SOCIALIST LABOUR
ACTION

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A bulletin for Socialist Labour Party members

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For a Democratic SLP

By Kirstie Paton, Secretary, Vauxhall CSLP

Comrades may be aware of the recent expulsions of John Pearson and Stan Keable. It seems they won't be the last. Barry Biddulph, a comrade in my CLSP, Vauxhall, also received a letter of expulsion on the 3 February from acting Secretary/Treasurer, Arthur Scargill. Barry has been accused of:

" .....acting openly in defiance of the Constitution and refusing to abide by the Rules."

Barry has not seen any evidence, nor has he been given any opportunity to respond to these accusations.

These expulsions are an outrage. Our comrades have been accused, tried, judged and sentenced without any evidence, without the right of defence and without the right of appeal. These are the methods of the Stalin show-trials, of victimisation and frame-up of oppositionists.

Stalin's aim was to silence critics of his dictatorial rule. For decades Stalinist parties used bureaucratic means to stifle genuine debate in their parties, instill fear of the leadership into the members and to impose the Moscow line without criticism.

Unfortunately our party is being infected by the same fear and the same threats. If you speak out, if you disagree with the NEC, then you can be accused of being a member of a hostile group or simply of acting against the constitution, and be expelled from the party by a stroke of Arthur Scargill's pen. His aim is to silence critics of his policies, or more particularly, to silence critics on the left of the party.

Stan Keable was selected by the Brent East CSLP to contest the seat in the General Election. Arthur Scargill disagreed with this decision, and informed the *Morning Star* - the paper of a different party - that Stan Keable was not a member of the SLP and Brent East CSLP would not be standing in the elections.

This is totally undemocratic. What does our constitution say on the matter? In Clause XII (8) it states:
"The constituency Party shall be responsible for selecting candidates to contest any Regional, Parliamentary or European election."

In addition to this the NEC passed a resolution on electoral policy on 3 August 1997 confirms that:

"The selection of a candidate for a Parliamentary Constituency shall be the exclusive responsibility of the Constituency Party concerned."

In the case of Brent East, Arthur Scargill has single-handedly told the CSLP they have no right to stand. It hasn't even been discussed by the NEC.

This is not an isolated event. It is a pattern that is developing throughout the party. Arthur Scargill wants 100 parliamentary candidates and he wants candidates who are uncritical of his politics. He is determined to force these on local parties whatever they think of the tactic or the candidate.

At a meeting of the Berkshire area branch, on 10 February, Katrina Howes, a local Greenham Common peace campaigner, argued she should stand as the candidate for the branch. The branch had already decided it wouldn't be standing in the elections. After a lengthy discussion, the branch felt that she was not an appropriate candidate and they confirmed their decision not to stand in the elections.

Despite this decision, Arthur Scargill announced at a public meeting on 20 February in Camberwell that the SLP would be standing a Greenham Common peace and anti-roads protester in the elections. Does this mean that the decision of the Berkshire area branch amounts to nothing?

Comrades from Cardiff have reported that they found out about the SLP's prospective parliamentary candidate for Pontypridd in the local press! The selection of their candidate had not been voted on in the branch. The branch then agreed it would stand in Pontypridd, but not in Cardiff and the Branch Secretary informed Arthur Scargill of this. In a reply to the Secretary, Pete Ashley, dated 17 February, Arthur Scargill expressed his disappointment and urged the comrades to reconsider their decision. He also said:

"You will also appreciate where a constituency Party decides that it does not want or feel able to stand a candidate then the NEC is within its rights to decide to contest in that Constituency and select a candidate."

It seems clear that it doesn't matter what branches decide. If your branch decides not to stand, then the NEC has the 'right' to impose candidates against the democratic decisions of the branch. This is an attack on members' basic democratic rights.

Not only are the rights of branches to decide to stand candidates in the elections being violated but more fundamentally, our right to discuss, adopt and advocate policies in the party is under threat.

