

Workers ACTION

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SLP at the crossroads

- **Smog, ecology and socialism**
- **Free Satpal Ram!**
- **Why Labour's wrong about the euro**
- **Miners under attack again**
- **George Julian Harney – setting the record straight**
- **Socialist Democracy – regroupment of the right**

Workers

ACTION

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Where now for the SLP left?

by Richard Price

The second conference of the Socialist Labour Party could be the last for many delegates. Appalled by the SLP's mockery of internal democracy, many on the left of the party are considering their future inside an organisation which was launched with high hopes, but has dashed them in barely a year and a half.

The run-up to the conference has seen a raft of undemocratic measures adopted by Arthur Scargill's inner circle. First the leadership ruled that members had to form constituency parties – a crazy formalism for a party of the SLP's modest size. Delegates and conference motions could only be sent by CSLPs. Having reluctantly complied, SLP activists then discovered that 18 out of 53 motions were ruled out of order.

The justification for most of these motions being ruled out is that they are

in breach of the constitution – a constitution which SLP members have never had the chance to vote on. But when it comes to playing fast and loose with the rules the SLP leadership is in a class of its own. From one delegate per CSLP the leadership changed it to five, then waited weeks before telling the membership. The conference itself is in breach of the SLP's constitution, according to which it should be held annually.

Instead of holding the conference in time to discuss the SLP's manifesto and intervention in the general election, the leadership has dragged its feet a further eight months. Meanwhile key members on the left of the party have been 'voided' or been threatened with farcical disciplinary action. Scargill has publicly attacked the left of the party, denied it the right to caucus, and even stopped branches from communicating with each other. Those arguing for greater internal democracy and

for changes in the constitution are held to be carrying out anti-party activity.

But the SLP leadership, which has accumulated little political capital, is in a weak position to demand the kind of blind loyalty from its members which Stalinist parties in the past enjoyed. Nor can the adoption by a new party of such authoritarian top-down methods and a constitution which is more bureaucratic than that of most unions gain it credibility in the wider workers' movement.

Although there have been significant losses as members have walked out in disgust, many SLP activists have struggled to keep going. Unfortunately, the leadership has forced them to jump through a series of organisational hoops, as rules for conference and branches are sent down from on high.

Nationally, the SLP is foundering. While the leadership concentrates on internal manoeuvres, it has virtually abandoned any role in the class struggle. It organises no national campaigns or serious interventions. Branches are left to do their own thing, and then jumped on if the leadership doesn't like what they have done. The cancellation of the payment to branches of their one-third share of national dues has left many branches struggling financially.

Socialist News, the SLP's paper, is an erratic, poor quality production. It has carried leadership attacks on SLP members (to which they have no right of reply), along with outrageous pro-Stalinist positions (for which the leadership has no mandate).

Married to the bureaucratic internal methods and the Stalinist international policy is the leadership's reformist electoralism. The SLP's impact on the general election, in which it won an average of only 1.8 per cent in the 61 seats it contested, should have shown that the working class has not broken from Labour in significant numbers. Undeterred, the SLP stood in the Paisley South by-election in November. Without any local base it won a derisory 153 votes (0.6 per cent), finishing eighth in a field of nine and only managing to beat the Natural Law Party.

Worse still, it compounded its sectarianism towards Labour-following workers by instructing SLP members in Scotland not even to talk to the Scottish Socialist Alliance, which also stood in the

Introducing

Workers ACTION

This is the first issue of the journal of the former Workers International League majority. In November, the WIL was dissolved after it became clear that political differences threatened the group with paralysis. The differences developed over the course of approximately a year, and centre on interpretation of the united front and the transitional method, and regroupment orientation.

While both sides are in favour of relating to left-moving currents and individuals critical of the existing centrist tendencies, the minority emphasised the need to engage immediately in detailed programmatic discussions with such elements and establish a liaison committee for international regroupment at the earliest opportunity. This led to a dispute over how much time and energy a small group could afford to commit to such a project without jeopardising the development of its own politics in struggle alongside other militants in the mass organisations of the working class.

Since the WIL was increasingly unable to function effectively, it was decided that the best course of action was to form two separate groups, with both retaining their affiliation to the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency.

Although it has a different name and format, Workers Action is directly descended from the WIL and its paper, Workers News, and will fight on the same political line. We hope that comrades who have supported Workers News in the past will bear with us during the transition period and become regular readers and supporters of Workers Action in the future.

by-election. Making a principle out of standing candidates against Labour without a serious base, even among militant workers, is counterproductive and tactically inept. Going out of your way to isolate yourself from others on the left in order to fight alone is completely crass.

The position of the SLP left wing within the party is increasingly untenable. The hostility of the leadership to revolutionary socialists, the nature of the internal regime and the absence of a mass membership within which to fight for its positions makes any long term role for it unlikely. In our view, the SLP left should carefully assess the results of the conference and decide its next move without delay.

Up to now, the main opposition to the leadership has been organised around the internal publication, *Socialist Perspectives* and a statement on party democracy. Opponents of the leadership are standing on a condensed version of the statement – the Democracy Platform – at the conference. It is obvious that, while this is a useful starting point for maximising opposition, such a platform can only serve as a limited point of reference in terms of holding together the best elements of the SLP left, should it be forced out or expelled.

The hopes of many who joined the SLP were based on the premise that a large party could be built in a relatively short period and that it would act as a pole of attraction to disaffected Labour leftists as well as the diaspora of the revolutionary left. These hopes have been dashed, and not only because of the paranoid Stalinist fashion in which Scargill has led the SLP.

The fact that broad sections of the working class have retained passive Labourist illusions is not accidental, and no amount of ultimatums to desert Labour after 18 years of the Tories were likely to cut that umbilical cord in the short period of time between the SLP's launch and the general election. Even the tarnishing of Blair's image in recent weeks is not simply good news for the SLP.

If anything, the SLP's standing among the vanguard of class conscious socialists is at a lower ebb than is Blair's among Labour voters. Given the unsavoury reputation Scargill has gained on the left, if a significant split did develop within the Labour Party it would be unlikely to head in the direction of the SLP. If there is no prospect of a mass split from Labour in the short term, then the

SLP left should reassess its perspectives. In our view, it should set itself less ambitious organisational goals for the time being, but sharpen its political weapons. There is no long term future for an organisation which blurs the distinction between reform and revolution.

A loose networking organisation is no alternative to the SLP. As anything more than a temporary measure, it would represent a retreat from socialist politics, and would assist in dispersing leftists into individual locally-based 'good work' in the labour movement.

The most important contribution the SLP left could make now would be to declare for a new Marxist organisation. In doing so, it would create the possibility of breaking the logjam in which far left politics in Britain finds itself, with dozens of competing crisis-ridden sects all jockeying for position, yet none capable of having any real impact on the class struggle.

If the founding of the SLP was based on a false perspective – one which many on the left of the party shared – the desire to find a way out of the swamp of sectarian squabbling was a healthy one.

Of course a new Marxist grouping cannot be created out of thin air, simply out of a wish for something better. Nor can it be defined negatively on the basis of anti-Labourism – since of course every crank and sectarian headbanger on the left is an anti-Labourite. It would be essential to have a thorough discussion on an action programme for this period – one which connects immediate demands around key class struggle issues (unemployment, benefits, cuts, wages, anti-union laws, privatisation, defence of the specially oppressed, etc.) with the overall struggle

for socialism.

Allied to such a transitional method must be a united front approach, which seeks to bloc with those in the ranks of the Labour Party opposed to Blair and the modernisers. In this light, the question whether or not to retain forces in the Labour Party (or indeed the SLP) should be seen correctly as a tactical – though nonetheless important – issue. Any assessment of this question would have to weigh the undoubted difficulties of carrying out meaningful work in the Labour Party against the need to link up with wider opposition to Blair and the continuing allegiance of broad sections of workers to Labour in spite of Blair's policies. At any event, the most fruitful area of such work would primarily be through trade union affiliated bodies, rather than ward and constituency parties.

Because of their strong trade union implantation, the best sections of the SLP could play a very positive role in relation to building rank-and-file opposition in the unions. Previous attempts to link up the various broad lefts and other opposition groupings have come to very little, with occasional conferences acting as support networks for marginalised left bureaucrats. With the demise of *Trade Union News* there is no journal to co-ordinate such struggles. It is surely time for a new initiative, and the experience of fighting the Arthur Scargills and Bob Crows of the SLP would be valuable.

If the SLP left is expelled or pushed out of the party then it will have to consider the kinds of issues posed in this article. If it moves in a positive direction it deserves comradely and non-sectarian co-operation from all revolutionary socialists.

WA

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How should a red-green alliance work?

The fires that devastated the Indonesian rainforest earlier this year were deliberately set. Greens and socialists must work together to oppose environmental destruction. **Charli Langford** draws out some consequences for socialists

Since June, forest fires have been burning in the Indonesian islands of Irian Jaya, Java, Kalimantan (the Indonesian half of Borneo), Sulawesi and Sumatra. Thick haze from the fires has travelled as far as the Philippines. A health official reports 88,000 people attending hospital for skin respiratory problems in South Sumatra alone. A ship collision and an airliner crash have been blamed on the smog. Rural villages have contaminated water supplies. The forest fires have driven wildlife from the forests into the hands of traders and poachers. The Indonesian rainforest is home to a huge number of species that exist nowhere else on earth and the fires are a severe blow to their survival. At a London press conference the WorldWide Fund for Nature reported the deaths of 29 of the very rare Orang Utan.

