

Workers' Liberty

The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself

Stephen Lawrence:

Who is Guilty?



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Prosecute Paul Condon!

ONLY the naive or the foolish will look to the police to protect black people from racism. Black people need protection *from* the police. The Stephen Lawrence case proves that the police can not even be relied upon to investigate the foul murder of a young man of 18, who had his life savagely cut short by the knives of racist thugs at a London bustop.

Stephen Lawrence is dead. His murderers, who are known, are free to strut before the TV cameras. They will never have to face a proper trial for the killing. Why? Because racist police officers made themselves accessories after the fact of Stephen Lawrence's murder. The police who helped the killers will face prosecution for it? No, they retire on police pensions!

The most hysterical or reckless of anti-state propagandists could not concoct a more terrible scenario to dramatise the realities of this system than what the police have done in the Stephen Lawrence case. Put no trust in the police! That is the first lesson of the Stephen Lawrence affair.

But consider for a moment the Stephen Lawrence case from the point of view of the legalities which the police are supposed to uphold. The Race Relations Act is 32 years old. It was brought in by a Labour Government alarmed at the growth of racism and at the way certain Tory politicians were using racism.

In the 1964 general election, Peter Griffiths defeated Patrick Gordon Walker, a front bench Labour politician, and won a Midlands seat for the Tory Party after conducting an uninhibitedly racist campaign. "If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour," was one of the slogans of this official Tory candidate. Fascists were feeding off racism, and fascism, though still a marginal force, was growing.

As part of the slow turn of the British establishment from the Commonwealth to the EC, the idea was being pushed, and none too subtly, by the establishment that black immigration was undesirable. A distinction was drawn between the white — Australians etc — "old" Commonwealth and the "new" black, Commonwealth". There was then virtually full-employment. Never mind that without black workers, the NHS and the railways would be in a very bad way.

Previous large scale immigration — Irish immigration in the mid-19th century, for example — had led to intra working-class conflicts because the newcomers, who were used to a much lower standard of living, undercut the wages and conditions of British workers. In the '50s and '60s nothing like that happened. The trade unions were strong. Black workers integrated into the unions; many had been staunch trade unionists in the West Indies. On the whole — though there were some shameful racist strikes — the labour movement acted as a force for assimilation. There was nonetheless a great deal of working-class anti-black prejudice.

In '68, and again in '72, dockers struck and marched in protest against the entry of Asians with British passports expelled from Kenya and Uganda. (A Labour government in '68 banned the Kenyans despite their British passports; in '72, the Tories let the Uganda Asians in.)

The 1967 Race Relations Act was supposed to regulate racial tension and conflicts and to outlaw overt racial discrimination. We were told by the liberals who led the Labour Party that we could and should trust to the law.

The Race Relations Act has played some positive role in education, occasionally triggering the prosecution of obstreperous racists. It has not, it seems, helped re-educate the police.

Thirty two years on the statute books — and after a third of a century what does the Stephen Lawrence case reveal? Active,

rancid, all-pervasive, murderous racism in the police forces to which it falls — and for 32 years has fallen — to work the Race Relations Act!

In the last decade large number of cases have been uncovered in which the police have been shown to have framed up innocent citizens and sent them to jail — the Birmingham Six, Guildford Four and others. These cases show that the police and the courts are riddled with fraudulence and corruption. Routinely, in big things and small, the police lie in court. Judges and magistrates know this: they could not but know. They have experience and, it can be assumed, they possess average intelligence and average powers of observation. They know. Yet they have let it go on. It still goes on.

The idea that the responsible police authorities and senior police officers have not known that the police force is a cesspool of racial prejudice and racist practices — that idea is preposterous! Of course they knew! Many are themselves outright racists. Those who were not, know perfectly well how things stood. They did nothing, or very little, about it.

The police authorities charged with implementing the Race Relations Act, with prosecuting racist attackers, with taking action against day-to-day racial discrimination, are now revealed to be a gang of state-licensed racists, some of them capable of covering for racist murder. Bribery and corruption may have come into it; prejudice was nonetheless central.

Why has it taken so long for the Commission for Racial Equality to be given the power to investigate and prosecute the police? This proposal is now made in the Macpherson Report.

Sir Paul Condon is reputed to be a force for reform of the police and may personally be free from prejudice. Yet Condon has presided over this racist police force. Of course, he should resign! He symbolises this whole tainted and in large parts, putrid system. But is resignation enough? Condon has *in fact* colluded in a vast conspiracy by those whose job it is to uphold the 1967 Race Relations Act to perpetuate the racism it was supposed to outlaw.

The police who covered for the murderers of Stephen Lawrence should be prosecuted as accessories after the fact of murder. Paul Condon and other senior police officers should be prosecuted under the Race Relations Act.

We have no confidence in that Act. It is however the law. The neo-liberals of New Labour tells us to rely on the law. Let them show us the 1967 law in action.

Prosecute Paul Condon and his senior responsible colleagues! Force Home Secretary Jack Straw to resign!

Workers' Liberty

Incorporating Socialist Organiser



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The police and “institutional racism”

By Violet Martin

THE police system is racist. It is officially admitted. Years of stubborn struggle by the Lawrence family and their supporters have finally driven the Establishment to concede that the police are “institutionally racist”. The Macpherson report on how the police dealt with the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence, on 22 April 1993 in South London, concludes plainly that the investigation “was marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism, and a failure of leadership by senior officers”. An official government representative admitted to the Guardian that it was “outrageous” that the police responsible for the case have escaped disciplinary action.

The Metropolitan Police responded by promising to clean up its act, under the slogan “Protect and Respect”. Yet the measures proposed in, or likely to result from, the Macpherson report, are more about salvaging “protection and respect” for the police than for Britain’s black communities. The aim of the Establishment is to stop the police losing control and being overwhelmed, on the one hand by grassroots racism and on the other by militant anti-racism. A dose of “institutional anti-racism” is proposed — to moderate the racism of the police and to make the police more acceptable and credible in black communities. The Establishment wants to restrain freelance racism in order that the larger racism underpinned by immigration and asylum laws and mass unemployment in a rotten dog-eat-dog capitalist society can continue without uncontrollable disorder.

Doreen Lawrence, the mother of the murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence, put it like this: “Everything in this country has black people who have played a part in it. We helped to make the National Health Service what it is today... transport, you name it and we have played a part of it. We have more than earned our place to live and not to have our children killed in the way that Stephen was....”

“My feelings about the future remain the same as they were when my son was murdered. Black youngsters will never be safe on the streets. The police on the ground are the same as they were when my son was killed... I think we have had enough of police policing themselves, because they have always given themselves a pat on the back...”

Duwayne Brooks, the friend who was with Stephen when he was killed, says: “I am frightened of the racists — but I am more frightened of the police. It feels like some are out of control and others cover up for them. I believe that if this inquiry fails to bring about change, people will not tolerate what is happening any more. They will take to the streets and they will take their message straight to the police”.

Stephen Lawrence was murdered at a bus stop at about 10.30pm on 22 April 1993. Within a couple of days five local white youths — racists with a known record of crime and trouble at school — were named to the police by several informants as the murderers. The Daily Mail has since denounced the five as the killers on its front page, and challenged them to sue for libel. They have not sued. Stephen’s friend Duwayne Brooks was with him when he was killed, and available to identify the killers.

The police, however, according to the Macpherson report, “stereotyped [Duwayne] as a young black man exhibiting unpleasant hostility and agitation”. They ignored what he said and went off to a nearby pub to ask if there had been a fight there.

The five were not arrested until much later, and the collection of evidence against them was bungled. The Crown Prosecution Service refused to take the case to court. The Lawrence family brought a private prosecution, but the cases fell in court for lack of evidence. The legal effect was the same as an acquittal: the five cannot be tried again for this murder. One of the senior police involved in the case had dubious links with the father of one of the five, a notorious criminal. Important police records from the case had disappeared by the time the inquiry came to ask for them.

The Macpherson report finds evidence of wider “institutional racism” in the police in such facts as that a black person is nearly eight times more likely to be stopped and searched than a white person, nearly five times more likely to be arrested, and nearly seven times more likely to die as a result of police actions.

The Macpherson recommendations, however, are much paler than its findings. The report says that the police should no longer be exempted from the general laws against race discrimination; that

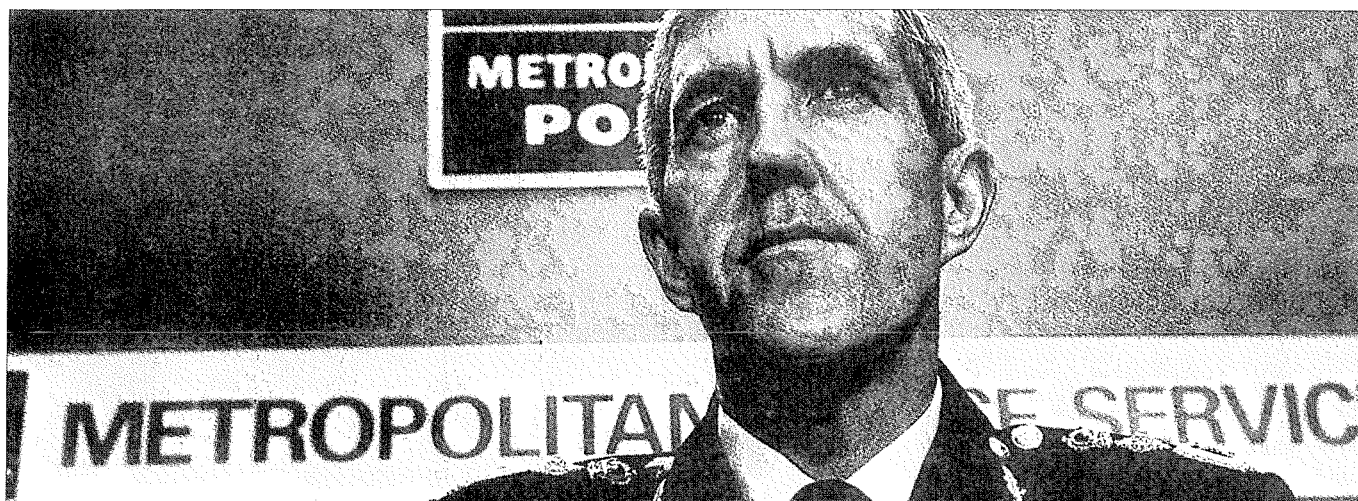
there should be a Metropolitan Police Authority with similar powers to police authorities elsewhere; and that a Freedom of Information Act should apply to policing.

Almost all the rest of the report’s 70 recommendations are to do with setting up internal procedures, policies and training programmes in the police force designed to make them more “sensitive” to questions of racism. Three recommendations call for more anti-racist education in schools. Home Secretary Jack Straw (not Macpherson) has mooted the possibility of changing the law on “double jeopardy” (the rule that says you cannot be tried twice for the same offence, and which has protected the five killers from being brought back to court). This is a change which, however attractive in this case, would in general do more harm than good.

No police officer is held responsible. All the senior officers involved in the Lawrence case are safely retired; Metropolitan Police chief Paul Condon can continue to defy calls for him to resign. The Macpherson report specifically says that the stop-and-search law should not be changed. All the recommendations are in the old framework, denounced by Doreen Lawrence: the police will continue policing the police.

NO new measures of democratic control or accountability are proposed, other than the adjustments to the exceptional position of the Metropolitan Police. In the early 1980s some Labour councils, in Sheffield and Merseyside for example, tried to use the Police Authorities (public bodies, partly and indirectly elected, which are supposed to supervise the police) to get some accountability. They failed. During the 1984-5 miners’ strike, the South Yorkshire Police Authority tried to stop its Chief Constable spending council money on anti-picket forces, but was stopped by a High Court ruling. No change to this toothless structure is proposed by the Macpherson report. Local authority cuts will continue to cripple community police monitoring groups.

Both in the report, and in official comment, much has been made of the idea that “the whole of society” is responsible. This is true in general. Here, it is a



Condon continues to defy calls for him to resign

cop-out, in more senses than one.

The report itself says that: "Too many of those who decry the police service allow themselves to go beyond fair criticism. We simply say that there must be full cooperation on all sides to combat racism". Paul Condon declared that "the blame that is being laid at their [the police's] door... is shared by all levels of society". Home Secretary Jack Straw said that "the inquiry process has revealed some fundamental truths about the nature of our society... Any long-established, white-dominated organisation is liable to have a culture which tends to exclude or disadvantage non-white people. The police service in this respect is little different..."

If everyone is to blame, then no-one is to blame particularly. But in truth the police are not just a reflection of the average racism of society. Duwayne Brooks is still being stopped and searched regularly — not by "society in general", but by the police. The police are deliberately separated from the rest of society, sheltered from democratic accountability, given wide-ranging arbitrary powers and extensive protection against any kickback from abuse of those powers, and run in a hierarchical and authoritarian way, so that they will be a reliable force against picket-lines, demonstrations, and uprisings. They therefore reproduce all reactionary prejudices at double strength.

According to an opinion poll published on 9 February, only 20% of the public believe that the police "are not racist at all", and 31 per cent of people aged 18 to 24 believe that most police "tend to be racist or very racist". The Institute of Race Relations has compiled a list of 23 racist murders since 1991, many of which the police refused to define as racist despite clear evidence.

All the pious "codes of conduct" will be more than offset by Jack Straw's

recent moves to increase police powers. Just as the cops currently use their "stop and search" powers more against black people, so also they will use their new powers in a racist way. These will allow the jailing of "psychopaths" even if they have committed no crime, and mandate a "three strikes and out" rule of jailing anyone with three convictions for burglary.

Likewise, the continued drive to structure education round tests and league tables, while resources are cut, will bring more and more exclusions — more and more young people trashed by the education system, a disproportionate number of them black — and make a mockery of government-decreed liberal sermons in school assemblies.

Racism in society at large is also more than a matter of personal prejudices. Racism can become harsher even while prejudice diminishes. By all accounts racial prejudice is very much weaker today than it was in the 1950s and early 1960s. In those days, though, there was full employment. West Indian and Asian immigrants were welcomed to Britain and got secure jobs here. Unemployment for them was no higher than for white people.

In times of mass unemployment, the same racial prejudice which in other days might result in no more than stupid talk is sharpened into a bitter competition for the few jobs available. Unemployment in most black and Asian communities is now much higher than for white people. Black and Asian people have also suffered from the Tories' and New Labour's trashing of the public services in which many of them were employed.

THE state underpins embittered racism through its immigration and asylum laws. Ever since the 1960s, Tory and Labour governments have

defined immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the West Indies as "a problem", and constructed ever-stricter laws and regulations to exclude them. In recent years, the possibility of "economic" immigration from such countries having been largely closed off, the government has set about closing the doors also to asylum-seekers fleeing political persecution. Under new measures, announced the same week as the Macpherson report, asylum-seekers will lose all remaining rights to state benefits (receiving only ration-tickets to stop them starving), they will be dispersed to detention centres round the country, and immigration officers will gain further powers to exclude them without appeal.

Laws against race discrimination, and the whole "race relations industry", have been developed exactly in parallel with the racist immigration laws. Ever since the 1960s they have been two sides of one state strategy: to sustain the definition of black and Asian people as "a problem", but to minimise, contain — and institutionalise! — both the "problem" and popular reactions to it, both racist and anti-racist.

Because of the weight and power of the state, the strategy is not just a nullity. Laws against race discrimination do have some effect, sometimes. But the "anti-racist" side of the strategy always lags, both because of the contradictions in the strategy and because of inbuilt limitations of abstract, bureaucratic, "preaching-from-above" anti-racism. It is 34 years since the first Race Relations Act supposedly outlawed racism, and 18 years since the Scarman report on the Brixton riots officially found the police racist! The Macpherson report sticks to the same strategy. Only a united struggle to change society by black and white workers can deal with racism

Poem about My Rights

By June Jordan



Even tonight and I need to take a walk and clear my head about this poem about why I can't go out without changing my clothes my shoes my body posture my gender identity my age my status as a woman alone in the evening/ alone on the streets/alone not being the point/ the point being that I can't do what I want to do with my own body because I am the wrong sex the wrong age the wrong skin and suppose it was not here in the city but down on the beach/ or far into the woods and I wanted to go there by myself thinking about God/or thinking about children or thinking about the world/all of it disclosed by the stars and the silence: I could not go and I could not think and I could not stay there alone as I need to be alone because I can't do what I want to do with my own body and who in the hell set things up like this and in France they say if the guy penetrates but does not ejaculate then he did not rape me and if after stabbing him if after screams if after begging the bastard and if even after smashing a hammer to his head if even after that if he and his buddies fuck me after that then I consented and there was no rape because finally you understand finally they fucked me over because I was wrong I was wrong again to be me being me where I was/wrong to be who I am which is exactly like South Africa penetrating into Namibia penetrating into Angola and does that mean I mean how do you know if Pretoria ejaculates what will the evidence look like the proof of the monster jackboot ejaculation on Blackland and if after Namibia and if after Angola and if after Zimbabwe and if after all of my kinsmen and women resist even to self-immolation of the villages and if after that we lose nevertheless what will the big boys say will they claim my consent: Do You Follow Me: We are the wrong people of the wrong skin on the wrong continent and what in the hell is everybody being reasonable about and according to the *Times* this week back in 1966 the CIA decided that they had this problem and the problem was a man named Nkrumah so they killed him and before that it was Patrice Lumumba and before that it was my father on the campus of my Ivy League school and my father afraid to walk into the cafeteria because he said he was wrong the wrong age the wrong skin the wrong gender identity and he was paying my tuition and before that

it was my father saying I was wrong saying that I should have been a boy because he wanted one/a boy and that I should have been lighter skinned and that I should have had straighter hair and that I should not be so boy crazy but instead I should just be one/a boy and before that it was my mother pleading plastic surgery for my nose and braces for my teeth and telling me to let the books loose to let them loose in other words

I am very familiar with the problems of the CIA and the problems of South Africa and the problems of Exxon Corporation and the problems of white America in general and the problems of the teachers and the preachers and the FBI and the social workers and my particular Mom and Dad/I am very familiar with the problems because the problems turn out to be me

I am the history of rape

I am the history of the rejection of who I am

I am the history of the terrorized incarceration of my self

I am the history of battery assault and limitless armies against whatever I want to do with my mind and my body and my soul and whether it's about walking out at night or whether it's about the love that I feel or whether it's about the sanctity of my vagina or the sanctity of my national boundaries or the sanctity of my leaders or the sanctity of each and every desire

that I know from my personal and idiosyncratic and indisputably single and singular heart

I have been raped

be-

cause I have been wrong the wrong sex the wrong age the wrong skin the wrong nose the wrong hair the wrong need the wrong dream the wrong geographic the wrong sartorial I

I have been the meaning of rape

I have been the problem everyone seeks to eliminate by forced

penetration with or without the evidence of slime and/ but let this be unmistakable this poem

is not consent I do not consent

to my mother to my father to the teachers to the FBI to South Africa to Bedford-Stuy to Park Avenue to American Airlines to the hardon idlers on the corners to the sneaky creeps in cars

I am not wrong: Wrong is not my name

My name is my own my own my own

and I can't tell you who the hell set things up like this but I can tell you that from now on my resistance my simple and daily and nightly self-determination may very well cost you your life

(1979)

The roots of racism

By Jenni Bailey

MODERN anti-black British racism has relatively recent roots, in the history of slavery and colonialism.

Racism did not start as a divide-and-rule trick imposed by the ruling class. The racist practice of slavery and colonialism came first; racist ideas came later.

When the modern slave trade started in the 16th century the British capitalists took slaves and sold them like cattle, bullied them and beat them. Then, they began thinking of them as subhuman.

That is the natural way of things for slave owners. When Britain conquered territories and peoples and assumed the right to rule and make decisions for them, then British people began to believe those peoples were inferior.

The roots of modern racism can be traced back to the planter class of slave owners. Although fear and suspicion of the stranger and the outsider had existed before, it had not been fear on the basis of skin colour.

In the ancient world there were many societies based on slavery. But there was no idea comparable to "race".

The ancient Egyptians looked down on the black peoples to their south, but they were just as scornful of other, lighter-skinned, neighbours. Egyptian artists caricatured the captives taken in war — but the peculiar dress of the Libyans or Hebrews was held up for ridicule as much as the features of the black southerners.

In Greek society the slaves were frequently of the same colour as their owners. There were many white slaves from the north and the east.

In Rome any citizen might become a slave and any slave a citizen. Slaves came from every province and every skin



"The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo"

colour — so did the Emperors, of whom some were black.

There is nothing "natural" about anti-black racism in the psychological biological make-up of whites. This can be seen today by watching young children of different skin colours play together.

Racism was a product of the beginnings of capitalism. In the beginning there were Indian slaves and white indentured labourers too as well as Africans. Black slaves were taken from Africa as a simple commercial decision: it was cheaper than going elsewhere. The reasons were economic, not racist.

Racist ideas squared an ideological

circle for the capitalists. Their anti-feudal revolutions took place under the banner of liberty. Yet there was no liberty for the slaves.

Paradoxically, it was because capitalism had developed the ideas of universal human rights and equality — the same ideas that would later inspire the revolts of the colonial and enslaved peoples — that it also developed the ideologies of racism. Previous societies had had slavery and conquest, but their rulers had no need for general theories of racial superiority to justify the slavery and conquest. The poor had no rights, whatever their skin colour and whatever their ethnic origin. There was no need for special theories to cancel the human rights of a special category of poor people.

Under the pressure of economic interests writers and thinkers developed the gut reactions of the planters into fleshed-out theories.

Black people were called sub-human, allowing the bourgeoisie to have their "liberty" and their slaves too.

Pseudo-science said black peoples were inferior—because of head shape, or some other rubbish.

Colonialism and the slave trade wrecked societies and civilisations. Much of the African past was destroyed.

Continued on page 8

Negro

By Langston Hughes

I am a Negro

Black as the night is black,
— Black like the depths of my Africa

I've been a slave:

Caesar told me to keep his door-step
clean
I've brushed the boots of Washington.

I've been a worker:

Under my hand the pyramids arose.

I've made mortar for the Woolworth
building.

I've been a singer:

All the way from Africa to Georgia
I carried my sorrow songs.
I made ragtime.

I've been a victim:

The Belgians cut off my hands in the
Congo
They lynch me still in Mississippi.

I am a Negro

[Written in the 1920s]

White Man

By Langston Hughes

Sure I know you!
You're a White Man.
I'm a Negro.
You take all the best jobs
And leave us the garbage cans to
empty and
The halls to clean.
You have a good time in a big
house at Palm Beach
And rent us the back alleys
And the dirty slums.
You enjoy Rome—
And take Ethiopia.
White Man! White Man!
Let Louis Armstrong play it—
And you copyright it
And make the money.
You're the smart guy, White Man!
You got everything!
But now,
I hear your name ain't really White
Man.
I hear it's something
Marx wrote down
Fifty years ago—
That rich people don't like to read.
Is that true, White Man?
Is your name in a book
Called the *Communist Manifesto*?
Is your name spelled
C-A-P-I-T-A-L-I-S-T?
Are you always a White Man?
Huh?
[Written in the mid-1930s]

Imperialism in India reduced a fabulous treasure-house, the world's leading industrial nation, to backward poverty. Europe then built a whole racist ideology that the peoples of Africa and Asia were naturally "backward". In Ireland the British state brutalised the people and then blamed them for their own condition. They were described as "unstable, childish, violent, lazy, feckless, feminine and primitive".

