

# The LENINIST

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Supplement on  
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## Euros call cops

**T**HE FORMATION of the Communist Party of Great Britain, on July 31 1920, was the greatest achievement of the working class in our country. With it, the working class is everything; without it, nothing. Only with a Communist Party can the working class go from being a slave class under capitalism to the class that will build socialism and liberate humanity.

Given its aims, given that it organised the best, most advanced, most self sacrificing section of our working class, the formation of the CPGB was a far higher achievement than the TUC and Labour Party put together, certainly incomparably more important than the petty bourgeois left organisations and crisis ridden rumps of 'official communism' that pass themselves off as 'parties' today.

On this, its 70th anniversary, we salute the cadres and militants who founded and built our Communist Party: a Party which has had a heroic history and served our working class well in many great struggles.

However, as is well known, over many decades those who wormed their way to the top of the Party sapped, through a thousand opportunist cuts, the revolutionary line and unity of our Party. Opportunism never stops half way. Tak-

### Occupation of 16 St John Street to mark 70th anniversary of CPGB and expose Euro treachery

ing its cue from counterrevolutionary Gorbachevism in the USSR, the Euro organisation – which illegitimately uses the name CPGB – now joins with the bourgeoisie in its triumphalist campaign of slander against socialism. With one voice they claim that the crisis and ignominious collapse of bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Europe and the USSR represents the demise of Leninism and the 'glorious' victory of the market.

This is a barefaced, contemptible lie. It is not socialism that has failed, it is backward, bureaucratic and formal socialism. It is not Leninism that has failed but 'official communism'; its embrace of the market (capitalism) shows the extent of its bankruptcy and betrayal of the working class. The market only produces wealth for the imperialist monopolies. For the mass of the world's population it means ever increasing exploitation, unemployment, pauperisation and the threat of war. The market long ago outlived any usefulness it might once have had. It represents the past; communism is

the only future worthy of human beings.

Today the process of political liquidation by the Euros has reached a qualitatively new stage: organisational liquidation. In its 70th anniversary year, the Euro leaders are selling off (privatising) the Party's collective property to the highest bidder, in true Thatcherite style, to finance their opportunism.

We cannot allow this to pass without protest. That is why supporters of the Communist Party of Great Britain (*The Leninist*) staged an occupation of 16, St John Street – now sold – on July 27. Although it is the HQ of the Euro organisation, the building was purchased only through a generation of communist work and self sacrifice. It also contains the Party's records and archives – the 'family silver' – which are likewise being sold off to finance opportunism (we promise that after the revolution all those who have taken part in this crime, both selling and buying, will pay for it).

After six hours, having managed to mobilise some 30 of their sup-

porters (who were given Dutch courage by being tanked up on beer and gin), Euro functionaries Ian MacKay and Martin Jacques formally threatened, in the presence of a large police squad, to stage a violent incident. Although our comrades made it perfectly clear that their occupation would cause no damage to premises, equipment or people, under bourgeois law any resistance they offered would have resulted in arrest and criminal proceedings. In the face of this our comrades reluctantly decided to stage a disciplined retreat. Showing their fighting spirit, they withdrew singing *The Internationale*.

The occupation of 16, St John Street on the 70th anniversary of the CPGB was an exemplary action and was more than symbolic. It totally exposed the reliance of the Euros on the bourgeois state machine, their readiness to use the police against revolutionaries. It also shows the determination of our, Leninist, wing of the communist movement to reforge the CPGB on the principles on which it was founded: the principles of

violent revolution, proletarian internationalism and soviet democracy.

The Euros are diametrically opposed to these communist principles in theory and practice; they openly embrace pro-capitalist liberalism and use the enemy's state machine against opponents. They have a right to think what they like. What they do not have a right to do is to sell off assets accumulated purely on the self sacrifice of those dedicated to the cause of communism. The Euros' claim to this collective property exists only in bourgeois law – that is why they turned to the police.

Alone the CPGB (*The Leninist*) stands upon the principles on which our Party was founded, the principles of genuine communism. Our organisation is the legitimate continuation of the Party founded on July 31 1920. Our organisation therefore has a historical, moral and political right to the archives, property and other assets of our Party. Before the working class and revolutionary movement we condemn the Euro cop callers and solemnly demand what is ours.

National Committee  
CPGB (*The Leninist*), July 29 1990

## 7th Summer Offensive triumph

**I**N THE presence of our friend and honoured guest, David Kitson, comrade John Bridge, national secretary, opened our final Summer Offensive meeting, by pinpointing the counterrevolutionary nature of developments in the USSR and Eastern Europe, and the need for genuine communist parties throughout the world, not least in Britain, where the Euros are now liquidating the Party's assets to finance their opportunism. In relationship to this historic betrayal the comrade praised the confident and disciplined manner in which Leninist comrades occupied the Euros' London HQ on July 27. He also announced the appointment of comrade Mark Fischer as circulation manager of *The Leninist*, to ensure our aim of doubling circulation was achieved by the end of the year.

The comrade said that in the forthcoming general election, only

### On Sunday July 29 the Communist Party of Great Britain (*The Leninist*) celebrated, in Central London, both the 70th anniversary of the founding of our Party and our 7th Summer Offensive

the opportunist left, and not the working class, will have illusions in Kinnock. Because of this the CPGB (*TL*) will campaign for spoilt ballot papers under the slogan 'fight whoever wins'.

The fight for programme is part and parcel of the fight to organise the working class vanguard. Hence throughout 1991, announced comrade Bridge, fortnightly seminars will be used for collective preparation of a Draft Programme, which will then be published as the focus for the fight to reforge the Party.

Our Summer Offensives combine our organisational and ideo-

logical struggle. The first "mini-offensive" of *The Leninist* in 1984 coincided with the miners' Great Strike, which set a benchmark level of self sacrifice from which revolutionaries must start if they wish to lead militant workers. We have come a long way since then. Our 5th Summer Offensive raised £10,473 in 1988, and last year we topped £20,000.

The 7th Offensive got off to a slow start, in part due to the expenses and work associated with the Corfu international school and our £2,000 desk top computer appeal in April and May. Initial pledges at the June 3 launch meet-

ing totalled £14,300 – only marginally more than last year. By mid July this had risen to a total of £18,700 (including comrade AJ, the first reader to respond to our Summer Offensive appeal, with £100).

By the July 29 meeting the total stood at £19,400, splendid but not good enough. In order to reach the £25,000 target, comrade John Bridge announced, the National Committee had extended the Summer Offensive by two weeks. Comrades responded by lifting the total to £25,385, with a top pledge of £2,700 and 11 of more than £1,000 – making the comrades 'honorary

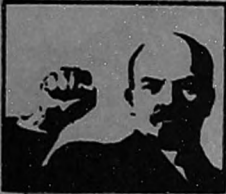
Turks', setting a fine example to our TKP comrades, whose 14th Summer Attack is beginning as our Offensive ends.

Because of the two week extension we are asking readers to use this last minute opportunity to join our Summer Offensive and take the total to over £26,000. Comrades, we need your help! We have set ourselves hard tasks. Reforging the CPGB cannot be done solely by criticising the various opportunist/liquidationist tendencies. They are rapidly removing themselves from our ground anyway. The problem we face is practice.

Taking part in the Summer Offensive, putting the needs of the CPGB (*The Leninist*) above your own personal needs, is a vital step on the road to becoming a genuine communist. Take the first step along the road to communism. Take the Summer Offensive to new heights.

Ian Farrell





IN A DRAMATIC move the only non-Militant national committee members of the All Britain Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions have resigned from their responsibilities. Danny Burns (vice chair), Ian Greves (assistant secretary) and Sham Singh (trade union officer) say they found themselves "systematically bypassed" in a way which would "not be possible in any other democratic organisation". For example Sham Singh, as the trade union officer, presumed he would be coordinating the recent trade union conference. Instead it was kept entirely in the hands of Militant.

We do not pretend to have the same politics as Burns, Greaves and Singh. But what their resignations reveal, yet again, are the bureaucratic methods of Militant, methods which do nothing to serve the struggle against the poll tax and, far from being typical of revolutionary organisations, are those of Labourism, which Militant embraces body and soul.

Of course, both the bosses' media, and Militant itself, claim it is a revolutionary organisation. This is untrue. Militant wants to channel the anger of the masses into a general election victory for Neil Kinnock (who has just announced that he sees eye to eye with the world's Number One imperialist George Bush). Why? Because for Militant socialism will come via a Labour Party parliamentary majority and a parliamentary vote.

Naturally, many sincere Militant rank and file activists believe the talk of its leaders about playing by the rules of bourgeois democracy is nothing more than clever politics; that when the hour is ripe they will discard parliamentary niceties and gloriously carry through Britain's October. These comrades are doomed to disappointment. Opportunism has its own logic; it begins with a scratch and ends with gangrene.

As with every other example of opportunism throughout history, because Militant is committed in *theory and practice* to reformism and the parliamentary road, it will end up betraying the working class and the struggle for socialism. Already it is doing everything to appear respectable, appear safe. That is why Steve Nally and Militant did nothing to defend the Trafalgar Square demonstration, withdrew their 650 stewards and dismissed the 3,000 who bravely fought back against police attack as "anarchists and lunatics". That is why Militant has welcomed, as a "big improvement", Labour's pledge to tax the working class through a new "system of local rating and taxation" as opposed to the poll tax. And why Militant is determined to end the People's March Against the Poll Tax in a safe, controlled rally rather than a mass demonstration.

*The Leninist* considers the fight against the poll tax to be of the utmost importance. But as genuine revolutionaries we want to mobilise the working class against it in a revolutionary fashion. We know that no permanent gains can be won under capitalism — whether it is administered by the Tories or the Labourites (whether Kinnockite or Militant). The working class can only liberate itself and build a future worthy of humanity through the dictatorship of the proletariat and the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

Hence we do not pin our hopes on *democratising* the ABAPTF at its November conference, as others do. We want to *revolutionise it now*, from below, in the fire of struggle. •The Glasgow-London march must be run by accountable delegates, who must report back daily and be instantly recallable. •Defend it and non-poll tax payers with Workers Defence Corps. •As the struggle develops transform the Anti-Poll Tax Unions into Councils of Action, made up of elected, recallable delegates from local working class political organisations committed to non-payment. •The ABAPTF should consist of recallable delegates from local APTUs and as the struggle develops be transformed into a National Council of Action. •Break the Tories' anti-trade union laws, for an indefinite general strike against the poll tax.

*The Editor*

## LETTERS

### NCP Desertion?

As one of the recently resigned 'lower level members' of the New Communist Party who, according to Ian Mahoney (issue 91), suffers from a streak of 'yellowness', I fully agree with his comments concerning the NCP's Ideological Conference, when he says "The idea that the political/ideological problems of the NCP — problems rooted in the organisation's foundation, in its practice since its foundation, in its very world view since foundation — would be resolved in a single day, in six hours, was ludicrous. To suggest otherwise was always politically naive in the extreme".

What is even more ludicrous and politically naive in the extreme is that Ian Mahoney apparently believes that the readers of *The Leninist* are stupid enough to accept his silly assertions that we "critical NCP elements" ever took such an attitude.

In claiming that our departures represented "dispirited desertion" and had removed any "potential for a coherent left challenge to his [Trevett's] leadership", he joins Eric Trevett, the general secretary of the NCP, in trying to identify us as an anti-leadership faction.

The only difference is that Trevett did so because he thought his status was being threatened, whereas Mahoney seems to do it in order to inflate his political image. At least, I can't think of any other reason why he should raise his Aunt Sallies and thereby detract from any potential *The Leninist* might have for making a useful contribution to the revolutionary movement.

But what I find really extraordinary is how the remarkable ex-National Organiser of the NCP, John Chamberlain, whom Ian Mahoney seems to so much admire, ever found himself in the NCP, which Mahoney describes as having been hurriedly formed "for purely organisational, not political reasons" and which is "organically incapable of self reform".

**Jerry Spring**  
West London

### USSR

Although he admits that the Soviet bureaucracy has carried out progressive acts, Alan Merrik (*The Leninist* No92) apparently denies that the bureaucracy itself has a progressive nature. To substantiate this point and his original statement (No90) that the bureaucracy "was never progressive", he gives an analogy with progressive actions of an "unequivocally reactionary" capitalism in expanding production and declares; "We must view the bureaucracy through the same eyes."

Apparently, for comrade Merrik, the question of capitalist private property relationships, and socialised property relations that have prevailed in the Soviet Union does not enter into the question being discussed; one can abstractly and superficially compare the 'progressive' aspects of 'reactionary' capitalism with that of a bureaucracy based upon a socialised property relationship. The *class* nature of the economy is of no consequence when determining the progressiveness or otherwise of the bureaucracy.

It is precisely the fact that the bureaucracy is based upon a socialised property relationship, and this same bureaucracy has,

despite its brutal and dictatorial methods, been responsible for nurturing and developing this economy, which gives the bureaucracy its progressive nature. If, as comrade Merrik says, "We judge the progressive nature of society by its ability to develop the productivity of labour", (a disputable point) then the bureaucracy was developing a profoundly progressive society in the course of its five year plans; or is this a prohibitive empirical statement to make?

On the basis of the scientific study of the bureaucracy, we have known that it conflicts with its socialised economic base; that its long term interest and trajectory is toward the restoration of capitalism. Not because of some abstract ideological preference for capitalist ethics or morality, but concretely, because the material interests of the bureaucracy is better served through a capitalist class relationship.

However, despite this correct scientific evaluation of the nature and future of the bureaucracy, this same bureaucracy has, despite its limitations and the 'relative fetter' its bureaucratic nature has imposed on the Soviet economy, been responsible, willingly or not, for an historically unprecedented growth of an economy and modern society.

The bureaucracy, based on a historically progressive economy and society, has been compelled to adopt a progressive role, despite its reactionary anti-working class attitude, which is reflected in the duality of its actions. History appears to be resolving the bureaucracy's contradictory role in its favour — however, the working class has yet to have its say.

**P Conlon**  
South London

### Trotskyism

Ian Mahoney in his breathtaking sweep across 70 years of communist history, brands Trotskyism as "an impotent, left liquidationist split from the world communist movement" (reviews, No92). It would be interesting to hear his grounds for this. The jibe about liquidationism was first used in 1923 by the Stalin faction, already looking to isolate Trotsky and to deflect criticism of the setbacks in Germany.

Trotsky and his followers did not 'split' from the world communist movement, they were purged, imprisoned, exiled, exterminated. Is this what Mahoney means by left liquidationism?

It is easy enough to pick holes in the present day shambles that passes for much of the 'Trotskyist' movement, and then mix this up with a caricature of Trotsky's positions. The Leninist opposition to 'official' communism is but a recent development; opposed to the bureaucracy, for political revolution but strangely bitterly hostile to the one tendency which consistently opposed bureaucracy and all its betrayals of Marxism.

I think *The Leninist* should explain its own antecedents, or at least where it stands on key political questions of the '20s and '30s.

**Mike Martin**  
Sheffield

### POW

I would like to ask those who produce this paper and its readership to support Irish political prisoners even more than ever. The plight I would like to highlight is the attack

on remand status political prisoners within the British jail system.

In 1985 it started using the same policy, only it was aimed at second generation younger political prisoners. It tried to isolate us and force us to integrate with pro-British loyalist/fascist terrorists. This conflict centred on Magiligan jail, in the middle of nowhere. In response the British NIO imperialists met with jail bombs, shootings, stabbings, scaldings, beatings and confinement. Then jail destruction, both of property and its mercenary personnel.

The middle stage saw the withdrawal of all prisoners from jail visits. It got to the stage of only six prisoners being allowed on a landing at a time, a riot squad on 24 hours standby. The jail totally divided in two, and when even a teacher or a doctor tried to give you your democratic rights they were intimidated.

In the end, the younger Irish republican/socialist generation weren't burnt out as the British hoped. We withstood the attack. The effects were the withdrawal of Irish republican/socialist POWs back to Long Kesh.

So, comrades, today's attacks are nothing new. The British imperialists want to criminalise us, to de-politicise our struggle against its anti-working class occupation that is assisted by reformist collaborationist self-interested groupings.