The fires have also spread to underground peat, which once alight can burn for years. The major ecological effect is the release of huge quantities of carbon dioxide in to the atmosphere – as much as Britain produces in 6 months. Carbon dioxide is a major component of global warming, so the effects of this will be felt worldwide. The huge quantity of smoke produced obscures sunlight and therefore lessens the effect of photosynthesis – the motor of plant growth. The loss of forest cover to the fires allows winds to whip up the topsoil as dust and blow it away; this occurs where the fire has burned because the undergrowth there cannot extend itself – the extra light due to the destruction of the forest canopy is offset by the lack of nutrient in the poor quality, scorched earth. Topsoil loss also occurs in adjacent cropped areas during subsequent dry seasons because the forest previously acted as a windbreak. The windborne soil eventually settles in the sea where it

damages the marine environment through silting and reduced light transmission.

The Indonesian government has tried to explain away the disaster by blaming *El Niño* (a weather effect that creates a long dry spell in the western Pacific). While *El Niño* has certainly increased in effect over the past decades – and current theories suggest that this is partly due to rainforest destruction – this is not the cause of the fires. They were started on purpose to clear land for commercial exploitation.

Indonesia second largest export, after petroleum products, is plywood – it is now the largest plywood exporter in the world. In addition, palm oil and related products produce over 1 billion US dollars per year – around 3 per cent of GNP. Plantation owners and logging companies are blaming each other for setting the fires. Commercial logging companies and palm plantations are every year encroaching a further 4000 square miles – an area half the size of Wales – into the Indonesian rainforest, clearing land for palm trees and quick-growing timber. The quickest way to clear rainforest is to burn it away, but rainforest is one of the wettest ecosystems on earth and even when *El Niño* has brought drought a forest fire will burn off superficial foliage and branches, leaving the central core of trees untouched. Serious fires have to be set to kill this core, and once set these fires are extremely difficult to control. Since the early 1980's when logging became essential to the economy serious rainforest fires have been a feature of every dry season.

Essentially the commercial interests don't care – extra rainforest destroyed means they have more land to exploit. President Suharto has close business links with timber tycoons. While the army and

police are relatively well-endowed, the rest of the public services are less well supported. Firefighters are completely unable to cope with major forest fires, which are generally allowed to burn until the November monsoon rains drench the forest. Even so, about two weeks of steady rain is needed.

Commercial exploitation

These fires are just another example of commercial exploitation being pursued irrespective of cost to the environment. Tropical rainforest is essential to the continuation of life on earth because through photosynthesis it is the biggest convertor of carbon dioxide to oxygen. Carbon dioxide levels are usually about 0.04 per cent in air and have been slowly increasing in recent years. A concentration of 1 per cent will cause humans distress and 3 per cent will cause death by suffocation. More importantly, carbon dioxide along with methane and the CFCs is a prime greenhouse effect gas and is already contributing markedly to global warming, which will have the dual effect of causing severe floods as more of the polar ice sheets melt and also will cause deserts to extend as rainfall decreases over the globe. These effects will destroy croplands leading to an increase in famine. Although this is well-known, commercial logging and cattle ranching have been permitted to destroy rainforest in south-east Asia and South America year after year – 98 per cent of the Brazilian rainforest has now been destroyed.

There are many other examples. Fishing fleets no longer go into the North Sea because there are so few fish there to be caught, due to pollution washing down the rivers of Europe. Chemicals are used in industry for their effectiveness with no

thought for their disposal – CFCs, used as refrigerants and aerosol propellants and in fire extinguishers, are now banned due to its effect on the ozone layer; this has proved fairly simple to enforce as there are readily-available alternatives. Polychlorinated biphenyls are used as coolant in heavy duty applications like national grid transformers; these are proving a major waste disposal problem because they are extremely poisonous in tiny amounts and they are extremely resistant to chemical breakdown. Nuclear waste will be dangerously radioactive for 25,000 years, so the disposal system has to be resistant to damage and the disposal places have to be recorded for a time period ten times as long as the written history of humanity.

Governments in the major economic blocs still find it easier to ship out waste than to run the propaganda risk of dumping it at home. In the neocolonial countries the environmental campaigns are much weaker and the governments tend to use more coercive powers. Economies are weaker and the chance to increase GNP by accepting the trash is more attractive. But the neocolonial countries in general have less technology available and therefore even bigger problems in toxic waste disposal. Chemicals can remain dumped in containers that eventually will degrade and leak; rain will then leach the waste to the rivers and eventually the sea.

Nuclear energy has all the same disposal problems as other toxic waste, and a specific problem of its own. In the Iran – Iraq war, power stations were seen as major potential targets. After the experience of the semi-contained Chernobyl accident the consequences of a major explosion in a nuclear reactor are easier to comprehend.

The red-green alliance

Here lies the basic problem of the red-green alliance. The ecological crisis is due in its entirety to the irresponsible organisation of industrial production, which is a consequence of capitalism. It is not possible to combine responsible production with capitalism because the costs – limited exploitation of resources, clean-up operations, use of environmentally-friendly processes – are directly counterposed to levels of profit. The Marxist law of the diminishing rate of profit explains how intercapitalist competition drives the rate of profit

downwards and therefore forces capitalists to remove all costs inessential to production. Any overheads in environmental responsibility will be excised in order to undercut competitors. The immediate question that surfaces in a red-green alliance is how capitalism is to be overthrown.

This is a defining factor of green politics. While there are socialists in the greens, the mainstream is not prepared to take the analysis to a conclusion. The solutions proposed are class collaborationist, depending on the commitment of capitalists to act against their own material interests. For this reason they are not feasible in the long term.

That does not mean socialists cannot learn from the greens. There is obviously much room for sharing of information for use in campaigning. But the most important idea that socialists have to come to grips with, commonplace among the greens, strikes at the heart of the simplistic socialist models of the society we want to build. Most socialist currents even today subscribe to an 'unlimited growth' model of the economy. Their argument is that wealth in unequally distributed, that a layer of capitalists is reserving all profit for themselves and leaving the working class with as little as possible, and all we have to do is redistribute the social surplus equally. The argument takes a theoretical justification from a quote from Marx, arguing against Malthus. But a comment within the context of the relatively tiny global population of the mid-nineteenth century (the figure can only be a guess since large parts of the world were unknown Europeans) cannot be applied to a world of 6 billion. While the productive forces may have advanced sufficiently to give us wealth unimaginable in 1850, there are certain items that cannot continue to increase indefinitely. Chief of these on a global perspective is food, followed closely by transportation and living space. It is probable that already we could not sustain the world's entire population at the consumption level of an average worker in western Europe.

No global socialism could justify maintaining a small part of the world's population in relative luxury while the greater part goes hungry. We have to accept that there is insufficient global resource to allow unrestricted private car ownership, for example. If we don't we are utopians, not realists, and our reformist

and bourgeois opponents will attack us very effectively on the point. We cannot assume that scientific progress will resolve this problem for us – no largescale controllable new energy source has been discovered since nuclear fission over 50 years ago and this source is clearly unsafe, as Chernobyl has shown. We have to embrace an economy based on sustainable energy sources and accept that a consequence is a lower living standard for much of the richer part of the world.

An immediate consequence is that we can no longer argue that the working class will be materially better off under socialism, *if we understand 'materially' as meaning having the opportunity to consume more.* We need to redefine material benefits away from consumption of wealth. Fortunately socialists are moving down that road already; the ideas of collectivisation of housework and childcare, and more generally of community rather than individualism, the ideas around locating workplaces conveniently for workers rather than for profit – all these are material benefits which involve consuming less; they grew to answer other perceived needs and only accidentally have an energy-efficient dimension. There are other ideas gaining common currency which are based, even if only implicitly, on energy economics. The main examples are around transport – the integrated transport system, the movement of traffic back to rail.

A common struggle

In conclusion, socialists have to take on environmental concerns. They are not an alternative to the class struggle but centrally important to it. The greens have been studying the causes and effects of environmental damage, real and potential, and have gone some way in pressurising the ruling class to have some concern for the environment. We can work with them, but as in all alliances there will be tensions and disagreements. We will have to fight to persuade them that their concerns lead to anti-capitalist conclusions, we will also have to fight for the greens to orientate to the working class and there will doubtless be many differences on how best to organise to carry campaigns forward. Socialists will have more credibility with greens when we recognise the importance of the main issues they take up, and we will then be in a far better position to win them to our anti-capitalist ideas.

Prisoners hungry for justice

From November 27-29, around 70 prisoners and many of their supporters went on hunger strike as part of a co-ordinated protest entitled 'Hungry for Justice'.

Since the election of the Labour government there has been no change in attitude towards the hundreds of cases of injustice through wrongful imprisonment. Labour continues the policy of cover up, defending a criminal justice system whose corruption, incompetence and irrationality has developed apace through 18 years of Tory rule. The situation has reached the point where even the Prison Officers' Association estimates that there are around 1,100 wrongly convicted prisoners serving time in Britain's jails.

