deepening and strengthening the NDR". Furthermore it is also part of the process of building "capacity for socialism, momentum towards socialism, and elements of socialism, here and now". This vacuous claptrap is totally meaningless, as can readily be seen when we examine what the SACP means by its "socialism".

Let its general secretary, Blade Nzimande, explain: "A socialist South Africa ... will be a South Africa in which, overwhelmingly, the ownership of the means of production ... is socialised, and not in the hands of those whose prime motive is profit-taking ... These enterprises would need to be subject to various forms of democratic control, including trade unions and workplace worker forums and committees" (*African Communist* 3rd quarter, 1999).

The groundwork for this socialism is to be achieved through gradual nationalisation by parliamentary legislation. Moreover, we are led to believe the foundations for it are already being laid. The party campaigns for a "strong, active state" (ignoring the fact that this is a *bourgeois* state), and wants to "defend and extend the public sector" (*Umsebenzi* August-September 1999). Yet far from nationalising the means of production like good reformist socialists, the ANC government of which the SACP is an integral part is steaming ahead with its programme of privatisation. Pathetically, leading party members and ANC MPs Yunus Carrim and Ncumisa Kondlo use the pages of *African Communist* to advocate public-private partnerships, claiming they are "different from privatisation" and help "advance social goals" (2nd quarter, 1999). It seems that PPP is also a form of "socialisation" - part of the building of "elements of socialism, here and now".

While the likes of Carrim and

Kondlo throw their weight behind the ANC's anti-working class policies, other SACP members find themselves on the other side. The party completely dominates the main trade union centre, Cosatu, which last year called prolonged industrial action against government-imposed, below-inflation pay rises in the public sector, and today is organising protests against cutbacks and job losses.

SACP MPs are bound not only by the 'collective responsibility' of the ANC, but also by the decisions of their own central committee, which in December pledged full support to union action to defend jobs and services. As Terry Bell, a leader of the International Socialist Movement, pointed out, this puts Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, the public service minister, in an unusual position: "As a minister, she has been at the forefront of the battles against the public service unions; as the deputy chairman of the SACP, she is apparently bound to support the unions against herself" (*Cape Times* January 14).

The party pretends to see no contradiction in such situations. For example, during last year's big pay battles it stated: "Leading party comrades find themselves ... on both sides of the public sector wage negotiations. Rather than seeing this as a cause of embarrassment or hesitation, the SACP, along with its alliance partners, sees in this reality a challenge" (*Umsebenzi* August-September 1999). *African Communist* commented at the time: "It would be entirely improper for the party to take a stand on the immediate wage issue. Government and the unions must negotiate" (3rd quarter, 1999).

While remaining studiously neutral over the public sector dispute, leaving it to its comrades in government and the unions to battle it out amongst themselves, the party is still perfectly capable of making revolutionary-sounding noises: "The SACP calls upon the working class to play a leading role in building organs of people's power where we work, where we live and where we study," exhorted Blade Nzimande, in a speech marking the 82nd anniversary of the Russian Revolution (*Umsebenzi* November-December 1999).

However, what he actually had in mind was "strong developmental committees, crime policing forums" and "democratic school governing bodies" - in other words the SACP should staff existing state bodies. As part of the party's 'Red October' campaign, comrade Nzimande called upon every communist to "distribute a condom or two" on World Aids Day.

Not surprisingly, there are growing tensions within the SACP as a result of its attempts to face both ways. The leadership is under enormous pressure precisely to "take a stand", and not only on wages. The SACP is still winning new members, but lately the recruits have tended to be of a different type - workers who are disillusioned with the ANC and who look to

the party to launch an independent fight.

A sizeable minority of the membership are questioning the continuation of the alliance itself. Vusikaya Mvuyisi, secretary of the 1,000-strong Khayelitsha district of the SACP, told me that the present arrangement - where the party is never seen to criticise the ANC, except in the mildest of terms, and where its parliamentary caucus has no public face - could end: "I believe the party will have to contest elections independently sooner or later. Those at the top who do not like it will have to leave."

Evidence of such tensions has started to appear in the pages of *African Communist*, which last year published excerpts from a report to the July congress from the national secretariat. Reflecting the pressure for a more independent line is the following passage: "In instances where we sense our position is different from that of the ANC, we have ... the tendency to say we therefore cannot adopt that position ... This is tantamount to decimating the identity of the party" (3rd quarter, 1999).

On the appointment of so many members to positions in government, the report asks: "Is it not time now that we honestly ask ourselves how the holding of such positions is practically and substantively advancing the overall strategic objectives and goals of the SACP?" This first tentative questioning of the ANC-SACP relationship is presented as a concern that "deployment to government has seriously deprived the SACP of some of its key cadres in day-to-day party work".

Clearly the leadership, while in its public statements continuing to give the impression that it will forever remain attached to the ANC, is manoeuvring itself into a position where, should it judge the time to be right, it can effect a smooth, painless break at minimum cost in terms of the defection of members, particularly those at the top.

At present Nzimande is doing no more than reviewing his options. He knows the present situation cannot continue indefinitely. There are deep divisions between, on the one side, those at the top who, viewing themselves as responsible politicians, yearn for class peace and believe they are fully entitled to take up the lucrative posts to which their role in the anti-apartheid struggle entitles them; and, on the other side, the many thousands of party militants and supporters who have illusions in its revolutionary credentials and are itching for action.

The crisis is looming and could well break out this year. While Nzimande will seek to minimise its effects, the non-SACP left must actively intervene in order to expose the careerists and hypocrites. The strategic aim must be to split the party, winning over revolutionary cadre and the broad mass of the rank and file to independent working class politics ●