Vauxhall, of which I am Branch Secretary, elected Ian Driver, a sitting councillor, as the candidate for Vauxhall CSLP on 9 February. We followed all the correct procedures. It was advertised in *Socialist Labour Information* (12.12.97) to ensure all members were open to the selection list. In preparation for our election campaign the branch was also discussing a number of draft election manifestos.

However, according to Arthur Scargill, our constituency party is not allowed to do any of these things without the blessing of the NEC (or

Arthur Scargill himself). In a letter to myself on 20 February he claimed that:

"1. No Constituency Socialist Labour Party has the right to stand in a Parliamentary Election without the authority of the National Executive Committee.

2. No Constituency SLP has the right to adopt or advocate policies or manifestos which are in conflict with the SLP's Policy document and Constitution."

This means the NEC has the right to veto candidates who it considers may be critical of the NEC. It also means that branches or Constituency parties cannot even take a position on policy questions if it is different from the national line of the party. This is a dangerous absurdity. It prevents members winning other comrades to their point of view and so building up support for a change of any party policy. This type of bureaucratic ban on debate may have a long tradition in the Stalinist movement, but it has nothing in common with the traditions of real socialism.

All these developments point to one thing. Arthur Scargill wants to build a monolithic, bureaucratic, Stalinist-type party, in which the rights of members can be violated if they contradict the policies of the leadership.

We must resist the attempts by Arthur Scargill and other party members who support these anti-democratic methods from destroying the SLP.

Every member should defend the right of Stan Keable, John Pearson, Barry Biddulph and other members who have been bureaucratically expelled from the party to remain full members of the party.

Every branch should be passing resolutions to the NEC to let them know how deeply opposed we are to these expulsions.

We should support the right of any branch to defy the violation of their democratic rights by Arthur Scargill or the NEC. Bureaucratically expelled members should be allowed to continue attending their branches and performing their official functions in the branch if they have any. Not to do this will give the message to the leadership that they can get away with trampling all over our rights without any resistance.

Comrades on the left of the party have already been building support for a Campaign for Democracy. The Left Network held a meeting before Christmas and decided to organise a conference for democracy in February to discuss ways of challenging bureaucratic methods in the party. This is an excellent initiative.

However, some in the Left Network have shown they are not prepared to conduct a principled fight against the witch hunts.

Chris Ford and Annette Wright from the West London branch proposed a motion that refuses to defend Stan Keable against expulsion. It was passed 5 votes to 4.

What comrades think of the tactic of standing against Ken Livingstone is not the point. We have to defend the right of every member and every branch to stand up to the leadership and defy their bureaucratic methods.

Not to do so is to strengthen the leadership's ability to carry out the witch hunt. That's how they win. By creating a climate of fear, they hope members will keep their 'heads down' to avoid expulsion. They hope comrades will cease their criticism of Scargill's reformist and Stalinist politics, and even his decisions on tactical questions like the election.

We will not be intimidated by these methods. We need to build a united campaign in the party for democracy.

The Conference for democracy was postponed by the co-ordinating committee. In light of the new date for congress in October they ignored the decision to hold it in February and decided to hold it in June instead.

This was a mistake and it needs to be rectified. We should call such a conference for March/April.

The whole future of the party is at stake. A mass socialist party needs to draw on everything that is best in the working class: courage, resourcefulness, new ideas, an instinct for the fullest democracy and a determination to act together in struggle. A victory for bureaucratic Stalinism will undermine all of these things and produce a party of docile and uncritical functionaries capable of doing only what they are told.

Defy bureaucratic expulsions!

For a democratic constitution!

SOCIALIST LABOUR PARTY
President: Frank Cave Vice-President: Patrick Sikorski
General Secretary/Treasurer: Arthur Scargill (pro tem)

9 Victoria Road, Barnsley, South Yorkshire

3rd February 1997

Mr B Biddulph,
Southwark UNISON,
177 Walwark Road,
London, SE17.

