



weekly worker

Neil Davidson on the Scottish bourgeois revolution: challenging nationalist myths

■ Schwarzenegger
■ Republicanism
■ ESF London bid
■ Workers' Liberty

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Towards a new workers' party

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500

Notching up 500 issues of the *Weekly Worker* is an undoubted achievement in itself. We began publication back in 1993. The declared intention was to systematically build upon the achievements of our fortnightly-cum-three-weekly, *The Leninist*. We quickly made the transition from a single-sheet paper to a four-pager and then to an eight-pager. Finally, in April 2001, with issue No369, we moved to the present 12-page format.

Few organisations on the revolutionary left have managed to raise themselves to the point where they can envisage, let alone sustain, such a frequent publication. Most happily content themselves with a monthly or an even more sluggish rate. For example, inside the Socialist Alliance only the CPGB and the Socialist Workers Party maintain weekly papers. Outside the SA the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Scottish Socialist Party are to all intents and purposes alone in matching us.

However, the *Weekly Worker* is noticeably different from the SWP's *Socialist Worker*, SPEW's *The Socialist* and the SSP's *Scottish Socialist Voice*. Firstly, and least importantly, the CPGB is still a smaller organisation. Therefore our paper has a narrower base from which to generate finances.

In spite of silly or malicious rumours to the contrary, the CPGB is not on the receiving end of a flow of cash from special branch or a mysterious millionaire donor. Like the rest of the revolutionary and leftwing press we rely on hard earned contributions from sympathetic readers and our own members. Money from sales and subscriptions are secondary in terms of finance and we get precisely nil revenue from advertising.

The reason the *Weekly Worker* can raise the necessary sums is easy to ex-

plain. In a word it is ... *politics*. Our paper exists first and foremost to champion the cause of revolutionary unity. Without the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists, progressive anti-capitalists and advanced working class militants in a single combat party - a Communist Party - there can be no hope of defeating the capitalists and their all-pervasive state machine.

The literary method we employ - programmatic consistency, open polemics and the honest reporting of differences - is inexorably bound up with the aim of forging a mass Communist Party. Principled unity is possible only with success in an ongoing battle to overcome opportunism in all its many and various guises - economism, first campism, national socialism, 'peace and justice' liquidationism, etc.

We therefore shun the shallow moralistic condemnations of imperialism's unfairness, the trite editorials chastising Tony Blair, the hopeless pleas for an ethical foreign policy and the endless official optimism served up by our rivals. A dull and unappetising diet. The *Weekly Worker* strives to tell the truth - above all telling the truth about the state of our organisationally and ideologically fragmented movement and what is urgently needed. As a result we consistently achieve a level of income comparable to bigger organisations. Hard politics and frank criticism and self-criticism makes partisans and wins commitment.

More than that though. The *Weekly Worker* has secured a relatively large body of readers. Circulation hovers around the 10,000 mark each week. Sometimes it is a little lower, sometimes a little higher - though on one occasion we leapt to a 13,000-plus total. Nothing, when set against the mainstream capitalist media - we are painfully aware of

that. But our readers are not passive consumers - overwhelmingly they are leftwing and trade union activists.

We view those readers in a very different light to the capitalist media. The *Weekly Worker* is not designed to achieve easy popularity or dovetail into some marketplace. Sometimes what we say is deeply unpopular. This is hardly surprising. Week after week our collective of writers doggedly confront and seek to positively overcome the widespread and often dearly held ideas that divide and blunt the effectiveness of the revolutionary left - not only in Britain and Europe, but globally. Our readers are educated to carefully follow high politics, study factional manoeuvres and theoretical arguments ... and to think for themselves.

There is another aspect to our paper. Production and distribution helps lay solid foundations. Necessarily we collectively organise according to the dictates of a definite discipline - a *weekly* routine. And, taken together, our readers, sellers, contributors, technical workers and editors can be said to represent the skeletal outline of the Communist Party needed by the working class.

Nowadays most readers come by way of the web - the ratio of electronic to print readers is around 10 to one. The web has allowed us to partially compensate for the lack of personnel we are able to deploy on Saturday mornings, in workplaces, at demonstrations, etc.

To get an idea of the success of the *Weekly Worker* compared to similar publications one can usefully turn to alexa.com's worldwide ranking of websites. I have not bothered to check out which sites are the most popular - though I would guess that pop music or pornography holds that particular honour. Idle speculation aside, the Labour Party is recorded as standing at

86,211. Of course, there are a huge number of websites and I give Labour's ranking not because it is leftwing, but solely for purposes of comparison and juxtaposition.

Hence, whereas the Labour Party occupies 86,211th place, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty trails far, far behind. Its position is 2,395,087 - remember, we are not talking about readers, but ranking. Next up comes the International Socialist Group, just ahead at 2,358,266. The *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain does considerably better - 1,668,846. And a neck in front of them comes the Scottish Socialist Party with its 1,542,212th placing. The SWP performs well - it ranks at 890,089. Surprisingly - at least to me - Workers Power is even more widely read. It is placed at 622,262. Nevertheless the CPGB does much, much better. Our position is 232,377.

There is another criterion that has rightly been used to judge the *Weekly Worker*. The number of letters we regularly carry (and we are sometimes forced to cut them to the bone for reasons of space). These letters are, let me stress, real. We do not instruct CPGB members to mimic the wooden and meaningless drivel typically found elsewhere on the left.

From the beginning our press has encouraged readers to write critically. The result is that every week we have no problem whatsoever in carrying a full page of letters. The importance we attach to correspondents is shown by the prominence given to them. Other leftwing publications either receive no letters or as an afterthought tuck them away towards the back somewhere. In contrast we put ours over the first inside page. This is more than symbolic. It is about actively wanting engagement, accountability and a two-way exchange.

Naturally the success of the *Weekly Worker* - and we are far from complacent - provokes fits of jealousy. Perhaps the most stupid, but most revealing, accusation is that our paper is nothing but the "gossip sheet" of the left.

That might be accurate, say, if we specialised in reporting who is sleeping with whom, or who is wearing what. But we hardly do that. Instead of sleeping partners and fashion sense, the *Weekly Worker* concerns itself with vital issues such as the European Social Forum, the SWP's 'peace and justice' turn, the SA's crisis and questions like Marxist theory, Scottish self-determination, Israel-Palestine, Iraq, etc. To describe such content as "gossip" is frankly a surreal departure from the truth. Those who peddle such nonsense certainly display both a profound lack of seriousness and an inability to grasp the left's crucial role as the bearer of our movement's traditions, history and hope for the future.

Where next? Though we have made some recent modest progress, there are three main fields of struggle where we have yet to properly or adequately engage. They are anti-capitalist youth, trade unions and the Labour left. Over the coming period we shall step up our reporting and organised intervention in all three areas.

Inevitably that means increasing the size of the *Weekly Worker*. Already we have to slice, leave over or spike too many articles. An alternative might be to simply turn to the web, which offers unlimited space. However, that would tend to produce journalistic flabbiness and wordiness. Up the number of pages we must at some point soon. Print and electronic are not really alternatives. They should instead complement each other - although with the print version always leading the way ●

Jack Conrad

LETTERS



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

Russia 1917

Iain McKay's response to Joe Wills repeats the standard claim that Bolshevik attacks on workers' democracy in Russia began before the civil war (Letters, October 9).

This assumes the standard historians' date for the beginning of the civil war in May 1918, when the Czech Legion seized part of the Trans-Siberian Railway. This dating is ideological. Luckett's *The white generals*, written by a military historian, more correctly starts the civil war with the Mannerheim movement in Finland, which was a White movement which aimed to take Petrograd but failed; by the end of December 1917 the Mannerheimers had killed around 75,000 Finnish workers or 25% of the Finnish working class, extending far beyond the Bolsheviks.

In fact, as soon as the Bolshevik seizure of power took place the Menshevik-defencists called on the military to make a counter-coup, and attempts were made in the next few days by the military cadets and by the Cossacks, with overt organisational as well as ideological support from the Menshevik-defencists.

More generally, in October the cities of European Russia were on the verge of starvation due to the dislocation of the economy by the war and peasants' withdrawal of their grain surpluses from the market. The only available alternatives to the Bolshevik policy of 'state of emergency' control were (a) a White generals' state of emergency (Mannerheim, etc) or (b) descent into warlordism à la Afghanistan (Semenov in Siberia, and so on).

The truth is that if (1) the Bolsheviks had let slip the reins of power, and the left SRs and anarchists had taken over, and (2) the left SRs and anarchists had been able to defend themselves against the White terror (unlikely), we would today remember Makhno and the others in the way in which we remember Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge: as the architects of a policy of destruction of the cities.

Mike Macnair
Oxford

Anarchism

Iain McKay states in opposition to my assertion that anarchists reject trade union struggle: "Some argue that revolutionary unions are possible and others argue that workers' councils, not unions, are the way forward." However, both lines of thought stated here are a complete disaster when translated into practical activity. The attempt of socialists to distance themselves from reformist unions (ie, 99.9% of existing unions) in favour of 'red' (or 'red and black') unions has historically proven to be self-isolating, sectarian disaster.

Across the world mere membership of a trade union is bringing millions of workers into a life and death struggle against their 'own' capitalist state (ask the besieged trade unionists of Columbia!). Marxists seek not to reject reformist unions, but transform them into organs of revolution. This requires an organised, democratic workers' party to guide the struggle, not autonomous 'direct action' by unelected cliques and individuals.

Back to Russia. McKay states: "As an anarchist I am aware, like Bakunin [anti-semitic and conspiratorial elitist] and Kropotkin [backer of Russian imperialism during World War I], that any revolution breaks out "in a hostile bourgeois world. As such, 'counterrevolution' is taken as inevitable and does not cut it as an excuse for Bolshevik authoritarianism." But it does "cut it as an excuse" for the anarchists who led the botched 1872-73 uprising in Spain that was

crushed by a militarily marginal bourgeois army due to the rebels' lack of centralised coordination?

McKay states: "From Bakunin onwards anarchists have argued that a revolution required a federation of workers' councils to succeed and that this would organise the defence of the revolution by means of a workers' militia." In Spain and elsewhere, however, anarchists themselves have dispelled the myth that revolution could be achieved without authoritarian means. In the above example, the anarchists, in seeming violation of their own ideology, did not rely on the direct administration of the people, but set up ruling juntas in all the regions they took.

Not even the Makhnoites, whom McKay speaks fondly of, were exempt from using authoritarian means. As anarcho-syndicalist Ben Annis attests, "Makhno sometimes succumbed to the dictatorial antics of a warrior chief, forgetting his egalitarian beliefs in the difficult circumstances of civil war and making arbitrary decisions without consulting the movement's supreme decision-making body, the Regional Congress of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents" (B Annis *Makhno and the Makhnovshchina*).

This "supreme decision-making body" sounds very much like a central committee to me. Indeed anarchism has never succeeded in surviving for any length of time in an 'intact' anarchist form. Betrayal of principle is not reserved for power-hungry reds alone, as McKay would have us believe.

McKay attacks my attempt to put Lenin's writings on revolution and civil war into context as a perversion of language. Not at all - the argument was perfectly logical: Lenin believed the revolution would take a violent form - one part of the population (the proletariat) fighting another (the bourgeoisie) - otherwise known as a civil war! My subsequent quote showed that Lenin believed that after the soviet revolution it would be possible to "break all the resistance of the bourgeoisie by bloodless means": ie, civil war following the revolution is by no means inevitable.

It is neither my purpose to defend everything the Bolsheviks did nor to make a virtue out of necessity, but rather to argue that anarchism's absolute hostility to any form of state is misplaced and a barrier to achieving revolution. This is the central contradiction of anarchism: the working class can achieve anything, but they cannot exercise democratic control and accountability over their leaders, it seems.

Joe Wills
email

Anarcho-cap

I am writing to support Paul Tate when he stated that "libertarian methods and practices are far more desirable and useful" (Letters, October 9).

The 'old' or 'Marxist' left has lost its ideological coherency, as have the New Right thinkers. The only coherent way forward is rightwing libertarianism or anarcho-capitalism. This alone can champion our natural rights, life, liberty and property. Reading Locke, Rothbard, Hayek and Friedman (David) has shown me that the right is *not* wrong.

John James
email

SA platform

The statement calling for a meeting to set up a national SA platform is reproduced in the *Weekly Worker* under the headline, 'Improving SA democracy' (October 9).

This accurately reflects the main emphasis of the statement - for a democracy platform. A minority at the previous meeting in Birmingham wanted to restrict any platform to the issue of democracy in the SA. But the majority of comrades

wanted to go further and include in the platform the campaign for a workers' party and a discussion bulletin or platform publication, which would facilitate discussion and activity with groups and organisations outside the SA, or part of the broader workers' movement.

This was to be politically based on the principles of *People before profit* and not any cross-class or popular front. Now the statement calling for the meeting in November seems to separate these aims, which went beyond the politics of the minority, to secondary points which are to be taken alongside any democracy platform rather than be integral to it. Many points implied in the emphasised theme of SA democracy are also included in the additional list, obscuring the importance of the workers' party and bulletin issues.

This statement might have been hastily drawn up. But the agenda of the previous meeting was hardly transparent. Nor was the meeting a model of democracy. Let's hope there is no organisational attempt to circumvent the decisive majority to proceed on the basis of putting democracy in the SA in the context of the central need for a new workers' party, socialist politics and a publication to promote political unity.

Barry Biddulph
Stockport

SSP success

Looking at British politics, and in particular thinking about the left, from the position of being abroad for a year, I find myself depressed, and 'Bob Crow and Scotland' only confirms this sense (*Weekly Worker* October 9).

One of the disingenuous features of the ultra-left is to argue from a position of theoretical purity as an excuse for not supporting anything. What is the state of the left in England - why are there theoretical articles on the position of the Scottish Socialist Party and Scottish independence? Not that there shouldn't be discussion, but surely what English socialists should be debating is why the SSP has been so successful, and why the English left is so irrelevant?

It is a terrible thing to say, but we have to face up to the truth of it - English socialists are a parody of socialists. It is no good, as a Marxist, arguing for what should, allegedly, be an ideal position, when the reality of the situation is that our pronouncements are of no relevance to anyone outside the circle of the 'left', and have no impact and *ergo* no bearing on reality. To talk of all-encompassing left movements as superior and more desirable to nationalistic expressions of socialism would only seem pertinent if there were a choice. But there is no use in opposing an existing reality with a fantasy. The SSP has made itself relevant by its efforts - the English left can't conceal its flaws by pretending to argue with them on the same level.

Lastly, surely it is the purpose of people seeking a revolutionary transformation in society to be pragmatic about it - meaning, that we should be aware of what is possible and what actions can legitimately exploit weaknesses in the ruling class.

If the SSP follows a socialist course, and a nationalist one; and if this is damaging to the Labour Party, to the ruling class of Britain, to the residue of empire mentality still cursing us today; and if it highlights the backwardness of the English situation and the deficit which needs to be made up - then surely it should be applauded.