**Gerard MacQuoid**  
ex-Republican Socialist POW

### Poll Tax

Tooting Anti-Poll Tax Union recently held a public meeting to discuss and explain the ramifications of the court summonses received by some residents in Wandsworth.

Two prominent issues arose throughout the evening. Firstly, a rather short debate took place as to whether or not the Labour Party's roof tax would in any way be radically different from the Tory's poll tax. Comrades from the Unemployed Workers Charter argued that there should be no more taxes on the working class in whatever form.

This was predictably rebuffed by *Militant* supporters at the meeting; not publicly, it must be added, but by heavy sighs and loud tutting! As to the Socialist Workers Party and the Revolutionary Communist Group, no one actually spoke against the UWC, or in favour.

More revealing of the particular politics of these groups was their attitude to calling for strike actions on the day of each court hearing. Excuses were given that this approach had been tried before and hadn't worked, and that we should consider only action that was 'achievable'.

Surely, as revolutionaries we should be providing a lead for the working class. This does not mean starting with what is 'achievable', but what is necessary to win a particular dispute or campaign.

**Gareth Phillips**  
South London

Note: Letters have been shortened due to lack of space. For political security we have changed certain names, addresses and details.

### WRITE OR RING

If you would like to reply to any of these letters, raise questions or comment on articles in *The Leninist* please write to The Editor, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX. Or phone us on 01-431 3135.

Six month subscription rates: Britain and Ireland £8; Europe £11; Rest of World £13 (airmail £20.50). Annual subscription rates: Britain and Ireland £16 (Institutions £26); Europe £22 (Institutions £32); Rest of World £26, airmail £41 (Institutions £36, airmail £46). Back issues: Issues 1-6 (theoretical journal) £1 each plus 25p p&p. Other issues 50p plus p&p. Cheques payable to November Publications Ltd. Printed by: Multiline Systems Ltd, 22-24, Powell Road, London E5 (081-985 3753). Published by: November Publications Ltd, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX. Copyright August 1990 ISSN 0262-1649



# The corpse stirs

Since the last thing the leadership of the NCP would want is for their subterranean machinations to be made public, we have decided to publish them, and challenge them to an open debate

IT TAKES a lot to provoke any sign of life from an organisation as moribund as the New Communist Party. We were therefore surprised to receive a copy of their *Internal Bulletin* of July 16, obviously from a disgruntled member. This contained a reply to our article, 'NCP, RIP', in *The Leninist* of June 8, plus a letter from the Communist Party of Britain, extending the hand of 'communist unity', with a reply from NCP general secretary, Eric Trevett.

"avowed bourgeois" one. Indeed, it cannot, since it has now dropped any pretence at being anything to do with the working class, and has gone cap in hand to imperialism. Nevertheless, the NCP still wants us to embrace the Ethiopian bourgeoisie with comradely "proletarian internationalism". What they mean is no more than their congenial 'pounds, shillings and pence' diplomatic internationalism. Could the NCP's enthusiasm for the reactionary and ailing Ethiopian state

Mike Hicks, sometime CPB general secretary, more often union official (there not being much money in general secretary-ing, nowadays).

We read in the *Internal Bulletin*: "The following letter - dated June 1 1990 - was received from the Communist Party of Britain:

"At the last meeting of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Britain there was a discussion on the question of overcoming the divisions within the Communist movement as a key element in developing the widest possible unity on the left.

"We feel that this is a very important issue which needs to be resolved as part of the struggle to get rid of the Tory government and secure a new type of Labour government...

"As a first step in this direction, the CPB Executive is proposing that a consultative conference should be convened which would be open to individual communists resident in Britain, and former members of the Communist Party who do not belong to any party at the moment.

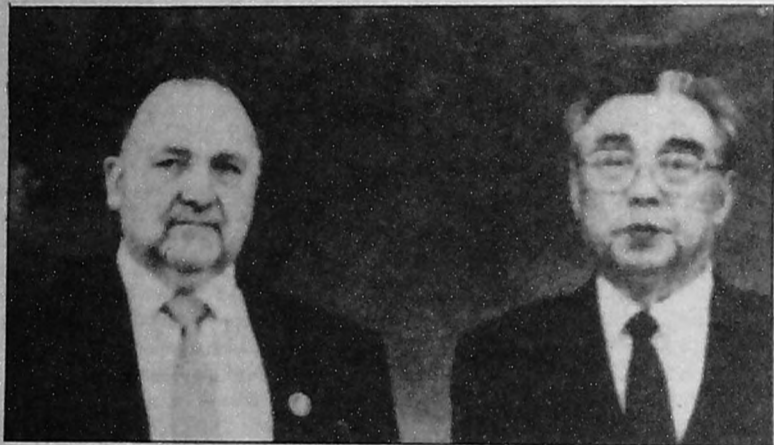
"We would envisage that admission would be by ticket which would be purchased from the head offices of the CPB and the other parties willing to support the initiative. We would suggest that the general secretaries of all parties supporting the initiative should have the same length of time to make an opening and closing statement. And a time would have to be agreed for speakers from the floor.

"In our view, such a conference should be held on a Saturday in London in the Autumn. It is not being suggested that there should be any resolutions before the conference as it is seen as consultative... Mike Hicks"

Salivating right the way down his shirt front, Trevett replies: "we have welcomed your relevant congress resolutions and present initiative ... We also believe that it should be made categorically clear that our respective organisations are in favour of the process of communist unity moving forward via a fusion of forces based on the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism." Which are? The necessity of violent revolution to smash the bourgeois state? Or is it just securing a 'new' Labour government? Whichever, Hicks does not want it to take the form of anything so binding as a resolution.

Trevett does not - and cannot - say, either. His 'principles' are just tinsel decorating an unsavoury desire for an opportunist lash-up. What 'principles' is he talking about that unite the CPB and NCP? Well, let's take the question of programme: the NCP split from the CPGB in 1977 against the *British Road to Socialism*, and the CPB was formed in 1988 precisely in defence of that self-same document. But then, what's a programme between opportunists?

Sean Quinn



Pounds, shillings and pence diplomatic 'internationalism'

Our 'NCP, RIP' critique clearly hit home, to the extent that its Central Committee felt compelled to issue an official statement on it, dated May 14 1990. It is an unprecedented step for such political troglodytes to venture into any sort of polemic, even if they then only keep it for the select few. However - and this is completely in character - the 'answer' skirts round all the central issues; as a result we have written to the NCP challenging it to open debate on this question. We doubt it will accept, after all its Central Committee talks about our being "quite dishonest, informationally inaccurate and ideologically unsound". But it won't tell us why:

"The *Leninist* on June 8 1990 published a quite dishonest, informationally inaccurate and ideologically unsound article on the NCP. As an example, the NCP is criticised for 'printing (uncritically) the policy statements of an avowedly bourgeois government in Addis Ababa, a government it is the task of revolutionaries in that country to overthrow, not support'. Hardly a shining example of proletarian internationalism, at a time when the Ethiopian government is fighting for its very life against the actions of avowedly reactionary and pro-imperialist forces...

"This article indicates that three members of the Central Committee who resigned, one of who was a member of the Political Committee and Editor of the *New Worker*, attended a meeting organised by a known anti-party sect, some six weeks before their resignations and had discussions about our internal Party life, political and ideological positions, without any consultation with the General Secretary, Political Committee, or Central Committee..."

First, note that the NCP does not dispute here the fact that the Mengistu government is an

grubby little fingers in its meagre pot?

The rest of the CC statement, as we see, is little more than a miserable attempt to besmirch those NCP members with independent thought enough to be critical of their own sect, and look to Leninists for constructive debate and answers - something they felt understandably starved of within the ranks of their own 'party'.

And, mark well, the attitude of the NCP leadership is nothing more than a blanket ban on open discussion, something of which it has something to do with the possibility that they still have their has a tradition. When the comrades who went on to form *The Leninist* were expelled from the NCP, its leadership actually passed a resolution making it a disciplinary offence to talk to one of our comrades, the NCP's ex-national organiser!

This has nothing to do with Lenin's concept of discussion, criticism and debate: "Criticism within the limits of the principles of the Party Programme must be quite free ... not only at Party meetings, but also at public meetings. Such criticism, or such 'agitation' (for criticism is inseparable from agitation) cannot be prohibited." (Lenin, quoted in C Silahar, *Party discipline*, p30). No, no, says the NCP - it must be okayed by the general secretary, political committee and central committee first!

A more appropriate quote from Lenin, given the politically corrupt nature of the NCP, follows: "A revolt is a splendid thing when it is the advanced elements who revolt against the reactionary elements." (*Ibid*, p41). The shame was that these 'advanced elements' didn't so much revolt as pack up and leave.

So, after thinning its ranks by a few more 'troublemakers', the NCP looks around for bedfellows new ... and finds one in the rotund form of a certain pro-Gorbachevite

The All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation march to London starts from Glasgow on September 3. *The Leninist* will encourage marchers to take control of the march, by electing a march committee composed of recallable delegates. Also imperative is the organisation of Workers' Defence Corps. In the light of the experience of the March 31 demonstration in Trafalgar Square, we must protect the march from police attack. The defence corps should be drawn from local anti-poll tax unions from the areas the march passes through, as well as marchers themselves. In addition, workers should be encouraged to take strike action as the march passes through their area, building to a nationwide one day general strike when the march reaches London. A demonstration is planned for October 13 to welcome the marchers to London. But the venue for this important event is likely to be Friends Meeting House in Euston, which only holds hundreds. This is another example of the Militant led ABAPTF's reluctance to stage a large rally, coming so soon after its shameful actions at Trafalgar Square in surrendering the field to the police attack. Instead, it is looking for a safe campaign, ending the six week long march with a whimper, rather than a bang. CA

It's open season on Arthur Scargill.

After weeks and weeks of mud-slinging, initiated by Maxwell's Labour Party supporting rag, the *Mirror*, the bosses have lighted on a fraud charge. This is being done via the sort of Soviet 'trade unionist' that the petty bourgeois left seem so fond of these days: one Sergei Masselovitch, brought to Britain by the anti-communist *Soviet Labour Review* and, like the Trotskyites' chum Yakovlev, a fan of the UDM (see p5). Yet what is Scargill guilty of? Of not giving over NUM funds to the state that attacked miners so fiercely in the Great Strike. Such actions increased the strikes effectiveness by keeping funds open to it. It is quite clear that what is going on trial is not just Scargill, but the record of militant trade union struggle in the strike and today. Kinnock's Labour Party is jumping on the bandwagon, looking to sanitise itself through throwing Scargill to the wolves. We say that what the bosses attack Scargill for, he should be praised for: the fact that he kept the funds from their grasp and raised more internationally. But Scargill's role should also be criticised. He is a bureaucrat, however left, and ran the strike in a bureaucratic manner, restraining independent rank and file initiative. But he fought with intransigence and militancy rare in a trade union leader. It is this which is on trial, buried under a ton of filth about 'fraud'. SQ

Hands Off Ireland! recently held a National Organising Committee meeting to determine future strategy, in the wake of the successful Easter Commemoration demonstration. HOI's orientation to the British working class was emphasised, as a break from identifying with their ruling class is essential if the working class of Britain is to liberate itself. HOI! sees future strategy being in the form of strike and boycott action against firms which supply the British occupying forces in Ireland, along the lines of the blacking of the *Jolly George* munitions ship to White forces in Soviet Russia in 1920, or the strike action taken by workers in firms involved with the apartheid regime in the mid '80s. This area of action has never been attempted by the left in Britain. Yet, despite the obvious difficulties, it can be the cutting edge of mobilising the working class as a class against the British state. It was also decided to up the profile of work on political prisoners within HOI!, relating the issues of them, 'guilty' or framed, to Britain's war in Ireland. The importance of increasing the frequency of the publication of the *Hands Off Ireland!* paper to a monthly was agreed. This is seen as of paramount importance to future work. HOI! will be mobilising for the Irish Freedom Movement's troops out march on Saturday August 11, Islington Town Hall, Upper Street, London N1 at 1pm. CO

## During the offensive



Our politics are independent because we ensure that our paper is financially independent: independent of advertisers, rich actors, oil rich states or ruling parties looking for an overseas press agency. That is why our £600 monthly fighting fund is so important. During July only £483 came in. Considering that during this period we were in the thick of our 7th Summer Offensive, no bad effort. But we must ensure that in August we surpass the target in order to make up lost ground. Particular thanks must go to comrades DK, Tom M, LC and AS, who have kept up their regular donations and comrade Ron W who has made his first donation after a short break.



Arthur Scargill is the subject of a state orchestrated plot. All militants must defend him



# Crossing the Rubicon: the British left and Eastern E

The counterrevolutions in Eastern Europe have not only shown the bankruptcy of the 'official communist' leaderships in these states, but of those on the left in Britain who, for one reason or another, welcomed the collapse of bureaucratic socialism



Political, or counterrevolutionaries?

**U**NIQUELY on the left in Britain, the Communist Party of Great Britain (*The Leninist*) has stood resolutely against the euphoria that has greeted events in Eastern Europe and the USSR over the past few years. We have repeatedly stated our position that "whatever the subjective inten-

tions of the masses, objectively what is taking place is a process of counterrevolution", (*The Leninist*, February 5, 1990).

Unfortunately, our correctness has been crushingly underlined.

Before we look at the shameful record of the left in Britain, let us give a brief thumbnail sketch of the current stage of the counterrevolution in some of the former socialist countries. While the process is at its very earliest of stages in Albania and is incomplete in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania, there can be no doubting about Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia or the GDR.

•Poland: Poland fully exposed the anti-communist prejudices of the petty bourgeois left; it also gave us a warning of how this current would respond when the crisis of bureaucratic socialism became generalised. With hardly an exception, they all — Trotskyites, social democrats, Euros — converged on support for the yellow, scab, bosses' outfit, Solidarnosc.

Most sought to deny the fact that Solidarnosc was counterrevolutionary, and urged it on to power. Well, what is this 'workers' movement', as proclaimed by one and all, doing, now it is in government? In the field of the economy, a comprehensive 'stabilisation' programme, agreed with the IMF by the end of 1989, came into effect in January.

'Corrective inflation' — in other words, austerity — was inflicted on the working masses of Poland. The ending of subsidies to basic necessities of life, plus a wage freeze, have depressed real earnings by one third since January 1. As a result industrial output fell by one third (in line with the 13.4% plunge for the first quarter of this year in all Eastern European countries, reported this month) and 400,000 have been thrown out of work.

The capitalist austerity attacks in the economic sphere are producing uneasy shifts in the political. Unsurprisingly, support for the government of Catholic intellectual, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, is waning dramatically. Abstentionism in the first 'free' local elections earlier this year was nearly 60% and opinion polls suggest that only 30% of the population had any support for the government at all. Yet, despite the fact that the workers are beginning to respond to the reality of capitalist restoration with strikes and protests, in the absence of a genuine communist alternative the centre of Polish 'opposition' is shifting significantly to the right, expressed most graphically in the polarisation of the 'political arm' of Solidarity, the Civic Committees, into a 'left' and right wing.

The politics of the 'left' are hardly worth discussing, composed as it is of intellectual loyalists of the Mazowiecki regime, with little or no popular base. At the head of the right stands the increasingly strident Lech Walesa himself, who has deliberately held himself aloof from his erstwhile colleagues in Solidarity as the law of value has started to wreak havoc in Poland. Now he is making his bid for power, on an increasingly authoritarian, semi-fascistic platform. Adam Michnik, the editor of Solidarnosc's daily paper, accuses the man of wanting to be a dictator on the model of Pilsudski. Though John Lloyd in August's *Marxism Today* urges Walesa to take over the presidency — "the china shop needs a bull" — other fans like the *Financial Times* warn over Walesa's "sometimes alarmingly authoritarian" tendencies (Editorial, July 17, 1990).

•Hungary: Back in October of last year, the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (the 'official communist' party) voted to commit collective suicide, changed the name of their party, allowed a plurality of parties and free elections this year. Crucially, Hungary became constitutionally a mixed economy. Despite the suddenness of these developments, the tensions that led to the 'break' had been building up for years.