Dear Mr Biddulph,

It has been brought to my attention that you signed a membership application form to join the Socialist Labour Party on the basis that you agreed to abide by the Constitution of the Party. It is clear from the evidence in our possession that this is something that you are not willing to do and are acting openly in defiance of the Constitution and refusing to abide by the Rules.

In these circumstances I have to inform you that your application for membership of the Socialist Labour Party was ineligible and therefore you are not a member of the Party. I would therefore ask you to return your membership card No.1181 and on no account should declare yourself as a member for Socialist Labour in any circumstances.

Yours sincerely,

A. Scargill
General Secretary/Treasurer

Vauxall Constituency S.L.P

Secretary :Kirsty Paton,Publicity Officer: Barry Biddulph,
Chair: Alan Gibson ,Treasurer: Christine Hulme
Socialist News organiser: Marcus Larsen

Open Letter to Arthur Scargill
From Barry Biddulph Membership Number 1181

Dear Comrade Scargill

In a letter to me dated 5/02/97 but received 14/02/97 you claim to have evidence that I am acting openly in defiance of the constitution and refusing to abide by the rules of the party. Yet you fail to substantiate your allegation. You do not present any evidence that I have broken the rules. Which Rules have I broken? Which section of the constitution have I Defied? You put me In an impossible position. How can I defend myself against an unspecific allegation. Nor I have not been given the right to appeal

Even the Labour Party and New Labour feel the need to be seen to formally observe Bourgeois norms of natural justice. In contrast you have acted in an undemocratic arbitrary manner. My Constituency party has not been consulted or even informed. You do not even claim it is a decision of the National Executive Committee. When you were a member of the Labour party you opposed bureaucratic witch hunts against socialists. Indeed, you have Treated me in exactly the Same way as my Bosses the New Labour Southwark Council They illegally prevented me carrying out my trade union duties for six months on the basis of general unsubstantiated allegations. There were no charges and I was unable to defend myself.

I believe you have victimised me because I have been part of a constituency majority and before that a South London Branch Majority who have had the temerity to exercise our democratic right to criticise the leadership and to seek to change or influence the policies of the S.L.P. It has been a great disappointment to myself and other comrades that you wish to prevent open democratic debate by bureaucratic means. It seems that you are determined to stamp out those who ask questions or stimulate debate about the Strategy and tactics required to advance the interests of the Working Class.

I should add that the membership have not been allowed to discuss and vote on the party rules and the constitution. This is in flat contradiction to your often repeated assertion that the members make the policies of the party. Ironically you have broken the rules by adopting the title of general secretary and postponing the party congress. The rules require a yearly congress and the election of the general secretary at the congress. There are many other irregularities. The Composition of the National executive does not conform to the constitution and so on. The truth is the constitution is hopelessly bureaucratic and many members would like to see it rendered more democratic. In other words many members have been compelled to accept the constitution but do not politically agree with it.

I have been a member of the S.L.P since May 1996. I have been actively involved in building the South London branch,then later the South west Branch and now the Vauxall constituency. I will continue my Socialist activities as a member of the S.L.P. as long as I have the support of my Constituency party.

Barry Biddulph

SOCIALIST LABOUR PARTY
President: Frank Cave Vice-President: Patrick Sikorski
General Secretary: Arthur Scargill

9 Victoria Road, Barnsley, S70 2BB

Tel/Fax: 01226 770957

20th February 1997

Ms K Paton,
19 Pearce House,
Tilson Gardens,
London,
SW2 4NJ.

Dear Kirstie Paton,

I acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 31st January 1997 informing me that the Vauxhall Constituency SLP Branch has selected a Parliamentary Candidate for the Vauxhall Constituency and also attaching a motion on what you describe as "Need For an Appeals Procedure".

I attach copies of what is described as a "Draft Election Manifesto" for the Vauxhall Constituency Socialist Labour Party and a "Socialist Manifesto" which I understand is being used and adhered to by members of the SLP in the Vauxhall area.

I want to make it absolutely clear that

1. No Constituency Socialist Labour Party has the right to stand in a Parliamentary Election without the authority of the National Executive Committee.