These are personal responses, set up to be criticised. And I regard my background as much English as Scottish!

Bruce Kendall
email

Foot in mouth

Stale arguments against the actions of Brother Crow.

Conrad argues that socialism is not possible in one country and that brother Crow is wrong to promote the SSP's cause of an independent socialist Scotland. Instead he argues that we should be campaigning for a socialist Europe or indeed world.

My response is, how do you make it happen on a European scale or global scale all at the same time? To bring it down to a more basic level and one closer to brother Crow's heart, should the RMT complain if the Scottish rail network is renationalised before the rest of the country because we would rather it all came back to public ownership at the same time? I would say bit by bit would do, just as an end to capitalism country by country would do.

Conrad also denigrates 'left' groups for arranging demonstrations or working certain campaigns, saying they are "kidding themselves that somehow this sort of limited and essentially circular activity inexorably leads to socialism". At least these groups are doing something. What is the CPGB doing? My impression of the left outside Scotland is that they are too busy bickering and slagging each other, as this article does, to unite and form a viable alternative to New Labour. That is the only way forward for the left - something those in the SSP realised years ago. Reclamation of the LP is not an option.

Conrad claims to seek unity as the only way forward, then proceeds to have a go at those he seeks to unite with. Foot in mouth stuff, Jack.

Douggie Kinnear
email

Galloway

In 'Speakers cause controversy' Tina Becker wrote: "Vicki Morris of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty unsurprisingly seemed to be in favour of a ban [on George Galloway speaking at the European Social Forum]" (*Weekly Worker* October 2).

"Ban" is a funny way to put it: I wish George Galloway had not been invited to speak at the ESF. I wish I had been at the England mobilisation meeting where his name was put forward: I would have opposed the invitation. Even though the England mobilisation accepted Galloway as a speaker, since the England mobilisation is not a representative or a democratic body, I could claim a right to object to the invitation to Galloway during the ESF preparatory meeting at Bobigny.

Shame on me for not doing so, but for only trying to assist Antoine Bernard to object. When we went outside to discuss the matter - Bernard, Jonathan Neale, Anne Mc Shane, I and others - I tried to give Antoine some more ammunition: I objected to Neale claiming that he spoke for the entire anti-war movement in Britain when he defended the invitation to Galloway; and I tried to point out that, contrary to what Neale claimed, George Galloway probably knew full well what company he was keeping when he signed the petition appealing for the release of Tariq Aziz. I think Jonathan Neale probably knows both of those things as well, and I think it was shabby of him to attempt to fob a foreigner off with a partial exposition of the facts.

The news about the petition wrong-footed Globalise Resistance/Socialist Workers Party. Tina was right: no one - except Antoine Bernard - had heard of it or, anyway, cared about it. GR/SWP are used to defending George Galloway against most criticism; hearing him associated, witting or unwitting, with an erstwhile fascist - Gilles Munier, who organised the petition - was momentarily embarrassing for them. And that's all, probably! Having persuaded Bernard that Galloway was "*hors soupçon*" - above suspicion, the phrase used in reporting back to the plenary! - in this matter, and got their way once more in

the matter of a speaker, would GR/SWP bother to go and find out something about this petition, and this Gilles Munier? I doubt it; one of the most detestable things about them is their political laziness.

I did bother. His signing Munier's petition doesn't make George Galloway a fascist, but it ought to alert the left, once more, to being careful about who they line up beside. Munier, as well as being the secretary general of the Franco-Iraqi Friendship Society (Amitiés Franco-Irakiennes), is the man who brings the word of Saddam Hussein to France in the shape of the books Hussein is supposed to have written: the novel *Zabiba et le roi*, for example. He was behind that grotesque nonsense! Other signatories to the petition stink politically. I have more details if anyone cares for them.

And, anyway, I should like to ask, even if George Galloway doesn't know or care who Gilles Munier is, why the hell would a socialist shed a tear for Tariq Aziz, the public face of Saddam Hussein in the west? The ability to speak good English doesn't render a Ba'athist cuddly in my book, nor does having any number of heart attacks. Galloway is off his rocker. Why the hell did the SWP turn him into the now apparently unimpeachable leader of the anti-war movement?

Vicki Morris
Mitham

Obsessed

Vituperative epithets aside, I am left somewhat stunned by Mike Macnair's preposterous polemic against the Alliance for Workers' Liberty ('Drawing the class line', October 9).

The gist of Mike's argument is that the AWL refuses to unite with people who hold 'Cominternist' positions on things like unity with bourgeois nationalists, and we refuse even to argue our case. We draw lines in the sand based only on our own limited conclusions about the world, and say, 'To hell with the rest of you'. He mentions in particular the Galloway business and the collapse of relations between the AWL and the CPGB.

His tendentious account of the latter I will ignore for reasons of space. We do not, as Mike suggests, refuse to collaborate with people on the grounds of some theory of imperialism they may hold in their heads. We insist on defining issues politically. Disagreement on one thing obviously does not rule out collaboration over another.

But take imperialism, or more concretely, take the war on Iraq. We collaborated with all sorts of people in the anti-war movement. We did not, for instance, refuse to attend meetings, or demonstrations, or storm platforms, or whatever, on the grounds that we disapproved of some of the participants. But we do, indeed, think there are some important political demarcations which define more precise 'collaborations'.

An anti-war movement, for example, which had explicitly promoted Saddam's regime would, in my view at least, have been morally bankrupt. It did not do so explicitly; but there was something of that implicitly - and the prominence of Galloway deeply compromised in his relations with that regime, with hardly anybody breathing a sigh of protest, is an indication, and a disturbing one, of that.

The issue of Galloway became more urgent when the Socialist Alliance began actively promoting him - at the same time as it (the Socialist Workers Party) was making its popular front turn. We are not refusing to work with people because they take a different view to us on Galloway. Rather, people who think we are crazy, obsessed, or whatever, about Galloway, are refusing - or anyway expressing their boredom and whatnot - at us trying to argue (yes, Mike) our case.

Clive Bradley
AWL

SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

Hard cash and comradeship

This letter has been sent by the Communist Party of Great Britain to the Socialist Alliance national executive committee

Dear comrades,
The financial contributions of the Socialist Alliance's principal supporting organisations are in urgent need of review. Once a new, acceptable agreement has been reached, the CPGB will, of course, fulfil its obligations completely.

Indeed this has been our practice. We should also point out that it was at our initiative that it was first agreed that the SA's principal supporting organisations pay an equal sum. Specifically, that we should finance a national office - at the time this required £160 a month from what was then six organisations (since then the Socialist Party in England and Wales and Workers Power have both broken with the SA).

Throughout 2002, only the CPGB fulfilled this mutually agreed pledge directly. The Socialist Workers Party discounted debts to its printshop (which doubtless helps maintain turnover). Others paid far less.

Our Provisional Central Committee decided to suspend monthly payments to the SA for two reasons. Firstly, the failure of other principal organisations to meet their contributions.

Our representative on the EC has complained about this on a number of occasions and naturally this was fully reported in the *Weekly Worker*.

Secondly, the climate in the SA has undergone a radical alteration over the last year - for the worse.

Effectively the SA was closed down for the duration of the US-UK war against Iraq. Instead of rising to the unprecedented challenge and the huge opportunity to make a qualitative breakthrough, the SA was disappeared from view. Prime responsibility for this rests with the SWP leadership. For example, its members were instructed by Chris Bambery, SWP national secretary, to concentrate on SWP recruitment and selling *Socialist Worker*. Furthermore, no SA speaker featured on any of the Stop the War Coalition's platforms (we still do not know whether the SWP argued for or against this).

Then, at the SA's much delayed national conference, there was an attempt to exclude Martin Thomas from the new executive. We should point out that comrade Thomas represents the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, which is now the second largest of the principal supporting organisations. This was in gross violation of the SA's principles of inclusion and toleration and surely would have been highly damaging. In all probability the AWL would have staged a walkout. Thankfully, the threat by the CPGB to boycott the SWP's slate forced a rethink.

Nevertheless, the national conference saw the SWP impose a dramatic shift in overall political balance. SWP representation on the EC leapt from three to 13 and the Resistance/ISG bloc was rewarded with six seats. Previously, the SWP had three and the other principal supporting organisations one each.

It soon became clear how the SWP intended to use its new voting strength. Steve Godward - SA vice-chair - was ousted. His 'crime' - opposing the SWP's

'peace and justice' turn. Then there was the move to replace Marcus Ström of the CPGB as nominating officer - once again because of his minority viewpoint.

This was followed by the AGM of Birmingham SA. At the initiative of the SWP any officer who dared express doubts over the opportunist 'peace and justice' turn was purged. Another gross violation of the SA's founding principles of inclusively and toleration and proof that the SWP's behaviour in Beds SA was no aberration.

Sectarian intolerance has replaced the comradely relations that characterised the SA at its best. At Marxism 2003 CPGB members were even subjected to physical assault (perhaps at the initiative of Chris Bambery). Naturally the CPGB wrote to the SWP in protest. We expected an honest investigation and an assurance that there would be no repetition. Sad to say, the SWP has not even deigned to reply.

Unfortunately the SWP now sees its

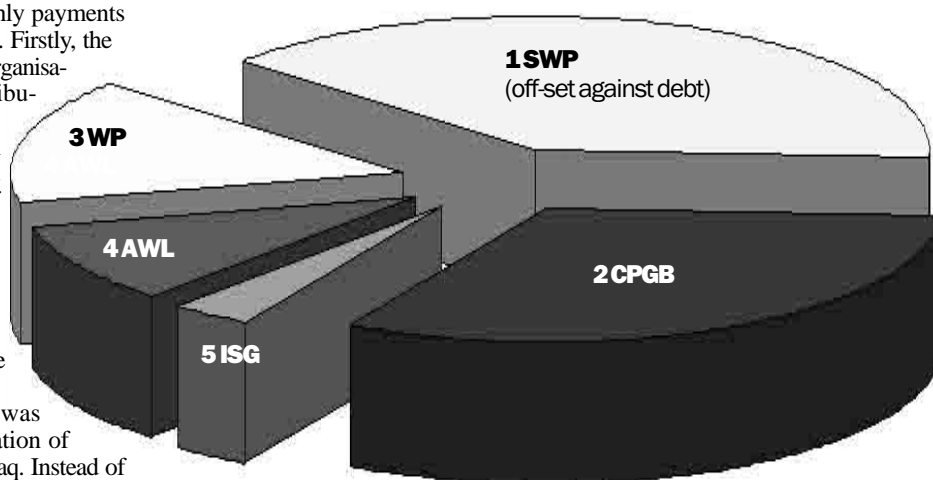
allies in the SA - apart from the most supine - as the problem. Nowadays communists are a barely tolerated minority, not valued partners. In such circumstances, we think it is entirely appropriate to review the CPGB's financial contribution.

The CPGB would agree to directly help fund the SA to the tune of £160 a month - if there was proportionality and a strict honouring of financial agreements. For example, contributions could reflect EC representation. The SWP would in this case pay £2,080 monthly and ISG/Resistance £960. Alternatively, we suggest a sliding scale based on claimed membership.

Comradely relations must be re-established as quickly as possible. Meanwhile old arrangements are no longer tenable.

With communist greetings

Mark Fischer
national organiser
Communist Party of Great Britain
October 14 2003



Group donations to SA, year ended
December 31 2002 (as reported to May 10
2003 annual conference)

1 SWP (donation by repayment of East End Offset)	£1,920
2 Communist Party of Great Britain	£1,590
3 Workers Power	£750
4 Alliance for Workers' Liberty	£480
5 International Socialist Group	£160

Join the Socialist Alliance

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

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**Socialist Alliance, Creative House, 82-90 Queensland Road,
London N7 7AS. Cheques and POs payable to Socialist Alliance**

ACTION

London Communist Forums

Sunday October 19, 5pm - 'The end of the 1848-51 revolutionary upsurge', using August Nimtz's *Marx and Engels: their part in the democratic breakthrough* as a study guide.

Sunday October 26, 5pm - special seminar: 'Zionism - for or against', with Sean Matgamna (Alliance for Workers' Liberty).
Phone 07950 416922 for details.

Renewing dialogues III

Marxism and education day seminar, Wednesday October 22, 9.30am to 5pm, Clarke Hall, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1. Sessions on identity, Marxism and action; activity theory; Gramsci, religion and the curriculum. To reserve a place (free, but limited), contact Glenn Rikowski: rikowski@tiscali.co.uk

No more deaths in custody

National demonstration, Saturday October 25. Assemble 1pm, Trafalgar Square, for march to Downing Street.
UFFC: info@uffc.org; 08453 307927.

Mumia Must Live

New video showing in support of Mumia Abu-Jamal, US militant framed for murder of policeman, at Anarchist Bookfair, Saturday October 25, 3pm, room 3B, University of London Union, Malet Street (nearest tube: Goodge Street).

Organised by Mumia Must Live, BCM Box 4771, London WC1N 3XX; mumiauk@yahoo.co.uk

No student fees

National demonstration, Sunday October 26. Assemble 12.30pm, Malet Street, march to Trafalgar Square for rally.
Organised by National Union of Students

British politics at the crossroads

Public meeting, Wednesday October 29, 7.30pm, Friends House, Euston Road (nearest tube: Euston or Euston Square). Speakers: George Galloway MP, Bob Crow, Ken Loach, George Monbiot, Linda Smith (FBU), Salma Yaqoob (Birmingham Stop the War) and a Socialist Alliance speaker.

Immigration laws disable!

Conference for disabled refugees, migrants and immigrants - and all opposed and subject to immigration controls: Saturday November 8, 1pm to 5pm (registration from 12 noon), Le Meridien, Victoria and Albert Hotel, Water Street, Castlefield, Manchester M3.

Organised by Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People, BEVC, Aked Close, Ardwick, Manchester M12 4AN; 0161-273 5153; gmcdp@globalnet.co.uk

Party wills

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

RDG

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

Socialist Alliance

Creative House, 82-90 Queensland Road, London N7 7AS; 020-7609 2999; office@socialistalliance.net

National council

Saturday October 18, 12 noon to 5pm, Steve Biko room, Nelson Mandela Building, Sheffield (opposite Sheffield rail station). Each local SA can send two members as delegates, at least one of which must be a woman. Please advise national office of delegates.

Lancaster SA

Meeting to discuss setting up of branch, Wednesday October 22. Call Eric Jones (01524 61585) for details of time and venue.

Convention of the Trade Union Left

Saturday February 7 2004, Friends Meeting House, Euston, London. Union support so far from: London region, Unison; London region, FBU; Essex committee, FBU; Stratford No1 branch, RMT.
Organised by Socialist Alliance, tu-convention@yahoo.co.uk

www.cpgb.org.uk/action

Kabul 1978 and Petrograd 1917: in defence of the October revolution

In this pamphlet Sean Matgamna refutes the *Weekly Worker* thesis that the PDPA coup of 1978 was an authentic democratic revolution, and discusses what the left must do to rid itself of the hangovers of Stalinism.