Under the bureaucratic mismanagement of the HSWP, Hungary's economy lurched from crisis to crisis. Negative 'growth' in industrial production and Europe's largest per capita

debt, necessitating growth rates of 3% to 4% if it was to be serviced — these were the features of the socialist economy in this country. The move to bourgeois plurality and a market economy is therefore an attempt by a section of the old party and state bureaucracy to avoid social explosion and preserve their privileges by converting themselves into a new bourgeoisie.

In free elections early this year, control of government passed to the Democratic Forum, an explicitly bourgeois coalition. Initially committed to a "social market economy" without "Polish style shock treatment", the Forum administration quickly cut the crap and upped the stakes.

Finance Minister, Ferenc Rabar, disclosed in late June that changes projected to take two to three years would now be pressed for by January of next year. After negotiations with the IMF, the government is moving quickly to end subsidies, introduce market prices, peg wages and reform the taxation system in favour of domestic and foreign capitalists.

This Big Bang approach has grown out of frustration with the failure of piecemeal marketisation to produce anything other than 25% inflation and a large premium on hard currency. The consequences of the capitalist roaders' 'impatience' for the Hungarian working class will be barbaric.

•Czechoslovakia: Elections in June resulted in a bourgeois Civic Forum/Public Against Violence coalition to oversee capitalist restoration in Czechoslovakia. Prices for many basic food products were hiked up by a quarter in early July, provoking anxiety among many Czechs.

Although the lines of demarcation are not yet as clearly defined as in Poland, the capitalist austerity measures are producing precisely the same sort of strains in the political sphere. Considerable tension exists between President Vaclav Havel and the government, which has fronted the deeply unpopular economic measures.

Havel and his supporters favour a slow restoration and are concerned with maintaining social peace; other elements in the government believe it must be risked. Either way, the workers are the losers.

•East Germany: Is there any group which is now going to argue that East Germany is not a capitalist country? Economic and currency union with the FDR on July 1 will be politically formalised in December with all German elections.

The bourgeois press and their little Sir Echos on the British left are full of speculation on the consequences of one Germany for what was the GDR, many suggesting it will become like Southern Italy. This is unlikely. There will be big transitional problems in the east but in the longer run it will be Germany's Turkish, Yugoslav etc 'guest' workers that will pay the price. Several thousand have already been made redundant and the Department of Employment has applications pending to sack another 22,000. Many more will follow.

The danger is that the German proletariat, in the absence of a real revolutionary alternative, will have their outlook thoroughly imperialised. The East German workers look like being the exception among the former socialist countries: but any 'affluence' they gain will be from the crumbs of a German imperialist table. A united Germany will not only dominate Europe — east and west — but has the potential to challenge US world hegemony.

## What's Left?

Not a pretty picture, is it? And we predict that things in Eastern Europe will certainly get worse. These countries are in for a dose of capitalism South American style, not Swedish. It is clear that the 'democratic' coalitions that initially replaced bureaucratic socialism



# Europe

are unstable formations and act, in effect, as conduits through which more rightist/semi-fascist forces gain strength and cohesion as austerity bites.

What we are living through is period of historic working class defeats, not simply in the individual countries mentioned, but of the world proletariat. For Leninists, the existence of working class state power, even in a distorted form, was a victory for our class internationally. That is why we gave critical support to the bureaucratic crushing of counterrevolution in Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968 and Poland 1981.

In stark, miserable contrast, the vast majority of the British petty bourgeois left saw these events as political revolutions, which, if allowed to go full term, would have resulted in healthy workers' democracies. Now Gorbachev promised the imperialist powers that no Soviet tanks would intervene this time. So the petty bourgeois revolutionary left - which supported, even raised funds for, Solidarnosc - has got its way. But things have not turned out as they first imagined, have they?

Workers Revolutionary Party. Are you following the Scargill-baiting campaign currently running in the yellow press? Well, remember where you read it first - in the WRP's *Newsline* way back in '83, when it went into hysterics over Scargill's spot-on assessment of Solidarnosc as "an anti-socialist organisation" ... and made damn sure that the man was pilloried by scabs like Hammond at that year's TUC for his simple statement of fact.

In its new rag, *Workers Press*, (July 14), it has a 'party' congress report. In it, the WRP covers the comments of one Bernard Franks, a delegate who raised reservations about the 'party's' Eastern European line: "People have fallen into line behind restorationism", he said. "You can't call that a political revolution." Quite right, Frank, you can't if you are any sort of Marxist. But then there are Marxists, and there are people like the clapped-out anti-communist hack, Cliff Slaughter. Speaking for the WRP leadership he reassured everyone that "the political revolution ... has begun because the mass actions of millions of workers and others brought the collapse of one government after another, and one Stalinist party after another."

So, lots of workers on the streets, demonstrating for the restoration of capitalism, led by explicitly pro-capitalist bourgeois political forces against a workers' state: that, apparently, is the 'political revolution' that Trotsky was talking about all along. Hope that clears things up for you, Frank.

Slaughter smugly goes on: "At the same time as its majority votes for bourgeois democrats, as in Germany this week, thousands of workers take to the streets in lightning strikes for 'guaranteed security of employment' in the much heralded 'market society!'"

Having vomited up the abominable Healy a few years ago, it is a little hard to understand how WRP members are now able to stomach this type of crass, anti-Marxist shit. Mr Slaughter, the fact that East German workers voted for bourgeois democrats is not a matter of academic interest to 'swingometer' watchers. It is the electoral expression of the peaceful, democratic counterrevolutionary overturn of the GDR workers' state.

The philistine Slaughter complacently celebrates the fact that the workers of this country will soon be striking against the effects of capitalist restoration. In other words, he thinks it is a progressive development that the East German proletariat have been reduced from the ruling class in society, even if only formally, to a subordinate class under a capitalist state. 'Ah but,' observes the 'Marxist' professor Slaughter, 'everything is hunky-dory because, look, workers under capitalism go on strike!'

Slaughter illustrates again a recurring

theme in his and a great many Trotskyites' political careers: an explicit preference for capitalism as opposed to working class state rule.

Workers Power. Workers Power got terribly excited about the 'political revolutions' sweeping Eastern Europe; so excited they urged on the purge of communists in the GDR and even compared the overthrow of Ceausescu with the October Revolution. Given the reality of capitalist restoration, probably more than any Trotskyite group WP's theory has been thrown to the wind. Like all the petty bourgeois left, the counterrevolution has precipitated a rightward shift in this organisation's political perspectives. The only difference is that in others, the move is measured in feet: with Workers Power, it must be measured in miles.

In *The Leninist* No88, we polemicised extensively against this group's position on Poland - a polemic they have dared not answer thus far. In the piece, we reported their *de facto* renunciation of their (always formal) commitment to defence of the workers' states by stating that, as a matter of principle, "we must resolutely back [the workers] in their struggle against the bureaucracy, whatever form it takes" (*Workers Power*, February 1990). Only six months later, they have the temerity to turn round and attack *Socialist Organiser* for taking exactly the same line, entering into an ironic 'auto-critique' of a position "which abandons class politics altogether" (*Workers Power*, August 1990).

The working class in Eastern Europe have not struggled in any independent sense, they have been swept behind the democratic counterrevolutionary mobilisations. This did not matter to Workers Power. So, as they promised, WP "resolutely backed" the alienated workers as they lined up behind the counterrevolution, even though they now admit this is a defeat for the working class of the world.

Back in November 1989, *Workers Power* was telling us that "a reunification [of Germany] under capitalist control would mean the destruction of the gains [of] the working class ... It would also mean a formidable German imperialism whose needs could only be satisfied by the reduction of whole sections of Eastern Europe to the status of semi-colonies. Communists oppose that."

Or at least, they opposed it then. Nowadays they can't seem to understand what all the fuss is about. "Don't mourn the death of Stalinism", they editorialise in their July issue. 'Strange', they muse, but "there are many in the workers' movement who secretly mourn the death of Stalinism. From Berlin to Beijing they can see nothing but counterrevolution in the mass movements which have rocked Stalinism to its foundations."

In fact, we are told, Eastern Europe is alive

with "revolutionary situations". Do tell, WP: if all these 'revolutionary situations' are bubbling up everywhere, and everything is going so swimmingly, how come six pages after your editorial your paper is telling us that the East German workers state, which according to you was worth defending, has "(collapsed) back into capitalism" and trailing way, way behind reality it innocently admits "it may not be the last".

We await WP's new set of gyrations on the 'political revolutions' in Eastern Europe with interest.

The Spartacist League. It does not like to admit it now, but the Spartacist League was, a while back, prattling on about the political revolution. They got just as hot and sweaty as the rest. "The developments in the DDR pose point blank proletarian political revolution", they told us (*Workers Hammer*, November/December 1989), and promptly booked their plane flights over there.

The only merit we can see in belonging to an organisation like the Spartacist League (or 'International Communist League', as their headed notepaper now dubs them) is that although its programme is irrelevant, sterile and bruisingly wrong, at least you get to see the world. The Sparts poured their meagre personpower and financial resources into East Germany, cost cutting around the world by reducing journals like that of their British section, already a skimpy monthly, to a bi-monthly. After all, the "proletarian political revolution" was being posed "point blank" ... wasn't it?

Nope, 'fraid not. The Sparts got a rude awakening in the March 18 elections in East Germany when their candidates got a princely 0.06%, ie somewhat less than the East German equivalent of the Monster Raving Loony Party.

Peaceful capitalist reunification of Germany was impossible, they once told us, as "what separates East and West Germany are fundamentally opposed social systems" (Ibid). And even more explicitly, they once polemicised against us and our comrades from Turkey because: "In *Living Socialism*, Yurukoglu has ... stated that 'the administrative stratum can gradually transform itself into a capitalist class'. The idea that the dictatorship of the proletariat ... can be reformed back to capitalism without a bloody counterrevolution is a Kautskyst revision of the Marxist theory of the state. It plays in reverse the notion that socialism can occur as an evolutionary, not revolutionary, process."

Interesting, therefore, that the July 13 issue of *Workers Vanguard*, paper of the ICL's commanding US section, admits "the destruction of the East German workers state". Now, unless we missed it comrades, there was no 'civil war', no "bloody counterrevolution" involved. So, Sparts, what was

that you were saying about "Kautskyst revision" of Marxism?

Socialist Organiser wholeheartedly greeted developments in Eastern Europe. For it there was nothing there to defend, nothing to lose. But then any organisation which reckons that Frank Chappel, former leader of the EETPU and well known red baiter, "had a good line on international questions", or Eric Heffer, the shambling former Labour minister, puts forward "a broadly Marxist approach" in parliament, needs its bumps felt. Judging from the latest issue of its theoretical journal, *Workers Liberty*, when it comes to Eastern Europe it seems to have more positions than the Karma Sutra (and some equally painful to maintain over long periods). 'Degenerate workers states', 'state capitalism' or 'bureaucratic collectivist' - what does it matter? They are all united in their love of capitalist 'liberty' and hatred of the former socialist states of Eastern Europe.

Revolutionary Communist Party. Although it castigates others on the left for imagining that what we are seeing in Eastern Europe is the 'political revolution', this sectarian little group still confesses itself "very pleased to see the collapse of the 'communist' regimes of the East" (*Living Marxism*, January 1990). This is despite the fact that the masses in these countries are now in for "hardship, violent unrest and instability". The counterrevolution at least "clears the decks" - for an Anglo-centric student sect, with a monthly glossy featuring tired and bombastic rehashes from the *Economist* and boring personal columns, to take over the world, we presume. Fat chance.

This really is a very odd, anti-communist sect. In the editorial of its July *Living Marxism* it tells us, farcically, that "the new Enlightenment starts here" and that we need to "raise our eyes above the horrors of our time." Surely the collapse of the regimes of Eastern Europe and the attendant "horrors" will hinder enlightenment. But no matter, the RCP says it is "very pleased" about the victory of the historical equivalent of the Inquisition.

The petty bourgeois left in Britain has historically projected a model of western bourgeois democracy onto the workers states, and found them wanting. Like their big brothers in the ranks of imperialism itself, these elements went into paroxysms of delight over the counterrevolutions in the socialist countries; now, as the disintegrative and disruptive effects of these reactionary changes become explicit, they are starting to get qualms.

Their support of counterrevolution in Eastern Europe has not been a 'hiccup' in an otherwise sound methodology. It has been rotten methodology producing rotten politics. Individuals may be salvageable; as organisations they have crossed the Rubicon.

Ian Mahoney

## Soviet miners and the left

### The anti-communism of Socialist Organiser and Workers Power has strengthened Roy Lynk's UDM and played into the hands of those witchhunting Arthur Scargill

THE CAMPAIGN for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc (CSWEB) is a sorry little organisation. It is (or was) a lash up between the viciously anti-Soviet *Socialist Organiser* and *Workers Power*, which weakly 'defends' the USSR with ever greater reluctance.

This unprincipled lash up of these two (who, years back, were organisational bedfellows, after both decanting from Tony Cliff's International Socialists) has wound up hand in glove with the extreme right wing of the Soviet labour movement.

*Workers Power*, in its May issue, criticised Militant for cutting its links - after it was too late - with Soviet miner Viktor Yakovlev, who met with UDM leader Roy Lynk while over here on a tour which the Millies had helped organise. 'Unfair!', cried WP: "Viktor, and millions of Soviet workers like him, want to hear all the ideas within the British Labour movement, right and left. Who would be surprised after years of Stalinist oppression?" And who would be surprised, even, if they wanted to meet fascists? In the

spirit of 'internationalism' and growing anti-communism, we are sure WP would be equally understanding.

Or would it? After playing such an even hand, the CSWEB had the same stunt pulled on it. It organised a speaking tour for a seemingly independent Soviet miners' representative, Yuri Budchenko. This 'independent workers representative', states *Socialist Organiser*, "seemed unconvinced by socialist arguments" (June 21).

Budchenko insisted that the rest of his tour should be organised with George Miller, a British representative of the pro-fascist Russian 'National Workers Union' (NTS) and supporter of the UDM. So CSWEB made a great fuss about cutting its links (no pun intended). Well and good, you would think. But no, CSWEB itself had meetings with Miller - a man up to his neck in the anti-Scargill plot - before the tour had even begun (*Workers Press*, July 14).

Egg all over its anti-communist face, *Workers Power* sought to blame Scargill for its own rightist faux pas: "The NUM has,

through Scargill's actions, distanced itself from the real miners' unions in the USSR by pledging allegiance to the 'official' stogie unions" (July 1990). Then, things took a turn to low farce. As a result of the tour, they withdrew from CSWEB, because SO "put the primary blame onto the NUM and Scargill whilst 'understanding' the desire of Soviet workers' organisations for links with the UDM, and expressing 'a large amount of sympathy for Soviet workers who are repulsed by Stalinists in the British labour movement...'" (*Workers Power*, August 1990). That is, for taking the line that *Workers Power* had in its previous issue!

For these petty bourgeois lefts the main criterion for eastern street cred is to be pathologically 'anti-Stalinist'. When their reactionary little games get out of control, they may feign a little righteous indignation, but this has proven little more than a cynical attempt at damage limitation.

The logic of their 'anti-Stalinism' and economic bowing to spontaneity has led them into cheerleading counterrevolution, and painting red the pro-capitalist, chauvinist forces in the USSR. Real working class independence can only be achieved through a resolute break from those whom the degenerates of WP and SO have been touting around. Militants should have nothing but contempt for these left covers for Soviet reaction.

Alan Merrik





# Our history

**■** We hate to say we told you so, but... Remember us saying that it wouldn't be long before Martin Jacques' Marxism Today went the same way as Tony Chater's Morning Star, and treated the Euro 'party' as an outside body? The chickens, we hear, have come home to roost. In the July issue of the Euro's News and Views there is an irate letter from its West Newcastle area members, bawling 'why, oh why', after picking up the £80,000 per year tab for MT for so long, and having Jacques ignore congress and Euro executive instructions for so long, is it now going its own sweet way into the wild blue yonder of 'independent' publications. This leaves the Euros, after the collapse of 7 Days, with nothing - only the ever changing promise of 'Journal X' (now dubbed Changes), which, if there is any justice in the world, will never see the light of day.

**■** And on the Euros, they have sold their offices at 16 St John Street for £1.3 million, to an unknown buyer. Worse, we've been told by a full time Euro functionary that as the new offices will be too small and they need the space and the money, the CPGB archives are up for grabs to the highest bidder. At our Fourth Conference, Leninists demanded the Party files from these renegades. They are not communists, they have no use for them. To now sell decades of CPGB and Comintern history for the narrow financial gain of their sect is a crime against the working class.

