

# **Introduction**

In the second edition of this book I have corrected a number of silly mistakes. The wrong date for the 2001 election had been inserted in the text, for example. Style has been touched-up here and there; various political formulations sharpened. Besides these minor changes, the first two chapters have, in particular, been considerably expanded both in the light of developments after the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US and in order to fully discuss the main submissions to the Socialist Alliance's December 1 conference. Inevitably, many passages will become completely dated on December 2. Nevertheless the general thrust of the argument still stands. Whether it convinces, I leave up to the reader.

**JC**

**October 16 2001**

# 1. Looking beyond

“Without struggle there cannot be a sorting out, and without a sorting out there cannot be any successful advance, nor can there be any lasting unity” (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 34, Moscow 1977, p53). As will soon be appreciated, I take these profound words of Lenin’s - written in 1900 to a party opponent, Apollinaria Yakobova - to be axiomatic.

The purpose of this short book lies not in highlighting the 80% where the Socialist Alliance purportedly agrees. Others can do that much better than I, not least the legendary journalist, Paul Foot (*P Foot Why you should vote socialist* London 2001). My method is unashamedly polemical. Paradoxical though it may appear, in order to achieve meaningful unity in the Socialist Alliance there must be the jarring dissonance of argument. An open, honest and, if need be, aggressive discussion on the areas where we disagree. Unity that ignores our palpable differences, unity that refuses to provide wide channels for dissent lacks inner strength and will prove worthless as soon as it is subjected to any kind of serious political test.

Mine is necessarily a contribution to the Socialist Alliance’s debate on structure that is due to culminate at the Logan Hall membership conference on December 1 2001. But much more than that. The intention is to lift our sights far beyond those circumscribed limits. What the Socialist Alliance desperately needs is an ambitious system of practical work. A system that, stage by stage, brings about a rapprochement between our many and various constituent elements - both the supporting groups and the so-called independents - and which in the shortest possible timespan achieves the solid and durable unity which is only possible within a fully democratic and, equally to the point, highly effective, revolutionary organisation. Its scientific name being - Communist Party.

The decisions taken on December 1 can either help or hinder the process of building a party ... and it is certainly more than a pity that comrades living in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are still excluded from taking a full part in our deliberations and decision making. The word ‘criminal’ springs to mind. As we shall argue, the party that the left requires must of necessity operate against the United Kingdom state on every front (and in due course against the entire system of global capital in unison with other working class parties). The hopelessly fragmented response to the Bush-Blair ‘war on terrorism’ has two main sources - sectarian obstinacy and the fact that socialists have by default allowed themselves to be separated off into England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland royalist units. Feudal tombs can only but

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suffocate.

There is, unarguably, a single UK capitalist state. Tony Blair's government directs nuclear-tipped all-UK armed forces that are an integral part of the so-called 'crusade' against terrorism. Exploiting the horror and outrage provoked by September 11, the very same entity is putting through a whole raft of interconnected 'anti-terrorist' measures throughout the UK - designed to secure national unity and augment repressive powers. Equipped with a unified party, the working class can confidently coordinate decisive resistance and in time come to overpower our main enemy. By the same measure, to argue for disunity is, consciously or unconsciously, to argue for defeat.

Structures may seem a dull, convoluted and altogether third rate subject. Especially to demagogues and the determinedly naive. But not to those who consciously inhabit history. Leninists inevitably recall the debate about membership criteria at the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party in 1903. Unexpectedly for all concerned, the Iskraits suddenly found themselves cleaved into two bitterly opposed, factions - the Bolshevik (majority) and Menshevik (minority). The earth-shattering fault line lay hidden in what at first appeared to be a minor, structural, detail - membership criteria. What sort of structures the Socialist Alliance adopts, or aspires towards, reflects our programmatic goals and will likewise materially shape the future. By taking a wrong course, or leaving things as they are, which actually amounts to the same thing, the whole Socialist Alliance project is in danger of losing all momentum. Our majority faction in England certainly seems content to have the Socialist Alliance in the rearguard and ambling along to the slow, debilitating beat of routine election contests. Yet by adopting the right structures - backed as a matter of urgency by further programmatic invigoration - the opportunity exists whereby the left can be solidly united and through successive stages built into a viable mass alternative to Labourism.

When the Socialist Workers Party decided, at last, to throw its weight behind the Socialist Alliance with the June 2000 Greater London Authority elections, this gave us a vital qualitative boost in terms of resources, cadre and reach. The SWP's entry cemented the Socialist Alliance as an alliance of *socialists*: principally Britain's main left organisations. Something, it should be stressed, the CPGB consistently advocated and tenaciously fought to achieve. There was what might be called a price to pay. Insubstantial elements fell away. However, there were in both, material and political terms, big gains.

In every respect this enlargement has reoriented the Socialist Alliance towards an altogether more worthwhile destination compared to the shore hugging venture planned by the original Liaison Committee. Objectively things point towards a party - though it cannot be denied that the pro-party bloc still forms a minority.

The Welsh Socialist Alliance benefited in no small measure too from the SWP's turn away from its unsplendid isolation. Numbers and political impact have grown

markedly. As for Scotland, the Scottish Socialist Party gained a valuable addition when the comrades finally secured entry on May 1 2001 ... as proved by the relaunch of *Scottish Socialist Voice* as a 12-page weekly. Nevertheless, despite these overwhelmingly positive developments the burning question of 'ultimate destination', and therefore, of organisational ways and means, has been left hazy or has gone completely unanswered by us collectively. The general election fixed our priorities for the first half of 2001. Since then, and from almost every quarter, there has been a dawning recognition that 'something must be done'. Good.

The Socialist Alliance has grown in leaps and bounds - above all with the 2001 general election. There were 98 candidates in England and Wales and some 57,000 votes. Many hundreds of recruits were signed up. Scores of new branches sprung into existence. Garnering trade union support is now within our grasp. Yet the structures of the Socialist Alliance act like a dead weight. Our elected officers operate as a body of rank amateurs and wield hardly a jot of authority. The absence of our officers from London and from the platforms of our rallies over the country is noticeable. And for ongoing publicity and propaganda the Socialist Alliance is expected to rely on *Socialist Worker*, *Weekly Worker* and *The Socialist*. These small circulation rivals and our website.

Organisationally the Socialist Alliance is an ineffectual, ramshackle, not to say Ruritanian affair. We have two national addresses. One in London, the other in Coventry. Applicants for membership can write to either of these two addresses. They then have to have their details sent to Walsall and comrade Dave Church, our membership secretary. He then informs the appropriate local Socialist Alliance, if he knows of one. Cheques, on the other hand, are posted to comrade Declan O'Neil, the outgoing treasurer. The whole rigmarole takes at least a week.

Micawber-like finances are as squeezed as they are precarious. Local and regional finances remain a complete mystery to our leading committees and officers. The many-tiered membership system is bizarre. You might have to join four separate times in order to take a full part. There is no single membership system. We are an officially registered political party but employ no staff. We have a national office but most aspects of the Socialist Alliance are still run from spare bedrooms. Scotland and Wales are, perversely, treated as foreign countries, in no small part owing to an inverted English chauvinism. And as long as Tommy Sheridan occasionally nods in the direction of the Socialist Alliance, nationalism is said to be a purely a Scottish and Welsh concern. Unless you are Chris Bambery! What of trade union work? Despite a rash of disputes on the London underground and the crisis-ridden rail network, the Socialist Alliance has still not taken up the CPGB's urgent call for a railworkers' fraction, or the AWL's generous offer of handing over their *Tubeworker* bulletin. What goes for the RMT, Aslef and TSSA, applies no less to the CWU, FBU, Unison, etc.

Simultaneously the six principal supporting organisations patrol the ideological seas

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with six *rival* flagship publications. Besides that they employ a posse of full time workers, and four of them run commercially viable print shops. So the Socialist Alliance still operates more as separate parts than as a single whole. This semi-unity, fledgling stage is itself endangered from within by the misjudged actions of one of our six principal supporting organisations - namely the Socialist Party in England and Wales. It has been systematically diluting or wilfully sabotaging common efforts: eg, running a semi-detached general election campaign: eg, operating an effective boycott across whole areas of the country. Serious involvement is almost entirely at the top. Worse, far worse, in the London borough of Hackney, Socialist Alliance candidates found themselves opposed by supposed allies. Such a state of affairs makes us a laughing stock. It was never tolerable. We must end it forthwith as an integral part of a December 1 structural revolution.

The structural alternatives on offer for December 1 frequently overlap but essentially revolve around two basic models - federalist and centralist. Proposals come from the SWP (supported by the International Socialist Group, John Nicholson, Mike Marqusee and Nick Wrack), the Socialist Party in England and Wales, Pete McLaren, Dave Church, the Revolutionary Democratic Group, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Workers Power and the Communist Party of Great Britain (five of whose members are also founding signatories of the 'For a democratic and effective SA' platform). We shall touch upon all of the submissions. But I think it will be most useful if our discussion concentrates on, or broadly follows, the SWP's draft. Not because it is the best. Not because it is the worst. The reason is straightforward. In all likelihood the SWP's proposed constitution is set to become the substantive one on December 1; then to be subject to debate, negotiation and amendment.

The SWP - the majority faction in England - argues that "one of the major weaknesses of the general election campaign nationally was that lines of responsibility and accountability were blurred and this also meant less coherence, more caution and weaker responses to changing events" (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p3). In other words, there was no clear chain of organisational command. Definitely true. But surely the localist make-do and lack of an authoritative leadership, the disconnected and uninspired propaganda and technical shortcomings, have deeper causal roots? In the last analysis everything goes back to programme. While there are some valuable nuggets to be found in the SWP's proposals: eg, the election of executive officers, a single membership system - it does not surprise me at all that, taken as a whole, the SWP cannot produce what is required. Neither the programmatic positions the SWP defends within the Socialist Alliance nor the sum of their organisational proposals meet the needs of the day.

Let us take an initial, exploratory foray into the programmatic thickets. Instead of taking as its point of departure the Socialist Alliance's general election manifesto, *People before profits*, the SWP prefers to keep one foot firmly in our pre-history. There is a passing reference to our general election manifesto and how our policies

will be “the matter for continual debate and refinement” (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p19). However, the bulk of the SWP’s ‘delete all’ amendment actually endorses and entrenches the clumsy, unedifying and syrupy formulations that introduce *A fair society, social justice and ecological sustainability*: ie, our antiquated standing constitution, which was agreed, despite stiff CPGB opposition, at the March 1999 conference in Birmingham (perhaps this dubious continuity represents the price exacted by John Nicholson in return for his support). Speculation aside, for all its limitations, *People before profit* is an altogether superior document. It was the result of skilled compositing and intensive debate. Moreover it involved a much wider and, no less germane, a far more politically sophisticated membership.

Frankly the programmatic formulations that validate *A fair society, social justice and ecological sustainability* as a whole - and by default the SWP’s subsequent structural proposals - are deeply embarrassing. They owe everything to Proudhon, nothing to Marx; everything to the abstract, nothing to the concrete; everything to petty bourgeois protest politics, nothing to working class self-liberation. The less the original - disillusioned Labourite - drafters had to say, the more banal the content of their proclamations (the only *other* active defender of the March 1999 ‘statement of aims’ is Pete McLaren - seemingly a true believer - who as a corollary urges the ‘re-establishment’ of the antediluvian ‘Network of Socialist Alliances’ title). That the SWP decided not to dump the entire sorry mess demonstrates once again that the comrades fail to take programme seriously. They should have replaced the long-winded existing aims and methods with a much simpler, more pointed, statement.

The SWP’s ‘delete all’ constitutional amendment expects members of the Socialist Alliance to “broadly” *agree* with its inherited ‘statement of aims’. What are these aims? Practical proposals and goals are absent and, substituting for them, we find a string of grandiloquent sentimentalities and empty phrasemongering. Where there might have been crisp, historically established principles and demands for definite rights and freedoms, there are instead good intentions about a “fair and sustainable society”, “social justice”, “a popular republic”, “peace”, ending “discrimination” and “economic exploitation”, etc. Take the call to promote “peace nationally and internationally”. This soggy nonsense can obviously serve all manner of political evils: eg, the promotion of peace is also in present-day official society a cynical cover for the preparation of war. Another obvious problem: when has a society proclaimed itself unsustainable or under the protection of injustice? Equally half-baked is the formulation that “economic exploitation” will be replaced by a society which secures for the people “the full return of all wealth generated by industries and services of society by means of common ownership and democratic control”. No society can do away with the necessity of putting aside reserves for emergencies or using surplus product to maintain or augment overall productive capacity. Similarly the SWP promises that “where necessary”, we shall restore “such biological diversity as is essential to the viability of both global and local ecosystems”. Could that require the depopulation of

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London and allowing the Thames to regularly flood low lying areas in the name of restoring the “local ecosystem” to its supposed pristine glory? Who knows?

From lack of real content there logically flows empty methods. Hence the transition to a “fair and sustainable society” will, it is said, require “fundamental social, political and cultural changes” (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p19). There is no concept of state power or of a revolutionary rupture. “Change” will come through a “variety of avenues”, we are vaguely told, and changes must be “valuable in themselves” and “stages towards greater change”, etc. In exactly the same inane spirit, the SWP’s ‘statement of aims’ informs the reader that the Socialist Alliance aspires as an objective to “offer organisation, facilitation and encouragement” to whatever efforts are “contributing to that process”.

Such barren formulations are verbose ways of saying precisely nothing - which is always the prime purpose of moralistic terminology. No one can really disagree with the slippery phrases; and they have the great virtue of not frightening off liberal radicals, greens and reformists; and not committing their authors to anything serious by demanding revolutionary deeds.

Blair and New Labour are roundly condemned as a matter of routine. Labour has abandoned “whatever aspiration” it had toward ‘socialism’ and is now in partnership with “multinationals and media tycoons”. Yet - ironically - ‘socialism’ as a positive goal is entirely missing from the SWP’s proposed ‘aims’. Amazing but true. Yet though the ‘s’ word hardly rates a mention, the SWP is, of course, peddling what we call ethical or sentimental socialism. Like state power and revolution, the working class and the class struggle are also entirely absent. And, as Karl Marx sharply observed, “Where the class struggle is pushed to the side as an unpleasant, ‘crude’ phenomenon, nothing remains as the basis of socialism but ‘true love of the people’ and empty phrases about ‘justice’” (K Marx, F Engels *SW* Vol 3, Moscow 1975, p92). In practice, we must add, that ‘socialism’ without the rule of the working class only exists as its opposite: eg, Stalin’s USSR, Attlee’s Britain, Pol Pot’s Kampuchea, Olaf Palme’s Sweden.

Clarity is needed - especially when it comes to the greens. Every genuine socialist is, of course, an environmentalist but the problem is that very few greens even formally adhere to socialism. Terry Liddle, speaking from first hand experience - he was coordinator of Greenwich Green Party and is currently treasurer of Greenwich Socialist Alliance - insists that there is a definite element in the Green Party which is “actively hostile to socialism” (*Weekly Worker* October 11 2001). Greens occupy a petty bourgeois class-political position and contain within themselves a wide spectrum ranging from the critical-utopian to the semi-fascist: eg, David Icke, Third Wave, *Green Anarchist*, etc. Its best thinkers have written savage indictments of capitalism which supply wonderful ammunition for revolutionary socialists and communists. Despite that, most green ideas are confused, naive and at the end of the day reactionary.

The solution to the world's ecological crisis lies for the greens in nature itself - now, of course, humanised. Deep greens, and those of a similar hue, oppose global capital. But they do so in the name of an imagined self-sufficient past, not a future of freely associated producers. There is an underlying prejudice against economic growth and technological progress. In parallel the Green Party programmatically insists upon a thoroughly inhuman, Malthusian, reduction of the number of people in Britain from 60 to 20 million, presumably along with draconian 'non-racist' immigration controls in order to prevent 'overpopulation'. Africa, China, India and the 'overpopulated' 'third world' are viewed with the same bilious eyes. People, not alienated capitalist social relations and production for its own sake, are for them the fundamental problem. Follow that route and you eventually reach the jaws of hell.

What the Socialist Alliance must get to grips with is the task of constructing our own, Marxist approach to ecology. Grafting greenism onto socialism always fails - motivated as it is by a vain opportunist search for popularity, not intellectual rigour. However, John Bellamy Foster, amongst others, has shown beyond doubt that Marxism alone makes possible ecological ways of thinking that are both thoroughly materialist and thoroughly human: eg, in *The German ideology* Marx and Engels explain that, "As long as man has existed, nature and man have affected each other" (quoted in JB Foster *Marx's ecology* New York 2000, p226). Men - and women - are part of nature and as such rely on nature. In other words, there exists co-evolution. Attempts by humanity to arrogantly rule over nature like a conqueror over a conquered people, like something standing outside nature, result in dire, totally unforeseen consequences: drought, soil exhaustion, erosion, flash floods, desertification. Nature "revenges" itself, writes Engels, and shows in no uncertain terms that "we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage of all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly" (K Marx, F Engels *CW* Vol 25, London 1987, pp460-61). Capitalism has, though, alienated humanity from nature. There is a profound metabolic rift between humanity's productive activity and the ecosystem. All progress under capitalism is bought at the expense of the worker and of nature. The task of socialism and then communism - associated humanity - is to bring about a return of humanity to nature and nature to humanity and through that establish a sustainable balance and interchange between the two.

For a - Victorian and low-tech - picture of the communist society we envisage pick up a copy of William Morris's futuristic novel *News from nowhere*. The distinction between town and country has vanished. England is a garden scattered here and there with airy workshops. Nothing is wasted. Nothing despoiled. Production is organised not for profit but for genuine use. Humanity lives in harmony with humanity; therefore humanity lives in harmony with nature. Maybe the Socialist Alliance has its apprentice William Morris in China Miéville. Either way, let us have an ecology commission, which, beginning with first principles, painstakingly takes us from mere



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good intentions to a fully rounded programme.

Still hankering after a red-green popular front, comrade Pete McLaren, editor of the Socialist Alliance's defunct *The All Red and Green*, actually warns of the danger of "direct clashes" between ourselves and the Green Party in elections - as happened on June 7 2001. In the same manner Ian Birchall fantasised a while ago - as an SWP "exercise in political science fiction"- about a "possible" reformist "coalition" government consisting of greens, the Socialist Alliance and independent Labour leftists (*Socialist Review* December 2000). His 'science fiction' served not to sound the alarm but was supposed to inspire. Heaven help us. Nevertheless those siren voices that seek "positive links" with the likes of the *Green Anarchist* or who would turn the Socialist Alliance into a rainbow coalition are nowadays increasingly marginal. The Socialist Alliance unites reds as reds. Excellent.

The reader is bound to ask whether communists actually want green socialists to join the Socialist Alliance? Absolutely - as long as they accept democratically agreed aims and policies as the basis for united action, and abide by our rules. Socialist greens should be offered the hand of friendship and positively welcomed: eg, the vote by the Green Socialist Network to affiliate to the Socialist Alliance - at its October 6 2001 AGM - is cause for celebration (*Weekly Worker* October 11 2001). Not because of its claimed 300 membership, but because it represents a *distinct* socialist viewpoint which has been won to put its efforts into the bigger Socialist Alliance project. Naturally this unity does not put an end to polemical exchanges. On the contrary, as stated above, unity for us is premised upon constant political debate.

The 'background and aims' proposals drafted by the Socialist Party in England and Wales in its alternative constitution have, in comparison to the SWP's the decided advantage of being compact and actually upholding the goal of "a socialist transformation of society". True, the approach to the Labour Party is rigidly closed-ended, but then the same goes for the SWP and the standing constitution. We are told with absolute certainty that the Labour Party cannot reverse its embrace of the "free market". The idea that present-day monopoly capitalism has anything in common with a "free market" is a complete fallacy, of course. Furthermore, the Labour Party - be warned - would quickly repaint itself deepest red, if socialism once again grew in popularity. There is, however, a definite sub-text in the 'aims' which by rather plodding implication seeks to legitimise Peter Taaffe's altogether problematic, not to say hostile, dealings with the Socialist Alliance. The Socialist Alliance "will attempt to support groups of workers who take steps towards ... independent representation" (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p21): eg, SPEW standing against us under the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation umbrella or Hackney shop stewards. The Socialist Alliance could just about live with the comrades' cut and paste 'background and aims', but we prefer something for the 'Statement of aims' along the following lines:

1. The Socialist Alliance aims to build a political alternative to the Labour Party. We do this by fighting elections, supporting workers in struggle, taking a lead on all demo-

cratic questions and building support for the Socialist Alliance within the working class.

2. Our goal is the creation of a new working class party dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism and achieving socialism, ie the rule of the working class and through that general freedom.

3. Till a full programme is adopted, the manifesto *People before profit*, agreed by the March 10 2001 Birmingham policy conference, and as subsequently amended, will function as the programme of the Alliance.

But let us pick up on our discussion of the SWP's proposals. Having dealt with the 'statement of aims' we reach 'membership'. In general this section has the definite virtue of moving the Socialist Alliance decisively beyond being an amorphous "confederation" of political groups and individual members who might or might not be factionally attached. Individual membership would constitute the bedrock of the Socialist Alliance. One system of membership operates - dues are collected below and after deductions pass upwards or *visa versa*. There is no mention of trade unions or the political groups being granted special access to leading committees, though clause B6 does somewhat obscurely talk of "other forms of affiliation". At our stage of development this is quite acceptable ... there is no pressing need to give concrete answers on trade union affiliation, etc. The SWP's proposals must, however, be improved by some judicious amendments.

Running through clauses B1, B3 and B4, one finds repeated formulations that it would be best for all concerned to swiftly cut out and discard. And then there is the truly toxic clause C13. Here is what we are complaining about: members have to "abide" by the "anti-sectarian, cooperative and positive way of working" (B1). Membership "assumes" a "commitment to the anti-sectarian and cooperative way of working, looking to build unity rather than set out a position to create discord, positively supporting and encouraging the notion of alliances and ensuring that any critical debates are conducted in a positive manner and without personal attacks" (B3). "Individual members are thus welcome from other groups and organisations and membership of these should be declared on application/renewal of membership" (B4). And then there is clause C13. It gives despotic powers to the executive. At a stroke it can "disaffiliate" local Socialist Alliances, "remove individual membership" and "refuse to ratify" candidates if it is "concluded that the basic statement of aims has been breached". Such clauses are either irrelevant pieties, in which case they should be deleted, or sinister. These formulations could be used to expel almost anyone: eg, is SPEW consistently "anti-sectarian, positive and cooperative" in its ways of working with the Socialist Alliance?

There must be specific rules making it a disciplinary offence to support candidates running *against* the Socialist Alliance. A code of membership duties is needed as well as rights. For our part we can agree with a good deal of the SWP's four 'requirements of membership' (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p21). No one can argue with the fourth

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criteria on the obligation to pay the “relevant membership fee”. However, we do have differences, albeit those of detail, with the first three. 1. Members must “support” Socialist Alliance “candidates and campaigns in elections” - why support just elections? This formulation is both too broad and too narrow. Replace it with a members’ *duty* “not to oppose Socialist Alliance candidates or campaigns”. That would represent a vital step forward without running ahead of ourselves. 2. Members must behave “in a democratic and cooperative manner”. Moralistic and again much too wide. Why not simply say that members are obliged to “accept” the rules of the Socialist Alliance? 3. “No racist, sexist, homophobic and discriminatory behaviour”. Something along these lines could be included in our constitution, as an aim, not a membership requirement. Society at large is still riddled with racist ideas (not to mention an overarching national chauvinism). What of sexism and homophobia? Can any of us really say with hand on heart that they are completely free of sexist or homophobic attitudes? And do not attitudes reflect themselves in behaviour, even if that is only at the level of body language? Should the Socialist Alliance set up special courts to vet recruits and expel miscreants? I think not. Racist, sexist and homophobic behaviour ought to be combated within the Socialist Alliance - and we ought to promise that that will happen. But how?

Here is an example of good practice your writer witnessed. I was pleased to attend the SSP’s 2nd conference in Edinburgh as a visitor. One of the most contentious debates on the first day surprisingly concerned clause 28. A handful of SSP members rose to argue against backing the abolitionists. Their excuse was that the SSP would drive away wide swathes of the Scottish population if it “sided” with homosexuality. One million people in Scotland did indeed sign up to Brian Sutor’s bigot’s referendum to retain clause 28 (so much for Scotland being far ahead of England and Wales in terms of political consciousness). Anyway what impressed me was not so much the passionate rhetoric directed against these prejudiced souls. Rather it was the fact that no one threatened them with expulsion. That approach is the correct way to overcome backward ideas. Note the SSP went into the June 7 2001 general election with a manifesto commitment to oppose homophobia.

The Socialist Alliance should move by degrees - as fast as possible, as slow as necessary - towards achieving the fullest unity in democratically agreed actions. As a precondition the right to criticise before and after must, of course, be enshrined. Such discipline is an aspiration though and must primarily be brought to life through common political struggle, patient education and raising consciousness. There should be no right of minorities to “actively” campaign against the Socialist Alliance *during* an action, as proposed by the Workers’ Liberty comrades (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001 p26*). That would be to *positively* institutionalise disunity. Membership should carry “an obligation not to obstruct” campaigns decided on by the Socialist Alliance, if by that is meant a definite action.

The Socialist Alliance must stress unity in action, not unity in thought. Catch-all

ideological offences must certainly be avoided. Sectarianism, for example, is in the eye of the beholder. It is also one of the most notoriously misused words in the lexicon of the workers' movement. As a grapeshot insult it is meant to send every critic, every thinker and virtually every left group flying. Sectarianism is often casually equated with all small groups as such and, more to the point, holding strong principles.

Sectarianism is actually putting the interests of the part above the working class as a whole. True, many left and revolutionary groups function as sects: ie, their overriding reason for existence is the promotion of some special discovery or unique ideological recipe, the SWP and SPEW being prominent examples. But such essentially 'honest' sectarianism cannot be abolished by decree (or membership clause). It can only be overcome through joint work, exchanging ideas and the subsequent growth of trust. Ending sectarianism must be envisaged as a process.

Leave aside the SWP's threat to "remove" members or candidates who "breach" the rambling nonsense in the "basic aims" (C13), what of debate being "conducted in a positive manner and without personal attack"? This again can easily be transformed into a catch-all which permits an irresponsible majority to witch-hunt any dissenting minority that is considered a nuisance or a threat. Is this book "positive"? It will, I sincerely trust, "create discord" in certain quarters. And the author makes no apology for attacking individuals when and where he considers them to be in the wrong. I am confident that hardened politicians such as Peter Taaffe and Clive Heemskirk, John Rees and Lindsay German, Martin Thomas and Mark Hoskisson are not going to wilt. They will, if they see fit, reply, no doubt in kind. Certainly when it comes to acidic invective few of us can match the greats: eg, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, etc. Marx was once described by an infuriated opponent as an insult on legs. He was determined to expose ridiculous ideas by making them *appear* ridiculous. That method is one that we should not be afraid to emulate. The benchmark of a civilised political culture is the right to insult and offend others, though there is no need to include the right to insult and offend in our rules.

Purging and witch-hunting? Are we suffering from paranoia? Or do real grounds for concern exist? Forget the SWP's murky internal life, the tangled history of expulsions and the recent excommunication of the International Socialist Organisation. The SWP's sister organisation in the USA suffered a rude expulsion from their International Socialist Tendency over what appears to be pure semantics. Was the Seattle movement anti-capitalist or anti-corporate? Look at our own Socialist Alliance. Not so long ago within the Socialist Alliance, yes, despite its "commitment to the anti-sectarian and cooperative way of working" the CPGB found itself on the receiving end of a whole series of attempts to bar or browbeat. Shamefully, both the SWP and SPEW involved themselves in such moves. Charges invariably referred to the *Weekly Worker's* failure to abide by what might be called the "commitment to the anti-sectarian and cooperative way of working". Polemics and reporting disputes - signs of a healthy political culture - were equated with sectarianism and were therefore by

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definition outside the norms of the Socialist Alliance. Thankfully, for the moment at least, wiser councils have prevailed.

In light of that background we view the SWP's membership clause B4 with some trepidation. The clause is directly carried over from the March 1999 original. "Individual members are ... welcome from other groups and organisations and membership of these should be declared on application/renewal of membership of the Socialist Alliance" (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p19). Five brief points. One, our present membership forms do not ask for such information. Two, a central membership list which includes factional affiliation would superbly expedite any witch-hunt. Neil Kinnock would have given his right hand for such a weapon as he rounded on Militant in the mid-1980s. Three, justification for requiring a declaration of factional affiliation derived from the elaborate collegiate elections envisaged by the Liaison Committee in 1998-99. Four, the SWP's constitutional amendment contains no such collegiate system. It proposes election by slate. Five, there is no need to introduce a declaration of factional affiliation on membership forms and every reason to remove the formulation from our constitution.

It is SPEW that needs to maintain B4 if it is to fulfil its mission of squeezing the Socialist Alliance back into a loose conglomeration of local and political groups. SPEW and its anarcho and localist allies of convenience are even less ambitious for the Socialist Alliance than the SWP. When not holding back finances in their "war" on the SWP and those "heavily inclined to support" them, SPEW is set upon little more than an election non-aggression pact (SPEW national circular, December 21 2000). Along with Bakunin, their organisational totem is federalism. Therefore SPEW's constitution provides for what it calls members' platforms. Let us call one of them the Socialist Party platform. These members' platforms possess awesome power, including arbitrarily vetoing decisions at a local and regional level. Changes to the constitution by the annual conference are also subject to a members' platform veto. Put in a nutshell, the SP platform has the anarchistic right to do as it pleases while being able to bureaucratically overrule any majority. With two-faced cynicism this is all proposed in the name of winning workers and those entering into struggle. A worthy objective. However, the constitution proposed by SPEW does not attract. Rather it repels. Militant workers know from bitter experience of the real world the benefits that come from *effective* organisation. Few have the slightest trouble understanding the advantages of democracy. Trade unions expect minorities who have voted against strike action to abide by majority decisions and to respect picket lines. Minorities certainly have no right of veto. The Socialist Alliance should embody democracy and effectiveness in its constitution. The scabs' charter drafted by SPEW must be rejected. We would propose instead the following three membership clauses:

1. A member of the Socialist Alliance is one who accepts the programme and rules, where possible works in one of its organisations and pays the relevant membership fees.
2. Members must not oppose Socialist Alliances candidates or obstruct

democratically agreed actions. The Socialist Alliance strives to move towards - as fast as possible, as slow as necessary - achieving the fullest unity in democratically agreed actions. An aspiration primarily brought to life through common political struggle, patient education and raising consciousness.

3. Members enjoy the following rights: the right to hold opinions and express them; the right to hold officers and representatives of the Socialist Alliances to account through democratic mechanisms; the right to collectively elect and recall Socialist alliance officers and committees; the right to form distinct temporary or long term political platforms; the right to read, write for and publicly distribute publications; the right to political education and socialist theory in the Socialist Alliance.

The annual conference, in SPEW's constitution, decides the policy of the Socialist Alliance. This will be "open to all members". The SWP uses the same C1 formulation so a specific comment on the annual conference is necessary. Obviously a strong geographical bias is inevitable, if we leave conference - that is, conference votes - open to all members. Those chosen ones living near the chosen location will find it easy to attend; those living far away will not. That is why a system of elected delegates is far more democratic. We look forward to such an arrangement. There should be encouragement for minorities to be generously represented: eg, if a local Socialist Alliance is given five delegates, the executive committee could recommend that two of them represent minority viewpoints.

Not surprisingly, the executive committee proposed by the SPEW comrades champions the parts rather than the whole. Six officers - party leader, treasurer, etc - will be elected by single transferable vote. Then we have six "representatives" of individual members; three "representatives" of the Socialist Alliance's Euro-MPs, MPs, councillors, etc; five trade union "representatives" who "must be either a national officer, or executive member of a TUC-recognised trade union"; and finally there are the members' platform "representatives". Through this collegiate system, with its complex set of restrictions, women-only places, etc, SPEW could find itself eclipsing the SWP as the dominant faction on our leadership.

All such constructs now represent an obstacle to deepening unity and effectiveness. The same goes for special "guarantees". Workers Power, for example, not only wants automatic representation for the six principal supporting organisations on the executive: it would give the same status to all "affiliated labour movement or community organisations" (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p23). That is to ask for our executive committee to be flooded with "representatives" of hollow trades councils, defunct union branches and dubious local campaigns. A factionalists' dream-world. A nightmare for the Socialist Alliance.

SPEW adds another bureaucratic twist of its own by inserting a clause which limits the influence of political organisations. No more than 40% of officers "at all levels" shall belong to any one members' platform (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p23). Unless "all" members' platforms "agree". To ensure this, SPEW has to have the B4

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declaration of factional affiliation. On the contrary, we say voters: ie, members or delegates in the Socialist Alliance must be free to elect whomsoever they see fit. Presumably in the SPEW system successful candidatures would be declared null and void and comrades would be turfed out if they took the quota of their political organisation above the 40% cut-off? And who decides which candidate is to be given the boot? What happens if one of the unaligned national officers subsequently decided to join a members' platform and thereby took it over the fixed quota? What happens if the SWP absorbs the International Socialist Group? Would lists of nominations "at all levels" be policed by the executive committee? The SPEW constitution is actually not designed to work. It is unworkable. But it does serve as a - threadbare - propaganda cover for SPEW's anarchist rejection of Socialist Alliance democracy.

So how should the executive committee be elected? As mentioned above, the SWP proposes election by slate. A number of other submissions, including the CPGB's, uses exactly the same formulation. After thinking about it, I now believe this to be a mistake. How it is supposed to function can be gleaned from the SWP's 'national policy-making structure' section. The 'alternative vote' system suggested by the SWP means that members/delegates will chose between rival slates. If no slate gains an absolute majority then the slate with the least votes will be eliminated and those votes distributed according to the next preference. In the course of that process one slate sooner or later gains an absolute majority. The 20 or 30 comrades on that slate now constitute our executive committee.

What are the pitfalls? Ownership of the slates lies not with the conference. The parts, the factions, draw up their preferred list and bargain with various individuals and competing factions. At present that means the SWP rules supreme. Everyone else can only hope to gain a place on the leadership of *our* organisation at the behest of that faction. Backroom deals will determine the content of the majority slate. There is no transparency. No democratic supervision. Dave Church, the Socialist Alliance's membership secretary, is not off the mark when he says that individual, unaligned, members are "becoming wary" that our present arrangement could leave them in the position of being "used" by the principal supporting organisations (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p10). That wariness can only but be compounded by introducing the SWP's slate system.

A couple of other objections. One, the existence of excluded, oppositional, factions is encouraged, not discouraged. Two, non-factional individuals: ie, those unaligned 'independents' not included on the majority slate, have no chance of finding their way through. Popular, but perhaps difficult, comrades will either have to draw up their own, or stand on equally no-hope slates. That or kowtow before the dominant faction. A bad atmosphere, which rewards toadying, not forthright criticism. No doubt the SWP has every intention of being generous. The five other principal supporting groups and a favoured selection of *aligned* independents will be included. But that is not the

point. No one denies that the majority has the absolute right to determine the composition of leading committees. But such a right can either be exercised with a heavy hand or through a much lighter, indirect touch.

A recommended list drawn up by an election preparation committee benefits the whole while taking nothing away, in terms of rights, from the majority or dominant faction. How does such a system work? The retiring executive committee appoints an interim election preparation committee, whose remit is to draw up a list of comrades to be recommended to the Socialist Alliance's annual conference. There are guidelines which stipulate the need to achieve a balanced list: eg, gender, ethnic background, political faction, experience and geography. The idea is not so much to achieve fairness in an unfair society, rather the election preparation committee has the job of considering what collectivity would give us the best Socialist Alliance leadership. An alloy that fuses diverse strengths makes the sharpest, toughest sword.

Once conference opens, this committee immediately becomes the servant or property of the members/delegates. The election preparations committee must be democratically confirmed and can be changed. The chair of the election preparation committee begins by delivering a preliminary report to conference. Members/delegates each receive a printed list of all the nominations to the executive committee along with initial recommendations. There will be a number of other similar reports at set intervals. The election preparation committee meets in almost permanent session. Members or delegations can oppose or support this or that candidate or combination of candidates before the committee. Are there enough women? What about this prominent Socialist Alliance councillor? Why is that windbag included? Subsequent deliberations are reported to conference by the chair and can, of course, be challenged. Another plus: members/delegates can actually listen to and judge various candidates in the course of the conference and its deliberations. Both those who are and who are not on the recommended list. Excluded minorities, awkward but valuable individuals, have the distinct possibility of breaking the recommended list ... if the election preparation committee has steered in the direction of exclusion as opposed to inclusion. Voting is, after all, by named individual not a take-it-or-leave-it slate. Every member/delegate has a set number of votes, say 20, and can cast them for any nominated comrade they wish. For the sake of illustration that could include 19 votes for those on the recommended list and one who is not. Inclusion invites votes for the whole list and vice-versa.

A final point. There is no ban on factions, or even non-factional factions, drawing up their own recommended lists. But instead of setting up one slate against another in a winner-takes-all gladiatorial contest, the election preparation committee and individual voting system advocated here institutionalises the huge advantages to be gained from collectively drawing upon all talents, all factions and all strengths. The dominant faction is subject to moral pressure and scrutiny. No more. The recommended list system is not perfect. No system can claim that. It is, however, admirably



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suites to the Socialist Alliance.

The CPGB welcomes the proposal coming from the SWP that officers should be directly appointed by the executive committee itself. C5 actually says “from amongst” the executive. The treasurer, chair, nominating officer, trade union organiser, etc, should be elected when and where needed, not according to some snap-shot popularity poll by an atomised membership. That is right. The mayoral or presidential system never had a legitimate place in our tradition. It crowns would-be labour kings like Arthur Scargill. Officers should be strictly accountable to their peers. They should be elected and replaceable by those whom they work alongside. If a comrade drops out because of illness, pique or work pressures, another comrade can easily be elected. By the same measure, those officers who fail or who become isolated from the political majority can be replaced without humiliation or the drama of a full-blown special conference.

Incidentally, while on the subject of officers, there have been some foolish mutterings warning us against the idea of authoritative leaders. For example, having clashed with Dave Nellist, our chair, on more than one occasion, John Nicholson, our joint coordinator, says he wants to avoid what he calls the “cult of leadership”. He has floated the suggestion of two co-chairs. His model is the Green Party. Ours in the Socialist Alliance should be the Bolshevik Party and Lenin. August Bebel, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky could also be cited. Communists and revolutionary socialists treasure and well know the value of tried and tested leaders. Tommy Sheridan has for instance played an outstanding role in the Scottish Socialist Party as an acknowledged leader - putting to one side ideological criticisms of his left reformism, nationalism, etc. As long as there is the robust culture of questioning, regular elections, recallability and the right to form temporary or permanent factions, then there should be no fear of ‘leadership cults’. Certainly what the Socialist Alliance has suffered from is *lack* of leadership, not the cult of leadership. We therefore seek to create the conditions for more and better leadership.

Having said that, what rhyme or reason is there in listing six named positions in the SWP’s constitution - unless there is a legal requirement? We support the principle of every level of the Socialist Alliance electing, and if need be recalling, its officers. But flexibility when it comes to specific positions and responsibilities is the best way to proceed. The executive should also be able to appoint officers and subcommittees from outside its ranks too. The idea of cooption, albeit by a two-thirds majority, included in C7 is not, however, one we would support unless those elected were limited to a voice but no vote on the executive committee. Cooption with a vote is prone to flagrant abuse. That way a majority can make itself into an overbearing one.

There is a constitutional time bomb ticking in the SWP’s constitutional clauses C9 to C14. The comrades call this time bomb the Socialist Alliance’s ‘national council’ (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p20). Their national council will consist of members of the executive committee along with one delegate from each affiliated local and regional

Socialist Alliance. The national council “will be able to determine policy” and in parallel to the executive committee “will be responsible for the running of the national organisation, for finances, membership, arrangements of national meetings, communications with local groups and individuals, national bulletin production and distribution, liaison with other groups and organisations, arrangements for seeking and enabling electoral unity; and any other matters delegated to them by the annual conference” (C12).

Why two committees and the entwining of powers? Revolutionary socialists and communists have in general opposed bicameral constitutions as much as they have the election of monarchical officers. The executive-national council division is a recipe for generating tension, though the eventual triumph of the executive over the national council is almost inevitable. One meets frequently, monthly, and consists of those with the levers entirely in their hands. The other is slow, quarterly, and easily thwarted. Frustration, however, breeds resentment and even revolt. An appeals committee, or control commission, would be an excellent idea. But two centres of executive power will structurally imbalance and weaken the Socialist Alliance.

In the midst of a big political challenge, general election, outbreak of war, etc, that could prove very harmful. A concrete example. The Socialist Alliance executive committee agreed to *condemn* the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. The SWP found itself in a small minority. The subsequent Liaison Committee - to all intents and purposes the national council by another name - meeting on October 6 2001 had a clear SWP majority. It could have easily reversed that “condemn” formulation with the SWP’s “we cannot condone”, if the issue had been pressed. At present that would not trigger a constitutional crisis. The Liaison Committee elects the executive. What happens though when that is no longer the case? What happens when two committees are elected according to two different systems and therefore rest on two different sources of legitimacy - on the one hand the annual conference, and on the other a quarterly mixture of executive members and branch and regional delegates?

Calling regular delegate meetings to discuss and vote on specific questions would be beneficial. Votes have an indicative status - a declaration, a call, a considered opinion, etc. But introducing a second centre of power, a House of Lords, is to set the stage for a damaging clash. Much better to have a clear line of responsibility going from the top to the bottom - at the apex stands the annual conference with legitimacy running down from there to the executive - which represents the whole in between annual conferences - and then to the regions, workplace and geographical branches, and finally the individual member.

Hence, we propose the following ‘organisational’ formulations:

1. The highest decision-making body of the Socialist Alliance is the annual conference. This will either be a one-member-one-vote or a delegate conference. Delegate conferences will be based on a system that ensures that minorities are properly

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represented.

2. If 10% of the membership, or 25% of the branches, requests it a special conference shall be held.
3. The implementation of conference decisions and initiating national political actions shall be the responsibility of the executive committee which will be elected by conference.
4. Election to the executive committee shall be individual nomination and those with the highest votes being elected. Conference will decide upon the size of the executive and can select from its ranks an elections preparations committee. It can draw up a recommended list based on agreed criteria to ensure an effective leadership, ie, gender, ethnic background, political faction, experience and geography.
5. The executive committee shall elect its own officers and establish working parties, commissions, subcommittee, etc, as it sees fit. All officers and committees are recallable.
6. The executive committee has the right to call meetings of the Socialist Alliance's council which is made up of the executive committee and delegates from branches and regions. Council votes have an indicative status - a declaration, a call, a considered opinion, etc. As a norm, the council should meet four times a year.
7. The executive may co-opt new members. These members have a voice, but no vote.
8. Annual conference shall elect an appeals committee to which members, branches, etc can lodge complaints against decisions of the executive concerning membership, ratification of candidates, etc. Conference has the final authority in all such matters.

One notable lacuna in the SWP's constitution is the "right to form distinct temporary or long-term political platforms" ("For a democratic and effective Socialist Alliance" - see Appendix 1). This right is supported under a variety of guises by just about every other faction and prominent personality: eg, "caucuses", "members", "platforms", "affiliated organisations". Sectionalism should not be encouraged, but if black-British or Asian-British, female or gay comrades wish to form distinct platforms/factions, so be it. That should be their right. (We distinguish between such platforms and formally established Socialist Alliance committees with a special remit to promote our agitational and propaganda work amongst women, youth, homosexuals, the black-Asian and Black-British, etc, sections of the population.) Such a right needs to be emphasised, especially given the often appalling anti-democratic regimes that have marred the internal life of the sects. As to the sects themselves, Dave Church is again quite right when he argues that the Socialist Alliance should "not require" the dissolution of the existing supporting organisations. For Socialist Alliance purposes they can transform themselves into "affiliated/confederated" national organisations. Put another way, there must be the right to continue in the form of factions, platforms or caucuses in the constitution.

Unlike Workers Power, SPEW and the AWL, communists do not propose any *automatic* representation for these, or any other, parts. Consistent democracy would

surely see those factions/caucuses that commanded any degree of serious support - judged politically, not by an arbitrary mathematical formula - included on the executive committee. As a fallback we have suggested that recognised platforms - set at an extremely low limit of 20 paid-up Socialist Alliance members - ought to be entitled to send a representative to the executive, with speaking but no voting rights. These platforms ought also to have the constitutional right to submit motions to the executive and conference under their own chosen name.

The SWP has flatly rejected all such proposals. Outside the frame of the constitution it is prepared to admit the existence of factions and the need to incorporate them into the executive committee, especially those who have “successfully collaborated in the building of the Socialist Alliance” (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p28). But why not go the whole hog and recognise the right to form factions? The answer is not hard to find. The SWP has no desire the lead the transformation of the Socialist Alliance into a fully-fledged party, factional rights being, of course, an organic feature of a party not a ‘united front’, which our Procrustean SWP has as its chosen ideal for the Socialist Alliance. Here, in this category, is to be discovered the theoretical origins of the SWP’s misplaced opposition not only to factions, but to a Socialist Alliance political paper, serious internal political debate and education, a rounded revolutionary programme, etc. Evidently the SWP is at one and the same time our biggest asset and our biggest problem.