£2 plus 34p postage from: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

CALIFORNIA

Arnold Schwarzenegger -
www.schwarzenegger.com
www.joinarnold.com

True lies

As someone best known for the size of his biceps rather than his acting ability, I doubt Arnold Schwarzenegger's dubious talents will do him well in his new job as California's 'governator'. Still he seems to have wasted no time getting embroiled in sleaze. Accusations of sexual harassment aside, Greg Palast's website has posted allegations concerning Schwarzenegger's 'political intercourse' with Enron executives. Despite his lack of political experience, he seems acutely aware of what side his bread is buttered. So it looks like it will be business as usual at the governor's office.

The briefest glance at his official website (www.schwarzenegger.com) says a lot about him. The grey metallic sheen, overlooked by a stern looking Arnie, suggests that he takes his Terminator alter ego a little too seriously. As is expected from celebrity web pages, the majority of the space is cluttered up with useless nonsense. So we have promotions for a couple of DVDs, broadcast time for Schwarzenegger-related TV shows, and even a poll where you can vote for your favourite early TV appearance. Thrilling.

The navigation panel neatly divides the website up into easy-to-digest sections. 'Actor' aims to "explore different facets of his work as an actor". It took me all of 30 seconds to take in the breadth of his talents, via the photo gallery, TV listings and filmography. The absence of a compendium of Schwarzenegger's toe-curling catchphrases is by far the best feature here. 'Athlete' is a dire collection of articles on our hero's rise to fame and the importance of physical fitness. And of course, we're treated to more pictures of Arnold striking a pose. 'Activist' is completely apolitical, serving to promote Schwarzenegger's endorsement of the 'special Olympics' and an after-school charity. The 'Life' pages invite us to dazzle our friends with Arnie trivia. (Did you know *Terminator 2* 3-D is, frame for frame, the most expensive film ever shot? Wow.) 'News' compiles an archive of more soft nonsense. 'Store etc' allows you to add to Schwarzenegger's burgeoning bank balance, and finally 'Games' provides three simple distractions.

Information about Arnold's infant political career is confined to the left-hand corner of the screen. The five pieces carried are pretty bland and out of date (as the news section says, "It's

not easy keeping up with Arnold"). But if there were ever any doubts about the interests Schwarzenegger will be representing in office, you will find an endorsement of his campaign by Californian manufacturing bosses tucked in there. There is little of substance on show here, which is fine for an excruciating online vanity project such as this.

The official campaign website (www.joinarnold.com) looks as if its packed to the gills with stories, articles, policies and footage. Schwarzenegger's ego still manages to shine through: for instance, the 'People joining Arnold' scrolling message is so embarrassing and congratulatory that it would make Göbbels blush. The site itself follows the traditional format of drop-down menus, main field and navigation bar. The latter is split into four subsections: 'Transition' concerns appointments and careers, while 'Get informed' reads as though it was culled from his other website - except the biographical pages are far worse than anything offered there. The image of a 21-year-old Austrian arriving in the US with just \$20 in his pocket is the stuff of the American dream, as are the listing of his charitable concerns, of course.

Schwarzenegger's politics finally get a look-in at this point, with a vague-sounding policy agenda and a question and answer session on them. Though shallow, it says quite enough about the thrust of his 'programme'. The leadership pages offer more hagiography, and endorsements list dozens of Republican activists (imagine mainstream British parties using endorsements from their activists as a central plank of election campaigns). 'Join the team' allows you to endorse/join the campaign and make donations. Finally 'Services' makes available photos, video streams and downloads.

The drop-down menus offers nothing beyond short cuts around the site. The main field is quite interesting on the eye, but again leads to little not already covered by the navigation facilities. The 'Opinion' link offers a dozen articles from the national press going back to early August. I was surprised to encounter so few, but it was unexpected to find a couple of critical pieces.

Whatever the case, the campaign site is so poor I almost preferred his personal one. To mangle a phrase, "I won't be back" ●

Phil Hamilton



An American nightmare

Arnie's total recall

Picture this: a young man travels to the US in search of fame and fortune. He finds it. Along the way he has lots of adventures and marries a beautiful woman. He loves his adopted country so much that he decides he wants to be one of the men charged with running it; and the people love him so much that they want him to.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, body-builder, movie star and restaurateur, has added to his list of achievements by becoming the new Republican governor of California, the world's fifth largest economy. It could be the plot of some schmaltzy and highly improbable Hollywood movie, with Arnie starring in the leading role as the poor immigrant who finds success in the land of opportunity.

The reality is that like all US politicians Schwarzenegger is obscenely rich and has nothing in common with the ordinary citizen. He differs from most politicians in that he is a household name because of his often gratuitously violent, machismo-fuelled, multi-million dollar movies. He also happens to be married to Maria Shriver, daughter of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, and scion of that infamous political family, the Kennedys.

There is nothing unusual in Schwarzenegger becoming governor. Big money and powerful political families dominate US politics and, lest we forget, prior to becoming president, Ronald Reagan was also both an actor and governor of California. As Arianna Huffington, one of the 135 candidates in the election, and who stood as an independent, perceptively observed, "The truth is, American politics is broken - controlled by a powerful elite using its financial clout to set the political agenda. Our representative republic has been replaced by the dictatorship of the dollar."

It is easy to be cynical about US politics. The British bourgeois media and intelligentsia have raised such cynicism almost to an art form (while turning a blind eye to the democratic deficit in our own country). For example, those who from a British chauvinist point of view decry the election of a movie star as representing the demise of democracy itself somehow fail to remember last year's election of a 'monkey' as mayor of Harlepool. Such scorn can, however, obscure important details. In the case of the Californian gubernatorial elections it has meant that a great deal of coverage has been afforded to the candidates, particularly Schwarzenegger, while too little heed has been paid to the political process which brought about the election in the first place.

The election did not take place because the term of the previous governor, Democrat Gray Davis, had expired. It took place because the electorate recalled

the incumbent. Enough of the people he represented were dissatisfied with him, and so a vote was held to determine whether he should be removed from office and, if so, who should replace him as governor.

The act of recall was put on the statute books in California in 1911 in order to provide the electorate with a mechanism to remove elected representatives from office before the end of their term. The proponents of the recall have to issue a notice of intention, declaring why they want the recall to take place, and then have 160 days in which to gather signatures equal to 12% of those who voted in the original election. This having taken place, the lieutenant governor is obliged to call an election within 80 days.

This legislation prevents governors from hanging on to their position against the will of the electorate. It acts as a counterbalance to any tendency to call elections at times when they judge they are more likely to be re-elected. If a representative is performing an unsatisfactory job, they can be removed. Communists defend such progressive legislation. We argue that the ability to immediately recall all elected representatives from below is integral to democracy.

However, California is unfortunately far from being a model of democracy. Since 1911 there have been 31 previous attempts to recall the incumbent governor - itself a highly undemocratic office, like the US president somewhat akin to an elected monarch. This is the first to successfully result in a ballot. The reason why this particular recall was successful seems to be due less to the dissatisfaction of the electorate with Gray Davis than the disgruntled Republican machine which lost the election last November. What is more, in order to run as a candidate, it is necessary to either gather 10,000 signatures or pay \$3,500 (in which case only 65 signatures are required).

California is facing an estimated \$38 billion deficit. The Republicans blamed Davis for the failing economy. Their solution to the fiscal crisis: tax cuts. Although Schwarzenegger has largely refused to engage with real politics - only once participating in a televised debate, where his replies were scripted - throughout he has made his opposition to anything above minimal taxation clear. The interests of capital were on display for all to see in this campaign: the 'statement of reasons' on the recall petition gives "gross mismanagement ... by overspending taxpayers' money". Conversely Davis argued against the recall, not by mounting a defence of public spending, but on the grounds that such an election would cost up to \$40 million.

The public dissatisfaction that led to Davis being ousted from office derived from his connections to powerful lobby groups, from whom he received considerable donations.

With his Teutonic good looks, muscle-bound body and taciturn use of language, it is easy to sneer at Schwarzenegger (although probably not to his face). However, it must not be forgotten that this is a man who has already been very successful both as a body-builder and as a movie star. Although he has been reticent about talking about politics in any detail, this could be due less to an inability to discuss such weighty matters than a calculated move on his part to sell himself as being different from conventional politicians. The US public are more enamoured with celebrities than they are with whey-faced professional politicians and bureaucrats. Schwarzenegger is popular because he is a larger-than-life character. He is popular because, rather than engage in political debate with his rivals, he repeats lines from his movies.

Schwarzenegger's campaign strategy paid off. He shrugged off the allegations of having sexually assaulted women. He shrugged off the fact that he said he admired Hitler in an interview in the 1970s. He managed to attract the votes of considerable numbers of women, gay people and ethnic minorities, voters who traditionally align themselves with the Democrats. Of the 55% of the electorate who voted to remove Gray Davis from office, Schwarzenegger gained more votes than his two nearest rivals combined.

Incidentally, aside from the more conventional of the 135 politicians who contested the election, the independents included infamous, gold-plated-wheelchair-bound pornographer Larry Flynt and the "adult film star", Mary Carey, whose election pledges included promising to install live web-cams in the governor's mansion. In calling for legal unions for same-sex couples, Carey was more progressive than Schwarzenegger, who was quoted as saying that "gay marriage should be between a man and a woman". Perhaps the new governor has been taking lessons in rhetoric from the president.

Ultimately the role of a politician in a bourgeois state is simply to provide a veneer of democracy whilst allowing free reign to capital. Schwarzenegger is likely to be able to fill the role admirably. His considerable experience in special-effects-laden Hollywood blockbusters will no doubt have prepared him adequately for the world of smoke and mirrors that is politics. The people of California deserve better ●

Jem Jones

around
THEWEB

THE LEFT

Labour socialists and SSP

Can Labour be reclaimed? Are avenues of dissent concreted over? **Vince Mills** secretary of the Campaign for Socialism - a group within the Scottish Labour Party - speaks to Mark Fischer

What is the Campaign for Socialism and what role does it play?

It began around the time of the attempt to get rid of clause four. There was a broad-based campaign in Scotland to resist that.

After the defeat of clause four, there was a real desire to continue fighting for a socialist position inside the party. Gradually, it has cohered. Initially, it was a very loose network - you would be invited to meetings informally, simply if someone knew you were on the left. We moved to a membership organisation and consolidated the funding for the campaign's quarterly journal, *The citizen*. We also improved it as a publication - initially it was pretty amateur.

We now have around 100 members. We have a constitution that commits us to the transformation of society from capitalism to socialism. We are entirely open and up-front as an inner party group and usually organise events around Scottish party conference, our AGM in January and a late summer event.

And is there a wider layer of support for the campaign? Is the party in Scotland to the left of Labour elsewhere?

That's a difficult question. I'll give you an example. Perhaps people in Wales look to Scotland and think the party is a bit more left. But then, we in Scotland would look to the Welsh assembly elections and see that the more 'real Labour' position adopted by the party was to the left of the mainstream party in Scotland.

I get the same feeling when I look at England. If you simply 'aggregate' politics in England, then perhaps you might conclude that Scotland has a more social democratic, 'welfarist' approach. But if you take particular bits of England - the north east, or London - and make comparisons, then you could actually argue that these have more socialists on the ground with more support than us. So the picture is complex.

Also history changes. In one of the elections in the 1950s, for instance, over 50% in Scotland actually voted for the Tories. So, the decline of the Tories here has been comparatively recent in historical terms.

Rozanne Foyer - assistant secretary of the Scottish TUC and a member of the Campaign for Socialism - told us about the revolt at the Scottish Labour Party in March over the right to debate Iraq (Weekly Worker April 3). What has happened since?

Basically, quiet consolidation. One of the biggest pluses of that conference was the development of closer links between the unions that are prepared to take the leadership on, the CFS and other left-of-centre constituency Labour Party activists.

That involved us talking to each other before the conference, primarily discussing how we would get that Iraq debate. We were successful in referring back standing orders and getting it, although arguably we didn't get the kind of discussion we wanted.

More positively, afterwards we organised a joint press conference, where leaders of Unison, GMB and other important unions sat with us on the platform. Since then, the dialogue has continued. The extent to which that has borne fruit waits to be seen in the levels of cooperation at the next Scottish Labour Party conference in late February next year.

Perhaps that cooperation will move to

a new level of organisation - we might set up a Scottish version of what Mick Rix has advanced, a Labour Representation Committee, although whether we call it by the same name or 'put a kilt on it', depends on how the whole thing develops, of course. I certainly sense in the big public sector and service unions a continued desire to work with radical CLP activists who want change both in policy and in the democratic structures of the party.

How did you view the Bournemouth conference? Some on the left - the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party in England and Wales, for example - either downplayed the revolt by the trade unions, or ignored it altogether.

Clearly, there were *real* signs of a change, although weaknesses remain. I shared with many others a real sense of disappointment with Derek Simpson's contribution to the debate. I would have liked him to be a tad more 'up an' at 'em'. But other unions leaders are in opposition already. That was the real story of this conference and a boost to the left.

However, the CLPs are still very patchy in Scotland. Personally, I'm in Glasgow Kelvin CLP, which is actually quite active. The last branch meeting had 15 people at it - and oddly enough, we had a discussion on the structure of the party and the Scottish leadership's idea that branches should be abolished. What that would do is destroy Labour as a political party. You would have US-style conventions of members to elect candidates, but you wouldn't have a political community that talks to each other, develops and challenges ideas.

But, whereas in bits of Glasgow the party is alive and well - and quite leftwing in places - in areas of rural Scotland and even in other cities, that's not the case. It's much more characterised by dying branches and low political activity.

However, I'd hasten to add that this is not a new phenomenon for the Labour Party. To some extent, that's *always* been the picture. Personally, I'd like to look at the impact of the disaffiliation of the Independent Labour Party in 1932. At that point, the ILP provided a real political community, right down to organising dances at the weekend.

When that ended with disaffiliation, I have a strong suspicion that the soul went out of the party to a certain extent, that it became much more of an electoral machine - although there have been attempts to reassert that kind of socialism in initiatives like the Socialist Fellowship and so on.

Many tend to view Labour as an empty shell - it comes alive for



Vince Mills: no golden age

elections and little else.

That was precisely my experience growing up on a scheme in the north of Glasgow - which is probably why I joined the Communist Party. I didn't actually know there was such a thing as the Labour Party - I knew there were Labour councillors and MPs, but I didn't see any party life at all. Probably because there was none there to see.

Do you see the Scottish Socialist Party as a serious threat?

No, not really. It's very difficult to be entirely objective here. Partly because I was in the Labour Party when Militant were behaving at their absolute worst - and that included Tommy Sheridan - who has since been sainted, of course.

In Glasgow, where they picked up about 15% of the vote in the Scottish parliament elections, they have a small, but genuine base and they expose the weakness of the mainstream labour movement. Everywhere else in Scotland, they scarcely feature. If - as some people are talking about - there was a move away from the 'top up' to a single transferable vote system for the Scottish parliament elections, then they would lose two seats based on their last performance.

