

# Notes on rapprochement

## Factions and the politics of Leninism

OVER 14 years of open, public existence our evolving organisation has never deviated, even momentarily, from its single-minded, central and defining mission of reforging the Communist Party of Great Britain. Neither the *Morning Star* breakaway nor the Democratic Left liquidation marked the defeat, the nemesis of our great struggle. Nor did the collapse of bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Europe and the USSR. On the contrary, as the militant, revolutionary wing of the CPGB our responsibilities increased. The Party had been wrecked but as members of the Party we were duty bound to re-establish it on the soundest programmatic and organisational basis. Leninists had to, and did, carry on disciplined and coordinated Party work using every avenue and opportunity to win new forces to communism.

However, as we said in the supplement 'Party, non-ideology and faction', to the degree we succeed in renewing the "strength and vigour of the CPGB", that "can power a rapprochement, in stages, with all revolutionary proletarian forces" (*Weekly Worker* December 15 1994). That does not mean unity for unity's sake. It means unity for the sake of Party work and the class struggle. Rapprochement is achievable through the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB precisely because it represents the *only established and effective* pro-Party centre. At the moment all Party work in progress, not least in the vital field of elections, is being carried out under the PCC banner. Thus, as the only consistent practitioner of Party work and the custodian of the Party principle, we have the responsibility and the right to call up potentially pro-Party people from other groups and from other traditions.

The process of unifying all partisans of our class into a force capable of giving the working class a viable alternative to Labourism (and thus capitalism), has to include more than those who consider themselves Marxists and Leninists. No serious Communist Party can afford to ignore libertarian and syndicalistic workers who are revolutionary but at the moment mistrust the party idea because of negative experience of Labourism, 'official communism' and the sundry Trotskyist groups. We firmly believe that many an abstract theoretical difference can be resolved, or at least put into proper perspective, by ongoing comradesly debates in which all teach and all learn. Certainly selfless, diligent and united communist work will overcome every manner of present-day schismatic quarrel, pedantry and haloed exclusiveness.

As a first very modest step in the process of rapprochement we selected three small groups - *Open Polemic*, Communist Action Group and Independent Communists - and called upon them to join us in the CPGB. The hand of friendship was extended not because of any particular close theoretical correlation between them and the majority of existing Party members. No, we called upon these comrades primarily because they formally stand for the reforging of the CPGB and claim to oppose pro-Labourism, ie the main form of liquidationism in today's British conditions. The offer was made to them of full *factional rights* and a mutually agreed *contractual agreement* on the basis of the struggle for the Party and broad acceptance of the 'what we fight for' credo presented in each edition of the *Weekly Worker*. The coming over of even one minute communist group during a period of reaction such as this, would, for us, be vastly more significant than the paltry numbers might suggest. The unity of different *opinions* in defence of Partyism would surely send a wonderfully positive and inspiring message reverberating throughout the left in the United Kingdom and beyond.

The purpose of this article is to inform readers as to the state of discussion, debate and counter-debate thus far. As the initiated would have predicted, a tangled skein. Inevitably we have been confronted with, and will have to hack through, all manner of side issues, diversions and, frankly, untruths. Having cleared the path again we can then hopefully take our project of rapprochement another step or two forward. Will any of them

come with us? That still remains to be seen. Fragmentation in our movement breeds and sustains dogmatism and fear of others. As the founders of our CPGB showed, principled unity requires tolerance, honesty and courage. Apart from the only partial exception of *Open Polemic* the method employed by our selected candidates for rapprochement seems dictated, for the present anyway, by the defensive need to generate self-justifying smog, not unifying light. Still, as they say, patience earns its reward.

## Party

As should be the case let us begin and concentrate on the Party question. We are presented with a bewildering variety of descriptions of what was, what is and what ought to be.

For example, in a letter to *Open Polemic* dated November 20 1994 the Independent Communists let it be known that "some of us are not against entry" into the CPGB "on principle" (*Open Polemic* No1, March 1 1995). Before "I could enter," writes the un-named author, "I would want guarantees on the following" ... representation on the "national committee" and editorial board, an internal bulletin, freedom of discussion and the rights of factions, including printing facilities at cost price. All reasonable and broadly acceptable as far as I am concerned.

True, our friend expresses mistrust of our sincerity and commitment to democracy because of the editorial decision to trim the Independent Communist's 1,500 word 'Open letter' to some 800 words when it was reproduced in the *Weekly Worker* of October 27 1994 (it was circulated in full to every member and, though the comrade would have it otherwise, the cuts were made for reasons of space in our paper, not because criticisms were "too near the bone").

Nevertheless in early January 1995 another letter was circulating in our ranks signed by Tom Cowan, the sole spokesperson of the Independent Communists. "Like many others," he writes, "I joined the old Leninist organisation, only to have this organisation liquidated and a leftwing copy of the old social democratic CPGB put in its place." Supposedly this liquidation and our so-called general bureaucratic practices have caused "a great loss of members".

Comrade Cowan did enter our ranks some time ago. That is correct. He also resigned a short while later - though, if I recall rightly, due to his business priorities not because somehow we had liquidated ourselves. That he, a sworn enemy of social democracy and presumably one of those who are "not against entry" into the CPGB, should now concoct such a strange version of past events says nothing about us. But it does say something about his own deficit in Party spirit. Indeed Cowan's group was defined from the start not by any common world view, rather *independence* from the CPGB. Besides himself, the Independent Communists are a lifeless mix of localism and Stalinite converts, ie people with whom Cowan agrees on nothing theoretically, only the need to excuse anti-Partyism.

The Communist Action Group's formulations are even more confused, evasive and dishonest. In the course of describing their "points of difference" with us in a rather disjointed official statement, it is reduced to this absurdity: "The CPGB (PCC) feel that the Communist Party has already been refounded by them. They feel that the way forward is to build their own organisation through electoral work. They feel that all communists should work within and under the discipline of their own organisation. They also feel that all other communist groups are essentially 'splits' from them" (*Communist Action* No6, March-April 1995).

Attributing feelings to others is of consummate

ease. Anything can be invented. For a serious polemic however, authoritative and representative sources and actions should be carefully sought out and conscientiously presented. Arguments with disembodied quotes, phantom thoughts and distorted instances produce nothing of value. They just waste time and space in their refutation. (I shall not bother refuting their more silly arguments such as the attempt to label me pro-Stalin in 1992, pro-Trotsky in 1993 and pro-Tony Cliff in 1994. How puerile.)

The PCC openly and honestly fights for all communists to democratically work together under a central leadership, yes, including on the terrain of elections. To that we plead guilty. Practical proposals about how to achieve that desirable and necessary end for communists have been advanced. Needless to say, as to the suggestion that we think the CPGB has "already been refounded" and all communist groups are splits from our organisation, this is patently and pathetically false. Our principled, unremitting and unfolding struggle, as CPGB members fighting to reforge the CPGB, simply means we are best, surely uniquely, placed to act as a focal point for rapprochement around the Party idea.