The creation of the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) in

Birmingham is an attempt by the executive to distance itself from responsibility. In effect, it creates an extra layer of bureaucracy through which cases have to pass before being allowed back to the Court of Appeal.

In all the famous examples of miscarriage of justice – the Birmingham Six, Guildford Four, Bridgwater Four, etc – the Court of Appeal has a terrible record, having turned down appeals years before release was finally won. Satpal Ram, the M25 Three and Winston Silcott are in a similar position, their cases having been refused by the Court of Appeal despite the overwhelming evidence, widely supported, of their innocence. The hundreds of different cases show the variety, complexity and scale of the injustices taking place – due to factors

such as corruption, incompetence and indifference ranging through the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, solicitors and judges.

The 'Hungry for Justice' events in Birmingham represent the latest attempt to link the campaigns for the release of different prisoners. They built solidarity amongst supporters and won considerable press coverage, reportedly pushing the CCRC to issue 13 separate statements in response.

Unfortunately, the labour movement has offered little support to such cases and is resistant at its higher levels to involving itself with prisoners. The problem is made worse by the fact that those co-ordinating the protests, Anarchist Black Cross activists and Action Against Injustice, have little or no orientation to the labour movement.

The need for such justice campaigners to formulate general demands around which they can unite and which will provide a general platform to win support from the labour movement is long overdue. A unifying demand would be for the release of all prisoners whose cases are awaiting review by the CCRC. This could form the political basis around which to co-ordinate the various campaigns and win substantial support from within the labour movement, working class communities and the left.

Of course, this will not end the frame-ups and miscarriages of justice which are inherent in the capitalist system. The criminal justice system exists to maintain and legitimate class rule. Working class people, black people, women and youth are less likely to receive justice in the bosses' courts than those with power and influence, and are much more likely to be imprisoned if found guilty. The process is controlled by the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the judiciary, who have good reason to conceal cases of injustice since if the massive scale of wrongful imprisonment in this country were widely known it would undermine the system.

Only when the working class takes power for itself and destroys the existing bosses' state can any real system of justice be realised. In the here and now, for those suffering false imprisonment, a movement for their release needs to be built. **WA**

Free Satpal Ram!

Satpal Ram has been in prison since November 1986 following the death of one of the six people who attacked him in the Sky Blue Restaurant, Lozells, Birmingham. Even the judge noted the racial motivation of the attack on Satpal, yet the defence counsel's decision not to plead self-defence (as Satpal wished), the lack of translation of restaurant staff evidence at trial, and the statements of the deceased's relatives, who were present in the restaurant and participated in the attack on Satpal, led to his conviction for murder.

The authorities have subjected Satpal to the most brutal treatment during his wrongful imprisonment. He has spent over 15 of the last 24 months in solitary confinement following a series of fabricated and unsubstantiated disciplinary charges. Most of these punishments have been on the 'suspicion' of being involved in incidents. Under prison regulations, no evidence is necessary to take disciplinary action.

Satpal has consistently been targeted by prison officers, many of whom are racist, and most of whom regard prisoners who fight for their release or who resist inhumane practices (such as

regular beatings and the widespread and frequent use of anal examinations during strip searches) with contempt.

Having now surpassed the ten-year tariff of the Lord Chief Justice to serve the 11 years specified by the Tory Home Secretary, Satpal should have good grounds for release. But his prison record could well be used to deny him his freedom. His case is awaiting consideration by the Criminal Cases Review Commission and he is currently awaiting the result of a parole board hearing held on December 12.

The nature of the attack on Satpal in the restaurant led many anti-racists to demand his release on the grounds of self-defence. Birmingham Trades Council issued a request to its affiliates to send letters to the parole board demanding his release, and justice activists have likewise been building up a number of submissions to the board. Even if the parole board recommends his release and it is accepted, campaigning work will need to continue to overturn the original conviction and assert the right to self-defence.

For further information, write to:
Re: Satpal Ram, PO Box 3241, Saltley,
Birmingham B8 3DP **WA**

No to the single currency!

by **Jonathan Joseph and Philip Marchant**

The attitude of the government towards the single European currency has become increasingly clear since parliament returned from its summer recess. In the growing certainty that European Monetary Union will go ahead, the government has signalled that it plans to take Britain in, although not in the first wave, and probably not until it has a second general election victory under its belt.

The pro-single currency position in Britain has hardened relatively quickly, with industry and the City having recovered from a bout of nervousness earlier in the year when it looked as if even Germany might not meet the convergence criteria. Now there is a growing list of EU countries set to join in 1999, and the worries are over being left out.

In his statement to the Commons on October 27, Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown declared that 'Britain must now make the difficult decisions on Europe'. He then went on to ignore his own advice and announce a delay over the decision until after the next election. Britain will not be part of the first wave, 'barring some fundamental and unforeseen change in economic circumstances'.

But the statement also revealed that the Labour leadership views monetary union as the inevitable future for Europe and is *in principle* in favour of Britain joining, provided, of course, that the project is successful. The current position of 'wait and see' is designed to meet a set of political, as well as economic, criteria, and satisfy two different constituencies: the wider electorate, which remains unconvinced of the merits of a single currency, and the business community, which is increasingly impatient to get on board.

In particular, Blair is worried about having to hold the promised referendum on joining the single currency during the lifetime of this parliament. Public support for EMU stands at less than 30 per cent. It is unlikely that such a figure could be

turned around quickly, and a lost referendum would not only hold up Britain's entry into the single currency, it would seriously threaten Labour's chances of winning the next election. Brown's statement allows more time to swing public opinion in favour of EMU. There would then either be a referendum after the next election, or Labour would make joining EMU part of its manifesto.

At the same time, practical steps are being taken towards joining the single currency. At the CBI conference, Brown urged Britain's bosses to prepare their companies for EMU, arguing that there was now a consensus emerging. Economic and fiscal policy will follow the conditions for entry laid down in the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties. The pound will probably shadow the euro, as a substitute for the requirement that national currencies must have had two years' membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism before joining EMU. From 1999, businesses will be able to use the euro to keep accounts, issue shares and pay taxes, whilst banks will be able to offer their services in euros. And in recognition of Labour's intentions, other European governments have sought to incorporate Britain into the single currency structures. Chancellor Kohl of Germany favours Britain being allocated a place on the board of the European Central Bank, which will set interest rates for the euro area, and although Britain has been refused permanent representation on the Committee to Co-ordinate Monetary Union, it will be able to attend meetings when issues concerning Britain are being discussed.

The European unity issue has once again highlighted the deep rifts inside the Conservative Party. Whilst Brown was pushing Labour slowly towards acceptance of EMU, Tory leader William Hague was attempting to rally his unruly membership around the policy of no single currency for the next ten years. This prompted the resignations of two shadow ministers, Ian Taylor and David Curry, and the near defection to Labour of backbencher Peter Temple-Morris. What persuaded Temple-Morris to stay was the

formation of a new pro-European Tory grouping called Mainstream, headed by Kenneth Clarke and Michael Heseltine, which will openly oppose the Hague leadership and fight for a cross-party campaign to win a referendum. It came too late, however, for Temple-Morris, whose disloyalty earned him the removal of the Tory whip. In addition, a number of Tories, including former prime minister Ted Heath, are preparing to ignore a three-line whip imposed by the Tory leadership on the ratification vote of the Amsterdam Treaty signed by Tony Blair.

Nevertheless, the majority of current Tory MPs, and, indeed, the majority of party members, are Euro-sceptics and accept Hague's position. The more significant split is that between the Tories and business. Whilst Brown was cosying up to the CBI, Hague was busy denouncing its members as 'lemmings'. Britain's traditional party of the ruling class is now openly out of step with the class it is intended to represent.

Despite all the signs that the single currency will go ahead, there remain serious tensions between the different EU ruling classes, as well as problems in harmonising their economic cycles and forcing through the cuts and austerity measures necessary to meet the convergence criteria. Germany and France continue to jockey for political leadership. The enthusiastically pro-integration position of Jospin's Socialist Party government in France is in conflict with the populist 'anti-Maastricht' programme on which it won office, and is likely to fuel further working class resistance. The German government has continued to voice its concern over weaker economies like Italy, Spain and Portugal being allowed to participate in the first wave and possibly threaten the stability of the new currency.

Germany's own economic shortcomings, combined with pressure from France for concessions to placate its working class, have forced a loosening of the convergence criteria. This is against the wishes of the employers, for whom a single European currency is not a political ideal but an economic necessity. With the introduction of the single currency,

national borders will cease to be an impediment to the development of a Europe-wide internal market. The effect of this will be a further, sharp rationalisation of production capacity throughout the participating countries, devastating entire regions and forcing workers to migrate to other parts of the EU in search of work. And if the new Europe is to hold its own against rival trading blocs, it must drive down the costs of production by sweeping away the social gains made by the working class in the post-war period. The introduction of the euro will go hand in hand with the casualisation of the workforce, the removal of health, holiday and pension rights, the privatisation of utilities, the running down of public services, and the reduction of benefits. Attacks on the working class are an integral part of the bosses' European project, vital to the success of the single currency, and are only temporarily on hold.

For this reason, it is wrong to remain neutral on the single currency, or to imply that it might be acceptable under more favourable conditions. For the bosses, there simply isn't any point in having a 'soft' single currency, or an EU in which market forces are obstructed by government intervention or other 'restrictive practices'. Our demands should be unequivocal: no to a bosses' Europe, no to the single currency, no to Maastricht!