In the heyday of the British Empire racism and nationalism penetrated every part of intellectual life as never before. Frederick Engels wrote to Karl Kautsky in 1882: "You ask what the English workers think about colonial policy. Well, exactly the same as they think about politics in general: the same as the bourgeois think. There is no workers' party here, you see, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies".

Many labour movement leaders campaigned to restrict the entry of Jews fleeing Eastern European pogroms at the end of the last century. The first modern immigration act was passed against the Jews — the Aliens Act of 1905.

Immigration laws have been one of the major mechanisms of state racism over the last 40 years. After the Second World War, capitalism expanded, and the British bosses toured Africa, the Caribbean and India looking for workers to work in British industry.

As the boom slowed the racist right

mobilised. It was led by Winston Churchill, the supposedly great leader of British democracy in World War 2. In 1955 Churchill proposed "Keep Britain White" as a Tory election slogan. The Metropolitan Police described "coloured people" as work-shy and content to live on National Assistance and immoral "earnings".

Black workers found "colour bars" in clubs and housing. Black community organisations began life as self-help groups in response to this racism.

Racist attacks became more common, and in 1958 there was a riot led by organised racists in Notting Hill, West London. "If you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labour" was a Tory by-election slogan in 1964. Margaret Thatcher said that "this country might be swamped by people from a different culture" before her election victory in 1979, taking some of the political ground from under the fascist National Front who, during the 1970s, organised some thousands of white British people.

The Immigration Act of April 1962 began the current process of formal racism — laws which discriminate against black people. Immigration Acts of 1968 and 1971 completed the process, barring almost all immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean and India except those joining close family here.

The latest phase in state racism is the successive changes in the law and government regulations on asylum, treating asylum-seekers not as human beings with rights but as an unmanageable "problem".

A programme to beat racism

THE Alliance for Workers' Liberty organises socialists to fight for working-class solutions to the crisis. If we do not, then black people, Jews and foreigners will be scapegoated; the working class will be split along ethnic lines; and we will all lose — black and white.

Socialists must be part of the basic organisations of the working class, the trade unions and the Labour Party and help to turn them outwards to campaign on the estates and streets.

- Jobs for all! Cut the work week to 35 hours; create useful new jobs by restoring and expanding public services; provide training and re-training at union rates of pay. To pay for this: tax the rich, cut arms spending, take

control of the big banks and financial institutions.

- Restore the Health Service and other public services.

- Jobs, training or education for all youth, with union rates of pay or an adequate grant.

- A decent home for everyone! Demand government money to enable local councils to undertake a crash programme of compulsory purchase of empty properties, renovation, and house-building, to create new homes at affordable rents.

- Scrap the immigration laws! Open the doors to asylum-seekers! No more deportations!

- Fight for real equality in employment and housing. Council-house

allocation by need, not by race under disguise of a "sons and daughters" policy. Special training programmes to ensure real equality in employment for ethnic minorities.

- Equality in the labour movement. No toleration for racist prejudice: special campaigns to recruit and integrate ethnic minority workers.

- Labour movement support for black communities' self-defence; united black and white workers' defence squads to beat back the fascists.

The labour movement must stand up and fight! That is the only way to beat New Labour, the capitalists and the racists. Help us fight in the labour movement for these ideas. Join the AWL.

New Labour's immigration legislation

WHEN Labour was in opposition it spoke out against the Tories' immigration legislation and committed itself to reversing these laws when it came to power. True, it was not very vocal in its opposition to racist legislation, and made only a limited number of commitments. New Labour could not, after all, afford to offend the readers of the "Daily Mail" and "Daily Express".

But the Immigration and Asylum Bill (IAB), presented to Parliament on 9 February, does nothing to reverse Tory legislation. On the contrary, it builds upon the foundations of the Tories' racist legislation, giving it at least one extra turn of the screw in virtually every aspect of immigration and asylum law.

The Tories' Carriers' Liability Act of 1987 imposed penalties on shipping and airline companies which brought undocumented passengers to this country. The fine currently amounts to £2,000 for each undocumented passenger. The legislation was aimed at making it more difficult for asylum-seekers — who are usually unable to obtain the appropriate paperwork — to reach this country. Airline staff in airports abroad were made into surrogate immigration officers.

Under the IAB carriers' liability is to be extended to lorry-drivers as well. Additional and separate penalties will also be introduced.

The Tories' Immigration and Asylum (Appeals) Act of 1993 removed the right of appeal against refusal to grant a visitor's visa. This left Entry Clearance Officers in British embassies abroad free to make decisions on the basis of prejudice and racist stereotyping, safe in the knowledge that they would not be called to account for their decisions.

Labour promised to restore the right of appeal for would-be visitors. In fact, the IAB restores a right of appeal for "family members", but not for any other category of persons (such as holiday-makers) refused a visitor's visa. Nor does the IAB define "family" — a concept which varies from one culture to another.

In an utterly unprecedented move the IAB also obliges appellants to pay a fee for the appeal in advance of the hearing. The fee is paid back only if the appeal is successful. This is clearly intended to deter family members refused a visa from pursuing their nominal appeal rights.

The IAB also allows the immigration authorities to demand payment of a bond, as a guarantee that entry conditions will



not be breached. Jack Straw has suggested a figure of between £5,000 and £10,000. This is blatant discrimination against poorer people.

In the years following the Tories' legislation of 1993 the number of immigration "offenders" held in detention steadily increased. By the time the Tories fell from power the number of detainees — often held in prisons alongside of convicted criminals — had increased by more than 300%.

Labour tut-tutted about such an unprecedented use of detention. Yet last year's immigration White Paper proposed increased use of detention, especially of asylum-seekers who might face removal from the UK. The IAB goes even further. The running of detention centres will continue to be contracted out to private security companies. "Detainee custody officers" will enjoy virtually the same powers as prison warders, but without being subject to the same degree of legal safeguards and public accountability.

Officers will be entitled to use "reasonable force" in exercising their functions, and resisting or obstructing a custody officer is to become a criminal offence. Taking anything into or out of a detention centre, in breach of detention centre rules, also becomes a criminal offence. ("Prohibited items" at Campsfield House detention centre, listed in a Prisons Inspectorate report, include "large quantities of dried fruit" and "cleaning materials".)

The IAB introduces a right for immigration detainees to apply for bail. But the

right is so qualified as to be largely meaningless. The first bail hearing must be heard no sooner than the fifth day and no later than the ninth day after detention. A second bail hearing must be heard no sooner than the 33rd day and no later than the 37th day after detention. There is no provision for Legal Aid for bail hearings, no provision for any bail hearing after the second one and no limitation on how long a person may be held in detention.

In 1994 the Tories issued a compendium of changes including a new set of criteria against which any application for asylum had to be judged. If no reasonable explanation was offered for a failure to meet the criteria, then the asylum application could be refused.

The IAB not only leaves the existing criteria untouched but adds new ones as well. Under the so-called "one-stop" appeal procedure no asylum application will be considered if it is lodged after an unsuccessful appeal to remain in the UK on other grounds. Nor will there be any right of appeal against refusal to consider the asylum application.

Persons resident in the UK for at least seven years will also no longer have a right of appeal against deportation. The appeal rights of overstayers and persons who have allegedly breached the conditions of their leave to remain are to be restricted. Finally, pursuit of what is deemed to be an appeal without merit will be subject to imposition of an undefined financial penalty!

The Tories' Asylum and Immigration Act of 1996 gave immigration officers increased powers of search and arrest, obliged employers to check the immigration status of job applicants, reduced the appeal rights of asylum-seekers, and denied most asylum-seekers the right to welfare benefits.

New Labour's IAB gives immigration officers increased powers of search and arrest, obliges employers to check the immigration status of job applicants, reduces the appeal rights of asylum-seekers, and denies all asylum-seekers the right to welfare benefits.

Immigration officers are to be given broad powers to arrest suspects without a warrant, to enter and search premises without a warrant, to search persons held in custody, and to use reasonable force when exercising the powers granted to them by the IAB. Immigration officers are to be provided with "powers of search, entry and seizure in respect of immigration offences equivalent to those the police already have."

The government wants to reduce the "dependency" of immigration officers on the police. In fact, immigration officers will end up with broader powers than the police — the police, under the law can use reasonable force only under certain circumstances, whereas immigration officers will be able to use reasonable force when exercising any of their enforcement powers. And immigration officers are even less accountable than the police.

The IAB leaves untouched the obligation on employers to check the immigration status of job applicants. In 1996 Labour condemned this as contrary to good race relations and promised to scrap the requirement. Now all that Jack Straw intends doing to is to issue a "code of practice" on how these measures should be applied in a non-discriminatory manner. How a piece of legislation based upon racism and discrimination can be applied in a non-discriminatory manner remains to be seen.

The reduced appeal rights for asylum-seekers introduced by the Tories' 1996 legislation are likewise left untouched.

Asylum-seekers who arrived here through what is deemed to be a safe third country (e.g. another European country), for example, will still have no right of appeal in the UK before their removal to the third country.

Other asylum-seekers (those whose claims were "certified" by the Secretary of State) were also left with reduced appeal rights by the Tories' 1996 legislation.

Under the "one-stop" appeal procedure created by the IAB all asylum-seekers will find their appeal rights are reduced to those previously restricted only to "certified" asylum claims. Some asylum-seekers, as already noted, will have no right of appeal at all.

In 1996 the Tories restricted entitlement to welfare benefits to those

asylum-seekers who applied for asylum on arrival. Since 1996 no "in-country" asylum-seeker has had any access to welfare benefits.

Now, under the most widely publicised measures of New Labour's legislation, all asylum-seekers will lose the right to claim welfare benefits.

A new "support" system for asylum-seekers is to be created. Asylum-seekers are to be concentrated in "clusters" around the country. Only one offer of accommodation is to be made to an asylum-seeker. No consideration is to be given to the asylum-seeker's own preferences when the offer is made. If the offer is not accepted, the asylum-seeker is abandoned to fend for himself.

There will be no financial assistance provided for asylum-seekers (except, possibly, for minor items of expenditure). Vouchers and assistance in kind are to be provided. Even this poverty-level support will be provided only if the asylum-seeker can demonstrate that he is unable to obtain assistance from elsewhere, such as friends or relatives in the UK.

An asylum-seeker who makes false representations in order to gain access to these "benefits" can be imprisoned for up to three months. An asylum-seeker who makes dishonest representations — "dishonest" is a different legal category from "false" — can be imprisoned for up to seven years.

An asylum-seeker who delays or obstructs a person responsible for administering the new "support" system is liable to a fine. An asylum-seeker who submits misrepresentations in order to obtain assistance under the "support" system can be ordered to repay the monetary value of the "support" provided.

When the Tories tried to starve asylum-seekers out of the country in 1996 they made the mistake of leaving open loopholes in other pieces of legislation

(such as the National Assistance Act of 1948) through which asylum-seekers could be given support and assistance.

New Labour makes no such mistakes. The IAB amends all other pieces of legislation to ensure that no asylum-seeker can benefit from their provisions.

As the Immigration Law Practitioners Association comments on the new "support" system: "This will create an apartheid system of parallel and inferior welfare and housing provision for all asylum-seekers. Such social exclusion is wrong in principle. In terms of race relations and social cohesion the proposals are a recipe for disaster. They deliver the message 'these people are undesirable' and will inflame the worst strands of popular prejudice."

The IAB even reverses earlier steps taken by Labour in the aftermath of the 1997 General Election, including the abolition of the "primary purpose rule". Under this rule a marriage between a British person and a non-British person did not give the latter the right to remain if the primary purpose of the marriage was to obtain leave to remain here.

The rule is now effectively being reintroduced through the concept of a "sham marriage", defined by the IAB as one "entered into for the purpose of avoiding the effect of one or more provisions of immigration law." A marriage registrar who suspects a pending marriage may be sham is obliged to report it.

The IAB is a viciously bigoted and punitive piece of legislation. For asylum-seekers it will spell complete disaster. The labour movement must oppose the Bill tooth and nail. We should demand of Labour MPs that they continue to oppose what they opposed when in opposition, and that they should vote against the Bill. The message from the trade unions must be that we want no truck with New Labour authoritarianism.

Stan Crooke

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Jubilee 2000 movement:

Workers should not pay the bosses' debt

HUNDREDS of people gathered at St Paul's Cathedral in London on 7 March to support Jubilee 2000, followed by an all-night vigil outside the Treasury. The organisers of Jubilee 2000 claim that by the time their petition calling on the governments of the richer countries to cancel the poorest countries' unpayable debts is presented, at the G8 summit in June 1999, it will have 22 million signatures worldwide. It is the largest petition in history.

The focus is on 41 countries, 33 of them in Africa, which have a total of about \$220 billion in outstanding foreign debt. At present the poorest countries spend £9 on debt repayment for every £1 they receive in aid. Africa spends four times as much on debt repayment as on health care, and in the 37 poorest countries health and education spending per person has dropped 50%. According to the United Nations, a redistribution of the money currently funnelled to the international banks could save the lives of 134,000 children who now die every week from malnutrition or avoidable diseases of poverty. A revised estimate today would probably put the figure even higher, since the prices of the raw-material exports on which most of the poorest countries depend have plunged since the current Asia-centred economic crisis erupted.

Jubilee 2000 has organised campaigns in 42 countries, mostly involving Christian groups (the "Jubilee" reference comes from the Bible). That gives them a wide reach and much Establishment support — but also ties them to politics which rely on appealing to the consciences of Clinton and Blair, Schroder and Jospin.

They argue that cancelling the "unpayable" debt, which they reckon at about \$160 billion, would cost little compared to the total income of the richer countries. That's true. Averaged out, the cost comes to about £2 per year for every British taxpayer. Politicians like Clinton and Blair, however, who have openly announced "the end of welfare" or "an end to tax-and-spend" as their aims, are not easily moved to do anything which might nibble, however delicately, at profits.

Jubilee 2000 also points to the model of the Marshall Plan and the cancellation of some of West Germany's debts after World War 2. The moving force there, however, was not conscience — not from

a US administration which had just dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki — but the threat of Stalinist or working-class revolution.

The campaign has support — or, more exactly, words of approval — from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the USA's trade union centre, the AFL-CIO; but it has no thought of orienting or mobilising the working-class forces which might cause sufficient alarm in the ruling circles to squeeze out some real concessions.

So it is to us, socialists and Marxists, that the task falls of taking the issue of starvation and poverty in the Third World into the trade unions. When we do succeed in mobilising workers and the poor around the issues of Third World debt and poverty, the logical demands and objectives will be somewhat broader than Jubilee 2000's call to "cancel the debt".

"Cancel the debt" poses the issue as one between nation and nation, or debtor and creditor. But our basic aim is not that the wealthy of poor nations should get a boost relative to the wealthy of richer nations, nor that capitalism should run on free or cheap credit. Jubilee 2000 talks about measures to decide exactly

which/what debt is "unpayable", and to ensure that the money freed by debt cancellation goes to socially-useful purposes, but once again sees no agency to do what's needed other than the conscience of the rich.

The problem appears in sharp relief if we look not just at Africa but also at Latin America. There, we see immense poverty and suffering, huge foreign debts — and equally vast wealth in the hands of the ruling classes. Large chunks of the money brought into Latin America by foreign loans went straight out again to enable Mexican, or Argentinian, or Brazilian capitalists to buy property or swell bank accounts in the USA! The answer there cannot be just to cancel the foreign debt, but to expropriate the wealth of all the exploiters, of whatever nationality.

The immediate slogan is not so much: "Rich-country governments, please cancel the debt!", as: "We, workers and poor people, refuse to pay the costs of the foreign debt. The capitalists of different countries can sort out the debt among themselves as best they see fit; but whatever they do, we must unite and organise against being made to pay the price!"

Colin Foster

World economic crisis spreads

BRAZIL'S national income will shrink by six per cent in 1999, according to the brokers Salomon Smith Barney. They expect Venezuela's economy to shrink by 3%, Argentina's by 2%, and Ecuador's by 4%. All this adds up to "the sharpest downturn in Latin America since 1982, when the 1980s debt crisis began".

The international economic crisis which opened in Thailand in late 1997 is still spreading its effects. In Asia, where it started, the Far Eastern Economic Review reckons that "1999 won't be as disastrous as last year for Asia [but] there's little hope for robust economic recovery".

Russia is in chaos. Europe is stagnant, though not yet in any sharp crisis. World prices of raw materials are still 30% below what they were a couple of years ago, and the overall average of producer prices has begun to fall for the first time in decades. The usually optimistic Economist magazine concludes that: "The world economy is precariously balanced on

the edge of a deflationary precipice". If price cuts snowball, they will make the burden of debt everywhere much heavier, cut spending, and thus trigger bankruptcies.

The great saving factor so far for world capitalism is the continuing consumer boom in the USA. Sales of consumer durables expanded by an extraordinary 13% between late 1997 and late 1998. Unemployment in the USA is relatively low, and real wages have risen for the first time since the early 1970s.

But profits in the USA have sagged as companies lose their export markets. And the consumer boom is continuing only at the cost of a huge trade deficit — the USA's current account balance was \$225 billion in the red in 1998 — and an unprecedentedly high level of consumer debt.

No-one knows how long the big trade deficit and the spiral of consumer debt can continue. But not for ever.

Chris Reynolds

OF
A
NHS
CONSUMER

Waiting for Doctor Godot

I COULD claim that I've long been Tony Blair's ideal National Health Service "consumer". Many years ago I spent two weeks in a hospital, behind screens and then in a small room, helplessly watching someone very dear to me die in agony and delirium. Since then, I've been phobic about doctors and hospitals, subconsciously — I deduce — feeling that if they once got hold of me, they'd never let me go. It's taken serious things like infections to make me go to the doctor for anti-biotics. When I became ill recently I had had little to do with the NHS for a dozen years or more.

Of course I know about the decline in the health service. I'd written about it, helping to draft the WL pamphlet *How to Save the Welfare State* that was one of the seeds of the Welfare State Network. But I was not prepared for what I am now experiencing.

Last August I began to feel increasingly ill — persistent earache, nausea, travel sickness on short bus journeys and a serious deterioration in my hearing. I'd had three, two-stage operations on my ears many years ago.

The feeling of general ill-being continued to get worse, as did the earache, which felt to me like a bad infection. My capacity to work decreased; routine things became very stressful. As always I delayed seeking medical help as long as possible.

I had in the past, as a registered patient with recurrent ear problems, been able to drop in at the ear hospital at Gray's Inn Road, but I had not needed to do so for years. I went. No! I could only be seen if I had a referral from my doctor. I went to the emergency department and a doctor looked in my ear: "Wax — get a doctor's referral and come back."

I had neglected to register with a local doctor when I moved house four years ago. I went to my old doctor on emergency. He said the ear was completely "occluded" with wax and gave me antibiotics in case there was an infection behind the blockage. I felt a bit better for the antibiotics.

I registered with a local doctor and my ear was syringed. The "wax" wouldn't come out. A second session a week later left the ear still blocked. I was now feeling generally pretty sick, with more or less continuous serious ear pain. An earlier long history of such trouble

— I come from a country where there was the most rudimentary of health services and suffered the consequences of neglect, until I came to England and benefited from the NHS — had taught me to be matter of fact and stoical about such things.

The earlier operations had produced the effect of recessing the ears closer to my head. I noticed that the angle of the painful left ear was changing as if it were being pushed out — one third of an inch perhaps. The ear would bleed a little, intermittently. The doctor gave me ear drops containing peroxide for use on the wax. I felt ill, increasingly so. One Saturday evening at a meeting, after I'd made a vehement 5 minute speech, blood began to ooze continuously out of my ear; I could feel blood in my throat and taste and feel it sticky in my mouth. I felt very ill, in serious pain, and, of course frightened.

AFTER a very bad night, early the next morning I rang the number I had for the emergency doctor. On the phone he diagnosed an infection caused by the "poking around" of syringing and arranged for me to get antibiotics from the local Tesco's.

My own doctor now discovered that I had a growth in the ear — "polyp". That, covered with wax was what was completely blocking the passage. I'd guessed. Not the least part of my problem now was uncertainty. Growths can be benign and they can be otherwise. I became convinced it was the worst possibility. I felt "sure" of that for a long time, waiting for an appointment with a specialist at the hospital.

I had been "referred" to Guy's Hospital, for blood tests and X rays. The doctor, a sympathetic man obviously unhappy with the service he was able to provide — there is an advert for BUPA in the waiting room — assured me that it was "an urgent case" and that within a couple of weeks I'd hear from St Thomas's/Guy's with an appointment. I did not. Another infection quickly occurred. The GP was surprised that I had not heard from Guys. I did not hear from them for over 2 months.

I was now continually feeling very sick. The GP advised pain-killers for the pain. He'd found other things wrong with me and put me on medication, whose side-effects made me

feel additionally ill. I ceased to be able to work except intermittently. Still no word from the hospital. Finally a letter came offering me an appointment for the end of April — over six months from my first visit to the doctors. A week later came another letter — they were sorry, but they had to put me back three weeks, to mid-May. And so it stands.

Doing my best still to be the NHS's ideal patient, I found a Bolshevik answer to the decline of the NHS: I experienced a sort of spontaneous regeneration. There was continuous heavy discharge from my ear — dried blood mixed with other things. One evening I felt a sharp pain and then relief, as though an abscess had burst. A day later I was cleaning the discharge and found it unusually solid and difficult to get out. When I finally got it out I had a lump of flesh the size of the top of my little finger, looking and feeling like a piece of raw chicken flesh, with a bloody patch, where it had broken off. I guess it had grown too large for the passage... Though intermittent bleeding continued for three or four weeks, the pain more or less ceased. I experienced a tremendous sense of easing off. There is still discharge. Though I'm inclined to be optimistic that it was benign, I still have no idea, and of course it is impossible not to fret.

It was suggested to me that I seek private medicine. I am not against it in principle: if the NHS is inadequate the right to live entitles you to find an alternative. If things had continued as they were before the "spontaneous operation" I might have had to. There is no absolute principle involved; but the idea of it is profoundly distasteful to me. Socialism is class struggle, not life-style, and not personal morality. But for people who spend a lot of time preaching it, socialism is also a morality. One of the lessons of "socialism" in the twentieth century is that it *has to be*.

This is one story of the human meaning of the cumulative destruction of the NHS. Similar stories, and worse stories, already number millions. Those millions and their friends and relatives know what the destruction of the NHS means. In certain cases a delay of months is a death sentence. If the labour movement would give a lead this is an issue that could still change the face of British politics.

Annie O'Keefe

The student fight against fees

STUDENTS in Britain are starting to show signs of irreparably damaging their media reputation as apathetic hedonists in a series of occupations and fees non-payment campaigns.

Recently there have been college occupations at Oxford, the University of East London and Goldsmiths College in London, while students in Sheffield opted to occupy the Constituency offices of David Blunkett — 9 of them getting arrested in the process. The catalyst for this has been the tuition fees non-payment campaigns that the Campaign for Free Education instigated.

Whilst it is too early to talk of anything like a new era of student radicalism, even the bourgeois press are picking up on the mood of student anger, both against the Government and also against our own national union for refusing to put up even a semblance of a fight. Since the non-payment campaign at Oxford hit the headlines, non-payment has become a big issue. Students who had been unable to pay or privately refusing can now see a campaign taking place. The confidence that gives is providing the push for campaigns and occupations to spring up all over the place. This creates an excellent basis on which to build for a campaign of mass non-payment next year.

And it is not just in the UK that students are fighting back. In Greece a huge campaign closed colleges and brought students and their supporters into conflict with the Police. Similar scenes have been seen in Israel where students have been protesting about fees. In France, Lycee students mobilised hundreds of thousands for improved conditions and in Indonesia and South Korea students continue to play an important part in the struggle against dictatorship.