Officially the SWP designates the Socialist Alliance as a united front between revolutionary socialists and left Labourites. The International Socialist Group and the Revolutionary Democratic Group echo this warped viewpoint. What is a united front? In the canon of Marxism: eg, the 4th Congress of the Communist International, a united front refers to a particular tactic, or set of tactics, designed to win over the working class to the side of communism. By entering into negotiations and agreeing to jointly campaign with social democratic misleaders, communists gain the ear of their followers. The aim is to put us, the communists, at the forefront of the workers’ day to day struggles and in the process secure mass support. So the united front is an initiative whereby communists actively fight alongside the mass of workers in order to defeat and replace reformist traitors.

That hardly describes the Socialist Alliance. The unity we have achieved is between a range of overwhelmingly Marxist or at least Marxian individuals - often former members of extinct and extant groups - and the revolutionary groups themselves. The largest being the Socialist Workers Party, of course, which still counts its membership in the few thousands, not the tens of thousands ... certainly not the millions necessary for a decisive socialist breakthrough in a country like Britain.

It is not a matter of abstruse theory. By designating the Socialist Alliance a united front, the SWP implicitly limits us in terms of tempo and scope to what it reckons is acceptable to left reformism. Apart from the historic bankruptcy of left reformism the unsoundness of the argument is immediately apparent. Where are the left reformists?

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Mike Marqusee hardly fits the bill. Nor do Nick Wrack, Dave Olser or Anna Chen. The Socialist Alliance has never contained anything more than a smattering of groups and individuals whom the SWP and co might care to define in terms of the tradition of social democracy: eg, Leeds Left Alliance, Democratic Labour Party (Walsall) and the now defunct Independent Labour Network. Even then we would do well to actually listen to these comrades and their accounts of why they broke with Labour. Dave Church, former leader of Walsall council, tells how the rightwing labour bureaucracy used to label him a communist. Within the Socialist Alliance, the comrade freely talks of his politics using Marxist categories. The Socialist Alliance must encourage Labourites to break from Labourism. Not perversely attempt to keep Labourites as Labourites - albeit in exile - for the sake of an abstract schema.

Of course, the comrades have their sights set upon the mass of Labour voters. To ensnare those who are becoming disillusioned with New Labour and to provide them with what appears to be a comfortable political home, the SWP bloc desperately tries to adulterate or tone down our commonly held principles and would-be programme. This is done so as to fashion us into a trap. The Socialist Alliance is *privately* visualised as a *transmission* belt into the SWP - supposedly *the* revolutionary party, but in actuality a state capitalist *confessional sect*. Today they join the Socialist Alliance. Tomorrow the SWP. That is the plan. So instead of thrashing out our own common ideas as Marxists and revolutionaries and then unashamedly and confidently presenting them to the working class, the SWP *et al* do their best to ensure that we routinely stand on priority pledges which, taken as a package, can best be described as warmed over social democracy. Stop the closure of X. Cut spending on Y. Don't privatise Z. Not that we should belittle or ignore such matters - the role of revolutionary socialists and communists is, however, to generalise, to raise and integrate all grievances and demands and immediately direct them towards the overthrow of the existing state.

Mistakenly there is no recognition that militants - and in time the broadest layers, having fallen out with Blair's Labour Party, and establishment politics in general - can be won to full blown Marxism by a direct course, or leap, as opposed to some dishonest and programmatically unviable halfway house. Real people and real change are absent from the schema. Of course, as a rounded body of historically accumulated knowledge Marxism can only be grasped through painstaking, extensive and ongoing study. However, Marxism's straightforward insistence of the reality of classes and class struggle, consistent promotion of extreme democracy and its heaven-storming mission of universal human self-liberation means that millions of so-called ordinary men and women can quickly, easily and passionately come to see Marxism and its 'big ideas' as their own. Individuals invariably have their Damascene conversion, the decisive moment when they suddenly see the light.

In Prague, Nice and Genoa SWP contingents chant flamboyant - anarchist-style - anti-capitalist slogans. But that heady brew is not for the consumption of the mass of

electors in Britain. Here, through the Socialist Alliance, the SWP ventriloquist speaks on behalf of the dead body of old Labour and offers a series of emaciated priority pledges that in their totality fail to transcend the system of capital or even the constitutional monarchy system. Democracy and high politics, which alone can forge the workers into a potential ruling class, are only to be found tucked away in the nooks, crannies and crevices of our 2001 general election manifesto. Put another way, the SWP - and the wider Socialist Alliance majority - is still yet to break with economism. At this juncture the SWP cannot therefore properly lead the Socialist Alliance despite the welcome flexibility and initiative displayed by the post-Cliff quadrumvirate of Chris Bambery, Alex Callinicos, Chris Harman and John Rees.

What of SPEW? Peter Taaffe is galled by the prospect of his rank and file mixing with other forces on the left and being contaminated by the dangerous ideas of unity. He is also blindly searching for a prophylactic formula that will magically restore the fortunes of his rapidly declining and fragmenting organisation. Incapable, it seems, of putting the interests of the whole to the fore, his sole concern has been his survival as general secretary of an accidentally but appropriately named sect. Politically, it hardly needs adding, SPEW constitutes the right wing of the Socialist Alliance. Under the banner of Marxism it advocates a completely bombastic and apocalyptic version of left reformism. Note: SPEW's hopes for socialism rely on a cataclysmic economic slump. Moreover, as an opportunist chameleon, SPEW colours red everything that suits - Kier Hardie, the Labour Party, Stalin's five-year plan, Assad's Syria, Gorbachev's counterrevolution within the counterrevolution, Burma, the black separatism of Panther (UK), Scottish nationalism, feminism, the petty bourgeois fuel protests, etc.

Obviously the Socialist Party in England and Wales fears being swamped by the SWP. Peter Taaffe's 'Ken Livingstone and a new workers' party' article which appeared in the April 2000 issue of *Socialism Today*, ended in an anti-SWP diatribe. Interestingly it earned a stinging rebuke from the SSP's international secretary, Frances Curren. She accuses SPEW of making a number of big "mistakes" in London and of a "yearning for a return of the glory days of entryism" in the Labour Party. Instead of idle chatter about a new mass party she rightly urged SPEW to throw its diminished weight behind the living Socialist Alliance project (CWI *Members Bulletin* May 2000). The CPGB is convinced that the best way to overcome fear of SWP, or anyone else's, domination is to consistently strengthen democracy and, yes, build a strong common leadership through inclusion (that is why we advocate an elections preparation committee and a recommended list which draws upon all talents).

What of the CPGB itself? Inevitably, as we think of ourselves as amongst the most far-sighted, consistent and selfless components of the Socialist Alliance, the CPGB has tried to present radical, ambitious and yet fully realisable and coherent proposals. It may be said without exaggeration that what the *Weekly Worker* proposes invariably finds confirmation in the grain of events which we have helped to direct and shape.

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Though SPEW likes to peddle the myth of a long and undeviating involvement, it was the CPGB that took the initiative in establishing the London Socialist Alliance in January 1999. SPEW hardly lifted a finger. Our comrade Anne Murphy subsequently broke the SWP's two decades of auto-Labourism and in a small way helped to edge the comrades towards the strategic-tactic of revolutionaries standing together in elections. She secured *active* SWP support, standing as the Socialist Unity candidate in the North Defoe ward (Hackney). Having a fully theorised understanding of the agitational purchase and educational importance of the election tactic in the present period of reaction *sui generis*, we did everything within our power to stand slates of Socialist Alliance candidates in local, regional and European elections. >From the start we argued for, and in due course won, a full list in the GLA elections.

On the Liaison Committee our delegates were, to begin with, alone in flagging the target of 50-plus candidates for the June 7 2001 general election and calling for a London headquarters. Others wanted six candidates; others 20: nothing more could be afforded. We were also determined to provide practical means whereby coordination between ourselves and the Scottish Socialist Party and the Welsh Socialist Alliance could be democratically facilitated. The CPGB proposed that election committee seats be reserved for the SSP and the WSA and that together with these comrades we set the target of 100-plus candidates on a UK-wide basis and thus secure the right for a nationwide TV party political broadcast (the election committee is now our executive committee). And thankfully what began as CPGB 'madness' now finds acceptance as the bottom line of Socialist Alliance common sense. Furthermore, the CPGB has also distinguished itself by steadfastly championing an ever widening and ever deepening democracy in the Socialist Alliance. That is why we champion the freedom to dissent; it creates the best conditions to centralise agreed actions.

At the Socialist Alliance's Coventry conference in September 2000 the CPGB and its co-thinkers were able to act as 'king makers' and score a string of successes which advanced the mutually compatible principles of democracy and centralism. The shameful Mike Marqusee-SWP ban on selling partisan literature was reversed: a body blow against bureaucratic centralism. Yet, as we freely admit, in terms of numbers the two -conservative - blocs dwarfed us. It should also be pointed out that our motions recommending the Marxist vision of socialism as an act of working class self-liberation to be included in our 2001 election manifesto were soundly, but revealingly, defeated by their combined votes. Our SWP and SPEW partners voted in that regressive way as a direct corollary of their self-serving perspectives. Opportunist narrowness either holds them back or actually throws them back. The CPGB's intention, as authentic Leninists, is in contrast to pull everybody and everything forward. That explains our desire to give form and breathe life into the forces of pro-partyism - hence the 'For a democratic and effective Socialist Alliance' platform (see appendix 1).

Since its launch this pro-party bloc has won an impressive and steadily expanding body of support. Diffuse though we still are, everything suggests that our forces have

now overtaken SPEW in terms of support within the Socialist Alliance Through this bloc must come a hegemonic Socialist Alliance majority that is committed to the positive supersession of the sects. We are neither anti-SWP nor anti-SPEW. Their tireless dedication, cadre and undoubted achievements command our respect. Yet the age of the sects has passed. The time has arrived when energies and resources must be devoted to an immeasurably more rewarding task: building the Socialist Alliance as an all-Britain combat party of the working class.



## 2. A political paper

Besides a common executive committee, common regional and local structures, a common programme, common rules and constitution, and common election candidates and campaigns, the Socialist Alliance requires in addition - as a matter of urgency - something else. In our opinion, a common political paper. True, when we first presented this proposal a year ago, a majority stood against us. At the December 2 2000 meeting of the Liaison Committee a sullen sea of hands outvoted us.

Collectively, a high price has been paid for this regrettable decisions. We fought the June 7 2001 general election campaign as if with one hand tied behind our backs. Swift tactical turns and national initiatives proved virtually impossible. The executive could neither speak directly to potential voters nor to the membership. Nor could the membership speak horizontally to the membership. Therefore there was no flow of information, discussion and lessons from top to bottom or from bottom to top. While advanced ideas failed to be generalised, mistakes were. Constituency organisations were left to fend for themselves with routine national leaflets, amateur bulletins, personal agitation and a rather ham-fisted SWP big brother. In the circumstances sterling work was done at every level. A promising national profile was established. *The Guardian* rated the Socialist Alliance as one of the major-minor parties. Gaining only 57,000 votes disappointed many; nevertheless this was a solid start considering where we began - in many places with nothing. A much wider constituency in the working class was also discovered, with whom a meaningful engagement on one level or another began.

Following the general election, however, the Socialist Alliance appeared to close down as far as the overwhelming majority of these people were concerned. Without a political paper that cannot but happen. There existed no means whereby the Socialist Alliance could maintain an ongoing dialogue with our voters and would-be voters. Much of what had been won through a tireless combined campaign therefore quickly ebbed away. What a waste. What a squandering of efforts. When the Socialist Alliance stands in the next round of local elections in 2002, or the next general election in 2004 or 2005, things will presumably have to start again virtually from scratch. That denotes an altogether frivolous approach to the Socialist Alliance and our tasks. Indeed we appear to have condemned ourselves to a labour of Sisyphus, an endless and essentially pointless cycle of expending precious funds and untold energy. For, every time we perform a minor miracle and gain a social hearing, we seem content to let everything roll back almost to our original starting point.

The same problem affects our membership and base organisations. Following the

general election, especially in the big cities, they have been demobilised. Branches are, in general, ghostly. Our general election candidates are all but publicly invisible. Socialist Alliance activity on the ground is almost patchy or nonexistent. For the leading faction in particular, other priorities intervened. There is a war going on, they indignantly tell us. Yes, comrades, we know. But instead of working through *your* Socialist Alliance so that we - the combined revolutionary socialists and communists - are in the forefront of the campaign against the Bush-Blair 'war on terrorism', you, the *leading* SWP faction, preferred to use other channels. Except in Scotland, where the SSP put its foot down, John Rees organised platforms and committees according to SWP whim or fancy. The Socialist Alliance has been left to endorse and tag on behind SWP initiatives nationally and locally, little more. Here is the bitter fruit of treating the Socialist Alliance as a mere united front. The Socialist Alliance is now on the back burner for the SWP, presumably to be dusted off and wheeled out again for the 2002 local elections. The SWP's indifferent attitude is vividly testified to by its unwillingness to have our chair, Dave Nellist, address the Friends' Meeting House anti-war rally in London on September 21 2001. Obviously there must be a broad anti-war movement. Within it, however, the Socialist Alliance ought to be taking the lead both organisationally and politically.

As far as most rank and file SA members are concerned, what has been going on must be a complete mystery. They might read in *Socialist Worker* about the rain-sodden Globalise Resistance-Green Party-Socialist Alliance-sponsored demonstration outside the truncated Labour Party conference in Brighton (to get reliable information on the deliberations and decisions of the executive and liaison committees, they will have to turn to the *Weekly Worker*). But there is no common source of regular news and views - let alone corporate and convincingly transmitted initiatives - coming from the Socialist Alliance itself. Without that there can be no close identification with the project. The local branches of the Socialist Alliance operate in the dark or as on-off factional appendages. Without a transparent internal life, without knowledge of who stands for what and why, or for that matter whether or not we still exist as a viable political project, it is hardly surprising that the flow of finances coming in to centre is little more than a trickle. Again and again the principal supporting organisations have had to come forth with the necessary funds to keep things afloat. Obviously not a satisfactory state of affairs.

The political landscape that lies stretched out before us is daunting and dangerous and yet holds out huge opportunities. Social democracy is in decay. Post World War II gains are under attack. Capitalist decadence is leaving whole tracts of the so-called 'third world' to rot. The end of the cold war system heralds neither peace nor prosperity. Blair has constituted Britain the junior policeman in the US attempt to forcibly impose the new world order. The crusade against terrorism means war against Afghanistan and who knows where next. There is an attendant threat to democratic rights and liberties. Besides that, the US-EU-Japan metropolis is sliding into deep

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economic depression. In answer, anti-capitalist sentiments are growing amongst a layer of radicalised young people. Disillusionment with Labour is nowadays a material factor in British politics. And then there are the votes by the FBU, Unison and the CWU on democratising their political funds. All this and more demands that the Socialist Alliance be built into a social force, a nationwide political-organisational focus for the tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, who are yearning to do something against imperialist warmongering and capitalism itself. But, and it cannot be emphasised too strongly, success will come only on one condition: if we manage to change ourselves and become an active agent.

A Socialist Alliance paper would not only send out an inspiring message to our constituency amongst the politically advanced section of the working class. It would set in motion an organisational logic, which, if consistently and energetically followed through, would enable us to steadily tighten, deepen and massively extend our activity and political scope. Indeed, to the extent that we publish frequently, develop the sinews and muscle weight needed to raise the finances and quickly deliver to newsagents, bookshops and into the hands of activists in the workplaces, colleges and on the estates, and thereby build our day by day influence, to that extent we can judge our real progress. In *Where to begin?*, Lenin famously likened the role of the political paper to the scaffolding that is erected around a building under construction. The scaffolding marks out the contours of the future structure and facilitates communication between the workers as they engage in their various common efforts and particular tasks. No chicken *or* eg. From the scaffolding comes the building; from the paper comes the party.

A collective organiser, distributed in the tens of thousands throughout the country, and uniting our network of branches into a single whole would enable us to swiftly manoeuvre and take advantage of our enemy's exposed flanks and momentary vulnerabilities. So a political paper more than complements and enhances our electoral interventions. It gives us the means, which at present we lack, to build *and* maintain our organisation - here is the most challenging immediate task facing the Socialist Alliance. Standing 98 candidates in the Westminster general election was in comparison mere child's play.

In terms of getting our message across to a mass audience the Socialist Alliance is at present almost totally reliant on occasional leaflet shots and our press team. Hence a paper brings with it another obvious advantage. Operating in tandem with, and powering, the SA website, we would have in our collective armoury an uncensorable independent voice. The Socialist Alliance should not have to bank on the generosity, or gullibility of *The Guardian*, the BBC or the Murdoch empire. Use them when we can. But let us primarily look to our own strength.

Our paper must combine the role of agitation with education. Without a collective educator there can be no consistency of principle on the 'big questions'. Nor can there be a speedy and generally agreed response to the countless new challenges

brought forth by the maelstrom of socio-economic, parliamentary and international events. For certain the trade unions, the anti-capitalist movement, the campaign around student grants, the ecological crisis, the stubborn national questions in the United Kingdom, etc, all cry out for Socialist Alliance political answers. And what about the Bush-Blair war on terrorism? Today we in the Socialist Alliance have before us the comparatively easy task of helping to build a broad anti-war movement. Tomorrow we might have to fight on more difficult terrain: for example, if terror comes to London or Edinburgh. Tomorrow, perhaps, we might also have to support British-Asian opposition to the war in Afghanistan as it takes to the streets of Bradford or Oldham, while at the same time skilfully countering the pernicious influence of the mullahs and fundamentalists. Denied a political paper, the Socialist Alliance leadership as a Socialist Alliance leadership is completely immured. Our would-be thinkers are unable to flesh out common Socialist Alliance policies and principles. Controversy takes place, but usually in code in the self-contained factional press or in meeting room soundbites.

More is required. For example, what has the Socialist Alliance to say about the Taliban in Afghanistan or the situation in Pakistan? How exactly can we stop the war? Should the Socialist Alliance concentrate on highlighting welfare as opposed to warfare? Does CND pacifism arm or disarm the working class? Do we defend the Taliban against the USA because Afghanistan is an oppressed country? Is there a third camp which champions democracy, secularism and socialism against the twin evils of imperialism and Taliban medievalism? Where is the analysis? Where is the argument? Has the Socialist Alliance a viewpoint on islamic fundamentalism? Is it counterrevolution or a form of deflected permanent revolution? No agreed answers from the Socialist Alliance.

Doubtless it will be argued by those stubborn forces still trapped in yesterday, including those selfishly attached to the notion of the Socialist Alliance as a transmission belt or an ineffective federation, that the working class already has all that it needs for a rounded political diet. Each recommends their own tried, tested ... and insubstantial speciality. And there is an overabundance of choice. Attend any all-London or national gathering and you will be overwhelmed by choice. There must be well over two dozen papers and periodicals inhabiting our SA space. Besides the *Weekly Worker* there are two other well-entrenched weeklies - *Socialist Worker* and *The Socialist*. There is one fortnightly, the AWL's *Action for Solidarity*. The above clutch of factions also publish *Socialist Review*, *International Socialism*, *Socialism Today* and *Workers' Liberty* as offshoots or leftovers. Then, slipping down the evolutionary ladder, come the cold-blooded monthlies *Socialist Outlook* and *Workers Power* and their altogether obscure auxiliaries. And in the furthest reaches the intrepid explorer will find *Republican Communist*, *Workers International*, *Red Shift* and a host of other equally worthy publications, whose names do not spring to mind or still remain to be discovered by science. But, and this is the point, none of these publica-

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tions, neither any one of them, nor the lot taken together, can lift the Socialist Alliance in terms of education, organisation and rapprochement to the necessary plane of readiness and combativity required if we are to do our duty by the class in whose name we all speak.

Frankly, we expect factional centres to persist within the Socialist Alliance for some considerable length of time. And that goes for factional publications too. Expecting anything else is to indulge in simple-minded or bureaucratic utopianism. However, we earnestly hope for, and will strive towards, a situation where factional differences are stage by stage resolved into little more than the differences of shade that are inevitable in any *class* party. A common Socialist Alliance paper in which all main strands have an editorial seat and find journalistic expression would represent a qualitative step in that direction. Herculean financial, journalistic and logistical efforts undoubtedly go into maintaining our present *divisions*. Pooling resources and talents is surely guaranteed to produce results way beyond the dreams of any existing circulation department. Just think of the stable of writers we have at our disposal - Paul Foot, John Pilger, Lindsey German, Alan Thornett, Jeremy Hardy, Peter Taaffe, Mike Marqusee, Sean Matgamna, etc, etc. And those who write, sell, raise finances and carve out a mass audience together are prone to stay together. In short, such a political paper represents the starting point, the first step towards creating a genuinely united revolutionary party in Britain. And that, not some united front transmission belt or a loose, federal nonaggression pact, should be the overriding goal. Hence, though with some reservations, we support the broad thrust of the AWL's December 1 2001 motion calling for a "regular Socialist Alliance paper" which will include on its editorial board those who represent our "political diversity" (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p27). We are glad to have the comrades on board. That said, amendments are needed. Why separate off the agitational role of a common paper from the necessity of common discussion? Why have a preset limit of 500 words for contributions? The comrades propose a pinched internal discussion and information bulletin. We say a common Socialist Alliance political paper!

Throughout this section we have deliberately employed the term *political*: ie, the Socialist Alliance needs a *political* paper. The Socialist Alliance project is not only fragmented by nationalism but held back by economism. By that Marxists primarily mean downplaying democratic questions and leaving to others initiatives on high politics. In general Socialist Alliance activities do not rise above the low horizons of local work and issues that concern the workers as a slave class. That is why we advocate a *political* paper.

We must train our membership in the politics of all classes and make our paper the tribune of the oppressed. Without such an approach the Socialist Alliance is doomed to tailism. That can mean following after CND with pacifist 'No to war' placards, voting Labour as the lesser evil, welcoming Blair's constitutional sops for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, aping anarchists in the anti-capitalist movement, pander-

ing to routine trade unionism and so on and so forth. Whatever its particular form, tailism remains tailism. Entering the field of elections was a step forward. Now the Socialist Alliance must take the next step forward. Launching a political paper - perhaps beginning as a monthly but as soon as is technically and financially feasible weekly, and in time daily.

## 3. Bowing to nationalist spontaneity

The revolutionary proletariat, as Marx and Engels, unforgettably declared, has no country. But we do face an enemy that exists on two mutually reinforcing but mismatched levels: the global and the state. We must therefore as a principle uphold a global and an all-UK perspective. The UK state exists - a simple statement of fact. And the first decisive contribution to the universal supersession of world capitalism that the working class movement within the UK can make is to overthrow that state. So there is another aspect to our political paper. Our political paper must strive to be all-UK. We say, combine all efforts. Certainly the nationalist fragmentation we have inadvertently legitimised and thereby allowed to fester must be overcome.

Nationalism blunts common efforts and sours relations between socialists: eg, replying to a proposal for discussion around a joint party political broadcast and the offer of a permanent seat on our Socialist Alliance leadership, Allan Green, Scottish Socialist Party secretary, indignantly writes in tartan nationalist mode and as if Scotland were an independent class state. The Socialist Alliance and the SSP, he protests, “operate in different countries” (*Weekly Worker* January 18 2001). The message of unity must go out to these comrades in the kingdom of Scotland ... and the principality of Wales and the province of Northern Ireland. Our common enemy is the UK state and every revolutionary socialist and militant worker has an elementary internationalist duty to unite against it.

It is commonplace in the Socialist Alliance to hear the SSP fulsomely praised. Amongst our micro supporting groups there are those that actually advocate a carbon-copy (eg, see *Pre-conference bulletin 2001* pp11-16). It is true that the advances made in Scotland, quite modest in objective terms, are impressive when compared to the dawdling and dallying that holds us back in England and Wales. Nevertheless what is needed is not flattery but criticism. Loud criticism. When you see a member of your own family - no matter how distant the relationship - striding towards a hundred foot precipice, all the while gazing fixedly at some pretty clouds, it is obscene, to put it mildly, to cheer them on their way. And the SSP is heading straight for a disastrous fall. It is, according to its own leadership, set upon a parliamentary deal with the thoroughly bourgeois and reactionary Scottish National Party in 2003. Alan McCombes, its main thinker, promises to “collaborate” with an SNP minority government; he specifically cites “legislation for a referendum” on independence (*Frontline* March 2001). A crossing of class lines originally floated last year by

Tommy Sheridan MSP in the Scottish edition of *The Observer*.

Scotland's people must have, as a matter of principle, the democratic right to self-determination; the right to freely decide their own future, up to and including whether or not to opt for full independence. That is why the CPGB has consistently championed a Scottish parliament with full powers. The right to self-determination does not for us imply the solution to a national question in the central, Westminster, parliament, but as Lenin insisted "by a parliament, a diet or a referendum of the *seceding minority*" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 19, Moscow 1977, p542). Obviously, however, the Edinburgh parliament has little or nothing to do with self-determination. Holyrood is designed to keep Labour firmly in control in north Britain, and Scotland firmly within the United Kingdom. There is no right to vote for separation nor the right to negotiate a new, democratic settlement between the constituent peoples of Britain. Not that that stopped comrades McCombes, Green, Sheridan, *et al*, from giving this sop parliament their double-barrelled 'yes' vote in the September 1997 referendum.

The overwhelming majority of the SSP leadership originate in the right centrist stable of Peter Taaffe and what was the Militant Tendency. Its method of endless adaptation and endless chameleon-like behaviour has - consistent with the method - been applied in Scotland so as to paint Scottish nationalism in the colour of socialism. Working class unity is no longer the watchword. The claim is seriously made by the SSP leadership that, through winning a Holyrood parliamentary majority around the cross-class demand of putting Britain on the dissecting table and hiving off eight percent of the population in Scotland this would represent some kind of socialist opportunity, or even in itself a necessary stage along the road to socialism. Evidently the socialism of comrades McCombes, Sheridan, Curren, *et al* is nowadays more a combination of Eduard Bernstein and Jozef Pilsudski than Leon Trotsky and Ted Grant. Effectively the comrades merely repeat Tom Nairn's national socialist nonsense, that the break-up of Britain is both progressive and inevitable. Quite clearly the SSP has made a fateful - though, we trust, a not irreversible - nationalist turn.

Of course, nationalism and socialism are not compatible but antithetical. Nationalism considers nations and national cultures positively. National differences between people are viewed as essentially healthy, something to be sustained into the distant future. Left nationalists, such as the SSP leadership, give this 'principle' a socialist gloss. Marxism, on the other hand, considers nations and national distinctions negatively. We want to create conditions whereby nationalism, nations, nationality and the nation-state all wither away. Marxists therefore oppose every form of nationalist ideology, whether this is represented by an established state or those forces striving to create a new state through a breakaway.

Clearly the SSP does not defend the Marxist viewpoint. Instead of working class unity against the existing UK state the SSP seeks a breakaway Scotland; presumably leaving the workers in England and Wales to overthrow it. The SSP therefore has a programme designed to *weaken*, not smash the UK state. Towards that paltry end



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comrade McCombes has already floated the idea of encouraging “greater autonomy” for trade unions in Scotland; obviously a prelude to cleaving them away from the TUC, British unions, etc. Hence, as capital becomes ever more centralised and global, the SSP irresponsibly tries to divide the forces of the working class.

It is essential not to conflate all nationalisms as equally reactionary. The nationalism of an established capitalist state is inherently conservative. Fascism, the most degenerate form of bourgeois nationalism, is counterrevolutionary and thoroughly anti-democratic. But petty bourgeois nationalism may contain a revolutionary democratic *content*. We unconditionally support that content. At the same time, it is vital not to abandon or water down criticism of petty bourgeois nationalism or advocacy of an independent working class approach to the national question.

The relative decline of British imperialism has laid the basis for a new Scottish nationalism (not the revival of a mythical nationhood going back to Kenneth MacAlpine or Macbeth). From the mid-19th century onwards, being Scottish was to share in the lucrative booty of the British empire. Now it means second class services, call centre jobs and a denial of rights. There is a palpable disidentification. And, given the absence of a viable all-Britain socialist alternative, nationalism has come to the fore. Masses of people in Scotland certainly view themselves as nationally disadvantaged within the UK. And in the form of the SNP, nationalism promises to secure for Scotland a more advantageous position in the imperialist pecking order, through the formation of a new, independent Scottish state within the EU.

Whenever a national question exists - as it undoubtedly does in Scotland - Marxists approach it from the principles of democracy and internationalism. We seek at all times to build the maximum unity and ever closer relations between nationalities, especially the working class. The working class has no interest in any delay in solving the national question, and has everything to gain from an immediate settlement of disputes. Communists therefore seek an immediate solution. We denounce any and every delay and procrastination as reactionary. That is why we argued against meekly accepting the Holyrood parliament. As Blair stated in 1997, it is little more than a glorified “parish council”. It is not a sovereign parliament; it cannot alter or renegotiate the constitution.

As stated above, we support the rights of nations to self-determination up to and including forming an independent state. Communists are for peaceful and democratic secession as opposed to any kind of coercive or violent maintenance of unity. The use of force to maintain unity, as for example in Northern Ireland, is an admission that the state’s territory is divided into oppressed and oppressing nations. However, supporting the right of self-determination does not mean that communists desire separation. On the contrary, advocacy of separation is something exceptional. For example, between Ireland and Britain there is a whole history of violence and brutal oppression. We therefore support the democratic unity of Ireland in which, through a federal solution, the rights of the British-Irish can be protected and guaranteed.

Separation only becomes a socialist demand if unity is imposed by force. The relationship between England and Scotland has not been primarily characterised by violence, at least since the 1707 Act of Union. It should not be forgotten that 1745 - the heroic last stand of Scotland according to nationalist fable - was more of a "Scottish civil war" (M Lynch *Scotland* London 1992, p338). The Jacobite rising had nothing to do with re-establishing Scottish independence. The Young Pretender wanted to re-establish the Stewart dynasty over the whole of the United Kingdom of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. He rallied a number of catholic clan chiefs in the highlands but was opposed by other sections of Scottish society - most notably the presbyterian clergy, lawyers and large southern burghs.

Our policy must be decided on the basis of actual historical conditions and circumstances in each case. Communists and revolutionary socialists in general favour voluntary unity and the biggest possible state units, because they provide the best conditions for the coming together and merger of peoples. Under present circumstances there would be nothing remotely progressive about a Scottish army, a customs post at Gretna Green and the splitting of the historically bonded peoples of Britain.

Nevertheless, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is constitutionally the unity of hereditary crowns, not the voluntary unity of free peoples. Sovereignty formally lies with the monarch, not the people. Therefore self-determination for Scotland and Wales does not and cannot exist under our constitutional system. The 1707 Act of Union, which merged the two parliaments of England (and Wales) and Scotland, had no popular mandate. The rich and powerful decided. Democracy was entirely within their fief.

Given the huge disparity between the populations of England on the one side and Scotland and Wales on the other, the UK must be dominated by the English (who have no problem with self-determination in spite of the ridiculous whingeing of the Tory rump, Tam Dalyell and other assorted eccentrics). It is the people of Scotland and Wales who cannot practically determine their own future. With or without the Edinburgh parliament and the Cardiff assembly they must go cap in hand to Westminster. Hence there exists an inborn democratic deficit within the UK monarchist constitution.

The Socialist Alliance must seek to create the best conditions for the closest unity of the peoples of Britain. To that end, we communists have put forward in one conference after another the demand for the immediate abolition of the monarchy and the abolition of the acts of union. We want to mobilise the working class of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in a political struggle for a federal republic and a united Ireland (interestingly Marx and Engels and in his turn Lenin argued that a federal republic in our islands would represent a step forward from the constitutional monarchy - it is not, I stress, some universal elixir). Ours is a democratic and *transitional* programmatic aim. The federal republic establishes the voluntary union of the

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peoples of Great Britain. If this is achieved, as we intend, using proletarian methods, it also means the revolutionary destruction of the constitutional monarchy: ie, of official Britain, and thus the realisation of our minimum programme. The federal republic is therefore no question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment, but the *first condition* for the social emancipation of the working class.

Pitifully, the majority in the Socialist Alliance utterly fails to grasp the necessity of independent working class politics. Scotland's constitutional status must be left to the Scots alone, they say. Again and again we have had to disagree. The whole of the working class throughout Britain must be united around a correct strategy. Scotland cannot be left to the Scots. Our demand for a Scottish parliament with full powers within a federal republic is primarily about the struggle it can engender throughout Britain. At every stage we stress the cardinal importance of working class self-activity. It is not an end in itself. For us the guiding principle is achieving working class unity, a process of becoming, synonymous with winning working class hegemony over all democratic issues and cases of injustice. So the goal of communists is not to weaken the UK state. The working class movement must have more elevated sights: the ending of the UK state and cementing the voluntary union of the peoples of this island using the most revolutionary means objective circumstances allow.

Tormented by our unremitting polemics on this subject, left nationalists have little choice but to run for cover into the dark caves of stupidity. Many refuse to recognise or admit the elementary fact that national self-determination can be exercised in favour of unity. Self-determination for them equals independence. It is as if their brains had been hard-wired. Again, in a ludicrous attempt at self-defence, left nationalists rant and rave about the CPGB's red, white and blue loyalty to Britain. Some even believe they can stop us dead with our party title: ie, Communist Party of *Great Britain*. Sad. Yes, it is true that territorially Great Britain is our immediate sphere of activity (the same could apply to the United Kingdom). But that state is also our main, immediate, enemy.

The same went for Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches and their Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. Suffice to say, they were neither royalists nor patriots. Like us their flag was red. Let left nationalists also ponder this. The CPGB is committed to sweeping away the European Union of the commission and council of ministers and replacing it with a fully democratic, federal, Europe. Does that make us Europhiles? No. The starting point of authentic communists is not nationality but proletarian internationalism and the interests of the universal revolution. We really can imagine a world without frontiers.

As mentioned above the Socialist Alliance majority has fallen in behind the separatist agenda of Scottish and Welsh left nationalists. Whereas our main enemy is effectively and malevolently organised across the whole of the United Kingdom state, we have irresponsibly divided and thereby weakened our small and fragile forces. How do our Socialist Alliance allies justify themselves? Chris Bambery and the SWP employ an oft-repeated stock formulation. The break-up of Britain - and by implication

the historically constituted working class - is “no problem”. What a pity they do not trenchantly stand by the “We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries” formulation (*Socialist Worker* ‘Where we stand’). Peter Taaffe’s SPEW adopts an equally agnostic attitude. The only break-up that appears to bother comrade Taaffe is the one between his Committee for a Workers International and the International Socialist Movement of comrades McCombes and Sheridan. Others positively connive with separatism. Alan Thornett of the International Socialist Group would gladly welcome the formation of an independent kingdom of Scotland. It would constitute some kind of perverse “step forward”. Like Yugoslavia? Though not going that far - yet - the SWP has uncritically promoted the McCombes and Sheridan book *Imagine*. Obviously there is a degree of Machiavellian *Realpolitik* here. The SWP was determined to pursue its courtship of the SSP. At Bookmarks’ promotional meeting comrade Louise Christian - SA candidate in Hornsey and Wood Green - actually described their national socialist tract as “the best exposition of socialism there ever is” (*Weekly Worker* March 1 2001).

What about Wales? The comrades in the Welsh Socialist Alliance have virtually been abandoned. Cymru Goch might be sulking on the margins, but given the stand-off between the SWP and SPEW, localism is rapidly filling the political void. One can already hear whispers of a Welsh Socialist Party modelled on the SSP coming from the lips of disenchanting Taaffeites. Hardly surprising, given that our Socialist Alliance majority still bars all Welsh organisations from membership - a synergy with left nationalism, born of inverted English chauvinism.

But there is a stronger connection. Both the SWP and left nationalism have a common methodological root: namely, tailing spontaneity. At first sight this statement might appear bizarre. After all the SWP insist week after week that: “At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system” and that “a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation” (‘Where we stand’). The awful fate of Stalin’s USSR is, of course, waved aloft as a clincher.

On the other hand comrade McCombes and Sheridan solemnly swear that their long and winding parliamentary road will eventually arrive at a “thriving, blossoming socialist democracy” in Scotland which would provide the whole world with “inspiration” (A McCombes, T Sheridan *Imagine* Edinburgh 2000, p189). The underlying idea is to follow the unstoppable and purportedly ever rising curve of nationalism. Of course, comrades McCombes and Sheridan are forced to be choosy. They extrapolate along carefully selected opinion polls, under 25s, etc, to the point of absurdity. Supposedly the break-up of Britain is not an open-ended matter to be decided by class interest and struggle, but exists almost as a definite fixture in the future. It is “inevitable”. In other words, to all intents and purposes the break-up of Britain is a foregone conclusion. Evolutionary nationalism!

Nevertheless, a connection there is. SSP left nationalists and the SWP merely bow before different aspects, or manifestations, of spontaneity. Look at SWP practice and

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what do you find? Proclamations about fidelity to revolution prove to be about sustaining a belief system. When it comes to the ‘grubby business’ of contesting elections, the SWP comrades are interested in votes for their own sake just like any run of the mill electoralist machine. What does that mean in practice? Instead of revolutionary propaganda the SWP collapses into old Labourism.

For example, the debate on the minimum wage in Haringey Socialist Alliance. Comrade Tina Becker for the CPGB proposed £8.57 as an hourly rate, or a £300 minimum for a 35-hour maximum working week. This is not a figure plucked out of thin air, or a leftist attempt to outbid others. We calculate that £300 is the barest minimum required to physically and culturally reproduce a worker in today’s Britain. Think about it. Could you live and replace yourself as a human being with anything less? To demand £4.61 (SWP), £5 (SPEW) or £7 (AWL and Workers Power) is therefore to argue for wages below the level of subsistence. Take Weyman Bennett, SWP member and our Tottenham candidate on June 7 2001. He did not want to put forward demands that might seem “too radical” in the eyes of union branches and regions that are beginning to support the Socialist Alliance (*Weekly Worker* March 1 2001). Comrade Bennett should recall where putting votes before principles leads.

Unfortunately the above incident is quoted because it is typical. Witness the exact same electoralism galloping across the board. Defence spending, the police, immigration controls, campaigning against the monarchy, etc. Except in the anti-capitalist milieu - Seattle, Nice, Genoa - where it adapts to anarchism, the SWP is determined not to appear “too radical”. Chris Harman gave this trawling for “more votes” a rather thin theoretical veneer. Apparently the SWP no longer views standing in elections “simply” as a means “of making propaganda”, because the number of votes “affects” peoples “willingness to fight” (*Socialist Worker* February 24 2001). So, instead of deriving strength from winning masses of people to the principles of socialism and working class self-liberation, the SWP has chosen the line of least resistance. Whereas the SSP seeks to ride nationalism, the SWP is convinced that the Socialist Alliance can replace New Labour more or less by becoming old Labour. Both forms of tailing spontaneity sacrifice working class independence.

For decades the SWP haughtily denounced fielding candidates as electoralism pure and simple. They were wrong. Their impotent ultra-leftist pose not only implicitly dismissed the historically significant role of Bolshevik deputies in the tsarist duma, the brilliant use made of parliament by Marxists such as August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, Shapurji Saklatvala and William Gallacher and the insistence by Lenin’s Comintern that communist parties were obliged to try and get into parliament if conditions allowed. More than that, the SWP light-mindedly abrogated politics to the Labour Party.

Refusing to fight elections went hand in hand with auto-Labourism. The standard refrain was “vote Labour ... but”. The “but” alluded to the working class upping the economic struggle against the employer and government vis-à-vis restrictions on, or

relations to, trade unionism. Having taken the step from a Tory to a Labour parliamentary majority, the workers are energised and soon come up against the nature of the system and open to political conclusions ... or so the stageist theory goes. From this angle it becomes clear why the SWP, unable to withstand the spontaneity of economic struggle, is unable to withstand the spontaneity of SSP left nationalism.

The Socialist Alliance should never turn its back on the economic struggles of the working class. However, if we are to raise the working class to the level of a class for itself: ie, a hegemonic class ready for state power - it is necessary to recognise the limitations of trade unionism. Battles around economic issues often take workers to the point where they confront the government's attitude towards them as trade unionists. But little more. As a result, no matter how comrades ingeniously attempt to equate economic and political struggles, the workers remain a lower class of wage slaves. No matter how militantly fought, their wage and other economic engagements never attain the level of political - Marxist - consciousness.

As is well known, Lenin expressed the view in *What is to be done?* that it was impossible to develop class political consciousness *from within* the workers' economic struggles. By this he meant starting from or prioritising economic struggles. Class consciousness "can be brought to the workers only from without: that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 5, Moscow 1977, p422). Class political consciousness is only obtainable in the sphere of relations between all classes and strata and the state and the government.

It is exactly with this in mind that the CPGB wants the Socialist Alliance to prioritise political questions as opposed to narrow economics and trade unionism - which is, when all things are said and done, the bourgeois politics of the working class. Together we must take the lead against the New Labour government, the UK monarchy system and the EU bureaucracy and unleash the floodtide of extreme democracy. That way, and only that way, can the dream of socialism come to be a living reality.

## 4. Economic and political demands

Let us examine the ‘priority pledge’ submissions to the Socialist Alliance’s March 10 2001 Birmingham conference. It is a sadly instructive exercise. Before us we had on parade economism lined up in neat regimented rows. An army of malign innocence (see *Weekly Worker* February 22 2001).

Besides debating and amending Mark Hoskisson’s policy document, the intention at Birmingham was also to agree five or six key demands which would feature on posters, leaflets, etc, during the general election campaign. These were the priority pledges. Each supporting organisation forwarded initial proposals (the SWP granting themselves 10 generous bullet points which were unsurprisingly carried over into the general election campaign). Apart from the CPGB, differences were of nuance, not substance: eg, the SWP talked vaguely of raising the minimum wage; SPEW fixed upon £5 per hour; whereas the AWL and WP boldly set their *below*-subsistence-level minimum wage at the European Union’s decency threshold of £7 per hour. Manifestly the general approach is exactly the same. No one even bothers to think of asking what workers *need* and beginning there.

Other priority pledges were likewise caged within narrow trade unionism. Put another way, they reeked of economism. Take the AWL, whom we have - perhaps wrongly - imagined as our closest allies. In brief they advocate “an emergency plan” for workers and jobless; taxing the rich and slashing the “arms budget”; the restoration of “benefits and pensions”; an expansion of “public services”; the “right to join a union”; “companies threatening closures” should be nationalised. And they still feign surprise, even indignation, when we dub them economists!

Ridiculously, theorists and cadre alike attempt to parry the charge by reducing economism in their own minds to nothing more than routine trade unionism and the worship of militant strikism. A desperate ploy. Any half-educated student of Marxism will tell you that there are many other forms of economism - in this instance *electoralist* economism. We have said it many times before, and we will hammer home the point as long as necessary: economism - broadly defined - is characterised by downplaying the centrality of democracy.

Spellbound by economic ‘common sense’, our allies actually voted on our Liaison Committee against highlighting a *militant* demand for the abolition of the monarchy in the Socialist Alliance general election campaign. And even when prepared to countenance key democratic demands in our policy statement - a republic,

Scottish and Welsh self-determination, a united Ireland, abolishing the House of Lords, establishing a democratic federal Europe - when it comes to priorities, economics always comes first.

There were some political demands to be found amongst the prioritised pledges. But they were as rare as rubies. The SWP called for “tough controls” over pollution, ending “discrimination on the basis of racism, sexism and homophobia” and cancelling third world debt”. Apart from WP’s demand to “abolish all immigration laws” and the final maximalist flourish of establishing a government “fighting for workers’ power and international socialism”, that more or less was that. Between our Socialist Alliance quartet we had a grand tally of 23 purely trade union-type bullet points and a paltry four that might be said to be political.

Historically our movement has drawn a sharp distinguishing line between socialist politics and trade unionism. By creating two separate categories we do not mean to imply that trade unionism is apolitical: rather that trade unionism is limited, one-sided and in the last analysis circular. Such an understanding ought to inform the Socialist Alliance. We should seek to *lead* the struggle of the working class, not only for better terms and conditions, but for the abolition of the system of capital that compels the propertyless - those who possess no means of production - to sell their ability to labour.

The Socialist Alliance represents the working class, not in its relation to a given employer alone, but in relation to all classes in society and the state as an organised political force. If that is the case, and it should be, then it follows that the Socialist Alliance must not limit itself to the economic struggle. More, we must not allow economic struggles to dominate our activities and demands. On the contrary, the Socialist Alliance must prioritise the political training and education of the working class, and developing its political consciousness.

What do we mean by the political education of the working class? Can it be confined to propaganda centring on trade union grievances against the state? Of course not. It is not enough to protest against the Blair government’s retention of Tory anti-trade union laws (just as it is not enough to complain when employers use these laws). We must take a definite stand on every democratic shortfall and concrete example of oppression and violation of rights (as we should with every trade union dispute).