In Britain, the implications of the single currency for the working class have yet to be fully grasped because the initial round of attacks was accomplished before the Maastricht Treaty was signed. Across continental Europe, where the social costs of production remain high, it has been a different story, with workers striking and demonstrating against attempts to rush through the necessary changes.

Socialists must build on the existing campaigns like the Euromarch, and in Britain particularly they must fight to explain the issues throughout the labour movement. They must expose the fraudulent claim of the trade union leaders, Stalinists and social democrats that it is possible to achieve a 'social Europe' under capitalism. They must intervene with the clear aim of frustrating the rush towards a united capitalist Europe by striking at the heart of the project – the single currency. **WA**

Renationalise the coal industry!

by Nick Davies

New Labour, new pit closures: that's Blair's kick in the teeth for miners and their families. Five to eight pits could soon be closed, mainly in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, and 5,000 jobs lost, threatening still more redundancies in dependent industries. The government has been smoked out by the leak of a secret Department of Trade and Industry document, a document more concerned with managing the news of the pit closures than with the closures themselves.

The roots of the crisis lie in the privatisation of energy by the Tories. The electricity industry regulator encouraged the newly-privatised electricity companies to build gas-fired power stations. Nineteen are operating, ten are being built, and 30 more are planned. They are quicker and cheaper to build than coal-fired power stations, and gas now accounts for one-third of total power generation; in 1992, it was two per cent.

The 'dash for gas' has left British energy needs tied to long-term contracts with North Sea gas fields, at high prices, and for reserves which will last only a few decades. It has also reduced coal's share of electricity output from 80 per cent in 1990 to 43 per cent now. From March 1998, the privatised companies will be free of the statutory obligation (imposed by the Tories) to buy British coal. Instead, they can buy it from the cheapest supplier, or if the dash for gas continues, not at all. Last year, RJB Mining (which owns most of the pits in England) sold 27 million tonnes to the electricity companies. Next year, that figure is likely to fall to 16 million.

In opposition, Labour promised to end the dash for gas and the rigging of the market against coal. In government, it's been a different story. Within six months, Labour licensed three further gas-fired power stations. According to the DTI document, 'direct government action is not feasible', this is purely a problem between private companies, and (and where have you heard this before?) you can't buck the market. When parliament

debated the coal industry recently, hardly any Labour MPs could be bothered to turn up.

For a few Labour MPs, this has been too much, with even the loyal Blairite Yvette Cooper (Pontefract and Castleford) belatedly asking that something be done. Grudgingly, a moratorium on the commissioning of gas-fired power stations has been announced, but this is to save the government's face rather than the coal industry.

The irony is, there's plenty of coal being dug. Despite the promises it made in opposition, Labour shows no sign of tightening up planning permission for environmentally disastrous open-cast sites.

Things don't look good for the deep-mined coal industry, or for the mining communities. Those former mining communities now without a pit are some of the poorest areas in the European Union. With or without a pit, the mining communities have been some of Labour's most loyal supporters. They might now be wondering why. Neil Kinnock played his part in sabotaging the 1984-85 strike, since when the number employed in the mining industry has dropped from 175,000 to 10,500. Blair and his clique hold the labour movement in barely concealed contempt and will not lose sleep over condemning further mining communities to poverty, heroin and the loan shark.

What the Tories started, New Labour will probably finish off, and the job has unfortunately been made easier by the National Union of Mineworkers leadership. Of course, unlike most trade union leaders, Scargill wanted to win. However, his tactics have been disastrous. In 1984-85, he concentrated on winning support for the Plan for Coal – a joint development plan for the industry which was torn up by the National Coal Board. He asked for support from the trade union leadership, knowing full well that this would not deliver real action, refusing to go over the heads of the leadership and call for action from the rank and file. In the pits crisis of 1992, he courted public

continued page 11

From LTT supporters in Sweden

For a workers' enquiry into pollution disaster

by **Gustav Mowitz**

One of the more important arguments of the 'no' side during the 1994 Swedish referendum on membership in the European Union was the environmental issue. The 'yes' side countered and launched a slogan of 'Yes, for the sake of the environment!'. Naturally, neither Marxists nor rank-and-file workers had any faith in either of these arguments. The sudden interest in environmentalism from the ruling class was a PR stunt. It was hypocrisy, since bosses will continue to pollute the environment whether they are doing it within the framework of the Maastricht Treaty or not.

The first steps towards a green movement in Sweden came in 1964 from dissidents of the agrarian Centre Party and environmentalism continues to be high on every political organisation's agenda. One of the big green issues in Sweden has been pollution from the factories in the Ruhr in Germany which destroys Swedish lakes and land. Many voters were persuaded to vote 'yes' in the referendum by the argument that the pollution could be stopped by joining the Germans in the EU.

Today, three years after the referendum, the environmental promises have been exposed as fraudulent. Jobs have decreased and social security has been slashed, whilst the price of food and other goods has risen. None of the 'green reforms' has been implemented. The government has also ignored the 1980 referendum on nuclear power. To date, not a single nuclear power plant has been closed, and one of them has even been sold to a German power company. The decision to phase out nuclear power by 2010 looks set to be ignored on the grounds that it is 'unrealistic'.

One of the most heated debates this year has been over the tunnel through the Halland ridge. Located in south-west Sweden, the ridge separates the regions of Halland and Scania. From Scania, it takes 20 minutes by boat to Denmark, and

the governments of Denmark and Sweden have decided to build a bridge from the Danish capital, Copenhagen, to Malmö, the regional capital of Scania. In order to shorten the train journey by seven minutes, the Swedish government has decided to build a tunnel through the Halland ridge.

The Halland ridge is not very stable. Leading geologists warned that the cracks in the rock would not only make the drilling hazardous, but that the water in the cracks acts as a natural reservoir for the region. The government chose not to listen. The contract was initially awarded to Kraftbyggarna, but it ran into financial difficulties when its drill got stuck in the mud and the giant concrete company Skanska took over.

Skanska's more traditional method was to use explosives and ordinary earth-moving equipment instead of the £13 million drilling machine. To harden the sides of the tunnel, they used an acrylic compound which is one of the most poisonous substances in the world. Very soon after this, people and livestock became ill after drinking the local water, and tunnel workers complained about feeling dizzy and losing sensation in their feet. The government denied any connection with the tunnel, but was pressurised into holding an investigation.

It soon emerged that a catastrophe had occurred. The chemical used to line the tunnel had permeated the water supply, causing sickness and making crops unfit for consumption. The workers were suffering from damage to their nervous systems, and it is a miracle that no one has died.

The government says there is no need for further investigations and that the case is closed. It must be called to account, along with the state-owned and private companies involved in the project. We demand an enquiry controlled by workers, small farmers and consumers, organised through a rank-and-file trade union commission, whose verdict must be enforced. The criminals must be punished!

WA

Row over spy files

by **Emil Trell**

A Swedish carpenter called Leander has just been told why he was refused a job at the marine museum in Karlskrona 15 years ago. The reason was that he was active in the Maoist SKP (Communist Party of Sweden) at the time. This has confirmed what left activists have always known, that the security police often assist employers in checking those who apply for jobs.

There has been a public outcry over these revelations, with many celebrities – not just leftists – calling for the opening of the files and for a commission like the one set up in Norway last year in response to a similar situation. The police answered that Leander was a single case, that systematic spying is nowadays a lot more democratic, and that they no longer registered Jewish people merely for being Jewish!

Ironically, the SKP, whilst being the largest grouping on the left in the 1970s and early 80s (18,000 subscribers to its weekly journal), was probably the most gung-ho party in the history of Swedish politics. It criticised the government for refusing to enlarge the army and provide it with better equipment, for refusing to extend the period of military service, and for refusing to join the EEC and NATO. The government's failure in these areas apparently revealed the basic criminality of the Swedish bourgeoisie, which was ready to sell out democracy and national self-determination to the 'aggressive social imperialistic USSR', and whose failure to join NATO showed it was unwilling to protect the 'fatherland'.

The idea that Leander was a security risk is nonsense, but the government nevertheless fears an enquiry. The Norwegian commission revealed the involvement of the security police and the social democratic party. An examination of the files in Sweden would reveal the same thing. We demand that a rank-and-file trade union committee be set up to investigate this issue and that the contents of the files be made public.

WA

Pit closure threat

from page 9

opinion instead of mobilising action in his own industry – which was still a realistic possibility. He periodically raised the reactionary demand for import controls. Now he is an isolated figure and the NUM is a rump of about 5,000 members.

The coal crisis is the result of free market Tory economic policies strongly motivated by revenge towards the miners because of their role in bringing down the Heath government in 1974. It's one of those Tory policies that's just a bit too convenient for Labour to get rid of – unless they are put under a lot of pressure. It's up to every Labour-affiliated trade union and every Labour party branch to demand that the government immediately renationalises the entire energy industry without compensation. **WA**

Council workers prepare for strike

by Andrew Berry

Workers in the neighbourhood services department of Islington Council are balloting for strike action. The council has brought in a firm of consultants – Capita – to make proposals for massive cuts in the department budget. The department is also to be divided into two – social services and housing.