CAG will not have any of this. For its Brian-like - "I have never claimed to be a man to be followed" - leader Len Holloway, things appear to exist as fixed categories. They have to be one thing or the other. They cannot be both. Hence we read that the PCC and the Party organisations which work under its auspices have nothing to do with the "CPGB as was" (*Communist Action* No6, March-April 1995). Why? Because we supposedly originated as a tiny "entryist project into a dying reformist-dominated party". According to Holloway the Leninists of the CPGB were "not formed as a 'wing' of the CPGB but as a group of expelled NCPers". Besides displaying yet again his contempt for the CPGB and acceptance of Euro domination, the point of trying to establish this NCP antecedent is transparent. It is so he can go on to claim that the PCC *therefore* has no, or only the most tenuous, connection with the CPGB, which was anyway, according to Holloway, "wound up by the Nina Temples".

Holloway's underlying philosophical method is worth drawing out. It informs his whole critique of the PCC and his refusal to defend the CPGB not only when it was under the domination of the Euros but after they had liquidated themselves into the Democratic Left. Clearly Holloway is mired in formal logic. He lacks the will or training necessary to grasp the higher logic of dialectics and the movement through nothing, being and becoming. The three laws on which his logic is based are well known, and in Holloway's increasingly dogmatic and defensive articles produce lamentable anti-Party conclusions:

1. The law of identity. 'A' equals 'A'. A tiny group of expelled NCPers equals a tiny group of expelled NCPers. Expelled NCPers can therefore only be "a fragment of the communist movement".
2. The law of non-contradiction. 'A' is not equal to a non-'A'. A tiny group of expelled NCPers is not a wing of the CPGB. A "small number of [Conrad's] supporters may well have been members of the old party before it was wound up by the Nina Temples" but it is "ridiculous" to "insist that his organisation is the continuation of the CPGB that was."
3. The law of the excluded middle. If 'A' equals 'A', it cannot equal non-'A' as well. If all we have is a tiny group of expelled NCPers and a "dying reformist-dominated party," and if one of those things is not a tiny group of expelled NCPers then it must be a "dying reformist dominated party".

Yet, while Holloway would have us think only in terms of his common sense fixed categories, if we introduce the lived reality of our struggle their limited, narrow and one-dimensional nature becomes readily apparent.

So what something constitutes our nothing? It cannot be denied that four founding comrades were in the New Communist Party for two years or so in the late 1970s. No secret has been made of this. Before that however they all had a well established record of CPGB membership. Mine in fact goes back to the 1960s. It involved not only serving in leading official district level positions in the Young Communist League and CPGB but the unofficial national factional structure - besides the NCP, here was the origin of the Straight Leftists, Communist Liaison and part at least of the *Morning Star's* CPB; all of whom our muddled Holloway says "have as much right to claim the mantle of 'true continuers of the CPGB tradition'."

The NCP split was in essence a split in the CPGB's centrist opposition and Holloway alludes to my publicly issued statement that I deeply regret the decision to join and take those who were prepared to follow me into it. The NCP was a dead end. That soon dawned on us.

Nevertheless, after a brief, pre-planned and self-educational *factional* struggle in the NCP, the route back to the CPGB followed by myself and my closest comrades was via membership of the Communist Party of Turkey. We joined as a group in order to learn from what we thought was the most advanced theory and practice to be found in the world communist movement at that time. Our declared intention from the beginning was to return to British working class politics as soon as we felt ready.

Holloway is no doubt aware of some of this. I suppose though it would not sound right if he was to *condemn* - of course using his well practised sneer - our pre-PCC organisation as a group of young communists, who having been in the communist movement for half their lives (and all their adult lives), were returning to *their* Party as qualitatively better communists - bringing back with them as they did the good and bad experience of both the NCP and TKP.

No one "begged" the Euros for readmittance, as Holloway colourfully puts it. Indeed the biggest difficulty the comrades had was obstruction from worried Straight Leftists (including supporters of the future Communist Liaison).

However our intention was not to work within the stifling confines of bureaucratic centralism but organise revolutionary rebellion against all forms of opportunism and liquidationism. Our method and aim was crystallised in the slogan we coined: reforge the Party. That we did as Party members. And we did it openly through the polemical journal *The Leninist*, the forerunner of the *Weekly Worker*. For the first time openness went hand in hand with pro-Partyism.

Our ranks grew slowly but steadily. Many new to communist politics were attracted. Existing elements within the Party and the YCL were also won; four members of its national council were our supporters (incidentally Holloway uses the verb 'small' as often as possible to describe us so he can claim some equality for his Stalinite group - size, in today's communist politics, is very relative).

## Past Party?

What sort of Party record has our old friend Len Holloway? That has been difficult to publicly establish. In *Communist Action* No4 he indignantly told me to "mind my own business". Thankfully two issues later, still huffing and puffing on about security and my supposed "obsessive interest" in his identity, we have succeeded in wheedling it out of him. Holloway tells us he joined the CPGB during the miners' Great Strike. "There," the well read ex-Labourite strangely "expected to find thousands of members of the Leninist faction". Sadly we were nowhere near that strong. Anyway, after working with our organisation "for a year" he "drifted away". "True I did not argue my corner," acknowledges Holloway, though he admits our comrades urged him to speak up and publish too.

So why did he drift away? Was it some matter

of high principle? Hardly; in his own words he could not stomach "chasing after the official Jarrow commemoration march" and launching the Unemployed Workers Charter. Apparently he and the other comrade assigned to agitate along the route of the TUC sponsored march were not unemployed - that, for his benefit, was also the case with many CPGB members in the NUWM during the 1930s. But working to build a campaign to fight for the organisation of the unemployed was all too, too "cynical" for our comrade.

Where did his drift land him? In the bosom of the Euros. Holloway lets it be known that he "tried to do what work" he "could" within the Euro wing of the CPGB. But a habit was beginning to take hold, a pattern was being set. "After some time, I had had enough," Holloway limply confesses. Can it be presumed that this was the historic moment when Holloway tore up his Party card? Did he this time fight his "corner," ie openly? Again no. Outlandishly, to find out his reasons for leaving the Euros we are expected to "ask" those with whom he was closely working, ie ultra-revisionist hyenas such as Dave Green, Monty Johnstone and Gerry Pocock. "They knew," he light-mindedly announces.

Where next? After joining "some comrades of mine" (the future CAG?) in what was then the Gorbachevite NCP, Holloway was four months later appointed editor of its terrible and tallist rag, *The New Worker*. How did he use his position? Did he encourage debate and discussion? Again no. Indeed using his "power as editor" he publicly discloses, for the first time I believe, that, arrogantly and bureaucratically, he spiked an important article by his NCP general secretary, Eric Trevett.

Desperate for new diplomatic links, the prostituted Trevett decided to try his luck with *juche* - the madcap Kimilsungist ideology of the North Korean state. Revolting, but surely no reason to silence one's general secretary. Laughably, Holloway tells us he had good reason: *juche* was not at the time "NCP policy".

Holloway did not use his unique position of "power" to openly criticise. He censored. Neither did he factionally organise in the NCP and fight its wrong ideas. He "resigned"; afterwards he was "falsely accused of factionalism" (*Communist Action* No6, March-April 1995). I repeat, what a ludicrous and vacillating career, what a lack of serious open debate, what a lack of Party morality.