In effect, their electoral performance is *entirely* dependent on PR. I sometimes think that unfavourable comparisons between the Socialist Alliance's performance in England and Wales and the SSP fail to take that into account sufficiently. PR transforms what the left can do electorally.

You're being too hard on the SSP (and not hard enough on the SA). PR is one aspect. But this organisation has succeeded in doing something that the left outside Labour in the

rest of the country has palpably failed to - that is, to generate enthusiasm for a party project. It has some democracy, it has united important sections of the left without smothering them as distinct trends and it has an ambitious approach to politics. That's its key lesson, surely?

I think you've just put your finger on the tension in its ranks. Is it a revolutionary socialist party? If so, then clearly the kind of statements made by Rosie Kane, for example, where theory is denigrated in favour of a 'campaignism' - however worthy - is a real problem. How can a socialist party with a culture like that start to develop a theory of the socialist transformation of society, when most of its members are simply wrapped up in the latest campaigns?

There is a more profound problem. In order for them to be successful, in a sense they have to unravel the alliance between the trade unions and the CLPs. You need to get disaffiliation. If successful, how can you guarantee that disaffiliated unions will either affiliate to any political party, or necessarily put their newly freed funds into progressive cause? We could have a step away from politics, a regression to the situation before the Labour Party was actually founded. We have the example of the United States, which should act as a warning.

If you move to dissolve the alliance between the unions and Labour, on what basis do you assume that coming out the other end will be a progressive outcome? The SSP clearly have not thought that out. Indeed, when you read the book *Imagine* by Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes [see review *Weekly Worker* March 1 2001 - ed], it is extremely short on the strategic vectors for change. You get a good description of the ills of capitalism; you get a liberal - in the positive sense - vision of what socialism might look like; ie, it's not statist, it allows for democratic initiative from below, etc. But the bit in between is missing - how do we get from here to there?

People accuse them of being Trotskyists but I don't think so - they haven't been clandestine about it, their leaders have been quite direct that they think these labels are not helpful any more. But one thing they seem to have retained is the sanguine assumption that the working class is pretty well up for - if not socialism - at least radical change.

They don't acknowledge how difficult it is to win that. To get a more sober judgement, all we need to do is look at the number of people involved in the elections in the unions. 20% of the membership put Woodley in the leadership of the T&G. Just 15% put Kevin Curran of the GMB in. Mick Rix *lost* on a much bigger turnout. That's my fear. The SSP underestimates the conservatism of many working class people.

Isn't this where the question of the SSP's nationalism comes in? It puts a left, socialistic tinge on aspects of the existing consciousness of the working class in Scotland - ie, nationalism.

What's surprising and disappointing about this is that the Marxism that they must have espoused at some point tells us that nationalism is a *historically constructed* entity, designed to serve the interests of a particular class and its political project. In early 21st century capitalism, the kind of nationalism that can be forged today is of the kind we saw in Bosnia and to some extent in Northern

Ireland. It's regressive, often based on ethnicities and xenophobic fears of being 'overwhelmed'.

I attended a *Morning Star* conference up here two weeks ago where Tommy Sheridan spoke. When I raised this, there was a real sensitivity. I suggested that, once you move towards nationalism, in order to define what a nation is, you have to define what it is *not* - you have to define *the other*. That opens the door to racism and chauvinism. That went down like a fart in a spacesuit, of course. But this is a serious question and they have *not* addressed it.

Lastly then, is the Labour Party really reclaimable? And reclaimable for what? Do we want a Labour left that replicates all the mistakes of the past, or is something new required?

So, we're finishing with an easy question then ...

First, people forget how quick politics can change. In the 1980s, the ranks of the Labour Party were full of radical and left ideas. That has been transformed over a decade or so. Logically, it must be possible to transform it in another direction - I don't want to say 'back'. In this, the trade unions will be key and they will have to move in a more combative direction simply because of what the neoliberalism of New Labour does to their members. To survive as trade unions, they *must* challenge what the government is doing to their rank and file - they are workers' organisations so of necessity they are going to be pushed into opposition, with all the implications that will have for developments in the Labour Party itself.

Second, you're right. There is a romantic view that there was a 'golden age' when party conferences were democratic and branches were vibrant and running exciting education programmes, etc.

Nonsense! Party conferences were stitched up by the union barons. Ordinary activists had damn near no say at all - you were lucky if you got three words in a composite somewhere. We do *not* want to return to that. Without being too prescriptive, we need to talk both to the unions and to the party activists to see what can be salvaged from the New Labour period that might be useful after it ends.

For example, policy forums that were properly democratic and allow for minority reports could be retained. These might allow for a more sustained dialogue about policy - we don't need to go back to a system where you turn up at conference, the unions have already taken their position and you're lucky if you get to second it. So I'm not arguing for a return to the past. That past was deeply flawed in terms of its democratic processes.

And the left outside Labour - are you simply calling on them to join?

From a purely pragmatic point of view, that would be very useful. The left inside the party is under strength and probably exhausted after 10 years of defensive politics.

More realistically, I think we have to work together to help generate radical constituencies in the wider community. All socialists will eventually benefit from a process like that.

If that tide comes in, then all our boats rise - the left in the party *and* outside ●

Join the Scottish Socialist Party



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Scottish Socialist Party, 73 Robertson Street, Glasgow, G2 8QD. Or phone 0141-221 7714



www.thecitizen.org.uk

SCOTLAND

Bourgeois revolutions and

Neil Davidson, a member of the Socialist Worker platform in the SSP, systematically takes apart what commonly passes for Scottish history. This is an edited version of the opening he gave to this year's Communist University

If you ask socialists when the Scottish revolution occurred, most will ask, 'What revolution?' It is not one of those which make up the great canon of revolutions. That is why, in my book, *Discovering the Scottish revolution 1692-1746*, and other writings, I try to conceptualise the period of Scottish history that could be described as the bourgeois revolution.

I shall begin with a few definitions. If you leave aside nonsense like the 'internet revolution' and such like, there are two types of revolution which make any sense for socialists and political writers generally. The first type is political revolution: a new regime is imposed, but does not fundamentally change the socioeconomic nature of the society. I can think of at least half a dozen such revolutions in Scottish history between the reformation of 1559 and the 'glorious revolution' of 1688-89. Though bloody and violent, and often involving popular elements, they did not fundamentally change the nature of Scottish society.

Much rarer, and much more important, are social revolutions. These revolutions do not just change the regime, but smash and totally recast the state, as a prelude to socioeconomic change. We only know of two kinds. One is the socialist revolution, which, alas, has not happened yet, but which we saw the beginnings of in Russia 1917 and in the Paris Commune, and in some other revolutionary movements of the last century. The second type are bourgeois revolutions. Revolutions that actually ended or completed the destruction of feudalism or absolutism, and allowed bourgeois states, the new bourgeois world, to come into existence.

How do we define bourgeois revolutions? I think there is a misconception about what a bourgeois revolution actually is, which is derived from a model based on the French Revolution, and to a certain extent on the English civil war and the English Revolution. According to this misconception, there is a very conscious move-

ment which beheads the king, proclaims the republic, starts abolishing all the great estates and creates a national identity for the country beneath it. Clearly this is a caricature even of the French Revolution and most countries do not have anything like that experience of the transition to capitalism.

We have to look instead at the bourgeois revolution as a series of political events, strung out over quite a long period of time, decades perhaps, which result in the creation of capitalism. They are revolutions *for* capitalism rather than being revolutions carried out by capitalists.

Most bourgeois revolutions fall into two main camps, in different historical periods. The first one includes the Dutch revolt, the English civil war, the American revolution and the French revolution. These are largely carried out by the petty bourgeoisie - small, independent producers and radicalised sections of the periphery of the capitalist class: a struggle from below by and large.

The second wave, most of which is concentrated in the 1860s, is much more common: top-down revolutions, carried out by a faction of the

old feudal ruling class, which has seen which way the wind is blowing and realises that if it wants to carry on as a ruling class it is going to have to change

the basis of exploitation. We saw this in Prussia, in the creation of a unified Germany, in Italy, in Spain, in Japan and also in America with the American civil war (one of the few revolutions actually conducted by an industrial bourgeoisie, incidentally, against the southern slaveholders).

Eric Hobsbawm has said that essentially there was no Scottish revolution, but there was a sort of functional equivalent, represented by a struggle between two different forms of society: the tribal highland clans and the advanced capitalism of the lowlands. That is plausible, but wrong. For one thing, the highlands and lowlands were not actually as different as Hobsbawm and many others have made out. And there was no such thing as tribalism, since the clan was in no sense a tribal formation.

Secondly, the main counterrevolutionary movement in Scotland, and indeed in Britain as a whole after 1680, the Jacobites were not based in the highlands. Although there was some support there, most came from the northern lowlands. For instance, Aberdeenshire was a hotbed of reaction throughout the 17th and 18th centuries.

Finally, if it is the class struggle that creates capitalism, then obviously the key thing is the highland clearances. But the highland clearances happened much later. The clearances do not really start until about 1815, when Scotland was already at the pinnacle of capitalist development, so that cannot be the decisive thing.

Others say that the Scottish revolution happened at the same time as in England with the struggles of 1612, 1637, throughout the 1660s, and then 1688-1690. There is a more sophisticated version which concedes that maybe those events were not significant in themselves, but through the union of 1707 the Scots essentially inherited everything the English had done - a structural assimilation

in which the Scots got all the benefits of what happened in England without having to fight for it.

Again, this seems plausible, but here too there are problems. For a start, Scotland was not remotely capitalist in 1660, 1689 or 1707, or indeed until well into the 18th century. So it takes some explaining why events which were supposed to transform Scotland in fact did not do so. Secondly, the Jacobites - who in 1715 and 1745 threatened to overturn the British state - had a social base for their counterrevolution, which surely would not have been there if things were really going so swimmingly for capitalism.

Bourgeois revolutions require three things. Firstly, a crisis of feudalism - productive forces can no longer develop sufficiently, causing massive problems. Secondly, there has to be a capitalist solution. There were crises of feudalism since the 10th century, but obviously they did not result in capitalism. Thirdly, there has to be a social force which is capable of implementing a solution.

What were the social forces in Scotland at the beginning of the 1690s? First of all I should say something about the 'glorious revolution' of 1688 to 1689. This event is usually completely misunderstood in a Scottish context. In England, it is fair to say that the 'glorious revolution' was the final stage in the bourgeois revolution. It ensured that absolutism was smashed forever as an internal force.

This was not true in Scotland, where the forces that carried out the revolution were completely different. In England it was the agricultural and mercantile bourgeoisie wanting to establish their constitutional rights, their religious views, their right to accumulate capital and so on. In Scotland it was the old feudal lords who carried out the 'glorious revolution'. Obviously their interests were not the same as those of the English bourgeoisie. They were fighting absolutism from the right, if you like, from a more backward position - absolutism was threatening to centralise: to take away feudal powers and remove the local dominions of the feudal lords.

By the beginning of 1691, that political revolutionary process had ended and the old ruling class was back in power. William ruled not just the Irish colony, but two countries at the opposite ends of European development. One of the most backward countries, Scotland (you would need to go as far as Poland to find a country as backward at this stage), and England, the most developed. That was a totally untenable situation for the English state.

Class forces

Within Scotland itself there were three broad class forces involved. There was a reactionary section consisting of some of the highland clans - people who thought that the new regime would stop them from using blackmail and rustling cattle, which is how they made their living. These clans looked to return the Stuart dynasty. There was also the episcopalian clergy. They had been kicked out, in some cases by popular revolt - particularly in the south west of the country, where in 1689 there had been major uprisings in villages and some big towns. The episcopalians were the most committed to the return of the Stuarts and to the counterrevolution generally - for the very good material reason that it was the only way they could get back their position of social power. They were sustained in part as private tutors for the Jacobite lords. These two forces made

up the reactionary section.

In the middle were the conservative feudal lords and landowners (who were often the same people). A ruling class which drew their wealth from rents. They also had extra-economic power, which had two bases.

One was a military form of tenancy, not just in the highlands, but also in the north east lowlands: tenure was given to peasants on the basis that they would fight for the lord. There was nowhere else in Europe where such an arrangement still existed except Poland. Everywhere else, that sort of power had been sucked up by the absolutist state.

Secondly, all the lords had local jurisdiction - or heritable jurisdiction, as it was called. This gave them the power to try and sentence people within their own courts. There were only four crimes they could not try - the four pleas of the crown, such as treason. There is a record of someone tried for stealing and drowned by order of one of these courts in 1789. There is nowhere else in western or central Europe where this would have happened so late in history, on the basis of a judgement by an individual in his own local court.

Allied to them were the conservative merchant groups along the east coast, who were trading with Holland and the Baltic states using monopolies granted by the crown. They were merchant capitalists existing within the feudal system, and they were wedded to supporting the old system. These people could, I suppose, have been encouraged to look for some new way of organising production, a capitalist way, had anyone been able to give them a lead, but of course there was no one at that point going in that direction.

Against them was ranged the progressive wing of Scottish society, the social forces who were opposed to the way things were. Again, there was a jumble of different kinds of people and classes. In the south west there were independent yeoman farmers who owned their own land. They were not tenants, but they were still subject to the heritable jurisdiction of the lord in whose territory they happened to be based. Then on the west coast were the new merchants, who were trading with America and the Caribbean in tobacco and sugar and later became involved in the slave trade. Alongside them were Church of Scotland ministers, the presbyterians, who wanted to get rid of the episcopalians altogether and therefore wanted to push state power in places where it did not have any basis. There were also lawyers, a very important bourgeois group, who were deeply opposed to the local legal powers of the lords and were trying to set up a rational, centralised legal system.

Finally, and extremely importantly, there were the British officer corps. The army contained many who saw the possibility of a more rational set-up - one that was not based on feudal levies or absolutist mercenary troops, but on money and talent, as opposed to whether or not you belonged to the nobility.

The crisis of feudalism, which came in the 1690s, had three elements. First, a collapse of trade by about 50%. Partly this was brought on by the war between Britain and France, the first of many. France was one of Scotland's main trading partners, but by the time the war ended in 1697, new trade routes that did not involve Scotland had been found.

But that was not the worst of it. The really catastrophic factor was the huge subsistence crisis from 1695 onwards,

Neil Davidson: one British working class

breaking national myths

which hit the whole of Europe - Finland, for example, lost a third of its population. The only two countries that were not affected were England and the united Netherlands, the two that had changed to capitalist agriculture. Scotland lost between five and 15 percent of its population - somewhere between 50,000 and 150,000 people died of starvation between 1695 and 1699. A huge number, but in a feudal society where physical labour-power is the main means of production it was a disaster. People were still paying off debts acquired during this time 20 years later.

The third factor was the famous attempt to set up a colony at Darien in the Panamanian isthmus. The original idea was simply to open up a trading company, but it became a colony, partly under the pressure of the crisis at home, and partly because of the attempt to leap in developmental terms over the backwardness up to the level of England. The English, needless to say, were opposed to it, because it was going to be a rival to their own recently founded major capitalist concern, the East India Company.