It is a much repeated establishment boast that Westminster is the mother of all parliaments and that Britain is the epitome of democracy: eg, the carefully cultivated myth that parliamentary democracy dates back to 1215 and Simon de Monfort’s robber barons and that nowadays the system of capital is synonymous with democracy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Every democratic advance originates from below - Wat Tyler’s peasants revolt, the Levellers, the physical force Chartists, militant suffragettes, poll tax refuseniks, etc. All these movements faced stiff, not to say bloody, opposition from above. Universal suffrage was only achieved in 1930 after



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generations of sacrifice and struggle. Nor should we forget that Britain is still constitutionally a monarchy with the crown holding significant - and potentially counterrevolutionary - reserve powers. Furthermore, due to the very workings of the capitalist metabolism - profit overriding human need - there is a constant erosion of democratic gains, a draining of active content and the reduction of democracy to a four or five-yearly ritual of choosing the lesser evil. Democracy and capital are in fact antithetical.

So in Britain we find countless examples of commercial corruption, state repression, divide and rule, chauvinist discrimination, inequality, gross exploitation and the denial of popular sovereignty. Inevitably this affects the most diverse social groups and spheres of life - family relationships, ethnic minorities and majorities, homosexuals, recreational drug users, the arts, religious cults, small businesses and farmers, scientific researchers, etc.

We cannot develop the political consciousness of the working class without having answers to all democratic shortfalls and exposing all cases of injustice. Indeed the working class can only be readied for state power if it is educated in the spirit of consistent democracy and comes to champion all oppressed and exploited sections of the population.

Frankly our principal Socialist Alliance allies only pay lip service to such a Leninist perspective. Doubtless that in part explains why *none* of them took up our urgent call for a Socialist Alliance *political* paper during the election campaign. The comrades are still mired in sect primitivism. In practice that means putting trade unionist demands to the fore and seeking to give them a socialistic colouration. Their initial priority pledges prove the point beyond a shadow of doubt. Evidently the comrades believe that economic struggles provide the surest, perhaps the only, means of drawing the working class into active political struggle. For them politics loyally follows economics. That is as true for the AWL and the SWP as it is for SPEW and WP. One way or another, we have heard it from them all.

But is prioritising economic demands the best means of involving people in political activity? No, it is not. Any and every police outrage, which are usually completely unconnected to the economic struggle, can galvanise large numbers. Kevin Gately, Blair Peach, Stephen Lawrence, Winston Silcott and Harry Stanley: each became a *cause célèbre*. The same happened with the Irish republican hunger strikers - the funeral of Bobby Sands in 1981 brought 100,000 out on to the streets of Belfast - and victims of the British legal system such as the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six.

What of the criminalisation of cannabis smokers and pill popping ravers, the horrors of Campsfield, clause 28, the Brixton, Soho and Brick Lane nail bombings, son of star wars, the democratic deficit in Wales and Scotland, Aids, GM food, the Bush-Blair crusade against terrorism and the bombing of Afghanistan, etc? Surely these and thousands of other such non-economic issues represent ways of drawing masses of people into political activity? Why then should the Socialist Alliance prioritise economic demands?

Long, long ago (May 1 1997) our principal allies in the Socialist Alliance voted Labour with varying degrees of enthusiasm. According to their theory of stages, before workers could do anything serious they first had to rid themselves of the hated Tories. Blair's victory was celebrated as heralding a crisis of expectations. Trade unions would be emboldened, economic militancy would undergo a revival and hopes would fructify. Suffice to say, there has been no explosion. Auto-Labourism was always a variety of economism, a veering away from the politics of authentic socialism and class *independence*. Hence the left groups and 'parties' - not least the SWP - found themselves swept along in the wake of Blair's constitutional revolution from above: ie, a complement and continuation of the Thatcherite counter-reformation. Trailing behind New Labour, they urged a 'yes' vote in one referendum after another: Scotland, Wales, Ireland, London. A sorry record, which, though one can forgive, should never be forgotten.

To achieve socialism requires revolution. Not just any revolution though. The revolution will have to be democratic, in the sense that it is an act of self-liberation by the majority and aims to take the democratic state to its limits as a semi-state that is already dying. Democracy and socialism should therefore never be counterposed. The two are inexorably linked. Without socialism democracy is always encumbered and stops short of ending exploitation. Without democracy socialism is only post-capitalism: it is not *proletarian* socialism. The task of the working class is to unleash the floodtide of extreme democracy, not leave high politics to the Blairites, the top bureaucracy and the so-called chattering classes. Existing democratic forms must be utilised and new forms developed: eg, soviets or workers' councils - and given a definite social or class content. The purpose is to extend democracy and control from below, both before and after the qualitative break represented by the proletarian revolution.

In June 1934 Trotsky set out a minimum programme. The flaws are best left aside here - what we are interested in is his plan for a "more generous" democracy. 'A programme of action for France' contains the following, for our purposes very relevant, passage:

"We are ... firm partisans of a workers' and peasants' state, which will take the power from the exploiters. To win the majority of our working class allies to this programme is our primary aim. Meanwhile, as long as the majority of the working class continues on the basis of bourgeois democracy, we are ready to defend it with all our forces against violent attacks from the Bonapartist and fascist bourgeoisie. However we demand from our class brothers who adhere to 'democratic' socialism that they are faithful to their ideas, that they draw inspiration from the ideas and methods not of the Third Republic but the Convention of 1793.

"Down with the Senate, which is elected by limited suffrage and which renders the powers of universal suffrage a mere illusion!

"Down with the presidency of the republic, which serves as a hidden point of

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concentration for the forces of militarism and reaction!

“A single assembly must combine the legislative and executive powers. Members would be elected for two years, by universal suffrage at 18 years of age, with no discrimination of sex or nationality. Deputies would be elected on the basis of local assemblies, constantly revocable by their constituents, and would receive the salary of a skilled worker.

“This is the only measure that would lead the masses forward instead of pushing them backward. A more generous democracy would facilitate the struggle for workers’ power” (L Trotsky *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35* New York 1974, p31).

What a contrast to our principal Socialist Alliance allies. The AWL, SPEW, ISG, SWP and Workers Power obsessively downplay democracy and prioritise economic issues. As everyone knows, the CPGB does not ignore or dismiss such matters. However, in and of themselves economic demands are containable within the wage-capital loop of bourgeois society. There is no circuit breaker.

The circuit breaker, comrades, is not a “decent job for all” or “nationalisation”, etc. It is, and can only be, a plan for a “more generous” democracy. The working class must be trained through political struggle to become a universal class, a class that can master every contradiction, every grievance, every constitutional issue and sees its interests as the liberation of the whole of humanity.

That is why we want to prioritise the following five *political* demands:

1. Abolish the United Kingdom monarchy system, the House of Lords and all aristocratic privileges.
2. Abolish the acts of union. Self-determination for Ireland, Scotland and Wales. For the voluntary union of England, Scotland and Wales in a federal republic. For a united Ireland within which a one county, four half-counties British-Irish province exercises self-determination. For working class unity. Oppose all forms of separatism and nationalism.
3. For an annual single-chamber parliament elected by PR. No to the presidential system. For the right to recall MPs. Limit MPs’ salaries to that of the average skilled worker. Combat national chauvinism. Scrap immigration controls. If the product is free to move, so too should be the worker. Defend asylum seekers and economic migrants.
4. Not a penny, not a person for the United Kingdom’s armed forces. Against standing armies. For a system of local, workers’, militias.
5. Abolish the Council of Ministers. Abolish the EU commission. For a democratic federal Europe.

## 5. Sect primitivism

Inevitably as we still occupy an intermediate but contested, proto-party stage, the subtext of all debates, proposals and manoeuvring concerns the future. Everything is attended by the ghost of things to come. Should the Socialist Alliance set its sights on attracting Labourites as Labourites - a united front of a special type, which then secretly acts as a transmission belt into the chosen sect? Should we settle for a loose - federal - nonaggression pact? Should the Socialist Alliance boldly aim to transform itself into a party? And if so what sort of a party? A reddish-greenish protest party? A Labour Party mark II, within which a snug revolutionary minority is kindly tolerated? A democratic and effective party with full factional freedom?

As we have detailed, the majority of groups and factions in the Socialist Alliance are congenitally infected with economism. Comrades automatically bring to the fore economic demands, or seek to give economic demands a socialistic colouration. High politics and the vistas of extreme democracy are not for today and ought not to disturb the bovine minds of ordinary folk. Stick to the European Union's minimum wage, anti-trade union laws, the NHS, etc. In other words let's back drab, day to day efforts to improve our lot as wage slaves.

Such a deeply patronising approach leads to a narrow view, not only of political, but also of organisational tasks. Economic struggles against employers and the government's anti-trade union laws hardly require a revolutionary programme. Nor do economic struggles around the NHS necessitate a Socialist Alliance political paper. Nor does the economic struggle demand a body of professional Socialist Alliance leaders. Nor can the economic struggle give rise to a Socialist Alliance party which exists to coordinate all protests, all movements against injustice, all discontent with the government and the system of capital - eventually into one final, mighty assault. This much is obvious.

Organisational forms are determined by political content. Our stuttering, on-off organisational forms, including those proposed by the SWP and SPEW, are therefore determined by prioritising the economic, trade unionist-type issues mentioned above. Narrow politics begets narrow organisation. With its famished agenda, all the Socialist Alliance can aspire to is an electoral ginger group or a loose nonaggression pact.

We have undoubtedly come a long way since the mid-1990s - when the Socialist Alliance first came into existence in response to the bureaucratic exclusion of the organised left from Arthur Scargill's stillborn Socialist Labour Party. Wider and wider forces have gradually swung into our orbit. Beginning as a loveless match between what was then Militant Labour, the CPGB and a flotsam and jetsam of vaguely

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leftwing grouplets and individuals, the Socialist Alliance now has all of Britain's principal revolutionary organisations giving their support, above all, of course, the SWP. No less an achievement is gathering support from a range of prominent individuals such as Mark Serwotka, Nick Wrack, Louise Christian and Liz Davies. They represent distinct traditions ... and will in the Socialist Alliance's conditions of tolerance and democracy bring with them their own distinct contributions.

Yet there is no room for complacency. Our much enlarged membership rests on organisational forms that are woefully inadequate. True, this inadequacy is made particularly obvious by our successes. What might have served five years ago must become an impediment when fielding over 90 candidates. Yet, precisely because our problems are those of growth there can be a determined effort to overcome backwardness from a position of strength.

We suffer not merely from creaking structures but what might be called sect primitivism. To begin to describe what we mean by that we can do no better than quote Alan Thornett in his address to the March 10 2001 Birmingham conference. Speakers had to make do with four-minute snippets. Replying - rather grumpily - to the minority who were determinedly trying to arm the Socialist Alliance with some basic revolutionary and democratic principles, he frustratedly told us that such attempts were completely misplaced. Apparently the Socialist Alliance manifesto is no place for such ideas. Why? Because most of us already have our "party"! In his case he is presumably referring to the International Socialist Group. Frankly what came from the mouth of poor old comrade Thornett could equally have come from any number of factional gladiators: eg, the SWP's Chris Bambery, John Rees, Chris Harman or Lindsey German. One after the other, these comrades have stood before us, momentarily posed to the left and then loudly urged a vote to the right. Fancy revolutionary notions should be kept to the revolutionary 'party' and its tight circle of consenting members and certainly not propagated to all and sundry. That is not where the mass of workers are at, and we should begin where people are at, and not where we want them to be.

A direct corollary of this bowing before spontaneity is justifying, perpetuating and blessing the continued existence of the sects. There is no need for the Socialist Alliance to undergo the painful, protracted and difficult transformation into a revolutionary party because there is already a plethora of them. My, your, their ... we all have our preferred revolutionary party.

A simple statement of fact. There is no revolutionary party in Britain. Neither the SWP nor SPEW, nor the ISG, AWL or WP. The Provisional Central Committee, and the CPGB branches, cells and committees it leads, is not a party either. Let me explain that apparent paradox. In 1991 as disciplined CPGB members we Leninists did our duty and took the title of our party from the *Marxism Today* liquidationists. As they announced the final end of the CPGB to the world's media, we announced its continuation. Scum such as these had no right to deprive us of our party membership or party

responsibilities. But, as we stated at the time, our overriding task was, and still remains, to “reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain” (‘What we fight for’ *Weekly Worker*). Establishing a Socialist Alliance party on the basis of democracy and effectiveness is in our opinion synonymous with that aim.

Sects, whatever their pretensions and grand name tags, are alien to, and far removed from, parties. Sects are defined not simply by small size and lack of deep roots in the working class. That is incidental. Sects are marked out by the primacy they give to some fetishised ideological catechism - usually conjured up by this or that sage. A requirement of *continued* membership being *full public agreement* with the sect’s current version of these ruling ideas. To disagree, for example, with the SWP dogma of state capitalism, or its latest line turn on elections, is to invite expulsion or is a prelude to yet another split. The same goes for the brittle regimes of SPEW and WP.

Life is richer than any theory. The former is four-dimensional, the latter an approximate, blurred and frozen reflection. With the passage of time theory and reality diverge to the point where even the best theory becomes its opposite in the hands of the guardians of the word. No wonder the history of the left since 1945 has been of one schism after another. Sects produce sects ... and from their nothing comes their nothing.

A party is another matter entirely. A party is a *part* of the working class, the advanced part. As the leading detachment of the class a party will and must contain within its ranks many different viewpoints because there will be many different thought-through experiences. Fierce arguments and clashes of opinion between rival groupings are inevitable and healthy. And, far from being confined to closed annual conferences or monthly internal bulletins, frequent polemics on all manner of subjects - yes, in front of the whole working class - should be the norm.

Sects operate as something akin to a religious order. Every sect has its incumbent pope and governing body of cardinals, along with the saints of old. Below the privileged ecclesiastical hierarchy, stands the humble flock. Here the stress is on discipline of thought, not unity of action. Moreover each sect is marshalled for war. Each has its special enemy. SPEW against the SWP. The AWL against the SWP. Workers Power against the SWP. SWP against everyone. Theory is not about explaining the world, let alone changing it. Theory is about the cohesion of the sect itself and a weapon to be deployed in the primordial war of one against all and all against one.

Given such an inauspicious environment, activity in the working class movement and society in general is bound to be one-sided, amateurish and above all selfish. Anti-fascist work and student protests against the abolition of grants, trade union broad lefts and anti-capitalism, standing in elections and the Socialist Alliance - it is all the same. Progress is first and foremost judged not by the self-confidence and self-activity of the working class but the number of paper sales and the tally of recruits.

This state of affairs, especially within the Socialist Alliance, can no longer be

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excused. While sects in some way kept alive the embers of the revolutionary Marxist tradition under bleak or particularly adverse conditions, they found justification: eg, during the 1950s. But, unless revolutionary theory is animated through revolutionary practice, it becomes a mere fossilised dogma, a mantra to be learned by initiates, but of no use in the real world. Anyone with even a passing knowledge of the Socialist Alliance will be aware that its best elements, its most forward thinking personalities, have begun to regard the existence of the sects and their primitive methods as a phase that ought to be left behind as soon as possible. A precondition for that is, however, the recognition of the connection between sect primitivism and economism.

Inexperience, amateurism and an inability to fully meet agreed financial targets are common to us all, including those who steadfastly fight for the principles of Marxism. If all it took was John Rees and one of his training days to overcome primitivism then there would not be much to worry about. But the problem of ‘primitivism’ is a wider one than a lack of experience and training. It denotes a narrow approach to the priorities of the Socialist Alliance. The Socialist Alliance cannot be built into a genuine alternative to New Labour while the ‘theory’ of a united front continues to excuse a majority voting to confine our programme to the narrow political space once occupied by old Labour. Such economism is intimately bound up with primitivism.

When we rid ourselves of economism we shall begin to rid ourselves of sect primitivism.

## 6. Quantity and quality

Undoubtedly the Socialist Alliance has moved ahead in leaps and bounds in the couple of years since the Socialist Workers Party made its turn towards elections. True, things began rather badly. The SWP decided to lift its siege mentality and embrace the Socialist Alliance ... but then momentarily and disastrously recoiled from the consequences. Fear conquered audacity.

The June 1999 European elections could have provided a brilliant launch pad. Proportional representation gave us a real opportunity. Both the United Kingdom Independence Party and the Green Party secured MEPs. Instead the elections proved to be a debacle. Apart from Dave Nellist in the West Midlands and the Communist Party of Great Britain in London and the North West, every principal element in the Socialist Alliance deserted the field (the Scottish Socialist Party also displayed courage and found itself well rewarded with an increased share of the vote).

To stand in the European elections was also to stand against Arthur Scargill. An Everest for some. Yet his Socialist Labour Party was no more than a red-brown molehill. It could have been, and should have been, ruthlessly exposed as such (the Socialist Alliance would have been better placed for the 2001 general election and seeing off Scargill's 114 featherweight candidates). Nevertheless after the SWP collapsed before the diminutive challenge, others fell like dominoes.

Thankfully that fiasco is now behind us as little more than a grotesque memory. The crucial turning point was the May 2000 Greater London Assembly elections. With the SWP now taking a lead and committing its full resources, we managed to stand a full slate, the only fly in the ointment being the Socialist Party in England and Wales. Peter Taaffe's comrades stood *with* our constituency list, but, much to their discredit, *against* our all-London PR list. Total support might have been modest in percentage terms - as it was in the general election. Despite that we suffered no humiliation. The vote appeared credible; certainly in terms of absolute votes. More importantly the London Socialist Alliance's campaign illuminated the way forward for a left deeply mired in the inter-linked crises of auto-Labourism and sect primitivism. Electorally this success has been repeated. Socialist Alliance candidates routinely score above the 5% threshold in local and Westminster by-elections and on June 7 2001 two of our candidates saved their deposits - Dave Nellist in Coventry North East and Neil Thompson in St Helens South.

For many of the groups, however, theory lags far behind the practice of elections and growing left unity. In some cases attempts to catch up turn into trip-ups, an ever present danger: eg, the stealth theory of the Socialist Alliance being a united front -



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which in actual fact camouflages selfish plans to build a confessional sect. Such an essentially dishonest and self-serving approach complacently assumes that the revolutionary party already exists. For comrade John Rees its initials are S, W and P, of course. Comrade Taaffe makes the exact same claim. Only the initials are different. Either way, arrant nonsense. Misguided by its warped perspectives, the SWP leadership opposes transforming the Socialist Alliance into a fully-fledged party with its own professional staff and political paper. Instead the comrades want a revamped halfway house and offer only conditional and temporary support. Ominously, comrade Rees wrote of the Socialist Alliance being “relatively durable” (*International Socialism* March 2001). Presumably the SA has an inbuilt time limit for the SWP.

A Socialist Alliance party would for some unknown reason preclude the unity of revolutionaries and reformists ... and thus block off the expected influx of disillusioned Labourites into what really matters - the SWP. In a similarly philistine attempts to scare, others ominously warn that our Socialist Alliance party would stand for the “dictatorship of the proletariat” - which, of course, we already do (*Pre-conference bulletin 2001* p13). In plain English the dictatorship of the proletariat proves to be nothing more terrifying than the rule of the working class: ie, the overwhelming majority of the population. “Socialism”, our manifesto says, means “the working class organising to liberate itself from the rule of profit and create its own democracy, abolishing the privileges of managers and officials” (*People before profit* London 2001, p19). Obviously such comrades have a typically sectarian conception of ‘party’. Agreement with, rather than acceptance of, the programme determines membership - the latter being Lenin’s formulation, as the educated reader will know. Certainly we would expect a Socialist Alliance party to contain within it a whole range of different shades of socialist opinion.

Anyway let us return to the main line of the argument. Since the GLA elections the Socialist Alliance has displayed an upward trajectory. Our national membership reportedly stands at just over 1,400. Such a bald figure considerably downplays our *functional* magnitude, however. Besides the six principal political organisations underpinning the Socialist Alliance, there is also a layer active in, or financially backing, local Socialist Alliances, who are not signed up nationally. There are around 80 regional, city, town and borough Socialist Alliances in England and Wales. Numbers in each vary, but in most cases extend some distance beyond the organisational and ideological borders of the SWP. No one knows the total membership of the Socialist Alliance counted in that, more accurate way, not even the SWP central committee. Dave Nellist has though produced a 3,000 guesstimate. A figure which implicitly questions the - hugely exaggerated - claims that the SWP contains 10,000 fighters for socialism within its ranks. Nonetheless even if we only have 2,000 members it is an impressive achievement.

Precisely under these promising circumstances the Socialist Alliance’s rank amateurism stands exposed with particular clarity. Quantity we have in membership.

Quality we still lack in terms of leadership and organisation. The majority faction bears prime responsibility here. The arguments advanced by comrades Rees and German and others who want to limit the Socialist Alliance to an *electoral* united front or a centrist halfway house are part of the problem. These comrades do not understand the pressing needs of the day. They cannot even say the words 'Socialist Alliance party' without shuddering with fear.

Once the Socialist Alliance declares itself a party they will be faced with a quandary. Do they advance revolutionary principles and fight for reforms in the most revolutionary way objective circumstances allow, or keep advocating old Labour pap? Do they attempt to impose their travesty of democratic centralism upon us, or do they concede the right to open polemics and permanent factions? Do they carry on building a sect or set about the much more rewarding and exciting task of creating a genuine socialist alternative to Labourism?

A self-reinforcing relationship exists between the Socialist Alliance's amateurism, its sect primitivism and its economism. While the sights of our cadre are occluded by trade union-type issues - wages, anti-trade union laws, etc - instead of widened by high politics and the vistas of extreme democracy, while confessional sects are considered of greater value than the founding of a *party*, there is every reason to keep the Socialist Alliance on the united front Procrustean bed. That intellectual torture and butchery excuses economism, sect primitivism *and* amateurism.

We, however, are confident that with the growth of the Socialist Alliance such an artificial imposition cannot hold. Our trade union militants will unite together on the ground. Our members will freely and fiercely debate. Our cadre will soon come to despise and ridicule amateurism. And, ironic as it may appear to some, the greater the number of our recruits in and from the Labour Party, the more certain does the formation of a Socialist Alliance party become.

## 7. Leninist advocates of authoritarianism and localist objectors

Objections to our plan for a democratic and effective Socialist Alliance party stem from two main sources. On the one side there are the sects and their self-satisfied central committees. Alike, the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party in England and Wales complacently maintain that they alone are *the* revolutionary party. And, in the name of their bitterly opposed high commands, John Rees and Peter Taaffe both strive to artificially limit our Socialist Alliance and keep it at a stunted, infantile stage of development: ie, a united front of a special kind or an anarcho-bureaucratic federation. On the other side are the localists.

By definition localists come in many forms and guises. Indeed at the activist base of the SWP in particular there exists a distinct localist orientation (usually an unconscious by-product of economism). Either way, the question of the relationship between the Socialist Alliance's local and all-Britain work needs to be properly and fully discussed.

I know there are those - some sincere, some insincere - who maintain that a Socialist Alliance party can only be built from the bottom up, from independent local or trade union branch work. For communists this argument must be turned onto its feet. Serious and really effective work, locally, in workplaces, or in trade unions, is only possible if it is organised by an authoritative centre. We take as our starting point the world and the worldwide transition from capitalism to socialism. There is nothing parochial about the struggle for socialism and human liberation. So the Socialist Alliance will become local by first being international.

Localism is a slippery slope. It is organisational anarchism. The forces of capitalism tried to destroy the Communist Party of Great Britain by deliberately promoting Eurocommunism and the Democratic Left, by lauding Martin Jacques and Nina Temple. Localism carries out essentially the same destructive and disorganising work without being asked or even rewarded. Localism not only promotes independence from our elected and representative Socialist Alliance leadership; it actually threatens the Socialist Alliance. The longer the period of reaction lasts, the more weak elements will seek justification for a self-important 'do your own thing'. One of the features of the present day is the flip from 'Marxism' to liberalism. Localism, *Red Pepper*, *New Left Review* and the Democratic Left are all rungs of one ladder, stages in a single process,

manifestations of the same tendency. To be for the unity of the left and the working class it is not enough to *call* oneself an anti-sectarian: one must carry out the practical work of building the Socialist Alliance.

From amongst the conscious - and belligerent - localists there comes the constant expression of fear. Fear that a centralised organisation will tilt the balance from the grass roots to a London HQ. Fear that a strong executive committee will ride roughshod over local and regional sensibilities. Fear that by involving ourselves in grand programmatic decision making our political focus will shift from the day-to-day concerns of so-called 'ordinary folk' to highfalutin issues such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, Ireland and the British-Irish, the monarchy system and the Marxist theory of globalisation.

You will have already guessed our response to such fears. Since the inauguration of the Socialist Alliance - the official launch took place in Rugby's United Railway Club on September 5 1998 - we communists have tirelessly argued for the maximum democracy, but with the same determination we have fought localism. For us the main immediate enemy is the United Kingdom state. Beyond that the universal system of capital. Everything - but everything - must be subordinated to defeating the existing state and from that salient overthrowing global capitalism. Attempts to *first* settle local grievances with an employer or local disputes over council cuts are a diversion.

Despite our best efforts the whole Socialist Alliance project has time and time again been put on hold, most markedly before the SWP entered our ranks, with this or that *localist* local Socialist Alliance serving as an excuse - Kent, Preston Radical Alliance, Greater Manchester, *et al.* Things tended to proceed at the pace of the slowest, the most backward, the most timid element. Often that meant no movement at all and the threat of ignominious collapse.

Pete McLaren, one of the Socialist Alliance's three joint convenors, has most consistently championed the outlook of the localists. The comrade is a likeable fellow and strikes me as a man of heartfelt principle. However, he is also one of those unfortunate overdetermined ex-Labourites. Disgust with Labour and its rotten record in and out of office led him to wrongly conclude that political parties as such are a menace and like the plague ought best to be avoided. Having bitterly rejected Labourism, resigning in 1987, he fell headlong for all the fashionable petty bourgeois causes of the day - Greenpeace, Reclaim the Streets and alliances of anarchists, environmentalists, single issue campaigners and direct actionists as a "radical, dynamic and different way" of organising the left (*The All Red and Green* summer 1998). In other words, eclectic eco-anarchism.

Not surprisingly the comrade displays no particular enthusiasm for elections. Recognising that socialism cannot be obtained "through parliaments" is a virtue. So is dislike of the sects. Comrade McLaren roundly condemns them for ignoring the views of minorities and often excluding or expelling them. But holding to Lord Acton's imperious maxim, "History tells us that power corrupts", is a recipe for utter disorgani-

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sation of the working class. After all, an experienced and highly organised enemy confronts us. Capital in Britain is defended in depth by national and other tiers of government, the monarchy, the Church of England, the BBC, the law and the courts, the armed forces, the police, MI5, etc.

Comrade McLaren is profoundly hostile to what he understands by the “discredited Leninist conception of “the party””: ie, the highest, most effective form of organisation the working class can wield against the many tentacled capitalist state. He is certain that political parties automatically become “authoritarian” (*The All Red and Green* summer 1998). And presumably the Leninist party, with its centralism and goal of military levels of discipline, is for him akin to ultra-authoritarianism or ultra-corruption.

The entry of the SWP into the Socialist Alliance and its almost instant rise to overall hegemony promptly cut down to size the *personal* standing and influence of comrades such as Pete McLaren. Nevertheless the *potential* of the whole project - where it could be and where it needs to be - has been continuously retarded by two interrelated factors. Firstly, the stubborn refusal to set our sights on founding a Socialist Alliance party; and secondly, the rank and file’s obsessive prioritisation, or emphasis, on localist campaigning work. Albeit from different angles, the anarchism of comrade McLaren and the economism and primitivism of the sects resolve themselves into *low* expectations for the Socialist Alliance.

Because of our necessarily *high* expectations for the Socialist Alliance we communists have sought by all available means to build an authoritative centre - the word ‘authoritarian’ does not frighten us at all. Integral to this drive towards *democratic centralism* is bringing to the fore national campaigning work. Far from weakening tentative and fragile roots amongst sections of the population, such an approach, if imaginatively put into effect by the Socialist Alliance, would immeasurably widen our support and give coherence and a single direction to all local efforts. Instead of frantically following or simple-mindedly echoing this or that isolated spontaneous outburst of anger, the Socialist Alliance would take the political lead by putting things into the wider national frame and global context.

Let us expand upon our argument for centralism and an all-Britain approach by revisiting the call for a common Socialist Alliance political paper. CPGB members and representatives at every level of the Socialist Alliance have long been arguing for such a publication - democratically edited and open to competing minority viewpoints. A unified but pluralistic mouthpiece would greatly enhance our impact.

At present supporting organisations produce a plethora of *rival* factional publications. And, replicating this sect primitivism, various local Socialist Alliances have published their own bulletins, websites, newsletters and even glossy one-off papers. I have no exact idea of the total, but at least 30 local print and electronic publications of one kind or another exist, according to reports the CPGB receives. Does this not highlight our amateurism in no uncertain terms? Does it not show that our Socialist

Alliance leadership lags far behind the support and growth of our movement?

It hardly takes an Einstein or a Hawkins, to conclude that if these heroic but disjointed efforts by our supporting organisations and local groups were pooled, not only would an immense amount of energy and money be saved, but our collective influence and local campaigning could be massively extended. If pathetic rumps such as the Communist Party of Britain and the Workers Revolutionary Party can produce their *Morning Star* and their *Newsline* daily, why not the Socialist Alliance? The SWP, the CPGB and SPEW each have their own print shop and within the Socialist Alliance taken as a whole there is a wonderful array of talented writers and journalists.

No less germane, with a common political paper - be it monthly, weekly or daily - there can be real control from below over what is being said and done above. Knowledge is power. Activists at present are expected to operate almost as unthinking automatons. Apart from reports in the *Weekly Worker*, what happens on the liaison or executive committee is virtually a closed book. Full publicity, not *Socialist Worker's* anodyne official optimism, will educate our cadre in the ins and outs of our own high politics and encourage democracy to flourish.

Despite such obvious advantages, the majority of comrades still refuse to concede the point. At the top, including on the executive committee, excuses from the office bearers and our principal allies have come down to preaching backwardness. Lindsey German says we need a paper like a "hole in the head" (*Weekly Worker* June 21 2001). In the same doleful spirit, at a local level one hears such views loyally echoed: a Socialist Alliance paper would be a "distraction." What reactionary and philistine nonsense. On the contrary a common political paper would surely be a unifying factor and in the hands of the Socialist Alliance as a whole, a powerful offensive weapon. Should we have to rely for ongoing mass publicity on sworn enemies - *The Guardian*, *The Times*, etc?

Chris Harman, editor of *Socialist Worker*, rightly hammers home how important his paper is for SWP members. One of his pep talk articles ran with the headline, "Paper knits the strands together" (March 31 2001). Exactly. SWP members are featured from around the country saying how they use their paper. Amongst them Peter Leech, our Socialist Alliance candidate for Ipswich in the 2001 general election. Proudly he tells of having "copies of *Socialist Worker* on me all the time" (thankfully the SWP-backed ban on selling partisan literature while doing SA work was overturned - so there is no breach of any restrictive code of conduct). Comrade Leech sells to his local TGWU, to people in the Labour Party ... to anyone interested in politics.

Is *Socialist Worker* a "diversion" from building the SWP? No. Is *Socialist Worker* the paper of the Socialist Alliance? No. Should non-SWP members be expected to sell *Socialist Worker* in order to spread the influence of the Socialist Alliance? No. So it is more than a pity that SWP comrades *plus* comrades in the other five principal supporting organisations, not to mention the ever increasing number of SA members in no faction, do not have a common political paper at their disposal to sell to fellow

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trade unionists, people in the Labour Party ... to anyone interested in politics.

In the absence of a bold lead from the liaison and executive committees, it is hardly surprising that at a local level comrades decide to put collective energies into a local publication. In its own way this is, of course, admirable. It is certainly no “diversion”. A local nonsectarian Socialist Alliance paper is better than no Socialist Alliance paper. No one is decrying or belittling the vital role local leaflets, bulletins and papers can play. However, that is not the point. The point is to lift, generalise and coordinate the campaigning work of the *whole* Socialist Alliance at every level and overcome the ingrained sectarian divisions and smug localist shallowness that at present limits and undermines our potential.

There is no answer for the whole to be found in trumpeting the successes SWP members - SA candidates included - have in selling *Socialist Worker*. The SWP has the right to promote its own organisation and freely circulate partisan literature. But wide swathes of SA members have no intention of taking out an SWP card. Nor is it good enough to say that local bulletins, papers, etc are nonsectarian. Comrades ought to have the courage to admit that the present state of affairs is far from satisfactory and could easily be overcome, if the will were there.

Producing two dozen *rival* factional publications and around the same number of local publications perpetuates our fragmentation, sect primitivism and amateurism (local bulletins, let us note, tend in most cases to be politically low level, trivial, technically shoddy, infrequent and quite frankly mind-numbingly dull). Of course, the lack of will is not accidental. It is actually fed and reinforced by our fragmentation and localism. Behind the plodding culture of the Socialist Alliance ‘establishment’ are those who put their confessional sect above building a party and those who believe socialist politics and initiative should only flow bottom-up.

## 8. Party and factions

The 20th century was characterised by failure, and on all sides at that. Only an ectopic parody of socialism was possible in the weak links of imperialism. Marx and Engels were right; real socialism needs coordinated revolution across the advanced countries: ie, “as an act of the dominant peoples ‘all at once’ and simultaneously” (K Marx, F Engels *CW* Vol 5, 1976, p49). Isolated, the fate of the *local* Russian Revolution was sealed. Its birth was its death. Trapped by dire material circumstances, the USSR quickly turned into its opposite and embarked on an unstable and unsustainable evolutionary pathway. The first five-year plan marked the genesis of a ‘freak’ society, not socialism. Eastern Europe and China, Cuba and Vietnam were post-capitalist but equally non-socialist. Neither they nor the USSR held the mirror of the future in their hands.

Capitalism survived; yet only by time and again turning away from its essence. Militarism and monopoly, fascism and the social democratic state are all in their different but related ways features of a decadent system, in a word of decline and transition. After the 1989-91 democratic counterrevolutions Eric Hobsbawm and Francis Fukuyama, Martin Jacques and Tony Blair, Mikhail Gorbachev and Margaret Thatcher hymned the triumph of capitalism. However, the 21st century has every likelihood of marking the beginning of the real world-historical transition to socialism. The *global* capitalist metabolism cannot for much longer contain within itself the wealth it creates in such antagonistic abundance. Behind the smug heralds of the New World Order ride war, economic collapse, plague and barbarism.

Of course, once material conditions are ripe, everything depends on human will, human consciousness and human organisation. People make history; it should be emphasised though that they do so primarily through the clash amongst them of class against class. The 21st century will therefore see either the victory of socialism and the working class or the victory of the bourgeoisie and mutual destruction.

That is why we communists stress the historic urgency of establishing a democratic and centralist Socialist Alliance party and the agenda of winning for it, not the Labour Party, the position as the natural party of the working class. Without such a party the workers face degradation, atomisation and endless servitude. Armed with their own party, the workers can make themselves into the hegemon of society.

There is a problem. The model that the leftwing groups consciously or unconsciously imitate in miniature is not the one that led the soviets to power on November 7 1917. Instead it is the changeling form which dominated the militant part of the proletariat after the bureaucracy in the USSR ceased being the servant of the working



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class and metamorphosed into its master.

The destiny of the 'official' world communist movement was, of course, inextricably bound up with the Russian Revolution. Stalin's bureaucratic socialism had on the one hand the prestige and on the other the brute strength to subordinate most 'official communist' parties to its state and sectional interests. Yet, faced with communist parties which gained millions of recruits by associating themselves with the dynamism of the first five-year plans and heading the anti-fascist wave, the leftist critics of Stalinism - not least the Trotskyites - failed in the main to make any substantial inroads into the working class. What began as a sect created more sects: each saddled with an internal regime directly analogous to that of 'official communism'. Dissent was gagged or dealt with by expulsion and demonisation.

So establishing a *revolutionary* Socialist Alliance party is not only about properly functioning branches, membership rights, trade union fractions and launching a political paper. It is also about reclaiming the conception of the *party* and cleansing it of the bureaucratic and undemocratic muck that has attached to it over the years.

To begin our Augean task we will ask an elementary question. What is a 'party'? We find our answer in the origins of the word 'party' itself: ie, from the Latin *pars* or part. With this in mind we disagree with those left social democrats who insist that their party should *represent* the working class. Communists shun such elitism. Our party must be part of the class. Not just any part though, but the voluntary union of the most determined *fighters*. The vanguard.

The working class has many organisations with which it wages its struggle against capital: trade unions, cooperatives, educational institutions, youth associations, defence corps, soviets, etc. But only a vanguard party can coordinate these organisations, patiently win them to work in a united way, so that they do not hinder each other and instead serve the entire class. The vanguard party can fulfil that centralising role precisely because it has rallied the best part of the class to its ranks and trained them as leaders. But that is not all.

The party can direct the class struggle because it itself, via the operation of democratic centralism, is the most *disciplined* detachment of the working class. Within the party, lower bodies subordinate themselves to the authority of the higher ones; both majorities and minorities act together as one in agreed practical action. Therefore our party forms a single system. The party is not merely the sum of its organisations. It is a fist which strikes in the right direction. That *centralism* is ensured through constant debate, education, open criticism and voting. Such far ranging democracy is no indulgent luxury. It provides the best conditions through which the party is self-united around Marxism: ie, the most advanced guide for the working class in its *practical* mission of changing the world.

Hence for communists the party embodies the most disciplined unity and at the same time the merger of the workers' movement with scientific theory. The party we want is, in other words, the highest form of working class organisation - for which

there is *no* substitute, and there should be no delay in starting. To wait - as some suggest we should - for the benign conditions provided by a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situation is to guarantee miscarriage and blood-drenched defeat.

A vanguard party does not spring forth ready-made. No class spontaneously produces the party that corresponds to its interests. Social life is complex and full of contradictions. Individuals, for example, can come from one class and yet take a political stand that means they belong body and soul to another. Only through the tangled skein of extended economic and political struggle - embracing the most diverse periods - do classes form a collective consciousness of themselves. As they do, the groupings, factions and trends of those classes shift, manoeuvre and crystallise around definite ideas and programmes. Then, as during 1917 in Russia, when millions are drawn from inertia and passivity into activity and enlightenment, "basic questions powerfully emerge and divisions are finally created which really correspond to a given class" (G Zinoviev *History of the Bolshevik Party* 1973, p8).

What we have said thus far goes some way to answer the question of what relationship exists between party and class. That is why our Socialist Alliance party should have no interests separate and apart from the working class. It should not set up sectarian principles of its own to judge and dictate to the workers' movement. On the contrary, Marx and Engels explained, our aim is to seek out and always to bring to the fore common interests, the "interests of the movement as a whole" (K Marx, F Engels *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1973, p61). Common interests, that is what should inform our programme. What the Soviet Union was or was not can be left for historians and theoreticians to argue over. The doctrine of the Soviet Union as state capitalism or a degenerate workers' state as a *condition* for *continued* membership is certainly utterly alien to our understanding of what constitutes a party.

What of the relationship between a Socialist Alliance party and other working class groups, factions and parties? We were not formed in opposition to other working class and socialist forces. Our *immediate aim* is to win all genuine partisans of the working class to take their place in the Socialist Alliance and, failing that, to deepen cooperation and joint work. That applies equally to the Scottish Socialist Party as it does to Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. Like them we argue in favour of the class struggle and against the existing social system. Internal democracy and countless "factional disputes" would help no end in overcoming all nationalist and monocratic nonsense.

How about the Labour Party? It is vital to correctly grasp the class character of the Labour Party. Otherwise success will always allude us. In spite of Blairism it still remains in my opinion what Lenin called a *bourgeois* workers' party. Essentially that means assiduous work towards separating Labour's broad class base from its reactionary and now almost free-floating leadership. A sensitive approach to Labour lefts is certainly vital. Class conscious workers do not look kindly upon a cavalier approach that fails to distinguish between Blairite clones and Labour lefts.

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So, although Peter Taaffe's organisation thankfully abandoned the Labour Party as its chosen vehicle of socialist transformation, nothing qualitatively has changed - yet. The designation 'bourgeois workers party' does not mean, and never has meant, automatically voting Labour. On the contrary communists and revolutionary socialists have always had a duty to combat Labourism in the ballot box. Indeed we have consistently opposed auto-Labourism: ie, voting Labour almost as a matter of routine. On the other hand nowadays it is necessary to bring to the fore opposition to auto *anti*-Labourism: ie, blindly standing against Labour candidates, including sitting MPs, almost as a matter of principle. The Socialist Alliance needs to challenge Labour candidates with a platform of basic, but radical, economic and political demands. eg, full trade union rights, republicanism, a decent subsistence income for all, substantive equality between men and women, self-determination for Scotland and Wales, massive expansion of spending on the NHS, housing, etc. There should be an imaginative and hard hitting campaign to popularise these demands. After all, mass action in the end decides everything. If Labour candidates cannot sign up to such politics they deserve no support. On the other hand those who adopt our platform, no matter how timidly, should be actively campaigned for. The Socialist Alliance's relationship with the mass of class conscious voters is thereby enhanced. At the same time all manner of strains and stresses between Millbank and Labour leftwingers are fostered. Such a course gives our comrades a focus and increases tensions within the Labour Party.

Communists do not encourage militants to simply walk out of the Labour Party. Leaving in dribs and drabs is both ineffective and an essentially individual act. Organise a Socialist Alliance movement inside the Labour Party. Publish a Labour Party Socialist Alliance journal or paper. Operate a system of dual membership. Capture wards and CLPs. Get Socialist Alliance delegates elected to Labour's annual conference. Such are the tactics advocated by the communists. The Socialist Alliance will only be built as the vanguard part of the working class in a ruthless and unremitting struggle *against* Labourism and all bourgeois influences. That, it should be stressed though, is a long-term perspective which necessitates continuous and close engagement.

So making the party is an extended process. Even after the overthrow of the capitalist state, under conditions of socialism, the party does not take final, fixed, shape. Splits and unifications continue. The vanguard party must consequently be viewed as a living entity which might begin with the merger of half a dozen revolutionary groups but finally ends only with the negation of politics itself - the relationship of classes to the state - when the lower phase of communism (socialism) passes into the higher phase and general freedom.

From what has been outlined it is clear that a Socialist Alliance party, in the span of its existence, can, and necessarily does, contain a whole gamut of opinions, the extremes of which may be sharply contradictory. After all it is itself part of the working

class. Take, for the sake of example, the various manifestations of the Communist Party in pre-revolutionary Russia. Side by side with Lenin and the Bolsheviks there were at different times centrist chiefs such as Plekhanov, Martov and Trotsky, as well as ultra-revisionists such as Struve. Each strand interwove in unity and conflict.

What fundamentally matters for communists is unity in action. Beyond those bounds there must be the broadest and freest discussion and the open fight against all harmful decisions and tendencies. Members should be obliged to *accept* its principles and abide by majority decisions on practical actions. Members are, however, by no means necessarily unanimous over theoretical questions, including matters of strategy and tactics. Disagreement is natural; so is its expression. Even when it comes to a fully debated and agreed Socialist Alliance programme, it is perfectly legitimate to criticise points and formulations.

Openness is as much a matter of principle as it is a weapon. The working class must be fully informed about every faction, shade and opinion in the Socialist Alliance as well as the labour movement as a whole. That way, it can be educated and won to take sides. So, besides fighting for consistent revolutionary theory and practice, from the first we fought for freedom to discuss *and* to openly criticise. There were many attempts to silence the *Weekly Worker*. None succeeded. Nor will succeed.

For communists differences and disagreement are not signs of weakness but strength. The Socialist Alliance must strive to organise and contain within itself all partisans of the working class, because that can only increase our social weight and thereby intensify our practice - which alone provides the ultimate proof about rightness or wrongness in theoretical matters. For our part we are sure that if at first arguments do not convince, practice will. Those who doubt the worth of united front tactics towards the Labour left or who think economic struggles are primary will not be excluded when we form the majority. The actual struggle will convince all honest comrades.

It would be mistaken to believe that a Socialist Alliance party should consist of a conglomeration of separate factions and tendencies. That is, of course, the state of affairs today. Even the independents form a tendency, if not a definite faction. Nevertheless we are perfectly clear about our fight for unity around Marxism. Unity, however, cannot be decreed. It has to be nurtured and fought for. Unity, the unity of all revolutionary and left socialists and communists within the Socialist Alliance, does not in the least mean members should hide disagreements on strategy and tactics, or refrain from fully explaining their views whenever and wherever appropriate. Nothing of the kind. Political struggle should be carried on openly, straightforwardly and resolutely till a conference decides. Naturally, even after a conference, if communists were in a minority, like any legitimate trend, we would retain the right to continue to present our views and criticisms. That is democratic centralism.

When the CPGB was formed in July 1920 it represented a great leap forward for the working class in Britain. In the battles that followed, despite the fact that it only had a

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few thousand members, its influence radiated out to the hundreds of thousands, at times the millions. Undoubtedly the CPGB was part of the class and the leading or vanguard part at that. Tragically, not least due to the baleful influence of the Soviet Union and its degenerating leadership, from the mid-1920s onwards the CPGB went on to suffer death by a thousand opportunist cuts.