The number of social services offices is to be reduced from eleven to five, and across the department social

workers, home care managers, occupational therapists and about 50 clerical staff will lose their jobs. Home care is to be centralised and prepared for privatisation. Health authority and other council staff are to be moved into the five offices even though there is no desk room.

The housing section is being devastated with the cutting of 35 housing needs officers and managers. The homelessness section is being centralised to one office instead of remaining spread across the borough and there will be a further cut in the number of housing advice workers. Employees who retain jobs will be subject to a salary cut, and may be instructed to work Saturdays and wear uniforms. All these cuts are at a time when more executive directors are being employed on salaries of £75,000 a year and 'quality' managers on £40,000 – even Capita felt that the latter were unnecessary.

Council services to many people will be stopped. Others can expect much longer waiting times and slower emergency response. The cuts will cause more people in Islington to be 'at risk'.

The ballot result will be out on December 15 and a union meeting two days later will decide the action to be taken. The most likely decision is an all-out indefinite strike. **WA**

Help us build a Swedish Trotskyist paper!

The Olof Palme left-reformist tradition in Sweden has been broken and replaced by modernisers similar to the Blairites in Britain. At the same time, the working class faces a new offensive by the Employers' League, the growing nazi movement, and health hazards at work.

The first steps towards resistance have been taken by some trade unionists. However, we need to arm the workers' movement with a Marxist analysis. That is why we launched the *Marxistisk Arbetarpress* (*Workers' Marxist Press*), journal of the FAR, Swedish sympathisers of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency. The first issue came out in October and includes our action programme, an article calling for a campaign in the trade unions to force the ruling Social Democratic party to end its de facto coalition with the agrarian Centre Party, an analysis of New Labour by Jim Dye and of the 'peace process' in Northern Ireland by the Irish group Socialist Democracy, plus much more.

The journal obviously gained the disapproval of the bureaucrats, since they then witch-hunted our comrades out of the Social Democratic Party. The second issue is in preparation, but we urgently need the help of comrades in other countries. The *Marxistisk Arbetarpress* fights uncompromisingly against the bureaucrats and the modernisers, and it would be a disaster if it should disappear.

We urge readers of *Workers Action* to send a cheque to the LTT at the address below, stating that it is for the Swedish group. We need all the cash we can get in order to develop the journal and broaden its circulation.

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On the centenary of George Julian Harney's death

The red republican and Irish freedom

George Julian Harney, one of the most outstanding leaders of the Chartist movement, died 100 years ago, on December 9, 1897. **Chris Ford** defends Harney's reputation against a recent attack by James D. Young

Even in his own lifetime George Julian Harney had to defend himself against the historians of Chartism. In later years various accounts of that first great workers' movement have attempted to dislodge the revolutionary content of Chartism. The works of such early historians as Hovell and Beer have sought to incorporate Chartism into the liberal traditions of British Labourism. The red republican Harney is portrayed by Hovell as the head of a 'violent and reckless body' and by Beer as a romantic whose revolutionary journals were a 'mine of Anarchist phrases' but contained no original thought. The rediscovery by socialists of Harney's role as a militant organiser and revolutionary thinker has been a long journey.⁽¹⁾ One can only conclude what a tragedy it is that on the 100th anniversary of the death of Harney it is necessary to defend him against a socialist historian such as James D. Young. The controversial Young has set out in a number of works to excavate Scotland's buried 'tradition of political dissent'. In his latest work, *The Very Bastards of Creation: Scottish International Radicalism 1707-1995*, he has decided to join the unlikely hostile camp of 'Whig, Tory, Labour and Marxist' writers against Harney.

In his chapter on the radical poet Alexander Rodger, Young adopts an attack on the Englishman Harney to enhance the radical credentials of Scotsman Rodger. This is part of a fuller assault on the English Chartist leadership as a whole. One could understand a comparison of the development of the movement and thought of English and Scottish Chartism, yet Young's methods are more worthy of the Stalinist historiography he claims to

despise. It is alleged that:

"To appreciate the full extent of the anti-imperialism of Scottish and Irish radicals, the attitudes of Rodger towards the Irish question should be contrasted to that of even the most left-wing of the English Chartists. Moreover, Julius Braunthal, the historian of the International, wrote about the English Chartists' hostility to the agitation for Irish independence. As he put it: At a subsequent meeting (of the First International) a letter from the Chartist veteran George Julian Harney, who had emigrated to Boston, was read out, in which he protested against the attitude of the International to the Irish question. "Ireland," he wrote, "is an integral part of the British Empire."⁽²⁾

The Stalinists iconised the figure of Lenin and proceeded to dig up records of his past disagreements with Trotsky as evidence of the latter's heresy. Young is sadly adopting the same methods in reverse by taking the attitude of Harney at the time of the First International (post-1864), when Chartism no longer existed, as proof of his opinions whilst a Chartist leader (1839-53). Young began his attacks on Harney in an article in *Cenrastus* literary magazine. In the same article Young ironically attacks former Trotskyist students who 'assume that a knowledge of Marxist theory is a substitute for a knowledge of the historical facts'. Evidently this advice was only intended to apply to others. Following sharp criticism of the Communist Party historian E.J. Hobsbawm's inadequacies, we are told:

'All the same Feargus O'Connor, Bronterre O'Brien and Robert Tressell

are given A grades for providing "the British working class with a cutting edge of radicals and revolutionaries", but there is no mention of Julian Harney's defence of the English Chartists' support for British imperialism in Ireland. Nor is there any mention of dear old Karl Marx's hostility to Harney on this issue.'⁽³⁾

In this article Young goes further than in his recent book, stating not only that Julian Harney was opposed to Irish freedom, but that the English Chartist movement was in full support of 'British imperialism in Ireland'. We read that Karl Marx adopted a hostility to Harney entirely because of his pro-imperialist opinions on the Irish question. Such far-reaching allegations against Harney and English Chartism as a whole, coming from such a respected socialist historian, cannot go unanswered.

The Irish question has provided an acid test for each generation of the English workers' movement and the militants of new-born Chartism were no exception. The Chartists faced immense problems, but these did not flow from an unwillingness to champion the Irish cause. Their difficulties were twofold: firstly, overcoming the deep-rooted chauvinism of the English masses towards Ireland born of centuries of colonial rule, and exacerbated amidst the near barbaric upheavals of the industrial revolution by the use of Irish immigrant labour to undermine wage levels and act as strike-breakers against English workers. There was, however, a further problem in this period which Young fails to mention: the narrow nationalism that dominated the Irish movement. The Irish movement for

repeal of the Act of Union with Britain was dominated by the pseudo-radical member of parliament Daniel O'Connell. He blocked contact with the 'insane or dishonest Radicals of England, who, instead of appealing to common sense, declare their reliance on arms; instead of resorting to reason and justice, talk of swords, rifles and physical force'.(4) In the words of James Connolly, he was 'the most bitter and unscrupulous enemy of trade unionism Ireland has yet produced'.(5)

An alliance between O'Connell and the British Whig government was established during Chartism's formative years. A measure of O'Connell's politics was seen in September 1837, when the members of the Glasgow cotton spinners' strike committee were arrested and charged with conspiracy following a bitter dispute in which a scab was killed. The same law that sentenced the Tolpuddle Martyrs three years previously saw the spinners sentenced to seven years and transportation to Australia. O'Connell used the situation to call for a parliamentary commission to inquire into the whole conduct of trade unions. Harney was in the forefront of attacks on O'Connell's conduct, and the incident led to the formation of the revolutionary London Democratic Association. Yet nowhere do we find a word of anti-Irish sentiment in Harney's denunciations of O'Connell or the Irish movement.(6)

The Chartists faced a problem which revolutionaries were to grapple with for years to come, and which Frederick Engels and Karl Marx in their own separate ways first began to address during the revolutions of 1848. How do revolutionaries of the industrialised oppressor nation relate to movements of the peasant-dominated subject nation? The English Chartists did not respond, as Young asserts, by supporting imperialism in Ireland and denouncing the Irish as reactionaries.

The conduct of the Chartists stands in stark contrast to the tradition of betrayal and failure that has dominated the British labour movement in relation to Ireland. It remains a shining example of internationalism to today's world, and is not to be buried in distortions. As for English Chartism being pro-imperialist, it contained in its ranks such Irishmen as Bronterre O'Brien and the leader of Chartism, Feargus O'Connor. The Chartists made strenuous efforts to win the support of the Irish movement and

the émigré community in England. In this task they faced the open hostility of O'Connell and the Roman Catholic Church. In Manchester, for example, Chartist meetings were physically wrecked with the encouragement of Catholic priests.(7)

1842 – landmark of internationalism

The year 1842 saw revolutionary upheavals, with England's first general strike. But it was not only historic in that new heights of struggle were achieved; the English Chartists made 1842 a landmark of internationalism. The new petition drawn up for adoption at the second National Convention of the Chartists in April of that year incorporated the demand for the repeal of the Act of Union between Britain and Ireland. The English workers' movement merged its own demand for political power with that of Ireland's fight for freedom. The decision provoked opposition from the 'moral force'-dominated Scottish Chartist Convention in Glasgow, which condemned the support for the Irish. It took a sustained campaign by Feargus O'Connor to keep the 'advanced' reformist Scots on board. Addressing the Irish people in 1848, O'Connor reminded them of this historic event: 'Even that portion of your Press, which chants its notes of liberty in the dullest strains of music, has withheld from you all knowledge of English feeling for Ireland ... while you were dull and apathetic, three millions and a half English people petitioned for Repeal of the Union.'(8) On a scale never to be repeated, the English working class mobilised for the Irish cause as part of its own struggle.