This colony was set up in the middle of the area which the Spanish at least nominally controlled, and they were none too pleased about the Scots coming in and doing to them what they had done to the Mexicans and Incas a hundred years earlier. Additionally the Scots were presbyterians, which made it even more painful for the Spanish to contemplate.

However, the decisive problem was that neither the Scottish state nor civil society was capable of running this kind of enterprise. The level of planning, given that everything was staked on this venture, was catastrophically low. They used granite from Aberdeen to construct buildings in the middle of a swamp. Supplies were erratic and inappropriate and the thing was a disaster from the start.

The failure of this enterprise cost a couple of thousand lives and ate up between a third and a half of the entire national capital, which could otherwise have been used to invest in agricultural improvement, for example. Money was wasted that could have been spent on developing production. What this pointed to for many was that Scotland as an independent state was no longer tenable, and that they would be forced to choose, as the Scots have always been forced to choose, between England and France.

England or France

So let me say something about England and France. I said earlier that 1688-89 was the last phase of the English revolution. That is true if you look at England in isolation from the rest of the world. However, if you think of the possibility of external counterrevolution, then it was not. Right on until the 1750s there was a massive inter-systemic conflict between capitalist, constitutional England, on the one hand, and absolutist, feudal France, on the other, which was fought out across the world. Of course, this struggle affected Scotland as well. The English establishment - both the Tories and the Whigs - saw it as a potential back door for France, the great enemy. Their solution was to impose the House of Hanover, which was going to succeed William's sister-in-law Anne in 1715, in Scotland as well.

The Nairn-Anderson thesis identifies the allegedly unfulfilled nature of the English bourgeoisie, but I have always thought that their inviting back George Hanover was a splendid piece of bourgeois bravado. He was 57th in line to the throne and could not actually speak English. Asking him to be king was a demonstration that they did not care a hoot about the hereditary principle. He

was essentially hired to be monarch - a gesture of the triumphalism of the English bourgeoisie. They imposed this on the Scots as well.

By 1706 the majority of the Scottish ruling class had opted for an incorporating union with England. That union was deeply and bitterly opposed by the popular masses in Scotland. Once it became known that the treaty existed and was going to be passed by the old Scottish parliament, there was an enormous eruption, which consisted of mass petitions, in some cases signed by peasants who had usually never done anything to disagree with their lords and masters before. There were public burnings of the treaty and riots in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Two major factors were behind this resistance. At this time, the church was the only democratic institution of any sort in Scotland. Parliament was a joke. It consisted of the nobility and two self-selected groups of burgesses and lesser landlords, who elected each other, so it was not a democratic institution at all. One person in a thousand had the vote. The church was the institution that organised welfare and what social services there were. Its elders and ministers were elected, so it was an institution with some level of popular participation. Even though the Scottish church was a mainstay of repression and witch-burning, on some level it did function as an institution where people could be involved and it was vitally important to protect it. After the riot in Glasgow, in the space of precisely three days a law was passed protecting forever the Scottish church from anything imposed by England, such as episcopalianism and bishops.

The second point of concern was taxation - increasing excise charges, the levies on salt, beer and other essentials. Again, the massive riots produced huge wrangling in parliament and reforms were brought in reversing the increases. The fact is that they were withdrawn for years as the result of the insurgency.

However, it did not go any further than that and, once these changes were made, the resistance to the union began to die down. There was an important reason for this. The only way that the Scots could have stopped the union was through an armed insurrection and everybody knew that France would have invaded in support. Either Scotland would have become a colony of absolutist, catholic France or the English would have invaded in response - they would either have conquered Scotland or turned it into something like Ireland. What was not going to happen was some sort of Scottish independent republic in 1707. I think people knew that and consciously pulled back.

Why did the ruling class go for union? The first thing to be said is that it was not a bourgeois deal. Despite what EP Thompson and CPGB historians used to argue about the union representing the linking up of the two bourgeoisies, the bourgeoisie opposed the treaty. It was the feudal lords who wanted it and it was they who voted most strongly for it in parliament. The reason is that the English essentially guaranteed their feudal rights. The most important part of the treaty is section 21, which says that all the heritable jurisdictions and all the associated powers of the lords will be preserved in perpetuity, regardless of anything else included in the treaty.

In effect the lords were to be allowed to continue exploiting the peasants in the same way, provided they did not bother the English. This of course is a technique that the British later perfected in India. It meant that no major social transformations were implemented: the old feudal ruling class were allowed to carry on, as long as they did what they were told.

However, the fact of the union did

actually mean that the transition to capitalism began to gather pace, even though the English had no real intention of carrying it out in any systematic way. People saw how English agriculture was accruing great wealth to its owners. Merchants on the west coast began to feed money into agriculture.

The feudal lords essentially had three choices. If they were rich and powerful enough, they could actually transform themselves into capitalist landlords. Or they could simply attempt to exploit the peasants harder - screw more out of them by upping their rent. But there is a limit to how far this can be taken. The third option was to stage a counterrevolutionary rising and try to turn the clock back - to return things in Scotland, and perhaps in England as well, to the way they had been. They could hope to do that because they still had the powers, the military tenures, etc, which the English had left in place.

It is interesting to ask why the English allowed them to retain these privileges. There are two reasons. One is that it was not just the supporters of the Stuarts who had feudal dominions. For example, Argyle was a supporter of the regime and the union - he had huge estates and drew great feudal rents from them. The second reason was the impotence of the state. In at least half of Scotland - the highlands and also large parts of the north - the state simply had no authority, no real power. It needed the local lords just to act as a general law and order machine, because there was nothing else to put in their place.

From 1707 until 1746, then, there was essentially a system of dual power in Scotland. There was a bourgeois state centred in London, with some vague outpost in Edinburgh trying to run things, and the local power bases of the feudal lords and their domains. This situation could not be sustained: it was untenable. It led to attempts by the more crisis-ridden lords to militarily turn the situation around. One of them, after he was captured at Culloden, said in his prison cell before he was beheaded: "My Lord, for the two kings [that is, James and George] and their right, I care not a farthing. But I was starving. And by god, if Mohammed had set up a standard in the highlands I would have been a good muslim for bread, and stuck close to the Jacobite party, for I must eat." This gives some indication of the actual motives of the lords in supporting the counterrevolutionary movement.

The '45

They rebelled on two major occasions: one was 1715, a stand-off that did not really resolve anything fundamentally. The other was 1745, the last British civil war, which resulted in the breaking of the powers of the lords forever, at least in terms of their ability to challenge the British state.

In April 1745, Charles Edward Stuart, the grandson of James II, arrived in the western isles and gathered around him several thousand troops, mostly brought out under feudal levies. He fought a number of insubstantial battles and soon had the whole country before him. The reason for this is that in the preceding years Scotland, although still carry-

ing out vigorous imperialist military operations abroad on behalf of the British empire, was essentially demilitarising, at least in the lowlands. So this was a feudal army marching into an increasingly bourgeois society, which was not armed to resist it.

The Jacobites moved into England. They knew they had to take London, but they got as far as Derby, as most people know, and then they turned back. The reason for this is quite interesting. They had been joined by only 300 people in England, and they had not been reinforced by the French, which is what Charles had said would happen. The French navy had been trying to get to Britain, but the British navy, the most powerful in the world, had totally immobilised them.

The high command of Charles's army believed that, if they returned to Scotland, at least they would be able to defend themselves in the highlands. This was a big mistake. Instead the British army - and it was a British army incidentally: at least a third of it was composed of Scots - went into the highlands in pursuit of the Jacobites. They were eventually forced to fight, at Culloden, on April 16 1746. It was the first time that a Jacobite band of any description had come face to face with the military revolution that was a product of the early 18th century. And they were destroyed by it.

I will not repeat the details of the battle, but the end result was 50 Hanoverian troops and 2,000 Jacobites dead. What is more, the slaughter did not just stop on the battlefield: it went on for weeks afterwards, as people - some who had nothing to do with the fighting actually - were shot, bludgeoned or starved to death. No prisoners were taken unless they were French, because the French were regarded as civilised rather than savages. A major ideological drive was led, not by the English, but by the lowland Scots, to make sure that the blame was shifted onto the highlands. Although in reality the Jacobite movement was not really a highland movement at all, the highlands were made to carry the can.

The terror went on for several months, but more important was the legislation that followed: the Tenures Abolition Act, which did away, finally, with the possibility of military tenure; the Heritable Jurisdictions Act, the most important change, which abolished the local power of the lords; and the Disarming Act, which forbade the carrying of weapons. That was the end of feudalism in Scotland and indeed in Britain. It was quite consciously done for that reason. The Scottish enlightenment figures of the time are quite explicit.

Two things followed. One was the transformation of agriculture, which was absolutely central to the development of Scottish capitalism. And, linked to that, here for the first time a bourgeoisie was consciously transforming society. The power of the feudal lords had been broken. They had been killed, or jailed, or had themselves decided to become capitalists. So there was no trouble coming from them. The working class did not exist yet, so the bourgeoisie did not have to worry, as later bourgeoisies would, about things going too far. Essentially they could do what they liked. And what they proceeded to do, over the period of the next 40 years or so, was to abolish all the remains of feudalism. Labour rent, rent in kind, all the things which could hold back capitalist development were done away with. Adam Smith and others theorised this.

In 1805 Walter Scott, wrote glowingly about the years since 1745: "There is no European nation which in the course of half a century or a little more has undergone so complete a change as this king-

dom of Scotland. The effects of the insurrection of 1745 were the destruction of the patriarchal power of the highland chiefs, the abolition of the heritable jurisdictions and the lowland nobility and baronies. The total eradication of the Jacobite party commenced this innovation. The gradual influx of wealth and extension of commerce have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers as the existing English are from Queen Elizabeth's time."

In this astonishing passage, what Scott is saying is that Scotland has done in 50 years what it took 250 years for the English to do. And it is true. All the statistical indices show a massive upward curve in economic development in absolutely everything - linen production, coal production, tobacco production and most of all in agriculture and agricultural rent accrued to the capitalist ruling classes.

Here was an example of what Trotsky was later to call uneven and combined development, where a backward country takes on board the achievements of a more advanced one and uses them to leap over several developmental stages at once. This is certainly what the agrarian capitalist classes did.

Controversy

As you may know, there was a certain controversy in *Scottish Socialist Voice* when my book came out. It was not so much over the book itself as over the review. Two essential criticisms were made. First, that somehow what I described was not a proper revolution because it was not a revolution from below. But why should bourgeois revolutions be revolutions from below? Very few of them have been. Since the actual objective of a bourgeois revolution is to establish capitalist society, a society which is greatly unequal and which, as Marx says, comes into the world dripping with blood from head to toe, I do not see any reason why we should expect it to happen from below. It happened that way in France and to a certain extent in England, but in most places it has not happened like that.

The other argument, slightly more serious, is that the horrors which happened in the highlands - not just after Culloden but during the clearances and so on - were so unspeakable that it is impossible to see the whole process as progressive in any sense (I think the clearances are a red herring, because they actually took place much later). But again this is the case with all bourgeois revolutions. You cannot neatly separate the good from the bad. You have to take the bourgeois revolution as a whole and understand how the nature of the social forces bringing it about means we can never fully endorse it or incorporate it into our tradition in an uncomplicated way.

As a result of the bourgeois revolution - somewhere about 1815 - Scotland achieved the same level of development as England. And that meant that, when the working class appeared in its own right, it happened in both countries simultaneously. The Scottish case was slightly different because more pressurised circumstances resulted in more militancy in the early days.

But for all intents and purposes there is one British working class and it emerged in 1820. This is what annoys my critics, because it means it is unlikely that there is going to be another Scottish revolution separate from one in Britain as a whole, because both classes - the bourgeoisie and the working class - came into being at a definite historic moment, and they were one throughout the 19th and 20th centuries ●



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SOCIAL FORUM

Open up London ESF bid

Another week, another secret meeting to discuss the proposal to host the European Social Forum 2004 in London.

So far, the main initiators of the bid, the Socialist Workers Party/Globalise Resistance, have refused to either organise or attend any public forum to discuss the bid in front of the left and workers' movement in Britain. All the while, a *de facto* leadership seems well advanced: Mick Connolly from the South East Region TUC (Sertuc) has been appointed "honorary treasurer" by GR's Chris Nineham. Comrade Connolly will apparently be supported by a "fundraising team" that has already started working - in the GR office. Comrade Nineham and his comrades have, however, given in to pressure from some of the NGOs involved and widened the circle of those invited to attend the organising meetings of the bidders.

Needless to say, neither the CPGB nor any other groups of the revolutionary left were invited to the latest meeting, which took place on Friday October 10 in the TUC's Congress House. As is usual with secret meetings, they normally do not stay secret for very long. More than one little birdie sung to us beforehand - despite comrade Nineham's thinly disguised threats. He apparently told all those invited not to talk to anybody about the meeting and that "people without official invitation will not get in".

Once we were there, however, Mick Connolly, who officially convened the gathering, had "no problem at all" with admitting us. He was very friendly throughout and did not seem to be centrally involved in the bid (or the conspiracy to keep it secret).

The numbers attending were pretty small, with only a few newcomers. The core consists of Chris Nineham and Guy Taylor from GR; Kenny Bell from Unison in Newcastle (and a close, though critical,

associate of the SWP); and Kate Hudson from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, who told us that she "recently joined the Communist Party of Britain" (the *Morning Star*'s CPB is not yet a sponsor). Redmond O'Neill, representative of mayor Ken Livingstone, sent apologies.

This inner circle is not dissimilar to the factional alignment which runs the Stop the War Coalition, where the SWP, CPB and CND form a solid bloc - only this time Ken Livingstone and Socialist Action are involved too. Action are a tightly knit group of deep entryists who have the same organisational origins as Alan Thornett's International Socialist Group. Apparently nowadays Action members more or less run Ken Livingstone's office, besides controlling some key Greater London Authority departments. It is unlikely that any pressure to open up the London bid process will come from that quarter. Bureaucratic structures and back-room deals suit Action and Ken Livingstone. Certainly Livingstone's chances of re-election in 2004 would not be served by allowing initiative and control to slip into the hands of open, democratic meetings.

The newcomers consisted of Oscar Reyes from Signs of the Times and a member of the London Social Forum (though not officially representing the LSF); Stuart Hodgkinson from *Red Pepper* (standing in for Hilary Wainwright); Dave Timms from the World Development Movement (WDM); and Naima Bouteldja from Globalise Resistance and the Progressive

M u s l i m
N e t -
w o r k

Although we informed Workers Power, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the International Socialist Group/*Resistance*, none of them sent anyone.

Both the narrow range of representatives and the discussion itself give reason for concern. It lasted only 55 minutes and was dominated by comrade Nineham going over technical details about the bid. And it is a hell of a mess. It currently seems to owe more to wishful thinking than reality. Take, for example, cost. It is based on 50,000 participants paying an "average £20 entrance". That would come to one million pounds - well short of this year's budget for the ESF in Paris, which is currently estimated at €7 million.