**■** From the same group who brought you "Why the poll tax is not a class issue": the Revolutionary Communist Party, in its paper The Next Step of July 13, published a centre page article entitled "Why the market won't come to Moscow". This is just after Yeltsin announced a massive privatisation plan. When, one can only wonder, will the RCP, which asked what "the fuss" was about when the ball started rolling with the collapse of Hungary last year, wake up to the real world. More interestingly, when it does, how will it explain it?

**■** So moved was one of our comrades by all the emotive tributes to Unionist bigot, Ian Gow - not least the Morning Star's accusation that he had been "murdered" - that, choking back the tears, he penned the following elegy:  
And so farwell, Ian Gow,  
You were an MP,  
But you're not now.

## The formation of the CPGB and its early years: articles, documents and manifestos

**N**EGOTIATIONS SEEKING to bring together the British Socialist Party, Socialist Labour Party and Workers Socialist Federation into a united Communist Party had been going on since May 1919. For nearly two years they got nowhere. The SLP was totally against the BSP's suggestion that the new Communist Party try and gain mass influence through the tactic of affiliation to the Labour Party. In the name of "revolutionary purity" the SLP leadership ensured that all compromises on this were rejected and made into a barrier preventing unification. Sylvia Pankhurst's WSF was not only against Labour Party affiliation, but all parliamentary activity too, even after Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership in Russia made clear their support for such tactics.

But in April 1920 the picture began to change for the better. Together William Paul, Arthur MacManus and Tom Bell - who had been the SLP's representatives in unity negotiations, that is until they were repudiated by the party's doctrinaire leadership - broke the logjam. Coinciding with the SLP's 7th official annual conference, on April 3-4, they called their own unofficial conference in Nottingham.

Their conference represented the most active members of the SLP, in particular those at the forefront of the mass movement. The pro-unity SLPers went on to call themselves the Communist Unity Group, and adopt a manifesto, which committed them to working for the "unity of all elements scattered throughout the various groups and Parties as the first essential to the formation of a Communist Party in Britain."

In light of this very important development unity negotiations at last began to bear fruit. The meetings of April 24 and May 9 agreed that the tactical questions of Labour affiliation and parliamentary activity should be decided after unity, rather than be a precondition for it. And on May 29 the representatives of the BSP and the CUG, along with a less enthusiastic and a far smaller WSF, felt ready to call a fusion convention. This is how the BSP's paper reported the news:

### Communist Unity

Considerable progress towards the establishment of a united Communist Party was made at a further meeting of the Unity Conference in London last Saturday. Those present were: JF Hodgson, AA Watts and Fred Willis (representing the BSP), Thos Bell, Arthur MacManus, and Wm Paul (representing the Communist Unity Group formed by members of the SLP), and Sylvia Pankhurst, Nora Smyth, and Melvina Walker (representing the WSF).

A national convention is to be held to establish the Communist Party to which all organisations,

branches of organisations, groups, and local societies accepting the three cardinal principles of Unity (Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the Soviet System, and the Third International) are to be invited to send delegates. This convention will also decide the tactical question of the relations of the Communist Party to the Labour Party. Meanwhile various sub-committees will deal with the general arrangements for the convention, prepare suggestions for the constitution, platform, and organisation of the Communist Party, and go into the details of the amalgamation of the existing organisations. All the bodies participating in summoning the convention are pledged to accept the decisions of the convention and to merge their organisations in the Communist Party, and representation at the convention will imply that organisations, branches, and groups represented will also accept its decisions and become parts of the Communist Party. The convention will be held in London, and the date provisionally fixed for Sunday, August 1st.

The delegates of the BSP and the Communist Unity Group were acting on mandates from their respective bodies. The participation of the WSF delegates was stated to be conditional upon a referendum of their membership now being taken.

The Call No217, June 3 1920

This did not mean that things were now plain sailing. Sylvia Pankhurst and the WSF insisted on maintaining a petty bourgeois leftist stance. In her isolation she turned to a decomposing and increasingly erratic, desperate and irrelevant SLP:

### Unity, Ourselves, and Others

Last week's issue of *The Socialist* contains a letter sent by Miss Sylvia Pankhurst to the SLP, in which she discusses the advisability, or otherwise, of taking part in this convention [printed on June 3 along with an SLP reply - Ed]. It is a long letter (about 2,000 words), but it can be summed up very briefly. Miss Pankhurst considers the question of participation under the separate headings of advantages and disadvantages. The advantages, says Miss Pankhurst, are that the delegates may be induced to accept her own particular point of view, in which case all would be well. The disadvantages are that they may not, and then, of course, all would be very far from well. But, she concludes naively, in the latter unfortunate event those agreeing with her need not consider themselves bound by the decisions of the conference - and, so again, all would be well.

The reply of the National Executive Committee of the SLP to Miss Pankhurst's letter is what was to be expected. It is rigid and doctrinaire, but quite honest.

These Calvinists of the Socialist

movement will have nothing to do with the proposed convention. They do not favour Miss Pankhurst's brilliant tactic of running away from the unity proceedings in the event of not being able to stamper them, but they make one suggestion which, to put it mildly, is surprising. They invite the WSF to join with them in calling a conference of their own. And to invite thereto representatives of the South Wales Socialist Society, the Irish Communist Party, the British Section International Socialist Labour Party, and the *Socialist Party of Great Britain*. I should like to have seen Miss Pankhurst's face when she saw this suggestion.

The SPGB stands for what it calls revolutionary parliamentary action as opposed to industrial action. It has as much right to its opinions as any other body, and we do not quarrel with its members for holding them, but to ask it to take part in a conference which would presumably endorse the Soviet system, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and industrial mass action, is something which - like the peace of God - passes all understanding.

Apparently Miss Pankhurst thought so too. The reply of the SLP to her letter is dated May 27th. On June 4th, she issued an invitation to all organisations who accept non-parliamentarism as a basis of unity, to attend a meeting for the purpose of deciding whether or not to be present at the conference our own unity committee is engaged in calling. Neither the SLP nor the SPGB will be represented at Miss Pankhurst's gathering, we presume, unless the voice of the charmer has been so alluring as to outweigh even the sterner call of principle.

For ourselves, we are willing to leave the less important matters of immediate tactics to the free play of opinion in the rank and file of a united Communist Party when formed. To rally the workers of this country to the banner so gloriously raised by our Russian comrades is all important at this juncture - all else is sound and fury signifying less than nothing.

Fred Willis  
The Call No218, June 10 1920

On the basis of genuine communist principle and in contrast to the pathetic shenanigans of the SLP and WSF, the BSP and CUG - who between them represented the bulk of proto-communist forces in Britain - were drawing closer together. From July 15 1920 *The Call* gave over, weekly, a full page for the CUG to use as it saw fit. The CUG had since its formation "felt the need of a paper that would enable us, without let or hindrance, not only to express our views on matters of general policy, but to publicly refute the lies and slanders against us from time to time". However because of the self proclaimed "transitory nature" of the group they preferred to husband resources in "deference to the larger object of a united Communist Party". In pursuit of this goal the CUG used its page to good effect:

In the discussions that took place in the initial stages of our unity negotiations, Wales figured largely through the South Wales Socialist Society. We at no time lost sight of the fact, and indeed had it repeatedly brought home to us in correspondence from many of our Welsh comrades, that the SWSS by no means adequately represented Communist opinion in Wales. We were scarcely prepared, however, for the news that it had "gone west." Yet such, we are assured, is actually the case.

From its ashes, and from some late SLP Branches, there has arisen what we think will prove a more substantial organisation, in the shape of a South Wales Communist Council. This council counts eight definite groups, while the Neath Socialist Society has just affiliated, and others are expected to follow - all for the Communist Party. We can appreciate the disappointment of the WSF, which always counted on the SWSS to back her up. It was no small surprise to find her secretary writing the council, soliciting support for her latest adventure. Needless to say there was "nothing doing." Let this be the reply to all such seductive attempts coming from 400 Old Ford Road [headquarters of the WSF - Ed].

The Call No223, July 15 1920

### Towards the Communist Party

History teaches that every crisis capitalism has to go through is a test period. The strain at such a period, however, is not confined to the purely commercial credit of its national groups. It is as much a test upon the loyalty and convictions of the revolutionists towards their communist principles. It is just at such periods when it is brought home to us that our Labour politicians of the Thomas and Henderson type are indeed the watchdogs of capitalist interests. The former, apprehensive of the dangerous situation capitalism is drifting into, is even now appealing to the Government to reduce the cost of living and so help to stave off "the turmoil and agitation that upsets everything and everybody." But, since there is nothing in common between Communism and Capitalism, the latter's difficulty must be the former's opportunity. Here, then, is where the test will be applied to the Communists. Are we to go on pottering about as a great many fragmentary groups; our efforts rendered sterile and fatuous by our sectionalism? Or are we capable of rising to the occasion, and, concentrating all our resources, make a strong national effort worthy of the principles we profess?

July 31 will be your opportunity for making an effective reply. At the National Convention will be laid the foundations of a Communist Party that will seriously challenge the powers of Capitalism. The Communist Party will, by its industrial, political, and social activity, foster the spirit of revolution. When Lloyd George told his German conferees at Spa to deal with the Communists as his French brothers did in 1871 - ie shoot them like dogs - he not only made a deadly thrust at Labour Party democracy, but he threw down a challenge to the Communists of Britain.

We shall not be worthy of the name if we do not pick that challenge up and prepare for the coming struggle.

The Call No223, July 15 1920



No excuses

Communist Party of Britain, *Communist Review*, Summer 1990, pp28, £1

STILLBORN at its so called "re-establishment congress" in April 1988, the CPB was, as we noted at the time, neither communist nor a party, nor capable of any serious practical activity. But that was early days, some said, as the 'party' had to adopt its programme before it could get down to work. Well, now that the "updated" *British Road to Socialism* is out (ludicrously claiming that the world balance of forces is tipping in favour of socialism) the CPB has no excuses. Its "re-establishment" is now complete. The fact of its inability to either 'interpret' the world or 'change it' has now become obvious to its own leadership and is all but acknowledged by its own journal.

"We have to face honestly the fact that our party is currently too small", says the editorial, "that it is too unevenly organised, and that among a significant minority of the membership there is a crisis of confidence." Ron Bellamy, in his speech to the March Executive Committee of the CPB on the "Crisis of Socialism," tells us that "shock" is the "universal" response of communists to the collapse of bureaucratic socialism. "Among a minority of communists here there is a degree of demoralisation." Given the CPB's disgusting official optimism, this really means the organisation is incapable of moving a muscle. The rest of the journal demonstrates this admirably: nowhere do we find the slightest trace of action carried out, or being planned.

The root of its paralysis, of course, lies in its blind faith in Soviet bureaucrats - who have "exposed with total honesty the mistakes they have made" - and its refusal to face up to the reality of counterrevolution: "The apparent loss of international landmarks has left many disoriented." (My emphasis - IF)

"Those who defended all Soviet actions are the hardest hit. Some adhere to their longstanding positions and believe that they have been betrayed by Gorbachev; others abandon old positions, and feel that they have been misinformed over a long period by the socialist countries, or by our own leaderships who, they believe, 'must have known, or ought to have known'. Others again, are suspicious of all evidence."

Bellamy pretends it is the membership which is "unclear", but his speech to the EC "was given ... solely as a basis for opening the discussion, and in no way commits that body." In other words, the EC is unable to form an opinion, let alone explain things to its members. Similarly with John Hoffman's "Has Marxism a Future?". "Neither article," says the editorial, "would claim to be at all definitive."

Faced with counterrevolution in Eastern Europe and bourgeois triumphalism, Bellamy claims "we do not have enough information to assess a rapidly changing situation." Nevertheless, he correctly identifies the root of the crisis in the substitution of bureaucratic centralism for democratic centralism. Attempting a materialist analysis of socialist society, he acknowledges "differences of interests ... between workers and peasants, between town and country, between regions at different levels of development, and so

on," but fails to recognise that socialism has been led down the opportunist slope to stagnation and counterrevolution not through mistakes by honest communists, but precisely in the material interests of the bureaucracy as a distinct stratum. This is the answer to Bellamy's own question: why the "authoritarian bureaucratic trend" was not recognised in time and corrected.

Hoffman's sickening 'defence' of Marxism puts him firmly in the Gorbachevite/Euro counterrevolutionary camp. Arguing that "the kind of liberal who still seriously believes in freedom and equality ... must become a Marxist," he implicitly rejects the 'class politics' which the CPB proclaimed on its 're-establishment' and shows his own metal as an anti-Marxist liberal. In place of the overthrow of imperialism, he looks to "the development of a world order in which the market, class divisions and the state are gradually being transcended." Regional conflicts are to be settled by "international agencies with regulatory powers derived from international law." Without openly saying so, he rejects Marx's key concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat: "states cannot sort the problems because the very existence of an institution claiming a monopoly of legitimate force implies an absence of universal interests."

"We should welcome unreservedly ... the collapse of a number of socialist governments," and Stalinists, Trotskyites and social democrats should "transcend" their differences and "move forward in unity." No thanks! After a Marx Memorial Lecture like that, we should fumigate Marx House! That the CPB gives house room to what Dietzen called 'graduated flunkies' should send genuine communists hurrying to join the work of the CPGB (*The Leninist*).

Ian Farrell

Bleeding Hearts

Lorna Reid, *Poll Tax: Paying to be Poor*, Larkin Publications, 1990, pp44, £1.95

The author of this pamphlet is a member of the Revolutionary Communist Group and the leading activist in Tooting Anti-Poll Tax Union (Taptu). Taptu is at the cutting edge of the anti-poll tax fight, being in the Tory flagship of Wandsworth, which has the lowest poll tax, heavily subsidised at the expense of other London boroughs.



Taptu has been particularly active in the field of fighting summonses (Wandsworth being the first London borough to issue them) by trying to get the thousands prosecuted to attend court to clog up the system.

This is almost the last line of defence in the non-payment tactic which makes up virtually the pamphlet's entire strategy for defeating the poll tax.

For Reid, most of the working class has little part to play in the anti-poll tax fightback. For her it must be built by the poor, from

"those who cannot afford to pay it". Although the SWP is correctly criticised for doing little but appeal to the trade union bureaucracy for industrial action against the poll tax, the author goes on to dismiss the trade union movement as a whole.

For Reid to call for "traditional trade union action [is] abstract and irrelevant". "The most abstract example ... represented by Workers Power [at the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Conference] who called for mass strike action including a general strike to defeat the poll tax, in a period when the trade union movement is doing hardly anything to oppose the poll tax".

Instead, says Reid, "Effective trade union action will only arise as a result of active and organised resistance within the communities". However, this is nothing but hot air.

When CPGB (TL) comrades in Taptu proposed a motion that Taptu should take a lead in calling for local strikes on the days of court summonses this was voted against by RCG members present, who said that they had tried workplaces once before and nothing came from it.

This dismissal of the organised working class springs from the RCG's liberal bleeding heart view. Reid sees poll tax as an "attack on the rights and living standards of the poorest working class", rather than an attack on the working class as a whole which includes much of "semi-detached Britain", which she appears to despise.

With the prospect of a Labour government within the next two years far from an impossibility, one might have expected to find the RCG's attitude towards the roof tax in the pamphlet, however we are merely told that "it has been attacked by all parliamentary parties as the domestic rates through the back door" (we are not told the RCG's attitude to domestic rates either).

Should the roof tax be fought? What is the RCG's attitude to all new taxes on the working class? Reid's pamphlet provides no enlightenment on these not inconsequential matters.

The pamphlet correctly points to the miners' Great Strike and Miners' Support Groups as having important lessons for the anti-poll tax fight. Miners' Support Groups were undoubtedly the most advanced, most militant and dynamic bodies our class has created for many decades.

However, to defeat the poll tax it will be necessary to go further and to transform anti-poll tax unions into councils of action, as seen in the Hands Off Russia campaign in 1920 and the General Strike in 1926 (ignored in the section "lessons from the past").