Holloway now credits his CAG with putting "reforging the party at the centre of our work". I wish it were true. As Lenin himself pointed out, "not everyone who voices cheap phrases about partyism is really pro-Party" (*VI Lenin CW* Vol 16, Moscow 1977, p343). We need not dwell on its work. CAG darkly whispers about the dangerous conspiracies "its cadres" are engaged in and all in all makes as much propaganda noise as it can muster about trailing behind Red Action and Afa. It hopes some of the terroristic glory will vicariously rub off. Sad to say the comrades' independent communist work is virtually non-existent; they *boast* about putting up stickers in London! Perhaps we should dub them stickies!

More to the point, what Party does CAG want to reforge? After all, with hindsight, before the Democratic Left liquidation Holloway contemptuously dismisses the CPGB as "dying" and "reformist dominated". Nevertheless there seems to be some confusion. Is the object to be reformed an entirely new party resulting from the "regroupment of Leninist forces"? (Editorial *Communist Action* No2, winter 1993-4). Why then talk of the CPGB at all? Their Mark James does after all bury our Party at birth in his closed mind. The infant died from a Leninist disorder. He argues that by adopting Lenin's electoral tactics it "effectively compromised the political independence of the CPGB, with regard to Labour, from day one" (*Communist Action* No5, winter 1994-5). On the other hand, Holloway says he is "crystal clear" that the past must be raised from its cold grave. He wants to reforge "a" Communist Party "in the tradition of the old CPGB," ie the CPGB circa mid-1930s (*Communist Action* No6, March-April 1995).

CAG has recently republished the programme *For Soviet Britain*, adopted by the CPGB at our 13th Congress in February 1935. Holloway comically says this dusty old centrist relic provides the "basis for revolutionary regroupment," not least because it stands in "stark contrast" to the "radical reformism" of the later *British road to socialism* programme.

*For Soviet Britain* does contain some general truths about the evils of capitalism. Nor is it wrong when it insists that socialism can only come as a result of "forceful" revolution and a "workers' dictatorship" (*For Soviet Britain*, London 1935, p8). Yet it reads like an election manifesto. Through its ephemeral pages troop a cadaverous army of facts and figures and frankly utopian plans that only speak for the year 1935. As explained in the

book *Which road?*, such irrelevancies are "damning evidence of an inability to grasp the strategic purposes of a real communist programme" and hence evidence of the rightist trajectory which *directly led* to the British road and eventually organisational liquidationism (J Conrad *Which road?*, London 1991, p127).

Hardly surprisingly, *For Soviet Britain* was dropped within four years; opportunism requires constant facelifts. The replacement *Draft programme* was to all intents and purposes a rewrite. Yet there were important innovations. Comintern's project of international class collaboration to "safeguard" bourgeois democracy was taken on board. But the most significant shift to the right was the perspective of electing a "labour movement" majority to parliament. A new proletarian state would emerge not from revolution but from the new (parliamentary) government's call to rebuff the "violent resistance of the powerful financial magnates" (*Draft programme*, London 1939, p60).

From this Militant Labour style right centrism it was only one step, and a logical one, to the 1951 *British Road to Socialism*, written with the touching help of one of the CAG's "major revolutionary figures", Stalin (since No5 Trotsky seems to have been quietly tipped out from the CAG's "what we stand for" pantheon). George Matthews, former deputy general secretary of the

"Not everyone who voices cheap phrases about partyism is really pro-Party"

CPGB, decided a few years ago to "put the record straight" on this. Stalin, he stated, was the main mover behind the "sharp and pungent formulations" in the *British Road* (*Changes* September 14 1991). In truth then the family name of Democratic Left is Stalin. The children of Cronus might have dethroned their father but he vomited them forth. Or is that just another example of what CAG rather hysterically calls our "slander of revolutionary leaders"? (Editorial *Communist Action* No5, winter 1994-5).

So when for CAG did the CPGB cease being the organisation all communists should defend and join: 1939, 1951, 1956, 1968, 1977, 1991? The opportunists in one guise or another had been liquidating it for many years. They dominated the Party and used it in their own factional interests long before Holloway was even born. Yet throughout the 1980s Leninists fought back as best we could and recruited new members to the Party. Should pro-Partyists have done otherwise? Holloway does not say. Maybe he cannot. Whatever the case his all too apparent formal logic leads him time and again to the same sorry liquidationist conclusions.

He says only a "small number" of our supporters were "members of the old party". In fact all our members were by definition members, not of the "old party" but the CPGB. He has a point to make though. The PCC is not the continuation of the "CPGB as was" (*Communist Action* No6, March-April 1995). It is dead, for Holloway, because Nina Temple and the Euros deem it so. For pro-Party members, however, to endorse or validate Euro democracy is effectively to call for desertion and final liquidation. It is a call for the further disorganisation of communist forces. It is unconsciously to do the work of the class enemy. Genuine communists do not stop being Party members because of a Euro vote in Congress House. No matter how few they may be, the duty of communists is to defend their Party. CPGB members, organised under the banner of the PCC, did just that. We defended our Party - as pledged in our founding statement issued a decade before the Euros liquidated themselves.

The PCC does not accept the right of the Euros to deprive communists of their Party membership or duties. To accept that Nina Temple "wound up" the CPGB is nothing but liquidationism. That does not mean the PCC "feels" that it has

refounded the CPGB or is the continuation of the CPGB "as was". The PCC only claims what is. It is the continuation of itself, an evolving self with new, higher responsibilities and tasks. The PCC is the leading Party committee that coordinates the struggle to re-establish, reforge and renew the Party.

## Ideal Party

CAG is firmly convinced that none of the "groups which currently exist" provide the organisational basis "for the future Communist Party, even in embryo" (*Communist Action* No6, March-April 1995). The "process of revolutionary regroupment" Holloway envisages is, one might conclude, therefore ritualistic and highly problematic. Nevertheless, despite the self-effacing, and in my opinion surely too modest assessment, that organisationally CAG itself offers nothing, not even in "embryo", for the reformed CPGB, that does not prevent it laying down a 1935 programmatic blueprint. Nor, presumably using the authority of a dead past, does it stop CAG ridiculously telling the still to be reformed CPGB that it "must be 80% workers - and so must its leadership" (*Communist Action* No6, March-April 1995).

If CAG is at fault because it idealises a tried and failed past, *Open Polemic* is at fault for the opposite, though in the last analysis, the same reason. *Open Polemic* has conjured up, as if from thin air, its very own ideal for the future, one which it is claimed transcends the "leader centralism" characteristic of Leninist parties (Plato had his *Republic*, More his *Utopia*, *Open Polemic* has its 'Future party of a new type'). Having wondrously been spirited forth by the revisionist parvenues of *Open Polemic*, the humble practical workers, scattered and confused in the 30 "vanguards", are expected to gratefully receive the idea, "dissolve" their old organisations and unite along prescribed lines. Incapable of providing anything practical, *Open Polemic* actually suggests that the CPGB "adopt" their "constitutional structure" and do the job for them. It is an "historic opportunity," they ineptly tell us (Letter, March 27 1995).