Some other comparisons:

- A number of arrondissements in Paris are providing free venues for this year's ESF. The GLA does not own any venues and has a very limited budget.

- At last year's ESF in Florence the average ticket was under €10 (about £6) - and a large number of people did not even pay that. After the first day, everybody got in for free.

- Comrade Nineham suggested that Londoners should be encouraged to put up visitors - in exchange for a free ticket to the ESF. If this scheme succeeded in easing the problem of accommodation, that would mean there would be a large number of participants not paying at all, let alone an "average of £20".

- In Paris and Florence, free accommodation was provided in sports halls - again provided by local government. Comrade Nineham could not confirm if any of those would be available and suggested (instead?) that "we are looking at the possibility of putting up a 'big, heated tent in Hyde Park'. In November!
- A tranche of finance for this year's ESF will come from charging organisations €300 to put up a stall and a similar amount to organise seminars. Although comrade Nineham mentioned this in passing, it was not on the sheet of paper that listed income.

Also, while the comrades have checked prices with big venues like the Royal Albert Hall, they have not actually asked if they will be available next year. A rather big oversight. Many of these venues are booked a good 12 months in advance for concerts and so forth.

Then there is the problem with supporting the bid - ie, who is actually prepared to help financially and organisationally? Quite a few organisations have agreed to allow their names to be used, but this does not seem to come with much commitment. According to Mick Connolly, Sertuc could not guarantee any funding, as "our money will be very stretched in 2004", given the European elections and other events. According to Connolly's report, some trade union officials have given the nod to the "idea" - similarly the Workers Beer Company, which has "expressed an interest" - but none of them are yet officially on board. The leadership of Unison has still not supported the recommendation of its international department to support the bid.

Another interesting insight into GR's cavalier attitude was provided when Teresa Hoskyns from the LSF gatecrashed the meeting halfway through. She gave out leaflets and complained about the secret nature of the meeting. Kate Hudson, officially chairing, tried to explain that this was only "a meeting for those putting the bid together". At this point Dave Timms made clear that his organisation (WDM) was not supporting the bid, despite Chris Nineham announcing this a number of times. "How can we support a bid that

we have not even seen yet?" comrade Timms asked. It looks like GR still has not made public the document it distributed in a secret meeting during the last ESF assembly (see *Weekly Worker* October 2). In view of this, we have decided to make it available through the CPGB website.

Comrade Timms was clearly unhappy when Chris Nineham said he "was led to believe" that WDM was supporting the bid. An argument ensued, which seemed to give other people the courage to speak out against GR/SWP underhand methods. Oscar Reyes quite rightly lambasted the idea of getting cultural figures involved when we do not even know about the bid yet. Stuart Hodgkinson said that "every different sector should be approached and asked to work together to brainstorm on funding, venues and other details". He said the bid should be opened up "as soon as possible" to allow everybody's input.

These - rather mild - criticisms were greeted with lots of understanding nods or, at worst, silence. But there are no concrete plans to go public and the date for the next meeting was not even announced.

Surely now is the time to bring *all* interested organisations and individuals on board. More input is urgently needed to make sure that the ESF 2004 does not collapse because of SWP control-freakery.

Public debate

The first public meeting to discuss the bid, hosted by the London Social Forum, will be held on Sunday October 19. So far, only Kate Hudson from CND has agreed to speak and answer questions. Chris Nineham, Redmond O'Neill and Mick Connolly have been invited.

There will also be a number of international visitors, who have - undoubtedly for their own reasons - been very keen on attending. Hugo Braun, a member of Attac Germany and the German Communist Party (DKP), will present the position of the German Social Forum, which "decided on Sunday unanimously to support [the] London candidacy for the ESF 2004 - only [with] the precondition that the preparatory process will reflect the broad political spectr[um] of the British civil society and will be transparent and will not exclude anybody from the left". Interestingly, even the members of the SWP's German section, Linksruck, seem to have supported the resolution.

Bruno Paladini is a prominent member of the Italian delegation to ESF meetings

and will represent the militant trade union, Cobas. He is also very close to Rifondazione Comunista, which is known to be extremely concerned with the SWP's behaviour. The Greek Social Forum and a member of the Hungarian ESF committee have also expressed their interest in attending.

Jean-Pierre Beauvais will present Attac France's retrogressive proposal to make the ESF "less gigantic" and decrease the frequency of the ESF by making it biannual. Attac has been very keen to influence the main organisers of the London Social Forum - unfortunately, the SWP's sectarian behaviour in refusing to cooperate with LSF plays into their hands. Hopefully though, Jean-Pierre will not find much support at Sunday's meeting.

Many Europeans are seriously concerned about the future of the ESF. "If the SWP carry on dominating things in such an obviously undemocratic way, they will jeopardise the whole future of the ESF," an angry delegate from the Italian Social Forum told me at the last ESF assembly in Paris. He feared that people would not travel all the way to London to support "what looks like an SWP stitch-up". If the ESF in London ends up considerably smaller than in the previous two years, this could also play into the hands of Attac, which would be in a much stronger position to argue for a further scaling down.

A number of organisations and individuals will be putting forward a draft resolution to the London meeting that welcomes the bid, but makes some concrete proposals as to how it can become the property of the whole movement in Britain. It argues for the details of the bid to be made public and sent to "all civil society groups, organisations and movements", so that it can become "open to consultation and amendment". Any decision-making body must represent "all relevant sectors, including trade unions, NGOs, campaign groups, cultural and community organisations, social movements and forums, political parties and left press". The body must meet in public, with meetings advertised in advance and observers allowed at all times.

As we cannot rely on any of the organisations so far involved making the bid more transparent, surely this is the right way to go. A wide range of individuals and groups from across Europe are already prepared to sign up to the proposal, which has already been dubbed the "rival London bid" ●

Tina Becker

Fighting fund

Leave something behind

This week's post has gone some way towards easing my worries. A number of comrades have responded magnificently to our appeal for an extra £250 for October, on top of our usual £500 monthly target.

I have to give special mention to SM, who used the new Pay Pal facility on our website to transfer £50 into our account, along with PH, who sent us an old-fashioned cheque for £30, UT (£20), MM (£15) and SW, who posted us his £10 donation from Norway. I also have to thank those regular donors who pay by standing order - not least MM (a different one), who forks out £60 monthly, as well

as several who provide us with smaller donations. Our latest statement shows £160 received via this method.

All that takes us up to £440, which leaves us nicely placed to reach our £750 target in two weeks time. But surely there are a lot more like SM out there who could make use of Pay Pal. After all no fewer than 7,553 visitors logged on to our website last week - but only one showed his appreciation by leaving something behind!

Robbie Rix

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

SWP's Chris Nineham: control-freakery

ESF in London?

Public meeting, Sunday October 19, 3pm, Room H216, Connaught House, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, Aldwych, London WC2 (entrance through main building). Question and answer session and lots of time for debate. All welcome. Hosted by London Social Forum: www.londonsocialforum.org

DEBATE

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group calls for a republican workers' party

Bob Crow, general secretary of the Rail Maritime and Transport union, told his audience at the 2003 TUC conference that "parties represent classes but under [Tony Blair's] leadership Labour is failing to represent working people". Whilst we can sympathise with this sentiment, it understates the real position.

New Labour never claimed to represent the working class. It can hardly fail in a task it never set itself. The Blair government is a capitalist government. Every day it is actively working for the capitalists against working people and their trade unions. Success is measured by the support of the business class and the continuing confidence of the City.

When Gordon Brown calls for real Labour values, we look to the experience of the governments of MacDonald, Attlee, Wilson and Callaghan. Labour governments have never supported the struggles of the working class. Yet illusions in Labourism - whether real, old or new - are continually reproduced. Labour's supporters in the trade union bureaucracy and the socialist movement continue to peddle the myths.

Echoing Thatcher's comment that the "lady's not for turning", Blair made it clear to Labour conference that there is no going back. He has "no reverse gear". His speech to the TUC spoke about "diversity of supply, consumer choice and flexibility of working" - the code words for the primacy of business and profit. Privatisation, supporting the anti-union laws, foundation hospitals and university tuition fees are the central planks of government policy in New Labour's second term; and, when it comes to foreign affairs, lining up with the neo-conservative Bush administration and its war on Iraq - the last straw for many Labour Party members.

Independent

The working class needs its own independent political party. By this we mean a party organised independently of capitalist interests and therefore independently of the Labour Party. Labour is a popular front in which the interests of the working class are subordinated to the capitalists. This is the real meaning of the Marxist formula that Labour is a bourgeois workers' party. Socialists must stop clinging on to the coat tails of the liberal bourgeoisie and form a new party of the left.

In some ways we are back in the situation at the end of the 19th century, when workers were arguing as to whether the Liberals could best represent working people or whether they needed a new party. Yet at the start of the 21st century the old argument must be restated on a higher level. The case for a new workers' party must be related not to the Victorian empire, but to the crisis of the Elizabethan welfare state and the bankruptcy of parliamentary democracy. Political developments in the UK - for example, the national question, the Scottish parliament and the emergence of the Scottish Socialist Party - mean that we are already beyond any idea of recreating the Labour Party of Keir Hardie.

Over the last 20 years the failure of parliament has been recognised by wider sections of the people. But the socialist movement has not provided any answers. There is an increasing disconnection between people and the political institutions. Corruption, lies and spin mean that cynicism about government is rife. The war has sharpened up this reality. Blair committed troops to George W Bush's war in a secret agreement nine



Blair: never claimed to represent working class

Allure of centrism

months before it began. He could do this confident that royal prerogative powers would enable him to go to war. As the Hutton inquiry has shown, there was no gap between Downing Street and MI6 when it came to 'sexing up' documents and dossiers. It was just a matter of spinning and manipulating parliament and the people into a war.

Mass struggles expose the real nature of parliament, concentrating the minds of millions. Like the poll tax over a decade ago, the recent Iraqi war sharpened and widened the sense that parliament does not represent the people. As the anti-war protesters pointed out in the run-up to the war, there was no democratic legitimacy or democratic mandate for war. There was no referendum, nor any general election, in which these life and death issues could be put before the people. Parliament simply keeled over and backed Blair.

It was no different when Thatcher imposed the poll tax. Parliament is a useless talking shop. Its select committees have been exposed as incapable of extracting the truth from a powerful state bureaucracy. The sense of alienation from the political system is reflected in disillusion with the two main bourgeois monarchist parties, the Tories and Labour. They have no solutions and make no difference.

The parliamentary fish is rotting from the head. The stench is infecting the whole body politic. The loss of respect for the political system shows itself in poor turnouts in elections. The stench is very pungent in places like Burnley, where poverty and alienation are breeding grounds for racism and the growth of the British National Party. Many people are voting BNP because it causes obvious discomfort to the bourgeois parties responsible for the mess. But, the more obvious the bankruptcy and degeneration of the so-called democratic system becomes, the larger will be the pool of people prepared to vote for the BNP.

The constitutional monarchy system has outlived its useful life. It is unreformable. Attempts at reform merely store up further problems. It is like a rickety old wooden house, rotten with woodworm, and attempts to shore it up threaten to cause the whole structure to crumble to dust. This situation is as dangerous for a working class tied to the parliamentary monarchy through the institutions of Labourism as it is ideal for the BNP.

This brings us back to Scotland, where socialists have been relatively successful. We need to draw the correct lessons from the SSP experience. First, it is important to remember that the SSP has been built out of a socialist alliance (ie,

the Scottish SA). It shows concretely that a socialist alliance can be transformed into a relatively successful new workers' party. Since the Socialist Workers Party is the main barrier in the SA to moving towards a workers' party, it is important to recognise that the SWP joined the SSP as the Socialist Worker platform. The SWP has no principled objections to joining and becoming a platform in this type of party.

Second, the word 'Scottish' is a very important part of the name of the party. It is not simply a definition of the geographical territory in which the party will wage the class struggle or the constituencies where the party will stand candidates. It refers most centrally to the political strategy by which the SSP seeks to win power. The strategy is built around a struggle for Scottish independence. In 'Scottish' the SSP expresses its view of how to get to socialism. The SSP is not simply a name, but a political declaration to the working class of a Scottish road to socialism.

Success

The success of the SSP is not merely down to changing its name and becoming a party or having a coherent (albeit incorrect) strategy for socialism. The transformation of the SSA into the SSP and its relative success is partly due to constitutional change in Scotland. The advent of the Scottish parliament and proportional representation has helped the SSP to gain seats and establish itself as a serious party. In England there has been no comparable constitutional change. The two-party system makes it very difficult for new parties to break through.

The conclusion is that the SA can make the transition to a broad-based workers' party, provided it develops a coherent strategy for winning power. Such a 'road to socialism' is essential if we want workers to take us seriously. However, this party or proto-party must not wait patiently to see if the ruling class will make similar constitutional changes in England. This would be hopeless. We must take our fate into our own hands by recognising that the fight for a new workers' party has to go hand in hand with the fight for democratic constitutional change.

At the 2001 SA conference the Revolutionary Democratic Group proposed the adoption of the Scottish Socialist Party constitution. Although the proposal was not widely supported, it gave us the opportunity to make important points about the direction the SA should take. We amended the first paragraph of the SSP constitution, which defined the party name, from "Scottish Socialist Party" to "Republican Socialist Party".

In this we were not simply substituting a democratic term for a national one, but pointing to a democratic road to socialism.

A republican socialist workers' party would be a broad-based party whose programme can unite socialists from the Labour left with those from the Marxist or communist tradition. The term 'republican socialist workers' party' identifies the ideological and political character of the party and not necessarily its actual name. The programme of such a party would not need to depart from the Socialist Alliance's *People before profit*, which is in essence a republican socialist programme.

The new party would represent a new direction for the working class movement. Yet it would root itself in the three major traditions of the British working class - Chartism, Labourism and communism (or Marxism) - which provide an important source of inspiration for the new party.

Chartism was the first working class political movement. It mobilised mass, extra-parliamentary, direct action in the struggle for democratic constitutional change. Labourism provides an emphasis on the link with and affiliation of the trade unions and the struggle for the welfare state. From Marx and the First International, through to the early CPGB and later Trotskyism, we take the scientific theories of capitalism, democracy, socialism and human freedom and the commitment to internationalism and the international working class.

How would the ideas of republican socialism stand up against the massive weight of Labourism? Old Labourism was characterised by a conservative attitude to the constitutional monarchist system of government. The party of Attlee, Wilson and Callaghan promised social reforms for the working class on the basis of loyalty to the state and the ruling class, as symbolised by the crown. A republican socialist workers' party is not therefore a Labour Party mark two or any vain attempt to recreate 'old Labour'. It stands old Labourism on its head by making the fight for political change as the means of achieving social change.

Under Blair, Labourism has taken the particular form of New Labour. This was the result of two major class struggles in the UK. The first was the 1984-5 defeat of the miners' strike, which gave the green light to Thatcherism. Politics shifted to the right inside the trade unions and Labour Party. Privatisation, the anti-union laws and a flexible labour force were accepted and adopted by New Labour.