An exciting development should take place at the end of May when student activists from all over Europe will take part in the Euromarch and counter summit in Cologne. Plans are in place for the conference after the march to organise some ongoing activity and a Europe-wide free education campaign. As the bosses and governments of Europe converge their plans to turn education into a fast-track training scheme to provide useful workers for the bosses, it is vital that students organise internationally to counter this offensive by pushing for a free education for all in full-time, post-school education, an increase in social provision



and campaigning links with the workers' movement. The individual struggles of students in different countries are inspiring but a linked campaign across national borders could be a formidable force.

As these protests are taking place a sharp contrast is being provided by the National Union of Students. Their National Conference and Women's Conference both take place this month. Whilst the Government has scrapped grants and introduced fees, and while students have demonstrated, occupied and refused to pay their fees, the NUS leaders have been silent. It took them until the end of February to "organise" a day of action - not when the fees were about to come in in the Summer, not when students arrived at college in September, not while the CFE was building a national demonstration or while the other student federations of Europe were organising a European Week of Action with the CFE, not while non-payers were getting threat-

ened with expulsion over Christmas — but February, when they were up for re-election and scared that they looked bankrupt! When they did get round to it they encouraged unions to send a postcard to David Blunkett that didn't even mention grants or fees!

The National Women's Conference elected Helen Russell, the CFE candidate, by a landslide despite a huge and unprincipled campaign by the right wing and their stablemates on the "left" — Socialist Action, that even saw them resort to accusing the current Women's Officer and other supporters of Workers' Liberty of being racist! Helen's election is a big success — the Women's Campaign has been the only section of NUS to campaign consistently and vigorously for free education for the past few years.

National Conference starts on March 14 and sees a very strong challenge being put to the current leadership by a joint slate between the CFE and the SWP-backed Stop the Fees. Last year, Workers' Liberty member, Kate Buckell came within 15 votes of the Presidency. This year there is a very real chance of closing that gap. An NUS that was prepared to fight the Government, to stand by and help organise students refusing to pay their fees, and to prioritise involving students in a mass campaign of civil disobedience would be a huge step forward in the campaign against the Government and also in uniting student struggle internationally.

Mick Duncan

Scottish Socialist Party formed

EVERYONE must have been pleased with the turnout at the Scottish Socialist Party's founding conference on Sunday, 21 February. There were 200 or so delegates in a packed hall. £14,000 was raised in pledges towards our target of a £100,000 election fund. There were many excellent speeches. Minorities were allowed, even encouraged, to articulate their concerns.

I also found unexpected, but virtually unanimous support, for positions that I support — on drugs (for decriminalisation) and on Europe.

The motion on the euro stated "While recognising that what we are witnessing is part of a natural devel-

opment within the European capitalist system, we will actively oppose and campaign against any and every proposal which acts against the interests of the working class. This includes opposition to the draconian cuts in public expenditure necessary to meet the criteria for the establishment of the euro."

Everyone had to admit that the motion was a fudge, cobbled together at the very last minute. However, it has, inadvertently, given me most of what I wanted on the question. Some of it was badly written, but it represents a great advance on both of the

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The free association of producers

BILL Gates of Microsoft is the richest man in the world. He gets richer so fast that if the riches were the product of his own labour — which of course they're not — it would not be worth his while to lose time in order to pick up a dropped \$500 bill. Microsoft, which sells little but software, disembodied information, is now wealthier than IBM or any of the companies that make the computers or their components.

What if the software, the information needed to make the computers run or to do particular tasks, were available free? No profits for Bill Gates, no Microsoft, no burgeoning new capitalist information industry.

In fact a lot of the software is available free. Instead of buying Windows to run your desktop computer, you can use another system, Linux, for free. Most of the software used on Internet servers, like Apache and Sendmail, is also available free.

This software is free in another sense, too. It is produced in a way that approximates closely to the old socialist idea of "the free association of producers". Linux, for example, had its first version written by a single man, Linus Torvalds, as a student in Finland in 1991. Nobody paid him to do it. He made both the programme and the "source code" (the detailed mechanics of the programme, comprehensible only to specialists) freely available on the Internet. Since then, thousands of other people across the world have contributed to enhancing the programme and fixing problems. Anyone can make a suggestion. No-one gets money for their contribution. Their reward is self-esteem and the esteem of others. Only 10% of the latest version of Linux was written by Torvalds.

Its advocates argue plausibly that free software is much better and more reliable than the commercial products. It draws on a much greater pool of talent to improve it and fix mistakes. And it can make its way — start the process of improvement — only through merit. People use Linux because they hear and see that it works well.

By contrast, DOS, the base on which Windows was built, made the fortune of Microsoft only because Microsoft made a deal with IBM to get DOS (a "quick-and-dirty" fix which they picked up from a non-Microsoft programmer) installed on all of IBM's first generation of desktop computers. Today people use Windows only because Microsoft has the commercial power to ensure that almost every new computer comes with Windows already installed, and the best-known and most easily available programmes for word-processing, databases, spreadsheets and so on are written to run with Windows.

Over the last year, the free-software movement has been pulled into the commercial and legal battle between Microsoft and its rivals. On 22 January 1998, Netscape, the company that produces the Navigator

web browser, announced that it would make the source code freely available. This was a move in Netscape's resistance to being driven out of the market by Microsoft, which gets its own web browser, Internet Explorer, supplied as part of Windows with almost all new computers. Netscape now employs over 100 full-time programmers on work whose products — improvements to Navigator — it gives away for free, but it reckons that the free browser helps to increase sales of other software and pumps up the advertising base for Netscape's web site.

"More important than convenience and reliability is the freedom to cooperate. In proprietary society, your dealings with other people are shaped by fear".

In May, the company that produces WordPerfect wordprocessor announced that they would make Linux versions of all their office software available free; in July, the company that produces Oracle database software said they would work with Linux too. In November, the "Halloween documents", internal Microsoft memoranda about their plans for dirty tricks against the Linux "threat", were leaked to the press. On 17 February 1999, IBM announced that they would work with Linux.

Anything up to 27 million people are now using Linux world-wide.

BUT maybe the success of free software has come at the cost of making it nothing more than a "loss-leader" in a commercial war in which other big corporations will defeat Microsoft. It will differ from the cut-price baked beans used by supermarket chains only in that these "baked beans" are produced for free by people who just like cooking and swapping ideas for recipes.

A number of free software developers now call their method "open source", and explain: "We realised that the Netscape announcement [of January 1998] had created a precious window of time within which we might finally be able to get the corporate world to listen to what we have to teach about the superiority of an open development process. We realised it was time to dump the confrontational attitude that has been associated with 'free software' in the past and sell the idea strictly on the same pragmatic, business-case grounds that motivated Netscape. We brainstormed about tactics and a new label. 'Open source' was the best thing we came up with" (www.opensource.org).

Another well-known free software

developer, Richard Stallman, disagrees. "More important than convenience and reliability is freedom — the freedom to cooperate", he told Salon magazine. "What I'm concerned about is not individual people or companies so much as the way of life that we have. That's why I think it's a distraction to think about fighting Microsoft... You have a certain way of life when you have freedom in a free society. In a totalitarian, non-free society, every aspect of how you deal with people is shaped by your fear. In proprietary society, your dealings with other people are shaped by fear of the information police, currently in its incarnation of the Software Publishers' Association".

Even if in the short term Stallman turns out to be, as he himself fears, "the last survivor of a dead culture... I don't really belong in the world any more", for the longer term an important marker has been set down.

Some products have to be private property to some degree or another. Your toothbrush is private. The food that you have eaten cannot also be someone else's dinner. The case for socialism is that modern technology allows us to produce such things so abundantly that they can be distributed simply according to need — just as dinner is distributed "according to need" in even a modestly prosperous working-class household today — and that it does so through other products, the modern means of production, which must be operated collectively and should also be owned collectively.

Where do new, less tangible, products like software fit in? They can be squeezed into the private-property form only by much socially-counterproductive ingenuity (witness all the methods used to stop people "pirating" software), and at the price of giving control to profit-hungry oligopolies like Microsoft (and its rivals) rather than having people contribute to production "from each according to their abilities".

Up until about the 1970s, so researchers have found, the fact that the average household owned more and more gadgets — furniture, then fridges and washing machines, then TVs and phones... — went with decreased misery. Over the last 25 or 30 years, as the majority of the population in advanced capitalist countries has escaped the absolute poverty of hunger, cold, and crushing physical labour, that has changed. On the whole, more people own more gadgets — and they have more stressful, insecure, poorer lives.

Human beings are social animals. Despite all the orthodoxies of capitalist economics, your life is not defined by your individual possessions, but also by social goods or evils — environment, culture, information. Capitalism's frenzied rush to produce more and more, to package it for sale, and then sell it, becomes increasingly perverse.

Chris Reynolds

London's united left gets going

THE united-left Euro-election list for London has finally made its public debut. It has put out a leaflet and appeal for support widely circulated to trade union branches, pensioners' groups, and student unions, and called a public meeting for Tuesday 9 March.

Speakers at the 9 March meeting will include a representative from the joint-left (Lutte Ouvrière/Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire) Euro-list in France, and some of the candidates already announced for London, such as Jill Mountford of Workers' Liberty, Candy Udwin of the SWP, Glen Kelly of the Socialist Party, and Greg Tucker of Socialist Outlook. Malkiat Bilku, a leader of the Hillingdon strikers will also speak, and leading trade unionists on the Tube and the railways are in discussions about standing on the slate.

Agitation continues in some quarters of the left about the London list's platform being too left wing, or (as Socialist Outlook puts it) "having too much about workers". But it does seem that the list is sufficiently well launched to cope with this agitation without great damage.

It will be standing under the name "Socialist Alliance", chosen in order to team up with the West Midlands Euro-list

headed by Dave Nellist of the Socialist Party. Friendly links have also been established with the Scottish Socialist Party, which is running a list in Scotland.

Elsewhere the picture is more patchy, on account of the varying strength and composition of the left in the different large regional multi-member "constituencies" in which the Euro-elections will be run and the SWP's decision to keep aloof

"People lack any language or frame of concepts which they can see as representing a new force and in which they can express their resentment with New Labour."

outside London and Scotland. In the East Midlands, Ken Coates — an MEP expelled from the Labour Party who has a long past in the Trotskyist movement — has stated that he does not want to run on a united-left list, but may stand on a personal platform of upholding certain "Old Labour" policies against New Labour revision. In Yorkshire, a "Left Alliance" list is planned, on a platform avoiding reference to the class struggle: its base is some local groups of ex-Labour Party people,

plus the Socialist Party.

Meanwhile discontent continues in the Labour Party. Tony Blair steam-rolled the big majority of Labour Party members (and of trade unionists who got to vote on the issue) by using union bureaucrats' and MPs' block votes to impose his man, Alun Michael, as candidate for Welsh Assembly leader.

The discontent remains largely atomised. The nearest thing to a rallying-point for it was the big meeting called in London on 15 February by Ken Livingstone to support his candidacy for Mayor of London. But Livingstone had already promised in the press that he would not use a Mayoral campaign, or the position of Mayor, to oppose the government.

Hundreds of thousands, probably millions, of workers and youth despise the New Labour government. But, with the collapse of "traditional left" political culture following the collapse of Stalinism, they lack any language or frame of concepts which they can see as representing a new force and in which they can express their resentment. That lack will not be made good overnight. But it is the duty of the working-class socialist left to begin the job.

Martin Thomas

Scottish Socialists Party

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original motions, neither of which I could have voted for.

Those focused exclusively on support for and opposition to the Maastricht Treaty and the single currency. Harvey Duke, Nicky McKerrall and Phil Stott of the CWI (the ex-Militant group) all spoke at the conference on their case for 'no to the euro' but chose not to push the issue to a vote at conference. Myself, I think we should wait until the referendum on the single currency is called before taking a definitive decision.

The CWI, Socialist Outlook, the SWP and others have already declared for a no vote. Until quite recently, that was my position. I am however increasingly attracted to supporting a boycott. Calling for a no vote not only runs the risk of causing confusion between international socialists and right-wing xenophobes, but is also liable to create illusions in workers' heads, to foster a

complacent attitude that by remaining outside Euroland — in a capitalist UK, or an independent capitalist Scotland — we could evade the convergence criteria. That is unlikely to be the case. I would also strongly support the right of Hugh Kerr, Allan Green, Bill Bonnar and others in the SSP who share their views to be given more time to articulate their case for a critical support for the euro.

I have heard a story about a well-known Trotskyist who used to support Celtic but converted to becoming a Rangers fan because the latter kept winning the championship. This desire to be on the winning side is the type of opportunism which so swelled the ranks of Stalinist parties in the past. If you want a party of yes-men utterly incapable of thinking for themselves, or displaying any initiative, then make them frightened of voting with the minority. Bourgeois and social-democratic parties are corrupted by this culture of opportunism and mindlessly following the leader. Our culture has to

be different. It has to be one of encouraging minorities to express their dissident views.

What is important is not that we try to con each other that we agree on everything, or even on 80% of our politics. Clearly we do not. What is essential is that we recognise that we agree on enough to coexist in a single organisation where all members work constructively with one another. We should be honest with each other as to those areas where we disagree as well as those areas where we already have agreement.

In the debate on the SSP's 16-point platform, one comrade intervened to say that he had only joined in the last few days and had not intended to speak. He did, though, feel compelled to express anxiety that in the SSP's agitation for an "independent socialist Scotland", insufficient is being said about the need to maintain and strengthen links with English workers. His intervention went down very well.

Tom Delargy

No more "Troops Out!"

IT is one of the oddest facts in recent political history. From the '70s, opinion polls consistently showed a majority of British people favouring British withdrawal from Ireland — "Troops Out". For many years the mass circulation *Daily Mirror* supported this position. Yet the organised "Troops Out Movement" remained a tiny ineffective sect of not very well disguised British Provo enthusiasts — "leftists" who chose to live in a sort of "internal exile" from the British class struggle.

The Troops Out Movement was started in 1974 by the British Mandeliste "Fourth International" [Socialist Challenge, Socialist Action, the Castroite Communist League] and others, including Workers' Fight, a predecessor of Workers' Liberty. The Mandelites thought that they could create a British equivalent of the great US anti-Vietnam war movement. They ignored the vast differences between Northern Ireland and Vietnam: it was not a British conscript army; casualties were comparatively few; the alternative to British army control — unless there was a prior political settlement before "Troops Out" — was full-scale Protestant-Catholic civil war. The large "troops out" sentiment was passive, inchoate and often reactionary — "Let the mad Irish kill each other" — and therefore could not be organised as a force for progress.

Troops Out was structured like a mini-sect, and some of us rejected the fantasies that Troops Out alone could build a mass movement. We argued for more all-round propaganda to explain the intricacies of the Irish situation to the British labour movement, including the injustice of a partition that imprisoned so many Catholics in the Northern Irish state against their will, and the underlying justice of the Republican cause. We found ourselves bogged down in vastly time-consuming, senseless, internecine conflict. We withdrew. After various subsequent splits, the Troops Out Movement became the sect described above. Troops Out became the general slogan of the British left. It was beyond discussion. Ours was not to reason why. We had no right even to discuss the issue: our only right was to follow the Provos!

It effectively outlawed discussion of the real situation in Northern Ireland in the entire left press, with the exception of *Socialist Organiser* and *Workers' Liberty*.

The Good Friday Agreement accepts and tries to build new structures on the basis of the six/twenty-six County partition of Ireland. Logically all those who raucously or implicitly backed the Provo



war as a pure and uncomplicated war of liberation should now denounce Gerry Adams as a traitor. Only a few lunatics on the outer fringe of kitsch Trotskyism have done that.

The Troops Out Movement? They are it seems dropping the demand for Troops Out. For the information of Workers' Liberty readers we print the following excerpts from a comment on this strange mutation, which appeared in *Saoirse* (Freedom), the monthly paper of Republican Sinn Féin/Continuity IRA. These are traditional Republicans. They include Rory O'Brady, one of the founders of the Provos, who left them in 1986.

Thomas Carolan

AROUND 900 people marched through central London on Saturday, 30 January — the 27th anniversary of the Bloody Sunday Massacre in Derry.

The Troops Out Movement (TOM) has always linked the Bloody Sunday commemoration to its call for "Troops Out Now" and the commemoration is the main date in the TOM's political calendar. One of the TOM's enduring slogans had been "British Justice, No Justice."

The link between Bloody Sunday and "Troops Out!" had already been weakening in recent years because of the "talks process" and in the wake of the Belfast Agreement, the TOM were faced with a stark choice: they could break with their mentors, the Provisional leadership, and maintain their long-standing demands on a principled anti-imperialist basis.

The TOM is heavily dependent for political guidance on the Provisionals and many had become baffled by the twists and turns occurring in the Stormont talks.

For example, the Troops Out Magazine had stated in its editorial (Volume 19, No1, Spring 1996): "As we go to press it looks almost certain that the SDLP will contest the [Assembly] elections. What is still uncertain is the SDLP's position over taking their seats... whether they will take part and, if so, to what extent"... However, there is no chance that [Provisional] Sinn Féin will take any part in this new "Stormont". The election is being fought on a very clear abstentionist basis. There is also no chance that this new "Stormont" will work..."

The TOM is largely comprised of English middle-class "trendies" and so it was an uncom-

fortable compromise that was reached in the special meeting [in Manchester last November]. There was discussion about dropping the demand for "Troops Out" and also about changing the name of the organisation but, in the event, the decision was reached to proceed by stealth.

The TOM would keep their name but drop the demand for "Troops Out!", linking the Bloody Sunday massacre instead with other abuses of power and within a UK context. Fearing to be seen as being "ahead" of their mentors,

the TOM jettisoned their traditional demand but do not plan to jettison control of the Bloody Sunday march which has become a political "institution" and which, they hope, will now be used to further their new, reformist programme.

On the day itself, there was little sign of any placards calling for "Troops Out!"

The march was allowed for the first time to pass Downing Street and Trafalgar Square showing that the authorities now view it as "just another protest."

The theme adopted for this year's commemoration was "March for Justice, Time for Truth" and some on the march seemed to believe that New Labour might actually deliver these things even though that would mean top military personnel and a former British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, ending up in the dock! That there is a full amnesty for England's state killers was signalled by the recent award of a knighthood to RUC boss Ronnie Flanagan.

At an indoor rally after the march there were speakers on behalf of Diarmuid O'Neill, Robert Hamill and Ricky Reel, and the main speaker was the Provisionals' Gerry Kelly. Invited speakers who did not attend included the SDLP, and an official spokesperson from the Stephen Lawrence Campaign.

No right-thinking person could be anything but sympathetic and supportive of the Lawrence family in its pursuit of justice. But no one is suggesting that Stephen was murdered for being a political opponent of the state. He did not die at the hands of the English police, let alone the British army.

To find a direct equation Stephen (and 13 of his friends) would have to have been shot dead on the streets of London by the Free State army, for being an enemy of that state. And this, manifestly, was not the case.

The transformation of the Bloody Sunday commemoration into a UK (or universal) civil rights protest is a direct consequence of the Belfast Agreement and an acceptance of the "United Kingdom" by the TOM.

The Bloody Sunday commemoration in England is in the process of becoming a means of sustaining the Belfast Agreement.

The Republican demands remain "Get out of our country, we ourselves will guarantee the truth and the justice". "Irish Freedom not British Justice."

Labour and the unions

The Employment Relations Bill: Good, but not good enough

By John Hendy QC

THE Bill, is not really like the curate's egg, part good and part bad. This egg is nearly all good. The bad things are what's not in it.

Good: right to maternity leave after one year instead of two. Maternity leave extended to 18 weeks. Parental leave, adoption leave, leave for family emergencies. Part timers to get equal rights with full timers.

Good: unfair dismissal after one year, not two. Dubious: sackings after 51 weeks instead of 103? Bad: what happened to the commitment to employment rights from Day One?

Good: maximum unfair dismissal compensation raised to £50,000 and index linked. Bad: Government abandonment of commitment to full compensation.

Good: blacklisting of trade unionists to be dealt with. Dubious: by Regulations which the Government "may" make.

Good: ending of union duty to identify strikers by name. Dubious: new duty to supply such information "as would help the employer to make plans and bring information to the attention" of strikers — could this require names, addresses and jobs? And might a "plan" be to sack and replace strikers?

Good: abolition of the CROTUM and the Commissioner for Protection against Unlawful Industrial Action. Dubious: the Certification Officer now becomes a judge, dealing with complaints concerning: union registers, accounts, election, political rules, amalgamations and transfers, breach of union rules other than discipline or dismissal of an employed officer or staff.

There's lots of other useful stuff in this Bill. And I don't mean the reaction of one of my learned friends: "If the trade unionists won't thank him — the lawyers certainly will." No, Ian McCartney is to be congratulated for battling the forces (including the Prince) of darkness. With a 170 majority in the Commons, and the unions under orders not to criticise, he can



expect a smooth ride from now on.

Or can he? Wouldn't demands for more in the Bill help counteract tabloid demands for less? Wouldn't some union pressure show the Government has not given in to the unions? Will the Bill satisfy trade unionists wrestling with the new recognition rights? Will it satisfy the demands of international law which the Government upholds against Iraq, which its "ethical foreign policy" is designed to support, which it acknowledges as vital in the global market place. Let's look.

First, recognition. At last a legal mechanism for recognition after 20 years. But why, oh why, the US system of workplace ballots? Why not the European or Australian systems of automatic recognition? Union membership in the US is near the lowest in the world at 15 percent. More important the number of workers covered by collective bargaining in the US is rock bottom at 18 percent of all workers. Hear Bill Gould, former Chair of the US National Relations Board discuss the US system at the Institute of Employment Rights Conference (see advert). Union membership in Europe varies from high to low. But collective bargaining coverage is universally high: France 95 percent of all workers; Finland 95 percent; Germany 92 percent; Netherlands 81 percent; Spain 66 percent. Britain is 48 percent, down from 83 percent in 1970.

The Bill's recognition (and derecognition) procedure is highly complex — 25 pages of small print. The hurdles to recognition have been well aired. Not so well known is that the sole remedy for a recog-

nised union where an employer refuses to negotiate properly is not arbitration but an application for "specific performance" in the Courts (not Employment Tribunals). These are notoriously difficult.

But what of international law? Britain has been condemned for years for having employment laws which breach the international laws which it has ratified. The Tories simply ignored them. For me, the real criticism of this Bill is that it will not stop Britain remaining an international law-breaker. This is particularly sad because this is the first law (other than European laws) for 20 years which has given anything to British workers.

Take the right to strike. Under the Bill it will be automatically unfair to dismiss a worker taking lawful industrial action for eight weeks from the date the action started. Compared to what we've got now, that's brilliant. But it means that it will be fair to dismiss a worker who threatens to take industrial action; fair after 8 weeks (and this would include an overtime ban every Friday) if the employer has "followed an appropriate procedure to resolve the dispute", e.g. reached a failure to agree by refusing concessions in a disputes procedure; fair if the action turns out to be unlawful in spite of proper ballots etc. as in the University College Hospital and London Underground court decisions before Christmas (strikes pressing an employer for guaranteed terms and conditions on privatisation held unlawful).

There are two essentials of British law which explain why employers can dismiss

strikers. First, there is no right to strike in Britain; second, all forms of industrial action are a fundamental breach of contract by the worker.

The International Labour Organisation has many, many times condemned these two characteristics as being profound breaches of ILO Convention 87. Last June the ILO Conference, with the support of the British Government delegation, adopted a Declaration of Fundamental Principles. First of these is freedom of association which, the ILO holds, includes the right to strike.