The defeat of the revolutionary wave of 1842 and the repression that followed did not blunt the Chartists' attitude to Ireland. Harney saw his main activity in 1843 as not only defending himself and other Chartists on trial for sedition, but as supporting the Irish campaign for independence. A staunch champion of oppressed nations, he saw Ireland as the 'Poland of the West'. As leader of the Sheffield Chartists, Harney was the first Englishman to join the Irish Repeal Association in that city.(9). At the Chartist Convention that year he was one of those who continued to attempt to unite Chartism with the Irish movement. Chartist rallies and street demonstrations were organised in support of the renewed

Irish agitation of 1843 – yet again to be met with the hostility of O'Connell and the Catholic Church.

Young praises the 'anti-imperialism of the Scottish and Irish Radicals', whilst ignoring the fact that, as Connolly noted, 'In their attitude towards all manifestations of working class revolt in England, the Young Irelanders were sorely divided'.(10) Much of the new movement known as Young Ireland, which split from O'Connell, inherited the latter's narrow nationalism – to Ireland's tragic detriment. The Young Ireland leadership announced in the *Nation* of August 15, 1847, that 'They desired no fraternisation between the Irish people and the Chartists ... Between us and them there is a gulf fixed, and we desire not to bridge it over but to make it wider and deeper.'(11)

Harney anticipates Connolly

Far from having no original ideas, of all the Chartist leaders it was Harney who provided a theoretical understanding of the Irish hostility to links with English workers. In the *Northern Star* of August 8, 1846, he anticipated James Connolly's analysis published in *Shan Van Vocht* in 1897.(12) According to Harney, the democratic ideal of Young Ireland leaders such as Smith O'Brien was limited to the greater freedom of the Irish bourgeoisie from England to further exploit the Irish masses. Harney argued: 'Smith O'Brien and his friends were no advocates of democratic principles. All they wanted was an Irish middle-class supremacy dignified by a national flag.'(13) Democracy without the social liberation of the subject of revolution – the labouring masses – was a 'sham reform'. Harney's insights of 1846 foresaw the tragedy of Irish nationalism that haunts us to this day.

It took the force of the 1848 revolutionary wave that swept Europe and the horrors of the Irish famine to bring about a new relationship between the Irish movement and the English Chartists. Now free from O'Connell's retarding influence, unity was at last established between the newly-formed Irish Confederation and the English Chartists on St Patrick's Day, 1848. Feargus O'Connor proclaimed: 'It will be the birth-peal of freedom – for the solitary fortress of tyranny must sink before the confluence of our united nations.' The Chartists were 'but tools in the hands of desperadoes' according to *The Times*. 'The true character of the present movement

is a ramification of the Irish conspiracy. The Repealers wish to make a great hell of this island, as they have made of their own.'(14)

Where was Harney during the events of 1848? Contrary to Young's opinion he was not hostile to the Irish, but was in fact called on to address the contingent of the Irish Confederation at the famous rally on Kennington Common on April 10. The following month, 60,000 Chartists marched through London for the release of the imprisoned John Mitchell, the most radical of the Irish Confederation.

No amount of historical revisionism by Young can obscure the English Chartist movement's truly internationalist stance on Ireland. There was a sustained effort to unite the cause of peasant Ireland with that of industrial England. In this period Harney can be identified as one of the leading advocates of the unity of the masses of Ireland and Britain. This was consistent with his role as the foremost internationalist of the Chartists – symbolised in his creation of the Fraternal Democrats, the first revolutionary international.

Now there is the question raised by Young of Marx's hostility to Harney as a result of his opinions on Ireland. In the period after 1848, Marx and Engels did develop bitter disagreements with Harney, but not, as Young asserts, over Ireland. Indeed, there is absolutely no record of Marx or Engels expressing differences with Harney on Ireland. In private letters, Marx and Engels strongly attacked Harney over his failure to break off relations with their opponents during the split in the Communist League. Yet even then they never ended their own relations with him.(15) If, as Young alleges, Marx was critical of Harney's position on Ireland, then how can it be explained that in the only period when Marx was hostile to Harney it was never once mentioned? Hardly characteristic of Karl Marx!

This was the period of the victory of counter-revolution in Europe, and Harney was attempting, through his publication *Red Republican*, to bring about a new beginning for the defeated movement. What was Harney's attitude to Ireland at this time? We can gauge this from the welcome given by *Red Republican* to the relaunch of the revolutionary journal *Irishman* in August 1850. It was described as a 'masterpiece of democratic eloquence' and every reader of *Red*

Republican was encouraged to be a 'reader and supporter of the *Irishman*'. In all of his later publications as an active Chartist and red republican there was not one word of hostility to the Irish cause from Harney. Any honest historian can only conclude that Young's assertion is completely at odds with reality.

The victory of the counter-revolution across Europe was soon followed by the defeat of Harney's efforts at reviving the workers' movement. After nearly 20 years as an active revolutionary, he gave up his role as a leader of the English workers and retreated to Jersey to edit the *Independent*. From this time on there did develop a change in Harney's views on the Irish question. The reasons for his transformation from viewing Ireland as the 'Poland of the West' to opposing Home Rule in later years demand explanation.

Although an admirer of Robert Emmet since his youth, Harney had always had disagreements with the social policies of the Irish nationalists, notably on the land question. This disagreement was reinforced by the experience of Feargus O'Connor's failed utopian Land Plan. In the *Red Republican* of October 12, 1850, Harney outlined his opinions in an article entitled 'Inadequate Remedies For Social Evils'. Against the advocates of 'little colonies' and 'freehold associations', Harney addressed the Irish tenants' rights agitators thus:

'The aim of the getters up of that agitation is to transfer the actual ownership of the soil from the landlords to the tenant farmers and their heirs for ever, on the understanding that the farmers are to pay an annual corn-rent to the present proprietors and their heirs. I confess that so far from regarding this "transfer" in the light of desirable change, I look upon it as one of the greatest curses that could befall the veritable people of Ireland, for the consequence would be that they would have two aristocracies, instead of one as at present; and the chances of their social emancipation would be proportionally lessened. . . . Any description of Land Reform which falls short of entirely abolishing private property in the soil, can at the best benefit a few at the expense of the many.'

This opposition to private ownership of the land was held by Harney

to the end of his life and it became a point of his divergence with the Irish movement in later years. Harney discussed this matter with Engels but, sadly, a full record of the correspondence is lost. It was clearly a one-sided view, and in fact Irish Land League leader Michael Davitt himself supported nationalisation of the land as opposed to freeholding. Previously, disagreements with the social policies under O'Connell had never prevented Harney from defending Ireland, and exactly the same issue was never an obstacle to his defence of Poland. A further event took place which moved Harney further from his old opinions – the Irish intervention on the side of counter-revolution in Italy in 1859-60. Following the republican rising of Garibaldi, a 1,000-strong Irish Brigade intervened in defence of the Pope. The event was to be the cause of many an Irish faction fight for years to come; for the already disillusioned Harney it only fuelled his break Irish nationalism.(16)

The Black dimension

If there was one main cause for Harney's change towards the Irish question it was his experience in America and his strong support for the freedom struggle of the Black masses. Support for the abolitionist cause was one of Harney's first political thoughts. He recalled that at the age of nine, during the election campaign of the reformer Robert Wilson, he had seen a banner of a 'black man in chains and with clasped hands asking "Am I not a man, and a Brother?" There needed not the speeches of a Wilberforce or a Clarkson., or the writings of a Granville Sharp, to make me an abolitionist forthwith'.(17)

Illusions in the republican constitution born of the American revolution permeated the Chartists. Ernest Jones declared in the *People's Paper* of December 1, 1855, that 'Liberty has spread wherever the Stars and Stripes have been lifted'. Harney's views on the United States had taken a far more critical course of development. His original hopes that the early socialist and homestead movement would bring about a new American revolution faded. Instead he saw 'bourgeois liberalism' in what he termed the 'dollar republic' of America.

He saw the war against Mexico and expansionism in Cuba and Central America as the result of the pressure of the slave states. For Harney, the institution

of slavery was a worm in the republic's heart, posing a threat even to 'bourgeois idealism'. 'The Slave-holders,' he wrote in the *Independent*, 'are the worst enemies to Liberty and Mankind that exist on the face of the earth, and have done more to prevent the triumph of Washington's principles than all the despots and armies of Europe combined.'(18) When the civil war broke out in 1861, Harney, as editor of the *Jersey Independent*, stood solidly with the Union at a time when there was formidable support for the Confederacy in Britain. For his courageous stand in support of the Northern cause, Harney was sacked from his editor's job in the winter of 1862, and with the help of the abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner he emigrated to the USA.