However, New Labour was also shaped by the anti-poll tax movement

that led to Thatcher's downfall. This movement had a major impact on Scottish politics. It produced Tommy Sheridan and the Scottish Socialist Alliance. It gave a real impetus to the democratic movement in Scotland and the demand for Scottish self-government. This firmed up the demand for a Scottish parliament in the 1997 Labour manifesto.

In this way New Labour stumbled across its own 'big idea' of constitutional reform. Blair aimed to 'modernise' the system of government (eg, Scottish parliament, Welsh and Northern Ireland assemblies, repackaging the House of Lords and the monarchy, limited proportional representation, etc). New Labour, therefore, goes beyond the constitutional conservatism of both Thatcherism and old Labourism.

Republican socialism is not about challenging New Labour with the ideas of old Labour. Blair's constitutional reforms have changed the political landscape forever. There is no going back to the 'good old days', by resurrecting the House of Lords or abolishing the Scottish parliament. If socialists are going to halt or reverse privatisation and abolish the anti-union laws, it will have to be in the context of radical democratic change.

This brings us to the question of the other alternatives to Labourism. The Liberal Democrats are not socialists of any kind. But they sell themselves as an anti-war party of radical democrats, who want to reform or improve the constitutional monarchy. As republican socialists we can and must distinguish our democratic programme, based on the mobilisation of the working class, from theirs.

The recent rise of the BNP indicates a growing social crisis and alienation from the rotten and corrupt political system. Fascism uses racism and nationalism to mobilise an anti-democratic movement against the working class. In defending democracy against fascism, we do not defend the existing form of parliamentary democracy, the constitutional monarchy. Republican socialism draws a line between ourselves and the bourgeois parties, which defend the constitutional monarchy.

Centrist party

The case for a republican socialist workers' party rests on the lessons from the SSP experience and the crisis of democracy in Britain. But we could also go back to 1991 to find a link with the old CPGB. For the sake of clarity let us call this the Centrist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). The political space previously occupied by this party has not been filled since its demise. Our argument can be seen as making a case to relaunch the Centrist Party of Great Britain, as a militant party of the working class.

A new Centrist Party of Great Britain would differ from the old party. First, it would not be called 'communist'. That would be an act of political fraud and deception. Second, it would need to be based on a democratic and republican road to socialism, rather than the British road. Third, we would not expect it to have a Stalinist majority or a Stalinist view of the former USSR. As in the current Socialist Alliance, Trotskyism would be more influential. Fourth, it would need to be more democratic than the old party.

In the 1980s the forerunners of the *Weekly Worker* were organising as the "Leninist faction" inside the old CPGB. However, the collapse of the Party was not the result of the victory of the Leninists. Had that been the case, we might have a revolutionary CPGB with 300 or 3,000 members, rather than the very small number that discretion forces me to forget. But in fact the Leninist faction failed. It could not overcome the historic problem of economism and centrism in the British working class.

So now we have to try again and again until we succeed. We need a new Centrist Party of Great Britain (or UK) and a new Leninist faction. That is precisely the meaning of our call for a republican socialist workers' party and a revolutionary democratic communist tendency ●

Agreeing to disagree

Sean Matgamna of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty demands to know the politics on which a new workers' party would be based. Is ideological consensus a requirement for unity? **Manny Neira** argues not

"Five socialists locked in a room together would form four parties and an entrust faction."

I first heard this over 20 years ago, and it was not funny then. When opening with a joke, it is perhaps ill advised to choose one which is both old and dull. The only thing sillier might be to then carefully explain exactly how old and dull it is. In my defence I can only say that, whatever this gem lacks as humour, the situation it describes is as true now as it was then.

Indeed, it may even be worse. As the size of the British revolutionary left has dwindled to perhaps a few thousand active comrades, their membership has remained divided between roughly the same number of different 'parties'. Logically, the only limit seems to be that the number of groups cannot exceed the number of comrades.

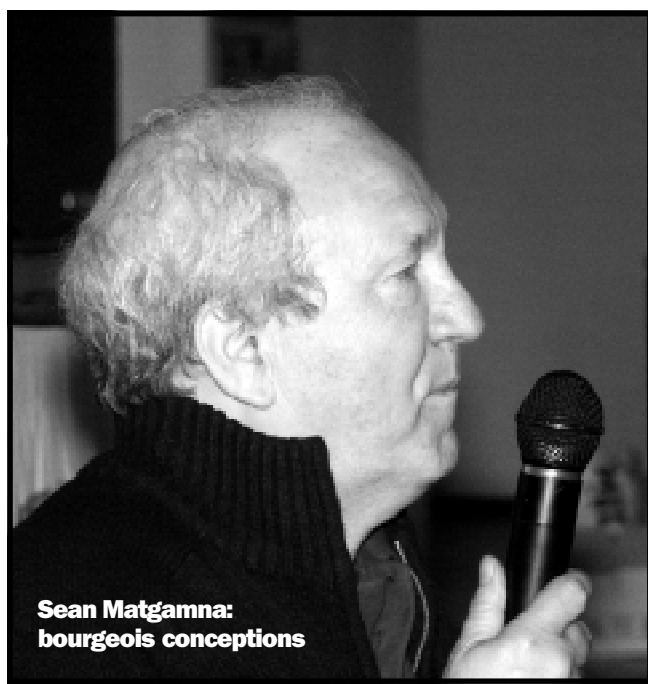
The chief problem faced by our movement, if it is serious about changing society, is not the reluctance of the working class to protest: this was magnificently shown by the historic demonstrations in London against the invasion of Iraq. Neither is it any current weakness in the trade unions, which are showing renewed industrial militancy. It is not even the force of the British state, which is on the back foot at home and abroad. It is our own division and consequent paralysis.

Cry 'unity!'

Thus far, my argument may seem uncontroversial. Most groups speak in favour of unity. Turn to the *What we fight* for column in this paper, and you will find the view of the Communist Party of Great Britain:

"Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists, anti-capitalists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party ... there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so called 'parties' on the left. In reality, they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion."

Amen to us, then. Amen also to the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who wrote in their special *Unity!* issue of their magazine *Workers' Liberty*:



Sean Matgamna:
bourgeois conceptions

Democratic centralism is the only political guarantee comrade Matgamna should need

"A more united left would impact far more forcefully on the working class and its movement, and on the capitalist world around us. It could hope to grow much more quickly than the left does now. It would also be forced by the conditions of its existence to talk about its own political divisions and disputes as a united left, and thus evolve a civilised and democratic party regime."

I could go on. It would not be difficult to find words written by socialists of many different stamps which called for unity: and indeed it is difficult to imagine a group opposed to the principle as such.

The question remains, therefore, why do we remain divided?

Apolitical?

At the May 10 fringe meeting for those who had supported pro-workers' party motions at the last Socialist Alliance conference, I found myself sitting opposite leading AWL comrade Sean Matgamna. I spoke on the dangers of sectarianism, which I defined as allowing the ideological fetishes of individual

groups to be placed above the objective needs of the working class. As I spoke, I was marginally distracted by comrade Matgamna carefully scribbling a note, which he passed to me as I sat down. It read: "What you've just said is entirely apolitical."

I was a little nonplussed. Had I, in an attack of nerves, forgotten the point I had planned to make, and instead unconsciously treated the assembled delegates to my favourite paella recipe? I looked around the room, but there was no sign of the mixture of amusement and bewilderment such a performance would have aroused.

I was especially interested, then, when this same debate resurfaced inside the AWL. Comrade Gerry Byrne, a member of the AWL national committee and one of *Solidarity's* editors, wrote of the meeting I mentioned above:

"Roughly a third of the Socialist Alliance conference voted for the workers' party resolution and for an SA paper ... Many stayed for the post-conference fringe meeting, wanting to take the first steps towards a workers' party (as yet undefined). An opportunity was missed - criminally."

Comrade Matgamna's reply appeared in the next issue: "Gerry's approach here is entirely apolitical. The Marxist organisation is built around politics. It unites with others, if it does, on the basis of spelled out politics."

Essentially, and I hope comrade Matgamna does not feel I am misrepresenting him, this argument runs as follows. We should not suppress our political differences - hide them, or refuse to discuss them - in order to achieve a nominal 'unity'. To do so is apolitical, in the sense that it avoids a discussion of politics in order to support the creation of a group united only by organisation. Such a group would be of no value: it would be unable to speak on issues of principle, and so be equally unable to act. Socialists unite with others only on the basis of political agreement, and this must therefore be secured before a united party can be achieved.

Though he will doubtless be appalled to be associated with them, I believe that comrade Matgamna here makes explicit the political argument which underlies not only the practice of the AWL, but of the leadership of most of the left groups. I believe that he is wrong, and that this error damages not only the cause of unity, but that of the very political debate he seeks to defend.

Ideology and division

There are really two parts to comrade Matgamna's position. Firstly, he argues that political differences should be discussed openly, and not suppressed to support a unity project. Secondly, he says that socialists should only unite in a party on the basis of political agreement.

In fact, I agree with his first point. The political debate should always be honest and open. What he mistakes for disagreement with this first point is actually disagreement with the second. I do not believe socialists should only unite in a party on the basis of political agreement.

At first, this might seem surprising. After all, what is a political party if it is not a group united around a set of political ideas? But I would argue that this betrays a bourgeois conception both of the party and of politics.

The bourgeois model is of a free society in which all are equal before the law, and the law is passed by a democratically elected legislative. As different people have different ideas about which laws should be passed, they form like-minded groups or political parties. These parties publish manifestos of the legislation they are planning, and the people vote on them. Those attracting the greatest support are elected and put their manifestos into practice. The resulting laws are impartially enforced by the state.

Marxism, though, is not based on this legalistic fantasy, but on materialism: that is, on an objective analysis of society as it actually exists. From this, it derives an understanding of society's class divisions. Power lies in the hands of the bourgeoisie - those who own the means of production and those who defend and serve the operation of capital. We are *not* all equal before the law: indeed, the law largely exists to regulate the operation of capitalism between capitalists. The interests of the mass of humanity can only be served by the *abolition* of the existing state, and the creation of a genuinely democratic society. While such revolutionary change is ultimately in the interests of all, it is the working class - those brought together by capitalism into an inescapable recognition of their common interest - which holds the power to actually achieve it.

The party of the working class is therefore *not* a group of like-minded people, but the most politically conscious part of the working class itself, committed to its own interests. As there is only one such class, there can be only one such party.

The bourgeois model, in which parties are defined by their ideology, naturally leads to a proliferation of parties. If individuals within a party come to disagree with the majority positions - or, given imperfect democracy, mere leadership positions - they will leave, as there is nothing but agreement keeping them in. If groups leave, they will form new parties, based around an ideology which better expresses their minority opinion. Sometimes groups will unite if their ideologies veer towards each other, but the interests of leaders who do not wish to concede status, and sub-political animosities based on a mere history of separateness, frequently prevent this. In the main, the tendency is towards fission.

It might be objected that the largest bourgeois parties survive despite these pressures, but at their level another factor comes into play: the realistic prospect of power within the existing system. In Britain, the Conservative Party has traditionally been the party of power. It offered a realistic chance of election, to anything from a local council to the national or European parliaments. Membership might provide you with a political career, or a position from which you might form useful associations with those who held power. To a lesser but still significant extent, smaller but still relatively large bourgeois parties such as the Liberal Democrats offer the same.

Even those with a sincere belief in the bourgeois system will reason that their level of agreement with their party's programme must be balanced against the realistic chances of that programme ever being implemented. When the Liberal Party merged with the Social Democratic Party, many sincere Liberals faced a dilemma: would they join the united organisation, despite what they saw as the watering down of its politics? A rump did not, and still campaign under the name of the Liberal Party, which remains closer to the politics of the Liberal rank and file of the 70s. Most, clinging to the possibility of political power, stayed.

It is amongst the smaller parties that the doctrine that they are defined by their ideology causes fission - and particularly amongst the parties of the revolutionary left. This is a bourgeois approach, and has served only the bourgeoisie.

The Marxist conception of a party based not on a unity of thought, but an expression of the political consciousness and interests of the working class, must therefore be re-established.

A party of Labour

If ideologically defined groups are doomed to fission and failure, what are we then to do?

There are left only two positions worthy

Support Bookmarks

Bookmarks, the socialist publisher associated with the Socialist Workers Party, together with its leading comrades Lindsey German (editor of *Socialist Review*) and Alex Callinicos, are currently facing massive legal costs as a result of a libel case.

A lawsuit has been taken out against them by Quintin Hoare, former editor of *New Left Review*, and Branca Magas, a socialist and author who comes from the former Yugoslavia. The case relates to statements made in a 1993 essay by comrade Callinicos, included in *The Balkans: nationalism and imperialism*, published in 1999 by Bookmarks.

According to Paul Foot, who is acting as spokesperson for the Bookmarks Libel Fund, "Hoare and Magas complained that one passage in the article meant that they were both 'apologists' for Franjo Tudjman and his regime in Croatia." Bookmarks and the named comrades have not contested the libel suit, but have rather sought to settle the matter as soon and as cheaply as possible. As comrade Foot points out in his appeal, "After much correspondence they agreed to make a statement in open court apologising for the article and agreeing to pay each of the plaintiffs £1,500." The lawyer's bill for these proceedings, however, which Bookmarks and the SWP will be forced to pay, is likely to be over £10,000.

What is particularly disturbing about this is that, in the words of comrade Foot, "It has been a long tradition in the labour movement that arguments between

socialists should be conducted openly and should not, except in extreme circumstances, be tested in the courts by the libel laws.

"The reason for this tradition is simple. As soon as lawyers get involved in these arguments, the expense of the action in almost every case far exceeds both any damage done by the libel and anything a socialist publisher can possibly afford." In this case, it appears that the lawyers, Carter-Ruck and Co (who have a long history of acting on behalf of litigious *capitalists* out to discourage criticism, including notoriously the late Robert Maxwell), were hired on a 'no win, no fee' basis. Meaning that the unfortunate socialist publisher gets landed with the bill, whereas the bringers of the action pay nothing at all.

We in the CPGB believe that the capitalist courts should not be used to intimidate socialists from publishing their views, whether correct or incorrect. Nor should they be used to land socialist publishers with enormous legal bills. We believe that the labour and socialist movement in general, and all defenders of democratic rights, should stand up and oppose this damaging legal attack on a socialist publication, and should contribute to the comrades' legal fund.

Please make donations payable to 'Bookmarks Libel Fund' and send to: 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3QE. Donations by debit and credit card can be taken by phone on 020 7637 1848 ●

Ian Donovan

of consideration: the ‘reclaiming’ of the Labour Party, or the building of a new workers’ party: in Marxist terms, a real Communist Party.

In a recent *Weekly Worker*, Graham Bash of *Labour Left Briefing* wrote a carefully argued and clearly passionately felt piece in which he set out his position that socialists should work within the Labour Party. He expressed no illusions:

“[The Labour Party] was born a distorted and bureaucratic expression of the working class. Key here was Britain’s early bourgeois revolution ... The Labour Party was based on the growth of trade unionism, which was largely cut off from revolutionary influences and under bourgeois hegemony. The opposite, for instance, of the working class in Russia and China, where the bourgeoisie developed too late and was too weak to carry out its own revolution, and the working class was powerful and revolutionary almost from the moment of its creation” (September 25).