This Bill fails to deliver the right to strike. It fails to rectify the Tories outlawing of all sympathy action. Britain remains an international law breaker.

It is not just the ILO. In February 1997, the Council of Ministers, the highest body of the Council of Europe, condemned Britain on the same grounds for breach of the European Social Charter 1961.

In December 1997, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights condemned Britain on the same grounds for breach of UN Covenant.

Before we leave international law, the ILO also condemned the law brought in during the Wilson-Palmer case which allows an employer to discriminate against trade unionists where the employer seeks to derecognise or impose individual contracts. The Bill leaves this intact.

Last point on the Bill. The TUC have demanded the right of a union to represent its members. That is a fundamental right derived from international law. The Bill does not provide such a right. Instead it gives a right for a worker to be accompanied by a trade union representative at discipline and grievance hearings. But this right only arises where the worker "is required or invited" to attend. No invite, no right to representation.

OK, this is nit-picking. Let's return to the big picture. The EU is all about harmonisation of markets across the nations. Globalisation is all about exploiting the differences. Trade unionists insist to both, rightly, that above all, labour standards must be harmonised across the globe. The ILO and the other international law bodies have decreed the minimum labour standards. We must begin by insisting on them here.

That is why 8 national unions and dozens of regions, branches and trades councils have formed the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws to "Reclaim our Rights". Join us on the London May Day Organising Committee's march and rally on 1st May 1999 from Clerkenwell to Trafalgar Square.

● This article first appeared in *The Morning Star*.

An insult to the trade union movement

By Maria Exall, CWU executive

THE New Labour government's Employment Relations Bill represents a defining moment for the trade union movement. It tells us exactly where we stand in relation to this government and indeed the entire New Labour project. The Bill provides us with a reference point by which we can measure the effectiveness of trade union involvement in the Labour Party and assess what trade union rights we have secured in return for funding and sustaining the party over nearly two decades in opposition.

The Bill is not the kind of thing to which we can react by saying, "Well it's not very good, but more reforms are in the pipeline." That's because there aren't any more reforms on the way. We have been told by both Blair and successive Employment ministers that the measures in the Bill represent all that is on offer from this government in terms of trade union law reform. So the question is: how should the trade union movement judge the Bill?

John Hendy's judgement that it is good, but not good enough, may sound harsh to some, but the reality is that the Bill is worse than Hendy admits.

The Bill treats trade unionists as second class citizens by saying that the normal rules of democracy and majority rule are not strict enough for us. That's the political meaning of the hurdles introduced into the recognition ballots that mean that unions must secure — not just a majority of those voting — but support from 40% of the total workforce if we are to gain union recognition. If this law was applied to Westminster elections then Blair and most of the Cabinet would be out of a job as few politicians ever secure the support of 40% of their total electorate in a ballot.

This 40% quota is a new departure in British trade union law and can only be described as anti-union. It is New Labour's very own contribution to the viciously anti-union legal framework that the Tories introduced. The removal of these shackles was — until very recently — one of the reasons given by trade union leaders for supporting the Labour leadership and subsidising the Labour Party — but now it seems that trade unionists are being asked to help fund our own subordination. To the tune of

millions of pounds since 1979.

Having established what elements of the Bill are in principle anti-trade union, I wouldn't want to quarrel with the rest of the assessment of the legislation made by my comrade from the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws, John Hendy. I would, however, want to question his assessment of the role of the trade union leaders and self-styled "working class" New Labour ministers like Ian McCartney MP.

The trade union leaders have suffered something that it would be kind to call ritual humiliation at the hands of Blair. He has given them virtually nothing and in return has demanded their silence and acquiescence. We even have the grotesque spectacle of people like Bill Morris and John Edmonds queuing up to give their endorsement to a legal settlement that leaves the trade union movement in a state of semi-legality in which virtually all of the traditional tactics of effective trade unionism are illegal.

It is difficult to work out whether Blair thinks of the leaders of the trade union movement as fools or tools.

Probably both because that's the way they are behaving.

It is this that makes John's reference to the trade unions being "under orders" to stay silent seem so strange. Who gave the order? Blair did, with the implicit threat that if the unions don't stay silent then they won't get anything.

The reality of British politics is that if the unions decided to mount a real campaign for trade union rights, jobs and the welfare state then it would be Blair who felt threatened and weak. It is the servility of our professional trade union leaders that has shaped this legislation as much as the ideological imperatives of New Labour. Politics abhors a vacuum, but that is just what the union leaders and politicians like Prescott and McCartney have created by refusing to stand up for working class and trade union values against this Thatcherite invasion of the body snatchers called New Labour.

That vacuum can now only be filled by a resurgent trade union and labour movement rank-and-file response to fight New Labour around the idea of working-class political representation.

A serious campaign to free our unions will have to involve a fight to remove 90% of the current official leadership of the trade unions who, judged by the Employment Relations Bill, can only be called abject failures as trade unionists. We will have to replace them with people closer to the rank and file and prepared to be held accountable to them. The same goes for bogus "working class" MPs like Ian McCartney whose behaviour proves the point about the Labour Party — it's the working-class people who get the shit jobs and the shit in real life.

The road to left unity

By Sean Matgamna

“UNITE the left!” That cry is becoming increasingly popular now that circumstances call unmistakably for left unity. Circumstances? The Blairite hijacking of the Labour Party and the reverberations of the collapse of Stalinism in 1989-91.

The political universe of the left has long been dominated by the fact of the Labour Party. All left politics was defined, negatively or positively, by this mass reformist party, based on and much intertwined with the trade unions, the basic organisations of the working class. Our tactical arguments focused on how to explode Labour's contradictions, the clash between its working-class base and its practice as a bourgeois party of government. Even the biggest revolutionary socialist group, the Socialist Workers Party, which to many of us seemed to be foolishly sectarian towards the Labour Party day-to-day, was content in election after election to shout “vote Labour”. The SWP looked after the immediate strikes and demonstrations, and the long-term socialist future; for immediate politics it could see no alternative to Labour.

That entire framework is breaking down. Blair-Labour has moved so far to the right that a huge dislocation has been created between the whole of official politics and the ideas, aspirations and experience of working-class people. According to opinion polls, 76% of Britain's people think that there is a class struggle between labour and capital. It has not, they think, been growing less in recent years, but more intense and bitter. They feel the bitterness in their daily lives — in the power of the bosses on the job, in widespread threatening poverty and homelessness, in the decline of the Health Service, and in the contrasts between the conspicuous consumption of the well-off and the fact that one third of Britain's children now grow up below the official poverty line.

The more politically aware know that much of this situation can be traced to the legal shackles on the trade unions which ban action like solidarity strikes. They know that the Blairites are hard-faced Tories, determined to keep the Tory anti-union laws, which Blair admits are the least liberal labour legislation in Western Europe, on the statute book. They know that the trade unions have been massively downgraded within the Labour Party structures. They

feel and increasingly know that Blair-Labour is organised to exclude workers and the labour movement from any role in politics other than as media-manipulated passive voters, and, the trade unions, as sources of money.

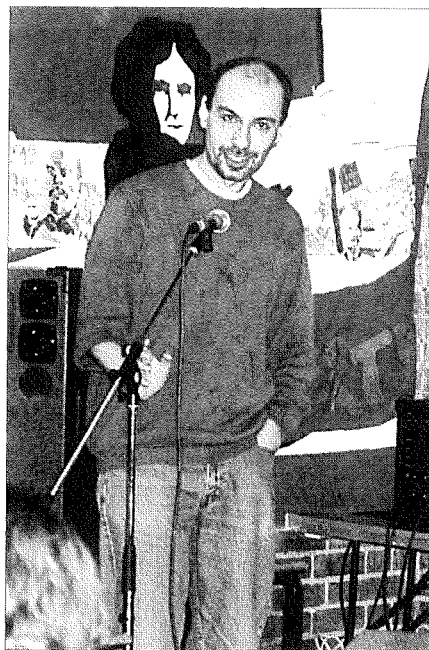
The sense underlying broad working-class allegiance to the Labour Party, that it was to one extent or another a party that would represent at least some of their interests, or look out for them against the Tories, is no longer part of current reality. Widespread awareness that this is how it is, is becoming an increasing part of our reality.

The Labour Party has always been a bourgeois workers' party; it remains that in the broadest sense, but the balance has shifted massively. The contradictions of the Labour Party are being resolved by the Blairites, not as revolutionary socialists for decades hoped they would be resolved, by the emergence of a better working-class political movement out of the Labour Party, but by the driving of workers and their trade unions out of any possibility of seriously influencing the Labour Party, or the Blair-Labour government.

The collapse of Stalinism has cleared the terrain for authentic working-class socialist ideas. But it has also discredited and gutted the traditional “mass” idioms of the “Old Labour” left. Much of the working-class resistance to Blairism remains inchoate, voiceless, lacking in any confidence that it can become a hegemonic mass force.

Either working-class socialists leave a monopoly of “working-class” politics in the hands of Blair-Labour — and that will soon mean no working-class politics at all, not even of the most muted sort — or we begin to reconstruct working-class politics on a new basis and to challenge that monopoly. One arena for challenging it is by standing against Blair-Labour in elections. That, of course, is not the only arena.

The Blairites do not yet have the labour movement entirely hog-tied. The key task in the trade unions, and — where there is life — in the Labour Party, is to raise as forcefully as possible the question of class. The whole point of the unions starting and sustaining the Labour Party was to secure working-class representation in politics. The proper goal of working-class representation is a workers' government, a government that serves the working class.



Duncan Morrison contributed to the AWL's debate on the Labour Party

Blair-Labour is not working-class representation; the Blair-Labour government is a Mark 2 Thatcherite Tory government. We need to get the unions to fight politically, — inside the New Labour structures too — for their demands on the welfare state, the minimum wage, and union rights; to fight for representatives of the workers to stand as Labour candidates; and to deselect Blairites.

And what where we succeed in a local Labour Party, and the Blairite centre bans the candidate? We either surrender or stand against Labour.

Where there is not, or not yet, enough working-class support in the official labour movement for that, socialists still have a duty to the many workers and youth keenly hostile to Blair-Labour but as yet unorganised or semi-organised. For the socialist groups to unite to run clearly working-class candidates can help rally and organise them. Minimally, it can avoid leaving the Blair-Labour party, which is both anti-socialist and anti-working-class, with a monopoly of the working-class vote for lack of an alternative.

That is the new situation. It has put the revolutionary left in Britain in a state of flux such as we have not seen in many decades. Left unity can make us immensely more

Unite the left!

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effective in the work that needs to be done now. Thus the popularity of the cry, "Unite the left!"

Then comes the question, how? The 1999 conference of Workers' Liberty, which met in London on 20-21 February, offered an answer in its own way. Not a formula in words and phrases, but one in practice.

For the question of whether the left can unite, and how it might unite, translates into another question. Political divisions exist on the left and will continue to exist. Different individuals and groups, even where they start from the same basic principles and honestly pursue the same goals, must often arrive at different and even conflicting responses to living events. It is certain that new differences will emerge again and again in any left-wing movement not stifled by bureaucratic centralism.

Given that, it is inconceivable that the disparate groups of the revolutionary left can be magically united by way of the disappearance of all but one set of answers to the vexed questions. It is even undesirable that we should be united that way.

The only possible way the left can unite is to abandon the predominant form of revolutionary socialist organisation, which is a self-stifling bureaucratic centralism, adopted as part of the contamination, over decades, of the anti-Stalinist left by Stalinist example

and Stalinist pressure. We must embrace instead the real democratic centralism of Lenin's Bolshevik party and of the Trotskyist movement in Trotsky's time. Lenin explained in 1907, for example: "The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and full freedom to criticise, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action... Criticism within the basis of the principles of the party programme must be quite free... not only at party meetings but also at public meetings" (Collected Works volume 10, p.442).

The prime relevance of the Workers' Liberty conference to the question of revolutionary left unity was that it offered a prefiguration of left-wing unity in action. Last May differences emerged in Workers' Liberty on the proper attitude of socialists to the Good Friday Agreement for Northern Ireland. Both sides considered this question very important. Debate has been heated, vehement, and impassioned.

Differences also emerged in recent months about the Labour Party, both on analysis of the precise stage the Blairite project has reached, and on how to respond. That debate, too, has been sharp.

Both arguments have been thrashed out in the pages of Workers' Liberty. Neither has been resolved by the majority trying to stifle the other side. Under the constitution of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty that is not possible. The last-but-one Workers' Liberty conference adopted a new constitution that made it impossible. One provision wrote into the constitution what had been custom and practice for many years — the right of minorities to put their views in the public press. Another established the right of a Control Commission, elected by conference, to call an emergency conference even against the will of the National Committee. Such provisions also help to educate people in acceptance of democratic procedures as the norm.

Does such a way of dealing with differences give over too much time and energy to debate, and make us ineffective? In observable fact it does not. Even if it did, it would not follow that the organisation could dispense with political discussion. Either we pay the price of democracy, or we would have to have some individual or group act the role of Pope, dictator, or college of cardinals.



Such a system requires the submission of everyone else. That kills political life, stops those involved being educated to think for themselves, and often means the expulsion or departure of those not willing to be stifled. It means costly splits.

Moreover, an organisation which establishes its "line" internally by top-down command will inevitably tend to attempt to use the same methods of fiat and decree within the broader labour movement. If its activists are trained in the idea that debate within the organisation is an unaffordable luxury that would serve only dilettantes, then they will tend to lack the confidence, open-mindedness, and sensitivity necessary in order to operate well in, and learn from, the debates in the broader movement.

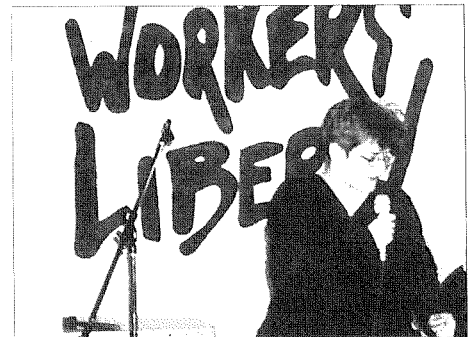
The notion that discussion is a waste of time, or something that should be reduced to the minimum, is in sharp contrast to the ideas that built the organisation that led the Russian October Revolution of 1917. Lenin once used a story which, he said, came from Leo Tolstoy, to explain this important part of what Marxist socialists do.

A man is walking along a road and sees another man in the distance. He is crouching, his body moving rhythmically. He seems to be gyrating senselessly.

Ah, the first man says, a poor lunatic. However, when he gets closer he sees that the second man is sharpening a knife on a stone.

Marxists too sharpen their political weapons, not by whetting steel on stone but





by whetting minds and wits on fact, argument, debate, and polemic with their comrades and with other organisations. Only thus is political clarity achieved and sustained.

The working class is the majority in Britain and in many other countries. The day the big bulk of the working class understands its own condition as the exploited wage-slaves of capital — on that day, the bell begins to toll for capitalism. The battle of ideas is therefore a central part of our activity against the ruling class. It is a key front in the class struggle.

But the battle of ideas can not be confined only to the battle with open bourgeois ideas. Ideas are malleable things. Their real meaning and content changes according to circumstances. For example, the idea that "Labour is the workers' party" now serves Blair.

The seemingly same socialist ideas can become imbued with other and alien content. What ideas are really revolutionary, really capable in the given circumstances of helping the working class achieve its emancipation — that is determined by experience and by debate and argument. Polemics with, for example, the SWP are necessary and unavoidable because we are engaged in building an organisation rooted in the working class and free from the defects which we see in the SWP. We appeal to the reason of honest SWPers against their SWP-incited prejudices and, where necessary, we appeal to the reason of the broader labour movement against them. As in our external affairs, so in

our internal affairs, our weapon is reason.

Only by way of reason and debate can our weapons be sharpened, and revolutionaries be trained. What are revolutionaries? Revolutionaries are those who can keep in the forefront of their minds a picture as sharp as the first time they saw it of what capitalism is, alongside a will-sustaining socialist vision of the world that humanity will attain when, led by the working class, it emerges from class society. Serious revolutionaries are people who can remain revolutionary without losing touch with the realities of the world in which we live, the world we must grapple with and change if there is ever to be socialism.

Those who are distressed by polemic and debate between socialist organisations and within socialist organisations are like the man who mistook the sharpening of a knife for the senseless gyrations of a madman. But polemic and debate are a necessary part of the battle. They are anything but useless. They are a precondition of health and vitality, not a sign of political and organisational illness.

There is no other way to reach and sustain clarity. There is no other way to move other socialists. And without political clarity the chances of working-class setbacks and defeats are massively increased.

To go back to our starting point: only by organising so as to allow openness and debate, and by committing ourselves to consistent democracy, can we get the maximum unity of the different strands of revolutionary socialism.

Main picture: fraternal delegate Raymond Adams from the French Trotskyist group Voix de Travaillés

Smaller pictures, some of the AWL members who addressed conference: from top to bottom and left to right — Jill Mountford, Janine Booth, Dan Nichols, Martin Thomas, Kate Buckell and Jean Lane

I We fight the sea at Kronstadt

Across the frozen, hostile, misted sea
To Kronstadt, to attack secured White Guards
Manning the garrison there, mysteriously
All-powerful, where once we could command,
Talking now to our own as we talked before:
Workers' control, soviet power (with no
Bolsheviks!), peasant rights — echoing the roar
From the countryside: impossible demands!

What could we do? Abandon the fort commanding
Petrograd? Call it off? Surrender? Give up
The workers' power, looming chaos notwithstanding?
No: we would take a stronger, firmer grip,
And fight to bridle History run amok!
We marched to conquer fortress Kronstadt;
Beating them as we beat the other Whites
(Who did not sound like us) wreaked bloody spite.

We marched to conquer Fortress Kronstadt:
Under their guns across the ice-clad sea
Went Congress delegate and soldier elite;
Their cannon smashed the ice on which we stood;
The abyss opened under us; ice closed
Above white-sheathed warriors splashed with blood:
The ghostly camouflage, pale cloaks like clouds
We wore, did duty too for billowing shrouds.

After, when our bodies were reclaimed from the sacrifice,
The red still showed, frozen, in long coffins of ice.

II Lament for the heroes manqué

Call back the dead! — my hero friends of old
Who fled their place in our unequal war
And sank in private life; those who grew cold
To our endeavour, chilled by grief or fear,
Too old to bear, at twenty-five, or nine,
The forceful cutting winds that howl along
Our promontory, anxious to realign
With brutish wage-slave masters seeming strong.
"But Trotsky led to Stalin!" Self-effacement!
No fine disinterested search for truth
But chicken-hearted knowing self-abasement
Beside the poisoned tree still bearing fruit.
Soul-wrecked, they make their peace, poor contrite braves;
They serve the masters, they who said: "Free the slaves!"

III There will be another day

(In the legend, Daedalus made wings for his son
Icarus. But Icarus flew up too high above the
earth, and too near to the sun. The wax binding
his wings melted, and Icarus crashed to his
death).

Lenin and Trotsky lost; defeated, they died.
You tell me: "They could not have ever won,
Those blood-infected dreamers, who essayed
So much, hubristic in their raw Red pride,
To leave a world dismayed, worse disarrayed;
Nothing can rise, once thus self-crucified!"
Daedalus dares, and Icarus will die:
And yet, to spite harsh Gods, we learn — we fly!

Sean Matgamna

What sort of socialist party?

By Mick Duncan

SINCE the start of our movement, there has been debate as to what sort of workers' party we need or should involve ourselves with. Some Marxists have thought it unnecessary to organise a disciplined revolutionary minority, and instead subordinated everything to building a mass workers' party. Others have wanted to ignore mass workers' parties because their political programmes are flawed or their leaders are traitors. Neither of these knee-jerk responses is sufficient. We need a more developed approach.

Capitalism is a system based on the exploitation of the majority by the few. While most of us must go to work to earn a wage to pay the bills, the ruling class buy our labour power and use it to add value to the raw materials they buy or the equipment they own. They make a profit out of our labour. This basic exploitative relationship forces workers to struggle, and that struggle forces workers to set up their own organisations — namely trade unions and workers' parties. In Britain that was the Labour Party, which for most of this century, until recently, has had a federal "broad-church" structure.

But workers live in a capitalist world. We are subjected to the full weight of bourgeois ideology from the media and education, and even from the very way society is structured and that structure's claim to be "natural". The basic workers' organisations have been bent out of shape by that pressure, and in the process they have acquired entrenched bureaucracies which become an active force keeping them safe for capitalism. Even long before Blair, union and Labour Party leaders wore expensive clothes, bowed to the Queen and generally tried to adopt bourgeois manners and behaviour. More importantly, they accepted that capitalist society is "natural" and restricted their objections to the worst excesses of capitalist exploitation. They bargained over wages, conditions and welfare and developed slogans like "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work".

The best of these "reformist socialists" believed that: "the road to socialism lies not through a workers' government, but through a joint government of labour representatives and the progressive or 'democratic' capitalists.... They do not believe that capitalism and the capitalist state machine must be overthrown in order to establish socialism. They declare that capitalism and the capitalist government can be gradually reformed by progressive legislation to the point where socialism has been peacefully introduced." (Max Shachtman, *The Fight for Socialism*).

These mass organisations, the trade unions and broad union-based labour parties, on their own will never progress

beyond reformism. They will never develop an ideology completely separate from bourgeois ideology. To do that we need a different sort of workers' party — a revolutionary party.

But a revolutionary party means nothing without a mass movement to relate to. Leon Trotsky described such a party as a lever that can move a much larger force — the mass working-class movement. But to do that the lever must be put in the right place. It must be connected to the mass movement it is trying to move. In other words, Marxists need to work in the trade unions and broad labour parties to offer a coherent working-class ideology and a revolutionary policy to the mass of workers. One way or another — inside the unions, always; inside broader worker-based parties, to the degree that they are broad and open enough to allow space for us to argue our ideas; through autonomous initiative (our own agitation, and strike committees and union rank and file groups) where necessary — we must help those workers break away from their own "leaders" who will betray them to the ruling class. Our attitude here to the trade unions and broad workers' parties should be a similar one. As Trotsky put it, writing about "Old Labour" — "The Labour Party and the trade unions — these are not two principles, they are only a technical division of labour. Together they are the fundamental support of the English bourgeoisie." (On Britain, written after the betrayal of the British general strike in 1926).

On the one hand, unions and broad mass workers' parties are "our" organisations. They are the basic defence for workers against the worst excesses of capitalist exploitation. As Marx and Engels wrote in the Communist Manifesto, "The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties.... They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement."

We get involved with these organisations and attempt to win the mass of the membership away from their leaders who will betray them. But, on the other hand, as the Communist Manifesto also points out, "The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can only be attained by the forcible overthrow of all existing conditions".

In order to develop, declare and achieve these aims and ends; in order to develop a distinctly working-class ideology; in order to train a body of workers in these ideas, capable of winning the mass of workers over to socialism and of waging a war against capitalist exploitation — we need a revolutionary party.

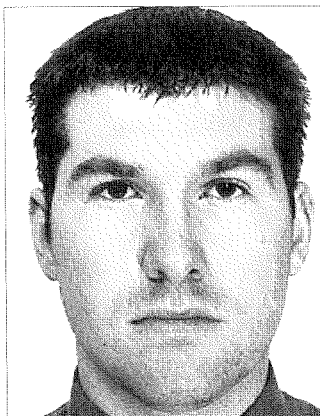


The UK labour movement has a long history of supporting Castroism. Scottish TUC Congress greets the leader of government-controlled Cuban "trade union".