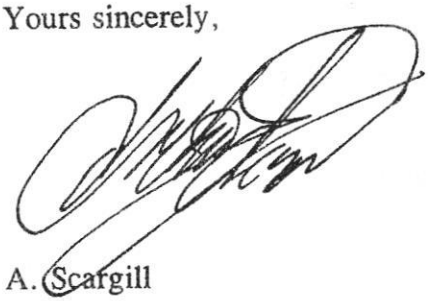
2. No Constituency Socialist Labour Party has the right to adopt or advocate policies or manifestos which are in conflict with the Socialist Labour Party's Policy document and Consitution.

3. I require an immediate explanation as to the reasoning behind these documents - who has written them, who supports them, and is the "Vauxhall Constituency Socialist Labour Party" recognised by the Party and does it approve of any or all of the documentation attached to this letter.

I am aware after reading a letter from Ian Driver that he has made clear that he supports and abides by the Constitution of the Socialist Labour Party, in which case he would not be in a position to support the "daft policies" contained in the material attached to this letter.

Could you please let me have a response by return so that I can determine what action to take.

Yours sincerely,



A. Scargill
General Secretary

Vauxhall Constituency SLP
Secretary/Treasurer: Kirstie Paton
19 Pearce House
Tilson Gardens
London
SW2 4NJ

21 February 1997

Dear Arthur Scargill,

I received your letter of 20 February 1997.

I also want to make it "absolutely clear" that:

1. Vauxhall Constituency's selection of Comrade Ian Driver (a sitting councillor) to contest the General Election was properly carried out pursuant to Clause XII (8) of the party constitution, which clearly states:
"The Constituency Party shall be responsible for selecting candidates to contest any Regional, Parliamentary or European election."

2. Every member of the SLP and every CSLP has a perfect right to "adopt" any policies it wishes and to "advocate" them in the party. This is an elementary democratic procedure which is not proscribed by the constitution.

3. The documents enclosed with your letter are policy proposals from individual party members. To date none of them has been voted on or adopted by the branch.

4. Vauxhall Constituency SLP was established on 12.12.96 in accordance with Clause XII (1) of the party constitution. It is recognised by the party, as is evidenced by the notice in Socialist Labour Information of 23.12.96.

Yours sincerely,

Kirstie Paton

Kirstie Paton
Constituency Secretary

REVOLUTIONARIES & THE ELECTION

by Pete Ashley
Branch Secretary South East Wales SLP

The approach taken by the leadership of the SLP to the general election threatens real disaster for the party. We are being driven to stand candidates in areas where we have no base and no chance of running an effective campaign. The results are likely to be a string of lost deposits and real demoralisation amongst party members after the election.

My branch, South East Wales SLP, had originally decided to stand in Cardiff Central, simply because most of our active members, less than a dozen, live there. This seemed sensible given how few resources we have available to run an election campaign. However, we have gradually started working as well in Pontypridd, despite the transport problems of getting there on a regular basis.

However my branch was virtually forced to stand a candidate in Pontypridd. How did this come about? The first the branch knew of this was an interview with our candidate, RMT Exec. member Peter Skelly, in the "Western Mail" newspaper! Apparently, Arthur Scargill had approached Peter Skelly, and without any consultation with the branch decided we were fighting the Pontypridd seat. The branch were furious and even angrier when former General Secretary Pat Sikorski ignored these concerns with typical bureaucratic arrogance.

Now, the seat has obvious appeal and potential for the Party as the MP is Kim Howells. After scabbing on the miners, his ever-rightward drift has him stating that "the word socialism should be humanely phased out". He is a particularly vile specimen of Blairism and hence an excellent target for the SLP. But bouncing us into standing in Pontypridd as well as Cardiff is typical of the NEC's approach to standing candidates.

In the Information Notes of 24/11/97 the NEC advises branches which have already agreed to stand a candidate to "consider running a candidate on the basis of a General Election address alone in an adjacent constituency". This means doing no work in the constituency at all except just one mail shot!