This, as we have said, was a worldwide phenomenon. Under Stalin's monarchy the once proud parties of Comintern ceased being an *internationalist* threat to the existence of metropolitan capitalism. Instead they became *national* pressure groups within capitalism. From time to time communist parties encouraged mass strikes and violent demonstrations, even threatened revolution. In spite of that, by the 1950s 'official communism', which began as a militant adjunct of Soviet diplomacy, in the main became respectable and programmatically social democratised (till the late 1960s this took a pro-Soviet form, hence it was bourgeoisification *sui generis*). The 1951 reformist *British road to socialism* programme, in part written by Stalin himself - which, as we have comprehensively shown, was "the product of many years of centrist adaptation and opportunist retreat" - became the sorry paradigm of all 'official' parties (see J Conrad *Which road?* London 1991, p126).

Throughout this downward spiral each opportunist twist and turn by 'official communism' produced its batch of recruits for various left oppositions. None were of much social weight, or - and this is what is crucial - any real party spirit. They were sects made up of *like-minded persons* formed primarily for purposes of a *literary* nature. Membership was determined not by militant class activity: rather by loyalty to, or willingness to parrot, the self-defining principle. In turn the working class as a whole was haughtily told that liberation depended on it doing the same. The idea was all.

Not surprisingly in terms of theory Bordigaism, Trotskyism, Shachtmanism, etc, in all their myriad varieties, were only partial, one-sided critiques of the USSR and 'official communism'. Relying on ready-made categories borrowed from the past, or refusing to recognise the qualitative change that had been wrought in the Soviet Union by the first five-year plan, in many ways they remained part of the problem. Things were made worse by the post-World War II international situation and the Cold War world system. Against all predictions, capitalism boomed and bureaucratic socialism spread. Already deep theoretical shortcomings were compounded: splits, disorientation and disillusionment followed. Having always been marginal, the sects tended towards apocalyptic madness in the indifferent and soporific atmosphere generated by the social democratic state. Meanwhile 'official communism' continued its rightist trajectory and often its domination of what constituted the real movement.

Getting the 'official communist' parties to serve the narrow interests of the Soviet Union's elite was not easy, especially as diplomacy by definition requires one about-turn after another. It was necessary, therefore, to impose an authoritarian internal regime. The Stalin-dominated Communist Party of the Soviet Union provided the model. Dishonestly and misleadingly this was called democratic centralism. The term

'bureaucratic centralism' is more accurate. Achieving obedience and pliability meant hounding and lying about every opposition, first and foremost internal oppositions. Bureaucratic centralism was, however, like the mythical dragon, the holyborus, which, having devoured everything else, begins to eat itself. Not only revolutionaries found themselves subjected to ideological persecution. Adherents of the last opportunism - yesterday's revisionism - became victims too. Finally the head consumes the head.

Of course, bureaucratic centralism relied primarily on organizational, not political methods (in the Soviet Union a single bullet in the back of the head sufficed). Those who disagreed were excluded from positions, their views denied a platform in the press. And any public dissent from the leadership line was deemed a breach of discipline. That mockery of democratic centralism was taken to the point where no member of any elected committee was allowed to voice criticism of the leadership to rank and file members.

History bites back. Intellectual pacification ran in tandem with intellectual poverty and organisational demobilisation. Theory that is mere justification, opposition that is forced to become purely organisational: both these inexorably produce a membership incapable of thinking critically and independently. Moreover, though to begin with the membership acts technically, finally it does not act at all. Denied the oxygen of theoretical controversy, it atrophies.

The decline and fragmentation of 'official communism' left behind Maoism, Enverism and a batch of equally dead-end splinters. It also bequeathed a political space within which Trotskyism in particular could expand. Like the Cretaceous birds, after the mass extinction of dinosaurs, it grew both in mass and diversity. The new environment suited explosive growth ... but only of sects. Unfortunately they represented no qualitative improvement on what had gone before. Notwithstanding the differences, the Workers Revolutionary Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales (formerly the Revolutionary Socialist League, Militant Tendency and Militant Labour) and the Socialist Workers Party - the three major lineages of Trotskyite evolution - have all been characterised by internal regimes that to all intents and purposes replicate that which the CPGB suffered - even at its nadir under the *Marxism Today* faction.

Till its implosion, just after the miners' Great Strike in 1985, perhaps the largest Trotskyite group in Britain was the Workers Revolutionary Party. As is well known, its leader Gerry Healy ran the WRP as his private fief. Rank and file members worked like slaves. He lived like a minor lord. Opposition was not tolerated, and, when it did surface, was often dealt with using physical and always verbal abuse. Only one view was allowed - Healy's. That applied externally to other revolutionaries as well.

While Livingstone and Labourites of a similar stripe were courted and feted, the leaders of other revolutionary trends and groups were endlessly and disgustingly branded as being minions of the CIA, the KGB or both. But it was the WRP that was a *paid agent* - of Libya, Iraq, Iran and other reactionary Middle Eastern regimes. For

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example, Gaddafi was praised for “politically” developing “in the direction of revolutionary socialism”. The name of this “undisputed leader of the Libyan people” was said to be “synonymous with the strivings of the oppressed in many countries” (*News Line* December 12 1981). The crossing of class lines was no aberration. Even as countless leftists and communists were hanging on the gibbet, ayatollah Khomeini was hailed as a revolutionary hero, not condemned as a medievalist tyrant and butcher. The WRP also defended the execution of communists who had established cells in the Iraqi army. And to prove his trustworthiness to Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist dictatorship, Healy ordered mugshot photos taken of Iraqi communist protesters in London. When such unprincipled financial links and political doings were exposed by critics - not least those who now publish *Workers’ Liberty* - the WRP’s reply came in the form of Vanessa Redgrave’s libel actions in the bourgeois courts.

What defined the WRP was a heady mixture of millennialism, political prostitution, paranoia and biblical Trotskyism. Crowning it, as if with thorns, was Healy’s *Studies in dialectical materialism*. Published in 1982, this was a diabolically and deliberately incomprehensible work of so-called philosophy, which attempted to bamboozle readers with plagiarised quasi-Hegelianism in order to establish Healy’s status as a great thinker.

Interestingly in 1982 the WRP political committee “emphatically and unanimously” demanded that their fraternal comrade, David North, secretary of the US Workers League, “withdraw” his criticisms of Healy’s *Studies*. Though they “had never been discussed”, he did (D North *Critique of G Healy’s ‘Studies’*, 1985, p3). Only in 1985, when the WRP was breaking up amidst financial scandal and tales of sexual wrongdoing, did Healy’s former lieutenants, notably Mike Banda and Cliff Slaughter, decide it was politic to announce that all along their king was philosophically naked. As the WRP plunged into oblivion, North’s *Critique*: ie, the notes he wrote and withdrew in 1982 - were circulated. True to bureaucratic centralist form they were “for members only”.

Things have never got quite so bad either in SPEW or the SWP. Nevertheless things have been bad. SPEW existed for 40 years as the most Labourite of deep entryists. Enscenced in the Labour Party, the comrades Labourised themselves. Historical progress could only come via the Labour Party and a Labour government. Kier Hardie became an object of hero worship. And despite loudly claiming Marxist credentials, its programme within the Labour Party - *Militant: What we stand for* - reeked of Hardieism. “Socialism”, it reassuringly says, will come not via insurrection, but “through an enabling bill in parliament”, which will nationalise “the top 200 monopolies” (*Militant: What we stand for* June 1990, p8).

In this respect it is worth bringing to mind Rosa Luxemburg. She once famously pointed out that the real difference between the parliamentary road and the revolutionary road was not two ways to get to the same end: ie, socialism. No, different strategic

approaches (means) lead to very different conclusions (ends). The reason is obvious. Communists want to mobilise the masses to smash the state, parliament included (to do that we fully accept the need to stand candidates and get MPs elected). Reformists, such as the then SPEW, on the other hand, regard parliament as something to treasure and protect. It is after all the instrument with which they said Labour would usher in the socialist order. No wonder Militant-SPEW insisted that: "The idea ... that we want to 'smash parliamentary democracy' is completely untrue" (*Militant International Review* No33, autumn 1986, p9). We believe them.

Taaffe and co habitually dismissed everything and anybody outside the self-enclosed Labour Party world; women, gays and blacks were told that they and their campaigns were mere diversions. Only the carrot and stick combination of Kinnock's witch-hunt and the anti-poll tax movement broke Militant *organisationally* from Labourism. However Militant-SPEW remains a *right centrist* formation - nowadays totally adrift politically. Relations with the Socialist Alliance are at best semidetached; at worse actively hostile. Talk of a new mass workers' party is just that - talk. Outside the Labour Party Peter Taaffe's organisation seems doomed to a slow, if noisy and destructive, decline.

Naturally ordinary members are forbidden under the edicts of so-called democratic centralism from voicing criticism in public. But minority leaders too have been denied a platform. For example, in 1991 a schism occurred on its central committee over the retreat from Labour Party deep entryism. Opinion was overwhelming. There was a 46:3 division. But this three were not any old minority. They were among the biggest and brightest stars in the rather dull Militant firmament. In spite of that, the public argument was not had out in the faction's publications. As a substitute Ted Grant, the organisation's founder and most prominent theorist, Rob Sewell, national organiser, and Alan Woods, editor of *Militant International Review*, leaked their opposition documents to *The Guardian*.

In it we found the minority mournfully and viciously complaining that a "clique" was shielding "individuals from criticism", and had bureaucratically tried to "gag" dissent (*The Guardian* September 3 1991). Why they chose to use an organ of the enemy class and not their own, or one of the many leftwing papers and journals, has never been explained. However, as shown only a few days later, the majority used exactly the same unprincipled method. The whole polemic was in fact conducted in *The Guardian*.

When it came to Peter Taaffe's turn he hinted that his one-time leader and mentor was getting crusty, if not senile. He went on to argue that with Neil Kinnock's shift to the right, "It would be criminal to pass over an immediate opportunity for expansion in order that we may cling to our few remaining points of support within the Labour Party" (*The Guardian* September 6 1991).

Since then how has the "immediate opportunity for expansion" gone? Membership of Militant, which was 8,000, now stands below the 400 mark in SPEW. The sons and



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daughters who were easily gained in the Labour Party Young Socialists had not been politically trained or prepared for life outside the committee rooms of Labourism. SPEW is Militant's empty husk. Not that Grant's *Socialist Appeal* kept anything much either. It limps on in the Labour Party, hardly noticed by anyone outside its small circle. Has the lesson been learnt? Hardly. Neither in *The Socialist* nor in *Socialist Appeal* will one find polemics. Not even between each other.

More recent cases are equally instructive. SPEW and its immediate predecessors have suffered a whole series of splits, walkouts and expulsions. Panther (UK), International Socialist Movement, Phil Hearse, Militant Opposition and Harry Paterson, to name a few. Where were these breakaways thoroughly debated? Not in *The Socialist* for certain. Only in the *Weekly Worker* were such issues comprehensively covered.

At this present moment in time the SWP has managed to steal a march on other left groups. It is now the biggest left organisation, once boasting some 10,000 members. For a number of years it dubbed itself the "smallest mass party in the world". However the SWP is not a party in the Marxist sense. It is a biggish sect that defines itself in a totally exclusive way. Tony Cliff's trinity of state capitalism, the permanent arms economy and deflected permanent revolution functioned as an SWP catechism.

In its *Socialist Review*-International Socialism origins the SWP was rooted in the Labour Party and marked itself out from the other groups by recourse to Luxemburgism. That is, an explicit non-Leninism (Leninism led to Stalinism, was the suggestion). During the 1950s not much happened organisationally. The US Shachtmanites' journal was circulated but in general the group suffered a slow decline. Membership in 1958 was no more than two dozen. Organised along federal lines, the group had distinct libertarian, social democratic and pacifistic leanings: Cliff himself described it as "centrist" (S Matgamna *A tragedy of the left* 1991, p1). The idea of building a Leninist party in Britain was contemptuously dismissed as "toy-town Bolshevism". Cliff's clever idea was staying in the Labour Party, all the way to the revolution.

It was only 1960s youth radicalisation, above all over Vietnam, that provided conditions of growth. The 'third campist' position that marked out the group over the 1950-53 Korean War was quietly ditched in the pro-NLF floodtide. 'Ho-ho-ho Chi Minh' became the chant, not 'Neither Washington nor Moscow'. The International Socialists, as the organisation had become, broke from the Labour Party in 1967, and a year later Cliff began his campaign for what he intuitively called Leninism and democratic centralism.

In the early 1970s, that meant a series of ruptures and expulsions: here was the primeval source of today's Alliance for Workers Liberty, Workers Power, Revolutionary Communist Group, etc. The 1980s and 90s also saw a steady stream of individual expulsions or exclusions - often on completely trumped-up charges: eg, Chris Jones, an SWPer for two decades. He wrote a letter to *Socialist Review* in June 1994 replying

to an article by Duncan Hallas. In the course of his letter he naturally presented some of his own ideas, including the need to put republicanism to the fore. Almost immediately he found himself subject to all sorts of allegations by John Rees, including breach of so-called democratic centralism. The majority of his branch in Liverpool supported him against suggestions that he was guilty of obstructing their work. Nothing was presented in writing. Only the flat, unelaborated charge, that he had broken SWP rules. Jones was duly expelled. And even when he appealed he was given the opportunity neither to listen to nor cross-examine his accusers, nor an explicit explanation of what he had been charged with. In the end he found himself expelled for “permanent opposition” (SWP *Pre-conference bulletin* No2, 1994, p38).

A travesty of Luxemburgism had evidently given way to a travesty of Leninism. The SWP membership is never trusted with genuine, to and fro internal debates. There is, however, a layer of ‘red professors’ who produce theory (and often earn a regular living in bourgeois academia). But this is in general either the stuff of the lecture hall, or sophisticated apologetics, designed to justify the latest turn by the post-Cliff Alex Callinicos, John Rees, Chris Harman, Chris Bambery quadrumvirate. Together, along with an inner-core of full timers, these four constitute the SWP leadership. All initiative, and any serious argument, takes place within the confines of this thin layer.

Below the leadership there is a tier of cadre that is *selected*, not for drive and self-reliance, but loyalty to the leadership and willingness to carry out, without question, its wishes and the latest line. Before 1905, it is true, Lenin argued for the appointment of party agents. But that was due to the *okhrana*, the tsarist secret police, not principle. Only an underground party could carry out communist work and *open* propaganda and polemic. The SWP has adopted an internal regime that owes much to the *okhrana* and nothing to Bolshevism. And, in case loyalists might be tempted to dismiss my remarks as nothing more than factional spleen, then note your Alex Callinicos’s recent damning *internal* remarks on the “siege” regime that operated in the 1980s and 90s.

The SWP rank and file is neither educated theoretically nor trusted politically by the leadership. Things operate entirely top-down. There is no control by the whole of the part. Full timers and district organisers are not elected but appointed. As to SWP conferences and councils, they are run like a pyramid sales rally or a corporation pep talk, not a collective decision making body.

SWP members are permitted factional rights. However, they can exercise them only in the few weeks prior to the annual conference. With no continuous and open argument, with no culture of top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top theoretical debate, with no democracy, it is predictable that when factions do form, they are insubstantial, unthought-out and tend towards the purely *technical*. A sad but typical example was the three-strong ‘Filling the vacuum’ *faction*. It agitated for a “rank and file network” in the trade unions and not much else (see SWP *Pre-conference bulletin* Nos 1,2,3,

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1994). Factions such as these are as much a mockery of factions as the SWP is a mockery of a party.

The failure of the WRP, SPEW and the SWP is primarily a failure of programme. Not personality, nor the corruption of power, nor a strange pathological compulsion to endlessly repeat history. Sects cannot produce anything but sects. None of them dare to understand that a revolutionary party cannot be built on the narrow ground of an exclusive ideology and the denial of democracy. The programme of the working class must not be trammelled by dubious theories - Tory Bonapartism, parliamentary roads, the USSR as state capitalism. The programme outlines the broad line of march from capitalism to communism. Nothing more, nothing less.

Hence the Socialist Alliance party which we fight for is a far more useful weapon in the class war than the sectarian group which isolates and then pits one socialist militant against another. There must, therefore, be room for all sorts of shades and trends. As we have said before, what is important when it comes to membership is not agreement with this or that theoretician's conclusions on the nature of the Soviet Union. Practice is what counts.

Our immediate task in the Socialist Alliance is winning an orientation towards the formation of a party. Fulfilling that task will involve all manner of false starts and compromises but would in our view be greatly enhanced by a symbolic name change. A Socialist Alliance *party* serves as a declaration of intent. But the party name has to be given content. Whole layers of the working class must be won to the Socialist Alliance. So rapprochement between the principal groups in the Socialist Alliance is not an end in itself. We are certainly not interested in ideological pacts or lowest common denominator, 80:20 agreements.

There are, of course, journals such as *New Left Review*, *Red Pepper*, *Radical Chains* and the like which claim that by providing an undifferentiated platform to an amorphous band of academic Marxists and armchair revolutionaries they strike a blow for unity. Quite the reverse. These publications sustain, fuel and flatter sectarianism. Unity, divorced from the fight for a working class party, is a hobby for dilettantes who are completely useless when it comes to the fight for socialism. Communists take workers and the serious left groups as our basis. Unity without organisation is a chimera. So we want to unite activists and militants. The idea of uniting the 'university socialists', most of them lazy, semi-reformist and completely detached from the working class, is a reactionary utopia. The idea of uniting all those who are willing to build the Socialist Alliance as a democratic and centralist working class party - that is our cause.

Within the Socialist Alliance it is absolutely necessary to accept and provide for the existence and struggle of *established* factions. There are, of course, objections to factional rights, most notably those that emanate from the SWP. Alex Callinicos writes that permanent factions tend to "institutionalise a government-versus-opposition regime that encourages members to interpret specific issues in the light of factional

struggle” (*Weekly Worker* May 31 2001). The SWP of course has a government but does not want an opposition. One might say that is somewhat hypocritical, given the comrades’ Socialist Worker Platform in the SSP. More than that, however, Callinicos’ stance is profoundly anti-democratic and anti-Leninist.

To begin, let us ask a very necessary question. What is a faction? (A term which, it has to be said, carries an enormous amount of negative baggage.) We shall turn to Lenin for an answer. “A faction,” he says, “is an organisation within a party united, not by its place of work, language or other objective conditions, but by a particular platform of views on party questions” (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 17, Moscow 1977, p265).

It is impossible to prevent the existence of differences. Invariably the same historical or political phenomenon will be experienced from a variety of angles. Especially at first, interpretations will be far from uniform. As will be the sought after or recommended tactics or strategy. And wherever there are co-thinkers there tends to be mutual attraction. Groupings form - as in the arts and sciences: eg, Gouldists versus Dawkinites within Darwinist biology. Yet if, as is the case in the SWP, there cannot be any permanent groupings, then it is only a step, and a short one at that, to the banning of contrary opinions. Only the leadership is free to act as a legitimate group. Not allowing for uneven development and its expression is not at all healthy. Holding to a different viewpoint ceases to be a possibly useful contribution that can help reveal the truth. Instead it becomes a synonym for treachery. Even the most loyal opposition finds itself outlawed. Unofficial manoeuvres are plotted. Resentments fester. Unnecessary expulsions occur.

Much better to bring differences out into the light of day. That was Lenin’s theory and practice. While he was not positively in favour of factions as such, Lenin’s concern lay more in emphasising the difference between honest and dishonest factions: “Every faction is convinced that *its* platform and *its* policy are the *best* means of abolishing factions, for no one regards the existence of factions as ideal. The only difference is that factions with clear, consistent, integral platforms *openly* defend *their* platforms, while unprincipled factions *hide* behind cheap shouts about their virtue, about their non-factionalism” (*ibid*). I will leave it for the intelligent reader to judge whether or not the Bambery-Callinicos-Harman-Rees faction in the SWP is honest or dishonest. Either way, there can be no doubting that it is a faction, albeit a leadership faction.

Lenin was proud of the Bolshevik *faction*. It openly defended and advocated its platform. When the Bolshevik paper *Rabochaya Gazeta* first appeared, he therefore did not hesitate to announce that it “necessarily makes its appearance as a factional publication, as a factional enterprise of the Bolsheviks”. After the defeat of the 1905 revolution and the disintegration of the mass party, he fought not for the end of factionalism, but rather he fought for the coming together of the Bolsheviks and pro-Party Mensheviks (those around Plekhanov). Lenin described the Bolsheviks as a “strong” faction and condemned “moralising, whining for their abolition”. That

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moralising and whining, it should be said, came from the likes of Trotsky.

And let those who would have it that factions by their very nature lead to splits ponder this argument of Lenin's. In the "observance in practice" of "democratic centralism, on guarantees for the rights of all minorities and for all loyal opposition, on the autonomy of every Party organisation, on recognising that all Party functionaries must be elected, accountable to the Party and subject to recall" and "their sincere and consistent application", there is "a guarantee against splits, a guarantee that the ideological struggle in the Party can and must prove fully consistent with strict organisational unity" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 10, Moscow 1977, p314). The suggestion that in consistent democratic centralism and minority factional rights we find a *guarantee* against splits might be something of an exaggeration. They do, however, provide the *best conditions* to prevent splits. Full minority rights also remove the democratic fig leaf used so frequently to cover desertion and renegacy.

So I think we can safely say that in the years that followed the 1905 revolution Lenin did not oppose factions. He was a factional leader.

After the October Revolution, the third revolution, amidst the danger of German invasion, a Left Communist faction came out against peace negotiations and for revolutionary war. Lenin not only fought them: he tolerated them. In March 1918 they had a daily paper, *Kommunist*, which carried their propaganda. Lenin also *demande*d that they take a full part in the leadership. The 7th Congress elected 15 members and eight candidate members to the central committee. Amongst them three Left Communists - Bukharin, Lomov and Uritsky - who refused to take their seats.

There was of course the 1920 ban on factions by the Party's 10th Congress. This, it should be emphasised, was an "exceptional year". Peasant discontent was welling up, demobilised Red Army men were turning to banditry, imperialism was making plans and ominous threats, "bureaucratic practices" gripped the Party and demoralisation was fast spreading among the "largely declassed" workers. Under the flag of anarchism, petty bourgeois counterrevolution was gaining strength (Kronstadt was soon to revolt). At the top of the Party there had been some fierce clashes, not least between Bukharin, Trotsky and Lenin over the trade union question. A number of factions emerged from below, the most notable being the Workers' Opposition. Its platform, written by Alexandra Kollontai, printed in 250,000 copies, won 21% of the votes in the Moscow Party in November 1920, 30% of communist miners in early 1921 and had 6% of the delegates at the 10th Party Congress.

"Assistance is on its way from the west European countries," Lenin promised the 10th Congress. "But," he added with sober realism, "it is not coming quickly enough." Under these specific circumstances he proposed a major retreat: ie, massive concessions to capitalism, which later became known as the New Economic Policy. More, he urged, as an *emergency measure*, a ban on factions. "Comrades," appealed Lenin, "this is no time to have an opposition. Either you're on this side, or on the other, but then your weapon must be a gun, and not an opposition .... Let's not have an opposi-

tion just now!” So there was nothing normal about the ban on factions nor the new (secret) rule that allowed for the expulsion of central committee members. It was not the principle Stalin turned it into (that is, excepting his own faction). “This is an extreme measure that is being adopted specially, in view of the dangerous situation.”

Lenin feared internal and external enemies would use the “luxury” of factional disputes within the “governing Party” for counterrevolutionary purposes. Hence “just now” he insisted that “there should not be the slightest trace of factionalism”. A retreat was “no time to argue about theoretical deviations”. The atmosphere of controversy was “becoming extremely dangerous and constitutes a direct threat to the dictatorship of the proletariat”.

It should be noted that, though the 10th Congress overwhelmingly voted to call for the “immediate dissolution of all groups without exception formed on the basis of one platform or another”, Lenin opposed the resolution presented by Ryazanov which would have prohibited elections according to platforms. “This is an excessive desire, which is impractical,” he declared, “and I move that we reject it” (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 32, Moscow 1977, p261). Rejected it was.

Back to today’s business. Factions in our Socialist Alliance should have definite rights. That must include the right to become a majority. To facilitate this and the process of building the Socialist Alliance, especially under today’s conditions, we would argue for inclusion of significant factions on the executive committee and as a fallback the right of recognised platforms to have a seat but no vote on the executive. Such factions should also have the right to put forward motions to the executive committee and conference. There must also be the right to publish and freely circulate partisan literature. As long as factions are loyal to the Socialist Alliance, as long as all members, irrespective of faction, diligently and fully carry out agreed assignments and fulfil all their financial obligations, such *transitional* arrangements provide the surest framework for the merger, the fusion of the principal supporting groups and the conversion of factional centres into centres that are only those of shade or trend. Instead of the present exclusiveness of groups, we urge the struggle for influence in the Socialist Alliance. ‘Work, criticise and improve’ should be the motto.

I am not suggesting the slightest watering down of politics or principles. For example, there can be no question whatsoever of dropping our stand on a federal republic and workers’ unity against the UK state, our prioritisation of politics over economic issues, our militant revolutionism, our proletarian internationalism. We fight and shall continue to fight for revolutionary communism. Needless to say, communists will not dissolve our identity in a Socialist Alliance party. We will retain Bolshevik “self-determination” when it comes to “elucidating” our policy, said Lenin (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 16, Moscow 1977, p150). We too are a definite political trend and will remain, no matter what, the foremost champions of democracy, centralism and the revolutionary road.

There cannot be the slightest doubt that big differences exist within the Socialist

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Alliance. But nothing should stand in the way of organising at the highest possible level permitted by objective circumstances. All revolutionary and left socialists and communists can be concentrated into one organisation. And that is what we must do. Not to do so would be criminal.

The theoretical differences that at present divide us should not be glossed over. Members of the Socialist Alliance might not agree on the nature of the former USSR, the exact way to overcome Labourism, or whether the Taliban and other such movements in the Islamic world are counterrevolutionary or semi-revolutionary. But we should be resolutely united on the *imperative need* to fight for the growth of Socialist Alliance organisations and establishing it as a powerful national party. In this period of reaction we are duty bound to come together in defence of socialism in general and of partyism in particular. The more powerful reaction, the stronger must be our party spirit.

## 9. Programme

Lindsey German's full-page article 'The future of the Socialist Alliance' repays careful study (*Socialist Worker* May 5 2001). Its contradictions and silences abound with unintended meaning. The comrade starts out by praising the "take-off" made by the Socialist Alliance - implicitly in England alone. Wales and Scotland do not rate a passing mention. Anyway a significant minority of former Labour activists have switched to the Socialist Alliance. Blair - supposedly - betrayed them and his 1997 election promises. Incidentally that still did not stop the SWP giving Labour an automatic vote in 2001 where there was no socialist candidate.

Independent socialists and trade union militants have apparently come to us too because the Socialist Alliance is "not simply an electoral machine but a campaigning activist organisation" (her "serious alliance" is step forward but remains essentially a variant of the electoralist united front of a special kind announced just previously by comrade John Rees - see *International Socialism* No90, spring 2001). As for the revolutionary left, it has achieved an "unprecedented" level of unity. Not quite. She surely forgets the first two congresses of the Communist Party of Great Britain - over the years 1920 and 1921 virtually all revolutionaries in Britain entered its ranks.

Caveats aside, the comrade is surely right when she declares that we are witnessing the "first significant break with Labourism", certainly since World War II. Socialism is making a comeback. Credit where credit is due. The SWP and its cadre have done sterling work helping to bring this about.

Naturally the bulk of Socialist Alliance recruits - in particular former Labour Party activists, militant trade unionists and independent socialists - envisage constructing a direct alternative to the Labour Party. By a long chalk most want to see the Socialist Alliance transform itself into a multi-tendency party. The *Weekly Worker* has provided an unequalled platform for these comrades and our writers have in turn raised the prospect of an all-Britain party based on the twin pillars of democracy and centralism.

Comrade German recognises that, given the momentum, the Socialist Alliance must move onwards. A loose, purely electoralist nonaggression pact - favoured by the Socialist Party in England and Wales - is not a serious option. "It would represent," she writes, "an abandonment of a highly successful movement" which the SWP has played a prominent part in building. Returning to isolation is therefore ruled out. "There is no going back", announced an SWP central committee communiqué in confirmation (*Weekly Worker* June 21 2001). Good. So what about the Socialist Alliance moving towards a party? At this present moment in time such an outcome is not to the liking of the SWP leadership. Building the sect still rules.



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Unfortunately, instead of honestly answering the many-headed call for a Socialist Alliance party and taking up the challenge of leadership, the comrade resorts to banal subterfuges. Frankly comrade German verges on the disingenuous. She maintains that SPEW favours the party option. In fact Peter Taaffe and co have cloaked their barely concealed hostility to the Socialist Alliance by *counterpoising* it to an abstract “new mass workers’ party” which they claim to want, but do nothing to bring about. Meanwhile they insist upon the virtues of a “federal” Socialist Alliance and their principle of “consensus”: ie, SPEW exercises a veto.

What about comrade German? Why her objection to a Socialist Alliance party? The working class “has sustained some of the worst” “defeats” over the last two decades, she says. Remember this from a prominent leader of an organisation which has - for its own reasons - been banging on about the supposed “upturn” in the class struggle since the late 1980s. No doubt in part due to the period of defeats, Labourism still holds the allegiance of the “bulk of the organised working class”. Nothing new here though. Throughout the 20th century Labourism occupied that dominant position. Nevertheless our degree of support is “still relatively small”. A 5% vote is celebrated as good news. Consequently, she maintains, because of our modest progress the creation of a Socialist Alliance party means “that the SWP would dominate”. The result could not be the sort of “mass” party the SWP would like to see. There are bound to be countless factional disputes.

Leave aside whether or not the SWP would “dominate”. Here, in the tail of comrade German’s argument, we find the sting: ie, what the SWP really fears. The comrades instinctively recognise that under *party* conditions - where many views contend - fragile bureaucratic unity would rapidly dissolve. The integrity of the SWP would be called into question under conditions of unity and factional disputes.

Coming from someone who claims to stand in the tradition of Bolshevism, a terror of factional disputes is strange. Even those with only the haziest knowledge of the Russian Revolution will recall the fierce clashes that characterised relations, not only between the various factions of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, but within the Bolsheviks themselves. Far from being a weakness, that proved to be an invaluable strength. It trained a *revolutionary* working class.

Nor did that *culture* depend on crude membership figures, election votes or even organic connections with left moving workers, as comrade German implies. From subterranean beginnings under conditions of extreme illegality, through the lows of black reaction and exile, to the giddy heights of state power the Bolsheviks fought one factional battle after another. And though comrade German might now object to the Socialist Alliance following that example, invariably arguments were conducted openly - in books and pamphlets and in the party and factional press.

Does the Bolshevik culture of permanent debate drive away advanced workers? No, on the contrary, it is the bureaucratic regime that stultifies intellectual life in most sects that brilliantly does that. The Bolsheviks did not win the loyalty of virtually the entire

working class *despite* their factional struggles but *because* of their confidence and willingness to engage in them.

As Liz Davies vividly describes in her book *Through the looking glass*, the Labour Party bureaucracy goes to great lengths to shut down debate. The result at the grass roots level is atrophy. A definite technocratic danger stalks our ranks too. Something our executive committee freely admits and recognises as a problem needing to be overcome. Socialist Alliance meetings often concern purely routine matters - finances, leaflet drops, Saturday stalls, etc. Dull, uninspiring, unattractive. The only solution is giving debate free rein and, yes, risking countless factional disputes. For a start, a political opening, followed by enough time for free-flowing debate, must be included on every local Socialist Alliance agenda as a matter of course.

At the root of comrade German's profoundly bureaucratic aversion to factional disputes is the SWP's sectarian shibboleth that there must be ideological "agreement". She says: "Socialists should be for the maximum unity on the left where it is possible to reach agreement," By this is explicitly meant the "unity of ideas". The Socialist Alliance is though, she triumphantly counters, an "inclusive organisation" containing reformists and revolutionaries. It does "not demand the adoption of a full revolutionary programme for people to join". A hopelessly muddled series of formulations. Despite that the message is clear. Oppose unity in a single party.

Her argument is fallacious. Under non-revolutionary circumstances the practical difference between 'revolutionaries' and 'reformists' comes down to what reforms we fight for and how we fight for them. The real line of demarcation in the Socialist Alliance is therefore much more likely to be between those who would limit us to localistic and narrow trade union demands and those who would seek to elevate our struggles to the plane of high politics.

Furthermore comrade German's underlying premise is totally alien to authentic Leninism. The Bolsheviks only required members to *accept* the party programme as the basis of joint activity. There was no demand to *agree*: eg, there was a sustained tug of war between Lenin and Bukharin over the crucial issue of the self-determination of nations. Lenin fought doggedly for it to be retained in the party programme. Bukharin - when he was a 'left' communist - tried to replace it with an economic phrase about the self-determination of working class people. Despite Lenin's authority the 'left' communists did score congress victories. It hardly needs adding that Lenin's disagreement with the resulting programmatic resolutions did not make him ineligible for membership. He fought on to rectify things.

What comrade German proposes in lieu of a party is a "serious" alliance. "Full time staff", a "system of affiliations", a "national steering committee", "delegate meetings", a regular "newsletter", campaigning, etc. CPGB comrades have, of course, consistently advocated such *transitional* measures on the executive and liaison committees. But we must aim higher and go further. Let us together finally leave behind the sect mentality. Why not a Socialist Alliance weekly political paper? A collective organiser

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and educator, in which airing different opinions is considered normal and healthy. Why not a Socialist Alliance party with full membership rights and membership control, a partyist regime under which our present-day ‘parties’ and groups reconstitute themselves as factions, or platforms, or mere shades of opinion which might or might not publish their own “newsletters”?

The omens point in that direction. There exist common finances, a common leadership, common election candidates, a common manifesto. The unity of ideas will come in due course as we work alongside each other ... but the unity of ideas ought not to be erected as a precondition, an artificial barrier *against* our ongoing process of *practical* unification.

Lenin in his day, it will be recalled, urged communists and revolutionary socialists in Great Britain - despite bitter divisions on key questions and small numbers - to forge a united party. The CPGB in 1920-21 did not exceed the 2,000 membership mark. Suffice to say, by forming a party, the comparatively tiny vanguard could by so doing engage with the Labour left in a united front and begin to engage with strategic sections of the masses.

In the early 1920s the CPGB successfully got members elected into the Westminster parliament, made great headway in the trade unions and took the lead in forming the National Leftwing Movement inside the Labour Party. Only a democratic and centralist party guided by the most advanced theory could carry out such a series of bold initiatives and complex manoeuvres. The lesson is obvious.

An arresting contradiction. The very issue of *Socialist Worker* which carried comrade German’s article reported the splendid news that SWP members in Scotland at last had joined the SSP. On May 1 2001 they constituted themselves as an SSP platform: ie, a recognised faction. Politically it is based on the ‘Where we stand’ column carried in *Socialist Worker* every week. With one important, and essentially correct, addendum: “We support the right of self-determination for the Scottish people and extension of the powers of the Scottish parliament. Scotland remains, however, part of the UK imperialist state. Together with English and Welsh workers we face a common enemy. Scottish workers remain part of British-wide trade unions. We stand for a united fightback by Scottish, English and Welsh workers.” Whether or not this is for reassuring doubters or is intended to have practical effect we have yet to see.

Revealingly, exercising the right to form that faction was insisted upon not by Chris Bambery or Julie Waterson. It was Tommy Sheridan, Alan McCombes and Allan Green ... against SWP objections. The SSP leadership preferred the SWP to operate in the open rather than secretly. Bambery and co eventually had to concede the point

There is, of course, a circle to square. For the SWP. That explains their initial dogged reluctance to establish themselves as an SSP platform. How could the “former” SWP members in Scotland operate as a faction in the SSP and yet go along with a ban on factions within their own mother organisation in England and Wales? The problem is, of course, entirely of the SWP’s making and the solution lies entirely in its hands.

There is a further problem. If comrade German's restrictive criteria *vis-à-vis* the Socialist Alliance had been applied in Scotland there would have been no merger. Has the SSP a "unity of ideas"? Has it a mass base in the working class? Has it a "full revolutionary programme"? The answer is three times 'no'. The SSP began essentially as the organisational merger of what was then Scottish Militant Labour with a disparate range of leftwing grouplets and independents who operated under the Scottish Socialist Alliance banner. SML constituted an overwhelming majority incidentally.

Annual conferences of the SSP continue to show that there remain profound differences of principle: eg, Scottish independence and an independent socialist Scotland versus working class unity and the fight for a federal republic. Far from ending that situation, the SWP has qualitatively shifted the centre of gravity.

I am sure the SWP will sooner or later rethink things through. What works in Scotland can work in England and Wales ... and for that matter in Britain taken as a whole.

### **9.1. Building upon solid foundations**

The next step for the Socialist Alliance and the SSP is surely self-evident. Move towards forming an all-Britain party, solidly grounded upon a clear-sighted and principled programme. Only from such foundations can we build a party - in the scientific sense of being the advanced *part* of a class - and pursue the correct strategy and tactics.

Our inability boldly to take the lead in high politics and to adopt a serious orientation towards the Labour Party dissipated much of the enormous energy on display during the general election campaign, a weakness that stems entirely from the fact that we still inhabit not only a *pre-party* situation, but also a *pre-programme* situation.

There is a vital interrelationship between the working class party and its programme. The programme is not some afterthought - mere window-dressing - nor an eclectic list of election pledges. Our programme has a twofold function. On the one side it represents our armoury of chosen demands and principles; on the other side it provides a *dynamic* road map, which, through constant debate, allows the working class to navigate the shortest, least costly route from today's cramped and squalid sociopolitical conditions to the far horizons of a truly human world. Real civilisation begins when humanity finally leaves behind the last vestiges of alienation, state repression and exploitation of one by another.

The programme owes nothing to holy script, fixed, timeless and inviolate. On the contrary, given a major political rupture: eg, overthrow of the monarchy constitution, partition of Britain and its workers' movement by nationalists, establishment of an EU superstate, etc, various passages of the programme ought to be suitably reformulated.

The party - being the advanced part of the working class - animates, empowers and verifies the programme. But in many ways the party is itself a superstructure growing

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from the programme. Recruits are motivated by its inspiring and theoretically proven goals. They are trained and encadred by the ongoing mass struggle to realise its immediate demands. Methods and day-to-day tactics flow from the strategy and aims systematically unfolded in the programme. In that sense the programme is responsible for actively generating the party. The main determination runs from the programme and its principles to the party and its organisation and membership.

Without an accurate and constantly tested programme, dangers threaten at every turn: adventurism, ditching or downgrading principles, opinion poll chasing, careerism, blithely walking into a counterrevolutionary bloodbath.

Confirmation of the above warnings comes from none other than comrade German. Somewhat ironic. Her organisation has, after all, an ingrained and heavy-handed antithesis towards any kind of programme. Furthermore, despite a five years too late entry into the SSP, the comrades still manifest an unwillingness to countenance the speedy transformation of the Socialist Alliance into a party. Nevertheless comrade German forthrightly explained in the article, 'The future of the Socialist Alliance' what negative consequences might follow if a "full revolutionary programme" is not adopted.

Under the testing circumstances of crisis - not even a war, but just a racist backlash - a party that had been "built on minimal demands" could "fudge or divide down the middle". A recipe, says the comrade, either for "paralysis or for splits" (*Socialist Worker* May 5). Quite right.

The Socialist Alliance should take comrade German at her word. Spurn all attempts to "fudge" principles. Uniting on the 80% where we agree is good politics. But ignoring the 20% where we disagree is simply to follow the minimalist line of least resistance. Instead, search out the truth. Gain strength from honestly admitting mistakes and shortcomings. Take the greatest care in painstakingly developing a "full revolutionary programme" and ensuring that it is comprehensively informed by the most advanced theory available. In a word - Marxism.

That will not prove as easy as it might appear at first glance. Within the Socialist Alliance many of our allies are prone to defend programmatic positions significantly to the *right* of what they formally adhere to in their own press and other such factional publications. Apart from showing that the ideas of revolution are habitually viewed ritualistically by such comrades: ie, as part of a private, confessional, belief system - rather than as vitally necessary for the working class, how else can one explain such seemingly perverse behaviour?

There are two main determinants. The first is the unfavourable balance of class forces and the nature of the period. The second, and most important, is theoretical weakness.

Let us begin by briefly discussing the period. Neo-liberal capitalism's temporary triumph and the tragic defeats suffered by the working class since the 1980s mean huge conservative pressures bear down upon the principal socialist and communist

organisations supporting the Socialist Alliance - SWP, CPGB, SPEW, AWL, ISG and Workers Power. What goes for the six applies no less to the smaller groups and the freelancers in the Socialist Alliance too. The official workers' movement is still exhibiting a tectonic drift to the right and occasionally erupts into violent witch-hunting: an inhospitable climate for revolutionaries, not made any more tolerable by the self-deluding nonsense about the "crisis of expectations" and "fructification of hope" that greeted the election of the first Blair government in May 1997. Class struggle has, in fact, remained mired at historically low levels. Moreover, democracy in the Labour Party has been systematically degraded into stage-managed rallies and focus groups. What Kinnock began, Blair completed. The TUC general council and the grandees of the big trade union battalions nowadays function as a docile lobby group. Hot air occasionally comes forth in a gaseous reminder of the past. Practically, however, general secretaries rely on governmental crumbs. Calling strikes is terribly old-fashioned. Calling them off is *à la mode*. In textbook fashion the trade union bureaucracy acts as a calming - privileged - intermediary between boss and worker, capital and labour. Simultaneously, there is the growth of nationalist and semi-nationalist ideas, anarchist and semi-anarchist ideas. Bill Morris has even, toyfully, suggested a return to trade union backing for liberalism. These are the politics of despair.

Nonetheless, if, as we possibly are, moving out from the shadow lands of ideological reaction into another, more promising period, then it is hardly surprising that the new mood this engenders is headed first and foremost not by Marxists - who uphold what first appear to be counter-intuitive, non-common-sensical ideas - but by well placed, and thus accidentally influential individuals: eg, George Monbiot, Susan George, Naomi Klein, José Bové. Such fleeting world-historic personalities - like father Gapon in 1905 - articulate both reaction and counter-reaction. They rail against the present, however, they cannot grasp the future. Instead of using the past as the bridge to the future, they reject it. Marxism failed. Bolshevism inevitably sired Stalin and the gulag system. On closer examination, unsurprisingly, the panaceas offered by these 'original' thinkers - fair exchange, ignore state power, reform WTO, Zapatistaism, localist self-sufficiency - turn out to be little more than warmed over pre-Marxist fantasies. Biting, albeit partial, critiques of existing capitalism. Significant, given the period, but useless as a practical course forward.

In the meantime reaction blurs vision and lowers sights. Every week *Socialist Worker* routinely declares that to "achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party" ('What we stand for'). Our SWP allies nevertheless employed their weight in the Socialist Alliance to ensure that we went into the 2001 general election standing on "minimal demands", a manifesto which failed to make any propaganda arguments for revolution, and a series of priority pledges which did not bring to the fore agitation for extreme democracy. In essence the comrades wanted to occupy the ground deserted

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by old Labour.

Originally, of course, social democracy - of almost all varieties - purported to be committed to a socialist transformation, only using non-Marxist - statist and technocratic, peaceful and parliamentary - means. Ends determine means. However, means also determine ends. There exists, in other words, an inescapable, reciprocal, relationship between the two.

In Britain, 100 years of Labourism amply proves that reformism logically and actually resolves into an *active* promotion of capitalism, crucially wage slavery (European social democracy and the mass 'official communist' parties in Italy and France could be cited with equal effect). Beginning as a defence of the working class *within* capitalism, the high point of Labourism proved to be state capitalism with mass welfarist provision - something which curbed the law of value in the service of the law of value.

During the long post-World War II boom, capitalist reproduction could benefit from conceding, or promoting, the social democratic state. No longer. New Labour marks the final close of that particular, secular, phase of post-World War II capitalism. Nowadays a second-term Tony Blair trumpets the virtues of private finance, partnership with big business and privatisation. Of course the state - and its role in propping up capitalist accumulation through intervention, subsidies, government spending and its swollen budget - has not gone away. Nonetheless all pretence of representing any kind of alternative social system has been abandoned. Redrafting Labour's clause four was of huge symbolic importance.

The attempt to make the Socialist Alliance a home for Labourites as Labourites, by disguising ourselves in its threadbare programme, is not only dishonest, but, as comrade German explains, dangerous. Labourites can be won and need to be won to Marxism. Clause four-type claims that capitalism can be peaceably reformed into its opposite are doomed to abject failure. Inevitably the social base feeding such a perspective has withered since the halcyon days of the mid-1940s. Social democracy demoralises and demobilises.

The notion that the Socialist Alliance had before it an instant constituency was fallacious. Blair, Hague and Kennedy vied before the electorate in the 2001 general election as managers of the national capitalist economy. Between them they accounted for virtually the entire poll. The modest fringe votes gained by the Socialist Alliance, the Scottish Socialist Party and Scargill's Socialist Labour Party reflect our reality. Defensive recourse to 40% of the electorate who abstained is as silly as it is desperate. The truth must be squarely faced, no matter how unpalatable.

Under these circumstances the Socialist Alliance should seek to patiently educate and organise the advanced part of the working class around its *authentic* programme. That must include united front work with the Labourite left, but no more attempts to give the kiss of life to the anti-socialist tradition of Labourism.