Is Cuba socialist?

A debate between Paul Hampton and Bernard Regan

Paul Hampton of Workers' Liberty spoke in debate with Bernard Regan, a leading member of the Socialist Teachers' Alliance, at a London Workers' Liberty meeting on 3 February 1999.



FORTY years ago, on New Year's Day 1959, the Cuban revolution triumphed, when guerrillas led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara drove out the hated dictator Batista after two years of struggle.

Cuba had been a semi colony of American imperialism for the first half of this century, a site for the production of sugar for the American market and a Mafia-run tourist destination 90 miles from Florida. Batista was a despot who ruled with the aid of a mercenary army, a corrupt civil service and a labour movement tied hand and foot to the state machine. Bourgeois democracy had been severely limited when it had existed at all in the forties. After 1952 it was non-existent.

Batista was overthrown in January 1959 by the July 26th

movement, led by Fidel Castro, who has ruled the island ever since. In 1961 Castro declared himself a communist, and Cuba is one of the last remaining states in the world with that affiliation. I want to challenge that description. Although Cuba had a revolution in 1958-59, it was nothing to do with socialism, and Cuba is no kind of workers' state. I want to explain what happened in Cuba, especially in the early sixties, and to argue that Cuba is a variant of Stalinism and the Castro government is a mortal enemy of working-class socialism. I will try to pull to pieces the arguments made by Castro and his supporters that Cuba is socialist, and then give my view about Cuba today and where it is heading.

There are four main arguments that Cuba is some kind of socialism: all of them are without foundation. The first argument is that Cuba is socialist because the revolution was led by people who now call themselves Communists. Yet you only have to look at the July 26th movement before 1959 to see that is wrong. Their programme was for the restoration of the 1940 Constitution, in other words for a bourgeois-democratic republic. They said in their manifesto that nationalisation was a "cumbersome instrument" and that Cuba would be "a loyal ally" of their Northern neighbour. Castro himself said in an interview in 1970 that, "In 1959 there was no class consciousness, only class instinct, which is not the same thing", and referred to the revolution in the early months of 1959 as neither capitalist nor socialist but "olive green". The Castroites labelled the Communist Party "totalitarian". They were certainly no mass party. There were 81 fighters on the Granma; only 300 at the battle of Santa Clara; and around 1500 overall. In terms of composition, the July 26th movement

was a mixture of middle class leaders like Castro, some workers and youth, but mostly déclassé elements. In no sense, by its programme, size or composition was it a mass socialist party.

Some commentators have said that the socialist element was provided by the involvement of the Communist Party, which by the fifties was called the Popular Socialist Party, the PSP. Although they had been in the previous period the largest and most influential Communist Party in Latin America, they were also the most cravenly opportunist, and the most Stalinist, following every twist and turn in Russian foreign policy and adapting to their Cuban milieu. They were sectarian in opposing the general strike in 1933 which brought down the dictator Machado. Later their popular front strategy led them to gain two ministers under Batista after forming an alliance with him after 1938. They spoke of having a "positive attitude towards the progressive endeavours" of Batista in his first period in power. Even into the fifties, though the CP had been repressed by their former ally, they referred to the July 26th movement as "putschists and sterile". Although they came to some understanding with Castro from 1957 and sent cadres to fight with the guerrillas, they were still formally calling for a bourgeois government to replace Batista into the middle of 1958, only months before Castro took power. This was hardly the programme or actions of a revolutionary socialist party that sought to lead the working class to power.

Finally, look at the manner of the seizure of power. After a two year guerrilla campaign, in the major battle of the war at Santa Clara in the last days of 1958, only 6 guerrillas and 300 soldiers died. Batista himself fled. There was not even a battle for the capital, Havana. There were no Soviets, few factory committees or occupations. The last general strike in April 1958 was a failure, and there were no organs of dual power. The workers were largely passive. The general strike in the first week of January 1959 was a public holiday. Batista's rule had already collapsed. No one in 1959, not even Castro or Guevara, said the revolution was socialist, and the revolution was not led by conscious socialists, whatever Fidel's later protestations. The 26th July movement stood for mild reforms, which could not be achieved because of Batista's dictatorship and the domination of American imperialism, hence the necessity of guerrilla war. The new government in 1959 was a petty bourgeois government, but one which ruled a country with a peculiar class structure and American hegemony. It was not socialist. To argue it was socialist in hindsight is to reach the absurd conclusion that a socialist revolution can be made without the active agency of the working class or without a conscious Marxist party.

THE second argument goes as follows: Cuba is socialist because capitalism was abolished in Cuba by the end of 1960. Well, I agree that capitalism was abolished by end of 1960 — but what replaced it? It was in fact replaced by Stalinism. This process went through two stages. Firstly from January to November 1959, when Castro and his coterie took over the government from the bourgeois figure-heads, meeting secretly at Tarara or in Cojimar to plan their strategy. Castro's group decisively broke with the bourgeois elements within the July 26th coalition by the end of 1959. Fidel became Prime Minister, Raul Castro the Minister of Defence, and Che President of the National Bank. The G-2 security service was established. Batista's army had been smashed. The new army was led by the ex-guerrillas, and trained in 'Marxism'. The student and trade union movements were taken over and purged of other oppositional forces.

"The trade unions are state-run. No others are allowed. It is impossible to organise in the unions against the line of the Communist Party. Far from holding the levers of power, Cuban workers do not have space to organise even minimal resistance legally."

The second stage, from November 1959 to November 1960, was the Stalinisation of Cuba. Castro consummated an alliance with the PSP which eventually led by 1965 to the Cuban Communist Party being the only legal party on the island, and an international alliance with the USSR, beginning in February 1960 and finally settled by the Bay of Pigs (April 1961) and the missile crisis (October 1962). This would eventually mean total integration into the Soviet empire, joint planning with the USSR, membership of COMECON, 85% trade with this bloc, and \$10 billion aid.

Stalinism in Cuba mirrored Stalinism elsewhere: expropriation of the bourgeoisie, nationalisation of Cuban and foreign businesses by November 1960, nationalisation of 80% of land and bureaucratic planning through JECEPLAN, together with the shattering of the working class movement and democratic freedoms. The trade union movement declined from 50% density in 1960 to 10% by 1970, to a state, as one bureaucrat put it, of "harmonious counterpart to management". An indicator is the Cuban legal code, which allows for no freedom of speech, assembly or organisation, in which mere disrespect towards the Maximo Jefe can earn years in prison. In fact even the lowest estimate of the number of political prisoners during the seventies and eighties — 5,000 — is the same ratio as Chile under Pinochet.

Stalinism meant above all the development of a ruling bureaucracy. The bureaucrats might have looked somewhat Spartan in their battle fatigues, but they were still privileged in areas such as housing, foreign trips, imported cars, dollar shops and above all in power.

Why did Cuba go Stalinist? It was not an automatic process. It was partly because of pressure from US imperialism, and partly choice by the Castroite leaders. As Che Guevara put it in 1963. "Our commitment to the eastern bloc was half the fruit of constraint and half the result of choice." Cuba was and is ruled just like the old USSR. It has the same class structure.

The third argument says that Cuba is socialist because of the gains of the revolution for workers and peasants. It is true that in the first year of the revolution the poorest 25% were made better off by cuts in rent and land re-distribution. I'm sure Bernard will wax lyrical about high rates of growth, lower ratios of doctors to patients, high life expectancy, low infant mortality and improved education and literacy. However, these facts have to be set against three other considerations.

Firstly Cuba was already relatively developed before 1959, probably third in Latin America. Secondly, Cuba compares well but not is not markedly better than examples of capitalist countries on a similar level, like Taiwan and Costa Rica. Thirdly, since the withdrawal of the Russian subsidy there has been a terrible decline in living standards.

CUBA'S annual growth figure of 4% over the first thirty years, even if it is credible, which I doubt, does not reveal the whole picture. Cuba fell from third place in Latin America to fifteenth for GDP per capita between 1952 and 1981, and the growth figures that were achieved did not arise from increases in productivity. The economy shrank from the mid-1980's and plummeted 35% between 1989-93, back to 1970's levels. GDP per head is now lower than Jamaica. From 1963 Cuba became a sugar monoculture within the Soviet empire. But the real crisis in Cuban agriculture is shown by the fact that half the food for Havana (three million people) is currently produced by the army, which owns just 4% of the land.

Crucially I would argue the working class lost out in the first



Comrades: Castro meets the North Vietnamese

decade of Castro's rule and since, through a longer working day, loss of bonuses and sickness benefits, by the abolition of special pay for Sundays and holidays (where a Christmas bonus could be up to one month's pay), voluntary work in the canefields and 'voluntary' collections for causes, through an inadequate supply of consumer goods and a lack of quality housing and transport facilities. Even in the much hallowed areas of health and education, not everything is as obvious as the statistics suggest. Cuba already had one of the highest ratios of doctors to patients before the revolution and the rise in life expectancy (approximately 15 years) is comparable with Panama and Costa Rica. In education, the quality of buildings, textbooks and other resources is not impressive and in 1980 the government themselves found that one third of secondary schools practised some sort of academic fraud or cheating.

The 1990s have been utterly wretched for workers. Rationing means that a few pounds of rice and black beans, with oil, soap and meat when available, have to last about two weeks. A basic wage of 200 pesos per month (£9) for manual workers and 450 pesos (£13) for engineers is never enough. Income inequality has massively increased, especially in the dollar industries such as tourism. You have the absurdity of trained doctors and other skilled workers eking out a living as porters and taxi drivers. At most you could have said Cuba was parallel to capitalism up to 1990, but overall it was not better in welfare terms. And it certainly is not now.

The final argument is that Cuba is socialist because it is ruled by the 'direct democracy' of so called 'mass organisations'. On paper the Cuban Communist Party is a mass organisation, with 700,000 members, and 600,000 in the Young Communists (UJC). But even sympathisers recognise that it is not mainly composed of workers from the factories and the fields, but of plant managers and bureaucrats. It is not a party in the real sense. Its top leaders are not subject to any kind of re-election or recall by the ranks. It does not compete with any other parties. They are illegal in Cuba. Who joins the CP depends on the party's Secretariat, which is itself subject to the Politburo who are elected by and accountable to no one. If you read the official propaganda, it says that the unified Cuban nation needs only one party to maintain its cohesion.

The Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, the CDRs, and the women's movement, the FMC, help manage the economy and administer the system, having received their orders from above. The CDRs manage the rationing process, and to get

a new apartment, a different job, electrical goods, even a role on game shows, depends on your connection to these organisations. And what use is the FMC when the Cuban Family Code defines a woman's place as in the home and women cannot do jobs like house painters, divers or grave diggers?

The trade unions of the CTC are state-run. No others are allowed. It is impossible to organise legally within or outside of these bodies against the line of the Communist Party. Caucuses like the Socialist Teachers' Alliance, which Bernard help to found in Britain in the National Union of Teachers, are impossible. The irony is that trade unionists with a record like Bernard's in Cuba would either be in prison, in exile or dead. Dissidents of any kind are subject to arrest, detention, exile or public acts of 'repudiation'. The most famous and significant case was in 1983, when some workers who tried to set up a Solidarnosc style trade union, copying what they had heard about in Poland, were rounded up and at one stage faced the death penalty.

FINALLY, look at the National Assemblies of Popular Power. They were only established in 1976, which makes you wonder about the first fifteen years. At the lowest (municipal) level, anyone in theory can stand, but no one is allowed to put forward any policies or discuss national or provincial matters. They can only put up their biographical details. The higher assemblies consist of candidates chosen by an election commission (made up of Communist Party, UJC and CDR members) who have the power to dismiss municipal leaders but are only accountable to the higher committees. The assemblies hardly meet and their agenda is set for them. Real power lies in the Council of State and the Executive Committee, and all of these people are Politburo members or from the Communist Party. Although it seems like participation, none of this is democracy, even bourgeois democracy. In reality it is a world away from workers' democracy, and the experience of Paris in 1871 or Russia in 1917. None of these bodies function like Soviets or workers councils, where representatives are elected by and accountable to those below them, on pain of recall and if necessary being replaced.

Far from holding the levers of power, Cuban workers do not even have the space to organise even minimal resistance legally, and certainly not to control the surplus which is extracted from their daily labour. The Popular Power assemblies, the unions, the CDRs and the Communist Party are organs of control and oppression of Castro's ruling class over the workers and peasants. Their role is the implementation of decisions handed down from above, and convincing other Cubans to obey orders.

What is our analysis of Cuba under Castro? This should be clear from my critique of the arguments that Cuba is some kind of socialism. Castro is a Bonaparte figure who used his party-army to smash the old state and create his own forms of rule. These were exceptional due to the peculiar class structure of Cuba and the type of state which thrived under Batista. Cuba is identical to the old Stalinist system in Russia. What was Stalinism in Russia? A one party state in which the capitalist class has been expropriated and the surplus product was extracted by the extra-economic coercion of a ruling bureaucracy. It simultaneously smashed the working class movement and bourgeois social relations, at least for a period.

The 1959 revolution was a blow against US imperialism. We would have supported the revolution against Batista in 1959, despite the leadership of the July 26th movement. This was the formal stance of most sections of the Trotskyist movement. But ours was the socialist alternative in 1959 — workers' liberty. The possibilities of working class socialism in Cuba were shown by the revolution in 1933, when the working class overthrew Machado and Soviets of workers councils appeared around the sugar mills. Our alternative was no utopia in the history of class

struggle in Cuba.

Where is Cuba going? Some sections of the bureaucracy want capitalism by the Chinese route. Tourism is their perestroika and glasnost. Look at the business conferences and magazines which advertise Cuba as a well educated workforce without the trade union obstructiveness found elsewhere in the Caribbean. The Cuban government is not our government. Down with Castro! What do we say about the blockade? We are clearly against it because of the national right to self determination. We know what US business wants to do and we don't support imperialism. We defend Cuba but we don't forget that "my enemy's

enemy is not necessarily my friend". Are we for elections in Cuba? Yes. We want democratic freedom for the working class. Are we for capitalism in Cuba? No. There are not only two camps but also a Third Camp. Look at Russia now. Capitalism has no answers for the Cuban working class.

What about socialism? For us this can only mean the self-emancipation of the working class. The alternative is the absurd conclusion that socialism can be made without the working class and without a Marxist leadership. Cuba is heading for capitalism. We fight for real socialism, for workers' power. Neither Castro nor Clinton! For the Third Camp of the working class!

"Leading in a socialist direction"

Bernard Regan argued that Cuba's Communist Party is a socialist leadership



I WANT to start off with a few caveats. Paul asked me to debate, and I was willing to speak because I do think that the issue of Cuba is extremely important for socialists. I must say I have limited credentials. The type of theoretical questions which are posed before us require more study than I have had time for — the questions of the nature of the state, the transformation of the economy, the process of transition, and the political programme for the transition to socialism. On the other hand although I have limited knowledge about Cuban history, I do have sufficient knowledge to refute some of Paul's points about how the revolution took place in 1959.

The first issue we have to think about is: what exactly is the question being asked? 'Is Cuba socialist?' Does that mean: 'Has Cuba achieved socialism?' That would imply a substantial number of things. There is no definition in any of the classical writings about what actually constitutes socialism. There is no blueprint. At various points in history definitions have been made. Lenin talked of socialism as 'electrification plus soviets'. For Lenin, at that moment in time, his conception of what constitutes socialism was very specific. Lenin did not provide any fuller description. He also said, at other times, that socialism was the abolition of all classes.

The second way of posing the question 'Is Cuba socialist?' would be to ask: is the political leadership of Cuba a leadership capable of not only vanquishing capitalism but of actually setting Cuba on the road towards socialism? Does the Communist Party leadership have the intention of developing and carrying through a programme which will involve the mass of the workers and peasants in the kind of social and economic transformation that will lead towards socialism?

Or, alternatively, should we look to Paul's 'Third Camp'? And I must say I find it extremely difficult to come to grips with a Marxist 'Third Camp'. Marx said that after capitalism there was no alternative or intermediary stage. The only possible transition was that of the working class seizing power and a transition to socialism. You are arguing something new. The notion of a 'Third Camp' seems to be alien to Marxism.

What is the class basis of this group you describe as the "bureaucratic elite"? Which class does it represent and rest on

inside Cuba? Is it based on the working class? Is it based on the remnants of the capitalist class?

The 1959 revolution was not just a question of a group of people landing from a yacht, setting up a rebel army and conducting military actions. That is a gross caricature. Any reading of the history of the revolution would tell you that within the guerrilla areas a complete social transformation took place. As the capitalist forces were disarmed, alternative structures of health care and education demonstrated the kind of relations the rebel army wanted to establish. It was a struggle which was at one and in continuity with an anti-imperialist struggle that had been taking place right back into the last century against the US and the agents of the US.

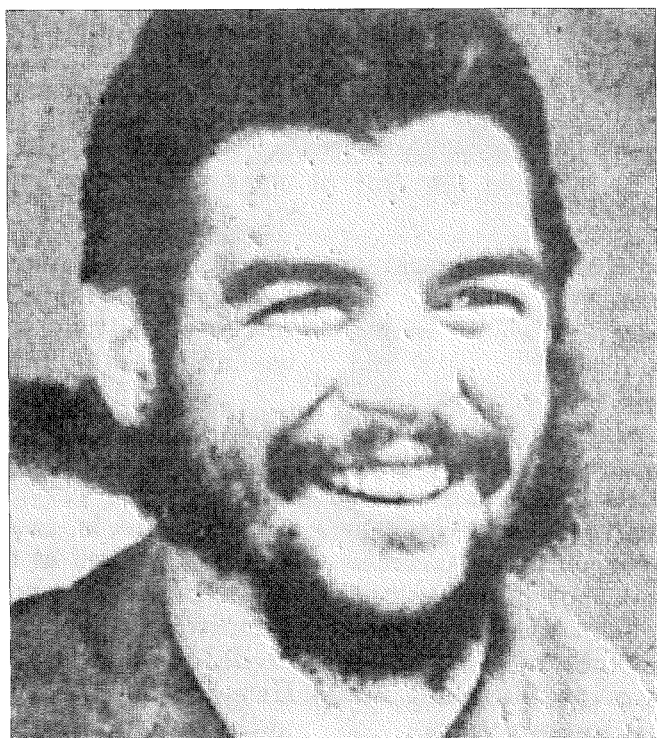
In looking at Cuba and trying to analyse where Cuba is now it is not good enough to look at the economic relations that exist in Cuba, nor is it adequate to look at the leaders of the Communist Party. Cuba has to be examined in the real world.

Cuba faces a massive onslaught from the biggest imperialist power in the world — not a casual refusal to enter into economic relations, but a systematic, hostile blockade that has been going on for 40 years. There is no other country in the world that has faced this type of assault. The USA has tried to destroy the Cuban economy. The achievements of the Cuban Revolution — the nationalisation of the land, the redistribution of the land, the gains made in the areas of health and education and social services — must be considered in that context. The achievements can not just be dismissed by saying: "That's OK, but lots of other countries have done the same". How is it that Cuba has sustained this, after 40 years of an onslaught from American imperialism?

And in addition, since the early 1990s Cuba has lost the economic trade they had with the former USSR and Eastern Europe. 75 or 80% of Cuba's trade was with that area, and so that was a colossal challenge. How is it that this political leadership, which has been called 'bureaucratic' here, maintained its political integrity? Why have they continued to defend the achievements of the Cuban Revolution?

At this point in time — in relation to health and education — the achievements remain. No capitalist country in the so-called Third World has sustained this provision. The Cubans themselves say Cuba has to be compared not to Germany or Scandinavia but to other Third World countries. Compare Cuba to Thailand or Latin America. The significant achievements show the moral and political goals behind the Cuban Revolution. Cuba has a higher per-capita number of doctors and teachers than almost any other country in the world. Infant mortality is lower than in the US and some countries in Western Europe.

When I went to Cuba recently on a trade union visit, what was



Che Guevara: a socialist icon?

said to us was "yes, we are suffering terrible hardship," but also that not a single nurse had lost her job, not a single doctor has been sacked, not a single school, hospital or health centre has closed. Why are those services still in place? That is no accident.

We must look at the nature of the transition which is taking place in Cuba. We tend to look at these issues from the perspective of a metropolitan country, and we look at the issue of the socialist transformation from capitalism to a workers' state solely in terms of industrial workers. But in Cuba the relation between the workers and the peasantry is a critical one. It is a relation which, in the 1917 revolution, was stressed as a critical factor in the ability of the Bolshevik party to carry through the overturn of capitalism in Russia, and the transformation that they brought about. The relation between the working class and the peasantry was key. The initial land reform in Cuba was a response to real needs. The reform sustained the ability of the working class to carry through a transformation which destroyed capitalist economic and social relations in Cuba.

How is the present economy managed? Within bourgeois society there is a clear division between the state and the economy. Gordon Brown handed over the setting of interest rates to the Bank of England. Whatever is said by the Labour government, the power to determine the economy is not in the control of a parliament or state. Capitalist governments cannot plan. In Cuba it is quite different. In the development of the economic plan to deal with the blockade and the 'special period', they conducted a massive debate in the country about how they should respond and what should be done. Something like 230,000 meetings were held in workplaces to discuss, practically, how workers would respond to the blockade and what their views were about the plan and how it should be implemented. They put forward a series of amendments which were incorporated in to the plan.

THAT is direct democracy — working class involvement in planning. That sort of decision making does not take place in capitalist Britain. The government does not come to us and ask how much should be spent on health and education. There is no engagement with the mass of the people about economic decisions. Cuba is qualitatively different. Every member of the pop-

ulation is involved in planning, from the age of 14 upwards.

For example, Cuban teachers told me that the student organisation was critical about the way that lessons were taught in schools. The students wanted less regurgitation of facts about 1959 etc. and more discussion about how and why events took place. The student organisation put a resolution to the teachers' union, calling for a change in the Cuban law to ensure the curriculum was changed. The teachers agreed and the state changed the education system as a result. That is a tiny example of how direct democracy works in Cuba.

We have been told that the Cuban unions are incorporated into the state. If we look at the debates that took place in Russia at the time of the New Economic Policy (NEP), we find there was a debate about the role of unions. There was a sharp exchange between Bolshevik leaders. Lenin spelt out the role of unions within the dictatorship of the proletariat. He said their role was different to their role under capitalism. Under capitalism the unions fight to defend their members in individual sectors. In a workers' state — and if you do not agree that Cuba is a workers' state we do have a difficulty — there is a different relationship between the unions and mass organisations and the state. Far from trying to destroy the state, in a workers' state the unions' role is to ensure the preservation and defence of that state.

When Paul says that the trade union movement in Cuba is giving up bonuses, I would say, yes, in a workers' state, that is something that could be on the agenda. And an issue like this can not be decided from a sectional point of view. That is economism of the crudest kind. We have to examine the question from an overall class point of view.

In Britain certain groups of workers have been capable of tremendous militancy. However, they have not always been particularly politically advanced, or prepared to fight for the abolition of capitalism. In the Midlands in the 1950s the workers in engineering had highly effective union organisations but at the same time they consistently fought for right-wing policies in the Labour Party. In a non-capitalist state, a workers' state, the unions must take responsibility for defending the state, but at the same time ensure the protection of the interests of the workers. That is what the unions do in Cuba.

The thesis the Cuban unions discussed in preparation for its 1994 Congress went to 80,000 people. The participants clearly stated that they wanted to see education and health defended, but within the context of defence of Cuba as a whole.