CAG suggests, for its own liquidationist and sectarian reasons, that there has been some kind of terminal wipe out, which has left behind not one fragment, faction or group worth the bother of defending in the communist movement. Being has become absolute nothingness. The formless void is, we suppose, to be filled with CAG's 1935 word. That said, CAG does, in its more coherent and down to earth materialist moments, possess the virtue of recognising the primacy of unity in action (for what and with whom is a different matter). Yes, the CPGB will and can only be reformed through practice - theory is the guide.

In contrast *Open Polemic* begins with what people say. Not what they do. The CPGB will be reformed, according to the *Open Polemic* schema, simply by "all those who profess" to be "Marxist-Leninists" getting together. Once it is realised, thanks to *Open Polemic*, that they all, or at least most of them, agree on the fundamentals - democratic centralism, proletarian internationalism, dictatorship of the proletariat, leading role of the party - then and only then, will there be effective unity in action, and even that must take place within a flawless and perfectly balanced towering construction already designed by *Open Polemic*.

It should be emphasised that the PCC has no romanticised model lightly plucked from the past ready to dump on the future CPGB. Apart from taking what is most general, what is universal from former times, in particular the Bolshevik experience, and absorbing the negative lessons of 'official communism', it is the present in its unfolding concreteness that determines our organisational structures, measures and proposals. It is neither desirable nor possible to reforge some CPGB of yore. Any such suggestion is pure idealism and by definition reactionary. Liberation cannot be found by going back. Let me deploy a rather appropriate old English proverb: *thynges don cannot be called agayn*. The past lives in the present but the present must live by going forward. Trying to raise the 1935 Lazarus should, I would suggest, be left to necrophiliacs.

Despite their supposed pristine originality, *Open Polemic*'s utopian plans for the future are equally reactionary. They neither stand on the general truths of Leninism nor do they have any organic connection with the objective conditions, needs and tasks of the present. But let us examine *Open Polemic* and its proposals in a bit more detail. Three main texts will be used: 1. 'Democracy and centralism', to be found, along with a diagrammatic model of the 'Future party of a new type', in *Open Polemic* No11, dated March 1995; 2. *Open Polemic*'s leaflet 'Against leader centralism', distributed at the CPGB's school in Catalonia

October 1994; 3. March 27 1995 *Open Polemic* letter to the PCC and members of the CPGB.

Essentially *Open Polemic* would seem to be the result of the disintegration of 'official communism'. Yet their response was different to most. Instead of quietly creeping off into oblivion these comrades had the inspired idea of staying in politics by staying quiet on the great issues and moments that have divided the revolutionary workers' movement in the 20th century. Their ideal party is "historically non-specific and multanimous" (Letter, March 27 1995). Thus while supposedly marking themselves off from anarchism and reformism, they effectively adopt an agnostic stance when it comes to Leninism, Trotskyism, Stalinism, Maoism, etc. It is not that the practice of reorganising the CPGB and then mass Party work will sift what is true from what is untrue, what is important from what is unimportant. For *Open Polemic* the main thing is abstract principle and dialogue (in response to discussion, *Open Polemic* shows a hopeful willingness to think).

Naively, but true to its idealist method, *Open Polemic* trusts that via dialogue healthy red flesh will be attached to the abstract white bones of its fundamentals, and through this (Socratic) dialectical process "existing ideological demarcations" will begin to be resolved and the conditions laid for "the ideological integration of the revolutionary movement" ('Against leader centralism').

The possibility of one of the existing 'vanguardist' organisations "eventually" triumphing over "the others" is, thankfully, not ruled out. However, the ascendancy of the reformed mass Communist Party would, it appears, not please *Open Polemic*. Almost "inevitably" we would not conform with their ideal. "Our concern," it writes, "would be that any national or international revolutionary party emerging from this kind of process," that is the triumph of one over many, "would be, not a party of the new type, but another variation of the 'leader centralist' party of the old type" ('Against leader centralism').

Hence in the name of their own peculiar 'Future party of a new type' *Open Polemic* irresponsibly lumps together the CPGB with what it dismissively calls the 'vanguards', ie just about every Stalinite, Trotskyite and Maoist group, sect and sectlet imaginable. Its readers are told that the PCC is merely one of the 30 varieties.

Sheer philistinism. It would be pointless to list our differences with every microscopic entity here. Suffice to say, what distinguishes the PCC from SWP, Militant Labour, CPB and the other significant groups on the left is not some obscure theoretical nuance but the *political content* of the coming British revolution, eg the question of Labourism. Remember the 1984-5 miners' strike. It brought militant workers into direct conflict with Labourism, not into unity with it. Besides the Tories and the state, the miners and their mass of active supporters had to fight a Labour Party and TUC fifth column. Miners waved the hangman's noose before Kinnock and Willis. I say it is a pity they did not lynch the bastards. SWP, Militant Labour, CPB, etc say it is a pity they did not elect 'em. To claim that our differences with the pro-Labour left is nothing but stale ancient history ignores the living class struggle. More, it is to lapse into gross opportunism.

Crucially there is the Party question. It is, of course, unpalatable but given the shattered state of the CPGB the *core of our Party* has, for the moment, the size and reach of a group. But those fighting to rebuild the Party cannot be equated with those who tail Labourism or define themselves according to some abstract totem.

It is undeniable that at present our forces are tiny and the influence of the CPGB has been severely diminished. However, if they are at all serious about reorganising our Party *Open Polemic* should not belittle or dismiss what has been done (both theoretically and practically) by the organisations represented by the PCC. Quite the reverse. The task of *Open Polemic* ought to lie in facilitating the development of Partyism. It should become a Party publication and explain to others the essence and significance of the struggle that has been conducted by the PCC. Branches and cells have been re-established. Local, regional, parliamentary and Euro elections are being fought. Our press is frequent and principled. Theory has been developed.

*Open Polemic* should join us in developing that work. Criticise and perfect should be the motto. A journal that calls itself communist and declares for revolutionary unity can legitimately act as a forum for debate across a wide spectrum. But on every major question of Marxist theory and practice - Labour Party and elections, state and fascism, Ireland and women, former USSR and socialist democracy - the line must be drawn beyond which begin the deviations from Partyism, towards bureaucratic socialism (Labourite and Stalinite)

on the one side, and anarchism on the other.

Unfortunately, as we know, instead of joining in the theoretical and practical work of rebuilding the Party, *Open Polemic* tries to organise the dialogue, which will, it childishly believes, overcome present, so-called artificial, demarcations, and allow unity to be achieved on a "non-programmatic basis" ("Against leader centralism"). Indeed *Open Polemic* wants us to forget the real struggle to reforge the CPGB and submerge ourselves instead in its endless abstract chatter, which, because it involves neither programme nor practice, will not and cannot produce the ends *Open Polemic* professes to desire.

In this difficult period of reaction and demoralisation we often come across the flotsam and jetsam who in all seriousness invoke this or that supposed principle in order to justify their unprincipled retreat from Partyism. *Open Polemic* is, I fear, in danger of becoming their tribune. The fact of the matter is that in the name of overcoming 'vanguardism' *Open Polemic* panders to, and indulges in, sectarianism - shades of Leon Trotsky pre-1917.