What the working class requires for its own self-liberation is the sort of party and

the sort of programme which enabled the working class to successfully reach the commanding heights of state power in Russia. A Bolshevik party and a Bolshevik minimum-maximum programme. The maximum programme describes the socialist transition period to communism and universal human freedom. The maximum programme advances *practically* according to the spread and momentum of the world revolution. Neither full socialism nor communism is possible within the borders of any single country.

Obviously both sections of the programme are internally connected. They form an integral whole. To separate one from the other - for example, to lop off or leave aside the maximum programme - robs the minimum programme of its *proletarian* and *internationalist* revolutionary content and reduces it to no more than a version of bourgeois democratic radicalism of the 1776 or 1789 kind.

The 21st century was ushered in with the slogans of anti-capitalism coming from a tiny, but growing minority. There now exists within society a definite anti-capitalist mood. Capitalist triumphalism of the 1990s has produced its opposite. That mood must be consolidated into an organised movement around a clear programme. Without the maximum programme, the Socialist Alliance cannot hope to get a hearing from this new audience. Without a minimum programme, the anti-capitalist movement will fall into a declining routine of trailing meetings of the IMF, World Bank, etc. In other words the minimum-maximum programme connects the struggles of today with the vistas of general freedom.

Unfortunately a whole generation of leftwing activists have been miseducated into believing that the Bolsheviks discarded their programme after February 1917 and the abdication of tsar Nicholas II. In fact the end of tsarism and the emergence of a protracted dual power situation - a bourgeois provisional government (class content being determined by politics, not personnel) alongside which stood the workers' and peasants' soviets - caused Lenin to *modify* - not, as the whole school of modern-day Trotskyism contends, "break" with - his minimum programme.

As an aside, that miseducation explains why Martin Thomas of the AWL mocks our minimum programme. According to our wag, it is "the brightest red on the cover, but pale pink inside" (*Weekly Worker* May 10). He goes on to illustrate his contention by criticising our minimum demand: ie, one which we raise today under the conditions of capitalism - for a federal republic. It is "without class definition", he tut-tuts. For the want of anything better, the AWL highlights "spontaneous" issues such as the NHS, wages, etc. Banal economism still passes for profundity in such circles. Needless to say, in eschewing the minimum programme the AWL hopelessly entangles itself in all manner of barbed contradictions. After all, the AWL has recently undergone a conversion to a federal republic in Britain - helped along in no small measure by Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group.

Does the AWL's call only apply to the future, after the revolution? If so, it lacks all concreteness. The CPGB raises the federal republic slogan because it answers the



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current - legitimate - aspirations of the peoples of Scotland and Wales to self-determination. At the same time it embodies the principle of working class unity.

Socialist revolution is almost by definition the act of a united working class. Communists certainly have a preference for centralised states today ... and under socialism. Only the existence of a living national question in Scotland and Wales prevents us from immediately advocating a democratic centralist state - yes, under capitalism - in opposition to the present monarchical unity of the kingdom of England, the kingdom of Scotland, the principality of Wales and the province of Northern Ireland.

Might comrade Thomas's implied insistence upon a socialist or a working class content to a federal republic also apply to the AWL's call for a federal Ireland? What about abortion rights, equality for homosexuals, etc? Or are these demands too only put forward under the condition that they are realised by a workers' government? For its part the CPGB is quite clear. The working class must take the lead in the struggle for democracy under capitalism on all fronts. Without that no *political* self-movement is possible, certainly not a socialist revolution.

Comrade Thomas gets worked up into a right lather by our supposed "party-fetishism". He cannot grasp why we should want to reforge: ie, remake through revolutionary means - the Communist Party of Great Britain. Eighty percent of its history is for him completely rotten. Let us explain to him once again our ABCs.

There are CPGB members, but no real CPGB - as a *party* - to point out the obvious. Our central aim as CPGB members is to reforge the CPGB. Why? Because the working class in Britain, and elsewhere, requires the highest form of organisation if it is to fight capitalism and win. Its scientific name, for Marx and Engels, and after them Lenin, was 'Communist Party'. A Communist Party that has a revolutionary programme and is based on the principles and practice of democratic centralism is a precondition for a successful socialist revolution. Necromancy holds no attraction for us. The CPGB of 1920, 1926, 1935 or 1977 can safely rest in its grave. The poetry we write is of the future, not the past.

Comrade Thomas likewise ridicules our contention that, without a Communist Party, the working class is "nothing", but with it "everything". For him "nothing" simply means 'nullity'. How can a nullity, the comrade patronisingly chuckles, become anything, a something, let alone everything? Of course this formulation of ours is directly adapted from Lenin. He spoke of the "working class mass" being "nothing" without organisation. With organisation "it is everything" (quoted in C Silahtar *Party discipline* London 1979, p24). Far from using the term "nothing" in comrade Thomas's prosaic, everyday sense, Lenin, and we, philosophically recognise that every "nothing" must by definition be a something and as such is in the process of becoming. The beginning of any process, therefore, contains both being and nothing: the unity of being and nothing, or being which is at the same time non-being.

The same can be said specifically of the working class. Without a Communist Party,

the working class is a slave class. As a class in itself it is nothing. But with a Communist Party the working class can become a class for itself: ie, a class that knows itself and its historic task of fighting for universal freedom. Between nothing and everything there is a process of becoming. We do not start with a finished Communist Party as something outside the working class. The Communist Party is the leading, vanguard, part of the working class and comes into being through the class and the class struggle - not, as comrade Thomas suggests in his criticism of us, from the outside. A working class that has formed itself into a Communist Party is everything, but again in the process of ceasing to be and becoming something else. As the working class liberates humanity and in the process itself, workers cease to be workers and simply become associated producers and, more to the point, rounded, and thus for the first time, fully human beings.

But let us once more return to the thread of our argument. We were talking about an incorrect reading of the history of Bolshevism and the rejection of the minimum programme as such. An unexceptional, but representative example of doing this is to be found in *International Socialism* No81, where Alex Callinicos innocently quotes Comintern's 'Theses on tactics', simultaneously claiming it as a repudiation of the minimum programme *per se* and as a pretext for the SWP's 'Action programme' - which is in actual fact no more than a "minimalist" set of demands of the type recently denounced by his comrade, Lindsay German. The SWP's 'Action programme' could easily be met within capitalism and within the existing constitution to boot. The pivotal question of the state is entirely absent.

Anyway, let us quote Callinicos's words:

"The communist parties do not put forward minimum programmes which could serve to strengthen and improve the tottering foundations of capitalism. The communists' main aim is to destroy the capitalist system. But in order to achieve their aim the communist parties must put forward demands expressing the immediate needs of the working class. The communists must organise mass campaigns to fight for these demands regardless of whether they are compatible with the continuation of the capitalist system. The communist parties should be concerned not with the viability and competitive capacity of capitalist industry or the stability of the capitalist economy, but with proletarian poverty, which cannot and must not be endured any longer ...

"In place of the minimum programme of centrism and reformists, the Communist International offers a struggle for the concrete demands of the proletariat which, in their totality, challenge the power of the bourgeoisie, organise the proletariat and mark out the different stages of the struggle for its dictatorship" (A Alder [ed] *Theses, resolutions and manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International* London 1980, pp285-86).

Clearly the target of Comintern is not the minimum programme as such. Rather it is the minimum programme of "socialisation or nationalisation" put forward by the

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*centrists* and *reformists* - which was to be achieved peacefully in an attempt to ameliorate the conditions of the workers, boost demand and thereby stabilise society (*ibid* p285). As the resolution explicitly states, the understanding that capitalism cannot bring about the “long-term improvement of the proletariat” does not imply that the workers have to “renounce the fight for immediate practical demands until after it has established its dictatorship” (*ibid* p285). Not at all.

Comrades like Alex Callinicos forget, or consign to the dump, the Bolshevik minimum-maximum programme. All that is remembered is the minimum-maximum programme propounded by the German social democracy of Bebel, Kautsky, Bernstein, Noske, David and Scheidemann. Like the Bolsheviks it arranged its programme - drafted by Kautsky - in two sections. The minimum programme “limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society” - furthermore, it must be emphasised, these reforms were within the framework of kaiserdom.

The approaches of Bolshevism and German social democracy were therefore superficially similar in that they both had minimum sections of their programmes. However, in their attitude towards the state and world revolution one finds a qualitative difference.

True, the maximum programme of German social democracy “promised” socialism. But between the minimum and maximum programme there was no bridge provided by the mass struggle to extend democracy up to the point of dual power. Moreover, apart from ‘holiday speechifying’, the rightist leaders of German social democracy - especially the trade union officials - had no time for the maximum programme. Indeed they eyed the maximum programme with greater and greater degrees of embarrassment. It had nothing to do with their daily practice and ought, therefore, to be buried. Blair and his arguments against Labour’s old clause four come to mind.

The chief theorist of rightist German social democracy and would-be gravedigger of the maximum programme was Eduard Bernstein, the so-called father of revisionism. In a cocksure diatribe against the maximum programme, he famously proposed that the “ultimate aim of socialism is nothing, but the movement is everything” (E Bernstein *Evolutionary socialism* New York 1961, p202). By the way, do those comrades who want the Socialist Alliance to be a home for Labourites as Labourites repeat this line of reasoning unconsciously? Let us hope not. Trimming or hiding our principles in the search for popularity has, as we have outlined above, a terrible logic.

Bernstein and others of a similar ilk articulated the interests of a counterrevolutionary labour bureaucracy which, after the repeal of Bismarck’s anti-socialist laws, flourished at the top of German social democracy. For them the huge party apparatus, its big parliamentary fraction and the powerful trade unions were ends in themselves.

With their encouragement the minimum programme metamorphosed into the new maximum. Effectively, German social democracy degenerated into a party that sought little more than petty, trade union-type reforms. An aged Frederick Engels and later Rosa Luxemburg bemoaned the cowardly failure of German social democracy to

immediately bring to the fore the demand for the abolition of the monarchy and the imperial constitution. Much to her credit, Luxemburg not only lambasted the right, but their centrist critics too - most notably Kautsky.

In the hallowed name of preserving party unity, the centrists refused to risk a split with revisionism and the right. The awful consequence for the working class was the collapse of social democracy into a "stinking corpse" with the outbreak of inter-imperialist war in August 1914. An overwhelming majority of leaders and officials rushed to defend the imperialist fatherland.

To reject the bifurcated programme of German social democracy, especially its truncated and purely reformist minimum programme, is one thing. Rejecting the minimum-maximum programme of Bolshevism is, though, altogether wrong. To do so is to throw out the proverbial baby along with the bathwater. The Bolshevik programme must, on the contrary, be carefully studied and its essential logic and structure emulated - of course, taking into account specific national and historical conditions.

## **9.2. Programme and the misreading of history**

For the first time since 1920-21 there is the distinct chance of uniting all serious revolutionaries in Britain in a single organisation and thereby starting the historically necessary process of building a viable mass working class party. The CPGB is absolutely clear, however. As an aim we are against any and all centrist halfway houses, attempts to revive old Labourism, an artificial Labour Representation Committee, etc.

The Socialist Alliance must be won to and built upon definite organisational principles: democracy and centralism. In the interests of the whole, that is what we communists are committed to achieving.

As we have said before, our democracy gives us cohesion and direction. Vital. By the same measure, downgrading centralism is effectively to surrender and abandon the struggle for socialism. Our enemy's state machine is highly organised and prepared, if need be, to crush the green, left Labourite, Socialist Alliance government envisaged by SWP political fiction (*Socialist Review* December 2000). We in the Socialist Alliance can afford not the slightest illusion, not even a tincture of doubt, regarding capitalism's commitment to democracy. Capital and democracy are antithetical. Unless we wish to share the fate of Chile in 1973, matching their state centralism with our party centralism is vital. Anything else is to play irresponsible reformist or libertarian games ... the ultimate consequence being counterrevolutionary terror.

Democracy and centralism are complementary principles for the working class and should form an unbreakable whole. Democracy is the means which allows us to unite in and test centralised actions to the maximum effect - all members of the Socialist Alliance voluntarily carry out agreed decisions, because, even if they disagree with them, at least they understand the arguments. Our model here is, of course, the Bolshevik Party. We must modify and adapt according to our exact circumstances but

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neither history nor logic offers anything better.

Unfortunately, but revealingly, the SWP failed to send a representative to any meetings of the Socialist Alliance's pre-manifesto programme commission that did the preparatory work for the March 10 2001 policy conference in Birmingham. While the CPGB, ISG, AWL, Workers Power and the RDG were all eager to present their ideas, the SWP exhibited a pronounced aversion to serious discussions about programme. This weakness - and it is a profound one - has its origins in the personality of Tony Cliff. Until his death in April 2000 the comrade exercised an overarching influence on the SWP's theory and practice. Evidently, even as a disembodied ghost, he continues to hover over events and exert a material hold.

For Cliff, the fact that the SWP - and before it the International Socialists and the Socialist Review Group - had no programme was a positive advantage. Absence of programme was perceived to serve the interests of 'party' building. The final aim is nothing, the 'party' everything. Unencumbered by an elaborated, long-term, strategic road map and a democratically agreed set of binding principles, the SWP leadership could perform the most sudden about-turns. Practice has been about swimming with what was perceived as the strongest tide.

Without a programme and a democratic internal life, the rank and file cannot judge or control the leadership, nor can they hold it to account. Not surprisingly then, since the SWP came into existence as a trend, its history has been one of zigzags - adopting a neutral stance during the Korean War, giving fulsome backing to the NLF in Vietnam, providing an alibi for the regime of Slobadan Milosevic over Kosova; turning to 'electoralism', after decades of automatically leaving parliament to Labour, preaching against the popular fronts of the 1930s and attempting to cement one in the Anti-Nazi League during the 1970s; mocking the fight for a general strike in the 1984-5 miners' Great Strike, while demanding that a craven TUC 'get off its knees' and call 'the' general strike in 1992, etc.

A recent example of this get-rich-quick 'method' was the courting of green MEPs, aligning with Jubilee 2000 charity mongers and cheerleading the antics of anarchists in the anti-capitalist movement. Virtually any line can be adopted as long as it goes to build the 'party' - usually measured arithmetically in crude membership figures.

Needless to say, the approach outlined above is contrary to the spirit and example of Bolshevism which Cliff and his successors claim as their model for the SWP - at least since the turn from 'Luxemburgism' in the late 1960s. Lenin's party, it should be emphasised, united around and fought on the basis of a minimum-maximum programme first presented to the 2nd Congress back in 1903. It is surely no exaggeration to say that without the revolutionary programme there would have been no revolutionary party or successful revolutionary movement in Russia. Tactical flexibility is, of course, essential for any serious working class party or organisation. The Bolsheviks indeed showed a commendable ability to manoeuvre. Underground committee work gave way to mass agitation, street combat to a semi-legal press and parliamentary

activity, etc. Of course, even when it comes to programmatic strategy and principles there must be room to question and change in the light of new opportunities. This the Bolsheviks did - for example over the land question in 1917, when they 'stole' the agrarian programme of the Socialist Revolutionaries. There was also *modification* of the programme due to new circumstances: eg, the fall of tsarism and dual power in 1917. But such changes only came about after serious, often exhaustive, debate and a democratic vote.

The Bolsheviks considered the programme of cardinal importance. That is why attempts to compromise or water it down met with the fiercest hostility. Lenin savaged legal Marxists, anti-theory strikists or economists, and leftist boycottists alike in countless open polemics.

Around the programme the Bolsheviks were able to organise the workers not merely in defence of their own economic terms and conditions but as the hegemon or vanguard of the democratic revolution. The tiny working class was empowered by the scientific rigour and scope of the programme - it summed up the Marxist analysis of Russia, the attitude of the workers to the state and the various classes, put Russia's revolution in the context of the world revolution and outlined the practice that flowed from it. As a result the workers came to master, or take a lead in, all political questions - national self-determination, fighting anti-Semitism, war and peace, women's equality, etc - and crucially were able to put themselves at the head of the broad peasant masses in the fight to overthrow tsarism.

The SWP's 'Action programme' would seem to have represented a break with the past. After first being published in September 1998, it was not only reproduced as a glossy brochure but there was an effort to get labour movement bodies to adopt it as their own and finance propaganda around it. Sad to say, what we actually had was another zigzag, not a conversion to Bolshevism.

As we will show, the 'Action programme' is based on a fundamentally incorrect analysis of the period and, for all the revolutionary verbiage employed to sell it, the contents amount to little more than a repackaging of economism - a widely misused term which must be properly defined.

Naturally economists define economism in a particularly jejune fashion. That way, in their own minds at least, they have to be found completely innocent of the ugly charge. Hence the plaintive cry, 'I can't understand why you in the CPGB call us economists'. If we have heard it once, we have heard it a thousand times.

Here, below, are four specially selected, but representative, examples of economism self-defined; it is a self-replicating Hydra. Let us begin, as is fitting, with Cliff's decoy of a definition: "Socialists should limit their agitation to purely economic issues, first to the industrial plant, then to inter-plant demands, and so on. Secondly, from the narrow economic agitation the workers would learn, through experience of the struggle itself, the need for politics, without the need for socialists to carry out agitation on the general political and social issues facing the Russian people as a whole" (T Cliff *Lenin*

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Vol 1, London 1975, p59).

Next an 'official communist' dictionary definition: "Its proponents wanted to limit the tasks of the working class movement to economic struggle (improving labour conditions, higher wages, etc). They held that political struggle should be waged by the liberal bourgeoisie alone" (I Frolov [ed] *Dictionary of philosophy* Moscow 1984, p118). The ISG's Bob Jenkins can speak as the head of orthodox Trotskyism: economism is "orientating to daily trade union struggles" and this "leads them to underestimate the important new political issues and movements unless they are to be found in the unions" (*Socialist Outlook* January 2001). Finally we turn to the AWL's Pete Radcliff, for a definition from unorthodox Trotskyism: "Economism was the term Lenin used to describe the politics and approach of revolutionaries who exclude themselves from the political struggle ... and merely concentrated on trade union agitation" (*Weekly Worker* January 11 2001).

Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong. Even against the "old economism" of 1894-1902, Lenin fielded the term in the "broad sense" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 5, Moscow 1977, p317). The *principal* feature of economism is a general tendency to lag behind the spontaneous movement, and to downplay the centrality of consistent and extreme democracy. That is why in 1916 Lenin attacked those Bolsheviks who, citing decadent capitalism's inability to grant meaningful reforms, dismissed the demand for national self-determination. He branded this trend "imperialist economism" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 23, Moscow 1977, p13).

Countless other manifestations of economism could be cited: eg, *atheist economism*, which, relying on technological and scientific progress, dismisses the need to combat religious superstition, or *Trotskyite economism*, which equates the former USSR with some kind of a workers' state due to property forms. Be that as it may, economism remains economism.

Hence not all economists concentrate, or limit, their agitation to trade union or workerist perspectives: eg, in banal rightist form: 'Leave issues like Scottish and Welsh devolution to Blair. We will fight for higher pay and build opposition to the anti-trade union laws': eg, in leftist form: forget the struggle for a republic within capitalism - "instead of a political revolution, a general strike for socialist revolution" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 23, Moscow 1977, p13).

Besides this particular, narrow form, many economists willingly, even enthusiastically, follow all manner of existing causes or demands - petty bourgeois greenism, feminism and black separatism, CND pacifism, Scottish nationalism, auto-Labourism, etc. So economists do not, by any means, shun politics. Rather economism veers away from the Marxist conception of politics. Crucially economism eschews taking the *lead* on democratic questions and uniting all democratic demands into a single working-class led assault on the existing state.

Take the ISG's Dave Packer. With the support of the SWP, he successfully opposed the Socialist Alliance conducting a "militant" campaign against the monarchy - as

proposed by the CPGB and the London Socialist Alliance. Perfectly in line with that craven desire to tone down and restrict the political scope of the Socialist Alliance, the same organisation wants us to trail behind George Monbiot. He recently made the deep green call “for a complete ban on the use of fossil fuels in five years time” (*Socialist Outlook* January 2001). No jet aircraft, no diesel engines, no rocket launchers. Our ISG ally supports this daft idea ... but refuses to put a time limit on implementation.

We find the same essential approach in the SWP’s ‘Action programme’. Instead of a fully rounded and comprehensive alternative to Blair’s constitutional revolution from above: ie, a revolutionary minimum, or immediate, *political* programme from below - the SWP leadership concentrates entirely on *minimal* questions of pay, hours and union recognition. The workers are to be left as an economic class of slaves, not elevated to a *political* class of self-activating revolutionaries.

When it does make an appearance in the ‘Action programme’, politics is entirely within the frame of militant trade unionism. Reducing the arms bill, curbing financial speculations, etc. Leaving aside the elementary principle of ‘not a penny, not a person’ for the capitalist military machine, this one-sided approach is completely inadequate. How our rulers rule through the UK’s constitutional monarchy system is entirely absent. No mention then of crucial *political* questions like abolishing the UK monarchy system and the second chamber, or an annual parliament and recallability of MPs, or the fight for self-determination for Ireland, Wales and Scotland. In short, no struggle for a “more generous democracy” *under capitalism* which would facilitate the organisation of the workers as a class, thereby enabling them to take command of all democratic questions and issues.

The SWP leadership effectively leaves such matters to Blair. In other words, the SWP remains programmeless (or, more accurately, it has an unofficial, or unconscious *minimalist* programme - another name for which is economism or opportunism). This, it should be stressed, is no internal matter that concerns the SWP alone. At the moment the SWP is the largest all-Britain left organisation. More to the point, the SWP is the dominating force in the Socialist Alliance.

The SWP’s economism and anti-programmism has, I believe, two main theoretical sources. The first lies in Cliff’s unconventional but relatively perceptive reading of Trotsky’s *Transitional programme* in the light of developments following World War II. Whereas orthodox Trotskyites such as Ernest Mandel (comrade E Germain) dogmatically refused to acknowledge an unprecedented economic boom and awaited the predicted imminent slump, Cliff, to his credit, bravely made the attempt to come to terms with reality (see the September 1947 essay, ‘All that glitters is not gold’, in T Cliff *Neither Washington nor Moscow* London 1982, pp24-39). The other source of Cliff’s economism and anti-programmism is his conventional but misplaced Trotskyite rejection of pre-1917 Bolshevism and its minimum-maximum programme.

Let us discuss these two sources, beginning logically, not least in terms of chronol-



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ogy, with Cliff on the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution. We find his ideas on this subject most fully articulated in the first two volumes of his four-volume study of Lenin. And as can be seen in Chris Bamberg's article on Leninism, this work remains the paradigm for the current leader of the SWP as the SWP (see *Socialist Review* January 2001).

Cliff quite correctly characterised the attitude of the Mensheviks as tailist. According to their evolutionist schema, the overthrow of tsarism had to be followed by the class rule, and a western-style parliamentary government, of the bourgeoisie. Tsarism was viewed as an antiquated and semi-feudal obstruction on the linear ladder of progress. Russia was certainly not ripe for socialism - socialism being the first stage of communism. Before socialism and working class power could arrive on the historical stage, the bourgeoisie would have to carry through its preordained tasks.

The historical job of the bourgeoisie was to develop capitalist production under conditions of bourgeois democracy - the bourgeoisie and democracy were wrongly but invariably seen as inseparable. Alongside capitalist relations of production and reproduction, a mass working class inexorably rises. Eventually this class would eclipse and then replace the peasantry in population terms. Only then was socialism feasible. If the forthcoming revolution against tsarism was bourgeois, reasoned the Mensheviks in a conference resolution of April-May 1905, then the working class and its party "must not aim at seizing or sharing power in the provisional government but must remain the party of the extreme revolutionary opposition" (quoted in T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 1, London 1975, p197).

So for mainstream Menshevik thinking the role of the working class was at most to critically push the reluctant bourgeois parties forward into their predetermined position as leaders of the revolution. Taking power, or participating as coalition partners in a revolutionary government, had to be avoided. Why? Because if the working class party seized power it would not be able to satisfy the needs of the masses; immediately establishing socialism was an illusion entertained only by non-Marxists such as the Socialist Revolutionaries. Like Pol Pot their socialism was peasant-based. Moreover, if the working class aggressively pursued its own short-term interests or succumbed to the temptation of power, it would lead the bourgeoisie to "recoil from the revolution and diminish its sweep" (quoted in *ibid*).

Lenin held to a similar evolutionary schema that informed the Mensheviks. However, as a revolutionary Lenin never let a bad theory get in the way of making revolution. His theory was rich and dialectical and therefore soars above the parched categories insisted upon by the Menshevik wing of the party. Russia might not be ready for socialism - if by that one means leaving behind commodity production and what Marx called "bourgeois right": ie, equal pay for equal work, as opposed to the higher communist principle of 'each according to their ability, each according to their need'. The *existing* social and economic material limits explain why Lenin and the Bolsheviks described the coming revolution as *bourgeois*.

Against the Mensheviks, Lenin insisted that to make such a revolution one had to aim to take power. To fulfil the party's minimum programme - overthrowing the tsarist monarchy and a democratic republic, arming the people, separation of church and state, full democratic liberty, decisive economic reforms such as an eight-hour day, etc - it was necessary to establish a revolutionary government which embodied the democratic rule of the mass of the population. Lenin summed this up in the following famous algebraic formulation: the democratic dictatorship (ie, in Marxist terms rule) of the proletariat and peasantry.

Such a regime would not bring complete liberation for the working class. Economically Russia would develop as a capitalist country - albeit one under the armed rule of the working class and peasant masses. Indeed the Bolsheviks envisaged a stage of *controlled* development of capitalist production and economic relations. Without that the working class could not grow in numbers, organisation and consciousness. Lenin argued that this last named subjective factor was bound up with objective conditions.

The Bolsheviks knew that the class balance of a revolutionary government of the proletariat and peasantry could not be determined in advance. The struggle itself decides. Needless to say, the Bolsheviks planned in their minimum programme and fought in practice for working class leadership. In other words, a workers' state supported by the peasant majority. Something that relied not primarily on forces internal to Russia but on sparking the external *socialist* revolution in the west. Without that conflagration a working class-led regime in Russia was bound to be short-lived.

The bourgeoisie was both cowardly and counterrevolutionary. The bourgeois parties wanted a compromise deal with tsarism, not its overthrow through a people's revolution. Russia had no Cromwell or Milton, no Washington or Jefferson, no Marat, St Just or Robespierre.

The only force capable of gaining a decisive victory over tsarism, overcoming bourgeois counterrevolution and ensuring the full sweep of the revolution was the proletariat in alliance with the peasant mass. Russia, it hardly needs saying, was overwhelmingly rural. Naturally the proletarian party laid great stress on its agrarian programme. Landlord power would be smashed and land nationalised and democratically distributed to the peasants without any redemption payments. This was not a socialist measure for Lenin. It would, though, help clear away the Asiatic features of traditional Russian society and allow capitalist relations to develop along an "American path".

How long was this stage of working class rule, combined with controlled capitalist development, to be? According to Cliff, up to 1917 Lenin "anticipated that a whole period would elapse between the coming bourgeois revolution and the proletarian socialist revolution" (T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 1, London 1975, p200).

Here in Cliff we have a devious formulation. After all how long is "a whole period"? It also leaves unanswered what Cliff means by socialism and whether or not the

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October Revolution of 1917 actually ushered in not a working class-led state but socialist relations of production and exchange. I have argued that the post-October 1917 regime was a proletarian-peasant alliance - albeit with bureaucratic deformations and a Communist Party substituting for the active role of proletariat - till the 1928 counterrevolution within the revolution. The idea that the USSR was socialist represented a Stalinite conceit that was still to come. Only in the mid-1930s did Stalin announce that the Soviet Union had fully completed the transition to socialism.

Cliff cynically sets Lenin up as an advocate of the “theory of stages” - by definition a cardinal sin for any self-respecting Trotskyite. First stage, the anti-tsarist revolution. Though it could not be led by the bourgeoisie, it could not go beyond bourgeois norms. A democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry would for a “whole period” witness and encourage capitalist development, of course under democratic conditions. Only after such a “whole period” could the working class think about putting forward its own class agenda and preparing for the second, socialist, revolution.

Actually, as we have illustrated, the real theory of *artificial* stages in Russia was advocated by the Mensheviks. Their analysis flowed from vulgar evolutionism and was thus very superficial.

The long and the short of it was that in the event that a popular revolution proved successful in Russia, the proletariat puts the bourgeoisie in power. Obeying the ‘laws of history’, it then patiently waits in the wings, as a “party of extreme opposition”, until capitalism has been fully developed and the conditions created for socialism. For Mensheviks then, there would have to be two revolutions in Russia. One bourgeois, with a bourgeois state. The other, coming a long time after, was socialist, with a socialist state. The two are separated by a definite historical stage, or a “whole period”, and crucially by distinct and antagonistically opposed regimes.

Yet, as we have seen, Lenin explicitly rejected this mechanical schema. Lenin considered the bourgeoisie in Russia counterrevolutionary. As a class it could not even begin the ‘bourgeois revolution’. The workers would have to take the initiative in overthrowing tsarism at the “head of the whole people, and particularly the peasantry”. The main underlying *political* slogans of the Bolsheviks were ‘Abolish the monarchy’ and ‘For the democratic republic.’

If their popular uprising proved successful - and remained under proletarian hegemony - the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry would *not* meekly make way for the bourgeoisie. Yes, capitalism would be “strengthened”: ie, allowed to develop. But there would be strict limitations. Not only an eight-hour day, full trade union rights and complete political liberty, but an “armed proletariat” in possession of state power. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry would wage a “relentless struggle against all counterrevolutionary attempts”, not least from the bourgeoisie.

Such a hybrid regime could not survive in isolation. It would, and must, act to

“rouse” the European socialist revolution. The proletariat of socialist Europe would in turn help Russia move to socialism (which requires definite material conditions in terms of the development of the productive forces). Inevitably there would, with the course of economic progress, be a differentiation between the proletariat and the peasantry. But not necessarily a specifically *socialist* revolution: ie, the violent overthrow of the state in Russia.

Put another way, there would not be a democratic or bourgeois stage and then a socialist stage at the level of regime. Democratic and socialist tasks are distinct and premised on different material, social and political conditions. But particular elements interweave.

The revolution could, given the right internal and external conditions, proceed *uninterruptedly* from democratic to socialist tasks through the proletariat fighting not only from below but from above: ie, from a salient of state power. The revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat thereby peacefully grows over into the dictatorship of the proletariat, assuming internal proletarian hegemony and external proletarian aid from a socialist Europe. Here is Lenin’s theory elaborated in his 1905 pamphlet *Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution* (see VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, pp15-130).

So in truth Lenin employed entirely elastic formulations concerning the “whole period” of capitalist development under the democratic rule of the proletariat and peasantry. Lenin’s “whole period” spoken of by the ventriloquist Cliff could therefore theoretically be reduced to zero in terms of time. In other words, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had a programme of permanent revolution of the sort Marx and Engels developed in Germany during and after the great revolutionary wave of 1848. So why does Cliff mischievously present Lenin’s theory as no more than a variation on a Menshevik schema?

### **9.3. Rescuing Lenin and Trotsky from ‘Trotskyism’**

There is an ingrained, though thoroughly misconceived, conviction - not least amongst our SWP, ISG, SPEW, AWL and Workers Power allies - that the programme of Bolshevism was abandoned by Lenin in 1917 and certainly has no relevance whatsoever to the 21st century. Naturally, then, the comrades dismiss minimum-maximum programmes with Talmudic certainty; the awful fate of German social democracy in 1914 is waved about like a talisman, a solemn warning for those who might be tempted to think otherwise.

The ‘improvement’ offered up by these comrades is the ‘transitional method’; derived from Trotsky in his “dark night” of 1938. In reality this much-vaunted ‘transitional method’ turns out to be nothing more than a rehash of economism, the tailing of spontaneity, downplaying democratic issues, etc. These comrades are transparently sincere in claiming Trotsky as the architect of their pig-headed dismissal of the minimum-maximum programme. Nonetheless, as we shall show, they are profoundly

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mistaken.

To equip the Socialist Alliance project with the weapons needed to beat the United Kingdom state and overcome the universal system of capital, it is incumbent upon us to comprehensively meet the challenge of 'Trotskyist' economism and resolutely defend Lenin and the Bolshevik programme - and, ironically Trotsky too.

Take Tony Cliff. As we know, along with the usual run of so-called orthodox Trotskyites, he wants us to believe that Lenin was essentially a Menshevik programmatically up to April 1917. Trotsky supposedly had an altogether superior theory. Trotsky is approvingly quoted, by implication against Lenin, as stating that "power must pass into the hands of the workers" through a revolution "before the politicians of bourgeois liberalism get the chance to display to the full their talent for governing" (quoted in T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 1, London 1975, p202). Yet the reader will recall that the real Lenin argued for the replacement of tsarism ... by the revolutionary rule of the workers and peasants. This was the culmination of the Bolshevik's minimum programme.

Essentially Lenin wanted a peasant revolution led by the working class, which would, given favourable conditions, ie the spread of the revolution to Europe, proceed *uninterruptedly* towards the tasks of the maximum, or socialist, programme. Taking his cue from Marx in 1848-49, Lenin spoke of the democratic revolution "growing over" into the socialist revolution". As an aside, at least for the benefit of pedants, it is worth noting that Trotsky too used the term "uninterrupted".

'Uninterrupted' was interchangeable with 'permanent revolution': eg, in 1906 he wrote that the victory of the proletariat "in turn means the further uninterrupted character of the revolution" (L Trotsky *The permanent revolution* New York 1978, p182).

Lenin was more open-ended and displayed greater flexibility than Trotsky on the potentiality of the downtrodden peasants in Russia. The democratic (majority) dictatorship (rule) of the proletariat and peasantry formulation was deliberately essentialist and plastic. The working class had the advantage of geographic and workplace concentration, tight organisation and the habit of collective solidarity. The peasants were the overwhelming majority of the population. But the centre of gravity and the organisational morphology of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry would be determined by the actual course of history and making the anti-tsarist revolution.

Lenin refused to speculate or give *a priori* answers to questions such as whether or not the peasants could establish their own party, whether such a party would form the majority or the minority in a revolutionary government, and what exact relationship the peasants would have to the proletariat and its party. Circumstances and the balance of forces would concretely decide all such matters. Lenin's overriding concern lay in releasing the peasant revolution *in practice* and aligning this giant to the working class and its leadership. Here the workers' party, as the subjective factor in the revolution, was crucial.

The peasantry, the sphinx of the Russian revolution, is for Trotsky, an elemental force in rebellion but is as an *estate* “absolutely incapable of taking an independent political role”. Trudoviks, Popular Socialists, the Socialist Revolutionary Party and the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party can be deployed by either side of the argument. Personally I think the huge support gained by the SRs in 1917 - they were the undisputed party of the countryside - and the Bolshevik-Left SR coalition after October lends far more weight to Lenin than Trotsky. Nevertheless in Trotsky’s prognosis the proletariat can, through consciously directing its revolutionary energy, and later from the vantage point of state power, draw the peasant mountain to its leadership.

He employs the closed formula - a workers’ state *supported* by the peasantry. The victorious proletariat would stand before the rural masses as their liberator and with their consent as benign rulers. The difference with Lenin is not unimportant, but is that of shade within the same ‘permanentist’ camp (which, besides Lenin, Trotsky, and Rosa Luxemburg, included Karl Kautsky when he was a Marxist, and, less consistently, a post-1917 Martov).

Lenin’s malleable, active approach has decided advantages. It highlights the pure class content of the revolution - and the inescapable necessity of winning and keeping the peasant mass. Yet it leaves open, or puts aside, the party composition of a revolutionary regime. Struggle provides the solution to that and other such questions. Not that that stopped Lenin in 1906, under the urging of Luxemburg and her Poles, using the formulation “the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry”.

When Martov and other Mensheviks got themselves into a froth over this ‘deviation’ from Bolshevism, an unruffled Lenin cheerfully informed them that there was no change: “Is it not obvious that the same idea runs through all these formulations, that this idea is precisely the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, that the ‘formula’ of the proletariat *relying upon* [supported by - JC] the peasantry, *remains* part and parcel of the same dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry?” (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 15, Moscow 1977, p368).

Trotsky’s governmental-class formulation recognises the social weight of the peasantry. On the other hand, he is insistent on an exclusively proletarian government and discounts even the possibility of a coalition, certainly one in which the working class party begins as a minority. Trotsky would not countenance participation in such a government. A peasant majority would hold the proletariat hostage.

The rapid *degeneration* of the isolated October Revolution into the dictatorship of the Communist Party can be used to justify Trotsky’s formula. A big mistake. Unfortunately, one Trotsky repeatedly made throughout the 1920s and 30s. Almost in exhilaration at his own daring, he uses the term ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in contradistinction to democracy. An elementary error in Marxism and evidence that a malign, bureaucratic socialist tumour existed in the ‘Fourth International’ sect at the highest level.

Anyway, proletarian political domination is, says Trotsky, incompatible with “its

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economic enslavement". Therefore, reasoned Trotsky, the workers are "obliged to take the path of socialist policy" (quoted in T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 1, London 1975, p202). Note, "socialist policy", not socialism. Trotsky, we should point out, disagreed with Bukharin's crude leftist version of permanent revolution, first expounded in 1916.

For Bukharin - the imperialist economist - the bourgeois revolution had already been essentially completed, if not in Russia then on a global scale. Uneven development was not considered. Russia was subjected to a deductive process of reasoning which robbed it of all specifics. There were then according to Bukharin no outstanding or preparatory democratic tasks before the socialist dawn. Not democracy against tsarism, but labour against capital. That was the sum of Bukharin's analysis. Hence, in Bukharin's lifeless schema, demands for national self-determination and the slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry should be dropped. The proletariat, insisted Bukharin, must proceed to capture power under the banner of an unadulterated socialism.

Though Lenin attacked Bukharin by attacking Trotsky - it was a shadow boxing polemic. We are obliged to say in Trotsky's defence that his theory was far removed from all such farcical caricatures of Marxism. Trotsky never turned his back on the need to fight for democracy under capitalism. Nor did he deny what he called "the bourgeois character of the revolution" in Russia in the sense of immediate tasks. However, between ossified tsarism and the development of capitalist forces of production there existed the possibility of "quite new historical prospects", namely proletarian power (L Trotsky *The permanent revolution* New York 1978, p67). These words are, by the way, taken from the beginning of Trotsky's 1906 *Result and prospects*.

According to the bog-standard "Trotskyite" account, in April 1917 Lenin saved himself by apparently undergoing a road to Damascus conversion. Lenin's 'Letters from afar' and the documents now widely known as the *April theses* "marked a complete break" with the antiquated notion of a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry (T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 2, London 1976, p124). Conditions which proceeded from the fall of Tsar Nicholas II and the establishment of dual power exposed the "bankruptcy" of the 'old Bolshevik' formula (*ibid* p128).

Cliff compounds the nonsense. Before 1917 Trotsky "differed fundamentally from Lenin in his view of the nature of the coming Russian revolution", he claims, without the least blush of shame (T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 1, London 1975, p201).

Trotsky badly misjudged the Bolsheviks. Cliff has to admit that much. He supposedly failed to realise that Bolshevism would have to break through the "bourgeois democratic crust" of their programme - because they based themselves on the dynamic of the struggle (T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 1, London 1975, p205). Here we find Cliff's rendition of Trotsky's theory of *revolutionary fatalism* - a theory he tested to exhaustion and wisely abandoned (Trotsky thought the Mensheviks would do likewise).

At this point in our discussion we will turn to Trotsky himself. His own carefully considered retrospective words show the utter disingenuousness of Cliff's version of history. In essence Trotsky took a centrist, "conciliationist", position from 1903 until May 1917, when he returned from the USA and placed himself "at the disposal of the Bolshevik Party". Until then his "revolutionary ideas or proposals amounted to nothing but 'phrases'". Lenin on the other hand carried out "the only truly revolutionary work". That was, a contrite Trotsky argues, "work that helped the party take shape and grow stronger" (L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition: 1923-25* New York 1980, pp265, 267). Was Trotsky right in this assessment? In my opinion there can be no doubt about it.

Leaving that aside for the moment (and the fact that Trotsky went on to play a truly outstanding role as a Bolshevik leader), we must focus upon the alleged "fundamental" programmatic difference between Trotsky and Lenin. Again we continue our journey with Trotsky himself at our side. Trotsky will prove that the picture painted by Cliff and the whole school of so-called Trotskyism either ignorantly or cynically misrepresents Trotsky in order to undermine Leninism pre- and post-1917. Tony Cliff, in the first volume of his study of Lenin, supplies us with extensive quotes from Trotsky's *Results and prospects* published in 1906 - which are used as ammunition against the subject title of his biography.

Trotsky outlines his application of the theory of permanent revolution to Russia. Like Lenin he dismissed any revolutionary potential of the bourgeoisie. The working class had to form a revolutionary government "as the leading force". They would do so in "alliance with the peasantry". But, given the circumstances of Russia, the fact of proletarian state power would destroy the "borderline between the minimum and maximum programme: that is to say, it places collectivism on the order of the day".

One should not interpret such a formulation to mean Trotsky imagined a backward and isolated Russia could 'build' socialism in splendid isolation. No communist then believed any such thing. Trotsky, to his credit, remained implacably hostile to "national socialism" till his untimely death in 1940 (L Trotsky *The permanent revolution* New York 1978, p159). On the contrary, Trotsky understood that the revolution would have to be made universal if the working class in Russia was not to be "crushed". European revolution was vital.

All in all, to any objective observer the differences with Lenin's theory are insubstantial. True, in *Results and prospects* and in Lenin's so-called replies there was a very unrewarding polemic between the two men. Factional interests produced more heat than light in both cases. Trotsky blinkeredly disparaged any suggestion of a "special form of the proletarian dictatorship in the bourgeois revolution". He was intent on rubbishing and equating both the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. Lenin in his turn savaged Trotsky for "underestimating" the importance of the peasantry by raising the slogan 'Not a tsar's government but a workers' government'.

On the basis of such evidence Trotsky is doubtless right when he concludes that



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Lenin had “never read my basic work”. The above slogan was proclaimed not by Trotsky but by his then friend and collaborator Parvus, in his introduction to Trotsky’s *Before the 9th of January*. Parvus envisaged the workers coming to power but not going beyond the parameters of democratic tasks - his model was Australia. Trotsky had a much more dynamic and earth shattering perspective.

Incidentally, why is there such a paucity of Trotsky’s works prior to 1917 available? *Result and prospects, 1905, Our political tasks* and precious little else. Whatever their factional hostility to Lenin, the translation and publication of the whole corpus would be of great value to the entire revolutionary movement. Perhaps the Socialist Alliance should sponsor such a venture.

Anyway, we must push ahead with our argument. “Never did Lenin anywhere analyse or quote,” says Trotsky, “even in passing, *Results and prospects*” (L Trotsky *The permanent revolution*, New York 1978, p166). True, there was a second hand quote polemically fired as a salvo against Martov in 1909. But Trotsky believes that in all probability Lenin only became acquainted with *Results and prospects* first hand in 1919 when the state publishing house reissued it.

More to the point, Trotsky is eager to detail the “solidarity” that existed between himself and the Bolsheviks during and immediately after the 1905 revolution. And for those who ignorantly demonise the term ‘stage’ in order to belittle Lenin, Trotsky’s boast that he “formulated the tasks of the successive stages of the revolution in exactly the same manner as Lenin” should provide food for thought (*ibid* p168). The same can be said for Trotsky’s proud affirmation about how “Lenin’s formula” closely “approximated” to his own “formula of permanent revolution” (*ibid* p198). Cliff can claim that Trotsky’s theory was far superior to Lenin’s democratic dictatorship. Needless to say, that only shows he held an agenda which owed very little to the actual revolution and even less to the truth.

It was natural in 1905 or 1912 for Lenin and Trotsky to exchange polemical thunderbolts based on nothing more than a few snatched lines or a disembodied phrase - they fought on behalf of rival factional centres or outposts and were star combatants. However, from the elevated distance of the 21st century, Marxists - of all schools - should concentrate on the content Lenin and the Bolsheviks gave to their programme and the famous formulation, the ‘revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’.

How did they view this formulation and how did they apply it in practice? What tactics were used in December 1905? That is what should decide the matter - not the fact that in 1917 Zinoviev and Kamenev sought a cosy peace with those supporting the provisional government using the slogan as a flimsy orthodox cover. Nor that during the 1920s the Stalin-Bukharin duumvirate grossly misused the ‘democratic dictatorship’ formulation to legitimise their bloc of four classes in China - uniting the proletariat, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie.

What is notable about the years before 1917 for me is the consanguinity of the

Bolsheviks and Trotsky, not the difference. Though it is painful for those present-day left economists who hide behind a caricatured mask of Trotsky, the fact of the matter is that Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution did not imply jumping over or ignoring the democratic stage of the Russian revolution. Indeed it is true to say that Trotsky mapped out the tasks of the successive stages of the revolution in "exactly" the same way as Lenin.

Within the realm of the Second International Trotsky and Lenin found themselves a common champion in the almost 'papal' authority of Karl Kautsky. He displayed a keen interest in Russian politics and would frequently intervene in various factional disputes. Hence in reply to Plekhanov's either-or question, 'Is the Russian revolution bourgeois or socialist?', Kautsky answered the Menshevik leader in the pamphlet *The driving forces and prospects of the Russian revolution* in a way that benefited Lenin and Trotsky alike.