Paul talks about the Political Bureau nominating people for the elections for municipal, provincial and national assemblies. That is not true. These are the functions of the mass organisations, who nominate on the basis of trustworthiness and recognition of exemplary political character. This is similar to the best shop floor practice in Britain.

Is Cuba socialist? I have given you my answer, but I also want to give you the answer of the Cuban Communist Party. The Communist Party is not the PSP from before 1959. It is a qualitatively different organisation, created in 1965. It does not have the same lineage of the Communist Parties in Eastern Europe. I could not quote a better authority than Castro, who says that they can not speak of building socialism at this time. He says they are simply defending their achievements. That is where I stand. Capitalist economic and social relations were overthrown in the 1959 revolution. Cuba is in transition. We should see Cuba in the context of the American blockade and the ending of trade with Eastern Europe and the USSR.

Beyond that parallels can not be drawn with Eastern Europe and the USSR. The parallels made by Paul between Castro and Pinochet are wholly uncalled for. Pinochet led a fascist regime which killed thousands of workers, destroyed the trade unions and smashed left wing organisations.

In 1984, conscious of the dangers of bureaucracy, a massive discussion began in the Communist Party about the Rectification Programme. It examined the danger of bureaucracy and set in train measures to combat that and reassert the ideals and political heritage of Che Guevara — not the caricature iconography, but Che as someone who systematically studied Marx and the question of transition to socialism, and who argued for the creation of new human beings with new ideals and aspirations. Cuba remains in that tradition, although it obviously faces huge challenges. Its leadership deserves the support of socialists.

Look at the Cuban actions against apartheid. 40,000 volunteers went to Angola to fight to defeat the South African regime. One of the first countries Nelson Mandela visited after his release was Cuba. Mandela said that there would have been no end to apartheid without Cuban help. Cuba put itself on the line. That demonstrates that the Cuban leadership are socialists and the trajectory of Cuba is towards a socialist society.

Summations of the debate

Paul Hampton

BERNARD skates around the issues, but nowhere does he prove that Cuba is socialist or any kind of workers' state. Nowhere does he adequately define socialism, or Stalinism. Instead he is an uncritical apologist for Castro.

Look at how he deals with my point about political prisoners. Bernard doesn't deny that people get locked up for trying to form free trade unions or putting forward socialist ideas in opposition to the Castroites. Instead he claims I equate Castro with Pinochet. I did not. I merely pointed out that the level of imprisonment in Cuba has been until recently as high as in regimes such as Chile in the 1970's. Freedom is important for our class, the working class, to organise itself.

On land reform, which was limited in the guerrilla areas anyway before 1959, Castro's first law as Prime Minister was to ban land seizures, to put the lid on revolutionaries who wanted to go further. How has Cuba sustained its achievements? By \$9 million per day of Soviet aid — at one point twenty times the Latin American average given by the USSR — and by the exploitation of Cuban workers' and peasants. We should compare achievements like with like: Bolivia and Peru were poor in 1959 and are still poor.

Lenin defended the workers' right to strike in 1920 against their own state. Bernard is wrong to deny this. Yet workers in Cuba now cannot organise their own workers' party, or their own unions or caucuses, or organise around different policies. Take the taxation debate a few years ago. Workers who were 'consulted' said they didn't want the tax changes, and yet the Castroites pushed them through. It isn't true that the assemblies are democratic bodies. They are organs of transmission and of control.

I'm glad Bernard raised the issue of Cuban foreign policy in Africa and elsewhere. He should try to justify it to the Eritrean people. They initially received support from Cuba in the 70's. Then, when their Soviet paymasters told them to, the Cubans switched sides and backed the Derg in Ethiopia, who viciously opposed self determination for the peoples of that region.

The Mexican workers and students were repressed in 1968. That drew no protest from Castro. Instead he has maintained friendly relations with the PRI, which has ruled Mexico for seventy years. In 1988, when the ruling party committed massive

fraud to get their candidate in, what did Castro do? He didn't support the opposition. Instead he attended the inauguration of Salinas, legitimising the fraud. Look at his attitude towards the Prague spring in 1968 and the Polish Solidarity movement in 1980-81: not only outright hostility but also open support for Stalinist repression. This is a long way from working class internationalism.

Clearly the present Cuban Communist Party is not simply the old PSP. But there are links. Carlos Rafael Rodriguez was a minister under Batista, and a minister under Castro. When the Castroites took over the trade union movement in November 1959, who was put in charge of the CTC? Lazaro Pena, the same Lazaro Pena who had helped the Communists in the forties tie the Cuban working class to Batista's state in return for legality.

Che Guevara's views are now well known, following the recent biographies of him. He supported of the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956. He masterminded the Cuban army and secret police after 1959. He was the most vocal and uncritical advocate of Cuba following the Russian model in the crucial two years after the 1959 revolution. Whatever his later criticisms and his commitment, Guevara never fought for our kind of socialism.

What is socialism? Bernard never got to grips with this question. The nearest he got to it was Lenin's formula: Soviets plus electrification. Yet in Cuba today the workers have neither. They don't have organisations through which the working class can rule in its own interests, and they have not developed the productive forces to outpace capitalism. They never could. Socialism is the self-emancipation of the working class. It is emblazoned on the cover of Workers' Liberty every month. "The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself". That is the measure against which we analyse Cuba. It is the test of class. In August 1933 the Cuban workers toppled the dictator Machado and a situation of dual power existed in the country. This is our model. It shows socialism was possible then and was possible in Castro's time.

What is so strange about our conception of Stalinism as a new form of exploiting society? Bernard quotes from Trotsky in 1936, but the phenomenon developed. It spread during the war. In places like China, independent Stalinist armies made their own revolutions. Those were not workers' revolutions. They simultaneously shattered the working-class movement and the capitalist class. Castro's revolution was like that. It was not imposed by the Russians, and because of that the Cuban revolution has an autonomy of its own.

It is necessary for the working class to rule politically in order to rule socially and economically. We do not make a fetish of nationalised property. We do not add a new stage between capitalism and socialism. Stalinism is a mongrel and an epiphenomenon, a blind alley. This is no revision of Marxism. There were societies before the epoch of capitalism in which the ruling class was based on the state and exploited the population by extracting a tribute — ancient Egypt and China, the Aztec and Mayan empires for instance. Marxists don't lump these together as 'feudalism'. So why isn't it possible in this epoch to have class societies which are broadly parallel to capitalism? The key question of who extracts the surplus product is central to a Marxist theory of class throughout history.

We defend Cuba against the threat of American imperialism, and we are against the trade embargo, which is a virtual blockade. But we can say that without losing a critical perspective on what is going on inside Cuba. Cuba is not capitalist, but that does not prove it's better. You have no evidence that it is qualitatively better. Cuban workers should not trust Castro to defend them. They should defend themselves, principally by building their own organisations, like trade unions, defence guards, their own political party, independent of Castro.

We stand for working class independence. That's what we mean by the Third Camp. Neither capitalism nor Stalinism is the answer for the workers of the world. Neither Washington, nor Moscow, nor Havana either, but international socialism. Socialism was possible in Cuba in 1959. It is possible now in Cuba. But only the working class can make it.

Bernard Regan

I RETURN to the question that I posed at the beginning. Do you agree that in 1959 capitalist economic and social relations were destroyed? What were the land reform, nationalisation of major industries and of foreign and Cuban banks? What was the second land reform which distributed land on an equal basis? It was not just an act against the "peasant hucksters" as Lenin once described the kulaks. It was an act aiming to transform the whole of society into a workers' state.

It was not the case that the Cubans ran off to snuggle up to the USSR. They first attempted to establish economic relations with America. When they forbade the American-owned sugar plantations owning Cuban land, the Americans refused to engage in trade. The Cubans were forced to look elsewhere to engage in trade. Cuba is a third world country, not a metropolitan European country. They did not have a choice where to look for trade.

Why do the Cuban leadership not generalise the dollar economy? For very good reasons. Economic relations, brought in by this development, if generalised, would destroy the gains made as a result of 1959. Correctly, as with the Russian NEP, the state seeks to limit the extent to which capital can gain a foothold inside Cuba. Absolutely correct!

The Cuban trade union movement says that it wants to see the eradication of the dollar economy as swiftly as possible, so that all workers are treated on the same basis. That is what the General Secretary of the Cuban unions said to us. We are in a special period, not one we accept.

The workers in Cuba and the mass organisations are those that define the economic plan, not just reflecting what comes from above, as it has been presented for political purposes in this meeting. For example, one of the critical issues in the recent period was the introduction of taxation in Cuba. In 1959 taxation was abolished. No worker paid taxes until very recently.

However, with the introduction of the dollar economy inequalities emerged. It was necessary to re-appropriate for the social good, ensuring that some groups of workers did not gain at the expense of others. That was quite correct. Beyond that workers in the tourist industry have organised and discussed how tips should be dealt with. Tips are returned voluntarily after political discussion. There is a conscious political understanding that the creation of socialism is about the voluntary activity of human beings, and a belief in ideals qualitatively higher than those of capitalism.

The Cubans supported the Angolans in defeating Jonas Savimbi's UNITA, a pro-capitalist force backed by the US, and in defeating apartheid. They put their best equipment into Angola. They were prepared to put their own existence at stake for black South African workers. The Cubans are internationalists. They have sent abroad 16,000 doctors — three times as many as the World Health Organisation — and 16,000 teachers. 25,000 students from other countries come to Cuba to receive a higher education at no cost. When hurricanes devastated the Caribbean recently Cuba was prepared to send doctors without asking for a penny. It was prepared to cancel the debt of Nicaragua.

This is a qualitatively different leadership to anything we saw in Eastern Europe or the USSR. Yes, solidarity against the American blockade. But, also, solidarity with the political leadership of Cuba.



"State socialism": forced labour under Stalinism

Marx and Engels on "state socialism"

By Martin Thomas

For Marx and Engels, "state socialism" was a form of "reactionary socialism". At the end of chapter 17 of *Capital* volume 1, Marx notes:

"The capitalist mode of production, while on the one hand enforcing economy in each individual business, on the other hand, begets, by its anarchical system of competition, the most outrageous squandering of labour power and of the social means of production, not to mention the creation of a vast number of employments, at present indispensable, but in themselves superfluous." (p.530/667).

Marx's answer to this was not to demand the generalisation to the whole of society of the economy enforced in each individual business. On the contrary: *Capital* indicts capitalist "economy in each individual business" (in other words, the capitalist shaping of the labour process) much more fiercely than the anarchy of competition.

Marx wanted to do away with the oppressive relations in the factories — by democratic reorganisation of production and by shortening work hours — not to extend them to the whole of society. He wanted the self-liberation of the working class, not its transfer from command by the factory-owners to command by the state.

Marx foresaw the working class fighting for "the free development of each and the free development of all", not for beehive-collectivism — as he made clear in a polemic against Christian socialism.

"The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submission, humility, in a word, all the qualities of the canaille; and the proletariat, which will not allow itself to be treated as canaille, needs courage, self-confidence, pride, a sense of personal dignity and independence, even more than it needs daily bread". (Marx, quoted in Riazanov's notes on the *Communist Manifesto*, p.208-9.)

And in his early criticism of "crude communism":

"Crude communism is only the culmination of this envy and

of this levelling-down proceeding from the preconceived minimum. It has a definite, limited standard. How little this annulment of private property is really an appropriation is in fact proved by the abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilisation, the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and undemanding man who has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not yet even reached it. The community is only a community of labour, and of equality of wages paid out by communal capital — the community as the universal capitalist..." (1844 *Manuscripts*, section 'Private Property & Communism'.)

In *Capital* volume 3, Marx explained further how he foresaw a society very different from being "only a community of labour" under a "universal capitalist":

"The realm of freedom... begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases... With... development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of... wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which can satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite." (*Capital* vol.3 p.820.)

When Marx alludes to the hypothetical "limit [which] would be reached only when the entire social capital was united in the hands of either a single capitalist or a single capitalist company" (*Capital* vol. 1, p.627/779) — that "limit" is, for him, state tyranny, not socialist freedom.

Confronted by Bakunin's claim that Marx's programme would mean: "nothing else but the very despotic guidance of the mass of the people by a new and numerically very small aristocracy of the genuine or supposedly educated," Marx did not argue that a statified economy would automatically ensure progress or exclude despotism. Instead, he poured scorn on Bakunin's inability to imagine the working class operating a representative democracy.

The elected representatives, claimed Bakunin, "as soon as they have become representatives or governors of the people, cease to be workers." "As little", retorted Marx, "as a factory owner today ceases to be a capitalist if he becomes a municipal councillor... If Mr Bakunin only knew something about the position of a manager in a workers' cooperative factory, all his dreams of domination would go to the devil..."

Marx argued not that a despotic "socialism" was impossible — he was vigorous in denouncing the ambitions of the German "state-socialist" Lassalle to be a "workers' dictator" — but that the working class could, and would when mobilised for revolution, realise another, and democratic, possibility.

The contrast between capitalism and working-class socialism is not one between competition and co-operation, or between individualism and collectivism. It is the contrast between wage-slavery and the workers' self-liberation from exploitation (the eventual self-abolition of the working class, because everyone will work, and no-one's life will be dominated by drudgery; thus no-one will be distinctively "a worker") — both on the basis of developed, large-scale, socialised, industrialised production.

The themes of Marx's early polemics against "crude communism" were taken up again by Engels in later years, arguing against "state socialist" ideas in the German workers' movement.

Priming Karl Kautsky on the question, Engels wrote:

"It would be a good thing if somebody took the trouble to

explain state socialism, which is now so prevalent, by the example of Java where its practice is in full bloom... On the basis of the old community communism the Dutch (colonial power) organised production under state control... This demonstrates that today primitive communism (as long as it has not been stirred up by some element of modern communism) furnishes the finest and broadest basis of exploitation and despotism..." (Marx-Engels *Selected Correspondence*, p.347.)

In *Anti-Dubring*, Engels spells it out further:

"In the trusts, freedom of competition changes into its very opposite — into monopoly; and the production without any definite plan of capitalistic society capitulates to the production upon a definite plan of the invading socialistic society. Certainly this is so far still to the benefit and advantage of the capitalists. But in this case the exploitation is so palpable it must break down. No nation will put up with production conducted by trusts, with so barefaced an exploitation of the community by a small band of dividend-mongers.

"In any case, with trusts or without, the official representative of capitalist society — the state — will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production... But the transformation, either into joint-stock companies and trusts, or into state ownership, does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces... The modern state... is only the organisation that bourgeois society takes on in order to support the general external conditions of the capitalist mode of production against the encroachments as well of the workers as of the individual capitalists. The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking over of the productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers — proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with. It is rather brought to a head..." (*Anti-Dubring*, p.329-331, emphasis added.)

In the discussions round the German socialists' Erfurt Programme of 1891, Engels specifically objected to defining capitalism by "planlessness":

"Paragraph 4, 'The want of plan rooted in the nature of capitalist private production' needs considerable improvement. I am familiar with capitalist production as a social form, or an economic phase; capitalist private production being a phenomenon which in one form or another is encountered in that phase. What is capitalist private production? Production by separate entrepreneurs, which is increasingly becoming an exception... When we pass from joint-stock companies to trusts, which dominate and monopolise whole branches of industry, this puts an end not only to private production but also to planlessness."

When the draft denounced "state socialism" by name, Engels objected only that the polemic belonged more to a commentary than to the programme proper. The clause was deleted, and Kautsky wrote in his commentary: "As an exploiter of labour, the state is more forceful than any private capitalist. Besides the economic power of the capitalists, it can also bring to bear upon the exploited classes the political power which it already wields."

A few years later, the argument was put even more clearly by Antonio Labriola (*In Memory of the Communist Manifesto*, 1895):

"It is better to use the expression 'democratic socialisation of the means of production' than that of 'collective property' because the latter implies a certain theoretical error in that, to begin with, it substitutes for the real economic fact a juridical expression and moreover in the mind of more than one it is confused with the increase of monopolies, with the increasing statification of public utilities and with all the other fantasmagoria of the ever-recurring State socialism, the whole effect of which is to increase the economic means of oppression in the hands of the oppressing class."

Class politics and the Agreement

THE following documents were discussed and voted on at the conference of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty over the weekend of 20-21 February 1999. In May 1998 the AWL's National Committee voted by a sizeable majority in favour of a "yes" vote in the Six County referendum on the Good Friday Agreement. The NC minority, most of whom favoured abstention, thought that this was a serious political misjudgment.

By the 11 July NC, after the referendum, there was probably no longer a majority for the "yes". The position taken on the referendum was now a part of our history. It was agreed on both sides that the important thing was to continue the political discussion for as long as necessary. This has been done in the pages of *Workers' Liberty* and in discussion bulletins, which are available to readers of *WL* on request. On 21 February the conference pronounced on the dispute. A resolution embodying the thinking of the May NC majority was presented in the names of John Bloxam and Pat Murphy. A resolution embodying the minority position at the May NC was presented in the names of Mark Osborn and Sean Matgamna. Approximately 75% of conference voted for the Matgamna-Osborn resolution as amended by Bruce Robinson (see below); there were a few abstentions, and the rest voted for the Murphy-Bloxam position. The discussion will continue in *Workers' Liberty* and in discussion bulletins. We invite contributions.

"Balanced bureaucratic sectarianism"

Preamble (not voted on) to the resolution carried by conference

THE Good Friday Agreement on new political structures in Northern Ireland was agreed between London and Dublin, and by all the major political parties and private political/sectarian armies in Northern Ireland, with the important exception of the Democratic Unionist Party, and sponsored by the USA and the European Union.

It built on the November 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. Historically, it might be called Part Two of that agreement. It has also, and not inaptly, been described by the Northern Ireland deputy prime minister Seamus Mallon as "Sunningdale for slow learners", a new version of the Sunningdale Agreement sponsored by the British and Dublin governments in 1973 and briefly implemented through the power-sharing executive which was set up in January 1974 and lasted until the Orange general strike of May 1974.

The crucial difference is that this version of "Sunningdale" proceeds in reverse order. Sunningdale set up a less structured Belfast power-sharing coalition government (without Sinn Féin), and then tried to get all-Ireland structures in place. The attempt triggered the general strike



of 1974. All-Ireland structures are in place, now, first: the stumbling block is proving to be the setting-up of an all-inclusive Belfast government. If that proves to be not possible, and Dublin and London try to keep all-Ireland structures in place, there could be another Protestant explosion.

Workable power-sharing is a lesser evil than renewed communal civil war. But that cannot mean we disarm politically and support the setting-up of a bourgeois, sectarian power-sharing government. The Agreement and peace are not synonymous.

The AWL National Committee at its meeting of 16 May 1998 voted by a sizeable majority to commit the AWL to advocating a "yes" vote in the referendum on the Agreement. That the AWL took that position is now an ineradicable part of the history of our tendency. It falls to this conference to pronounce political judgment on that position, and to repudiate it.

It does so in the spirit of the following words, which prefaced the pamphlet which our tendency produced in November 1969, *IS [SWP] and Ireland*, about what we thought was the grievous mistake made by that organisation when British troops were put on the streets of Northern Ireland in August 1969:

"The test of the seriousness, the maturity, the honesty and the ultimate viability of any revolutionary organisation is its attitude to its own mistakes. Marxists make mistakes — inevitability. Those who are serious face their mistakes, analyse them in the light of further experience, analyse why they made the mistakes they did, and thereby avoid making a merely empirical alteration without fundamentally learning from the experience. Those who are not serious, or who are first of all concerned with 'face', prestige, and factional self-defence seek above all to evade an honest accounting: they subordinate fundamental questions of method and approach to what are essentially secondary and, in the final analysis, unimportant considerations."

The main features of the Good Friday Agreement are:

1. A Northern Ireland Assembly is set up, to which will gradually be devolved legislative and executive authority for matters now dealt with by Northern Irish government departments.

2. The Assembly's functioning is regulated by a complex system of checks and balances designed to structure politics around communal identity. Members of the Assembly are required to designate themselves as Unionist, Nationalist, or Other. Since a certain level of support among both "Unionist" and "Nationalist" is required for decisions, there is pressure against choosing the designation "Other".

3. A North-South ministerial council will deal with European Union matters for the whole of Ireland. The Agreement also provides for a British-Irish Council and a standing British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference.

4. The Agreement calls for the disarmament of paramilitary organisations within two years. It makes no commitment about the British Army, but calls for a reform of policing in Northern Ireland.

5. The Agreement provides for statutory guarantees of human rights.

6. In short, the Agreement erects institutions of power-sharing above the existing partition of Ireland. These can solve neither the legitimate "Irish national" question — the right of the Catholics where they are the majority, as they are in large areas of Northern Ireland adjoining the Republic, not to be severed from their own — nor the all-island minority question, the right of the Protestants where they are a majority (mainly in the north-east of the Six Counties) to autonomy and self-rule.

7. If a majority in a Northern Ireland poll votes for a united Ireland, then Britain is committed to legislate for it. This proviso both leaves the Northern Ireland Catholic minority entrapped for now, and cancels out the right to autonomy of the Protestants should demographic change make them a minority in the Six Counties, as nationalist politicians hope it will.

In short, the Agreement tries to bury the basic question of two conflicting identities under

a structure of balanced and weighted bureaucratic sectarianism, coupled with a highly explosive long-term pledge. It is in fundamentals a continuation of the programme pushed by the British state since the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973.

Procedure and tradition

1. The position taken by the National Committee flatly contradicted the position we had taken towards the Good Friday Agreement's predecessor, Sunningdale 1973, and the Agreement's preparatory, ground-laying stage, the Anglo-Irish Deal of 1985. It also contradicted, for example, the approach we had taken to the Oslo Agreement of 1993 on Israel-Palestine: we argued that this miserably inadequate agreement was a step forward, and better than any available option, but we did not support it, or take responsibility for it. The May NC jettisoned our long-held democratic and transitional programme for Ireland.

2. A distinct issue, though in the circumstances it was intertwined with that of the Good Friday Agreement, is the question of proper AWL procedures. If such a radical shift in our approach was necessary and proper, then, to ensure continuity of method, politics, and tradition, the departure should have been made deliberately, openly, and accounted for in Marxist fashion in terms of our previous positions and our tradition. Without that approach, with only case-by-case decisions on issues as they come up, there can be neither political consistency, nor organic and stable tradition, nor the thoroughgoing education of cadres — which is the practical political purpose for which we build up, and where necessary criticise, revise and rectify our tradition. The NC should have given priority to maintaining our tradition — clarifying and amending, if and where necessary; it should have understood the magnitude of the political lurch involved in the decision to vote "yes", and resolved not to take a snap decision.

3. The minority at the 16 May NC was seriously at fault in not supporting and fighting for the proposal made in that NC by some majority comrades, not to decide there and then but to continue discussion, thus letting the exigencies of the referendum and its timetable override our most basic programmatic and methodological concerns.

6. The fundamental cause of our error was excessive narrow "realism"; a drift towards excessive journalistic preoccupation with sifting the pros and cons of options within the existing system; an over-reaction against the demagogic, denunciatory, "maximalist" — essentially anarchist — politics current in some of the far left; a narrowing of horizons caused by the pressure of the recent period of depression and setbacks in the British labour movement. We resolve to correct ourselves.

"We do not choose the lesser evil. We counterpose independent working-class politics"

Resolution passed by conference

1. Conference believes that the position taken by the AWL at the 16 May 1998 NC and afterwards was a grievous political mistake.