This will be done through Anti-Poll Tax Unions being made up of elected and recallable delegates from local working class organisations committed to non-payment of the poll tax. Similarly, although Militant is criticised for its stranglehold on the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, no answers to breaking this (ie, calling for the ABAPTF to consist of elected and recallable delegates from local APTU's) are put forward.

The RCG's tactics of mass non-payment, clogging up the courts, marches and demonstrations - all of which should be used - are insufficient to guarantee victory. What is necessary to smash the poll tax is an indefinite general strike.

We must start to build for this now. Workers must be won to take political action to smash the poll tax and the government that introduced it.

Boris Kaplan

The Leninist

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# Gorbachev: Kerensky in reverse

**R**EMEMBER when Soviet party congresses were unanimous; when wrinkled grey men in crumpled grey suits voted as if motivated by the same central nervous system? The wrinkled grey men may still be there in their thousands, but the dull, bureaucratic unanimity has gone with the wind. Discord, far outstripping that of the Khrushchev era, has riven the CPSU.

The 28th congress is an expression of the crisis within the Soviet Union as a whole, in particular the bureaucracy. It is a crystallisation of the increasingly embittered struggles at the apex of Soviet society.

Gorbachev has had his work cut out for him, battering and haranguing the delegates into line. He did, though, accomplish it with some success: 3,411 of the 4,554 delegates voted for his re-election. Only a couple of weeks back it was beginning to look doubtful whether he would even stand. This achievement, however, is not a reflection of the great statesmanship of the general secretary, but rather the bankruptcy of the main opposition trends.

Gorbachev has achieved the backing (albeit begrudged) he wanted from the congress for his political programme. Like Thatcher in the early eighties, he claims 'There Is No Alternative'. Protestations aside, the majority of delegates have shown they agree. Gorbachev got the deputy secretary and the Politburo he wanted. For all the hype beforehand about the 'conservative backlash' at this congress, Yegor Ligachev polled a pitiful few hundred votes against Vladimir Ivashko for the deputyship.

As we have argued in past issues, Gorbachev is playing out a precarious balancing act. He stated from the podium that "I defend the socialist choice. I will never be linked to those who want to push the country back to capitalism." In this, he palms off the rash restorationist schemes of Yeltsin and co, invoking the authority of the October Revolution to placate the 'conservatives' around Ligachev. He is also legitimising his own authority. If he formally renounced the last 73 years, he would in effect be renouncing his own legitimacy as president.

Yet he has inveighed most strongly against this same group, accusing them of wanting to "bury or split" the CPSU. He has placed all faith in the restoration of market dominated relations: by definition, capitalism. Such a transformation is far from easy. The inertia of the likes of Ligachev is a problem. But so too is the vacuous tub-thumping of Yeltsin, promising the world — and able to deliver — cheap farce.

After the departure of Yeltsin and Democratic Platform, Gorbachev is straining with the task of reigning in the different trends within the party, and straddling the diverging functions of party and state. Though still head of the CPSU, Gorbachev is edging towards a situation where the architects of his programme are cutting themselves free from the party, for which the majority of Soviet people now hold little love.

As the *ancien regime* fragments, sections of the bureaucracy are tearing off in different directions in

## The 28th Congress of the CPSU: collapse of the 'conservative' opposition

a desperate search for a base. The Gorbachevite government is increasingly detached from the discredited party, rooting itself within the structures of the state.

Dissociation from this bureaucratic leviathan also gives the Gorbachevites a freer hand, unhindered by 'conservative' party apparatchiks. Foreign minister Shevardnadze has dropped out from the CPSU leadership, as have KGB head Krychkov, minister of defence Yazov and ex-head of the party's ideological department, Medvedev. No doubt the label 'communist' is one the likes of these will be only too glad to drop. There is now not one member of the government on the new, restructured, federalised, Politburo.

At the moment, the stresses that are tearing the Soviet bureaucracy apart are embodied in Gorbachev. Despite the skill that he has shown so far in holding it together, he is a victim of this crisis, borne forward in its anarchic rush to disintegration.

The Gorby propaganda machine, at home and abroad, has bust a gut presenting him as the Soviet Union's one and only great white hope. Others, with less hype and more honesty, have seen him as a Bonaparte figure, pathetically manoeuvring within ever narrower options. He is a Kerensky in reverse.

Yeltsin is of the same stripe, but with a different angle. His position within the Russian Federation has considerable popular support. Alongside this, his abandonment of the CPSU and distance from Soviet state structures present him with a giant-sized scapegoat for the crisis. He offloads criticism onto the CPSU leadership, complaining that moves back to the market are not proceeding swiftly enough. Before he stalked out from the congress, the Moscow demagogue even suggested following the East German lead (!), changing the CPSU's name to 'Party of Democratic Socialism'. Now he dissociates himself even from Democratic Platform, claiming to 'stand above factional politics'. He is a Bonaparte-in-waiting to his ex-leader.

The options within the Gorbachevite bureaucracy's parameters narrow by the day. On one level of this pro-capitalist logic, Yeltsin is right. The tinkering, bit-by-bit reforms proposed in Soviet premier Nikolai Ryzhkov's plan can only accelerate disintegration. They will do no more than exacerbate the paralysing antagonism between plan and market, without resolving the contradiction in favour of either. Such an approach has already led Soviet growth rates to plummet from the levels of "the period of stagnation" under Brezhnev, to a situation where they are now negative (see 'The Gorbachev Solution...' in the last issue of *The Leninist*).

It has to be one or the other — all or nothing. This has accelerated the Gorbachev 'centre's' drive to the right. Speedy capitalist programmes, authored by Gorbachev advisors Abalkin and Petrakov, have superseded the Ryzhkov 'softly, softly, catchy monkey'

approach. Yeltsin, at the helm of the Russian Federation, has gone further, announcing a 200bn rouble privatisation package within 18 months. Alas for the bureaucracy, none of this holds any easy answers. Soviet workers might be dazzled by the *idea* of the market, but the experience of it will be somewhat different. Already, there are warning rumblings of the storms to come. The congress was accompanied by strikes from coalminers and oilworkers, one of the most powerful groups of the Soviet proletariat.

This situation has added urgency to Gorbachev's appeals for aid from imperialism, in order to facilitate the transfer to his universal panacea, the market economy. Despite the recalcitrance of the unreconstructed cold war warrior Thatcher, the increasingly hegemonic Germany has promised to bankroll the USSR. But, of course, this goes hand in hand with 'investment opportunities' for imperialism, to guarantee their dominance. And still, this is scant insulation for a full force return to capitalism, which will still lead to an all-out attack on the living standards of Soviet workers.

Gorbachev is well aware that his market reforms will, in all probability, progress hand in hand with increasing social struggle, as workers fight to defend themselves. Even if this takes place purely on the economic level, this is still a massive problem. Yet the status quo of the bureaucratic plan can no longer deliver social peace, either. Its irreparable collapse has destroyed the coherence of the Soviet state. The Soviet leadership is faced with a social explosion on the one hand, and total economic collapse on the other. And this itself must bring on a huge reaction.

Gorbachev's 'successes' are now found only on the foreign policy front. For the *Morning Star*, the recent Nato declaration that the Soviet Union is no longer the enemy, bringing down the (iron) curtain on the cold war is a result of Soviet "pressure". Did you ever come across such idiocy? By Gorbachev's own admission, the USSR is less able to flex its muscles on the international field than at any time in the post-World War II period. Nato's change of attitude is nothing to do with its pacification at Soviet hands. It is merely a recognition of the fact that war against the Warsaw Pact is made redundant with the latter's collapse. It has now occurred to even the most rabid Nato general that there is not much point in launching short range nuclear missiles from West to East Germany.

Such a 'success' in the supposed attainment of world peace is a result of the collapse of the USSR as a prime force in world politics. It is no more than a pause to reload. The collapse of bureaucratic socialism will merely bring about internecine imperialist tensions. A three cornered fight is certain to ensue, as the European, American and Japanese 'allies' eye each other distrustfully over the conference table.

What about those who Gorbachev accuses of wanting to derail

perestroika and to bury or split the CPSU? The gerontocracy of the New Communist Party put their faith in the self-proclaimed 'Marxist-Leninists' around Ligachev. Even the staunchly Gorbachevite *Morning Star* seems to have edged towards this group in its otherwise nondescript coverage of the conference. Indeed, Ligachev has come out over the recent period bemoaning the Soviet crisis, the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the loss of Eastern Europe. Turning on the 'radicals' at the congress, he stated: "Radicalism is just revisionism. We have been here before."

True enough. But what is his response? As we noted above, to continue to back Gorbachev. The NCP's *New Worker* also notes that they "have not backed calls for Gorbachev's resignation" (July 6 1990). At the June Russian Communist Party congress the 'conservatives' felt confident enough to raise the flag of rebellion. At the CPSU congress, and with no strategy to counter Gorbachev, they quickly lowered it and fell into line. Ligachev, in his contest for the new post of deputy general secretary, stated that he only had 'tactical' differences with Mikhail Sergeiovitch. *Tactical* differences with the architect of capitalist restoration? This echoes the NCP's "critical support" for perestroika: a graphic illustration of the bankruptcy of both the old bureaucrats around Ligachev in the Soviet Union and their hangers on here.

The basis for this weak resistance, as the *Independent's* Soviet correspondent notes, is "an alliance of senior party functionaries from the provinces and apparatchiks in the middle and upper reaches of government. Their driving motive is not so much ideological as the fear that they will lose their privileges and powers guaranteed them by the centralised command system under which the Soviet Union has hitherto been run." (June 22 1990).

This is all too true. The old bureaucracy provided a comfortable niche for many. The restoration of market relations would sweep away the basis for this. They are not defending socialism in defending the collapsed bureaucratic plan. The halcyon days to which they wish to return are dead and gone. What we see with the Ligachev camp is the death throes of an inert and ossified caste. This is not only being expressed through the medium of pseudo-Leninist jargon. A substantial base of opposition in the congress came from the 'united workers front', which combines this bureaucratic hostility to market relations with an ugly, thick stripe of Great Russian chauvinism.

Another section of these 'Marxist-Leninists' is the upper echelons military bureaucracy, who have even been accused by sections of the 'radical' intelligentsia of hatching plots for a military coup. To do what? Like their co-thinker Ligachev, they have no coherent alternative policy. Any such attempt would quickly degenerate into low farce. The military, though, represents one of the most solid bas-

tions of conservatism within the state apparatus. The officer caste, removed as it is from production, is most resistant to the Soviet economic collapse. As we have seen in many under-developed capitalist countries, in periods of crisis the military presents itself as an island of stability.

In the USSR the situation is different. As with Poland (when it was socialist) the officer caste does not have the coherence of a class perspective behind it. No section of the bureaucracy has this. It does not reproduce itself naturally in the process of production, but perpetuates itself through political domination. Rather than sustaining and being sustained by the dominant mode of production, it has stifled it. These relations of production have now been brought to a state of collapse, unleashing powerful centrifugal forces within the bureaucracy and Soviet society in general.

No section of the bureaucracy has developed any coherent standpoint. For the dominant section the task is to reestablish coherence by transforming itself into a capitalist class. This intent arms it with a programme which, if not exactly rigorous, at least provides it with 'solutions', as against the inertia of the 'conservatives'. The rest are thrashing about in the wake of the rush back towards capitalism.

The collapse of the Soviet economy and the fratricidal struggle within this old leadership have forced all the scum to the surface: the culmination of the restorationist logic of the bureaucracy, the growth of nationalism and anti-semitism, and a mass anti-communist demonstration as a coup de grace to the 28th congress.

It is impossible to give any backing to forces whose commitment to socialism goes no further than empty rhetoric as part of a self-serving reactionary strategy, whether of the Gorbachev or Ligachev varieties. No answers in the interest of the working class are coming from any section of the old ruling caste. It has proven itself bankrupt beyond redemption.

The third option is the democratisation of the whole of Soviet society: true soviet power. For the bureaucracy this is a non-option. After all, it means asking workers to decide on whether the fat cats at the top should keep their country dachas, their Zils, their bulging bank accounts and superior housing and access to consumer goods. The choice of Soviet workers would not be hard to guess.

But working class discontent must be expressed through the lead of a genuine communist party, if it is not to be brought under the wing of pro-capitalist demagogues or Solidarnosc-style trade unions. That is the only proletarian solution, and we must recognise that this has still to emerge.

The crisis of the old has, as yet, manifested itself in an overwhelmingly negative way in the socialist world and internationally. Yet, just as with the betrayal of the Second International in 1914, this crisis also creates new forces and possibilities. Recognition of defeat and betrayal does not mean acquiescence to it, but enables us to recognise the battles ahead and to prepare for them.

Alan Merrick



# Nation and class in the British Isles

This article is an edited version of a talk given by comrade Jack Conrad

**D**EAR COMRADES, I don't intend to provide any sort of detailed analysis of nation and class in the British Isles. All I'll be attempting is to present the basic communist approach to the question, the principles involved and what broad conclusions we draw given the concrete situation in the British Isles. For all its limitations, I therefore hope this talk will lay the solid basis for the spread of our practical communist work throughout Britain.

Let's begin by saying that in general there can be no doubt that in many ways the 1980s was very negative for the working class and its organisations in our country. Although it started with a hope that things would soon change for the better, the decade ended with Thatcher still in the saddle and, in spite of recent wobbles, determined to hang on for a fourth term. International developments undoubtedly helped her.

Reaganism in the US, defeat of Argentinian forces in the South Atlantic, the fascist coup 'against anarchy' in Turkey, Solidarnosc in Poland, medievalist terror in 'revolutionary' Iran, Gorbachevism in the USSR, the collapse of bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Europe and the social democratisation of 'official communism', all in their different ways reinforced Thatcherite ideology and gave moral strength to one government attack on our class after another.

Sometimes we went down ignominiously, as with the collapse of the dockers' strike; sometimes heroically, as with the miners' Great Strike. Either way though, defeat was defeat.

Now, so long as people believe that the working class has the power to make things happen, while they believe that capitalist society has no future, they come together. They come together regardless of their sex, regardless of their colour, regardless of their religion or nationality – in joint activity and joint struggle against the ruling class and its system. Albeit in an incoherent and elementary form, this was the situation in Britain during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The Thatcher years were definitely different. As she took on and defeated the working class, section by section, personal disillusionment spread among advanced workers. Many of their organisations decomposed or collapsed and there was a creeping erosion of faith in the potential for social change itself. Among the mass, instead of collective action, people began to blame each other for their growing problems.

Although the class war has gone against the working class, Thatcher hasn't had it all her own way. In the absence of a credible working class lead, her authoritarian measures, her beating of the British chauvinist drum and her racist talk of being swamped by alien cultures has been answered from elsewhere: by Greenham Common feminism, black separatism, muslim fundamentalism, along with Welsh and Scottish nationalism. The growth of these sectional movements, though they might be anti-Thatcherite, could only further weaken working class unity and working class consciousness.

Apart from the climate of defeat, nationalist politics gained ground in Scotland and Wales due to a number of other (closely related) factors. The 1980s saw economic dislocation and upheaval, though not quite on a 1930s scale. British capitalism went through what government ministers called a necessary, if painful, restructuring (and we would call a further example of decay) in a vain attempt not to fall further behind its more dynamic imperialist rivals.

Wales and Scotland were bound to be disproportionately affected. The mining, engineering, shipbuilding and steel industries were prime targets for the Thatcher axe. As well as being unprofitable and undercapitalised, they accounted for a far greater proportion of the workforce in Scotland and Wales than in England. When they were one by one 'pruned', the resulting mass unemployment and 'de-industrialisation' meant that a ready ear was given to those with a simple nationalistic

explanation: England is the problem; going it alone with our oil the answer.

During the 1980s the Labour Party seemed unelectable in Britain as a whole; yet, at the same time, those voting Tory in Wales and Scotland were becoming something of an endangered species. This could only help the nationalist argument, as did singling out Scotland for the trial run of the poll tax. The *Financial Times* of December 5 1989 reported a resulting swing towards nationalism; opinion polls in Scotland showed 44% favouring a Scottish parliament and some sort of independence.

As a matter of principle, the stronger nationalism becomes, the more firm must be our defence of working class unity: obviously a duty that particularly applies to communists in and from Scotland and Wales. The spread of the nationalist canker must be stopped. If we fail, the consequences will be dire: our forces will be further divided, worker will be set against worker. The fragmentation of Britain could only help backwardness, fuel national hatred, and could even herald the emergence of Lebanonisation.