It was shortly after his arrival in New York that events took place which brutally broke Harney from his support for the Irish cause. He witnessed a meeting of 'Copperheads' – supporters of the Confederacy – addressed by Fernando Wood, an ex-mayor of New York. Harney was appalled that an overwhelmingly Irish audience could enthusiastically support an appeal for violence against the Union. This was followed by the New York anti-draft riots in which nearly a thousand people were killed or injured by racist lynch mobs. The sight of Irishmen only recently emigrated from English oppression supporting the slave-owners' cause was a terrible disillusionment for Harney, and it transformed his thinking on Irish matters. On the Black dimension of American politics, Harney was welded to his lifelong beliefs and took up the job as editor of the Massachusetts-based abolitionist journal *The Commonwealth*, forming a historic link between the Abolitionists and Chartism.(19) For the Irish it was the loss of a once powerful ally.

Young has described Harney as being pro-imperialist, but even after his break with Irish nationalism Harney did not abandon his internationalism. At the time when British imperialism was at its zenith Harney had nothing but contempt for the empire builders: 'I take no stock in the British any more than any other nation's exploitation of the African continent . . . The pretence of spreading civilisation is a lie to mask the inhuman greed of the so called civilisers'.(20) As he had argued in the *Red Republican*, he wished to see those nations held together in 'Links of Justice'. His views stood in

contrast to many of the time who considered themselves 'Marxists'.

Whilst a member of the First International in Boston, Harney made known his opposition to Irish Home Rule. Perhaps it was then that Marx expressed his 'hostility'? But an honest examination of the records of the International will find not a shred of evidence for this. How could it be that Marx, such a staunch defender of the Irish cause, expressed no criticism of Harney's opinions at this time? Perhaps Marx recognised what Young does not, that Harney was no longer a leader of the workers' movement and that the Irish policy of the labour leaders who sat in the First International paled in comparison to that of the revolutionary Harney when he was Chartist leader.(21)

Until his death, Marx continued to correspond with Harney, who was aiding Marx in his research for *Capital*. Frederick Engels, a friend of Harney's since long before he even knew Marx, remained a friend until his death. Harney was to write faithful obituaries of them both. So, on the 100th anniversary of his death, Harney should be celebrated as one of England's

foremost revolutionary socialists. As a Chartist, he was an internationalist who defended the cause of Ireland amongst many other subject peoples. Harney and the Chartists as a whole were unique in that, against chauvinism and narrow nationalism, they attempted to unify the forces of freedom in both nations.

Young's tragedy is that to achieve the rightful recognition of Scotland's tradition of dissent he believes it is necessary to adopt the very practice he abhors – denigrating another nations' socialists to enhance one's own. The Scottish radicals can be judged on their own efforts without such unwelcome methods. Indeed, it was the Physical Force Chartists of Glasgow who elected Harney their Honorary President. It is perhaps fitting to allow Harney the last word: 'Sir, you owe it to yourself, you owe it to the reputation upon which you have given many indications that you pride yourself – the reputation of being considered the working man's friend and advocate . . . to substantiate or repudiate the assertions contained in the above quotation . . . In conclusion, I beg to say that I am one determined to stand by my order' (22). **WA**

NOTES

1. See M. Hovell, *The Chartist Movement*, Manchester University Press, 1918; M. Beer, *A History of British Socialism*, Vol.2, 1920; T. Rothstein, *From Chartism to Labourism*, 1929.
2. James D. Young, *The Very Bastards of Creation: Scottish International Radicalism 1707-1995*, Clydeside Press, 1997, p.129.
3. James D. Young, 'Culture and Imperialism', *Cencrastus*, Summer 1995.
4. J.T. Ward, ed., *Popular Movements 1830-1850*, Macmillan, 1970, p.177.
5. James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, Bookmarks, 1987, p.123.
6. G.J. Harney, Letter to D. O'Connell, *The Times*, London, February 13, 1838.
7. J.T. Ward, *Chartism*, Macmillan, 1973, pp.154-5.
8. Feargus O'Connor, 'Address to the Irish People', *Labour Review*, Vol.V, No.7.
9. A.R. Schoyan, *The Chartist Challenge: A Portrait of George Julian Harney*, Heinemann, 1958, p.124.
10. Connolly, op. cit., p.140.
11. Ward, *Chartism*, op. cit., p.194.
12. P. Berresford Ellis, ed., *James Connolly: Selected Writings*, Monthly Review Press, 1973, p.124. Connolly's article 'Socialism and Nationalism' contains the famous lines: 'If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain.'
13. Ward, *Popular Movements*, op. cit., p.177.
14. Ward, *Chartism*, op. cit., p.205.
15. For an unblinkered analysis of this dispute, see Peter Cadogin, 'The Origins of Sectarianism', *Labour Review*, Vol.3, No.5, 1958.
16. T.A. Jackson, *Ireland Her Own*, 1976, pp.278-9.
17. Schoyan, op. cit., p.3.
18. *Ibid.*, p.258.
19. Margaret Hambrick, *A Chartists' Library*, Mansell, 1986.
20. Schoyan, op. cit., p.277; see also *Red Republican*, August 31, 1850.
21. For Harney's correspondence, see F.G. & R.M. Black, eds., *The Harney Papers*, Assen, 1969.
22. G.J. Harney, Letter to D. O'Connell in defence of the Glasgow cotton spinners, December 22, 1837.

The Socialist Democracy group

In search of a new labour movement

Last month five comrades led by Phil Hearse left the Socialist Party to set up the journal *Socialist Democracy*. The new group is talking with eight comrades who have just left *Socialist Outlook*. Charli Langford looks at this latest regroupment initiative

The right-wing splits from the Socialist Party (formerly Militant) and from *Socialist Outlook* are probably the clearest indication so far of the crisis of the Trotskyist left under the twin pressures of the capitalist offensive and the collapse of Stalinism. The *Socialist Democracy* statement, published in *Socialist Democracy* no.1, says that the changes within the Labour Party 'caused many workers to ask "who will represent us now?"' and emerges with the answer 'no-one'. There is no analysis whatsoever of the trade unions. There is a lament for the failure of the SLP to become a type of party that it could never be. There is a catalogue of organisations and movements over the world which the group describe as 'new socialist formations', even though 'there are strong rightwing pressures on their leaderships, indeed some of the leaders of these groupings have capitulated to important parts of the neoliberal offensive'. There is a criticism of the Trotskyist left which contains some elements of truth but is completely overblown in comparison with the minimalism of criticism of the 'new socialist formations' and the SLP. This group appears to be markedly dissatisfied with the actually existing labour movement and left, and is in search of another one.

It cannot be denied that these are hard days for socialists. The ruling class has been heavily on the offensive since the late 1970's. In the advanced capitalist countries working class living standards have dropped as wages fail to keep up with

inflation, unemployment grows massively, casual and part-time working increase, and all aspects of education, health and welfare come under attack. Regular reports come in of famine, flood, disease and war from the neo-colonial world. The former Soviet Union and the eastern European states are recapitalising their collapsed economies while China and Vietnam are also returning to the capitalist fold through a more controlled choice of the ruling bureaucracies. Cuba and North Korea are under enormous capitalist pressure and are unlikely to hold out much longer.

This has had a huge impact on the working class. The trade unions have shrunk massively – in Britain membership has dropped from a high of 12 million to 6 million. The social democratic parties have moved a long way to the right. The Communist Parties, incapable of surviving the demise of the USSR, have in the main collapsed into social democracy where they haven't disappeared entirely.

The working class and the Labour Party

Socialist Democracy comments:

'Scargill's call for the formation of the SLP was cleverly timed, coming as it did in the wake of the symbolic ditching of Clause Four, and the long decline of the Labour Party into being a bourgeois liberal party. Of course Clause 4 was not itself decisive. Neither is the exact form of the links with the unions. The real issues are whether the Labour Party can be expected again to act as a vehicle for progressive reforms

in the interests of the working class; and whether it is a viable arena for action by socialists.'

Scargill's call may have been cleverly timed to appeal to those who had no intention of working in the Labour Party, but for those who had a perspective of winning the working class from Labour it was very badly timed. After four Tory election victories and the clear unravelling of the Tory Party a Labour election victory was likely. Millions of workers had been told by the union bureaucracy to not rock the boat – Labour will see us right. For those convinced that Labour would only see the ruling class right the best tactic was clearly to remain in the Labour Party and to build up the opposition within, aiming to make the biggest possible gains as Labour in government continued Tory attacks on workers. The optimal point for calling for a new party would be when workers' opposition to Blairism peaked, not the time Arthur picked – when Labour was seen by the great majority of the class as the only hope for deliverance from the Tories.

However, it is quite likely that it would still be wrong to call for a new party to the left of Labour in the near future. The basis for revolutionaries to work in the Labour Party is working class identification with it; a new party can only be built when a sizeable part of the working class withdraws its allegiance to Labour. *Socialist Democracy* seems very unclear on this. The question is not Labour's policies – we have understood that social democratic parties defend the

bourgeoisie ever since 1914, when they supported nation against class and voted for the First World War. In dropping Clause 4, maintaining the anti-union laws, handing over the economy to the Bank of England and attacking the poorest members of society Blair's Labour Party is behaving completely true to type. Even a formal dissolution of the union link would not be enough by itself to justify a pull-out. The most likely cause for a non-trivial move of the working class from Labour are the actions of the Labour Party in government. Any assertion that there is a move in the working class to look for alternative political representation, as Socialist Democracy claims, is simply wrong, as proved by recent by-elections where the SLP vote was derisory.