Of course *Open Polemic* unites nothing except crackpot Stalinists, sad loners, dilettantes and general political decomposition. Having self-appointed itself ringmaster, its editorial board presides over a freak show in which irrelevant hole-in-the-corner grouplets - International Leninist Workers Party, Finsbury Communist, Partisan, etc - parade their grotesque, deformed dogmas. To be honest, I have infinitely more confidence in anarchistic and reformist workers coming over to Partyism than these 'Marxist-Leninists'.

Communists take workers' and serious left organisations as their basis. "Unity without organisation is impossible," runs one of Lenin's dictums. So we want to unite active workers. The idea of uniting *Open Polemic's* bickering circus, most of them semi-detached from reality, is a reactionary utopia. The idea of uniting all workers willing to rebuild their CPGB, that is our cause.

Needless to say we have no intention of barring anyone, not even sectarians, from the hard work of reorganising the CPGB. If they abide by majority decisions and fulfil assigned tasks this will provide the best conditions for the open battle of ideas and scientific enlightenment. Certainly the CPGB we reforge must be strong enough to contain within itself many contradictions, many theories, many spirits. What matters is the unity of the working class in revolutionary action.

That is why in the 'what we fight for' column in the *Weekly Worker* there are only the most general principles. The draft programme to be published later this year will be informed by the same approach. As is surely right, it will concentrate on immediate needs and democratic demands. The future will only be dealt with in the maximum terms of the revolutionary process, ie resolving the contradictions of present-day class society. It will neither be a talmudic commentary on the past nor a book of futuristic revelations. It will be a guide to practice.

## Democratic centralism

What manner of organisational regime CAG aspires to can easily be discovered by a cursory examination of the 1935 CPGB. As we have detailed elsewhere, whatever its virtues the CPGB did not practice democratic centralism but bureaucratic centralism. The programme was centrist, *ipso facto* the internal practice must be centrist as well. There was no atmosphere of healthy on-going discussion and debate, no room for serious open criticisms. Everyone was expected to conform with and carry out Stalin's latest dictat. If that is the soiled banner CAG wants to pick up, it is welcome to it. Only the crazy will follow.

Defending the 1935 CPGB because it was the advanced part of the working class is perfectly correct. Glorifying the opportunism that was corrupting and undermining it, even if it is by a marginal group, is perverse if not macabre. That CAG combines dull Stalinism with an anarchistic advocacy of terrorism shows just how far it is removed from Marxism-Leninism.

*Open Polemic* seems to share, though not proclaim, the same Stalinist prejudices and essential world outlook as CAG. Only where CAG veers towards anarchistic terrorism, *Open Polemic* veers towards anarchistic liberalism. According to it, the old lines of demarcation in the workers' movement between reform and revolution, stateism and self-liberation, Partyism and anti-Partyism are now secondary. Instead, egotistically and surely fantastically, *Open Polemic* comes perilously near to claiming that it itself constitutes the main line of demarcation today. "The central demarcation

in the present period," it writes, "lies between those who continue to reject, and those who support open polemic across the revolutionary movement as the most necessary expression of the revolutionary interest" ("Against leader centralism").

Having been hurt in previous encounters with bureaucratic regimes that outwardly and not very convincingly pass themselves off as practitioners of democratic centralism, the *Open Polemic* comrades are now conditioned to avoid any repetition - Pavlov could not have trained them better. Unfortunately in recoiling retrospectively from the 'official' CPGB, *Proletarian*, NCP, etc, they unintentionally reject Leninism both historically and ontologically. While paying lip service to the achievements of Bolshevism and the principles of democratic centralism, *Open Polemic* is retreating in the direction of permanent chatter and disorganisation.

In effect wheeling out the hoary old story that Leninism was directly responsible for Stalinism, *Open Polemic* says that the Bolshevik Party was unable to escape the autocratic conditions of its birth. From the beginning onwards its practice was "not" democratic centralism but straightforward "centralism" ("Against leader centralism"). Why was that? Because Lenin argued initially, in 1902, for trust in professional revolutionaries and appointment, not election. Admittedly this does not bring forth harsh *Open Polemic* criticism, rather purple phrases of regret. *Open Polemic* can, nevertheless, only see the lack of formal democracy. It is unable to grasp that the essence of democratic centralism is not elections within the basic units.

Democratic centralism is a fundamental organisational principle. That is why in the "event of a state of emergency" there cannot be any "temporary suspension" of it, as *Open Polemic* ridiculously suggests. That would be akin to suspending the Party. Without democratic centralism there can be no revolutionary Communist Party. For genuine communists democratic centralism is not fixed, not timeless. It is the dialectical (ie, the moving, developing, changing and interconnected) unity between theory and practice.

Centralism makes the Communist Party more than the sum of its parts; the subordination of the minority to the majority allows the Party to strike as a fist. However, what ensures that fist strikes in the right direction is revolutionary theory. Marxism-Leninism as the most advanced revolutionary theory is therefore inseparable from the organisation of communists. Organisation has to flow from and be built upon unity around the struggle for Marxist-Leninist theory - that requires the oxygen of on-going democratic debate, criticism and self criticism.

Because of their dialectical understanding of democratic centralism, communists do not fetishise formal democracy. Obviously, in countries where the state governs using dictatorial methods the Party has to operate illegally. That means, as with the Bolsheviks, many aspects of democracy have to be curbed (not only election of cell secretaries but public meetings, open congresses, etc).

However, as Lenin and orthodox communism, as opposed to *Open Polemic*, make clear, if there is trust among comrades, crucially rank and file trust in the leadership, then not even the most terroristic dictatorship can prevent the Communist Party operating freely among the masses and openly struggling for correct aims and principles. Formal aspects of democracy cannot function. Yet as long as there is open criticism and discussion there is democratic centralism. In the communist press different ideas contend, criticisms are made and answered. Though, in other words, "there might not be formal democracy there is genuine democracy" (J Conrad *Problems of communist organisation*, London 1993, p10).

For Leninism, in spite of the inescapable fact that the Russian revolution had its own specific features, the Communist Party, the Bolshevik party of a new type was "universally applicable" (*Ibid* p8). In contrast and in diametrical opposition *Open Polemic* is of another opinion. It would have it that the practice of democratic centralism taken as their "model" by the parties of the Third International was inapplicable. The consequences of adopting the Bolshevik model were, it implies, "disastrous". But so it can still whither on about democratic centralism being one of its four basic principles it needs another category through which it can criticise the practice of everything it dislikes. Thus we have "leader centralism".

What does this anarchistic-liberal catchphrase mean? *Open Polemic* sets the stage. "It has long been accepted" - including, I would presume, in the *Open Polemic* book, by Lenin and the Bolsheviks - "that leaders, elected at a previous congress, should develop the programme and strategy to place before the next party congress,

for the general assent of the assembled delegates who will then "put it into practice" ("Against leader centralism"). This leads, *Open Polemic* suggests, to a self-perpetuating leadership, suppression of minority views and passivity among the mass of members.

What is the *Open Polemic* cure? It is to throw out Leninism. It denies the right of leading committees to initiate or formulate anything to do with the Party's "programme, strategy and tactics". That must "constitutionally" be the sole "responsibility" of the "basic units", which would have to be of "a composition and numerical size to ensure political self-reliance and the capability to develop the education of its members and to direct its own activities in all spheres - economic, social and political" ("Against leader centralism").