Here, his key point is that the Labour Party was not merely an ideologically defined group - indeed, it was not defined by an ideology at all. It was an expression of the objective interests of the working class, though distorted by the strength and prevalence of the British bourgeoisie. Growing out of the trade unions, it remained at best economic, and at worst an instrument by which the working class was wedded to the state, but it was nevertheless the party of the British working class.

Twenty years ago, at the time I heard the joke which opened this article, I would have agreed with this. I was a member of *Militant*, and a member of the Labour Party. Our most common complaint against the Trotskyist left outside Labour was that they had failed to understand the objective, historic role of Labour as the party of the class. However, in the witch-hunt which chased out *Militant*, the foundations of New Labour were already being laid by Kinnock in the 80s.

It is difficult to say whether comrade Bash entirely subscribes to this view, or whether he views New Labour as a more recent phenomenon; and he does not mention *Militant*, or its fate, at all. He points out that New Labour has imposed an explicitly capitalist character on the party more completely than “even Kinnock” could aspire to, which suggests he believes that the fundamental change happened recently. His view of New Labour, though, is clear:

“New Labour had a qualitatively different relationship to the labour movement. It was not and is not the distorted and bureaucratised expression of the working class. It was, and is, ... the direct and immediate expression of the interests of big business ... the logic and explicit intention of New Labour is to destroy the Labour Party. But - and this is the central point - it has not yet happened. It has not yet succeeded. The Labour Party is a party based on the trade unions and the link between the Labour Party and the trade unions, however bureaucratised, is still there.”

Ultimately, this is comrade Bash’s main argument: the same argument presented by *Militant* in the 80s. It is interesting to note that the largest rump of *Militant*, the Socialist Party under Peter Taaffe, is now the most strident critic of the link between the trade unions and Labour - though Ted Grant, *Militant*’s leading theorist, remains in the Labour at the head of *Socialist Appeal*.

While it is certainly true that the Labour Party retains important links with the unions, the class base of the party has been degenerating over a long period. Internal democracy has been dismantled. Relations with the trade unions have become increasingly strained, and there has been open discussion within some about the possibility of withdrawing funds from, and supporting candidates against, New Labour.

Such transitions are difficult to judge. At what point does this quantitative change represent a qualitative change in the objective nature of the Labour Party? The disarray within the Conservatives seems likely to leave Labour in power for at least another term - during which the contradictions between Labour’s links with the trade unions and the interests of those unions will inevitably sharpen. Are socialists going to find themselves arguing *against* the most militant and politically independent trade unions who seek to break first?

And are we merely to be observers? One

of the main reasons the trade unions retain their links with Labour is that there is no realistic alternative - particularly in England and Wales. This is why we do not currently support the call for disaffiliation: trade unions should not drift into apoliticism and the economic defence of narrowly defined interests. However, comrade Bash uses the links between the Labour Party and the trade unions as an argument against building precisely the kind of organisation which might allow those links (which will become increasingly regressive as the New Labour project takes hold) to be broken.

Ultimately, I remain unpersuaded. The Labour Party retains its links with the working class, but is now, as comrade Bash acknowledges, in the hands of an explicitly pro-ruling class leadership. The more militant trade unions show more sign of breaking with Labour than they do of trying to reclaim it; and, as the Labour government accelerates its programme against both the trade unions and the class as a whole, this tendency is only likely to increase. The crying need now is for a party which might offer a political alternative.

Interestingly, the situation in Scotland may yet provoke a crisis which we will be ill-equipped to deal with. The Scottish Socialist Party provides an alternative political focus which the Socialist Alliance plainly does not, and Scottish trade unionists may be drawn towards it. The peculiar strengths and weaknesses of the SSP, as a united workers’ party which we would support, but as a nationalist party active in only part of the country, are likely to create further contradictions.

Democratic centralism

And so, if not Labour, and not ideologically defined groups, we return to the argument for a workers’ party: and to comrade Matgama’s accusation of ‘apoliticism’. Will we have to suppress our differences to achieve some nominal unity?

My answer is an emphatic ‘no’. The party will draw together the most politically conscious elements of the working class, and exist to further their interests. Its aim will be to replace Labour, not by reconstituting old Labour (for all the reasons of class contradiction which comrade Bash correctly identified in old Labour) but by establishing an independent working class position.

And the politics? What are we to do about, for instance, George Galloway or the involvement of the Muslim Association of Britain in the Stop the War Coalition? These are merely two of the many arguments which the AWL have taken up with the rest of the movement, and which have led them to characterise us as “fake left” and, in the case of the CPGB, even “crazies” and “leftwing fuckwits”. Comrade Matgama demands to know what we will do about our disagreements over Galloway and MAB before he will consider political unity.

The answer is simple. Everyone will be allowed to speak, and then we will *vote* on them. The majority vote will form the basis of the party’s programme. The minorities will be allowed every opportunity to argue and publish their case, but will be expected to show *unity in action*.

And here we come to the nub of the argument. The problem of accommodating different political opinions within a single party - a party which must be single because it represents the objective interests of a single class - has long been understood by our movement. The solution has already been found: *democratic centralism*.

Now, the abuse of this term has taken its colouring from the inevitable, anti-democratic ideological bludgeoning which has gone under the name of democratic centralism within the ideologically defined groups. They have failed in democratic centralism not because they were bad people, or insincere democrats, but necessarily because of the contradiction between the free expression of opposing views within a group and the group’s coherence around a particular ideological position.

This contradiction is not hard to understand. Consider the position of the AWL. It will not unite with other groups until it has won political agreement with them. And yet, what is the position of one of its own comrades if he or she, either through a change of mind or through a different interpretation of underlying politics of the group to a new situation, disagrees with the majority? If the AWL

cannot unite with, say, the CPGB because the majority of CPGB comrades adopt different positions, then logically, the individual dissenter inside the group is as intolerable to it as the CPGB is outside, and on the same grounds: ideological disagreement. While some nominal freedom to express the opposing views may be written into the organisation’s constitution, the *very logic of its status as an ideologically defined group* demands that the comrade is silenced, removed from important offices and ultimately even forced out.

The demand for democratic centralism - full-blooded, scrupulously observed, jealously guarding the rights of its minorities, while acting in unison to implement its democratic decisions - is the only political guarantee comrade Matgama should need. He, like the rest of us, will have to rely on the quality of his argument to win the day: and not refuse to play and take his ball home if it does not.

Comradely discussion

I would add one final note.

There seems to be a tradition in our movement of the most violent and abusive tone being adopted in debate. The AWL has referred to “the fake left continuing to rot”, has characterised members of the CPGB as “crazies” and made reference to “leftwing fuckwits”. Neither is it alone in using such language - and on one occasion I was one of several CPGB comrades protesting the judgement in the *Weekly Worker* that the AWL ‘didn’t like Arabs much’.

I object to this absurd practice on two grounds: of justice, and of effectiveness.

Firstly, such language is almost always unjust. To put it simply, the political judgements we make are extremely complex. The world is not a simple place, and the application of our basic principles is not always an easy process. In my experience, when I have tackled comrades inside my own organisation or outside it about political differences, I have found them to have sincere reasons for their views. There is a breathtaking arrogance in assuming not merely that you are right (which is implicit in the mildest assertion), but that you are so obviously right that anyone who disagrees is a ‘fake left’ or ‘crazy’. It seems that the simple dignity of being ‘wrong’ (let alone ‘possibly wrong’) is no longer extended.

Secondly, it is both a result of and a contributor to the division of the left. As such it is an obstacle to unity and to clear political discussion - both of which are in the interests of the class. As comrade Byrne argues, “Is it any surprise that people who are described as some kind of human sewage are reluctant to unite with us?” This is not a demand for political censorship, merely comradely discussion.

I have long made such objections, and am generally met with quotes from Lenin as a counter-argument. Lenin, it is true, was not always gentle in his writing: but there are a few problems in engaging his support.

To begin with, we are materialists who draw from the work of historical revolutionaries because of the light they can shine on our own struggles: not scriptural theologians quoting infallible sources. Or, to put it more simply, just because Lenin wrote like that, it does not follow we have to. (There, I’ve said it. The fear has passed.)

This is particularly true when we consider the objective conditions in which Lenin was working. A moment’s thought should suffice to reveal the huge differences between Russia at the turn of the century and modern Britain: in levels of education and literacy, in the development of ubiquitous political ‘commentary’ through television and radio, and generally in a century of social and political development in countries which were not on a par to begin with. Lenin would have written with his own audience in mind. If we ape his style, we will not be writing for our own, but for one which existed a long time ago: and we will sound like it. To summarise again: even if it worked then, that does not mean it will work now.

But above all, I cannot help wondering if all the would-be Lenins are not carrying it a little high. When we have all done the work and faced the risks that he did, maybe we can speak with his assurance and expect the same respect for doing so. Until then, it seems a rather proud parallel to draw ●

What we fight for

■ **Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists, anti-capitalists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.**

■ **The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communists Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.**

■ **Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.**

■ **Communists oppose the neo-conservative war plans of the Project for the New American Century and all imperialist wars but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.**

■ **Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.**

■ **The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.**

■ **Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.**

■ **Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.**

■ **The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.**

■ **Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.**

■ **We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.**

■ **Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.**

■ **Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.**

■ **Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.**

■ **Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.**

■ **All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.**

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Reject latest 'peace and justice' coalition

Class politics not electoralism

It looks as though the Socialist Workers Party's hopes for a cross-class 'peace and justice' coalition to contest next year's European and Greater London Authority elections are alive and well after all.

On October 13 *The Guardian* carried a story headed, "Monbiot to found anti-war coalition", which stated that Salma Yaqoob, chair of Birmingham Stop the War Coalition, together with radical journalist George Monbiot, were looking to "unite socialist parties, anti-globalisation campaigners, peace activists and faith groups, including muslims", in a new electoral alliance.

The pair were said to be "approaching political and peace activists to set a common manifesto ... which Mr Monbiot is drawing up". However, George Monbiot told me in an email exchange that his involvement was "peripheral" and that the *Guardian* report was "not entirely accurate and rather premature".

"Premature", it seems, in that the story was leaked to the paper, whose journalists then contacted Salma Yaqoob - described as the "driving force" behind the initiative. She is said to want to unite all the various forces that came together in the anti-war movement behind "a clear or comprehensive political programme" and promises "a convention later this year to agree a final manifesto".

It all sounds very familiar, doesn't it? Ms Yaqoob, as well as being the chair of Birmingham STWC, is associated with the city's central mosque - one of the main parties with whom the SWP has been in talks over the 'peace and justice' proposal (the other was the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain). George Monbiot has also been cooperating with the SWP over the recent period and is among the speakers from England and Wales nominated by the SWP for November's European Social Forum in Paris.

The SWP has made it abundantly clear that the kind of 'peace and justice' manifesto proposed by Yaqoob and Monbiot would not constitute a socialist platform. In fact even such basic demands as women's rights and gay equality are clearly viewed as expendable. The SWP's Lindsey German notoriously stated at Marxism 2003 that they should not be treated as "shibboleths".

After having thrown its efforts into the anti-war movement, provided the hegemonic leadership for the STWC and had speakers like comrade German and John Rees on numerous platforms - not least in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square, addressing rallies of tens, if not hundreds, of thousands - the SWP was shaken by its failure to recruit from the upsurge. Nevertheless, it still hopes to tap into the mass anti-Blair sentiment by attempting to 'reproduce' the movement on the electoral stage.



George Monbiot: drawing up manifesto for Socialist Alliance?

It is, of course, quite correct to strive to make radicalisation a permanent political feature. But, the job of socialists, then as now, was to attempt to shape and mould the movement, to win hegemony within it for the ideas of working class socialism, not simply hold up a mirror to newly politicising forces and be content to leave them as they are. However, for the SWP it was the numbers mobilised,

... such basic demands as women's rights and gay equality are viewed as expendable

not the politics around which it was necessary to win them, that was all-important. And it is quite happy to carry over this abandonment of working class principle into the election field too.

At its May 10 annual conference the Socialist Alliance agreed overwhelmingly to a motion, proposed by the International Socialist Group's Alan Thornett and backed by the SWP, that committed us to try to attain a broader alliance, with the aim of contesting elections as widely as possible. But this new alliance, according to the resolution, was to be democratic, inclusive "and of course socialist". How is that compatible with joining forces with a section of the mosque - or indeed signing up to some vague, left-liberal coalition?

The Guardian quotes the leader of the Green Party in the north-west, John Whitelegg, as saying of the as yet unpublished Yaqoob-Monbiot proposals: "The parts of the manifesto we've seen so far read like summaries of Green Party policy." In other words, nothing remotely "socialist".

Of course, it could be that the apparent similarity between the SWP's 'peace and justice' turn and these latest revelations is just coincidence. But, judging by the contribution of Socialist Alliance national secretary and leading SWPer Rob Hoveman, in the SA e-bulletin sent out the day after the *Guardian* report, the SWP still hopes to lead the SA into exactly such a lash-up.

His short piece, entitled 'Getting ready for the Euros', appears under the by-line: "The Socialist Alliance is committed to the biggest socialist presence at the Euro and GLA elections in June 2004." A "socialist presence" is not the same thing as a socialist platform, of course. And the SA seems the most likely 'socialist party' referred to in the Yaqoob-Monbiot draft.

Comrade Hoveman writes: "Our decision at our annual conference was clear.

We want to encourage broader forces to come on board the project of which the Socialist Alliance has been a vital part. If the condition for creating a more credible left alternative is that the Socialist Alliance becomes one element of a broader left electoral coalition, that is something Socialist Alliance members will have to consider very seriously if and when the issue arises" (SA e-bulletin, October 14).

The usual SWP obfuscation. What does he mean by "the project of which the Socialist Alliance has been a vital part"? Just *how* broad (and how "socialist") is the "broader left electoral coalition" going to be? And why does he say, "if and when the issue arises"? Is he the only SA member who has not seen the *Guardian* story?

At this weekend's SA national council meeting in Sheffield, delegates - including many SWPers, I suspect - will be hoping for clear answers. Salma Yaqoob's idea of a "comprehensive political programme" will be very different, for example, from *People before profit*. The Socialist Alliance must seek to represent the working class, not further dilute the politics of its allegedly revolutionary components. Marching alongside non-socialist forces to stop a war is totally different from jointly contesting an election with them. Such a platform, of necessity, must skirt around the contentious issues that divide the various forces involved - the gay and women's rights "shibboleths" being only one.

Delegates must reject any notion of some green-liberal-pacifist coalition that will take the working class movement precisely nowhere. The irony of the Yaqoob-Monbiot-SWP 'peace and justice' hogwash is that it is likely to be ignored by voters even more than the Socialist Alliance itself was in last month's Brent East by-election ●

Peter Manson

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