The revolutionary left and democratic centralism

Socialist Democracy has decided that a 'huge process of renewal, renovation, rethinking and reassessment' is needed, particularly in Britain among the Trotskyist groups where the comrades acknowledge their roots (Workers Action comes from the same root, of course). They ascribe the problems of these groups to democratic centralism, and imply that their own form of organisation will be different. We have to take issue with them on this.

The democratic centralist form of organisation comes from Lenin in his 1902 work *What is to be done? Russia at that time was an underdeveloped capitalist police state; merely organising a socialist newspaper or demonstration was enough to attract a period in a particularly unpleasant prison. A secure and secret organisation was required. Democratic discussions, elections and accountability of leadership were utopian impossibilities. In liberal Britain in 1997 there is no need for such clandestinity. We can take advantage of this to demand the fullest freedom of discussion and clear exposition of political differences to allow the organisations to make fully informed decisions. The organisations then need collectively to carry out their decisions and evaluate the results. Direct application of norms of 1902 Russia serves only to avoid challenges to entrenched leadership and to conceal differences within that leadership. The problem lies in the way that democratic centralism has been applied, not in democratic centralism itself. For Socialist Democracy to oppose*

democratic centralism calls to mind the cliché about the baby and the bathwater.

Socialist Democracy says that workers and youth will be repelled from the 'heavy-handed authoritarian regimes' that operate in most Trotskyist groups. It does not follow that they will be repelled by democratic centralism, and Socialist Democracy is wrong to equate their experiences in Militant with democratic centralism. The point at issue is what sort of organisation you are trying to create. Full and frank discussion is appropriate to a discussion group, but a revolutionary party is formed to take its programme into the working class struggle. Workers and youth join a party on the basis that its discussions are to decide on actions to take, not an end in themselves. They have a right to expect honest democratic discussion rather than authoritarian fiat, but they also have a right to expect commitment from their comrades to work with them carrying out the tasks agreed by the majority. They have a right to expect that their comrades will inform the class of the view of the organisation and what it is trying to achieve; they would normally allow comrades holding different views to the majority to explain them, as long as the organisation's majority view is also put.

Socialist Democracy says 'Intelligent workers and young people today will not stay in organisations which grant them less rights of criticism and political independence than those allowed by bourgeois democracy or the workers' movement at large'. True – but this isn't quite the point. 'Rights of criticism and political independence' are idealised conceptions; they only exist in bourgeois democracy because the ruling class is confident that an effective opposition cannot be built; when this confidence is lost the democratic freedoms disappear. And when 'the workers' movement at large' is operating in a manner akin to a revolutionary party – that is, when it is organising genuine industrial action (as opposed to the fig-leaves the bureaucracy occasionally requires to cover itself) – it will not tolerate members attempting to persuade other workers against action after a decision has been made. Most Trotskyist organisations allow some level of internal criticism at all times, and greater democratic participation than a choice of exploiter every fifth year.

What Socialist Democracy is trying to do is to use the worst aspects of existing organisations to attack democratic

centralism. The comrades want to build a broader, looser organisation where they can exercise control and there is no formalised method of calling them to account. Democratic centralism, properly applied, is a method of taking and carrying out decisions collectively and subsequently critically and collectively reviewing and changing them. It is explicitly designed to allow oppositions to coalesce and organise.

Phil and Duncan (Chapple, from the split from Socialist Outlook) may feel a sense of déjà vu at this point. Both they and several comrades of Workers Action were in Socialist Outlook in 1994 – they in the leadership. At that time we made criticisms of their application of democratic centralism in very similar terms to those they use now – we went as far as naming these two comrades as being central to the problems of democratic centralism in that organisation.

The SLP

While the comrades make severe criticism of the way the Trotskyist organisations work, their comments about the SLP are extraordinarily muted. They see the selection of 'Arthur's handpicked few' to lead the SLP as unfortunate; they see the ludicrously anti-democratic SLP constitution as an attempt to stifle sectarian raiding parties, rather than a pre-planned vehicle for the leadership to exercise control over all political difference within the organisation; they see the voiding of dissidents' membership (so much tidier than expulsions) as nothing more than 'grist to the mill of sectarian raiders'; they see but are unable to account for Scargill making policy up as he goes along, completely outside the control of the membership; they see and label as wrong the exclusion of Militant and the refusal to give autonomy to the Scottish SLP. They make no mention of other SLP aspects – the racist immigration policy, the welcoming and promotion of homeless Stalinists (a recent article in *Socialist News* accused the Tiananmen Square demonstration of 'brutal violence against the Chinese state'), the extreme hostility to voting for any other candidate where the SLP was not standing in the election. Had a Trotskyist group done even a small part of that they would denounce it from the rooftops.

They state that the call for the SLP was correct (we have already explained why it was wrong) and that it could be

built into a substantial organisation if it was open, pluralistic and democratic. It would doubtless make a fine parrot too, if it had wings and a beak. The SLP was not set up to be an open, pluralistic, democratic organisation. It was modelled on electoralist Old Labour but without the democratic 'weaknesses' that allowed a left opposition to form within it. It has developed into the reborn Communist Party of Great Britain, aligning itself with the 'Parties of the European Left' – which includes the Communist and ex-Communist Parties of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden. The correct characterisation of the SLP is that it is anti-democratic, racist, sectarian, opportunist, pro-imperialist and Stalinist.

New socialist formations?

Socialist Democracy lists a number of organisations as indicative of the left redefining itself politically, and says that we should be relating to them. Unfortunately they give little indication of how this should be done. They say we should be within Rifondazione Comunista (Italy) and the Spanish Izquierda Unida (and we would add the Brazilian Workers' Party, the German PDS and probably the Zapatistas to their list). But for all these the key question, which they fail to answer, is what should we be doing?

Rifondazione has some members of the Italian parliament. It props up the centre-left. Should we be loyal supporters of this organisation? We would say no – the role of revolutionaries must be to build a revolutionary socialist wing in Rifondazione. We have no basis for supporting a reformist government. Similarly with the Brazilian PT, which has made sharp attacks on the working class in the areas where it controls the city councils, and the PDS – a revamped reformist offshoot of the former ruling Stalinist party of East Germany; in all these organisations revolutionaries should be working to construct revolutionary socialist oppositions. The Zapatistas are engaged in unprincipled political horse-trading with the Mexican government and we have to oppose this.

There seems to be a clear pattern emerging – that these new 'parties of recomposition' may well contain militants who can be won to revolutionary Marxism but the parties themselves are very ready to collapse into collaboration with the ruling class. Our tactics towards them, whether operated from an entrism or

external perspective, should be those of the united front – we need to identify the interests of the working class and formulate a set of demands that express them clearly; these demands must have an anti-capitalist dynamic (which is likely to be a simple task in these days of global capitalist offensive). We then seek to build a campaign around these demands, taking them into the organisations and demanding support. Where we obtain support we ensure that the organisations pursue the demands at all levels; where we don't we use the refusal to expose the organisations and to win the vanguard and the class to the need to go further than these formations will. Eventually we hope to convince militants of the need for a revolutionary solution.

One has to wonder why Socialist Democracy is willing to state the need for working with these organisations, yet is so coy at spelling out tactics towards them. The answer almost certainly is that the ex-Trotskyist majority group of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec) are cheer-leaders for these organisations and that Phil Hearse has a long political history of capitulation to this group. Neither Hearse nor the USec majority are likely to take a united front approach to the 'new socialist formations'; in fact they are far more likely to submerge themselves uncritically into them.

Liberation and ecology movements

Socialist Democracy treats these movements similarly to the 'new socialist formations' – it makes a generalised 'we support you' appeal to them although a note of caution on right-wing tendencies within the greens is sounded. The comrades go a little further, though, in asserting a link between social justice and environmental sustainability. Essentially we would agree with them, but again we would argue with activists in the liberation movements and in the greens that their aims cannot be attained within capitalism, and that they must therefore be looking towards winning the working class and splitting the green movement along class lines. Again we would want to apply united front campaigning tactics within the movements.

Conclusion

The Socialist Democracy platform statement is a long document but it doesn't

say very much. Concretely the comrades claim to be Marxists and revolutionary socialists. They think a new regroupment for the development of Marxist theory and practice needs to be developed. Their supporters will be free to take discussions on issues into the public domain. They are extremely critical of democratic centralism though they don't go quite as far as saying they oppose it. Apart from massive hostility to the Trotskyist groups and slightly less hostility to the Labour Party they seem to want to be friends with everybody. They offer no tactics or mode of operation for their work.

Given the years of experience that the Socialist Democracy comrades have in the Trotskyist movement, this is an incredibly anodyne and disingenuous document. It reads as if they have nothing to say except that everything they did was wrong and they now need to start learning from scratch again. This seems a rather unusual basis upon which to set up a new organisation. A more likely explanation is that this is a rather cynical opportunist exercise to appeal to the imagined prejudices of comrades currently on the left of the SLP.

Despite all evidence to the contrary Socialist Democracy defends the discredited view that the launch of the SLP was well timed, along with the odd line that the working class no longer sees Labour as its political representative – this in spite of one of the biggest landslides this century. This is clearly an incorrect assessment of the current situation. Coupled with an orientation to the 'new socialist formations' and new social movements which contains no perspective of building a class-based revolutionary wing we have to assess that this new organisation has lost confidence in the working class. **WA**

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