Foolishly and self destructively, the opportunists try to gain relevance not by combatting nationalism, but by accommodating it. Nationalism in Scotland and Wales does not, of course, only take the form of Plaid Cymru or the Scottish Nationalist Party and a host of tiny 'left' nationalist offshoots. It has increasingly become the ideology of Labourism and 'official communism'. (There is always the exception that proves the rule: the New Communist Party considers Scotland a full blown nation, yet for one crass reason or another refuses to recognise that it has any right to self determination).

If the 'official communists' pander to Scottish and Welsh nationalism in the splendid isolation of their London headquarters, it is no surprise that those in the present atmosphere of Scotland and Wales adopt it. In Scotland the CPB insists that the realisation of its petty programme of reforms relies on the construction of yet another layer of bureaucracy in the already over-bureaucratised British state; ie, a Scottish Assembly in Edinburgh. As to the disintegrating Euro organisation in Scotland, it has definitely gone native: indeed, at this very moment voices are being raised for a separate party in Scotland.

The ground has been well fertilised for such suggestions. It is worth recalling the Govan bye election in 1988 and their candidate, Doug Chalmers, secretary of the Scottish Euro organisation. (Our comrades certainly know all about this excuse for a human being: Chalmers of the Yard, as we dubbed him, called the notoriously racist Hackney police on nine of them – seven of whom were black – in order to exclude them from a meeting they were democratically entitled to attend).

His election campaign fully reflected the Scottish nationalism of the Euros in Scotland. None of the Chalmers election material mentioned that he was running as a candidate of what they illegitimately call the "Communist Party of Great Britain". Instead it merely spoke of "the Scottish Communist Party". He stood on a social democratic platform, as is to be expected of him. But he dressed it from head to toe in the white and blue of the Flag of St Andrew. For him, not only was Scotland the subject, England was presented by implication as the problem.

Obviously many on the left in Scotland who favour Scottish independence do not take a social democratic position; some, to their credit, wage something approaching an honourable struggle against the SNP, Euros and Labourism alike. Unfortunately, however, these comrades are utterly incapable of really fighting for the liberation of the working class, which by definition necessitates the coming together of all races and nations.

I remember debating with a Glaswegian 'republican socialist' not so long ago. Although this comrade claimed to be a Marxist-Leninist, his nationalism led him to dismiss the founding of the Communist Party of Great

Britain. Apparently Lenin was wrong to back it, it was the example of John McLean we should follow (in 1920 he set up a shortlived so-called Communist Party in Scotland). The poisonous logic of this ideology soon came out. When pressed the comrade actually *advocated* that not only should Scotland separate from the rest of Britain, but every nation *should* separate from every other nation: a recipe for economic collapse, wars and barbarism.

The reason I refer to this comrade and his arguments is that they are far from unique on the nationalist left, either in Scotland or Wales. If anything they are typical.

That *The Leninist* has not come out with a major statement on the national question in the British Isles long ago, is something we must be self critical about. Nevertheless our basic position has always been crystal clear, as shown by the extensive two-way exchange over a number of years on the national question in the letters page of our paper. We have consistently argued that communists should work for the coming together of nations, and that, while a unified capitalist state exists in Britain, communists throughout Britain should organise together to overthrow it. Quite rightly we have been prepared to break with sympathisers who refused to accept our position. We will never waver on proletarian internationalism.

With this talk I want to correct our past failure and give a more extensive presentation of our position on the national question in the British Isles. Of course, as anyone familiar with the Marxist method will understand, to do this effectively we cannot take Britain as our starting point. We must start from first principles.

Fortunately Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin left us an excellent little pamphlet dealing with these first principles. In 1913 the Bolshevik Party's leading spokesperson on the national question had his *The National Question and Social Democracy*, published over three issues of the legal Bolshevik monthly *Prosveshcheniye*, under the name K Stalin – a carryover from his original cadre name, Koba. The article was titled *The National Question and Marxism* when it was published a year later in pamphlet form, while today it is universally known as *Marxism and the National Question*.

Against those who foolishly dismiss everything Stalin wrote (as some sort of attempt to remain untainted by his later mistakes and crimes) it is worth recalling what Lenin thought of his work. In February 1913 he wrote to the revolutionary and pro-Bolshevik writer Maxim Gorky in the following enthusiastic fashion: "We have a wonderful Georgian here who has sat down to write a big article for *Prosveshcheniye* after collecting all the Austrian and other material".

Later, learning that it was proposed to print it only as a discussion document, Lenin vigorously objected: "Of course, we are absolutely against this. It is a very good article. The question is a burning issue, and we shall not yield one jot on principle to the Bundist scum". Subsequently in his *The national programme of the RSDLP*, when referring to the mass of Bolshevik literature on the national question, he insisted that "prime place must be given to Stalin's article". In the light of this we have no hesitation in taking *Marxism and the National Question* as our starting point.

## 1. Nations

Let us begin, as Stalin did, by asking what a nation is. Stalin said that a nation is a definite, stable, historically constituted community which shares a common language, territory, psychology, culture and economy. He stressed, therefore, that a nation is not equivalent to a tribe, race or culture.

Tribes can only maintain any sort of long term stability while their economic activity does not go beyond the most primitive levels of subsistence agriculture. Tribes are based on gentile (blood) relations; they are socio-bio-

logically, not historically, constituted. Hence, as society develops its members often cease to share the same territory or economy. They settle far away from their homeland, while formally remaining members of the tribe with all its supposed rights and obligations. Likewise its members engage in economic activity that is completely separate and independent of the tribe. Certainly, when commodity exchange relations fully come into being, tribes are mercilessly torn apart territorially, linguistically and culturally.

What about race? None of humanity's three races – Indo-European, Mongoloid or Negro – can be considered to be the same as a nation. For example, nowadays there are those – not least middle class careerists in the race relations industry – who like to talk of a black nation. There's no doubt that there is a Negro race. But as to it constituting a single nation, this is sheer nonsense. Negroes obviously don't just inhabit the patchwork of sub-Saharan states. Large numbers live in France, Belgium, Britain, and of course the Americas – not only in the US, but also Caribbean countries like Cuba and Jamaica, as well as Brazil and Guyana in South America.

They speak not one, but a huge variety of languages (not least in Africa itself). Moreover, the Negro race never meets economically as a whole – we're not referring here to this or that individual, but peoples. They never act together, neither in war, nor peace. All this goes to show that despite having a common ethnic ancestry, it's completely wrong to talk of a Negro or black nation.

The same applies to a culture, even one as enduring and unique as Judaism. Over many hundreds, indeed thousands of years, Jewish people have moved, sometimes willingly, sometimes unwillingly, from one European, Asian and African (and now American) country to another. Unlike many other migrant peoples, for one reason or another, assimilation was not always total. Often they formed a distinct oppressed element, separated from the mass of the population by law, custom and/or bigotry.

As a result the Jews of Poland share some of the religious practices and taboos of the Jews in Morocco, USA, Israel, Britain, etc. Yet while their psychology and culture shows traces of shared origins in the ancient past, for day to day purposes they might just as well live on different planets. They have no common language, territory or economy.

Thus, against the Bund, who argued that the Jews were a nation and had to organise their own liberation, the Bolsheviks stood in total opposition. They argued that Russian Jews, who more and more spoke Russian rather than Yiddish, were part of the Russian nation. That therefore Jewish workers should not be organised under the leadership of a distinctly Jewish party. They should be organised in the same party as other revolutionary workers, so as to further the joint struggle and bring nearer the day of joint liberation.

So nations are not the same as tribe, race or culture. Indeed, because they are formed from the social results of a common territory and economy, nations are invariably created from a coming together of peoples from many different tribal, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. We can give a few examples to illustrate our point.

Take the Italian nation. It was formed from all sorts of tribes and peoples: Illyrians, Oscans and Latini, Romans, Etruscans, Greeks and Phoenicians, Ostrogoths, Normans and Arabs, to name but a few. Likewise the French nation was formed from, among others, Pictones, Veneti and Senones, Gauls, Romans and Franks (a Germanic people who gave the country its modern name).

The same is true of the far, far, newer US American nation. It is, to use a well worn but accurate phrase, a veritable melting pot. It is made up of a huge diversity of still merging peoples. As well as English colonists, it was formed from Dutch, French, Scots, Irish, Italians, Russians, Jews, Poles, Germans (who constitute the second largest source), etc, etc



— not forgetting native American Indians and the descendants of African slaves, as well as Latinos — who are being added to at a rate of a million a year, driven into the US by the abject poverty of debt ridden Central and South America.

Having said this, it is nevertheless obvious that not every people sharing a historically constituted common territory and economy is a nation. The empires of Nebuchadnezzar, Xerxes, Alexander the Great, the Romans, the French, and the British covered definite territories and were joined together economically, at least in the form of paying tribute to the same exploiting centre. Nevertheless, just like the Warsaw Pact/Comecon and the European Community/Nato, they were far from stable.

They waxed, waned and fell apart, depending on the success or failure of this or that general. For instance the Roman Empire lasted many hundreds of years and included the whole of the Mediterranean world, as well as most of Britain in its far north. But its borders dramatically and constantly changed depending on its military fortunes. And such was the nature of its unity that its colony — the serf peasantry — actually welcomed as liberators the Germanic barbarian hordes as they looted, pillaged and then carved up the western empire.

Much to our disappointment, not entirely dissimilar features have characterised the USSR. In a sense the USSR has been a stable community of people historically constituted well before 1917, in that it more or less conforms to the borders of the Tsarist Empire. Yet we know that as soon as the lid of bureaucratic authoritarianism was lifted, we saw age old ethnic conflicts between Russians and Georgians, Lithuanians and Russians, Letts and Russians and between all sorts of other peoples, come to the surface. We also saw the previously 'indissoluble' constituent republics of the union using the chaos of Gorbachev's counterrevolutionary perestroika to stake their claim for sovereignty from the USSR, including the Russian Federation itself.

One of the main reasons for the crisis of bureaucratic socialism taking the form of national disunion is that the USSR is a *state community* and not a nation. While it has a common territory and economy, it certainly does not have a common language or culture. There are many different nations within the USSR — I don't know how many, but there are something like 120 distinct languages — all with their own network of grievances.

Nor does having a common language mean one is part of the same nation. The obvious example for us is those who speak English. Like the Jewish religion/culture, it can indicate common origins, not unity within a common nation. Most North Americans, Australians, South Africans, New Zealanders, and more or less all the British, speak English. But, because the original language users/givers no longer have a common economy or territory, they have long ago separated into distinct nations.

Like all aspects of human society, nations are subject to the laws of change. They have a history — a beginning and an end. They are living and active. They are not carved immutably in stone, but constantly change. It goes without saying that in the real world, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, nations only diverge slowly because of their deep social roots.

Even if a nation was split up due to military defeat (as Poland was on numerous occasions) it does not cease to be a nation. A nation is, it must be emphasised, a *historical* phenomenon. It therefore has a stubborn long term social-psychological robustness; it is not ended as easily as some conquerors would like to imagine. We can see this in the case of *dissected nations* like Korea, Vietnam and Germany. All these nations have been forcibly divided and were subject to separate development for many years, yet their peoples — despite being, in a number of cases, hermetically sealed off from one another — continued to see themselves as one.

For example, in spite of being kept apart by concrete, barbed wire and automatic machine guns, and living under two distinct, opposing economic systems — capitalism and bureaucratic socialism — the German people of both the Federal Republic and Democratic Republic yearned for unity. Only a hopeless cynic would suggest that the call for unity was simply a craving on the part of those in the east for the fat crumbs from the Federal German imperialist table. It must not be forgotten that the call for unity came from both east and

west, and reflected a heartfelt popular desire to come together again as the German nation (in the full sense of the word).

Against this, efforts by the old 'official communist' leadership under Honecker to present the GDR as a distinct nation were both unscientific and bound to fail. Although from 1945 to 1990 Germany (not to mention Austria) had no common economy, nothing could prevent the development of a German national movement welling up from below (albeit in a counterrevolutionary form) as soon as Gorbachev announced that the USSR would no longer guarantee the existence of the GDR.

There are important lessons here when it comes to our islands, in particular dissected Ireland. It certainly should lead those (if they are honest communists and not clumsy police agents) who wrongly use Stalin in an effort to show that historically there are two distinct nations in Ireland, to think again. Ireland might not be a nation in the checklist sense, but taken *historically*, it clearly is. As with Germany, in spite of being dissected, there can be no denying the national movement in Ireland, nor the popular desire that Ireland might be a 'nation once again' ... but more of this later.

## 2. Dominant and subordinate nations

Nations do not just evolve. They evolve as a particular historical category and belong to a definite epoch: the epoch of rising capitalism. Of course, nations can and do come into being under decadent capitalism, but these no longer represent the cutting edge of progressive humanity. The reactionary nature of present day capitalism can, in fact, be seen through the prism of the nation, not least in the contrast between Western Europe and sub-Saharan Africa.

In Western Europe, capitalism triumphed in the name of the nation. The bourgeois revolution took the form of liberating the nation from, on the one hand, the feudal manor, with its parochialism, local autonomy and customs barriers; and on the other, the cosmopolitanism of absolutism. But behind the revolutionary enthusiasm and self sacrifice of the French *Armée Révolutionnaire* and the Italian Risorgimento was the necessity of creating a home market "with one code of laws, one national class interest, one frontier, and one customs tariff" for capitalism.

The requirements of modern capitalism and its home market were best served by the political unification of peoples in territories who spoke the same language and felt a cultural self-identification, ie through a common nationality. The resulting nation state provided the best conditions for the free development of commerce and trade, and the defence of that commerce and trade from 'alien' predators.

The state borders of sub-Saharan Africa were the product of decadent late nineteenth century capitalism, drawn in London, Paris and Berlin according to the balance of power between rival European imperialist nations, not local developments. As a result, today's borders — which are directly inherited from the colonialist powers — cut up tribes and ethnic groupings in a completely arbitrary fashion. Moreover, as capitalist development has been feeble in this area of the world, not least because of the ravages caused by neo-colonialism, attempts to create nations have been equally feeble and to some extent artificial. What still dominates in the main beneath the surface of 'one people, one party, one leader' nation building, is the rivalry of various elites who use tribal hatreds and tribal fears to further their own narrow interests.

If by chance history allows full nation states to develop — as opposed to the whole sub-continent skipping this stage of development and passing directly from dependent capitalism to socialism — then I would suggest that the pattern they are most likely to follow is that of Eastern, as opposed to Western, Europe. (The significance of this to the British Isles will become clear later.)

Because Eastern Europe never experienced a dynamic development of capitalism, nations formed *within* states, and *dominant nations* emerged which led these states, eg the Germans in Austria — not the little shell of a country made famous in the *Sound of Music* and the *Third Man*, of course, but the Austrian Empire that dominated Central Europe for centuries, in fact till the end of World War I. Within the Austrian Empire an Austrian German nation formed and came to act as its leading, *dominant* element. The same thing

happened within the Russian Empire, where the Great Russian nation formed and became the dominant nation.

But along with dominant nations, Eastern Europe also saw nations which, in a sense, came too late: *subordinate nations*. These were too late, not to become nations, but to form nation states. They suffered persecution and oppression under the heel of the dominant nations; the Bolsheviks called the Russian Empire the prison house of nations. The Georgian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian and a whole host of other nations grew up not under the wing, but under the boot of the Great Russian nation.

In *Marxism and the National Question* Stalin talks about the dominant nations in Eastern Europe crushing national minorities, passing acts of repression, restricting people's freedom of movement, restrictions on franchise, closing of schools, closing of religious institutions and restrictions on the use of languages, etc. Not surprisingly, such subordinate nations were forced onto the road of struggle, of national rebellion.

Here, as we've already suggested in the case of the USSR, history repeated itself, not as farce but as tragedy. For what did we see in Eastern Europe while it was still formally socialist? The dominant regional nation, USSR/Russia, acted as a great power bully; and within each socialist country the dominant nation acted as a little power bully. Reading Stalin on Eastern Europe in 1913 one is struck by the similarities with 'official communist' Eastern Europe.