The Russian revolution was no longer bourgeois, but was not yet socialist. It was a transitional form from one to the other. Lenin expressed his fulsome agreement with Kautsky's formulation in a December 1906 introduction. Independently Trotsky did the same from his prison cell. He included his foreword to *The driving forces* he had written in the book *In defence of the Party*. Many years later, in 1928, Trotsky was able to justifiably proclaim that both "Lenin and I expressed our thorough accord with Kautsky's analysis" (L Trotsky *The permanent revolution* New York 1978, p179). He was fighting a rearguard action against Stalin's scattergun accusations about his anti-Leninist past.

No surprise then to find that in 1905 - Trotsky was at the forefront of events in Russia - he found himself aligned with the Bolsheviks. Many of their appeals to the peasants, issued by the central press of the Bolsheviks, were actually penned by Trotsky. Nor should it surprise us that during this period Lenin on occasion found the need to defend Trotsky. In *Nachalo* Lenin, as editor, sided with Trotsky in forthright terms against his Menshevik critics. The Bolshevik press also chose to publish one of Trotsky's pamphlets. Furthermore we can cite Lenin's frequent support for the resolutions of the St Petersburg Soviet which were nine times out of 10 written by its chair, Lev Bronstein.

At the 5th Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party - held in London in 1907 - Lenin spoke of the affinity of Trotsky to the Bolsheviks. Trotsky's recognition of the unity of interests between the proletariat and peasantry in the anti-tsarist revolution and his opposition to the liberal bourgeoisie prompted Lenin to acknowledge that "Trotsky has come close to our views. Quite apart from the question of 'uninterrupted revolution', we have here solidarity on fundamental points in the question of the attitude towards bourgeois parties" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 12, Moscow 1977, p470).

This, remember, was at a time when Trotsky was not a member of the Bolshevik faction and Lenin was quite rightly mercilessly attacking him for his conciliationism

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towards the Mensheviks. Naturally, what primarily concerned Lenin was raining down blows on Trotsky's conciliationism and thereby steeling his Bolshevik cadre, not fairness towards Trotsky, the political theorist. Praise was therefore faint and grudging.

Trotsky represented a particular danger. Unlike other conciliators, he was consistent. Worse, he managed to give conciliationism definite theoretical foundations: ie, *revolutionary fatalism*. Under the melting heat of the class struggle the glacial factions - the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks - would, he thought, flood into one party and be driven, as if by nature, to fight for permanent revolution.

Lenin used fair means and foul to discredit and defeat Trotsky's conciliationism with Menshevik, Bundist, boycottist and other forms of liquidationism. That included exaggeration, ridicule, parody, seizing upon stray remarks and shocking appellations. And, of course, likewise being a 'hard', Trotsky hit back in kind, using not dissimilar literary weapons. That way molehills sometimes grew to resemble mountains.

Nowadays it is a commonplace to condemn Stalin and his lie machine for its invention of Trotskyism. That should also encompass Trotsky's supposed inherent programmatic hostility to Leninism: eg, "Permanent revolution' is an underestimation of the peasant movement which leads to the repudiation of Lenin's theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat" - or so pronounced the first high priest of the timeless Lenin quote (JV Stalin *Leninism* Moscow 1940, p93). Given this wretched tradition, it is sad to find Trotsky's self-appointed heirs have their own system of falsification. Almost a mirror image of Stalinism, they habitually misuse Trotsky to denigrate pre- and post-1917 Leninism and Bolshevism.

But this 'Trotskyism' totally contradicts the real Trotsky. His theory of permanent revolution did not diverge from the strategic line of Bolshevism, did not stand as an alternative to it. Nor did it triumph over it. On the contrary, despite all the factional fog and flack "the basic strategic line was one and the same" (L Trotsky *The permanent revolution* New York 1978, p173). That explains why Trotsky worked hand in hand with the Bolsheviks in the first, 1905, revolution and why he later defended this work in the international press against Menshevik criticisms. And, of course, under Lenin's sponsorship Trotsky joined the Bolshevik Party as a *top leader* in 1917.

Trotsky experienced few qualms in finally throwing in his lot with the Bolsheviks because of the long established nearness of the strategic lines; and that by the way included, as we have seen, the peasant question, which was deployed as an ideological bulldozer by Stalinite propagandists against Trotsky. When the Bolsheviks' 'stole' the agrarian programme of the Socialist Revolutionaries, Trotsky recognised that, while it was a contradictory measure, it was unavoidable. No peasant masses, no second revolution. He therefore stood foursquare behind Lenin's audacious act of grand larceny.

Conciliationism, not permanent revolution, separated Trotsky from Bolshevism. As soon as the scales dropped from Trotsky's eyes about the possibility of winning

Menshevism over to making a working class-led revolution, he inexorably drew ever closer to Lenin and Bolshevism organisationally.

#### 9.4. Programme: the 1917 test

As we have said, according to standard Trotskyite history - which apart from ourselves is espoused as dogmatic certainty by all the principal organisations supporting the Socialist Alliance - the Bolsheviks were completely hobbled by their programme for the democratic (majority) dictatorship (rule) of the proletariat and peasantry and an uninterrupted (permanent) revolution. The collapse of tsarism in February (March) 1917 and the formation of the provisional government - dominated by Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks - threw them into utter confusion.

For the recently installed Kamenev-Stalin internal leadership, the provisional government - resting as it did on an SR-Menshevik majority in the soviets - embodied a real gain for the forces of revolution. True, Alexander Kerensky and his socialist ministers were bent on continuing Russia's expansionist involvement in the imperialist slaughter of World War I. No peace! True, they refused to implement radical land reform. No land! True, they resisted all inroads into the power of capital necessary to prevent the impending economic collapse. No bread!

So, reasoned the Kamenev-Stalin leadership, the correct tactic for the Bolsheviks was to support the provisional government ... but as a party of 'extreme opposition'. Shades of the old Menshevik formula.

On occasion *Pravda* proved none too extreme. Lurching towards outright defencism, it urged upon the provisional government a course of immediate negotiation and a democratic peace. In the meantime *Pravda* admonished fraternisation and indiscipline in the army: "We must not allow any disorganisation of the armed forces of the revolution" (quoted in L. Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25* New York 1980, p214).

Only after Lenin managed - at last - to gain entry into Russia from his Swiss exile - on board the famous sealed train - were the Bolsheviks rearmed. His *April theses* caused a howl of protest, not least from the 'old Bolshevik' leadership running things in Petrograd. Lenin had undergone a conversion to Trotskyism. Or so the story goes.

Swept along by the floodtide of revolution, Lenin felt compelled to jettison the 'old Bolshevik' democratic dictatorship ballast. Tony Cliff calls it a "complete break" (T. Cliff *Lenin* Vol 2, London 1976, p124). Other 'Trotskyite' authors too write of a *tabula rasa*.

Switching from the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, Lenin instead called for an immediate fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism. "Until then," confirms Chris Bambery, SWP secretary, "the Bolsheviks had accepted one part of Plekhanov's argument - that a Russian revolution could not break the bounds of capitalism." Logically, had Lenin not changed his mind, it would have meant "subordinating the interests and organisation of the working class" to the

“bourgeois provisional government” (*Socialist Review* January 2001).

Anyway, the *conciliationist* wing suffered defeat in a series of sharp set-piece battles: joint meeting of Bolshevik and Menshevik delegates to the all-Russia conference of workers’ and peasants’ soviets, April 4; Petrograd city RSDLP (B), April 14–22; All Russian RSDLP (B), April 24–29. Within a month Lenin had successfully rearmed Bolshevism with Trotskyism. In October (November), red guards storm the Winter Palace and topple the provisional government. Working class rule (dictatorship) begins. The October Revolution therefore marks the triumph of Trotskyism. Lenin might have been right on the party, but Trotsky was indisputably right on programme.

We shall merely note in passing here the stubborn fact - as comprehensively presented above - that pre-1917 there is no essential *programmatic* difference between Lenin and Trotsky. Only high fidelity Stalinites and the most wooden-headed of ‘Trotskyite’ epigones refuse to admit the truth. Trotsky rightly maintained, against Stalin’s lie machine, that the “basic strategic line was one and the same” (L Trotsky *The permanent revolution* New York 1978, p173). Nevertheless, in order to rescue the programme of Lenin *and* Trotsky from the economistic clutches of modern-day ‘Trotskyism’, we must scotch another myth. The myth that in 1917 Lenin carried through a “complete break” with his old formula.

Admittedly the germ of this idea originated with Trotsky himself. His motives were perfectly understandable. Stalin’s Gatling gun was firing a barrage of quotes culled from Lenin at Trotsky’s anti-Leninist past. In self-defence Trotsky overcompensated polemically. He suggested that there was a direct line of continuity between Lenin’s democratic dictatorship formula and the vacillation of the ‘old Bolsheviks’ in March-April 1917. This proved to be a self-inflicted wound, albeit a minor one.

Unfortunately it has been left untreated for many decades. We see the frightful anti-Leninist results in the economistic contagion which still passes itself off as ‘Trotskyism’.

Faced with the onslaught against ‘Trotskyism’ launched by the post-Lenin triumvirate of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev, it was not surprising that Trotsky found himself on the back foot. As an original thinker and an aggressive polemicist of the first rank he had a long curriculum vitae of countless big and small disputes with Lenin - whom Stalin in particular had all but deified by inventing the cult of ‘Leninism’. Trotsky’s opponents carried no such baggage. By and large their contributions to Marxism did not go beyond competent echoes of Lenin: eg, Stalin’s *Marxism and the national question*, Zinoviev’s *Social roots of opportunism*, etc.

Trotsky was desperate to counter-attack. However, in terms of skeletons the triumvirate’s past proved a rather bare cupboard. He found nothing apart from highlighting the less than honourable role the trio played in the events that led up to October 1917. Putting a brave face on it, he insists that study of the disagreements “is not only of extraordinary theoretical importance, but of the utmost practical importance” (L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition 1923–25* New York 1980,

p211). An exaggeration, perhaps. Nevertheless 1917 posed the question of power point blank and none of the triumvirate performed well.

As a conciliator, Stalin almost instantly melted before Lenin's authority and quietly reverted to an entirely secondary position within the Bolshevik Party. Like the body of the 'old Bolshevik' cadre - they had been steeled in 1905 and were well educated by Lenin - his opposition lasted no more than a couple of weeks. Kamenev, on the other hand, doggedly, though ineffectively, urged the Bolsheviks to form an "influential" opposition in the promised Constituent Assembly and carry on accrediting delegates elected to the soviets.

The "bourgeois democratic revolution is not completed" and will not be for some considerable period of time, he obstinately warned. In sync with this, Kamenev advocated a "combined type of state institution" - what might be called a "dual power republic". Naturally, of course, this *class* conciliationism was couched in the language of Bolshevik orthodoxy. Kamenev concealed his political irresolution underneath the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' slogan.

In fact Kamenev retreated politically into a hopelessly rigid and scholastic conceptualisation. His starting point was not life. Rather it was an *a priori* vision of what a 'normal' bourgeois regime ought to be like: ie, the polarisation of society into two camps - labour and capital. At the Bolshevik's April conference he argued in the name of reaching towards this bourgeois paradigm and against the proletariat in Russia foolhardily taking the premature lead in the world *socialist* revolution.

Like a typical Menshevik, his categories were fixed and his logic altogether circular. As a cross-class bloc, the soviets of workers and peasants are apparently proof in and of themselves that bourgeois democratic tasks remain "uncompleted".

Here is a further snippet of what Kamenev said in April 1917: "Had the bourgeois democratic revolution been completed, this bloc would no longer exist ... and the proletariat would be waging a revolutionary struggle against the bloc ... And, nevertheless, we recognise these soviets as centres for the organisation of forces ... Consequently, the bourgeois revolution is not completed, it has not yet outlived itself; and I believe that all of us ought to recognise that with the complete accomplishment of this revolution, the power would actually have passed into the hands of the proletariat" (quoted in L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25* New York 1980, p218).

Kamenev found few allies. But he did find Zinoviev - Lenin's second in command. Like Lenin he returned to Russia from Switzerland in the sealed train. And, much to their undying shame, together, Kamenev and Zinoviev 'scabbed' on the Party's call for 'All power to the soviets' and a second revolution.

Due to what they sincerely perceived to be an unfavourable balance of forces - Cossack regiments, the officer corps, artillery emplacements, etc, stationed around the capital - they feared that the working class in Russia would suffer the same fate as the 1871 Paris Commune. Just two weeks before it happened Kamenev and Zinoviev

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publicly condemned the Military Revolutionary Committee's plans for an insurrection. Their conciliationist letter was gleefully published in *Novaya Zhizn* (the paper of the Menshevik Internationalists).

Seizure of power by one party, the Bolsheviks, could only but result in splits in the camp of democracy, and bloodshed, they concluded. And, unwilling to take responsibility for the actual revolution of October 25, they resigned from the central committee in protest.

Add to that episode the contemporary dispute over China in the mid to late 1920s. We have already noted that Stalin and Bukharin advocated a bloc of four classes - workers, peasants, the intelligentsia *and* the national bourgeoisie. This class collaboration, the political subordination of the Communist Party of China to the Kuomintang, was excused under the orthodox democratic dictatorship rubric. Opportunism is seldom honest.

With full justification Trotsky hit back and sought to justify his own past. He single-mindedly, exhaustively and methodically detailed the fundamental solidarity between himself and the Bolsheviks prior to 1917. Nonetheless in the mid-1920s he egotistically left a hostage to fortune. Trotsky directly - and incorrectly - criticised Lenin's formula, the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry', in some key works. He even claims Lenin's authority for this. In his *The lessons of October* Trotsky maintains that in 1917 Lenin "came out furiously against the old slogan of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'" (L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25* New York 1980, p209).

Untrue. Lenin attacked not that formula, but those who misused it, those who refused to concretise it, those who urged conciliation with the provisional government supposedly because "the bourgeois democratic revolution is not completed".

This "formula" - the "bourgeois democratic revolution is not completed", not the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' formula - "is", says Lenin, "obsolete". "It is no good as all. It is dead. And it is no use trying to revive it", he underlines (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p50).

However, Trotsky's main criticism of the 'democratic dictatorship' formula in the mid-1920s is its open-endedness. As demonstrated by Lenin's quickly fought and necessary correction carried out under the banner of his *April theses*, the ambiguity of the formula allowed *rightist* interpretation. As proof Trotsky cited Kamenev and Zinoviev and Stalin and Bukharin. He urged Comintern, the Communist International, to bury all mention of the democratic dictatorship. Instead he recommends raising his unambiguous call for a workers' state *supported* by the peasantry.

I have already discussed at length the advantages of Lenin's open-endedness. Even in 1917 he could admit the possibility of a peasant regime. And for my part I am unconvinced about the unambiguous nature of Trotsky's formula.

Trotsky's formula - like any other - is capable of opportunist misuse, or even being press-ganged into the service of counterrevolution. Stalin, for example, passed off his

vile monocracy as the “dictatorship of the proletariat” (*Constitution of the USSR* article 2, Moscow 1969, p11). And, in turn, so did Mao with China, Enver Hoxha with Albania and Kim Il Sung with North Korea ... and for that matter so did Trotsky’s epigones. Albeit with the ‘deformed’ sobriquet, all such anti-working class regimes were designated with the ‘workers’ state’ title by apologists such as Ernest Mandel, Gerry Healy, Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe.

By adhering to either the ‘theory’ of bureaucratic collectivism or the ‘theory’ of state capitalism one obviously avoids that particular snare. Nevertheless there are other snares: eg, one can become a first camp apologist. Take Sean Matgamna, a Marxist from the ‘third camp’, whom I otherwise hold in some esteem. He actually described the 1945 Labour government of Attlee as a workers’ government. Surely, for us class-policy content must be primary in categorising any political phenomenon, not quack constitutions or phoney propaganda claims.

But we must not run away with ourselves. In order to scotch the myth of Lenin making a “complete” break with the ‘democratic dictatorship’ formula and his turning to Trotsky’s “superior” programme we return once more to 1917.

Tsarism collapsed in the midst of a huge popular outburst. A provisional government took over, headed first by prince Lvov and, following his hurried departure from the scene in July, by the Trudovik, Alexander Kerensky.

The provisional government acted fully in the spirit and in the interests not of the proletariat and peasantry, but of the bourgeoisie. *Ipsa facto*, Lenin reasoned, the proletariat and peasantry had “placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie”. And though the Kerensky administration consisted in the bulk of men who had at various times been hunted by the tsarist secret police - Skobeliev, Tserelli, Chernov, Avksentiev, Savinkov, Nikitin, etc - the educated reader will not find Lenin’s designation at all strange.

The *capitalist* bourgeoisie rarely *governs* directly. Unlike the Greek slaveocracy, the feudal aristocracy and the Stalinite bureaucracy, its special business is not government but the business of making money in the market place. It is an unremitting war of one against all and all against one.

Consequently as a collectivity the capitalist class usually prefers to leave the business of government to others. In 19th century Britain the landed aristocracy fulfilled the function. From at least the 1960s onwards government has almost exclusively fallen to professional middle class politicians. Tory or Labour, the trend is unmistakable. Tony Blair and William Hague were alike in more than their political programmes.

Anyway, after February 1917 and the fall of tsarism, Russia was the freest of the belligerent countries. In parallel to the bourgeois provisional government, there stood the soviets, or councils, of workers, soldiers and peasants. There was, in fact, dual power.

What was Lenin’s programme during this “first stage of the revolution”? Did he



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jettison his old theory? Did he make a “complete break”?

Yes, he did ... in the same way Trotsky jettisoned his ‘Not a tsar’s government, but a government of the people’, and consistent followers of Parvus jettisoned his ‘Not a tsar’s government, but a workers’ government’. Nor were the Mensheviks, the SRs, Kamenev or anyone else unaware that one algebraic element of the left’s common demand for a republic had been fulfilled.

Common sense, let alone Marxism, requires recognition of such fundamental sociopolitical developments. The tsar had fallen. Memorising, or the mere repetition of formulas learnt by rote owes everything to religion, nothing to Marxism - which is, as Marx and Engels themselves said, “not a dogma but a guide to action”. If Trotsky had not made a “complete break” with his ‘Not a tsar’s government’ slogan his close friends would have been well advised to seek out suitable psychological treatment for the poor man. The same could be said of anyone who lays hold of Connolly’s historically specific programme for Ireland and tries to shoehorn it into another country: eg, Scotland.

Obviously the crux of disputes in 1917 lay not in supposed dogmatic attachments to past formulations. It was about ‘where next’?

The answer to this question bore a direct relationship to one’s living - and therefore, when necessary, adjusted - programme. Should power be consolidated in the hands of the provisional government and, when it suited, a post-Constituent Assembly government of the same *bourgeois* stripe? On that side stood the Mensheviks, the Right SRs ... and Kamenev. Or was power to pass elsewhere - to peasant democracy, to the peasant majority aligned to the proletariat, or to the proletariat alone?

Arriving back from exile in April 1917, Lenin issued the urgent call for the Bolshevik Party to *amend* “our out-of-date minimum programme” (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p24). The demand to overthrow the tsar and establish a republic was now manifestly obsolete.

The key to the future, for Lenin, lay in combating ‘honest’ popular illusions in the provisional government and raising sights. The Bolsheviks were still a small minority in the soviets. Their task was to become the majority. To that end Lenin advocated agitation around a series of *transitional* demands - which incidentally are in broad terms to be found in the Bolshevik programme dating back to 1905 - confiscation of the landlords estates and the nationalisation and redistribution of land, abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy, and the amalgamation of the banks into a single bank under workers’ control.

Such agitation would prepare the conditions for the “second stage of the revolution” and the transfer of all power into “the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants”. The “only possible form of revolutionary government” was a “republic of soviets of workers’, agricultural labourers’ and peasants’ deputies” (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p23). Lenin made no claims that the Party’s “immediate task” was to “introduce” socialism, only that production and distribution had to be

put under workers' control to prevent the impending meltdown of the economy.

Do these 'stageist' programmatic formulations and the perspective of a workers' and peasants' republic indicate abandonment or a development of Lenin's theory in the light of new and unexpected circumstances? I make no excuse for turning to Lenin himself for an answer.

In the article 'The dual power' he writes as follows: "The highly remarkable feature of our revolution is that it has brought about a *dual power*. This fact must be grasped first and foremost: unless it is understood, we cannot advance. We must know how to supplement and amend old 'formulas', for example, those of Bolshevism, for while they have been found to be correct on the whole, their concrete realisation *has turned out to be* different. *Nobody* previously thought, or could have thought, of a dual power" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p38). Many other such articles could be quoted.

But in order to clinch things, we may perhaps once more bring Trotsky to our side. After referring to Lenin's stinging criticism of Kamenev's conciliationism and the formula, "the bourgeois democratic revolution is not completed", he asks whether or not Lenin's dismissive remarks about an "outdated" formula means he is "simply 'renouncing' the formula?" (L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25* New York 1980, p275).

What does Trotsky think? He is convinced - 'Trotskyites' take note - that Lenin did not renounce the formula. Nor is Trotsky intending "in the slightest to impose such a renunciation on him". Nor does he consider that Bolshevism needed to "change its nature through the medium of 'Trotskyism'" (L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25* New York 1980, p274).

Nor, incidentally, does Trotsky believe that the errors of Kamenev and co stem from a "consistent" application of Lenin's formula. He says they applied Lenin's formula in a non-Leninist way. Lenin's 'democratic dictatorship' formula "was totally dynamic, action-orientated and consequently concretely determined".

However, for myself at least, the main characteristic of what Lenin later called the 'October opportunists' was not a non-Leninist rendition of the Leninist 'democratic dictatorship' formula: rather a muddled and disorderly retreat from formal Leninism into a Menshevik bunker. That is why Kamenev harked on about the 'uncompleted' bourgeois revolution and assumed that it was an innate law - at this stage in history - that the bourgeoisie should govern. Such a wobble owed something to personality. Following Lenin's death the subsequent history of Kamenev and Zinoviev was one of tragic vacillation between Leninist rebellion and abject surrender before the Stalin machine.

Of course pre-1917, Lenin never aimed to place the bourgeoisie into power. True, Bolshevism envisaged the fettered development of capitalism. That way, the working class continues to expand into a fulsome majority. But in the short term tsarism was to be replaced not by a state dominated by bourgeois politicians - neither of the liberal or

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the Black Hundred type. It was to be a revolutionary state, based on the workers and peasants.

Yet although in their programmatic imagination the overthrow of tsarism provided the means to carry on the revolution uninterruptedly from the tasks of democracy under capitalism to the tasks of socialism and the transition to global communism, the corporeal reality brought about by February was far more complex. It both completed the immediate programme of the Bolsheviks and did not.

Hence when in *Pravda* Kamenev complained that Lenin's "general scheme" appears unacceptable, because it proceeds from the assumption that the "bourgeois democratic revolution is *completed*, and builds on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution", he received in reply a thoroughly *concrete* double-barrelled rebuttal.

Kamenev's harping criticisms were wrong on two accounts. Firstly, though state power had been transferred, that did not fully meet the immediate programmatic aims of the Bolsheviks. The old Romanov order had been politically overthrown. To that extent, argued Lenin, the programme had been fulfilled. But the 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants' in the form of the soviets had voluntarily ceded power to the bourgeoisie. Life for the moment was in that sense closer to the programme of the Mensheviks. To bring it in line with that of the Bolsheviks required carrying through the agrarian revolution - the landlords still held their estates - and splitting the peasants from the bourgeoisie. "That", asserted Lenin, "has not even started" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p44).

Repetition of the slogan 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' *in general* had therefore become a mere abstraction. Events had "clothed it with flesh and bone, concretised it and *thereby* modified it" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p45). The soviets were the slogan made real.

The Bolsheviks, or those whom Lenin was now calling the communists, had to deal with the actual situation, where instead of coming to power, this 'revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' existed side by side with, and subordinate to, a weak government of the bourgeoisie. Lenin energetically fought for the Party to gain influence in the soviets. Once it had won a majority a majority, the programme could genuinely be completed.

The dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry had therefore become interwoven with the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The Russian revolution had gone further than the classical bourgeois revolutions of England 1645 or France 1789 but in Lenin's words "has not yet reached a 'pure' dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p61).

There can be dual power but no dual power *state* (whether it is a monarchy, a theocracy or a democratic republic). As an aside, here we find a class collaborationist formulation typical of centrism. Indeed what Kamenev proposed in 1917 approximates to the ideas propounded by Hilferding, leader of the Independent Social

Democrats, during the German revolution of 1918-19. Both in Russia and Germany centrism drew up schemes for an ideal *transitional* political system which combined soviets with a bourgeois provisional government or a bourgeois-dominated Constituent Assembly. Kamenev neatly summed up the position arithmetically: the “Constituent Assembly plus soviets”.

Such miserable centrism, we must stress, has to be distinguished from the consistent Bolshevik agitation for the convening of a Constituent Assembly. Kerensky feared the results. The tide of Bolshevism and its allies on the left of the SR party inexorably rose. Might not they secure a majority? Elections were constantly delayed. Nor should it be forgotten that when the Bolsheviks promised to ensure elections to a Constituent Assembly through winning all power to the soviets, they did not entertain any notion of sharing power with the bourgeoisie. The Constituent Assembly they agitated for, and expected to realise, would legitimise *soviet* power. That was the only sort of ‘combined state’ Lenin entertained.

When in 1918 the returns saw a Right SR majority, they disdainfully dismissed the result: eg, SR candidates had been chosen before the breakaway of the bigger Left SR faction, with whom the Bolsheviks had already concluded a coalition agreement in the soviets. As an organ of implicit counterrevolution the Constituent Assembly had to be dispersed. In conditions of revolution and civil war to argue otherwise is to adopt the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie.

For Lenin, the combining of soviets with the Constituent Assembly was a technical, organisational matter. There can be no class alliance between exploiters and exploited. You cannot reconcile the irreconcilable. To orientate towards such an outcome, Lenin argued, was to renounce soviet power in practice while secretly fearing to say so. “There is no middle course,” he wrote in deliberately blunt terms (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 26, Moscow 1977, p200).

In the event of dual power one of the dictatorships (states) has to die. Either the revolution would be completed under the hegemony of the proletariat, or popular power would be killed by counterrevolution. It was, and is, one or the other.

What about the second barrel of Lenin’s reply? Kamenev feared that Lenin and the majority had succumbed to voluntarism, were being seduced by dangerous Blanquist temptations and wanted to launch Russia on an impossible leap straight to socialism. Lenin swore that there was no such intention.

“I might have incurred this danger [ie, a socialist leap],” explained Lenin, “if I said: ‘No tsar, but a workers’ government’. But I did not say that. I said something else”: ie, that power must pass to the workers’ and peasants’ soviets (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p48). The peasant movement could not be “skipped”. The idea of playing at the seizure of power by a workers’ government alone would indeed not be Marxism but Blanquism. Power had to be exercised by the majority.

Far from making “a complete break” with his old formulation of the ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’, Lenin quoted his 1905 *Two tactics*

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pamphlet to back up his concrete application of it in 1917. Like everything else such a slogan had a “past and a future”. Its past is “autocracy, serfdom, monarchy and privilege ... Its future is the struggle against private property, the struggle of the wageworker against the employer, the struggle for socialism” (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p52).

Kamenev and the ‘old Bolsheviks’ could only see the past. That is why they sought unity with the Mensheviks. But in 1917 the future had begun, above all around the attitude towards ‘defencism’ and preventing the economic collapse caused by the imperialist war. Russia and its people could only be saved by the soviets of workers and peasants. That was not socialism. But it would bring socialism nearer.

Considering everything written above, I think one can conclude with ringing certainty that Lenin did not jettison his ‘democratic dictatorship’ formula. He modified and concretised it in the light of new historical circumstances. He did not carry through a “complete break”, as claimed by Tony Cliff and virtually the whole range of present-day ‘Trotskyites’.

We must ask then, why are the would-be inheritors of Trotsky’s mantle so determined to traduce Lenin by painting him as a Menshevik before 1917? Perhaps the solution to that problem is to be found in the thoroughly economic approach to contemporary politics emanating from the ‘Trotskyite’ stable - the SWP, SPEW, ISG, etc - whereby democratic questions are viewed at best as secondary, if not irrelevant.

They find little or no justification in the real Trotsky. But the myth of Lenin’s conversion to a bowdlerised Trotsky serves them admirably.

## **9.5. SWP changes**

Under the buckling pressure of the Socialist Alliance, the Socialist Workers Party has been forced into adopting more and more of a programme. Excellent. After shunning any hint of programmatic commitment for decades, the SWP is at last telling us what it believes in and crucially how it - or at least the Socialist Alliance - should go about arriving there.

Unfortunately the skeletal outline submitted to the Socialist Alliance’s March 10 2001 conference in Birmingham was - deliberately - vague to the point of constituting a real and present danger. The whole thing could be read as an out-and-out reform programme, whereby capitalism is to be slowly made more humane before at some point in time it clicks over into - a state - socialism.

Our SWP allies might be tempted to argue that their programmatic outline is designed solely for the Socialist Alliance. That it reflects some lowest level common denominator upon which all can agree, that it falls far short of what the SWP actually seeks to obtain. If so - and we earnestly hope it is not the case - then it marks out the SWP as a sect.

The task of communists: ie, Marxists - is to always bring to the fore the general

interest of the whole working class movement. We have, or should have, no special credo, which separates us or marks us out. Only a sect would preach one thing to chosen initiates and another publicly. Indeed it would be perverse in the extreme for the SWP not to strive might and main to equip - through democratic debate and agreement - other socialist and working class forces with what it considers to be the most accurate, most safe, most direct route to the desired future.

The Socialist Alliance programme must be a programme for the entire working class. And that is exactly what the CPGB has presented the Socialist Alliance in the form of its draft programme.

Being an outline for a general election manifesto, the SWP's contribution to the March 10 conference left much unsaid. No description of classes and class relations. No stand on the contradictory process of globalisation. No sense of history. Nevertheless, the SWP's submission is introduced as a "contribution to the establishment of a common 'minimum' programme", the maximum aim of "a socialist world" and "a more extensive programme for socialist change" is included. Put another way, the SWP finds itself advocating a minimum-maximum programme not of the *revolutionary* kind advocated by the Bolsheviks but the *centrist* kind characteristic of classical German social democracy.

There are worthwhile demands. Full employment, the right to lifelong education, a 35-hour week with no loss of pay, an end to homelessness. Indeed, compared with what the SWP has said in the past, one can detect some micro advances: eg, there is an explicit call to "end arms spending". True, this is wide open to pacifist interpretation. Nevertheless previously the SWP has talked merely of "slashing arms spending".

The CPGB is much clearer. As a matter of principle we are against the capitalist state having even one penny or even one person for its armed forces. At the same time though, we stress that any class aspiring to become the ruling class must as a precondition arm itself. First as a desire in the collective mind, finally in consummation on the streets. The working class needs a powerful militia to protect and further its universal interests. Without that, talk of socialism is no more than empty phrasemongering.

Another tentative step forward is to be found under the heading 'Political structure'. The SWP says: "Abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords." Remember, this comes from an organisation, which voted on the Socialist Alliance's Liaison Committee in opposition to a *militant* campaign on the monarchy. Instead of taking the lead, our majority allies - first and foremost the SWP - seem intent on chasing votes. Not surprisingly, given such a lead, one SWP member in Bedfordshire Socialist Alliance *militantly* argued to remove republican demands from the Luton election address - again, you understand, so as not to frighten royalist voters (Viv Smith, the regional full-timer, tells me it was not her, as we stated in the first edition). Unless one is guided by a correct programme such electoralist cretinism is inevitable.

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Obviously there remain some notable lacuna. What, for example, is to replace the monarchy? How will the SWP answer that? The comrades want a republic, yes. But do they have no aim short of a socialist republic? What about self-determination for Scotland and Wales? What about Ireland and the British-Irish? Do they want the break-up of Britain? What about voluntary unity in an England-Scotland-Wales federal republic? So far all we hear is silence.

In sum there is no bridge joining, or systematically linking, the struggles of today, with the goal of working class rule. As the SWP commands, for the time being, an effective majority in the Socialist Alliance, this concerns us all.

Both to show how far the SWP has come, and how far we in the Socialist Alliance have yet to go, it is necessary to pull together the threads of our discussions on Bolshevism and programme and move on to critically examine the shortcomings of Trotsky's much vaunted transitional programme. The way forward, not only for the SWP, but the whole Socialist Alliance, will then start to become clearer.

Under Tony Cliff, the SWP's founder-leader, the role of revolutionaries in a country like ours was seen as twofold. In the here and now support and give an SWP colouration to bread and butter issues like the minimum wage and trade union rights. That is practical politics, which in spite of the grandiloquent phrases about the logic of the struggle remain firmly within the narrow horizon of the present system and the UK constitutional monarchy state.

Then, in the indefinite future lies the socialist millennium. As there is no revolutionary situation in Britain, that exists in the realm of propaganda, where the ideologically defined sects engage in a primeval battle for supremacy - the SWP appearing as of this moment triumphant over once mighty rivals: eg, 'official communism', the WRP founded by Gerry Healy, and Peter Taaffe's rapidly disintegrating Socialist Party in England and Wales.

The minimum, or immediate, programmatic demand for a federal republic and a "more generous democracy" advanced by the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB never had a place in comrade Cliff's world view. The only republic Cliff willingly countenanced was the *socialist* republic.

In the meantime his SWP gave a left gloss, or alibi, for Blair's and his programme. The SWP campaigned for and enthusiastically welcomed the election of the Blair government in May 1997. Subsequently the SWP called for a 'yes' vote in the Scottish and Welsh referendums; a 'yes' vote over the Good Friday deal for Northern Ireland; and a 'yes' vote for the 'presidential' Greater London mayor (thankfully the SWP's outline for the Socialist Alliance said we should "oppose the cabinet and mayoral system in local government - presumably that means actively exposing it in any future referenda and not voting 'yes').

Evidently till recently the SWP has been content to leave initiative around high politics to others. No wonder Cliff was determined to rubbish Lenin. His Bolsheviks were committed to a minimum or immediate programme, whereby the working class

would exercise hegemony in the struggle for democracy and a republic in Russia; something to be crowned by the seizure of power by the workers at the head of the peasant masses (the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry).

In marked contrast to Lenin Cliff eschewed any kind of testable and democratically agreed programme. To have a programme was to court danger and therefore best avoided.

That is, until 1998 when the SWP's 'Action programme' suddenly appeared. Here though we find not the high politics of democracy but a list of unexceptional minimalist demands: stopping closures and the nationalisation of failed concerns; a 35-hour week with no loss of pay; a £4.61 minimum wage; ending privatisation; repealing the anti-trade union laws; state control over international trade in order to curb speculation; an increase in welfare spending and slashing the arms bill; full employment so as to boost demand.

As noted above, three years later there appears to be a certain hardening up. The SWP's proposals for the Socialist Alliance's general election manifesto is slightly less minimalist and even contains a brief mention of the maximum demand for socialism.

Anyway in order to provide authority the 'Action programme' was backed up with reference to Comintern's 'Theses on tactics' agreed at its 3rd Congress in June 1921 and Trotsky's 1934 'A programme of action for France' (see A Callinicos *International Socialism* No81, winter 1998; and J Rees *Socialist Review* January 1999). But the boldest claim is that it was premised on essentially the same conditions which prompted Trotsky's 1938 *transitional programme*. This came from Tony Cliff himself (see T Cliff *Trotskyism after Trotsky* London 1999, p82).

As most readers will be aware, Cliff distinguished himself from orthodox Trotskyism during the immediate aftermath of World War II. He was able to recognise the palpable reality of capitalist boom and the inappropriateness of Trotsky's *Transitional programme*. In my view, of course, Trotsky was badly mistaken even in 1938.

Trotsky believed that capitalism was more than just decadent and moribund. Capitalism faced immediate extinction, was experiencing its "death agony" (L Trotsky *The transitional programme* New York 1997, p111). As a system it could no longer develop the productive forces. The introduction of new machines and technology provided no answer to chronic stagnation. Nor in general can there be in the epoch of "decaying capitalism" systematic social reforms or the raising of the masses' living standards.

Therefore, Trotsky concluded, *defence* of existing economic gains through demanding a "sliding scale of wages" and hours would virtually spontaneously trigger a final and apocalyptic collision with capitalism. The question of democracy was likewise reduced to merely *defence* of the existing "rights and social conquests of workers" (*ibid* p115).

In explaining his programme of *transitional* demands Trotsky takes to task the minimum-maximum programmes of "classical" social democracy. Most doctrinaire



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Trotskyites interpret this religiously, as a final judgement from on high, damning the minimum-maximum programme *per se*.

Obviously the Bolsheviks too had a minimum programme. You know it almost word perfect by now. It mapped out a road under conditions of tsarist autocracy, which would culminate in a democratic republic born of a popular revolution. Economically not going beyond the norms of capitalist commodity production, nevertheless at the level of regime Russia was to be ruled over by the working class in alliance with the peasant masses. Here was the bridge that united the minimum and maximum sections of the programme. The Bolsheviks were committed to using the salient of state power to help spark the *international socialist revolution* in the countries of advanced capitalism.

In defence of their own economic practice, Trotsky's latter-day disciples - Cliff included - woefully misrepresent the history of Bolshevism and Leninism. As a direct by-product they reject out of hand the concept of a minimum section of the party programme: ie, a logically designed series of immediate demands and perspectives under the socioeconomic conditions of capitalism which in the orchestrated struggle to fulfil them transforms the workers into a class that is ready to seize state power.

Trotsky actually warned his tiny band of followers, organised under the tight umbrella of the so-called Fourth International, that it would be a terrible mistake to "discard" the programme of old "minimal" demands "to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness" (*ibid* pp114-115). Nonetheless, simply because capitalism was viewed as being in absolute and terminal decline every serious economic demand of the workers "inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and the bourgeois state" (*ibid* p114).

In effect Trotsky was reduced by extreme organisational weakness into advocacy of a particular apocalyptic version of economism: ie, the workers would through strikes and other such elementary struggles find their "bridge" to revolutionary demands and revolutionary consciousness. With him eschatology was combined with revolutionary economism.

No matter how we excuse Trotsky in terms of how things appeared on the eve of World War II, there is no escaping that he was wrong in method and periodisation. Trade union struggles are not hegemonic, nor was the capitalist general crisis permanent. Suffice to say, after World War II capitalism experienced its highest and longest boom. By organising a further deformation, or retreat, from the law of value with Keynesian welfarism, nationalisation and the Cold War arms economy, conditions were laid for a sustained and unprecedented spasm of capitalist accumulation.

Cliff readily admits how "excruciatingly painful" it was to face up to the reality that Trotsky's prognosis had not come true (T Cliff *Trotskyism after Trotsky* London 1999, p14). Yet he was one of the few voices of sanity on the left. While 'official communism' gained solace from the Stalinite mantra that capitalism's general crisis was getting ever deeper, orthodox Trotskyism repeated Trotsky's 1938 formulations in

order to inoculate itself. Eg, Ernest Mandel arrogantly denied the new-found dynamism of the system with the certainty of a Moses; Gerry Healy demanded obeisance before the crisis of leadership and imminent collapse of capitalism throughout his horrid life. In contrast Cliff fearlessly tried to come to terms with reality. Arriving from Palestine in 1946, he was struck by the relatively high living standards of the working class and the existence of full employment in Britain. That had to be explained, not explained away.

Essentially Cliff held an underconsumptionist theory of capitalist crisis. Slumps, for him, have their origin in the inability of the masses to buy the goods that have been produced. Against that theory it has to be said that workers are employed only to the degree that they produce surplus labour, that living labour produces beyond what is necessary for its own production and reproduction. So it is quite obvious that the profit system by its very nature must rest on a demand *exterior* to that of the working class. Surplus product can only be realised in the last analysis through sale to other capitalists.

True, the more dead labour is accumulated in relation to living labour, the greater the amount of surplus product which has to be realised. Nevertheless under the lash of competition capitalists are engaged in an endless drive to expand production in order to realise profit - and in the process new markets and new demands are created. Profit, not the consumption of the working class, therefore, constitutes the limits of the system of capital (see S Clarke *Marx's theory of crisis* London 1994, pp144-47).

Underconsumptionism was with Cliff turned on its head. His explanation of the post-World War II boom lay in the theory of the permanent arms economy. The huge military budgets post-World War II served to temporarily stabilise the system by staving off overproduction through expanding a third department of production - arms - which relied solely on governmental demand. Manufacturing the means of destruction boosted aggregate demand and thereby through the multiplier effect increased investment in the production of the means of production and in turn the production of the means of consumption of the masses: ie, it stimulated both departments one and two.

Be that as it may, Cliff decided that Trotsky's *Transitional programme* was disproved "by life" and that reformism was enjoying a second spring (T Cliff *Neither Washington nor Moscow* London 1982, p117). In conditions of rapidly rising real wages, demands for a sliding scale of wages in line with the cost of living were at best "meaningless" or at worse "reactionary." The same went for a sliding scale of hours under conditions of full employment.

Unfortunately, an incorrect Trotskyite reading of Bolshevik history plus a correct recognition that Trotsky's *Transitional programme* did not correspond to post-World War II conditions, produced in Cliff's mind a disdain for a revolutionary programme, full stop. SWP leaders, Cliff included, routinely boasted of their freedom from programmatic constraints. They might just as well boast of being at sea without a compass. In

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practice, for the SWP, absence of programme meant hugging the familiar shores of everyday trade union politics and making abstract propaganda about the unknown continent of socialism. Unexpected lulls and violent storms could only but produce impressionistic bouts of pessimism and paroxysms of ultra-leftism. The SWP had no programme to guide it.

For instance, in the midst of the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85 - a strategic clash of class against class - the SWP specialised in pessimism. The year-long strike with its hit squads, mass pickets, nationwide support groups, women against pit closure movement, etc, was, announced Chris Harman, an "extreme example" of what the SWP called the "downturn". Cliff had decreed that the whole period throughout the 1980s was one of retreat. Hence, as the miners gallantly battled with the Tory government and the semi-militarised police outside power stations and in the pit villages, the SWP proclaimed that this was more like 1927 than 1925: ie, agitation to generalise the miners' strike by fusing it with the dockers, the railways, the Liverpool council and countless other such disputes - both possible and vital - was completely misplaced. We had already lost.

Such irresponsible defeatism, along with a deep-seated anti-programmism, led comrade Cliff to write - only a few years ago - that Trotsky's *Transitional programme* was only relevant when there was "a situation of general crisis, of capitalism in deep slump", and that many of the programme's proposals: eg, workers' defence squads - "did not fit a non-revolutionary situation" (T Cliff *Trotsky: The darker the night, the brighter the star* London 1993, p300). As if the miners' hit squads of nine years before were not embryonic workers' defence corps, or militias, in all but name.

Then, all of a sudden, everything changed. In late 1992, when the NUM was forlornly looking towards Tory MPs and the shire county set to save Britain's remaining deep coal mining industry from Heseltine's savage decimation, the SWP stole the WRP's semi-anarchist slogan: ie, 'TUC, off your knees - call the general strike'. The general strike being, of course, a prelude to, or a step away from, social revolution, which in the deranged schema of the WRP had been imminent since at least the early 1970s.

That is why for serious Marxists, as opposed to charlatans and windbags, the call for a general strike is always accompanied by agitation: ie, a dialogue with the masses - about the necessity of forming workers' defence squads.

Needless to say, in 1992 the SWP did no such thing. Cliff did, however, wildly suggested in an interview that if the SWP had 20,000 or 30,000 members the huge demonstration in London in support of the miners would have been re-routed and parliament stormed. Shades of Sergei Eisenstein and 'October' ... or more likely the Odessa steps in 'Battleship Potemkin'.

The years that followed saw Cliff rationalise his flip from extreme pessimism by undertaking an intellectual return to Trotsky's 1938 version of programme (not Lenin's). Despite working class confidence and self-activity being at an all time low

ebb and revolutionary consciousness almost nonexistence, Cliff decided that pursuit of even the most minimal demands is all that is needed to fell our mortal enemy.

Cliff insisted that we live not in a period of reaction (of a special type) but, one must presume, of imminent revolution. "Capitalism in the advanced countries," he wrote, "is no longer expanding and so the words of the 1938 *Transitional programme* that 'there can be no discussion of systematic social reforms and raising the masses' living standards' fits reality again" (T Cliff *Trotskyism after Trotsky* London 1999, pp81-2). As Cliff once said about the periodisation of Trotsky's epigones - pure fantasy.

Suffice to say, despite being punctuated with downward oscillations capitalism in the advanced countries has been continuously expanding. True, at the beginning of 2001 the USA began to experience a definite economic slowdown. Nevertheless throughout the 1990s the USA recorded sustained high growth rates. The European Union remains a - precarious economic powerhouse for capital and has yet to catch cold after the American sneeze. For those in work in Britain, especially in the private sector, living standards still climb in real terms. As for worst paid labour, it is now benefiting from the minimum wage, albeit far below subsistence levels. Pathetically the SWP's 'Action programme' whimpers that "at the very least" such workers need "£1 an hour more".

Even if economic struggles were all that it takes to transform the workers into a class for itself - which they are definitely not - capitalism in Britain still exhibits - at this phase - the potential to concede substantial reforms. The financial crisis, which so excited Cliff in 1999, remained stubbornly confined to the far east and Russia.