Put another way, cells would need to be capable of substituting for the Party as a whole. They would have to be enormous and thus, in my view, unwieldy and incredibly (criminally) wasteful. Instead of being flexible, made up of three, four or five comrades who can act and meet at a moment's notice, they would plod from one routine weekly meeting to another. Instead of being capable of specialising through the division of revolutionary labour, they would be jack of all trades and master of none, ie they would be next to useless for a revolutionary party.

It gets worse. Comrades serving on leadership committees would be subject, not to instant recall and regular congress elections, but *limited tenure*, ie, I would guess, one or two terms, after which they would no longer have the same right as other comrades to be elected. The continuity of an experienced body of leaders would thus constantly be broken and comrades demoted simply because of anarchistic fear of leaders.

Such a state of affairs cannot help the revolution. It can only help the bourgeoisie. *Open Polemic* forgets what the Party is for. In their leaderphobia *Open Polemic* would effectively kill the Party so as to make sure it never will be dominated by self-serving leaders. Belying the title of its journal *Open Polemic* believes that constitutions, bureaucratic methods and the organised mistrust of the leadership provides the guarantee against opportunism.

There is a different, Leninist, approach, to which we adhere. Only the grave provides a guarantee against opportunism. What is needed for a healthy revolutionary life and vigorous practice is the never ending and uninterrupted fight against opportunist tendencies and manifestations which are inevitable while we communists operate in class society. The best conditions for that fight are provided by the organised mistrust by the whole (as represented between congresses by the leadership) of the part, and openness for ideas.

Under prevailing British conditions we favour emphasising democracy from below. Local, geographic branches should be self-reliant and autonomous when it comes to their officers and specific tasks. Cells should have the widest powers for initiative. But democracy from below and full accountability does not mean leading committees should be denied the same rights as lower committees. Nor does it mean that the function of leadership should be reduced to mere "coordination". The task of leadership is to lead in all matters relevant to the whole. That requires experienced, fully rounded and dedicated leaders whom their comrades trust because they have, year-in, year-out, been tried and tested. It means the best possible comrades should be elected and be electable to a collective characterised by its revolutionary continuity.

## Factions

As shown by the *unanimity* of our 6th Conference in September 1993, it is the considered and expressed view of the Leninists of the CPGB that democratic centralism can function neither fully nor properly without the ability of Party members to "support alternative platforms" and "form permanent or temporary factions". That is, as Lenin succinctly defined them, "organisations within the party", "united not by its place of work, language or other objective conditions, but by a particular platform of views on party questions" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 17, Moscow 1977, p265).

Minorities must have the right and possibility of becoming the majority. As long as they accept, when it comes to practice (ie actions), majority decisions, loyal opposition can only help the rebuilding of the Party and its consolidation. The Party is on the road to not being a Party once one view, one faction claims a monopoly on truth, bans opposing opinions and treats leadership positions as private property.

The Communist Party is not some ideal to be revived from the past nor realised in the distant future. The CPGB is a tool for making revolution

and will be remade according to the resources, fighting abilities and requirements of today. It develops from itself and does so according to its own logic. Leninists now lead the Party, much reduced though it is. That objective fact will shape the reformed CPGB. By using the commanding heights gained in the inner-Party struggle we already have the possibility of calling up pro-Party comrades in other groups to join us as full members on the same footing as ourselves.

It would of course be futile and counterproductive to demand that such groups simply dissolve themselves. Neither are we "Conrad's clique," as Holloway has it, insisting on "maintaining control" of the PCC. That would elicit nothing positive, only point blank refusal. Other groups should, on the contrary, enter our ranks as Party factions - with the right to proportional representation on the PCC, the right to maintain and develop their own platforms and theories, the right to publicise their views without restriction (and thus have access to all members and basic units), and the right to become a majority. Such far reaching democracy, I would argue, provides the best conditions to overcome the existence of factional exclusiveness and rivalry. It also provides the best conditions for their transformation into mere shades of opinion within Marxist thought and surely an eventual theoretical coming together. Organisational unity will, with patience, time and mutual respect, produce full political unity.

Critics, including CAG and *Open Polemic*, allege that we are proposing a "hotchpotch" or "ragbag" collection of different factions in which anything goes. I can assure them once again that this is not the case. As stated in 'Party, non-ideology and faction': "We fight for unity around Marxism-Leninism and a single whole". The Communist Party is a voluntary association of communists formed precisely to combat all manifestations of bourgeois thought (eg, reformism, idealism, liquidationism and bureaucratic socialism), and to defend and put into practice one definite world outlook, namely, Marxism-Leninism. That is why we have said good riddance to those Euro, Straight Leftist and Charterist factions who wanted to liquidate our Party into Labourism. Their splits were a good thing. Only the confusion and dispersal of pro-Party elements they caused was bad.

CAG's case against factions is cliché-ridden, conventional and based primarily on the sectarian need to excuse the political degeneration and bureaucratisation suffered by the world communist movement from the mid-1920s onwards. Holloway crudely counterposes factions to democratic centralism and maintains that the "existence of factions" can only "distort and impede it" (Communist Action No6, March-April 1995).

Instead he deviously offers what he calls "properly functioning democratic centralism". His lofty (and patronising) concern is, you understand, the "individual cadres" and preventing them falling prey to various "would-be-leaders"; he is, I expect, more concerned with losing his motley band of disciples now that he has reached the dizzy heights of a leader-in-fact. In idealised form his democratic centralism means the "full participation in discussion and the process of decision making, where individual communists speak their mind and argue their corner, and where once a decision has been made it is binding on all members."

The problem with such formal equality has been well documented in our publications and press. It is the formal equality that exists between the seller of labour power and the capitalist boss. The isolated, atomised *individual* communist, cadre or otherwise, is no match for a well entrenched, bureaucratic leadership. The individual is given 400 words every two years in pre-congress discussion and, if elected to congress, one minute to "speak their mind and fight their corner". The leadership thus blocks coherent thought and any articulate, viable alternative. It is a disciplined body, those in opposition a mindless, carping, rabble.

As the example of the Bolshevik *factions* showed, discussion and decision making by like-minded comrades and the election of authoritative spokespersons facilitates theory and the fight against wrong decisions. Bolshevism (majorityism) is by definition a factional title and its history is the history of factional struggle.

Holloway cannot in all honesty entirely skip over the Bolshevik faction's splits, unifications, conferences and fights. He therefore vulgarly puts their existence as a faction, and the frequent faction fights amongst them, down to the nasty "non-revolutionaries" operating in the party and the need to combat "revisionism and other distortions of Marxism-Leninism". Only then could factionalism "ever be justified," he says, imagining he has closed the debate (*Communist Action* No6, March-April 1995). Leaving aside the fact that most of the factional struggles were between

comrades who were at the time honourable revolutionaries, Holloway has, despite himself, hit the nail on the head.

To combat "non-revolutionaries", concretely in Britain the Chaterites, Euros, etc, we formed a faction. To combat the centrist liquidationists, the Straight Leftists, etc, we formed a faction. We were fully justified and Holloway should have stayed with us, argued his "corner", and not irresponsibly gone walk-about. There was nothing narrow or sectarian about our struggle. Leninists organised not to defend the gospel of their own factional theory, but the general spirit and meaning of revolutionary communism. And to rebuild our Party we shall continue to defend and advocate just that - Partyism.