In 'official communist' Bulgaria, Turks were banned from using their mother tongue in public, their schools were closed down and between 250,000 and 300,000 of them 'voluntarily' fled to Turkey. In Ceausescu's Romania the Hungarian minority was subjected to vile treatment, while in Gierick's Poland it was the Jews, and in Hungary it is the gypsy. Today in Yugoslavia the dominant Serbs deny elementary rights to the subordinate Albanians. The list is long, and the list is, yes, tragic.

In 1913 Stalin blamed such manifestations of dominant nation chauvinism (which will no doubt greatly intensify with the restoration of capitalism throughout most of Eastern Europe) on the reactionary bureaucracy. Considering the bourgeois aspirations of the 'official communist' bureaucracy in these countries, we can only concur with the Stalin of 1913.

## 3. Self determination

The division of the world into nations long ago outlived any progressive usefulness, as has capitalism. With a 'globalised' world economy what is needed is the communist organisation of production. Nations therefore no longer *serve* to advance production. They have become a relative fetter, they hold back *what is possible*. Hence in *purely economic terms* the creation of nation states with borders other than those inherited from colonial times in sub-Saharan Africa would not be progressive. (As we will see, in terms of politics this need not be the case.)

Nations might no longer serve to advance production. They do, however, continue to serve the now reactionary bourgeoisie, whose slogan has gone from 'liberty, fraternity and equality' to 'divide and rule'. A weak bourgeoisie of the dominant nation will turn to divide and rule chauvinism in an effort to rally all classes of the dominant nation behind it and thus shore up its position, so that it can continue to rob, exploit and plunder all. Its ability to get away with this naturally depends on the strength of our class, the degree of working class organisation and consciousness. But where divide succeeds it will call forth resistance from bourgeois or proto bourgeois elements in the subordinate nation. This stratum will seek to rally all classes of the subordinate nation behind it, not for altruistic reasons, but in the hope to exploit them later, alone, without having to give the lion's share of the booty to an outsider.

Under such circumstances communists do *not* line up behind the national movement of the subordinate bourgeoisie. As Marx said, workers have no country. Our aim is communism, and that aim necessitates a worldwide fight against all sections of the

\* Incidentally, opportunists love to march under the national flag; and not just the national flag of the oppressed. In the 1950s, CPGB demonstrations looked more like they were organised by the National Front, so many Union Jacks were there. Things were the same in the 1970s. I remember going to the 1973 World Youth Festival in Berlin, where they made us march under the Union Jack.

bourgeoisie. That is why we will not rally under the flag of the bourgeoisie, not even the flag of the oppressed bourgeoisie\*. For us, for genuine communists, there is only one flag, the red flag of the working class.

Here we're not just talking symbolically. We always ensure that our political programme, our political line, remains pure. That does not mean that our tactics are inflexible. No, under *certain* circumstances we'll strike together with the subordinate bourgeoisie. However we do so only if it furthers the interests of the working class and brings nearer communism. In other words, whereas the subordinate bourgeoisie fights against the dominant bourgeoisie in order to become a dominant bourgeoisie, we fight against the dominant bourgeoisie in order to channel the struggle against national oppression into the struggle for proletarian revolution.

So we don't stand aside from the national struggle or belittle national oppression. Quite the contrary. Communists come forward as the most consistent, most outspoken and bravest champions of the nationally oppressed.

As a matter of principle we stand against all forms of national or racial oppression, whether it be crude and open, as for example it was in Bulgaria, or whether it is subtle, as in most imperialist countries. Indeed we take our stand against national oppression to the point where we demand the *right* of all nations to self determination up to and including the *right* to form an independent state.

What we mean by the right to self determination is straightforward. It means nations should have the right to pursue their own affairs as they see fit. It means the Irish, the Estonian, the Cuban, the Czech, etc, etc, nations have the right to enter into alliances, separate, federate or merge with any other nation they choose. Self determination means what it says: the right to choose, the right to determine one's own future.

Having said that, it has to be emphasised that self determination does not mean that we *advocate* separatism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Let's illustrate our position by using the analogy of marriage and divorce. We stand by the right of a man or a woman to quickly and easily end their marriage, whether it be a state, church or communist marriage. Taking such a stand does not, however, lead us to send out flying pickets to registry offices or interrupt church marriage services, like Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate*, with the slogan: 'divorce'. After all, we also stand by the right to get married. More, we think people coming together is an excellent thing.

So defending the *right* to divorce must not be taken to mean *advocating* divorce. Similarly, defending the right of nations to separate does not mean *advocating* separation. On the contrary, it must be emphasised that we defend the right to separate because we want a coming together and a staying together of nations.

Communism goes hand in hand with the merging — if you like, the 'marrying' — of nations. Obviously, for that to be possible in the first place, for the staying together to last, their 'marriage' has to be mutually advantageous and voluntary. We're not in favour of forced or arranged marriages between people or nations. We're in favour of true love, true unity. And what that necessitates is both sexes and all nations having equal rights.

Again, defending the right of nations to decide their own future does not mean that we fold our arms, sit passively on the sidelines and let them get on with it. As communists we have no time for 'I'm white, I'm English, who am I to judge' liberalism.

For example, as communists operating in Britain we would not argue, in the name of self determination, that Iran has the right to carry on stoning prostitutes, cutting the arms off thieves and hanging homosexuals. We agitate and fight against backward practices and harmful customs, not only abroad, but also at home — whether it be carrying out female circumcision in Harley Street on behalf of upper class African and Arab parents, or the burning of *Satanic Verses* by lower class Muslims on the streets of Bradford.

Defending the right of nations to self determination is not a passive position. It is a com-

Many protested. Only after much argument and because of a false sense of communist discipline did we do so; the same thing happened with the US delegation. To march behind the Stars and Stripes might have made 'official communist' backs happy, but not those who were used to burning it, back at home, in protest against US aggression against Vietnam.



unist stratagem which seeks to open up an active working class intervention in order to overcome all forms of nationalism and chauvinism in both oppressor and oppressed nations.

So, yes, although a nation – to directly quote Stalin – “has the right even to return to the old order of things. That does not mean we agree.” If the people of Lithuania are determined to return to the capitalist past, if the people of Iran are determined to return to medievalism, such is their right. But we are not going to sit idly by, either in Lithuania, Iran or Britain, while the leading forces in these countries actually try and carry this through.

#### 4. Norway and Sweden

To fully understand the Leninist attitude towards national self determination one must also understand the different rights, duties and obligations communists have, depending on whether they are operating in the dominant (oppressor) nation or the subordinate (oppressed) nation; the division between the two is the essence of imperialism. We can explore the rights and duties of communists in such countries most usefully by looking at Lenin's penetrating comments on Norway and Sweden.

From 1814 Norway was united to Sweden, through the Swedish crown – a bit like Ireland and Great Britain in the eighteenth century. It had its own parliament, the *Storting*, true. But although Norway was nominally an independent kingdom, its population felt that it was some sort of semi-colony. And with the introduction of universal suffrage in 1898 the national movement was able to fully make itself felt. In June 1905 things reached a head: the *Storting* voted for separation; after a plebiscite Sweden accepted it, and two months later Norway became an independent nation state.

What's interesting about this is not the details concerning the separation of Norway and Sweden; rather the generalisations on the rights, obligations and duties of communists which Lenin extrapolated – rights, obligations and duties which are applicable to all oppressor and oppressed countries.

Lenin said that communists in Sweden (the oppressor country) had an obligation to the national movement in Norway to defend unconditionally the right of Norway to separate. Without taking this stand the communists in Sweden had no right to say anything else. If, on the other hand, they stood by the principle of national self determination, then what else they had to say would at least be listened to by Norwegian workers.

That did not mean that Swedish communists had to advocate the separation of Norway and Sweden. Lenin argued that communists in Sweden (of course, he referred to 'social democrats', but we'll use 'communists' because it has the same modern meaning) could quite legitimately agitate and propagandise for the unity of Norway and Sweden.

In Norway, on the other hand, Lenin insisted, communists had to have a conditional attitude towards secession. They had to look at it concretely, taking into account the class struggle nationally and internationally. But whatever position they decided on, they were obliged to carry out internationalist propaganda advocating the unity of Swedish and Norwegian workers. They must not jump on the bandwagon of Norwegian nationalism. To just say: 'We must separate from Sweden' – that would be nothing more and nothing less than a left cover for the Norwegian bourgeoisie. If Norwegian communists had done that they would have been guilty of nationalism.

What Lenin shows us here is that obligations and duties work two ways. There are obligations and duties for communists in the oppressor country. But also obligations and duties for communists in the oppressed country. The differences between them go together to make a dialectical unity within proletarian internationalism, a proletarian internationalism to which the right to self determination is subordinated.

In reference to Norway and Sweden, Lenin made the point that the right to self determination is not an absolute right. It is not a right that exists above the overall struggle for socialism. Lenin argued, for example, that if a world war – because that was what it would have amounted to – if a war between Germany and Britain had been provoked by the separation of Norway and Sweden, then the communists in both Norway and Sweden would have been correct, indeed would have been obliged, to oppose Norway's separation,

in the interest of the proletarian struggle on the world scale.

In other words, the right to self determination must be approached according to the struggle for communism.

#### 5. British nation

At last, we arrive at the national question in the British Isles. Let us begin by saying that in Britain there are not three nations – the English, Welsh and Scottish nations – but one, British, nation. Within this nation, there exist all sorts of regional variations, accents, customs, different economic levels of development. In this sense Britain is no different from other nations, such as the US, which because of its vast territory and people from many different backgrounds, contains within it tremendous diversity; or even Germany, which in spite of being formed almost purely from one source, ie, German people, has big differences of religion and dialect according to region.

The formation of the British nation came about with the rise of capitalism. This represented a qualitative stage in the merging of the peoples of Britain which had been going on for well over a thousand years. Crucially the rise of capitalism began the merger of the English, Welsh and Scottish nationalities, which were themselves the result of the coming together of many different peoples.

The English were formed from the merging of British Celts (including the Cornish), Romans, Jutes, Angles, Saxons, Norse, and finally the Normans. The Scottish nationality too was formed from a variety of peoples. The original Picts, Scots (from Ireland) and Norse (who settled in Cathness, Sutherland, and ruled the Hebrides till 1468 and the Orkneys till 1471). Even the Welsh nationality has assimilated waves of later English and Irish migrants.

Before continuing we must just say what a nationality is. Nationality is a more complex social formation than a tribe, which as we have said, is essentially a blood relationship between people. Nationality is a social relationship which went hand in hand with the emergence of classes and is based on a common territory and language, and the accumulation of a common culture.

The evolution of the various nationalities in the British Isles was a drawn out process. Only with high feudalism did the English nationality take final shape with the absorption of the Norman conquerors. In Celtic Wales and Scotland things were more complicated, not least because of English expansionism.

From the 11th and 12th centuries Anglo-Norman lords began to seize Welsh lands, establishing themselves as semi-autonomous Lords of the March. With the killing of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd by the army of Edward I in 1282 the English crown took the lead in Wales, a process of incorporation finalised by Henry VIII – a Tudor: they had Welsh origins – in 1536.

Wales was conquered by the sword and held down by a highly sophisticated system of fortifications. But although the English legal system and the Church of England were imposed and the Welsh gentry anglicised, this did not mean that Wales as a whole became English; as late as the 17th century a clear majority of the population was recorded as speaking Welsh. It was only with the industrial revolution that these people and the English really began to draw together.

One of the key centres of the industrial revolution was South Wales. The whole area was characterised by industry: steel, iron and coal in particular. This saw local South Wales peasants transformed into proletarians. It also saw huge numbers of migrants sucked in, not only from the north of Wales, but also from England and Ireland. There is still a distinct Irish strand in Welsh life in the form of the Catholic Church.

So when we talk about the Welsh, it's important not to think only of the descendants of Celtic Britons who successfully resisted the invading Anglo-Saxons from their highland strongholds, but also the assimilated English and Irish migrants who were sucked into the area by the industrial revolution. Together they formed the modern Welsh proletariat, which is part of the British nation.

Of course, the development of capitalism was far from even. North Wales remained a rural backwater, because of which its merger into the British nation has been far slower. Nonetheless, Wales and the Welsh today are, to a greater or lesser extent, integrated in, and constitute part of, a British nation; the 1981

census recorded only 21,000 Welsh speaking monoglots (all in the north).

In Scotland the picture was somewhat different. Scotland merged politically with England and Wales with the coming to the throne of a Scottish king, James VI, as James I of England. Given that this occurred when early capitalist development was already gaining momentum and economically drawing England and Scotland together, the result was not some temporary fleeting merger, as occurred with royal marriages in feudal times, but a lasting unity. True, this happened under English hegemony – English bribes played an important role in ensuring that the Scottish parliament voted through the Act of Union in 1707 – but there can be no denying that Scotland benefited greatly from the merger; it was no internal colony.

As with North Wales, the Scottish Highlands were somewhat peripheral to capitalist development. Integration was tardy, and met resistance which took the form of a Highland-Lowland conflict just as much as it did a Highland-English conflict. The Jacobin Rising of 1745 was finally crushed by joint English and Lowland forces.

The reason for this is easily explained. It must be remembered that at the time of the Treaty of Union, England was not only more advanced than Scotland, it was one of the most advanced countries in the world. But well before James VI was even born, the Lowlands of Scotland operated in economic terms very closely with the more advanced English economy; English was the language of politics and commerce in the Lowlands from the 13th Century (later called Scots, or Lallans, in order to distinguish it from English English). The political merger of England and Scotland speeded up an already ongoing economic merger.

United, the economies of England, Scotland and Wales formed the British home market – the material basis for nations. Together, in the form of the British nation, they exploited the world. Capitalism in Scotland and Wales did not develop against capitalism in England, but in cooperation with it. Within the British home and overseas market there was a division of labour. Scotland and Wales concentrated in particular on mining, steel and heavy engineering and, while Britain was the workshop of the world and Britannia ruled the waves, they – or more accurately their capitalists – prospered alongside those of England.

#### 6. Ireland

Ireland was different to England, Scotland and Wales. Through conquest – completed with the Williamite Wars at the end of the 17th century – it did go on to form part of the British state, but not the British nation. This was not due to Ireland being somehow irrelevant to capitalist development in Britain. Ireland was, along with the slave trade, a key source of cheap labour and primitive capitalist accumulation that made the industrial revolution in Britain possible.

However, far from Ireland benefiting from the industrial revolution, as did the elites of Scotland and Wales, it was its tragic victim (this is indicated by population figures: in 1801 Ireland accounted for some 33% of the total population in the British Isles; by 1951 this percentage had gone down to only 8%. In contrast England increased its proportion from 53% to 79% in the same period; Scotland maintained a more or less steady 10% and Wales a more or less steady 4%). Deprived of its people, its wealth plundered for the sake of industrial development in Britain, Ireland was bled white.

True, in the Belfast area, some significant industrialisation did take place. On the other hand Dublin remained not much more than a centre to administer plunder. It was never an industrial powerhouse. As to the rest of Ireland, it suffered depopulation and dedevelopment. Ireland therefore emerged as a subordinate nation, unlike Scotland and Wales which slowly merged with England to form a united imperialist, oppressing, nation.

From the earliest days there were numerous peasant revolts against Anglo-Irish landlords. But in 1798 the people acted for the first time as a single body – a nation – when Protestants and Catholics, organised under the banner of the United Irishman led by Wolfe Tone – a bourgeois Protestant – staged a powerful uprising in which many hundreds of thousands took part and in which many thousands were killed.

Britain reacted to the United Irishman uprising by trying to incorporate Ireland into

the United Kingdom. After the proposal was rejected by the Irish parliament in 1799, the Pitt government in London turned to systematic bribery. As with Scotland in 1707, it worked, and on June 7 1800 the Irish parliament voted, 158 to 115, to abolish itself and for the Act of Union.

But where in Scotland the antagonism between wage worker and capital came to the fore, the national question remained at the heart of Irish politics. One rising followed another. Emmet's abortive attempt in 1803 was followed in 1848 by the Young Ireland insurrection, the Fenians in 1867 and then the Easter Rising of 1916 which led to an all-Ireland insurrection. And even though today Southern Ireland operates as a nation state, the national question still dominates Irish politics, above all in the form of the armed struggle in the north, led by Sinn Fein/IRA, for national reunification and full independence.