Reforms are anyway primarily by-products of class struggle, not capitalism's health. In the most difficult conditions, to save their system, the ruling class will enact the most far-reaching measures. As Luxemburg rightly noted, in 1905 the workers in backward Russia "were, as regards the economic and social freedom of their movement, head and shoulders above the Germans" (R Luxemburg *The mass strike* London nd, p56).

On May 1 1997 the SWP enthusiastically voted Labour. After two decades the slogan, 'Tories out' was realised. But not in the way the SWP hoped. Blair and his shadow cabinet, it should be stressed, had done everything to steer Labour to the right and lower popular expectations to the barest minimum. Those who turned out for Labour did so in the main because they thought it would be no worse than the Tories. Despite that, not least in order to excuse themselves, the SWP - along with the whole auto-Labourite left - did their utmost to talk things up. In the months following Blair's parliamentary landslide the SWP press carried daft articles on the theme that there existed a crisis of expectations. To state the obvious, there was no explosion.

Needless to say though, Cliff left the SWP he did so much to create and build facing a crisis of perspectives. Blair's de-Labourisation of Labour undermined auto-Labourism. At the same time the absence of any serious mass movement from below forced programmeless SWP theoreticians and propagandists to make the most absurd and

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hyperbolic claims to bolster Cliff's last about-turn. Prior to entering the Socialist Alliance, the SWP momentarily came to resemble the old WRP under the raving and ranting Gerry Healy.

Take Lindsey German - an intelligent person by any reckoning. She insisted in early 1999 that Blairism was between the proverbial hammer and anvil "in every major area of government policy". Therefore, comrade German held out the prospect of Britain being pushed to the brink of revolution through purely economic struggles: "It is increasingly obvious that even one major national strike or an all out strike in one city would lead to a rapid crisis of Blairism and Labourism as society polarised along class lines" (*International Socialism* No82, spring 1999, p35).

This was no objective assessment. It was servicing the Cliff line, which had to be parroted, no matter what the evidence to the contrary. Hence in response to polls showing Blair enjoying historically unprecedented ratings, Mark Steel, then a *Guardian* columnist, felt duty bound to talk nonsense. "Blair must be the most unpopular 'most popular person' ever", he lamely joked (*The Guardian* April 14 1999).

The gulf separating SWP theory from reality stemmed directly from Cliff's 11th hour reconversion to Trotsky's *Transitional programme*.

What our Socialist Alliance allies have taken from his programme is many of its weaknesses and precious few strengths. In their hands, the "transitional method" becomes a commandment to prioritise trade union-type demands - still excused, as in 1938, by holding fast to the theory that somehow such struggles, if conducted militantly enough, will spontaneously lead, stage by stage, directly to the conquest of power.

A couple of examples will suffice to show how revolutionary economism is in fact hardly distinguishable from the strikist economism which was the butt of Lenin's fearsome polemic in *What is to be done?*

Our first example is the AWL's Duncan Morrison on the minimum wage (*Weekly Worker* May 24 2001). The second is the International Socialist Group's Veronica Fagan on the police and army (*Socialist Outlook* May 2001).

Comrade Morrison counterposes the approaches of the CPGB and the Socialist Alliance majority on the minimum wage. The AWL and the Socialist Alliance majority have plumped for a £7.39 per hour minimum wage, the EU 'decency threshold'. A sum arrived at by an obscure committee of state-sponsored experts. A year ago the SWP, amongst others, were touting £4.61 - Unison's figure, which does have the virtue of emanating from the real labour movement and has been reluctantly fought for by the leadership in a Grand Old Duke of York fashion.

Presumably both the £7.39 and £4.61 figures conform to the "transitional" method. Either way, comrade Morrison now wants the Socialist Alliance to use the EU's - higher - decency threshold as a "lever to help the mass of workers: ie, those not inclined to take our word for what is needed to enter the struggle to level up wages and benefit across Europe" and thus rise to "their feet" and no doubt in the course of

time to the heavens of state power.

In contrast the CPGB proposes a £8.57-per-hour - or £300 for a 35-hour week - minimum wage. That corresponds in our view to the actual needs of the working class, a calculation based on the minimum needed to reproduce simple labour power under today's cultural conditions.

We advocate the creation of workers' commissions to produce the exact level to be fought for in dialogue with the broad mass of the working class. A two-way process of education and agitation. The minimum wage therefore emerges as a struggle for the political economy of the working class as against the political economy of the bourgeoisie. By putting human needs before the needs of profit, the working class is beginning to challenge the right of the capitalist class to control production. The whole system of wages is also beginning to be brought into question.

In the name of the *Transitional programme* comrade Morrison derides our method. It is nothing but a special 'communist' calculation. Without a blush of shame he also says our figure "remains within the bourgeois definition of need".

This is strange. Remember comrade Morrison champions a minimum wage sanctioned by the EU bureaucracy whose remit most certainly "remains within the bourgeois definition of need". Moreover, the comrade proudly describes himself as a Trotskyite. Yet one of the distinctive features of the *Transitional programme* is establishing working class committees, aided by statistical and other such specialists, in order to draw up plans for the *entire* economy.

Trotsky rejects "the muddleheaded reformist slogan of 'nationalisation'". Instead he calls for the working class to set about the reorganisation of the whole of production onto a more "dignified and workable basis" - not meekly submitting to what the capitalists say they can afford (L Trotsky *The transitional programme for socialist revolution* New York 1977, p121). That reorganisation includes fixing wages. Any suggestion of allowing an "office-holder of the bourgeois state": eg. an EU bureaucrat - "to carry out this work" is explicitly and indignantly ruled out by Trotsky. Here the CPGB cannot but agree.

Comrade Fagan of the ISG goes even more awry. She slams proposals from the CPGB and Workers Power on the army and the police presented to the Socialist Alliance's policy conference in Birmingham. Workers Power flatly stated that the police force is irreformable and we should therefore fight to disband this whole institution. The CPGB in its turn wanted the Socialist Alliance to defend the basic principle of the armed people and oppose the standing army.

Comrade Fagan is livid: "If this isn't a maximum programme, then I don't know what is," she ignorantly declares. "There is no way that this reflects the consciousness of the majority of people breaking from Labour," the comrade concludes.

Firstly, the maximum programme, as we have explained, deals with the situation *after* the revolution. Without the workers having already disarmed the bourgeoisie and arming themselves, that would be impossible. Secondly, the programme is certainly

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not designed to reflect the opinion of exiled Labourites. It should rather serve to break them from the mental prison of Labourism.

Opposition to the standing army was, we note, characteristic of bourgeois revolutionaries in the 18th and 19th century. Likewise the principle of the armed people. The American revolution of 1776 embodied this democratic principle ... a principle taken up and consistently advocated by Marx, Engels, Lenin and, yes, Leon Trotsky. The “only disarmament” which can avert or end war is “disarmament of the bourgeoisie by the workers”. And for that to happen they must first “arm themselves” (*ibid* p129).

Whereas the Socialist Alliance manifesto disgracefully committed us to backing *reduced* arms spending by the bourgeois state, Trotsky put forward exactly the same formulation as proposed by the CPGB and dismissed by comrade Fagan. “Not one man and not one penny for the bourgeois government!”; “Not an armaments programme, but a programme of useful public works!” we read. Trotsky insists upon military training and the arming of the workers and the “substitution for the standing army of a *people’s militia*, indissolubly linked with factories, mines, etc” (*ibid* p131).

Interestingly in an exchange with Max Shachtman - who argued that the “sentiment” for a workers’ militia did not yet exist - Trotsky replied that the real question was not existing opinion, but “preparing the minds of the masses through propaganda” (*ibid* p85). Again we can only but agree with Trotsky.

### 9.6. Towards a common programme

The need for a Socialist Alliance programme is pressing and arises from the objective requirements of the movement itself. Without such a democratically debated, constantly tested and therefore adjusted compass we operate blindly, or according to the whim of this or that passing majority or set of office holders. That way, we are prone to chase every fad or succumb to short-term interest and thus fall into confusion and incoherence.

An obvious starter. What is a programme? To begin with, let us answer in the negative. For revolutionary socialists and communists a programme is not some list of admirable but abstract objectives: ie, social justice, decency, equality and ecological sustainability. Nor is it a futile appeal for the great and the good to improve the lot of Britain’s ‘socially excluded’ and abolish ‘third world’ poverty. Nor is it a general election manifesto with attacks on Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and the New Labour project and specific comments about the latest news: eg, Ken Livingstone’s New Yorkist solutions for the London underground system versus the government’s PFI proposals.

Our programme must be a long-term guide to action for the *working class itself* and should be informed by the most advanced theory available. Hence our Socialist Alliance programme represents the crystallisation of world historical experience and logically unfolds key defining principles and an overall approach from the present-day to the winning of state power and universal liberation.

Those who are distinguished from other sections of the working class only by a single-minded commitment to the general interest have a duty to map out a strategic road that will help take our movement step by step towards our long-term goal of general freedom. Lenin made this exact point time and time again during the course of his struggle to equip the working class within the Russian empire with a mass working class party that could lead the overthrow of tsarism and then carry through that revolution uninterruptedly to the tasks of socialism. Indeed it could be said that the prime purpose of *Iskra* was the unity of all revolutionary socialists and communists around a definite Marxist programme.

The Socialist Alliance programme is the foundation upon which everything else is built, including in time our organisational forms and constantly changing tactics. It formally links our continuous and what should be all encompassing agitational work with our ultimate aim of universal human liberation and a communitarian or communist system. Our programme thus establishes the basis for agreed action and is the standard, the point of reference, around which the voluntary unity of the Socialist Alliance is built and concretised. Put another way, the programme represents the dialectical unity between theory and practice.

Every clause of the programme must be easily assimilated and understood by advanced workers. It must be written in an accessible style whereby passages and sentences can be used for agitational purposes and even turned into slogans. Here we can learn from the *Communist manifesto*, the Erfurt programme of classical German social democracy and the first and second programmes of communists in Russia.

Of course, it goes without saying, “every step of the real movement is more important than a dozen programmes”, as Karl Marx famously quipped. But neither Marx nor anyone else genuinely standing in the Marxist tradition has ever denied the necessity of a programme. It was Eduard Bernstein who sought to belittle the programme and elevate the organisation of the party into a thing in and for itself.

Unfortunately, we find distinct echoes of that dire approach in the tradition of our SWP allies. Their founder-leader, Tony Cliff, routinely warned of the danger of adopting a programme. What was perceived as encouraging an influx of recruits appeared to be the sole guide. A democratically agreed programme would have created definite difficulties for the SWP’s many and sudden about-turns under Cliff. Much to the discredit of the incumbent quadrumvirate publicly he met with no opposition. Either way the SWP has never produced a programme worthy of the name - though it is rumoured that in the early 1970s comrade Harman penned a draft. Needless to say, it still gathers dust - perhaps now it should see the light of day.

‘Programmatically’ the SWP is naked apart from its thumbnail ‘What we stand for’ column in *Socialist Worker* and the now half-forgotten and thoroughly minimalist *Action programme*. Except for those, totally in thrall to the so-called ‘transitional method’, it is clear that the former contains some vital principles but no overall strategy. On the other hand the latter transcends neither the constitutional monarchy



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system in the UK nor the system of commodity production.

Let us now turn to discuss our draft programme for the Socialist Alliance (see appendix 2). The structure of any programme should be closely connected with its content. The programme therefore follows an inner logic. Each section, each statement, each demand logically leads to another and to the final conclusion that socialists must unite into a single democratic and centralist party.

We divide our Socialist Alliance programme into six distinct but connected sections. The opening section is a brief preamble describing the origins of the Socialist Alliance. The next section outlines the main features of the epoch, the epoch of the transition from capitalism by way of socialism to communism. Then comes the nature of capitalism in Britain and the consequences of its development. Following on from here are the immediate economic and political measures that are required if the peoples of Britain are to live a full and decent life in the here and now. Such a minimum or *immediate* programme is, admittedly, technically feasible within the confines of present-day advanced capitalism. In actual fact though it can only be genuinely realised in its totality by way of revolution.

From these radical foundations the character of the British revolution and the position of the various classes and strata can be presented. Next, again logically, comes the workers' government in Britain and the worldwide transition to socialism and then communism. Here is our *maximum* programme. Finally the need for all partisans of the working class to unite in the Socialist Alliance itself is dealt with. The essential organisational principles of democracy and unity in action are stated and we underline in no uncertain terms why the Socialist Alliance must facilitate criticism and the open discussion of differences.

It will be readily appreciated that our draft Socialist Alliance programme has no place for long historic explanations or passing facts and fleeting details relevant only to a certain time or even a particular year. Our programme must be as short and concise as possible. Everything that is not essential should be kept out. Engels rightly insisted that, "All that is superfluous in a programme weakens it." The Socialist Alliance programme should therefore consist where possible of pithy statements, statements that are so well honed that they can serve as slogans.

The programme deals with principles. Again because of that it should give no space to tactical tasks or explanations; this ought to be left to pamphlets and, when we have it, a regular political paper. On this subject Lenin made the following telling point: "The programme should leave questions of means open, allowing the choice of means to the militant organisations and to Party congresses that determine the *tactics* of the Party. Questions of tactics, however, can hardly be introduced into the programme (with the exception of the most important questions, questions of *principle* such as the attitude to other fighters against the autocracy). Questions of tactics will be discussed by the Party newspaper as they arise and will be eventually decided at Party congresses."

Our programme, if it is adopted as a generally correct approach, will therefore not of necessity need rewriting every couple of years but will serve as a long term guide that will hopefully need modification only in terms of big developments and unexpected changes. Because it is intended to be a long-term guide, the programme is of supreme importance. It is therefore quite natural for us to take great pains in finalising our Socialist Alliance programme and then to guard it against any attempts to water it down.

## 10. Europe and the politics of the offensive

For establishment politics in Britain the European Union represents a fundamental fault line - and one that could well be replicated in the Socialist Alliance. This is hardly surprising. The EU is a continent-wide superstate in the making. Old national and sectional identities, interests and symbols are being destroyed or have declining use-value and therefore are in crisis. The nation-states that emerged from the womb of the sprawling empires of dynastic Europe no longer exercise undivided political sovereignty. National parliaments have, though, not given way to the European parliament. That institution is largely a talking shop. It is the European central bank, the council of ministers and the commissioners who are visibly gaining more and more influence by the day over the lives of Europe's peoples.

The Socialist Alliance's response to these developments is still to be decided. Our general election manifesto does contain the correct slogan, "neither advocate the euro or defend the pound" (*People before profit* p19). However, a fully rounded response is still needed, and if we are to get to grips with the question, we must base ourselves on a historical understanding of the drive for European unity and why it manifests itself in anti-democratic forms.

Behind integration lies a blood drenched past. Throughout the 20th century objective circumstances cried out for European integration. The stupendous productive capabilities of capitalism have "outgrown" the narrow framework provided by the nation-state. Germany in particular found itself constricted. As Trotsky argued, the question presented by history was which class was going to "organise" a united Europe (L Trotsky *The first five years of the Communist International* London 1974, p341). Capital or labour? Twice the German bourgeoisie tried to unite Europe using the methods of blood and iron. In 1918 the kaiser was defeated by the superior power of Britain, France and the USA. World War I saw the collapse of the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian autocracies. The main focus of world economic activity shifted from Europe to the Atlantic and under the terms of the 1920 Versailles peace treaty whole tracts of German-inhabited territory in Europe were torn away - Alsace-Lorraine, Posen in west Prussia, Danzig, Northern Schleswig, the Saar basin, Upper Silesia, etc. Crippling reparations were also exacted.

Faced with the Balkanisation and decay of Europe, Comintern, in 1923, adopted the slogan for a united socialist states of Europe. It was meant to be a transitional demand that would lead to the eventual world socialist federation. And yet the working class

was already on the retreat and one defeat followed after another - not only at the hands of fascism but also from within in the twin forms of social democracy and 'official communism'. Labour could not unite Europe. The conditions were laid for World War II and another attempt to bring about European unity through blood and iron. In March 1936 Adolf Hitler effectively tore up the Versailles Treaty. In April 1938 the *Anchluss* between Austria and the Third Reich was affirmed by plebiscite. By 1940 Germany dominated Europe from the borders of Spain in the west to Stalin's USSR in the east. Plans were afoot for Operation Sea-lion, the invasion of Britain. However, a Europe united by counterrevolution could never be stable. Nor could it hold against world power. Germany was defeated by a combination of British, Soviet and US power and national liberation movements across Europe - Poland, Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Denmark, France, etc. Europe lay in ruins and under the terms of the Yalta agreement half the continent was incorporated into the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and through bureaucratic revolution 'sovietised'. Like Hitler's Europe it was a prison house of nations.

However, in the west Britain and the US encouraged not only economic recovery but measures of unification; the idea was to both avoid another internecine conflict, and to create a bulwark against bureaucratic socialism. There was an internal impulse too. Federal Germany and France in particular, having twice been devastated, were determined to establish a historic compromise between themselves. In 1951 a coal and steel community was created between France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. In 1957 these countries signed the Treaty of Rome which was designed to steadily reduce tariffs between them and establish common external ones - in other words a common market.

European integration has certainly advanced qualitatively since 1957. The customs union - born of the cold war - has become a single market embracing 350 million people and 15 countries with free trade and movement of labour. Economically it is the world's biggest home market. It has a combined GDP of about \$6 trillion - as compared with \$5 trillion for the US and \$3 trillion for Japan.

Politically, however, because it has been united from above, through bureaucratic not democratic methods, the EU resembles something like the creaking Austro-Hungarian empire that straddled middle Europe in the 19th century. The EU is an amalgam of unevenly developed state units with a reunited Germany quietly trying to steer things from the centre. Nevertheless the direction is clear. Wider, in the form of candidates like Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Deeper, in the form of majority voting in political institutions and economic integration. The EU already has the first elements of a Euro army - the rapid reaction force.

With the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties the tempo of integration increased. And in January 1999 11 EU countries subsumed their national currencies into the euro - overseen by a powerful central bank. Economic discipline in Euroland is enforced by a stability pact that limits government borrowing to 3% of GDP. A social chapter has

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also been put in place to facilitate convergence, along with provisions for common foreign and immigration policies.

There is another, important, factor at work behind European integration. Inter-imperialist rivalry. Europe has to compete with the US and Japan. They might have marginally smaller markets, but despite that, due to an historically constituted nationality and an economically centralised territory, they are blessed with a single working class and a single political and business elite. Like every other commodity, labour power can easily move, and therefore be bought and sold, anywhere in the US or Japan. Europe is not only divided by history, but culture. Commodities freely circulate, but not the special commodity, labour power. Language is a material barrier except for those with higher education (worst paid labour being a partial exception). A multinational, and therefore fragmented, political and business elite constitutes a similar handicap. To successfully compete, the EU must as a minimum forge a federal superstate from where its radically reorganised transnationals can gorge themselves in ever corner of the planet. Survival necessitates political integration and overcoming the historic division of Europe into antagonistic national capitals.

In Britain this ongoing process caused deep divisions. Ideologically the residues of empire arrogance clouded the brain. Barred from the Common Market in 1963 by de Gaulle's veto, the British ruling class tried to maintain a quasi-empire, along with the 'special relationship' with the US and a stake in Europe through Efta. But neither the Commonwealth nor the conceit of being an independent world power added up to a viable strategy. Britain eventually entered the EEC in 1973 under Heath's Tory government (along with its Danish and Irish Efta allies).

Apart from its extreme right wing around Roy Jenkins, the Labour Party was highly critical of the terms and conditions. Nonetheless in 1975 Harold Wilson's government successfully fought a referendum on the issue of continued membership. The main opposition came from a Tony Benn-Enoch Powell popular front. The Labour Party remained officially uneasy with European integration till the leadership of John Smith and then the government of Tony Blair. A parallel shift occurred in the TUC with the appointment of John Monks. New Labour, and its coterie of middle class career politicians, loyally and now openly serves the interests of the most competitive, most internationalised, sections of British capital. The subaltern working class pole of Labourism is today a marginalised appendage and is treated with barely concealed contempt.

It is the Tories who are organically split. While Iain Duncan Smith's wing echoes Lady Thatcher's call for a "fundamental renegotiation" of Britain's relationship with the EU, the Clarke wing joins the Lab-Lib pact over the forthcoming referendum on the euro. These pro-big business traditionalists will operate within the Britain in Europe campaign under the prime minister. As to the Tory front bench, it articulates the interests of the least competitive sections of capital and plays on little England xenophobia. The Tory Party went into the June 2001 general election committed to not

joining the euro for at least one parliamentary term so as to defend “British sovereignty”. For five years! The Hague Tories constituted little more than the politics of fear.

If the British ruling class has been divided and parochial, the groups, factions and sects of the left have proved utterly incapable of providing anything like a serious working class alternative. This is something the Socialist Alliance must correct. And with a referendum expected within the next five years there is no room for complacency.

The reformist and national socialist left adhere to the most backward looking and chauvinist positions on the EU. They instinctively recognise that European integration makes a mockery of their utopian British road to socialism. In terms of rhetoric and immediate programme the Campaign Group rump in New Labour, the SLP Scargillites and the ‘official communists’ of the *Morning Star* are virtually indistinguishable from Thatcher, Portillo and the UK Independence Party. Together they want to save the pound sterling and restore British sovereignty. Naturally with the likes of Skinner, Scargill, Griffiths, it is all done in the name of socialism ... but this is the socialism of fools. The best these ‘liberators’ could achieve in reality is a British version of Stalinism, Kim Il Sungism or Pol Pottism: ie, state slavery - and that imposed onto a capitalistically advanced, country fully integrated into the world economy. What cost the lives of millions elsewhere could only but be repeated many times over as a still greater tragedy. On all criteria civilisation would not be advanced an inch but thrown back miles.

Proletarian socialism - as the first stage or phase of communism - is international or it is nothing. There can be no socialism in one country because capital, as an exploitative social relationship, resides not within a single national state but internationally in the realm of the global economy. Bureaucratic or national socialism just brings back all the old crap, albeit in different forms. That is why as long ago as 1845 Marx and Engels emphatically rejected all localist schemes and insisted on the contrary that: “Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples ‘all at once’ and simultaneously” (K Marx, F Engels *CW* Vol 5, Moscow 1976, p49).

As aspiring leaders of the working class, Peter Taaffe and his lieutenant Lynn Walsh have proved themselves to be theoretically bankrupt over the EU. They staked their reputations as seers on the ‘Marxist’ prediction that European integration and the euro were impossible. Such prediction says everything about them as bureaucratic charlatans and nothing about Marxism. A more sophisticated ‘Marxist’ position, also within the Socialist Alliance, has been taken up by the so-called Fourth International and its section in Britain, the International Socialist Group, aka *Socialist Outlook*. Unfortunately, its demand for British withdrawal from the EU is an echo of the national socialism of the Labour left, SLP and CPB. Yet because it is done sincerely under the guise of internationalism, this national socialism is all the more insidious and dangerous.

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Writing in *Socialist Outlook's* pamphlet *Even more unemployment: the case against Emu*, Alan Thornett admits he and his group of co-thinkers will be siding with the reformist left and the Tory right in voting 'no' in the euro referendum. Predictably comrade Thornett calls for a "progressive 'no' campaign". He does not want to share a platform with Duncan Smith, the UK Independence Party or the BNP. However, when stripped of the pious internationalist declarations, *Socialist Outlook* has in actuality the same immediate *nationalist* programme as the reformist left (which logically leads it organisationally into the most revolting company). "We are for the dissolution of the EU or Britain's withdrawal from it. It is a capitalist club designed to organise the restructuring and concentration of capital to the advantage of the bosses. But our aim is not a capitalist Britain outside the capitalist EU. We want a socialist Britain in a socialist Europe" (*ibid* p11). Essentially the same dire argument is repeated in John Lister's March 2001 pamphlet *Buiding the alternative to Blair*.

The shallowness of this kind of internationalism stands revealed if we apply the method to Britain itself. It is surely a "capitalist club" designed to "organise the restructuring and concentration of capital to the advantage of the bosses". Should we call for the "dissolution" of Britain, as do Welsh and Scottish nationalists, or even a working class "withdrawal from it"? The suggestion is stupid (though it does not stop comrade Thornett and co from promoting the 'break-up' of Britain).

Interestingly, before the October Revolution of 1917 Lenin and the Bolsheviks confronted similar manifestations of national socialism. The tsarist empire was a vast prison house of many nations. Nevertheless, while fighting for the right of these nations to self-determination up to and including secession, the overriding, central, strategy was cementing the highest and most extensive workers' unity throughout the tsarist empire - in order to *overthrow* the tsarist empire.

Unwittingly comrade Thornett and co have placed themselves outside the international communist tradition, a tradition represented by their claimed mentors, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. Unflattering though the observation is, comrade Thornett actually stands in the camp of Jozef Pilsudski and his Polish Socialist Party. Formed in 1892, it adopted a national socialist programme for the reconstitution of an independent Poland out of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires (which between them all but partitioned it out of existence at the 1815 Congress of Vienna). Rosa Luxemburg and Julian Marchlewski split with the PSP in 1893 over this perspective. Objective conditions, they rightly said, demanded the unity of workers - Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Georgians, Latts, etc - against the tsarist empire.

In defence of the past, in particular in defence of the welfare state and the post-World War II social democratic gains, comrades Thornett and Lister present a progressive-conservative programme that would at best weaken the EU. It would, however, also weaken the European working class movement if its strongest detachments forced upon their capitalists a policy of withdrawal - a road that would lead not to a national socialist paradise but in all probability the hell of increased national

exploitation and eventually counterrevolution.

The purpose of communist politics is not to look fondly upon an anti-working class past (the welfare state). Our programme is about the future and emphasises the positive advantages of the workers being organised into the largest, most centralised states. All the better to overthrow them and begin the advance to communism. The working class can only but suffer one cruel defeat after another if it confines itself to the politics of defence. Communists therefore raise the perspective of the politics of the offensive. Hence we say: to the extent that the EU becomes a superstate, so must the advanced part of the working class organise itself into a single revolutionary party to overthrow it.

The EU is undoubtedly a reactionary anti-working class institution which upholds the “rule of the wealthy minority over the vast majority” (J Lister *Building the alternative to Blair* London 2001, p60). Amongst consenting Marxists that hardly needs proving with statistics concerning spending limits and lurid details of the Nice treaty. The real question is what attitude we adopt to it. The CPGB stands for consistent democracy under capitalism. Concretely that means fighting for the maximum democracy in the EU: eg, abolition of the council of ministers and the unelected commissioners, a constituent assembly of the peoples of Europe, an armed working class and substantive equality for all citizens. Without such an approach talk of socialism in Britain or a socialist Europe is but empty economic chatter. A democratic EU won by a powerful, working class-led, movement from below creates the best conditions for an uninterrupted transition to the united socialist states of Europe advocated by Comintern in 1923. The realisation of that aim is well within the capabilities of a combative European working class. In Germany, Italy and France our forces are strong. What is needed for success is working class unity, beginning with trade unions but also quickly reaching the level of a single party and the right programme.

Towards that end, when it comes to the euro versus the pound sterling referendum, we will refuse to take sides. Being for European unity does not commit us to support every measure that comes from the EU bureaucracy and the reactionary integrationists. Not at all. Our Socialist Alliance 2001 general election manifesto was undoubtedly correct when it said we should “neither advocate the euro nor defend the pound” (*People before profit* p19). Essentially the ‘yes’ camp argues that workers will be better off if we are exploited by European capital; the ‘no’ campaign with equal cynicism says we will be better off if we are exploited by British capitalists. Revolutionary socialists and communists must constitute themselves as the third camp, the camp of independent working class politics.

It was therefore worrying to read Alex Callinicos’s analysis of the Irish referendum on the Nice treaty. He argued that the referendum, along with anti-capitalist demonstrations in Gothenburg and the decision of the Danes in 2000 not to participate in the euro, “illustrate that there is a strong socialist and internationalist case against the EU” (*Socialist Worker* June 16 2001). That no doubt explains why the SWP’s Irish com-



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rades placed themselves in the ‘no’ camp alongside some very dubious and very reactionary partners. They included hard-line catholics who were fighting against what they saw as a threat to the “integrity” of Ireland’s anti-abortion laws in the shape of the treaty’s human rights provisions.

Anxious to establish the ‘progressive’ credentials of the ‘no’ campaign, comrade Callinicos mentioned only the left groups, Sinn Féin and the greens. Yet, as *Socialist Outlook* acknowledged with a surprising degree of honesty, “By and large the working class were not to the fore of this campaign” (*Socialist Outlook* June 2001). The left in Ireland was drowned in a cacophony of voices defending narrow Irish interests. *The Daily Telegraph*, for its part, celebrated the ‘no’ vote in Ireland because it reflected “a rising level of anger against a powerful, rich, distant elite of bureaucrats and politicians who are seen to arrange the affairs of the continent for their own convenience” (*The Daily Telegraph* editorial June 25 2001). There was indeed a distinctly parochial coloration to the ‘no’ campaign: eg, Sinn Féin expressed the fear that the extension of majority voting would “relegate us to the second division of a two-tier Europe” (referendum manifesto).

Nevertheless the praise heaped upon the ‘no’ campaign in Ireland by comrade Callinicos points in all likelihood to the stance the SWP will adopt during the euro referendum in Britain. And since it is the largest element in the Socialist Alliance this concerns us all.

Scoring a victory against an incumbent government was obviously a major attraction for those on the left aligned with the ‘no’ camp in Ireland. According to comrade Callinicos, “The establishment was united in favour of the Nice treaty” and almost by definition those opposing it must be conducting a progressive struggle that demands support from revolutionaries. It is of course a huge exaggeration, even in Ireland, to claim that the ruling class is as one over European integration and a single currency, and Callinicos concedes that this is certainly the case in Britain. However, our primary goal in the Socialist Alliance must be to establish working class politics - not to inflict embarrassment on EU governments and bureaucrats.

We can draw useful lessons from the writings of Marx and Engels on the contest between free trade and protectionism in their day. In June 1847 Engels wrote in the *Deutsche-Brüsseler Zeitung* that, whichever system “held sway”, the “worker will receive no bigger wage for his labour than will suffice for his scantiest maintenance” .... nevertheless in spite of the subjective intentions of the bourgeoisie free trade tended to clear the way for the “last decisive battle” between the “propertied and the propertyless, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat” (K Marx, F Engels *CW* Vol 6, Moscow 1976, p94).

Marx reasoned along exactly the same lines in the second half of September 1847 and for flavour added a touch of irony: “If they [the protectionists] speak consciously about the working class, then they summarise their philanthropy in the following words: it is better to be exploited by one’s fellow-countrymen than by foreigners.

“I do not think the working class will for ever be satisfied with this solution, which, it must be confessed, is indeed very patriotic, but nonetheless a little too ascetic and spiritual for people whose only occupation consists in the production of riches, of material wealth.

“But the protectionists will say: ‘So when all is said and done we at least preserve the present state of society. Good or bad, we guarantee the labourer work of his hands, and prevent his being thrown onto the street by foreign competition.’ I shall not dispute this statement: I accept it. The preservation, the conservation of the present state of affairs is accordingly the best result the protectionists can achieve in the most favourable circumstances. Good, but the problem for the working class is not to preserve the present state of affairs, but to transform it into its opposite.

“The protectionists have one last refuge. They say that their system makes no claim to be a means of social reform, but that it is nonetheless necessary to begin with social reforms in one’s own country, before one embarks on economic reforms internationally. After the protective system has first been reactionary, then conservative, it finally becomes conservative-progressive. It will suffice to point out the contradiction lurking in this theory, which at first sight appears to have something seductive, practical and rational to it. A strange contradiction! The system of protective tariffs places in the hands of capital of one country the weapons which enable it to defy the capital of other countries; it increases the strength of this capital in opposition to foreign capital and at the same time it deludes itself that the very same means will make that same capital small and weak in opposition to the working class. In the last analysis that would mean appealing to the philanthropy of capital, as though capital as such could be a philanthropist. In general, social reforms can never be brought about by the weakness of the strong; they must be brought about by the strength of the weak” (K Marx, F Engels *CW* Vol 6, Moscow 1976, pp280-81).

A short while later Marx received a request to address the free trade congress at Brussels. After paraphrasing the above argument in his, non-delivered, speech, he made the following telling point - as reported by *The Northern Star*’s German correspondent (Engels) - “We are for free trade, because by free trade all economic laws, with their most astounding contradictions, will act upon a larger scale, upon a greater extent of territory, upon the territory of the whole earth; and because from the uniting of all these contradictions into a single group, where they stand face to face, will result the struggle which will itself eventuate the emancipation of the proletariats” (K Marx, F Engels *CW* Vol 6, Moscow 1976, p290).

The same message was propounded before the Brussels Democratic Association at a public meeting in January 1848. After attacking the hypocrisy of free traders in Britain - Bowring, Bright and co - Marx concluded with these words: “Do not imagine, gentlemen, that in criticising freedom of commerce we have the least intention of defending protection. One may be opposed to constitutionalism without being in favour of absolutism. Moreover, the protective system is nothing but a means of

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establishing manufacture upon a large scale in any given country: that is to say, of making it dependent upon the market of the world; and from the moment that dependence upon the market of the world is established, there is more or less dependence upon free trade too. Besides this, the protective system helps to develop free competition within a nation. Hence we see that in countries where the bourgeoisie is beginning to make itself felt as a class, in Germany for example, it makes great efforts to obtain protective duties. They serve the bourgeois as weapons against feudalism and absolute monarchy, as a means for the concentration of its powers for the realisation of free trade within the country.

“But, generally speaking, the protective system in these days is conservative, while the free trade system works destructively. It breaks up old nationalities and carries antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the uttermost point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. In this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, I am in favour of free trade” (K Marx, F Engels *CW* Vol 6, Moscow 1976, p465).

Likewise, we can conclude that European integration and the euro objectively unites the working class on a larger scale and across a huge territory and thus prepares the “struggle which will itself eventuate the emancipation of the proletariats”. In this revolutionary sense alone, we in the Socialist Alliance should be in favour of the euro and the EU.



# Appendix 1

## For a democratic and effective Socialist Alliance

The Socialist Alliance has grown and developed through our collective experience of the general election. We are now a registered political party and have the beginnings of a national profile, national leadership and we have our democratically agreed manifesto. To fight for our manifesto (which culminates in socialism), we must move beyond our present structures. We need an effective and therefore democratic organisation.

The Socialist Alliance is more than an electoral organisation. We need to take initiatives in all fields of society.

The Socialist Alliance should neither be bureaucratically controlled from above nor limited to an ineffective nonaggression pact.

We need democratic unity above and below. The SA needs clear central priorities with local autonomy and democratic rights for members.

The Socialist Alliance should strive for maximum unity in action through debate at the highest level involving a broad, wide-ranging and inclusive discussion. The Socialist Alliance should strive to ensure that all significant trends find representation on leading committees.

Making the Socialist Alliance an effective weapon in the struggle for socialism means that all members must enjoy the following rights:

- freedom of opinion and expression;
- the right to take part in the formation of Socialist Alliance policies;
- the right to put oneself forward for and to take part in the selection of Socialist Alliance candidates;
- the right to hold officers and representatives of the Socialist Alliance to account through democratic mechanisms;
- the right to collectively recall all elected Socialist Alliance officers and committees;
- the right to form distinct temporary or longer-term political platforms;
- the right to read, write for and publicly distribute publications;
- the right to information about Socialist Alliance activities;
- the right to political education and socialist theory in the Socialist Alliance.

### Initial signatories:

Janine Booth (SA candidate, Islington South and Finsbury), John Bridge (CPGB

representative, SA Liaison Committee), Anna Chen (Socialist Alliance press committee)

Dave Church (executive committee), Lawrie Coombs (SA candidate, Stockton South), Peter Grant (SA candidate, Salford; chair Manchester Piccadilly Aslef), Marcus Larsen (chair, London Socialist Alliance; executive committee), Mike Marqusee (executive committee), Dave Osler (LSA steering committee), Lee Rock (London regional organiser, PCSU), Martin Thomas (executive committee), Neil Thompson (SA candidate, St Helens South; chair region 9 FBU), Nick Wrack (executive committee; chair Southwark SA)

# Appendix 2

## Draft Socialist Alliance programme

### Preamble

The Socialist Alliance is not yet fully a political party as such but in many respects already resembles one. We have an elected leadership and many local and regional affiliated parts. Beginning as a loose alliance established in 1997 between socialists from a variety of backgrounds, we have over the subsequent years been working together in an ever closer way. We are supported by the principal left organisations - the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Communist Party of Great Britain, International Socialist Organisation, Socialist Party in England and Wales, Socialist Workers Party and Workers Power.

Besides members of those organisations there are a wide range of individual socialists within our ranks. Indeed independent socialists have from the first played a leading role.

The Socialist Alliance is especially committed to coordinating and unifying our campaigning, electoral and other relevant work with comrades organised in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Together we are confronted by a common enemy - the United Kingdom state and the British capitalist class. The Socialist Alliance is internationalist and seeks to promote the unity of workers throughout the world. We are for the globalisation of the world's working class movement and its struggles.

### 1. Our epoch

The present epoch is one of the transition from capitalism to socialism and communism. The main contradiction in this our epoch is between decadent capitalism and immanent socialism.

As imperialism superseded the period of competitive capitalism at the dawn of the 20th century, the world as a whole became ripe for socialism: ie, the first stage of communism. Imperialism is monopoly capitalism and in the drive for profit it globalises production and creates an international division of labour and its own gravedigger, the working class. In this way capitalism lays the material basis for socialism and, despite itself, human freedom.

The October 1917 revolution in Russia marked the beginning of the epoch. Socialism was transformed from the realm of theory to that of practice. However, the workers' state in backward Russia was, fatally, left isolated. The workers could not

exercise direct control. Under these famished conditions bureaucratic deformation was inevitable. The eventual collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 confirms that there are no national roads to communism nor any sustainable alternative between capitalism and genuine socialism. Socialism is international and democratic or it is nothing.

### **1.1. Global economy**

The world capitalist economy is an organic hierarchy based on exploitation and force. Depending on where they stand in the pecking order, countries play different roles within the imperialist system.

Though they remain viciously exploited, the backward and medium developed countries now occupy a significant place in the world division of labour. And not only as suppliers of raw materials and agricultural produce. Such countries now produce a wide range of industrial goods. As a result the working class objectively exists globally, and subjectively has the possibility and self-interest to become a consciously international class.

A prerequisite for the final victory of the international working class is winning socialism in the main advanced countries. Only here has capitalism fully proletarianised the mass of the population and socialised production to the point where real socialism is immediately realisable. The working class can come to power in backward or medium developed countries. But such gains will prove short-lived unless revolution follows in the advanced capitalist countries. The decisive battles will be fought in the heartlands of imperialism, not its periphery.

Capitalism develops through a series of booms and slumps. With the global economy, the massive extension of the credit system, state regulation and intervention the period between boom and slump tends to grow ever wider. Yet in direct proportion to the height and duration of the boom slumps prove ever more devastating and protracted. Once the boom peters out seemingly permanent reforms obtained by workers during the period of prosperity become subject to sustained and unremitting attack.

### **1.2. The danger of war**

War is the continuation of politics by other, violent, means. War is a *sustained* conflict on an extended scale. War is the product of class society. War, and the potential for war, will only end with the ending of class society itself.

The main source of war in our epoch is imperialism. Imperialism has incorporated war into its economic cycle of boom, stagnation and slump. For imperialism war is an attempt to escape from socioeconomics problems it cannot solve by means of mass slaughter. The existence of imperialism therefore means the danger of war.

Under capitalism peace is only a period of ceasefire. It is only the freezing of the division of spoils arrived at through war.

Capitalism goes hand in hand with uneven development. Hence there is an



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increasing pressure for the redivision of spoils. Rising 'have not' powers sooner or later challenge the existing imperialist hierarchy and seek to offset their own crisis at the expense of foreign rivals. When diplomacy and trade wars fail, military might eventually decides. Trade blocs become military blocs. So imperialism means the preparation of world war.

Capitalism possesses weapons capable of destroying the whole planet. The struggle to end the danger of war by the working class is therefore a struggle for the survival of our species and its culture.

Under communism the word for 'war' will become redundant. So will the word for 'peace'. The absence of war will gradually render obsolete its opposite as humanity leaves behind its pre-history.

### **1.3. Why not capitalism?**

The world economy and the tremendous dynamic of capitalism makes the existence of countries and borders thoroughly reactionary. Capitalism, however, cannot contain the wealth it creates either within the nation-state or as a global system.

The continuous accumulation of capital means the social nature of production becomes ever greater and cosmopolitan. In contradiction the ownership and control of capital is increasingly international, institutionalised and concentrated.

Capitalist accumulation in no way implies the development of a rational system. Under capitalism production becomes production for its own sake. Capitalism never rests, driven as it is by the unquenchable vampire-like thirst for surplus value. It is a system of chronic overproduction that knows no intrinsic limits to the exploitation of labour power. It is a system where dead labour turns against living labour, where money and profit are primary and need is incidental. It is a system of extreme alienation that de-humanises every human relationship.

As the capitalist class accumulates more and more wealth workers suffer relative pauperisation. Compared with capital, wages and state benefits shrink. As the world of things becomes ever greater, the world of people becomes ever more insecure and atomised. Capitalism, despite the abundance of its commodities and the wonders of technology, is unable to allow human beings to fulfil themselves as human beings. Work is a clock-watching torture - a daily drudge, not life's prime want. Much hyped though it is, leisure is no more human. These pinched moments of passive recovery, so-called hobbies, holidays or clubland hedonism, are used by capitalism as just another marketing opportunity.

Moreover during periods of stagnation and crisis, through unemployment, wage cuts, intensification of labour, longer hours, temporary contracts, etc, capitalism assaults the existing cultural level of the masses - meagre and impoverished though it is. Hard won wage rates, trade union rights and legal restrictions imposed on exploitation are damned as economic heresy by the high priests of the dollar, pound, euro and the yen - hence capitalism threatens the workers even as a slave class. The more

capital accumulates, the more antagonistic it therefore becomes to humanity.

Distorted by relations of exploitation and the lust for profit, national economies become not only anachronistic but lopsided.

In the imperialist countries huge numbers are engaged in unproductive labour such as banking, insurance, advertising and marketing. In backward and medium developed countries capitalism's destruction of peasant agriculture leaves hundreds of millions destitute and eking out a precarious existence in sprawling slums and shanty towns.

Thus imperialist capitalism, even during its periods of peaceful development, can only advance the productive forces in a grossly inefficient, wasteful and inhuman way. Capitalism ruins the ecological balance with its ruthless disregard of the planet and the life on it. City air is polluted, rivers turned into sewers, the countryside cleared of wildlife, food is constantly degraded in quality and even made unsafe. As a species that is dependent on and part of nature, humanity requires for the full development of its powers a sustainable ecological balance which can be achieved only through direct planning and social control of production - not merely on a national, but international scale.

#### **1.4. The battle of ideas**

Socialists and communists operating in Great Britain, one of the key metropolitan centres of capitalism, are fully aware that the class struggle cannot be separated from the struggle against opportunism.

Capitalism is objectively approaching socialism and communism. Yet achieving socialism and then communism must be the conscious self-liberation by the working class. Our class needs the truth. Therefore the battle of ideas - crucially against the elevation of short-term or sectional interests over the general interest - is fundamental to the supersession of capitalism. The part must be subordinated to the whole, not the other way round. No country, no party, no trade union, no leader, no section of the working class should take precedence over the global struggle for socialism.

Because socialism begins as a political act by an oppressed class its inevitability in no way implies that the negation of exploitation, alienation and unfreedom is mechanically assured.

Though for example the capitalist class is tiny, it possesses huge power - and not only in the form of wealth and the state machine. As the *ruling* class, its ideas are the ruling ideas. Capitalist ideas are spontaneously generated and in the battle for minds are carefully cultivated by a paid army of permanent persuaders - the media, education, the arts, religion, establishment parties, etc.

In contrast the working class is huge in numbers. It can, like any slave class, economically and politically fight to better its conditions within the existing system. Yet to realise itself as a class for itself, a class with an historic mission to free humanity, it must acquire for itself a scientific world outlook. That cannot be gained except through an open struggle against wrong ideas. This openness must encompass the

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struggle against manifestations of short-termism within our own, national and international ranks.

### **1.5. Internationalism**

The socialist revolution is the global fight to liberate humanity. It is a process whereby capitalism is replaced by a society of freely associated producers: ie, communism.

The victory of socialist revolution in one or more countries is only partial until the balance of forces has tilted decisively against capitalism. That means socialism must triumph more or less simultaneously in most of the advanced countries if it is not to suffer deformation and counterrevolution in one form or another.

The struggle for socialism is a unified world struggle and must be based upon working class internationalism. The revolution must be coordinated and to the largest possible extent centrally planned.

### **2. Capitalism in Britain**

Due to a combination of social, political, economic and other factors, Britain was the first country to be dominated by fully developed, real, capitalism.

With its origins in agricultural capitalism, by the first half of the 19th century the mass of the population had already been expropriated from the land. Denied any possibility of an independent existence, to survive they had to sell the only commodity they possessed - the ability to work. They were herded into factories, mines and mills and subjected to ruthless exploitation. Aristocratic and mercantile wealth gained from piracy and colonial plunder, and the trade in black slaves became capital used to suck the life energy from waged workers. Vast fortunes were amassed.