Around the Party idea and spirit there should be the coming together of communist groups and their transformation into loyal Party factions. That was essentially what Lenin proposed to the pro-Party Mensheviks. The unity of the two strong factions in the RSDLP did not, of course, require the immediate end of factionalism - that was Trotsky's slogan pre-1917 - but the unity of factions under the banner of Partyism. That in our conditions would be a splendid thing and we will do everything we can to bring it about.

To permanently ban the right to form factions is to disarm those who would combat non-revolutionaries and revisionists. It is not that in themselves factions are a good thing. They are a necessary evil like the workers' state itself. That is why Lenin made the point that "no one regards the existence of factions as ideal". But he, like us, distinguished between honest and dishonest factions. One the one hand there are honest factions that "with clear, consistent and integral platforms openly defend their platforms". On the other there are dishonest factions which "hide behind cheap shouts about their virtue, about their non-factionalism" (VI Lenin CW Vol 17, Moscow 1977, p265). Hence far from sanctioning "disunity and disloyalty" as Holloway stupidly claims, factions provide the weapon of last resort within Partyism to honestly and openly fight anti-Party forces.

But Holloway will not be convinced, not by the history of Bolshevism, nor his own sorry failure in the CPGB and the NCP, nor the immediate need to overcome the fragmentation of the revolutionary movement. He puts his Stalinist dogma before the interests of the working class and Partyism. For "a healthy Communist Party they [factions] are intolerable," he conventionally parrots - it could be from any Novosti dross. Yet to make this a communist formulation, I will reverse it. Only within an unhealthy Communist Party are factions intolerable.

The Russian Communist Party temporarily banned factions in 1920, not because it had all of a sudden come to health after the unhealthy toleration of factions and factionalism since 1903. Right or wrong, the ban was imposed "as an extreme measure" (Lenin), because of a deep malaise and possibly fatal crisis within the country, within the regime, within the proletariat and within the Party. "Let's not have an opposition just now!" pleaded Lenin. Those who, following Stalin, use the emergency decision of the Party's 10th Congress to permanently denounce factions as "intolerable" in fact denounce the history of Bolshevism. For all their cynical ploys and off by rote phrase-mongering about revisionism and alien currents, they reveal themselves hostile to Leninism.

## Factions and ending factionalism

*Open Polemic* cites as its authority in objecting to factions, not the perverted ideology of Stalin's terroristic dictatorship, but a liberalistic fear of being dominated and hurt. Factions, it is claimed, should be opposed because of their essential unfairness, their disruptiveness and their inherent desire to gain a majority on the Central Committee - how the Bolsheviks succeeded in leading a revolution almost beggars belief.

*Open Polemic's* rejection of factions leads it to bizarre and surely unintended conclusions. For starters, opposition factions are disgracefully blamed for revisionism and organisational disintegration. The symptom gets the blame for the disease.

In its recent letter to us, *Open Polemic* maintains that: "the struggle between clandestine factions over decades was perhaps the most destructive feature of the old Communist Party of Great Britain. Indeed, in our view it is factional struggle which gives rise to leader centralism, for factionalism invokes a repressive response from any dominant faction on the Central Committee which sees itself under threat. Eventually, it is not

only other factions which are marginalised and even purged from the party but all 'dissent' voices. The party is 'braindamaged'. It ceases to be enriched, loses creativity, sinks into dogmatism and thereby becomes prone to opportunism" (Letter, March 27 1995).

This rare excursion from the shadowy realms of abstraction shows just how topsy-turvy *Open Polemic's* politics really are. The so-called "leader centralism" of the Third International parties is presumably explained by the factionalism of the Bolsheviks. The disintegration of the CPGB is certainly put down to the inner-Party struggle conducted both by the centrists and ourselves.

*The Leninist* did provoke the ire of the McLennanite right opportunists and the Euros. They did feel under threat. But that did not justify their repression. In the court of the revolution they have no rights, no defence. Of course, the fact of the matter is that while our supporters and structures had to be kept "clandestine", the political struggle we conducted was open. It was not responsible for the "braindamage" in the Party, nor the purges, nor the opportunism. Indeed our factional fight was the only hope there was of saving, reviving and reforging the Party that was being wrecked by opportunists, who had dominated the leadership through a historically specific process dating back to the 1920s of revolutionaries ceasing being revolutionary.

*Open Polemic* has, though, its more usual abstract objections to our proposals. "The propagation of different programmes," it announces, "encourages the development of factional discipline in the struggle to dominate the Central Committee and gain control of the party apparatus." More, the "automatic access" to basic units "diminishes the cohesion of the party and the 'democratic', bourgeois notion of 'publicity without restriction' means that those with the biggest resources have the biggest voice" (Letter, March 27 1995).

Before proceeding, clarification is needed alongside criticism. No factional representative has the right to blithely waltz into, or for that matter be politely invited to, Party cell meetings. The business, composition, place and times of meetings, and the activity of these bodies is strictly private in our organisation. That will remain the case if I have anything to do with it. However, there are plenty of other opportunities for debate and discussion. Certainly all Party members have the right to publish their views through the official Party press (at the discretion of the responsible editors and editorial boards), or failing that they can seek out other avenues or means. In this way every member and cell is accessible. As long as comrades publish responsibly, do not disrupt Party actions or jeopardise security, as long as their ideas are broadly within the programme and principles of the Party our cohesion will not be diminished. It will be enhanced.

Let me use a couple of hypothetical but not far fetched examples.

Example one. A group of Glasgow based comrades think that the Party should adopt a different emphasis on the national question in Scotland. They want to change a particular clause in the Party programme. They state their criticisms in a brief statement. It is printed in the Party press. They are joined by a thin layer of comrades throughout the country. Having got together enough finance they publish a small factional pamphlet. Printed at cost price at the Party printshop it freely circulates within and without the Party. They remain a small minority at the congress. However, in order to develop their case their most experienced and authoritative comrade commences work on a detailed theoretical study of the British nation, Scottish nationalism, and the relationship between class and nation. After some years of hard labour the result is weighty tome. Though the Party leadership says it lacks the resources necessary to produce the book our comrade finds a commercial publisher. It is widely acclaimed. Not only do Party members read and learn but the entire left is drawn into the debate which the Party leadership decides to initiate around it. The minority becomes a majority. How can that diminish the cohesion of the Party?

Example two. The election tactic proves highly successful. The Party grows rapidly in leaps and bounds. It has a handful of MPs and councillors by the score. But the times are not revolutionary. The ageing leadership of the Party grows complacent and begins, imperceptibly for the majority of members, to water down revolutionary positions. A well organised and dynamic youthful minority begin to criticise on a wide range of issues and warn that unless the slide is halted the Party risks becoming opportunist. In defence of the Party programme they publish their own paper. At the next congress they succeed in winning the argument and securing a slim majority on the Central Committee. How can that diminish the cohesion of the Party?