2. We are for an end to communalist paramilitary violence and to British Army and RUC

violence. We sympathise with the feelings of that majority of Irish workers who voted for the Agreement because they saw it as offering a chance of peace. But only if working-class unity is built on it can the peace be solid; only if the working-class socialists maintain their political independence, and the clear counterposition of their programme to all the bourgeois alternatives on offer, can working-class unity be built on such peace as we may hope for from the Agreement. To subordinate our independent political tasks (upholding our programme) to "realistic" political calculations (our votes are needed to help the Agreement pass; or, we must vote "yes" so as not to offend the workers who vote "yes") is to misunderstand what we can and should do.

3. The Good Friday Agreement flatly contradicts the democratic programme of working-class socialists for Ireland — consistent democracy, the maximum of self-determination for each community compatible with the rights of the other, a federal united Ireland with regional autonomy for the Protestants, a confederal link with Britain. Socialists therefore could not back the Agreement. We should not have advocated a "yes" vote in the referendum.

4. If the Agreement holds and restrains armed communal conflict in Northern Ireland, then that will create easier conditions for working-class politics there. In that sense, the Agreement is a "lesser evil". But as between a capitalist project which runs counter to our programme and principles, and the status quo, we do not choose the lesser evil. We counterpose independent working-class politics to all the capitalist options. Consequently, it was in the circumstances a breach of working-class principles and of our programmatic position to advocate "yes". We uphold the old watchword of classical Marxism: "Not a person, not a penny, for their system!" We support "lesser evils" only when they represent a real, if limited, element of our programme, and when doing so can be clearly dissociated from any granting of confidence to bourgeois political programmes. In the actual case, to give any credit to the Agreement was inseparable from giving political credit to the British state.

5*. We believe that a "no" vote would also have been incorrect, not merely because it would have made it impossible to address the legitimate concerns of those supporting the Agreement because it brought peace or because it would align us with Paisley and the Republican ultras. Crucially, a "no" vote would have signified, both programmatically and practically, a vote for the status quo of polarised division between the two working class communities and a continued campaign of sectarian violence. Voting "yes" to this British state project was wrong in principle. Therefore abstention was the only principled alternative.

"Yes was a vote for communal compromise and peace"

Resolution rejected by conference

1. Conference endorses the decision of the May 1998 NC supporting a critical "yes" vote in the two parts of the all-Ireland referendum on the Good Friday Agreement.

2. The NC was relating to a new political situation in Northern Ireland: in particular, the change of line by Sinn Féin/IRA implicitly accept-

ing the bankruptcy of their perspective since the early 1970s and the shifts in the Protestant and Unionist community towards forms of communal compromise/accommodation. Summing up an analysis of this situation, the editorial in WZ45 ("Endgame in Northern Ireland") outlined the basic attitude of Marxists to this: "Socialists who want Protestant-Catholic working-class unity should welcome any moves that offer serious hope of permanent peace and an end to blind-alley militarism. We cannot and should not, however, take responsibility for either London or Dublin. We state what is and prepare the future. We work for the development of independent working-class politics. The first step is to understand reality clearly, and that means rejecting all delusions that 'anti-imperialist war' can bring progress in today's Ireland."

3. In the referendum people voted with different views and expectations, largely shaped by the communal divide. Nevertheless, the main lines were clear — 50-60% of Protestants voted for power-sharing and links with the South; the overwhelming majority of Catholic Ireland voted to recognise that the central issue was the relationship between the Irish majority and minority, and that this relationship should be settled on the basis of consent and accommodation. It was a vote for communal compromise and accommodation of one form or another against communal domination or conquest.

What did the large mobilisation for a "yes" vote, including in our class, fundamentally express? Not an attitude towards the details of the Agreement, certainly, nor even a "vague desire for peace", but an acceptance that there had to be a new way, that any progress required consent, communal compromise, minority rights, recognition of prisoners, etc. The question of whether the actual deal can deliver on these in the long term is a different one. It cannot, but our ability to convince workers of our programme is better served by clearly indicating the shared starting point than by appearing indifferent. In the simple and limited "yes/no" of the referendum, in which the issue of communal relations was central, we needed to indicate clearly which side we were on.

It was also a vote for peace, for the political settlement that underpinned the main paramilitary cease-fires. Whatever our criticisms of the details of the settlement we are for such peace — for the cease-fires and the consequent limiting of inter-communal slaughter. Our class has paid a terrible price for the paramilitary campaigns, seriously sharpening communal tensions and bitterness and thereby rendering more difficult a proper democratic resolution of the national questions in Ireland and also progress in developing normal class activity. If we believed that opposition to blind-alley militarism, to sectarian slaughter, constituted "working class pacifism", then we must say that we are "100% working class pacifists"! If we believed that this could simply be summed up as "war weariness" then "war weariness" is a very

* Point 5 is an amendment from Bruce Robinson, adopted by conference in place of the original Matgama-Osborn formulation which read as follows:

"Whether or not to vote 'no' was a question of tactics. Voting 'no' would not have been wrong on principle. In our view abstention was better because the 'no' vote was so much dominated by the outright Protestant sectarian DUP. Voting 'yes' to this British state project, however, was wrong in principle."

good thing indeed.

The best members of our class will say, "we are for peace, for an end to working class people slaughtering each other. We need to do things differently, start working together, not try to dominate or force each other. It's either voting for that or the status quo. We're voting yes." And our response? Certainly not to dismiss them as being dupes of the Blairite spin-doctors! Instead: "We agree and that's why we're voting with you. It's a step forward, but it's only that. It's better than the status quo, but it's not a solution — it's tinkering from above. We need a different approach, that properly and democratically deals with the rights of the two Irish peoples, and which does this as part of a fight for a workers' republic. We will try to convince you of that on the basis of experience, and also of the urgent need for our class to use the new situation to start organising politically and across the communal divide. Trust yourselves, not the bastards who are behind this deal, etc. etc."

4. Our attitude to the details of the Agreement were spelt out in the first document, "Not a Solution but Socialists Should Advocate a Yes Vote", whose conclusions the May NC voted for: "At worst, what it does is institutionalise the sectarian conflict at the heart of Northern Ireland society. At best it provides a new framework within which the leading communal politicians can manage that conflict", "...the alternative to the communal conflict institutionalised in the Agreement is the united working class movement committed to a democratic settlement". "It is not... our solution or method" but neither are we neutral. Our class, and the possibility of developing working class unity, was affected by the outcome. The Agreement could minimise sectarian conflict; the alternative, a return to sectarian war, means 'more polarisation' and 'less workers' unity.'

(a) The Agreement was a bourgeois "lesser evil". "Lesser evils" exist because our class is weak and Marxists a small minority. How we relate to them depends — there is no recipe book answer or substitute for thinking. In an electoral contest with Hitler, Hindenberg was not a "lesser evil" for the working class; if he had moved militarily against Hitler he would have been. It can only be judged concretely on the basis of the interests and development of the working class as a class — the conditions under which it organises the development of class consciousness. It is a positive and independent political assessment, not a negative reaction to what our class enemies are saying or which "camps" exist.

In Northern Ireland the Good Friday Agreement was "the lesser evil"; the cease-fires of the main paramilitary organisations it cemented, the new structures created, provide better conditions for our class to organise. That, without any illusions or expectations of what it would deliver, was sufficient basis for a critical "yes" vote.

In the context of the last 30 years, such progress should be welcomed. We have recognised this before. "Any arrangement acceptable to most people on both sides would be progress and should be welcome to socialists, whose first concern is to see the working class in Northern Ireland, and in Ireland as a whole, unite across the murderous communal divide" (WL 42 editorial: "The IRA 'restores its cessation'")

Further, it is not a passive prediction. "We say what is and prepare the future." We do not

thereby accept this lesser evil as some "necessary stage" in developments, nor does it reduce us to "gratefully accepting crumbs from the table of the bourgeoisie." How much progress there is will, in important part, depend on the activity of socialists on the ground.

(b) To accept it as a lesser evil is to kid nobody that it is either a solution or that it can do what its bourgeois authors promise or even expect. "The facts have spoken" certainly, but only to (i) underline the fact that we are faced with a new political situation and (ii) indicate that the Agreement is neither stable nor a democratic answer to the relationship between the Irish majority and minority. (ii) is true, although even a consistently democratic programme would face serious resistance from the likes of the Paisleyites and the "Spirit of Drumcree", which it could expect to undermine, not abolish.

It is not a solution because it accepts the parameters of the artificial six-county statelet, with its in-built denial of democratic rights for the majority community in Ireland; it further provides no territorial safeguards for the Irish Protestant minority.

To recognise this, however, is not to reject the possibility of progress within the confines of the Northern Ireland statelet. Progress, however limited, has been made, and is reflected in the Good Friday Agreement. Unless there is the possibility of further progress, and above all developments in working class unity and politics, the programme of a united, federal Ireland, let alone a workers' republic, is utopian. Working class unity cannot wait until a federal Ireland which is the programme of a united working class...!

(c) The Agreement is not our programme, but neither is it the direct opposite — which is why we agree with parts of it (e.g. minority rights, release of prisoners, the changes in the Irish Republic's constitution). The direct opposite of our programme is the 'no' camp in the referendum — those who support the six-county statelet as a Protestant ascendancy, support communal military conquest and reject communal compromise and accommodation.

To the worker who asks "why are you in favour of the Agreement if you support a different approach, federalism?" we say: "For a start, the referendum is only about the Agreement. We say better communal power-sharing than sectarian civil war; better bureaucratic checks and balances for communal agreement than a programme of communal conquest and subjugation. But 100% better than the few steps forward we have got here is a programme that offers a real solution. Let's use the new structures as a platform for a fundamentally different approach, relying only on ourselves."

Sectarianism has structured and dominated politics in the North from the very beginning. It will continue to do so in the Assembly with or without the provisions for communal classification; it reflects the reality of the Northern Ireland statelet. Rather than throw our hands up in despair, or reject in fact (if not in principle) the possibility of any political progress within Northern Ireland, we seek to find a way forward — there is no shortcut to contesting our class answers to the answers of the Green and Orange parties. We are for a Northern Ireland Labour Party with a federal programme. If it existed we would argue for it to stand in the Assembly elec-

tions; if elected to refuse communal classification; to use the Assembly as a platform for a working class programme, functioning independently, rejecting the sectarian watchwords.

5. In calling for a critical "yes" vote we "take responsibility" for what we say — for saying that this bourgeois settlement is a "lesser evil", for rejecting blind-alley militarism and voting for a settlement that underpins the main paramilitary cease-fires, for saying that the new situation provides a better situation for our class to organise, for agreeing with prisoner releases, for backing the idea of communal compromise. We do not thereby "take responsibility" for the whole project of imperialism/"the greatest popular front in history", or become advisers to the bourgeoisie about how to make the settlement work, any more than our call for a "yes" vote in the Scottish referendum led us to "take responsibility" for the project of the Blairites, the SNP, the Lib-Dems in Scotland, or become advisers to the Scottish Office. Further, calling for a "yes" vote in the referendum no more obliges us to vote for the bourgeois politicians who drew it up than hypothetically voting "yes" for the legalisation of homosexuality obliges us to subsequently vote for Liberals.

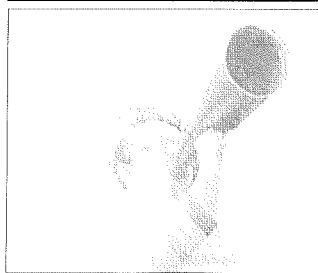
We support a critical "yes" vote and retain our political independence. Why this rather than the vaguer expressions of "welcoming" and "hoping", but refusing to vote? Because it is clearer and sharper, because it helps us talk to people in Ireland and therefore improves the chances of winning Irish workers to our programme, because it can be done in a way that is intelligible and not a self-contradicting mockery, because we can do it and maintain our political independence.

Yes, irreconcilable opposition to the bourgeoisie, the fight for working class independence and self-activity, are the beginnings of the Marxist alphabet, but not far behind is the need to talk to our class, to relate our programme to their needs and concerns, to win workers to revolutionary politics, to build the force that will get rid of the Clintons, Blairs and Aherns, the Trimbles and Adamses, and the classes they represent. Even if we are tiny, and haven't got any supporters on the ground in Ireland, it is in that spirit we should conduct ourselves — if not, why should anybody take us seriously?

6. Support for a critical "yes" vote on the Good Friday Agreement did not contradict our approach to either British troops or previous attempts at political settlements (Sunningdale; Anglo-Irish Agreement).

Since the early 1980s we have called for Troops Out as part of a political settlement, and polemicised against the slogan "Troops Out Now". At best, we argued, the British state and its troops froze the situation — better the status quo of low level sectarian civil war than a full blown Bosnian-type civil war followed by bloody repartition; better the status quo in which communal divisions were deep and bitter, the prospects of working class unity and political development virtually non-existent, than a full-scale catastrophe. We also pointed out that, in the course of freezing the situation, the troops had done great harm. We never "welcomed" the troops in our public press, nor expressed a "hope" they might succeed; our immediate demand was that they should be "taken off the streets" and then got out as part of a polit-

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Not the time to turn inwards

Socialist Outlook of February 1999 carried a long article announcing their withdrawal from the Welfare State Network, in which they had previously worked with *Workers' Liberty* and other socialists. We print the reply sent to John Lister of *Socialist Outlook* by WSN organiser Jill Mountford.

WE would ask you to reconsider your resignation from the WSN and to get involved with *Action* again. Look at the facts. From the outset both the cam-

paign and *Action* have welcomed and encouraged *Socialist Outlook* to take a full role. Never has the paper excluded an article submitted by yourself or any of your comrades; never has the Network ignored or not taken up an idea for campaigning; never has any *Socialist Outlook* comrade been opposed in elections to office or the steering committee.

This is as true towards the end of your involvement with the WSN as it was true at the beginning. The AWL's commitment to building a broad campaign to defend the welfare state remains as strong today as it was in September 1994 when we

launched the WSN. You correctly point out that *Action* and the WSN have "won a considerable degree of respect in the wider labour movement". On this basis we ask you to think again. We invite you to get back involved in building a broad campaign to defend and rebuild the welfare state.

Your reasons for leaving could appear as petty and sectarian, if not a little cheeky. Your organisation's commitment to the paper and the campaign has been lukewarm. You say your Political Committee took a decision in December 1998 to put resources into *Action* and the campaign, well what about the last four years? We know that

your conferences, not just your Political Committee, voted to support *Action* — but what happened in practice? *Socialist Outlook* have never sold the paper; apart from yourself, have rarely written for it and over the last four years have contributed only £200 to its production. During that time we have produced 48 issues of *Action* (each issue costing around £750), sometimes with a print run of as many as 9,000 copies.

You have been joint editor for the last four years, though you have not worked on the actual production of *Action* since July 1997 (you say the big bar to you working on *Action* was the decision to

Class politics and the Agreement

From page 33

ical settlement. We do not have the same attitude towards a particular peace settlement that represents progress, which underpins a widescale paramilitary cease-fire, that aims for communal co-operation, that creates better conditions for the beginnings of working class unity, that is acceptable to most people in the two communities. For sure they are both bourgeois, but we shouldn't flatten out or ignore the differences because of a general and indivisible attitude to bourgeois society.

Our assessment is concrete. In 1969 the British state put troops on the streets of Northern Ireland to control the situation — to hold back the Orange pogromists, certainly, but also to demobilise the mass Catholic revolt, to break down the barricades to the "free areas". Any value in the former was massively outweighed by the latter. Rightly, we said no.

"In essence the details in the Good Friday Agreement are little different from what the bourgeoisie has had on the table before. We never said critical 'yes' before, why now?". The short answer is for the same reason that we never "welcomed" them either.

(a) The Good Friday Agreement was a peace settlement that cemented the paramilitary cease-fires, and in particular the Provo war, that had wrecked such havoc to communal relationships. The previous "deals" were not that.

(b) It clearly had wide support in both communities, representing an acceptance of the need for some form of dialogue and communal compromise. It proved to be acceptable to most people in the two communities, even if there was only a small majority among the Protestants. The other "deals" did not.

(c) Because of (a) and (b) it was progress, and represented better conditions for our class and the possible development of working class unity. The previous "deals" did not.

7. For the last two decades we have openly rejected the idea that the central problem in Ireland is British imperialism, and its accompanying slogan "Troops Out Now". Blame the British ruling class, yes, but the central problem concerned the relationship between the two peoples in Ireland and the need to secure a consistently democratic settlement of that relationship as part of the struggle for a workers' republic. The slogan of a united, federal Ireland, with autonomy for the Protestant areas, etc., was not advice to

the ruling class but an indispensable weapon in the fight of socialists for working class unity and political development, itself a necessary condition of serious progress.

Our declaration that the Provos' military campaign was futile and counterproductive, and our call for it to end, was part of this approach, not an example of pacifism. Time and again we said without ambiguity that the "central achievement" of the Provos long war "has been to make the division in Northern Ireland between Catholic and Protestant deeper and stronger". We consequently welcomed the IRA and loyalist ceasefires and the resulting peace talks. In January, when Sinn Féin were kicked out of the talks and it looked as though the entire process might well break down, we said: "It will be a setback for the working class and for both communities in Northern Ireland if they (the talks) do (break down)... This is not because the peace talks will produce some miracle solution, but because the paramilitary cease-fire increases the possibilities of building a socialist movement in Ireland which can unite workers around a programme offering advance both to Catholic and Protestant workers". (WL bulletin, 23.1.98). The vote at the May NC was in line with this approach.



go fortnightly, but that did not happen until January 1998). Your organisation's attitude to *Action* is reflected in your attitude towards the many and varied events the WSN has organised — our lobbies of Parliament, our pickets and lobbies of MPs, our marches and demonstrations and our conferences. *Socialist Outlook* has never built for these events, or even mobilised your own comrades for them.

Yet despite *Socialist Outlook*'s lack of commitment, the WSN and *Action* have won respect in the broad labour movement. Over the last four years both the campaign and the paper have developed.

The dispute here arose because some of us working on the paper wanted to push it forward, make it a broad socialist paper, give the paper some autonomy from the campaign and the campaign some autonomy from the paper. We believe that a vigorous campaigning newspaper cannot be limited by the monthly rhythms of an official labour movement currently very much in the doldrums. It's not our job to reflect such rhythms, no more than it is our job to reflect the defeat or passivity of large sections of the labour movement. Rather, it is our job to agitate for an increase in activity. It is our job to organise initiatives and support others in the movement making such initiatives, just as it is our job to raise a banner for working class demands and rights and that has to mean

producing a paper that goes beyond the defence of the welfare state. As central as this remains, it is not enough.

Those of us arguing for developing the paper further were mostly AWL members; those arguing for a more limited paper, monthly only and more narrowly focused on strict welfare state issue, were *Socialist Outlook* supporters. Who was sectarian?

Not the AWL. We — I write here as an AWL member rather than in my WSN capacity — believe we can develop our politics by working with a broad paper, open to all socialist views including *Outlook*'s (in addition to our own monthly publication), and a broad campaign; you evidently find it impossible or uncongenial to promote anything but your own monthly party paper.

You are reluctant to sell *Action* now? But your comrades were always reluctant to sell it, even when it was monthly and more narrowly welfare-ist. Why should others who work on *Action* defer forever to a scheme and a formula which you don't actively support yourselves?

The bottom line is that your organisation have walked out on a campaign with over 200 affiliates and subscribers for petty sectarian reasons. Now is not the time for *Socialist Outlook* to break from *Action* and the WSN. Now is not the time to turn inwards. Think again. Rejoin the campaign and move forward with us.

For Scottish independence?

AS capital becomes ever more global, with the production of many goods now being organised and distributed on a planetary scale, why should socialists in Scotland, who should stand for a World Socialist Republic, retreat into being champions of Scottish separation?

It is obvious to any objective observer that Scotland is not an oppressed nation and that Scots suffer no significant discrimination either in Scotland or in the rest of the U.K. Indeed it can be argued that Scotland gets more than its fair share of UK public spending and parliamentary representation. It is also obvious that the Scottish working class is an integral component of the British working class and the conditions of the working class in Scotland are no worse than working class areas in Liverpool, Manchester or London.

Some will agree with the above but contend that the denial of Scottish self determination is itself a form of national oppression and since socialists must oppose all forms of national oppression Socialists must champion Scotland's right to self determination.

However the fact is that Scotland is not being denied the right to self determination. If Scots want independence they can vote for it. All the main British parties have stated publicly that if the Scots want independence and vote for it they can have it. Who really believes that the British state would refuse to accept the outcome of such a vote? With a Federal Europe on the agenda, an independent Scotland in Europe is no threat to the interests of capital. Indeed this is why a significant sector of the Scottish business community are not hostile to the idea, and why the middle class professionals in law, media etc. are so enthusiastic

for Home Rule, along with sectors of the trade union bureaucracy and local government apparatchiks who also wish to get their noses in the potentially lucrative trough at Holyrood.

So far the majority of Scots have been sceptical as to the benefits of independence and have refused to vote for it. Unlike the people of Kosovo, the Scots have the right to decide. So where is the denial of self determination?

During the Thatcher years the labour movement establishment in Scotland used the demand for devolution as a way of covering up their complicity with the Tories' attacks on working class living standards and as a useful means to hinder the emergence of a British-wide class struggle fightback. In this diversion they had the tacit or open support of most of the Scottish Establishment. When the working class did mount a generalised fightback, in the miners' strike and over the Poll Tax, the politics of Home Rule were shown to be either irrelevant or worse than useless in respect of promoting a successful outcome.

Of course support for the independence option has been growing in the working class, particularly amongst the young. Given the continuing attack on the welfare state under Blair, the daily diet of pro-Scottish/blame-the-English propaganda churned out in the Scottish media over the last 15 years, and the failure of the socialist left to effectively organise for socialist politics, is this surprising?

It is important to note that there has never been much enthusiasm within the working class in Scotland for the demand for independence or even devolution. No strikes, and not much in the way of participation in demonstrations. The support

for the "Scottish dimension" in politics has generally been passive acceptance of the Labour bureaucracy's demand for Home Rule.

What socialists in Scotland should be considering is not how we harness support for independence and give it a red tinge, but rather how we organise to prevent the justified anger among working class youth at their social conditions being diverted into the dead end of Scottish separation.

The purpose of socialist organisation is to aid the struggle for working class self-emancipation from the domination of capital. Socialists believe that this self-emancipation involves the direct producers taking control of the means of production and democratically planning production in order to satisfy human need. Such planning has nothing in common with Stalinist command economies or the capitalist nationalisations promoted by, among others, "old Labour". Socialist planning is based on the self-activity of the working class, or, to be more exact, socialist planning is the self-activity of the working class taken to the level where the working class is in power.

Any activity we collectively undertake should have as its aim the strengthening of working class self activity and the concomitant increase in proletarian solidarity and socialist consciousness such self-activity brings.

Working class self-activity can be defined as the situation present when workers come together to collectively pursue an aim which has an objectively anti-capitalist dynamic, e.g. wage rise, better housing, defence of facilities, defence of democratic rights, etc. Such self-activity of necessity tends towards democratic forms of organisation.

The state and its various agencies including the trade union bureaucracy recognise such proletarian self-activity as their deadly enemy, to be co-opted, corrupted, divided, diverted and where necessary forcibly repressed. In this period of capitalist decline it is extremely unlikely that any section of the Establishment will promote any movement fighting for significant democratic reform. It is just too

dangerous. Any reform instigated from above will have as a central part of its purpose the prevention of proletarian self-activity. The form may seem democratic but the essence will be "change" in order to attempt to reinforce working-class atomisation.