Initially unchallenged, British capital was able to secure a hitherto unprecedented position in the world market. Britain truly was the workshop of the world.

Inevitably Britain was chased and then in the 1890s overtaken by its most dynamic rivals - Germany and the United States. Britain was no longer world hegemon. From then on it was simply one of a number of big capitalist powers, but one suffering relative decline.

Increasingly Britain experienced difficulties in accumulating capital. To delay socialism the ruling bloc turned to the restriction of competition by way of monopoly and a greatly expanded overseas empire. As part of this process the export of commodities tended to be eclipsed in importance by the export of capital itself. Finance capital evolved.

Britain was first into the field of imperialist expansion. Consequently it experienced little initial resistance, apart from the native peoples themselves. A gigantic empire was built that at its peak covered one-quarter of the earth's land surface and included one-quarter of its population.

The empire was a source of cheap raw materials and army recruits. It was a safe market that could be administratively closed. It spawned a huge bureaucratic-military

superstructure, staffed by the aristocratic products of Britain's public schools. Furthermore the super, or extra, profits gained from robbing the colonies and returns from the export of capital provided the wherewithal needed to ameliorate class antagonisms at home.

Inexorably Britain's rivals began to experience similar problems and seek out their own expansionist solutions. By the dawn of the 20th century the world was effectively divided. Inter-imperialist contradictions came to a bloody climax. In two devastating world wars tens of millions were butchered in the interests of capital. Barbarism took on its capitalist form.

Britain saw off the two challenges from Germany in 1914-18 and 1939-45. But eventually it succumbed to the USA and the might of the greenback.

After Europe had exhausted itself, so strong was US imperialism that it had no need for an empire and could relatively peacefully go about the redivision of the whole capitalist world. The conditions for the post-World War II long boom were created.

### **2.1. Social and political consequences of Britain's imperialist development**

From the second half of the 19th century onwards Britain's industrial monopoly and then its empire enabled the governing elite to tame the spontaneous working class movement. Being able to bribe directly and indirectly a wide section of the working class, it could keep expectations within the parameters of the existing system. The revolutionary tradition of Chartism gave way to the reformist tradition of trade unionism. The consolidation of a trade union bureaucracy - merchants in wage labour - only served to reinforce retrogression.

The revolutionary, communist, militant trend on occasion posed a threat to the stability of capitalism. Despite that throughout the 20th century Labourism and the Labour Party dominated the workers' movement. Labourism has often deployed socialistic rhetoric. It is, however, a thoroughly reactionary and pro-capitalist ideology. In war and peace, in government and in opposition, the Labour leadership has loyally served the interests of British imperialism. What legislation for reform it introduced was designed to dampen, not fire the class struggle.

Britain managed decolonisation in the midst of an unprecedented boom. There was no crisis of empire. It was moreover able to achieve high rates of economic growth and put in place a social democratic settlement. In a negative and perverted way capitalism anticipated and carried out some of the measures of socialism - cheap housing, healthcare on the basis of need, free comprehensive education, etc.

Nevertheless British capitalism fared less well than its main rivals and dependence on banking, insurance and general parasitism was further exacerbated. Hence relative decline continued apace.

When the post-World War II boom came to an end Britain no longer enjoyed the option it had in the 1930s of cushioning itself through the system of empire prefer-

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ences. British capitalism had to realign geopolitically and renew the class struggle at home.

A whole swathe of Britain's old industrial base was sacrificed in the attempt to become competitive. The resulting closures and unemployment were used as a means to undermine trade union bargaining power. Integration into Europe was, despite that, undertaken from a position of weakness, not strength. Britain cannot dominate the European Union, neither economically nor politically. Greater Germany can.

Though it was most spectacularly carried through using the carrot of home ownership and share buying, the erosion of the social democratic settlement, beginning in the 1970s, likewise illustrated the weakness, not the strength, of British imperialism. Transient and individualised crumbs do not guarantee social peace. Hence to enforce the reversal of the social democratic settlement all manner of authoritarian measures were enacted - laws against trade union activity, laws outlawing squatting, laws curbing demonstrations. The reversal of the social democratic settlement proves yet again that reforms workers gain under capitalism are by their very nature liable to be lost given new conditions.

### **3. Immediate demands**

On the most basic level the development of capitalism in Britain creates the necessity among the workers to struggle against the effects of the capitalist system that confronts them. Even without the leadership of revolutionary socialists and communists resistance will occur, albeit spontaneously. This is the unconscious expression of the fact that the workers have nothing to lose except their illusions and everything to gain through the overthrow of capitalism.

To succeed, however, this social movement must *consciously* oppose every violation of democracy and example of discrimination. Workers must defend every oppressed minority and elevate itself to a ruling class by winning the battle for democracy.

The demands we put forward are based on what the masses need if they are to live any sort of a decent life in Britain. They are not based on what the capitalist system says it can afford. Our intention is to provide a plan of action and at the same time make the workers aware of their power to refashion society so that it serves human interests. The formulation of our demands thereby connects today's conditions and consciousness to the aim of revolution and the establishment of socialism.

#### **3.1. Working conditions and wage workers**

In order to advance the immediate interests of the working class we demand:

1. A five-day working week and a maximum seven-hour day for all wagedworkers. Reduction of that to a four-day working week and a maximum six-hour day for occupations which are dangerous or particularly demanding. The working day must include rest periods of not less than two hours.

2. An uninterrupted weekly break of not less than 60 hours for all waged workers.
3. Equal pay for work of equal value.
4. The abolition of overtime in its present form. In the case of emergencies and other such eventualities overtime must be voluntary, for only short periods and with at least double pay.
5. A minimum net wage set to reflect the value of unskilled labour power. This to be decided on the basis of what is needed to physically and culturally reproduce the worker and one child. The minimum wage to be used in the calculation of all other wage rates and benefits.
6. A minimum of six weeks' fully paid holiday leave during the year.
7. Insurance and other such payments to be made entirely by the capitalists and the state.
8. Occupational training for all workers to be a legal obligation for employers.
9. Child labour to be illegal before the age of 14. No more than a five-day week, no more than a two-hour day. Child labour to be banned in any industry harmful to children. Coordination of work and education under trade union supervision.
10. All industrial courts, arbitration panels, etc to be made up of at least 50% elected workers' representatives.
11. All workers must have the right to strike and the right to join a trade union.

### **3.2. Migrant workers**

There are large numbers of workers who have migrated to Britain in order to improve their lives. Immigration is a progressive phenomenon, which breaks down national differences and national prejudices. It unites British workers with the world working class.

The bourgeoisie of Britain uses migrant workers as worst paid labour and keeps them in that position by criminalising them through immigration laws, police raids and deportation orders.

The capitalist state in Britain has an official ideology of anti-racism. That in no way contradicts the national chauvinist consensus that champions British imperialism's interests against foreign rivals and sets worker against worker.

Migrant workers are not a problem. The capitalists who use them to increase competition between workers are. The reformist plea for non-racist immigration control plays directly into the hands of our exploiters. It concedes the right of the state to bar workers from entering Britain. Capital moves around the world without restriction. We socialists are for the free movement of people and against all measures preventing them entering or leaving countries.

It is in the interests of all workers that migrant workers are integrated. Assimilation is progressive as long as it is not based upon force. In order to encourage integration

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and strengthen the unity of the working class the following demands are put forward:

1. The right to speak and be educated in one's own language. The right to conduct correspondence with the state in one's own language.
2. No religious or separate schools.
3. The right to learn English for all migrant workers and their families. Employers must provide language courses.
4. The right to become citizens with full social and political rights of the country they have emigrated to for all workers who have resided in the country for three months.

### **3.3. The unemployed**

Unemployment is an inevitable by-product of capitalism. Full employment can only be a temporary phenomenon in a system that reduces people to the mere possessors of the commodity, labour power: ie, objects of exploitation.

Especially in periods of crisis millions cannot profitably be employed and are therefore discarded. Maintained at below subsistence levels, the unemployed are used as a reserve army of labour to drive down general wage levels. Unemployment is not due to the policies or coloration of this or that government. The only way to eradicate unemployment is to end the system that causes it.

As part of the working class the unemployed must be fully integrated into the workers' movement. They must be made into a reserve army of socialism.

The immediate Socialist Alliance demands for the unemployed are:

1. The right to work at trade union rates of pay or unemployment benefit at the level of the minimum wage.
2. No state harassment of the unemployed. Claiming benefit is a right, not a privilege.
3. Cheap labour schemes must be replaced by real training and education under trade union supervision.
4. The unemployed must have the right to remain in or join trade unions as full members with equal rights.
5. To the extent that they operate, unemployed workers' organisations must be represented in the trade union movement - from trades councils to the Trades Union Congress.

### **3.4. Nationalisation**

From the point of view of globalisation and the world struggle for socialism, programmes for wholesale nationalisation are today objectively reactionary. The historic task of the working class is to fully socialise the giant transnational corporations, not break them up into inefficient national units. Our starting point is the most advanced achievements of capitalism. Globalised production needs global social control.

We oppose the illusion that nationalisation equates in some way with socialism.

There is nothing inherently progressive or socialistic about nationalised industries.

Under definite circumstances, however, nationalisation serves the interests of the workers. Faced with plans for closure or mass sackings, the Socialist Alliance demands that the state, the executive committee of the bourgeoisie - not the workers - bear the consequences for failure.

Against closures and mass sackings we demand:

1. No redundancies. Nationalise threatened workplaces or industries under workers' control.
2. Compensation to former owners should be paid only in cases of proven need.
3. There must be no business secrets hidden from the workers. The books and data banks of every company must be open to the inspection of specialists appointed by and responsible to the workers.

### **3.5. Trade unions**

Trade unions limit competition between workers, thus securing a better price for labour power. They represent a tremendous gain for the working class, drawing millions of backward workers into collective activity against employers.

Of course, left to itself, trade union consciousness is characterised by sectionalism and the hopeless attempt to constantly improve the lot of workers within capitalism. The Socialist Alliance openly seeks to make trade unions into schools for socialism. They do this by always putting forward the general interest, by fighting for workers' unity and by fully involving the masses in decision-making.

Bargaining is a specialist activity. Consequently the trade unions need a layer of functionaries. However, due to the passivity of most rank and file members and lack of democratic accountability, these functionaries consolidated themselves into a conservative caste.

The trade union bureaucracy is more concerned with amicable deals and preserving union funds than with the class struggle. Operating as an intermediary between labour and capital, it has a real material interest in the continued existence of the wage system.

Within the trade unions we fight against bureaucracy by demanding:

1. Trade unions must be free of any interference or control by the state.
2. No trade union official to be paid above the average wage of a worker in that particular union.
3. All officials must be elected, accountable and instantly recallable.
4. Workers should support trade union leaders only to the extent that they fight for the long-term interests of the working class as a whole.
5. One industry, one union. Industrial unions are rational and enhance the ability of the workers to struggle.
6. All-embracing workplace committees. Organise all workers, whatever their trade, whether or not they are in trade unions. Workplace committees should



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fight to exercise control over hiring and firing, production and investment.

### **3.6. Councils of action**

In any decisive clash of class against class, new forms of organisation which are higher, more general, more flexible than trade unions emerge. In Russia they have been called soviets, in Germany *rates*, in Britain councils of action.

Democratically embracing and coordinating all those in struggle, such organisations of struggle have the potential to become the workers' alternative to the capitalist state. The Socialist Alliance will encourage any such development.

### **3.7. Workers' militia**

The Socialist Alliance is against the standing army and for the armed people. This principle will never be realised voluntarily by the capitalist state. It has to be won by the working class developing its own militia.

Such a body grows out of the class struggle itself; defending the picket line, mass demonstrations, workplace occupations, fending off fascists, etc.

As the class struggle intensifies, the conditions are created for the workers to arm themselves and win over sections of the military forces of the capitalist state. Every opportunity must be used to take even tentative steps towards this goal. As circumstances allow, the working class must equip itself with the most advanced, most destructive weaponry available.

To facilitate this we demand:

1. Rank and file personnel in the state's armed bodies must be protected from bullying, humiliating treatment and being used against the working class.
2. There must be full trade union and democratic rights, including the right to form bodies such as soldiers' councils.
3. The privileges of the officer caste must be abolished. Officers must be elected. Workers in uniform must become the allies of the masses in struggle.
4. The people have the right to bear arms and defend themselves.

### **3.8. The national question**

As a general rule we do not want to see countries broken up into small nation-states. Ours is the call for humanity to shed the flag-waving imagined community of nation-states.

As consistent internationalists the Socialist Alliance unreservedly stands against any tactical pandering to, let alone attempts to exacerbate, national tensions.

The Socialist Alliance wants a positive solution to the national question in the interests of the working class: ie, the merging of nations. That can only be achieved through democracy and the right of all to fully develop their own culture.

The Socialist Alliance fights to secure the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination. Every historically constituted people should be able to freely decide its

own destiny. They can separate if they so wish. Thereby they can also elect to come together or stay together with others.

### **3.8.1. England, Scotland and Wales**

The British nation evolved from the gradual bonding of three nationalities or proto-nationalities - the English, Welsh and Scottish. Drawn together over many centuries by common political and economic experience, they now in the main possess a common language, culture and psychology.

The birth of the British nation objectively was a profoundly progressive development. Nevertheless, because it was carried out under the aegis of a brutal absolutism it was accompanied by countless acts of violence and discrimination.

As post-boom British imperialism was forced to turn inwards, and in the absence of a viable proletarian alternative, resistance in Scotland and Wales often took a national form. A mythologised past was deployed by nationalists, left nationalists and Labourites alike to serve their own nefarious purposes.

The Socialist Alliance opposes every form of Scottish and Welsh national narrow-mindedness. Equally we oppose every form of British-English national chauvinism. Ideas of exclusiveness or superiority, national oppression itself, obscure the fundamental antagonism between labour and capital and divert attention from the need to unite against the common enemy - the United Kingdom state and the system of capital.

While the Socialist Alliance defends the right of Scotland and Wales to secede, we do not want separation. We want the closest unity circumstances allow. That can only come about by fighting for full democracy. The peoples of Scotland and Wales cannot decide their own future through the monarchy and the Westminster parliament of the House of Commons and House of Lords. Nor does devolution within the United Kingdom and a sop parliament in Edinburgh and a tame assembly in Cardiff allow for the exercise of genuine self-determination. That is why we stand for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales.

It is the internationalist duty of socialists and communists in Scotland and Wales to defend the right of the Scots and Welsh to remain with and achieve an even higher degree of unity with the English. As an equal proletarian internationalist duty those in England must correspondingly be the best defenders of the right of the Scottish and Welsh peoples to separate. That in no way contradicts their duty to advocate unity.

### **3.8.2. Ireland**

Ireland is Britain's oldest colony. In 1921 the Irish nation was dissected. A sectarian Six County statelet was created in order to permanently divide the Irish working class and perpetuate British domination over the whole island of Ireland.

We unconditionally support the right of Ireland's two national-religious traditions to democratically and voluntarily reunite - best facilitated by a federal solution whereby a

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British-Irish two-and-a-half-county province exercises self-determination up to and including the right to separate.

Working class opposition to British imperialism in Ireland is a necessary condition for our own liberation - a nation that oppresses another can never itself be free. The struggle for socialism in Britain and the national liberation of Ireland are inextricably linked.

Socialists in both parts of Ireland also have internationalist duties. They must fight for the closest spirit of solidarity between workers in Britain and Ireland and their speediest coming together. They too must be resolute opponents of nationalism.

### **3.9. Europe**

The European Union is a capitalist club run by an appointed bureaucracy - the European commission. From the point of view of socialism the EU is reactionary.

However, it would be incorrect to call for the break-up of the EU and seek a future based on national independence, sovereignty, etc. We neither advocate the euro nor defend the pound. To the extent the EU becomes a superstate, the working class must unify its resistance and organisations across Europe.

The Socialist Alliance will do everything in its power to create the conditions necessary for the creation of a united socialist party of the EU.

The Socialist Alliance demands:

1. Abolition of the European Union's commission and council of ministers.
2. A democratic EU. For a constituent assembly of the EU elected on the basis of universal suffrage and proportional representation.

### **3.10. Peace**

British imperialism has an unparalleled history of war and aggression in virtually every corner of the world. Though no longer the power it once was, it maintains large, well equipped armed forces in order to defend the interests of capitalism abroad and at home. The Socialist Alliance opposes all imperialist military alliances and ventures.

British capitalism is one of the world's main weapons manufacturers and exporters. It has a vested interest in promoting militarism. The Socialist Alliance stresses, however, that the struggle against the military-industrial complex cannot be separated from the struggle against the profit system as a whole.

The Socialist Alliance does not call for this or that percentage cut in military spending. We are against giving even one penny or one person to the capitalist state's armed forces.

Peace cannot come courtesy of bodies such as the United Nations - an assembly of exploiters and murderers. Nor can it come about by trying to eliminate this or that category of weapons. It is the duty of revolutionary socialists and communists to connect the popular desire for peace with the aim of revolution. Only by disarming the bourgeoisie and through international socialism can the danger of war be eliminated.

The Socialist Alliance is not pacifist. Everywhere we support just wars, above all revolutionary civil wars for socialism. We will therefore strive to expose the war preparations of the capitalist state, the lies of social chauvinists and the illusions fostered by social pacifism. These alien, bourgeois influences objectively disarm and paralyse the working class in the face of a state armed to the teeth.

### **3.11. Women**

Women are oppressed because of the system of exploitation and the division of labour. Women's oppression has existed since the dawn of class society. The abolition of exploitation will mark the beginning of the emancipation of women. Therefore the struggle for both is interconnected.

Women's emancipation is not a question for women alone. Just as the abolition of class exploitation is of concern to female workers, so is the emancipation of women of concern to male workers. The struggle for socialism and the emancipation of women cannot be separated.

Under capitalism women carry out domestic labour, such as housework, child rearing, etc, which is performed gratis. Given the technical possibilities to industrialise it, such work is enormously time wasting. It is also dull, demoralising and does not allow for any kind of cultural development.

Advanced capitalism has created the material prerequisites for the liberation of women. However, women cannot be fully emancipated until the disappearance of the division of labour without going beyond bourgeois right - that is, right based on work done.

In Britain women have won or been granted formal equality with men. The very existence of the capitalist system makes a mockery of that formal equality. At work, at home, in education, before the law, women are at all times faced with inequality, discrimination and oppression.

There has been a rapid increase in women's participation in the economy. Capitalism has an inherent tendency to increase both the number of unemployed and the absolute size of the working population. As a norm therefore women are exploited by capital as cheap wagedworkers and domestic slaves. Hence they suffer a double burden of oppression.

Women have their own problems and demands. These demands, however, do not conflict with the demands of the working class but rather they reinforce them. The Socialist Alliance demands:

1. Turn formal equality into genuine equality. Socially, economically, politically and culturally there must be equality of opportunity. Open 24-hour crèches and kindergartens to facilitate full participation in social life outside the home: ie, trade unions, political organisations, workers' militia, cultural activities, etc.
2. Open high quality canteens with cheap prices. The establishment of laundry and house-cleaning services to be undertaken by the state. This to be the first

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step in the socialisation of housework.

3. Fully paid maternity leave three months before and six months after giving birth (the partner to be provided with six months' paternity leave).

4. Free abortion and contraception on demand.

5. Provision for either parent to be allowed paid leave to look after sick children.

6. Maximum six-hour working day for all nursing mothers.

7. Decriminalisation of prostitution so as to remove it from criminal control.

Prostitutes to be provided with special healthcare and other services to reduce the dangers they confront. Measures to give prostitutes wider social opportunities.

### **3.12. Youth**

Youth are at the sharp end of Britain's capitalist decline. Young workers are in general not protected by trade union membership. Homelessness and unemployment are greatly disproportionate amongst the young. Training on official schemes is notoriously mediocre, designed more to massage government statistics than equip youth with the skills of the future. In the drive to cut costs basic education is under constant attack: with the standard of university education woefully diluted.

Youth are contradictorily fawned upon by advertisers, exploited as cheap labour and blamed for social decay. The system is in fact only interested in youth in terms of the cash register. Every ideal, every artistic talent is judged purely in terms of its ability to generate artificial needs in others. There are many who reject the twisted values of the system. But in despair they often turn to nihilism - itself turned into a commodity by capitalism.

The following demands are of crucial importance for youth:

1. The provision of housing/hostels for youth to enter of their own choice for longer or shorter periods when they lose their parents or choose to leave them.

2. Compulsory education up until the age of 16 and from then on within a fully democratic system. Education should be free and of a polytechnical nature: ie, rounded to include technical skills as well as academic.

3. No religious schools, no private schools.

4. Students over the age of 16 should receive grants set in line with the level of the minimum wage.

5. The right of every young person on leaving education to either a job, proper training or full benefits.

6. Remove all obstacles to the participation of youth in social life. Votes and the right to be elected from the age of 16.

7. The provision of a broad range of sports and cultural centres under the control of elected representatives of youth.

8. The abolition of age-of-consent laws. We recognise the right of individuals

to enter into the sexual relations they choose provided this does not conflict with the rights of others. Alternative legislation to protect children from sexual abuse.

9. The extensive provision of education and counselling facilities on all sexual matters, free from moralistic judgement, is an essential prerequisite to enable youth to develop themselves in all areas of sexuality and reproduction.

### **3.13. Pensioners and the elderly**

People deserve a secure, dignified and comfortable old age. The needs of the elderly should be met fully by the state, and should be available by right. Our old people should not suffer the humiliation and anxiety of relying on means tests or charity.

The aim of these demands is to mobilise the working class as a whole to fight for pensioners' rights.

1. No compulsory retirement. Right to retirement from age 60 for all workers - at 55 in unpleasant and dangerous jobs.
2. The state pension should be at the level of the minimum wage, and should be paid to everyone who has retired.
3. Old people should have the right to decide how they live. There should be no compulsory institutionalisation. The state must provide what is needed to allow elderly people to live independently if they so wish, for as long as they are physically or mentally capable of doing so.
4. Social clubs for the elderly should be democratic and subsidised by the state, nor charities.
5. The comfort and dignity of the dying must be ensured at all times. Euthanasia and disposal of the body after death should be carried out according to the wishes of the individual.

### **3.14. Homosexuals**

Homosexuals have often been scapegoated or persecuted. They can be portrayed as deviants who threaten the family - the basic economic unit of capitalist society.

Homosexual rights is therefore a key demand.

Homophobic attitudes divide the working class and aid those advocating the authoritarian state. The working class needs to be mobilised in order to defend and advance homosexual rights.

The Socialist Alliance demands:

1. Abolition of all forms of state discrimination directed against homosexuals.
2. Lesbians and gays should be accorded the same rights in society as heterosexuals: ie, state marriages, artificial insemination for lesbians, adoption and fostering. No discrimination in custody cases on the grounds of sexual orientation.
3. No discrimination in any area of employment.

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### **3.15. Freedom of information**

Knowledge is power. The British bourgeois state has always shrouded its affairs in secrecy. The real class interests and imperialist ambitions of the capitalists are thus kept from the eyes of the working class.

Existing freedom of information legislation are a sham. The working class must therefore continue to fight for openness in all state matters, not least as a preparation for running its own state. The Socialist Alliance demands:

1. The affairs of the bourgeois state are conducted in complete openness in all matters.
2. Abolish the 30-year rule and all other forms of secrecy. Public access to all state files, cabinet papers, diplomatic agreements, etc.
3. End all forms of censorship, both legislative and institutional.

### **3.16. Crime and prison**

Crime can only be understood in relationship to society. In a class society crime is a product of alienation, want or resistance. Under capitalism the criminal system is an anti-working class, anti-popular system.

Against this system the Socialist Alliance demands:

1. All judges and magistrates be subject to election and recall.
2. Fines must be proportionate to income.
3. There must be workers' supervision of prisons.
4. Prisoners must be allowed the maximum opportunity to develop themselves as human beings. People should only be imprisoned within a short distance of their own locality - if not, families must be given full cost of travel for visits.
5. Prison life must be made as near normal as possible. The aim of prison should be rehabilitation, not punishment. Within prisons there should be a wide range of cultural facilities. Medical treatment must be via the general health service. There must be provision for daily visiting hours and weekly 24-hour conjugal visits.
6. Worthwhile prison work must be made available. It must be paid at full trade union rates and limited to seven hours a day.
7. Cells must be self-contained and for one person alone.
8. Prisoners must be allowed access to books, newspapers and periodicals of their choice. Incoming and outgoing letters can only be checked for contraband - they must not be read nor censored.
9. Prisoners should have the right to vote in parliamentary and other such elections and to stand for election. Votes from prisoners to count within the constituency they actually live, not where they happen to originate.

### **3.17. Religion**

Unlike for previous oppressed classes in history, religion can play no progressive role

for the working class in its struggle against today's ruling class.

Nevertheless, though revolutionary socialists and communists want to overcome all religious prejudices, we are the most consistent defenders of the individual's freedom of conscience and freedom of worship.

The Socialist Alliance therefore demands:

1. Separation of the Church of England from the state. End all state subsidies for religious institutions. Confiscate all Church of England property not directly related to acts of worship.
2. Freedom for all religious cults. Freedom for atheistic propaganda. Religious organisations and individuals have the right to propagate their ideas and seek to win converts. Opponents of religion have the same right.
3. End all state-sponsored religious propaganda and acts of worship. Religion is a private, not a state matter. Religion can be taught as a subject of academic study, not as a means to indoctrinate children.

### **3.18. Small businesses and farms**

Small business people, including small farmers, form a several-million-strong petty bourgeois stratum in Britain. Carrying on an unstable, precarious existence, these people operate in the nooks and crannies of the monopoly-dominated capitalist economy.

Their limited profits often oblige them to work alone or alongside their employees. A combination of the threat of bankruptcy and the aspiration to become big capitalists drives them to work longer hours in worse conditions than many members of the working class.

Every downward oscillation of the capitalist economy faces the petty bourgeoisie with financial ruin. While the destruction of this stratum is economically progressive, the working class has a political interest to defend the petty bourgeoisie from the short-term ravages of the anarchic capitalist economy, at the same time helping to raise the working conditions, security of employment and living standards of wage workers in farming and in small businesses.

The Socialist Alliance demands:

1. Secure rights of tenure for owner-occupiers, small farmers and small businesses, with low rents.
2. Cancellation of debts to banks arising from disproportionately high interest rates. Provision of low interest rates for small businesses.
3. Guaranteed prompt payment of bills by big business to small businesses.
4. Encouragement for the formation of producers' cooperatives through the provision of scientific and technical advice, research facilities, administrative machinery, grants for capital improvements, etc.



#### **4. Character of the revolution**

Britain is materially ready for socialism. To achieve that goal there must be an overthrow of the main enemy, the capitalist state. However, it has to be stressed that without the workers as the agency of change there can be no subsequent socialism, no end to exploitation, no human freedom. Only the workers can rally all who are oppressed and through a *people's revolution* establish a new socialist semi-state. To carry out its historic mission the workers' movement must educate and organise itself as a class. The proletariat cannot become the liberator of society without grasping and fighting for the positive resolution of all contradictions inherent in it.

##### **4.1. Classes in the revolution**

The working class is the only consistently revolutionary class in Britain. Of course, left to itself, left to spontaneity, it exists merely as a slave class, capable of being militant, democratic and even insurrectionary, but not hegemonic.

What makes it truly a class is the leadership of advanced workers who have transcended the purely economic struggle and mastered scientific theory: ie, revolutionary socialists and communists. With such consciousness the working class can raise itself to a future ruling class, which by the very nature of its own self-liberation also liberates humanity.

The working class is by far the great majority of the population in Britain. Besides manual industrial workers it consists of workers in the health service, transport, the civil service and local government as well as non-manual workers in industry, finance and distribution such as technicians, clerical and sales workers.

Many of the traditional distinctions between manual and non-manual work are being more and more broken down by advances in the production process. Despite that if the working class does not elevate itself from being a slave class, it finds its common actions paralysed or limited by opposing competitive interests that divide every section against every other section.

The inspiring and time honoured call for workers' unity can be realised only as unity around a genuinely revolutionary programme founded on the aim of universal human freedom. Only in the process of this self-realisation can all oppressed sections of the population be won to identify with the working class.

In Britain, as in any other capitalist country, there are contradictions within the bourgeoisie. Capitalist is pitted against capitalist in the market. But the most important contradiction in this respect is the domination of Britain by monopoly capital.

What does this mean for the non-monopoly bourgeoisie?

On the one hand the non-monopoly bourgeoisie suffers due to its disadvantageous position in the market and the state. On the other it benefits from monopoly capitalism's global reach and ability to pacify the working class.

All capitalists are united in needing the working class to remain wage slaves in perpetuity. So as well as contradiction there is benefit, which is in fact the *main* feature

in the relationship of non-monopoly capital to monopoly capital. Hence contradiction is secondary.

This is mirrored politically. The non-monopoly bourgeoisie is united behind the monopoly bourgeoisie. It has no real independent voice. It is ideologically narrow-minded and tries to influence society through institutions which are in the main entirely subordinate to the monopoly bourgeoisie.

So while monopoly capital operates at the expense of non-monopoly capital, the subordination of the later is kept in place by a thousand golden threads. Like the monopoly bourgeoisie, the non-monopoly bourgeoisie will fight tooth and nail to kill the revolution. It is a reactionary section of society.

The task of the Socialist Alliance is to break the working class from the influence of all sections of the bourgeoisie. There can be no revolutionary alliance with the non-monopoly bourgeoisie. Individuals from the bourgeoisie can come over to the side of the working class, but never any section of it. However, the working class can and should take advantage of the contradictions within the bourgeoisie, not least between monopoly and non-monopoly capital. Concessions offered to the non-monopoly bourgeoisie open up fissures in the ranks of our enemy and help to neutralise sections of it.

The middle class, including the petty bourgeoisie - lawyers, doctors, middle management, middle grade civil servants, the self-employed, well paid professionals - is defined negatively by what exists and wavers between the two main classes in society.

As monopoly capitalism relentlessly revolutionises production, elements within the middle class find old privileged positions being dissolved. Such a process gives rise to explosive shifts and through political intervention can speed the process of proletarianisation. Economic crises plunge the middle class into turmoil and into political action.

Workers ought to seek, as opportunities present themselves, alliances with the various organisations and manifestations of this intermediate strata. Indeed the working class must represent the middle class against capital.

The middle class is always open to bourgeois influences and can under no circumstances be regarded a consistent ally of the working class. That said, success in prising it away from monopoly capital deprives our main enemy of a major social prop and adds to the momentum of revolution.

## **4.2. The socialist constitution**

This section on the socialist constitution outlines the form of organisation of the state and political life. It represents the culmination, embodiment and *continuation* of our immediate demands.

Incongruous as it might seem, the aim of this constitution is to facilitate its own negation. The socialist constitution will become simply a piece of paper, an historical

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document, as the state withers away along with classes.

The principles of our constitution are born out of a scientific understanding of the class struggle. Crucially that in the process of smashing the capitalist state organs of working class struggle becomes organs of working class state power. Our principles are not gleaming abstractions, nor are they a utopian dream. They reflect historic experience and the necessity for the workers to continue the class struggle even when they are the ruling class.

The Socialist Alliance fights for:

1. Supreme power in the state will be workers' councils, composed of delegates who are elected and recallable at any time. These organs will have both executive and legislative functions.
2. The pay of full time elected delegates will be no greater than the average skilled worker.
3. All parties that accept revolutionary laws will be free to operate. We accept the possibility of one revolutionary party or coalition of parties replacing another peacefully. Minorities have the right and should be given the opportunity to become majorities.
4. There must be no financial penalties to inhibit standing in elections. Elections should be on the basis of proportional representation with an open count.
5. Local organs of power must have a broad degree of autonomy.
6. The principle of openness in state affairs will be guaranteed.
7. All international agreements counter to the interests of the working class will be abrogated. Key constitutional, international and other such questions should be put to referendum.
8. There will be no censorship. There must be the right of expression and discussion of all topics.
9. The armed forces and the police will be dispersed. In place there will be a workers' militia that will embody the right of everyone to bear arms. The production and distribution of weapons will be under the control of workers' collectives.

### **4.3. Economic measures**

The workers' state would be wrong to nationalise some pre-set number of companies or list of industries. Nationalisation could be used tactically as a political weapon against those who refuse to cooperate or who rebel. But the full socialisation of production in Britain is dependent on and can only proceed in line with the completion of world revolution.

The immediate task is the systematic extension of workers' control over production. This greatly curtails the power of capital and culturally prepares the workers for the day when the law of the plan finally and completely replaces the law of value.

The scope of workers' control should be gradually extended as the working class "wrests by degrees" power over the economy from the capitalist class and management experts. This will require the raising of the cultural level of the working class, its capacity for organisation and leadership.

This process will continue until full workers' management of production is achieved. At this stage the economy will be fully socialised and will in the main be communally owned: that is, in the "hands of the state: ie, of the proletariat, organised as the ruling class".

In order to facilitate this we envisage the following measures:

1. All major decisions relating to management of production, hiring and firing, etc, must be ratified by workers' committees.
2. Trade unions are independent from the state and should protect workers' rights and conditions against the state and the remnants of capitalism.
3. As part of the process of expropriating the bourgeoisie, the introduction of a graduated inheritance tax targeted against the rich.
4. The abolition of income tax for all waged workers as part of the process of simplifying the economic regulation of society.
5. It will be compulsory for everyone to do socially useful work - the only exception being those who are unable to do so for reasons of health or age.
6. The formulation of a national plan of production, based on the widest participation, discussion and decision-making process possible in society. This plan as a whole will be presented to the working class organs that have formulated it for ratification before being implemented. It will then be monitored, analysed and if necessary modified at every stage by the class fighting for its implementation, the working class.

## **5. The transition to the communitarian system**

Socialism is not a mode of production. It is the transition from capitalism to communism. Socialism is the communism which emerges from capitalist society. It begins as capitalism with a workers' state. Socialism therefore bears the moral, economic and intellectual imprint of capitalism; it is the lower stage of communism.

In general socialism is defined as the rule of the working class.

The division of labour cannot be abolished overnight. It manifests itself under socialism in the contradictions between mental and manual labour, town and country, men and women, as well as social, regional and national differences.

Classes and social strata exist under socialism because of different positions occupied in relationship to the means of production, the roles played in society and the way they receive their income

Class and social contradictions necessitate the continuation of the class struggle. However, this struggle is determined by the new alignments brought about by the overthrow of the capitalist state and the transition to communism.

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The class struggle can, in the last, analysis go in two directions depending on the balance of forces inside and outside the country and the class policy being followed. It can go backwards to capitalism or it can advance towards communism.

While socialism creates the objective basis for solving social contradictions, these contradictions need to be solved with a correct political line and the development of mass, active democracy. This is essential as communism is not a spontaneous development.

Social strata will only finally disappear under communism.

### **5.1. The socialist state**

In its first stages communism has not reached complete maturity or completely rid itself of the traditions and remnants of capitalism. One of these remnants is *bourgeois right* which means that the communist principle, “to each according to their needs”, cannot be applied under socialism.

The concept of ‘right’ continues under socialism due to relative scarcity. Everyone has the right to receive from society only as much as they give - as speedily as possible that will be judged according not to the law of value but straightforward time. Nevertheless right depends on contribution, albeit labour hours. The abolition of this bourgeois right is dependent on greatly reducing necessary labour time.

Socialism transforms the commodity back into a product. It replaces the law of value with the law of the plan. To begin with, social labour can only be measured indirectly by the average labour that is socially necessary. However, through the plan labour becomes directly social.

The clearest indication that socialism is a class society is the existence of and need for a state - an instrument of class rule.

The socialist state: ie, working class rule or what Marx called the dictatorship of the proletariat - is needed in the first place against the resistance of the forces of capitalism. Though this can involve draconian measures it must be emphasised that, as socialism is the rule of the overwhelming majority in society, the socialist state is characterised by the fullest flowering of democracy.

The repressive role of the state is not only connected with overcoming the capitalist class, but also with the division of labour. Until work becomes life’s prime want the need for the state will continue. This means laws, courts, the obligation to work. The persistence of bourgeois right expresses the fact that work is based on coercion.

To consider the state as repression against enemy classes is right in the last analysis. However, the proletarian state exists over all the individuals in society and it represents a force over the individuals who belong to the class which rules society.

The socialist state dispenses with much of the bureaucratic and military baggage of the capitalist state - it is a semi-state. Beginning when the working class establishes its own rule, it lasts till the higher stage of communism. During this period it undergoes internal changes and its function changes according to the development of the class

struggle both inside and outside the country. These changes are the process in which the state withers away.

The World Union of Socialist Republics is the moment when socialism becomes fully mature. The state cannot entirely disappear in any country before this stage.

Both the withering away of the state and the disappearance of classes can only be completed on the basis of the socialisation of the productive forces on a global scale. Socialism is a worldwide revolution and has to be worldwide in scope. There can be no socialism in one country.

## **5.2. Socialism and democracy**

Socialism and democracy are inseparable. The rule by the majority is in the first place attained by the truly mass, truly democratic smashing of the bourgeois state and its replacement by the organs of working class struggle, which have become the organs of the new state.

However, this is not the end of the matter. From the start all spheres of administration must be simplified so as to ensure that functions of the state are fully democratised. The aim is not rule by a stratum of specialists (ie, a bureaucracy - an alienated form of organisation) in the name of the majority. On the contrary our aim is the direct rule by the majority itself. Hence measures have to be taken, not only for the destruction of the old state bureaucracy, but also to prevent the new state from turning against the people.

Socialism must progressively involve the working class in the administration and running of the state. Democracy cannot be understood as only casting votes. It is a process of the constant forming of ideas and taking of decisions. For this reason, it demands the opportunity for broad discussion in every sphere and at every level. Without platforms and oppositions for the presentation of different views, and in which open discussion is the norm, democracy can only be formal.

Thus we need democracy in the following areas:

1. The organisation of the state apparatus.
2. The organisation of the political system.
3. The organisation of the economy.

The key to realising this development of active, mass democracy, is a radical shortening of the necessary working day. Only when everyone has the time to become administrators will there be no administrators and no division of labour.

## **5.3. Communism**

Socialism in Britain will start from a relatively high level of technique, output and culture. Once the hard task of winning working class state power has been achieved we will advance directly towards communism. The speed of that advance is dictated by the completion of the world revolution and the correctness of the policy of the working class and its vanguard.

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Victory of the world revolution will facilitate democratic planning on a world scale by the World Union of Socialist States. Even with existing levels of labour productivity in a country like Britain, redirecting unproductive and unemployed workers to socially useful work would allow a reduction of necessary labour to something like 10 or 15 hours a week. This, not the drive to raise overall production, is the main social task of socialism.

Through society reabsorbing the functions of the state the need for it withers away. Democracy (a form of the state) negates itself and gives way to general freedom. The higher stage of communism is a free association of producers. Everybody will contribute according to their ability and take according to need. Real human history begins and society leaves behind the “realm of necessity”. In the realm of freedom people will become rounded, fully social individuals who can for the first time truly develop their natural humanity.

This is what we want to achieve. To win the prize we will overcome all obstacles.

## **6. The Socialist Alliance**

The Socialist Alliance is the voluntary union of socialists and communists. It recognises the value of the theory first established by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels and then developed by Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky and others.

The Socialist Alliance is part of the working class. It is formed and built by the self-selection of the most class conscious, most selfless and most far-sighted workers. The Socialist Alliance has no interest other than the working class as a whole. The Socialist Alliance differs from the rest of the working class only in that it has the advantage of a theory which enables it to understand the historical path and results of proletarian class struggle. Hence at every stage and turn of events it champions the general interests of the movement.

Consequently, as advanced workers and true partisans of the working class, we socialists and communists understand the necessity of coming together in the closest and highest possible unity.

## **Unity**

The Socialist Alliance supports the organisation of the working class in the largest, most powerful and most centralised units. In the absence of objective conditions compelling separate organisation, the working class organises as a single party. This is an elementary requirement of internationalism.

As a general principle socialists strive for the organisation of the working class in a single party based on the existing borders of the capitalist state that is to be overthrown. Those who fail to fight for such organisational unity of the workers have embraced or succumbed to nationalism.

Objective conditions in Britain require the workers of all nationalities to organise together. The Socialist Alliance is therefore committed to creating the conditions

whereby we join with comrades in Scotland and Wales in day to day action and eventually in an all-Britain party.

### **The Socialist Alliance is internationalist**

The Socialist Alliance stands on the principles of working class internationalism. It is an internationalist duty to fight for socialism and make revolution in one's own country. However, the struggle for socialism in Britain is subordinated to the struggle for world revolution. Working class renders it compulsory for the interests of the workers' struggle in one country to be subordinated to the interests of that struggle on a world scale.

Understanding the unity of the interests and aims of the world working class does not arise spontaneously within the national workers' movement. The Socialist Alliance has to conscientiously imbue the working class struggle with the ideas of internationalism and uncompromisingly fight against nationalism. The Socialist Alliance sees it as its duty to fight against any trend which harms the unity of the world's working class. We are well aware of the connection between nationalism and reformism and opportunism.

The Socialist Alliance believes that the world proletariat needs a world strategy and world organisation. Without global organisation the working class is weakened and lacks coordination. The Socialist Alliance will do all in its power to rectify this situation.

### **6.1. Principles of organisation**

Our foremost and unchanging task is to conduct systematic, all-sided and principled agitation and propaganda. In our conditions this means combating all manifestations of ruling class ideology and winning the masses to the ideas of socialism.

#### **A political paper**

The Socialist Alliance requires a vehicle to conduct propaganda and agitation - a regular political paper. Such a paper is not only a collective propagandist and collective agitator. It is also a collective organiser.

Organisation around the distribution network around such a paper and education on the basis of its articles is the best way to constitute the basis for continuous action.

#### **The basic unit**

Our basic organisational unit is the local or workplace Socialist Alliance. The local or workplace Socialist Alliance facilitates the closest and broadest relations with the working class. Such Socialist Alliances have complete autonomy within their sphere of responsibility and should be self-sustaining and constantly striving to take initiatives.



### **Criticism and self-criticism**

Criticism and self-criticism on an individual and collective level are the first condition for the unity, development and growth of the Socialist Alliance. The aim is to continually strengthen our ability to serve the working class and thus humanity.

Criticism in no way implies the undermining of the individual or committee concerned, but improving their contribution to the Socialist Alliance. It shows the individual or committee being criticised why their attitude accords neither with the interests of the class nor the Socialist Alliance as a whole.

Bourgeois and middle class influences must constantly manifest themselves in our ranks. The Socialist Alliance lives in a world dominated by the spontaneously generated ideas of capitalism. Hence if the mistakes of individuals or committees are not corrected they can endanger or undermine the whole. Criticism and self-criticism is one of the most effective weapons against such a threat.

### **Men and women**

There must be no discrimination between men and women in the Socialist Alliance. Male socialists must practise equality and female socialists must insist on it. However, given the male-dominated culture we operate in and the need to win women to follow the lead and join the ranks of the Socialist Alliance, every effort should be made to promote women comrades. In this way, the Socialist Alliance develops its culture and extends its strength for the struggle.

### **The Socialist Alliance strives for democracy and centralism**

The Socialist Alliance is organised on the basis of democracy and seeks through those means ever-closer centralised actions and world outlook. Democracy, and centralism achieved through democracy, is both a form of organisation and a political principle.

Democracy and centralism entail the acceptance by the minority of majority votes when it comes to actions. That does not mean that the minority should be gagged. Minorities must have the possibility of becoming the majority. As long as they accept in practice the decisions of the majority, groups of comrades have the right to support alternative platforms and form themselves into temporary or permanent factions.

Democracy and centralism therefore represent a dialectical unity entailing the fullest, most open and frank debate, along with the most determined action.

Democracy and centralism allow the members of the Socialist Alliance to unitedly carry out actions, elect and be elected, and openly criticise what are seen as mistakes or shortcomings without fear or favour. In essence then, democracy and centralism form a united are a process whereby socialists are united around correct aims and principles.

## **6.2. The Socialist Alliance and trade unions**

Trade unions are basic organisations of working class defence. The Socialist Alliance is a political organisation of socialists and communists. The Socialist Alliance and the trade unions are therefore different organisations of the same class. We do not confuse the two and their different roles.

The Socialist Alliance seeks to extend the influence of socialist and revolutionary ideas in the trade unions. This can best be achieved by establishing Socialist Alliances in every major trade union, in every major industry and every major workplace. We fight to overcome all forms of trade union sectionalism and exclusiveness. In this way, we socialists show that we are the best fighters for the day-to-day interests of the proletariat as well as those who look after the interests of the future. The Socialist Alliance is also committed to fight for internal democracy in the unions and against all forms of bureaucracy.

The Socialist Alliance will tirelessly work in the trade unions to fight bourgeois ideology. We explain that no trade union demand can be made permanent while wage slavery lasts. All economic, trade union and political demands must be connected with the task of putting society as a whole into the hands of the working class.

# **Appendix 3**

Six principal Socialist Alliance supporting organisations

Alliance for Workers Liberty  
Communist Party of Great Britain  
International Socialist Group  
Socialist Party in England and Wales  
Socialist Workers Party  
Workers Power