The point in using these two hypothetical examples is to show that factions need not disrupt the Party. Factions obviously think their ideas are correct. But then every individual I have ever met is convinced they are right as well. I readily confess that I too suffer from that sin even though my thought undergoes constant change and development.

Factions will undoubtedly struggle to get their views accepted and gain a majority for them. If their platform is sufficiently wide, that can mean a struggle to change the leadership. Under extreme conditions this can lead to a violent clash and the decision drive out certain views from the Party. If they were counterrevolutionary, that would be good. Alternatively, if they are revolutionary ideas, that would be very bad. However no scenario can be guaranteed. All we can do is fight for the best conditions for revolutionary ideas, ie openness.

Between genuine revolutionaries though, the existence of honest factions within a single Communist Party can create a political rapprochement, convergence and eventual complete merger. That was the case in our CPGB between the majority of comrades originating from the British Socialist Party, who favoured the affiliation tactic, and the Communist Unity Group, which in general opposed anything to do with the Labour Party. Party life sorted out differences and united the comrades into a single whole.

Let us now turn to *Open Polemic's* concern for fairness. 'Publicity without restriction' would mean, it fears, that those with "the biggest resources have the biggest voice." Yes, a group of comrades who raise big resources between themselves will have a bigger voice than a group of comrades who raise less. That cannot be denied. However whether or not the big voice proves more influential than the small voice is a matter of political correctness, the Party's overall level of theoretical sophistication and how important the issue of factional contention is in the first place. One slim pamphlet can have a huge impact. No matter how inexpensive, a bulging glossy journal can fall on stony ground.

Factions are bound to be unequal not only in terms of resources but adherents, contacts, skills and influence. But that goes for individual comrades too. People are unequal and communists have never pretended otherwise. It is the Party rules which apply equally to all members. However some comrades have more responsibilities and authority than others. Some will be elegant writers, others brilliant agitators, others famous artists. Some will be young and energetic, others middle aged and experienced, others old and slowing down. That is life and the task of the Communist Party is to develop to the maximum all the talents at its disposal.

*Open Polemic* proposes as its alternative to our unrestrictedness "the right to equality of opportunity in publicity." This soppy formulation is reminiscent of local government tokenism to me. To ensure equality, *ipso facto* restrictions and quotas must be imposed. Is the general secretary to be afforded the same column inches in the Party paper as the raw recruit? Would one of our leading theorists be prevented from securing a publisher because not all comrades have written a book? Is a 95% majority to be given the same publicity as a 5% minority? Such suggestions might be applicable for the Green Party. Communist parties however are combat organisations. We have our general staff, we also have our chain of command. The different levels of responsibility in the Communist Party requires different levels of publicity. To pretend otherwise is pure liberalism.

Instead of our dangerous factions, *Open Polemic* proposes that its ideal party would have the "provision for members, if they wish, to form forums." Besides the "right to equality of opportunity in publicity," which we have just dealt with, three other rights are listed. The right to "formulate views and propositions on particular questions and issues," the right to indirect access to all units" via what it calls a "Policy Committee," the right to "direct access to particular basic units on the request of those units" (Letter, March 27 1995).

Again this is liberalism. It is not that I object to such bodies, call them forums or whatever you like. But *Open Polemic* gives them at the same time too little and too much leeway in the desire to substitute for factions. At this present moment in time I am a member of a 'forum' working on the Soviet Union question. Besides three Party members it includes two other comrades, a CPGB supporter and a former leading member of the TKP. The erroneous nature of the idea that this forum should have "the right to equality of opportunity in publicity" has been referred to above. Suffice to say the work we have planned on the Soviet Union question covers six volumes - whether and in what form they see the light of day remains to

be seen. But to suppress 99.9% of this work in the name of "equality" would be Kafkaesque.

Then again instead of getting a publisher and freely circulating the work, *Open Polemic* would have comrades write off to its Policy Committee to get what would have to be, in the name of "equality," a thumbnail sketch. What a nightmare. Worse, "basic units" are expected to operate like open geographical supporters' branch meetings and invite speakers along. There they can, I suppose, cosily chat over what the *Open Polemic* equality police, ie its Policy Committee, has deemed it allowable to publish. This is bureaucratic centralism not democratic centralism.

But now we come to the rub. In the *Open Polemic* schema perfect party groups of comrades (forums) are only allowed to "formulate views and propositions on particular questions and issues." This is a monstrous restriction on democracy. Even if a perfect party could be brought into existence it has to be admitted it would not function in a perfect world. Bourgeois influences cannot be stopped with pious hopes or passing a congress resolution. And even the best leadership is not immune from slipping into opportunism. If comrades were to openly formulate a far reaching criticism, present an opposition platform and organise across the *Open Polemic* perfect party to combat this opportunism they would be in breach of its rules. I was candidly informed in our discussions with them that those guilty of factionalism would be duly expelled. Opportunism would be tolerated. Those who organise to fight for communism would be removed in the name of perfection.

## Leninist faction

Both CAG and *Open Polemic* accuse us of not being serious about communist rapprochement. CAG says we "insist on maintaining control" because other communists are "invited to unite under the banner of the PCC" (*Communist Action* No6, March-April 1995). Along similar lines *Open Polemic* argues that the Leninists are a "resident" faction and have already "assumed the dominant, leading role" (Letter, March 27 1995). The rapprochement we propose is with the CPGB, and this "is but one step" to other groups and individuals "bowing to the Leninist' faction which being composed of the only 'true Leninists' is accorded a superior and, in practice, a ruling position within the CPGB." Hence there will be "first class members" who will be found in our faction while the rest would constitute a "second class membership." *Open Polemic* concludes that no "self-respecting" vanguardist organisation could accept that - of course they do not include themselves in the category of 'vanguardists', but the message is clear.

Reforging the CPGB is not a game of cricket. There should be no pedantic time wasting, no tampering with clear and precise proposals. The CPGB question should be at the top of the agenda of anyone who is really a communist. Campaigns, utopian schemes, theoretical nuances, trade union work, anti-fascism, polemics, everything should be subordinated (not counterposed) to that one crucial task. Nothing, but nothing, should be allowed to get in the way.

We have made it crystal clear that the unity we propose does not involve the present majority in the CPGB automatically "maintaining control". The PCC will be expanded or adjusted proportionately in line with those new Party members who are brought in. If that means we constitute a minority, so what? The interests of reforging the CPGB must always be put to the fore. I do not fear being in a minority. Nor should comrades in CAG, *Open Polemic* and Independent Communists.

No one is expected to bow before anyone or anything. There will be no "first class" and no "second class" members. Our rules will apply equally to all, and every communist individual will have the same right to organise with like-minded comrades in temporary or permanent factions. What is important is coming together, working together in the great struggle to reforge the CPGB.

The comrades must choose. It is either rapprochement or become liquidators. Time moves on. If all you are interested in is utopian blueprints, or secondary campaigns and the dead past, if no agreement is wanted, so be it. Those who will not or cannot move in the direction of rapprochement objectively place themselves in the liquidationist camp and reveal themselves as pseudo-communists. Our advance will continue and new candidates for rapprochement will come forward. Leninists will make the CPGB into a mass vanguard Party together with those who want to help and against those who are incapable, or do not want to help.

Jack Conrad