The demand for Scottish independence does not promote working class self-activity but is rather an attempt by a section of the Scottish Establishment to use working class support for their own narrow purpose. Some would argue that a sovereign Scottish Parliament is a step forward for democratic rights. I would contend that it is a step backwards, since the voluntary union with England and Wales is being ruptured for no good cause. If an increase in democratic rights is desired (and such an increase is essential to the struggle for socialism), we should be advocating a British republic with annual parliaments as part of our fight for a workers' government. Such a demand would have an anti-capitalist dynamic and help provide a focus for a fighting unity of the British working class.

At present in Britain the self-activity of the working class is at a very low level. The old forms of working class organisation have been



shown to be inadequate to combat the attack of capital while the new forms have yet to materialise, although the local action committees formed during the miners' strike and the poll tax struggle can be viewed as precursors of bigger and better things to come.

As global capital organises itself to pursue its interests through such bodies as the IMF, World Bank, WTO and the various trade blocs (European Union, NAFTA, ASEAN), the importance and role of the old nation state has tended to diminish. Ambitious local elites have attempted to form more direct links with transnational capital and thus further enrich themselves. This process can be seen in Spain, Italy, Belgium, Canada etc., as well as in the UK. Given the coming slump, this project offers nothing to the mass of work-

ers other than continuing austerity and increased national antagonism.

To champion the call for Scottish independence is to champion the demand of a section of the Scottish establishment which wishes a more direct and lucrative relationship with global capital, mediated through Brussels rather than London. Their project of an independent Scotland in Europe makes promises to Scottish workers but offers nothing in reality. For the socialist left in Scotland to continue to tail-end this project is disastrous.

The demise of Stalinism and evident bankruptcy of social democracy, combined with a growing awareness among large sectors of the population that capitalism offers them little in the way of prospects for a better life, provides the potential for a regeneration of genuine socialist consciousness and organisation. What is necessary is dedication to the process of building a coherent democratic united socialist organisation throughout Britain as part of the regeneration of socialist organisation throughout Europe and the world.

*Sandy McBurney, secretary,
Glasgow Marxist Forum*

"United left" slates are sectarian!

THE Labour Party is a bourgeois workers' party. The "modernisers" project is clearly to turn it into a straightforwardly bourgeois party. But the recent evolution of the Labour Party is not simply a realisation of this project. Since Kinnock was elected leader the pace and direction of change has been conditioned by the influence of "new realist" trade union bureaucrats. The freedom that the "modernisers" have had to pursue their anti-working class project and weaken links with organised labour has been made possible by the cowed and cowardly nature of the trade union bureaucrats. This in turn is a result of the defeated and battered condition of the workers' movement.

Essentially the Labour Party

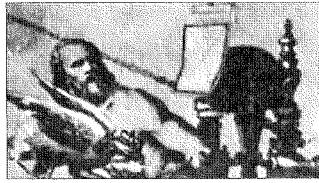
remains a bourgeois workers' party. It has not reached the turning point in the decline of working-class content that makes the victory for openly bourgeois politicians like Blair inevitable.

What is vital in any perspective is a resurgence of class confidence and combativity. This will be expressed through the organised labour movement, though the outcome (split, shift in the leadership etc.) is impossible to predict. The process of forming a revolutionary current in the working class can only take place by engaging in existing working class struggles and using these to renew, transform and transcend existing working class organisations. It is important to recognise that Blair is the product of the defeat of our class. The key aim of

Marxists now must be to gain working class political representation. This cannot be achieved through "united left" slates unaccountable to the class in any way. Propaganda for independent working class representation is not only passive if pursued through these means, but is actually undermined since such unaccountable candidates avoid the problems of the class's present consciousness.

The problem boils down to making propaganda for a new Labour Party while the old one still exists. In the unions we should argue for the bureaucrats to break with Blair within the Labour Party, not break with the party itself: to do otherwise would not be so much premature as sectarian.

Duncan Morrison



Exchange, solidarity and indifference

The Contract of Mutual Indifference: Political Philosophy after the Holocaust, by Norman Geras (Verso).

DRAWING on the experiences of the Holocaust, Geras casts in wider terms the problem of the real and painful failure of the "passive bystander" to come to the aid of Jews at the time of their greatest need. It cannot be assumed that the problem of indifference to others is a unique feature of the Holocaust: it is a widespread and general feature of everyday life. If we are not prepared to help others in the time of their need, we cannot reasonably expect others to come to our aid in times of our need. This is what Geras calls the "contract of mutual indifference."

But what is the evidence for the allegation that people are "in general" indifferent? Geras himself stresses that he is describing a phenomenon which is not "universal", but only sufficiently widespread to support his thesis. It is not an argument which can be sustained without further investigation. It is certainly true that the failure of many people — who knew, or must have known, or should have known, what was happening to the Jews — to come to their aid is well documented. But as Geras acknowledges, the actual historical picture was complicated by the fact that there were some at least who went out of their way to care for their fellow human beings. An understanding of indifference should be able to grasp the picture as a whole and not merely one aspect of it, even if this aspect is a prevalent one.

However, it is with the introduction of the notion of contract that the major difficulties arise. What exactly is the status of this "contract of mutual indifference" — that if

we are not prepared to help others in times of their need, we cannot reasonably expect others to come to our aid in times of our need? Is it a (regrettable) fact of human nature that people will only give aid on the basis of exchange, and does this fact of human nature serve to explain indifference in terms of the breakdown of natural reciprocity? Or is it a destructive result of a society based on the exchange of commodities, so that even aid is governed by exchange principles? Geras seems to plump

firmly for the former. But what is the evidence for this "fact of human nature"?

Are there not plenty of examples of people giving aid without any hope of reciprocity? In the case of the Shoah, it is particularly unfortunate that the contract of mutual indifference was a classic antisemitic argument for not coming to the aid of Jews: since the Jews since time immemorial have only thought of themselves and have never come to the aid of others, why should others now come to the aid of the Jews? We can trace this "moral logic" back to the early days of "the Jewish Question".

Geras wishes to cultivate a "duty to aid" others in times of distress, but on the basis of rational self-interest. If I do not come to the aid of others, then others will not come to the aid of me and I shall be left without friends when I need them. This "rational choice" model of the duty to aid stipulates that the decision to aid another is necessarily based on a rational choice that it is worth aiding the other since the other will then, and only then, aid me when I need

it. But consider the following: a) what rational interest do I have in aiding another if it results in my own death? b) why should I aid this particular other if this other has a record of not aiding me? c) why should I aid this particular other if my belief is that this other will be unable or unwilling to aid me in the future? Is it not likely that where aid is most needed — for the pariah who is not equal — exchange theory would be a kiss of death for aid?

There is a further problem

"In modern civil society indifference is structured within, and by, a system of exchange which subordinates meeting the needs of others to respect only for their rights."

in the enforcement of this contract. Geras puts his faith in "robust and democratic" political institutions to enforce the contract. But how are these "robust and democratic" institutions to arise if

they are themselves grounded in a society of mutual indifference? And how are they to enforce the terms of this "contract"? Are they to absolve those who fail to give aid when they themselves have not been aided? Or are they to force those who have been aided to aid in return? Or are they to demand that everyone gives some aid to some people some of the time?

Political institutions are not only enforcers of contracts, but also powers in their own right with their own capacity to come to the aid of others. During the Holocaust, decisions were taken by the Allied governments not to publicise the plight of the Jews until the war was over and not to come to the aid of the Jews except in terms of the general war effort. These were political decisions which doubtless had to do with a number of factors: a certain military logic (bombing the

Auschwitz camp would not help the war effort), antipathy to Jews within certain political circles, and another important factor for this discussion — the traditional political framework of nationalism which demands indifference to what nation states do to their own subjects within their own territorial borders. The equivocations of mutual concern and indifference are as much present within the nationalist framework of modern politics as they are within the exchange framework of modern commerce.

Having reached this point, we might be prompted to ask whether we need to understand indifference in terms of contract at all? Should we perhaps abandon notions of contract altogether? While Geras' model is perhaps too constraining to assist in our understanding of indifference and the duty to aid others, we will still need to understand the relation between reciprocity and indifference. One possible avenue for exploration is to explore the indifference of others in the context of the failings of reciprocity rather than Geras' reciprocity of failure.

In a functioning exchange model, respect for the rights of others is combined with indifference to the needs of others insofar as those needs are not covered by their rights. In modern civil society, indifference is not total: indeed the world market creates connections between people which never previously existed. But indifference is structured within and by a system of exchange which subordinates meeting the needs of others to respect only for their rights. When the system of exchange breaks down, as it did when Jews were robbed of their very right to have rights in Nazi-occupied Europe, the resulting picture is no less equivocal.

On the one hand, the framework of mutual respect of rights is abolished in a frenzy of mutual fear and suspicion; on the other hand, new forms of solidarity can emerge not only within pariah peoples (eg, among Jews themselves) but even between Jews and non-Jews. There is some evidence for this within occupied Europe, even if the solidarity had to be hard fought for and was extremely precarious in the face of all manner of disintegrative pressures. But it was enough to reveal that, as a social phenomenon, solidarity is not only a contractual relation; it also arises beyond the threshold of contract.

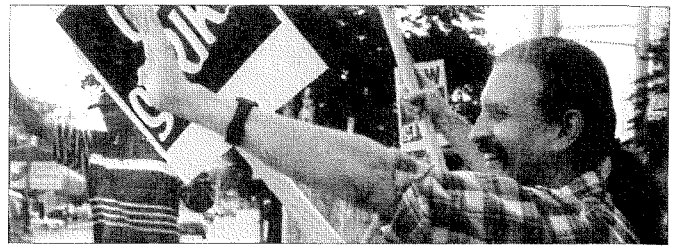
Another possible avenue for exploration is to use Geras' theory of the "contract of mutual indifference" in another, perhaps opposite, way: as something to be overcome by a theory of aid which, if it is not anti-contractual, is not constrained within this contractual frame. In other words, could we not turn Geras' theory round to investigate the ways in which the contractual theory of the duty to aid is surpassed rather than confirmed? The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas provides one alternative: that my duty to the other is unconditional and has nothing to do with the expectation of reciprocity — only with the pre-social face of the Other. But Levinas does not so much surpass the contractual model, which has the virtue of being a social theory, as negate it in the name of a pre-social relation to the other. We need to understand the relations between exchange and indifference in a way that neither locks it in a contractual model of sociality (Geras) nor removes it altogether from the arena of social relations as a purely moral "ought" (Levinas).

The equivocal relationship of indifference to reciprocity may require a third possible avenue of exploration: one in which the theorist moves beyond an analysis of indifference in terms of reciprocity to seek an understanding of indifference which takes into account the confusing and conflicting evidence for its existence within a wider theoretical framework. The starting point for this enquiry is to understand

the nature and extent of indifference before speaking of a remedy. How then might we begin to characterise indifference? Indifference in this context refers to two very distinct phenomena. On the one hand it is passivity, a state of non-action; on the other hand it is an explanation for that passivity in terms of a character failing. That the same word covers two separate phenomena is an indication of the tendency to assume that there is an inseparable connection between the two. But there may be all manner of reasons why people do not go to the aid of others — other than that of indifference. Their actions may stem more from antipathy than from apathy; they may believe for instance, that the victims are not worthy of aid. Conversely, they may have the best of motives, but fail to act because of terror or from a belief that they are unable to offer effective aid despite their feeling of shame or sorrow that they can do nothing. They may also believe that there are other ways in which they can act which will be more efficacious — for example, the Polish armed resistance to the Nazis rather than direct aid to Jews. Most likely, there may be a mixed and confused amalgam of motives for not coming to the aid of others.

Clearly Geras has broached a topic which will fuel a much needed debate, and we would not wish simply to throw out his own theory of the "contract of mutual indifference". Unless we open up the question of indifference, however, there is the danger that we may succumb either to a false optimism or to a false pessimism which colours and reinforces any argument we make. Geras, understandably, begins writing in a mood of profound pessimism, but ends making a determined but muted attempt to be optimistic on the basis of a revitalised system of reciprocity. The remedy, however, only makes sense if the grounds for his original pessimism were less 'general' than he himself makes out, and if it addresses the problems of indifference which inhere within reciprocity itself.

Robert Fine and Sarah Sturdee



Lean times

Workers in a lean world: unions in the international economy, by Kim Moody. Verso.

THREE snippets give an indication of the material Kim Moody covers in his latest book:

- Workers on the General Motors assembly line used to work for 45 seconds out of every minute. Today they are in motion for 57 seconds a minute.

- At the Opel car plant in East Germany internal contracting has resulted in 700 workers being employed by 28 different contractors. In the VW plant in Argentina workers from 24 different firms work side by side in the same facility making the same cars. The contract labour hire firm Manpower Inc has replaced General Motors as the USA's largest employer.

- More than half of Australian companies use video and electronic surveillance of their employees. Monitoring phone calls, internet and e-mail usage is normal.

Lean production, a model inspired by Japanese manufacturing capital, has become an international phenomenon. Its beachheads were General Motors New United Motor Manufacturing Inc (NUMMI) plant in California, CAMI in Canada, Opel in Germany, Nissan's Sunderland plant and Renault's Cleon plan. The centrepiece of the system is the introduction of teams, and its features are restructuring work methods, downsizing, work intensification, flexibility, outsourcing, and overtime.

Two examples stand out. The Renault blue collar workforce at Boulogne-Billancourt was 35,000 when the plant was closed down as a precursor to introducing the lean system. When it re-opened at Cleon it employed 5,567 workers, with much of the parts production moved to other plants. After

GM introduced the NUMMI system in the mid 1980s, each vehicle took a total of 21 hours to produce compared to the average 43 hours under the old system. Moody's colleagues at *Labor Notes*, Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter, named this system "management by stress".

Team work streamlines production by drawing on the knowledge of the workers to do the streamlining — the "deliberate gathering in of all the great mass of traditional knowledge, which in the past had been in the heads of workmen", just as it was advocated by the early 20th century advocate of "scientific management" FW Taylor.

The sad fact is that many workers see no other alternative but to assist their employers compete to bring wages and conditions down in order to compete against workers in other plants. One GM worker described it: "Given an opportunity to 'bid' against outside suppliers to keep work, many members spent countless hours analysing the work process to develop innovative proposals to reduce cost and improve quality and service."

The pattern is to get unions to first agree to co-operate in modernisation then turn on the union demanding increased flexibility, a list of lean production style changes, contracting out, downsizing, increased workloads and new work schedules. In the developed world union leaders have embraced a new "realism" of competitive business considerations. Co-operation with management is the means to that end, and partnership with national or regional capital is the road to employment stabilisation. As a strategy this has demonstrably failed. The results are increased unemployment, casualisation, lower real wages, lower living standards, increased income

Identity and doubt

inequality and pervasive uncertainty about the future.

Moody calls for a new international social-movement unionism, arguing that it has already been born in Korea, South Africa, Brazil and the more industrialised parts of the third world. New layers of union activists have also emerged in the United States in a number of localised union campaigns, in starting the Labor Party in 1996, and in the new AFL-CIO leadership. Critical to the new unionism is the fight for union democracy and leadership accountability, membership activation and involvement, commitment to union growth and recruitment and to reaching out to other sectors and organisations of the working class.

What Moody doesn't consider is how such a social-movement unionism might connect with, or in the case of the US, develop with a political party of the working class. This a book about the political economy of the working class, but not about politics. Political parties, other than governing labour parties, the Democrats and the formative American Labor Party, are not discussed. The need for working-class socialist political parties is not raised. There is also some skimming over the difference between union leaders, working class leadership and political leadership. At times they are treated separately, at other times interchangeably, indicative of a lack of clarity about the role of each.

If the argument of the book — that lean production and market regulation are the cause of the race to the bottom — then any effective alternative must be based on rejecting accommodation to those forces. The repackaged social democratic claims of a third way, a way of ameliorating class division in order to produce mutually acceptable change are illusory. To endeavour to convince workers and union activists of the possibilities that improved living standards can result from this collaborative practice is to build false hopes and turn a blind eye to what is really happening in the workplace and in working class communities across the globe.

Tony Brown

Eye of the Cricket, by James Sallis. No Exit Press.

THE last 10 years or so has seen the revival of the American crime novel. The quality and weight of recent writing bears comparison with the days of Chandler and Hammett. The notion that such a popular form can be a vehicle for serious and even radical ideas about society is at the heart of the work of writers like Walter Mosley and Sara Paretsky. At the dark and dangerous end of the pool there are the stunning novels of the self-styled "mad dog" of American crime, James Ellroy.

James Sallis deserves to be considered in the same company. *Eye of the Cricket* is the fourth in his series of Lew Griffin novels. Griffin is a black intellectual, a teacher of French and Literature and a writer of crime novels.

The book opens with Griffin responding, half in fear, half in hope, to the latest lead in the search for his son who disappeared without trace years earlier. We are not allowed to settle on this plotline too long before he becomes involved in two further searches — for Shon Delaney, the son of a neighbour, and Danny, son of his long-time police friend Don Walsh.

These stories are interwoven skilfully but lazily against the background of a cold naturalistic portrait of New Orleans. As a piece of noir writing it presses all the right buttons. It is a gripping, engaging page-turner.

In substance, however,

this is more than a crime novel, and Sallis' intentions go beyond suspense. If there is a rational core to post-modernism then maybe it's possible to find it in novels like this. The hero lives in a world where there are many realities, many truths. It isn't that there is no "reality", but Sallis does insist that it can only be found by piecing together the fragments, seeing it from all sides.

The crime novel, of course, lends itself to this approach without having to pay the price in coherence or purpose. At its best it is a genre where solutions are sought but the search is complex, broken, strewn with blind alleys, wild-goose chases and never more than partially successful. Sallis makes great use of these liberties to entice us into his world of ideas and doubt.

The hero of his book, for example, also writes crime novels in which the protagonist is Lew Griffin. The lead to Griffin's son turns out to be a down-and-out who claims to be the famous writer Lew Griffin and can support it with a faultless grasp of the plotlines of his books. There is much cross-referencing, not only to crime writing, but to literature in general, and it never seems forced, given Griffin's "day-job".

The references to writers like Joyce and Beckett reflect the real source of Sallis' inspiration. The story is less a search for David Griffin and much more a search for self, a study of identity. The form, however, and the pace and

rhythm required of good crime writing, make the whole enterprise accessible and entertaining. The narrative drive isn't lost because Sallis is raising ideas, and yet you are involved in the reflection as well as the search.

The question of identity, and indeed identity politics' clearly form part of James Sallis' concerns. His central character is black, and racism is part of the fabric of the society in which he moves, sometimes openly discussed, more often taken as read. Lew Griffin recalls at one point in the novel how it came to him with the force of revelation that America's racial problem has never been so much racial as fundamentally (in this supposedly classless society) a class problem. It is hard to avoid comparisons with Walter Mosley's reluctant hero Easy Rawlins.

All this has led to the assumption that Sallis himself is black, whereas he is, in fact, a middle-aged white. In a recent interview he was assertive about this: "To hold that a middle-class, middle-aged white man can only write about middle-aged, middle-class white men certainly limits the prospect for any kind of interesting writing... to say that I can't write from the point of view of a black man or a woman is absurd: that's what I do. I may not write well but I can surely try".

He tries, and all in all he succeeds. Enough at any rate to make me want to read the earlier Lew Griffin novels.

Patrick Murphy

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State murder draws nearer: Save Mumia Abu-Jamal!

by Alan McArthur

THE MILLION FOR MUMIA campaign aims to bring a million people on to the streets of Philadelphia on 24 April as part of the urgent drive to massively step up the campaign to save framed radical activist and journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal from being murdered by the US state.

On October 29 1998 the Pennsylvania Supreme Court denied Mumia's appeal for a new trial, and State Governor Tom Ridge announced that his "pencil is sharpened" to sign a new death warrant. This was Mumia's last chance to appeal. The death warrant could be signed any day — the state killing could be scheduled for as early as May.

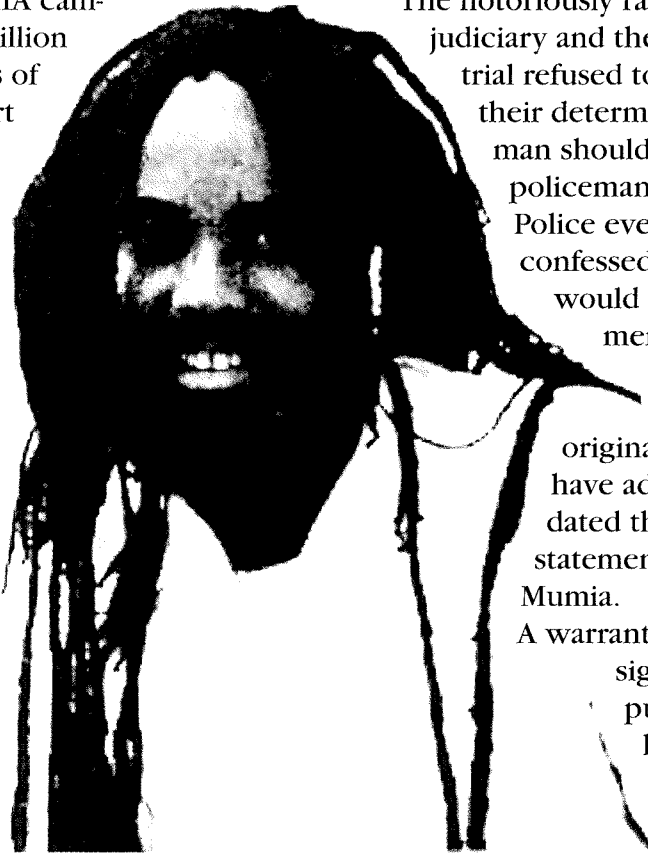
The Million for Mumia march — which will be joined by hip hop and rap artists, trade unionists, international delegates, prominent political figures and religious leaders — is part of the growing international campaign to stop them murdering Mumia and gain him a new trial.

Former Black Panther and MOVE activist Mumia was accused of shooting Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner in 1981, even though five witnesses from five different vantage points said that another man shot Faulkner then fled.

Mumia was found at the scene, shot in the chest by Faulkner. He was beaten by police, bundled into a police van, and then driven around for a while in the hope that he would bleed to death.

When Mumia awoke in surgery, handcuffed to the bed, a smiling cop was standing on his urine bag, forcing urine back into his body in an attempt to burst his bladder.

There was no evidence that Mumia's gun had been fired. No other forensic evidence was produced.



The notoriously racist Pennsylvania police and judiciary and the all-white jury at Mumia's trial refused to let facts like that affect their determination that a political black man should die for the shooting of a policeman.

Police even claimed that Mumia had confessed to the killing, but they would not explain why they did not mention this until two months after the event and Mumia's arrest. A number of the original prosecution witnesses have admitted that police intimidated them into making lying statements that helped convict Mumia.

A warrant for Mumia's execution was signed in 1995 — but massive public opposition stayed the hands of the state executioners. It can be done again.

The police and the press are whipping up a lynch mob atmosphere against Mumia. Time is short. But not too short: enough people can still be mobilised to stop them killing Mumia.

There have been demonstrations, rallies and benefit gigs right across the world — from Holland to South Africa to Britain. There is a growing international campaign to stop this political state butchery. We must make it into such a massive campaign that they cannot ignore it.

What you can do:

- Write to Pennsylvania State Governor Tom Ridge, Room 225, State Capitol Building, Harrisburg, PA. 17120, USA
- Send a message of support to Mumia, at AM 8335, SCI Greene, 1040 East Roy Furnham Highway, Waynesburg, PA. 15370, USA
- Get campaign materials and the latest information by calling 0171-326 0353, or visit the Save Mumia website: <www.mumia.org>
- Workers' Liberty can supply a speaker and video for your union branch or students' union. Tel: 0171-207 3997.

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