Marx recognised quite clearly that Ireland was developing, not as an equal part of the United Kingdom, but as an exploited, oppressed, subordinate nation within it. Marx initially thought that Ireland's liberation was dependent on the victory of the working class in Britain. Ireland would be liberated after the workers in Britain had liberated themselves.

Marx changed his mind on this when he came to appreciate how the oppression of Ireland was used by the British ruling class to ameliorate class antagonisms in Britain and sow divisions amongst the workers. Workers in Britain were being won to identify with the actions of their 'own' ruling class in Ireland, something helped by a feeling that Irish workers were rivals in the labour market: Irish workers were brought over to Britain in huge numbers to be used as cheap labour throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Because of this Marx came to the view that it was necessary for Ireland to separate from Britain, even if only temporarily. Indeed he stated that the separation of Ireland from Britain was a precondition for British working class emancipation. While they were tied to their own ruling class because of Ireland, he argued, the British working class would never do anything decisive.

So Marx's position went from where he thought that the British working class was going to liberate Ireland, to where he thought the success of the Irish liberation movement – yes, with the active identification of the British working class, let's not forget this – will provide the key to open up socialist progress in Britain. That is the position of the Communist Party of Great Britain (*The Leninist*) today.

We stand for the right of Ireland to self determination. We stand for the right of Ireland to take up arms against British imperialism. We stand for the right of Ireland to decide its own future independent of British domination. This position is crystallised in the slogan 'troops out'. Not troops out sometime when things have been peacefully sorted out, courtesy of some Labour government, as the people of 'Time To Go' dream about, but troops out now, ie, troops out unconditionally.

Of course, for us troops out is not a call for a nice orderly disengagement by British imperialism from Northern Ireland, again, as the 'Time To Go' lot want. That's a reformist attitude. We want to see Britain disengaged – not disengage – from Ireland. Not an orderly retreat, but the British proconsul, Peter Brooke, fleeing from Northern Ireland, just as the US ambassador had to flee from Saigon, 'on the skids of their helicopters'. That's what we are fighting for. We want to see the humiliating defeat of British imperialism. We want this because we are revolutionaries. So when we call for troops out now and self determination for the Irish nation we do so because, to quote another of our slogans, 'Britain's defeat will be our victory'.

The separation of Britain and Ireland will hopefully be a temporary separation, not a divorce. The peoples of Ireland and Britain are closely interlinked historically, economically and culturally. Irish workers in Britain, have, for example, played a tremendous role in the struggle of the working class. Indeed they were in the vanguard of establishing the labour movement in Britain.

Because of this we hope that after a separation there will be a coming back together as quickly as possible.

#### 7. Ireland: one nation or two?

British state propaganda would have it that



Ireland is not one but two nations: a southern Catholic nation and a northern Protestant nation. This is nonsense. The Irish nation was *dissected* in 1921 in an act of political gerrymandering, through force, in an artificial way not dissimilar to the dissection of the German nation in 1945. The GDR might, like the Six Counties of Northern Ireland, have been *predominantly* Protestant; might, like Northern Ireland, have had a separate political system; but this, like Northern Ireland, did not a nation make.

Simply because claims to Northern Ireland nationhood are based on its Protestantism, up to 40% of its population (the Catholics) are excluded even though they share the same territory, economy and language; on this basis the GDR's claims to be a separate nation were far more sound. Of course, there cannot be a Protestant nation, not only because this would exclude nearly half the population, but because nation and religion are not the same thing at all. If the Northern Ireland Protestant 'nation' is distinguished from the Southern Ireland Catholic 'nation' by religion, then 'multi-cultural' London would have within it at least ten, perhaps twenty, separate 'nations'. Certainly Glasgow should be divided into a Protestant and a Catholic 'nation', along with Liverpool.

Protestant claims to national rights cannot be taken seriously. The Protestants in Northern Ireland constitute the basis for a pro-British labour aristocracy, not a nation. This does not mean that there is no Protestant culture in Ireland. There is. There is an Irish Protestant tradition which, as well as having a reactionary pro-imperialist side, has a progressive side to it in the form of its historic rationality, self reliance and support for trade union organisation. As communists we aim to build on the positive side of Protestant culture, to educate Protestant workers, and for that matter Catholic workers, in the progressive features of the history of Protestants in Ireland.

While some claim that Northern Ireland Protestants constitute a second, Irish, nation, because of Protestantism, others claim that they are British. That is perhaps the most laughable claim of all. The fact is they don't even live in Britain. They live in the British Isles (then so does the Catholic population in the north and the whole population of the Twenty-six Counties), but not in Britain.

As well as not sharing a common territory, they have a separate economy, and history. Even if we put the armed struggle and revolutionary situation aside, its politics are very different too. The separate Stormont parliament might be in cold storage, but even without it Northern Ireland's direct rule, PR election system and unique parties means it has a very different political tradition than Scotland, Yorkshire, London and other parts of Britain. Not surprisingly: it is, after all, part of another nation, albeit a dissected one.

Obviously communists aim to develop the positive features of the Protestant tradition. They should also offer guarantees concerning the minority rights of Protestants in a socialist state.

There can be no question of exchanging British domination in the north for a priest-ridden united Ireland. As we've said many times before, what we're fighting for is the right of nations to self determination *as part of the struggle for socialism*.

We're not fighting for Ireland to be united under the tricolour of the Irish bourgeoisie. We're fighting for Ireland to be united under the Red Flag of the proletariat. And under the Red Flag, people have the right to freely practice whatever religion they choose and fully develop their progressive traditions. Only in this way can the negative historical antagonisms which have divided the people of Ireland be overcome.

Now while we stress that Ireland is one nation, this must not lead us to the 'always has been, always will be' claims of misty Irish nationalists. Nations — as opposed to nationalities — are a very recent historical phenomenon. More than that, they evolve; they come into being, merge and divide. The fact is that Ireland has never had a full-blown industrial revolution; even the post-1960s industrialisation (capitalist development) was in the main from the outside, fragile and lopsided. Ireland's development of capitalism has, in other words, been more like Eastern Europe than most of Western Europe. In addition we must take into account the British division of Ireland, which, in Connolly's words, turned back the wheels of progress.

Because of all this, it is theoretically possible that if Ireland's struggle to be 'a nation

once again' fails, two nations could develop. Naturally this would require certain definite circumstances. For example, if one part of Ireland left the EC and developed along divergent lines — in the light of the GDR, not just for a couple of decades, but for much longer. Or perhaps the expulsion of all Catholics from the north into the south, and the sealing of the border with an Irish version of the Berlin Wall would do it.

As we've said before, nations are dynamic, not static. If you divide a people for long enough they will form into different nations. So we shouldn't treat the existence of one Irish nation as a matter of doctrine, rather a historical fact which, although true today, *could* change tomorrow.

To illustrate this point let us look at Cyprus. For many years Cyprus had areas that were predominantly Greek Cypriot or predominantly Turkish Cypriot. Nonetheless these peoples mixed and shared a common territory and economy. Not any longer. With the 1974 Turkish invasion Greek Cypriots were driven out of the north and a Turkish Cypriot neo-colony created. This means that northern Cyprus is now developing in synch with Turkey rather than with southern Cyprus. The possibility exists therefore that, if the division continues, the two distinct peoples could in time come to constitute two separate nations on the island of Cyprus.

## 8. Against unity ... for the moment

Leninists have always argued, as a general principle, for the most highly centralised state. And not only the most highly centralised state, but the largest possible state. I know it's very unfashionable at the moment, when what's in vogue is 'small is beautiful', to argue for 'big is best'. Why do we do this? Because we're for the World Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and finally communism, which by definition is organised on a world-wide basis, reflecting the existence of a highly integrated and interdependent world. As a step towards that goal we fight for large socialist states. Not just large states, but the biggest possible states (this does not in any way contradict local democracy and initiative, which we wholly favour).

What applies to states also applies to communist parties. When our Party was formed it was formed as a world party, the Communist International — the CPGB was its section in Britain. So our Party was not the Party of British Communists, but the Party of the communists who operate in Britain. That is why we don't have the *British* Communist Party, but the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Communist Party that operates in and aims to overthrow the existing state.

Because the bourgeoisie in Britain is not organised in three nation states, but in one unified nation state, it would be criminal to divide our forces along the lines of nationality. That would be to do our enemy a favour; we might just as well split our organisations along the lines of sex, race and religion. The bourgeoisie would be overjoyed if we acted so stupidly.

Those with a sharp mind will already have noted an inconsistency in our argument. The bourgeois state is not the state of Great Britain ('Great' not in the sense that it is better than other countries, but to distinguish it from Brittany, ie, Little Britain), it is the state of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Given this fact, surely we should form the Communist Party of the United Kingdom, which includes Britain and Northern Ireland.

Interestingly, when I joined the CPGB it did organise in Northern Ireland. The Irish Workers Party was responsible for the Twenty-six Counties of Ireland, while the Communist Party of Northern Ireland functioned as a *district committee* of the CPGB.

However, the reason behind the merger of the IWP and the CPNI in 1970 and the formation of the Communist Party of Ireland was completely cowardly. Or, more accurately, the CPGB's junking the CPNI was completely cowardly. As soon as a revolutionary situation emerged in 1969 the opportunist leadership hurriedly decided they wanted to have nothing to do with Northern Ireland. So they simply washed their hands of their former comrades and acted as a dishonest match-maker — an opportunist manoeuvre if ever there was one.

Our seeming 'inconsistency' is, of course, no opportunist manoeuvre. As we've already argued, Ireland (all of it) is an exception in terms of our attitude towards the separation

of nations. We actively favour the reunification of Ireland, a period of separation from Britain and then a speedy getting back together again. The same applies to the organisation of communists in our two islands.

## 9. For unity

We Leninists want the unity, and finally the merger, of all peoples. In spite of this we stand for the division of people in the here and now. We're for the division of nations into class against class. Only if one does not understand the relationship between means and ends would this seem to be a conundrum. For in order to achieve the ultimate unity of all peoples it is necessary first for the workers in every country to turn against their own bourgeoisie. Nationalism is clearly a barrier to that aim.

As I have said, neither Wales nor Scotland has ever been a nation in any scientific sense of the term. In spite of this it cannot be denied that the people of Scotland, and of Wales, still have a strong sense of themselves as a nationality. Because of this there is always the danger of nationalist demagogues gaining a following and thus diverting the working class into the mire of separatism.

To counter this we stand for the right of these nationalities to fully develop their culture, with all its distinct aspects, origins and richness. But on top of this we are also obliged to defend their right to self determination, up to and including the right to separate, and to go on and form a separate nation. Naturally, supporting the *right* to separate does not mean that we advocate it; we don't. We support the unity of all workers in *Britain* in the fight to overthrow the *British* state.

There are a number of left groups in Britain who would agree with us that there is a British nation. Where they differ is whether or not Scotland and Wales have any rights. Their argument is that because Britain is an imperialist state, and because Scotland and Wales are an integral part of that imperialist state, then there can be no talk about them being oppressed nations, and therefore no right to self determination.

This is formal logic of the worst sort. The reason we advocate the right to self determination is not as some perverse award for being oppressed. No, the reason we advocate the right of self determination is to *overcome* nationalist prejudices and nationalist calls for separatism, in order to clear the ground for the class struggle.

We cannot counter nationalism in Wales and Scotland simply by stating that neither Wales nor Scotland is a nation and never has been, nor that the people of Wales and Scotland are guilty of supporting British imperialism and therefore they should, like the English, shut up and start feeling guilty. The fact of the matter is that there is a powerful Welsh and Scottish nationalist undercurrent. This cannot be wished away through formal logic.

Indeed, in the face of a concrete manifestation of nationalism the best thing we can do is to put ourselves at the forefront of the fight to win the democratic demands being put forward by the nationalists, as the way to undermine support for nationalism and channel the whole struggle along class lines. That is the communist approach.

The national struggle may take many different forms far short of separation; for language or religious equality, for a local parliament or local officials. If we take the lead in fighting for such demands then there's clearly less room for nationalistic propaganda which can only undermine the unity of the British working class.

As we have already made clear, although we stand for the right of Wales and Scotland to determine their own future, including having the right to secede and establish an independent state, there is no pressing need for separation in the way that there is for Ireland. Welsh and Scottish separation would be reactionary, not progressive.

Even if we just take into account the economy, what on earth is progressive about establishing a customs and immigration post at Gretna Green or Caerphilly? What could be progressive about dividing up industries that have developed on the basis of an all Britain market, on the basis of an all Britain division of labour? Or what would be progressive about splitting up the TUC into separate English, Welsh and Scottish units, along with the TGWU, Nupe, AES, MSF, GMB, etc? In a word, nothing!

Now as we have said, the rise in Scottish and Welsh nationalism was born of defeat and

the resulting idea that somehow the English are to blame for Thatcher. Obviously we've got to nail this myth, the myth of backward English workers and advanced Scottish and Welsh workers. It really is crap.

Scotland and Wales have in their history splendid examples of working class militancy. The strikes by South Wales miners and Clydeside engineers in 1915, the Little Moscovs and Red Clydeside of the immediate aftermath of World War I, the Councils of Action in 1920 and 1926, the formation of the Workers' Defence Corps in Methil, the Hunger Marches of the 1920s and 30s, being the most outstanding.

It will, of course, be recognised that all of these examples have parallels in England and were invariably the product of the class struggle in Britain as a whole. They were not the result of the national question, as was, for instance, the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland.

Being forced to admit this, the last refuge of the nationalistic scoundrel is the claim that Scotland and Wales vote for the Labour Party to a greater extent than England. This is true. But then parts of Northern England vote Labour to a greater extent than either Wales or Scotland. That does not lead us to advocate that they hive themselves off and form separate states. And before going on we must question whether voting Labour is an example of advanced working class consciousness, or merely a matter of being *less* backward. We take the latter view. The Labour Party is a bourgeois workers party with a consistently reactionary record in and out of office.

Where are the votes for revolutionary organisations in Wales and Scotland that show that workers there are really far ahead of workers in England? Even if they were voting for their version of Sinn Fein — rather than the tartan Tory SNP and the pale pink Plaid Cymru — this would be something. Okay, Sinn Fein is a petty bourgeois movement. But it's a petty bourgeois movement that fights in a revolutionary way.

If the workers in Wales and Scotland were voting in large numbers for organisations that were fighting the British state, or even organisations that actively identified with the liberation struggle in Ireland, then we could talk about a qualitative gap between workers in Wales and Scotland and those in England. But this is not the case, and the reason is simple. The workers in Wales, Scotland and England are part of the same, British, nation. There might be regional variations within it, the class struggle might develop unevenly, but in the last analysis they march together and share a common fate.

When it comes down to it, rubbishing workers in England is an act of opportunism. It is used as an excuse for those who like to call themselves socialists in Wales and Scotland to avoid the necessary task of forging working class unity, and winning workers in Britain, not to Labourite politics, but to communist politics. Likewise, behind silly jokes about the 'soft' South East, there is a contempt for the working class as a whole and an abdication from the struggle for revolution in Britain.

About 25 million people live in the South East: that's nearly half the population. Any movement for socialism that dismisses them as 'soft' and relies simply on the working class in Wales (population 2.5 million) and Scotland (population 5 million) is doomed to failure.

If we really want revolution, Scotland and Wales are vitally important. Even with the rightward shift of traditionally left unions like the NUM in these areas, they are still bedrocks of working class militancy. But if we don't win the South East, and above all London, then the revolution will never be won. The government bureaucracy is centred in London, it is the heart of the beast.

There is every reason for confidence. In recent years workers in the South East have actually taken the lead in a number of struggles: for example, the hospital workers' strike, the struggle for a 35 hour week in the engineering industry, the ambulance workers' strike and poll tax non-payment. This is something that genuine proletarian revolutionaries will welcome. After all, we are not in competition against each other. We are part of the same army — a revolutionary army which should organise in the most rational way, in a way to maximise our unity and fighting abilities against our common enemy: the British bourgeoisie and its state.

- For the unity of all communists in Britain in the reformed CPGB!
- For proletarian internationalism!
- For a new world proletarian party!