The imposition of a candidate on our branch by Scargill and the NEC was not enough it seems, for suddenly we found ourselves under pressure to put up another candidate! We were then in effect offered a bribe to stand in Cardiff as well. We were verbally promised at the NEC the £500 deposit if we agreed to stand, though this was never confirmed in writing, and was later denied by Pat Sikorski!

This raises an important question of party democracy. Is there a pot of money for the General Election and who decides how it' s spent? If deposits can be offered to some constituencies and not to others it is obviously a weapon of political control and patronage if left to a group

on the NEC. Why not disperse the fund equally to all constituency SLPs who are standing candidates? At Congress, members must demand a full set of accounts of this general election fund and how it was used.

The story in Wales is not finished however. Scargill recently did a speaking tour in South Wales. We were now told to consider standing not just in Cardiff and Pontypridd, but in the Vale of Glamorgan and Ogwr as well! Likewise at the meeting in Bristol the comrades there were encouraged to stand in 3 of the 5 Bristol seats. Like the comrades in Bristol we have taken the realistic decision of standing in only one seat, Pontypridd, no doubt to the chagrin of comrade Scargill!

Scargill and the rest of the leadership are desperate to get 50 candidates in place. Why? - apparently to allow a 5 minute T.V. broadcast. While this would no doubt be of some use to the Party, given our distinct lack of coverage nationally, even the broadcast is not guaranteed, it's at the discretion of the TV companies. Ideally, Scargill would like 100 candidates and at least 5% of the vote nationally. That way, the argument goes, if a Labour government introduced state funding for political parties then the SLP would qualify for such funding.

This desperate attempt to get at least 50 candidates, virtually imposing them where there is local dissent, is typical of the bureaucratic methods Scargill is adopting to build the Party. Another example of this method of trampling on the constitutional rights of constituency SLP's to choose their own candidates is in Brent East. The CSLP candidate, Stan Keable, was recently told by Scargill that he was not a member of the Party and that the SLP would not be fighting the seat! Could this be because Ken Livingstone is MP there? Quite rightly the local Party have decided to defy this bureaucratic and anti-democratic manoeuvre.

The move from branches to CSLP's is also being bureaucratically imposed on us. This has meant the ridiculous situation in my branch (South East Wales), of forming 3 constituency SLP's, each containing only 2 or 3 active members each. This is happening all over the country. Scargill doesn't even officially recognise the existence of branches, all correspondence to him or the NEC etc. has to be from a CSLP. Again this suits Scargill as it splits up potentially oppositional local branches.

Why should we have to organise on a constituency basis to be heard in the party? Only because our leadership is besotted with parliament and organising for elections. If we are to build a real fighting party with its roots in the factories, mines and offices, as well as on the housing estates, in the colleges and schools, then town, estate, workplace and college branches should be what we are working towards. This is where the real struggle for socialism will take place, not in the House of Commons.

On top of all this, we have had no opportunity to discuss the Party's election manifesto or policy at all. Even Labour Party members have been allowed a vote on "the road to the manifesto'. Are we to be less democratic than New Labour? It appears so.

We should demand the calling of an all-members national meeting to discuss and debate our positions. The national election policy document must be circulated and be open to amendment. We must also be allowed to decide our position on the nature of New Labour, and as a result whether we call for a vote for it where we are not standing. At the moment we are stuck with a position of calling for a vote for 'socialist candidates' (Ken Livingstone for example?), which presumably means abstaining where no such candidate stands, and hence no vote for Labour. The article by Bernie McAdam in the first issue of the SLA bulletin was absolutely right on this question. To refuse to help beat the Tories would severely damage our party.

The Appeal on SLP Election Policy from the comrades in the South West of England has already opened up a lively and healthy debate over electoral tactics. I encourage all readers of this bulletin to sign the Appeal and to attend the meeting organised by Swindon branch on 8th March. However, there are some potential dangers in the comrades' position. If they think that we should not stand any candidates in the elections *as a matter of principle*, then I think they are wrong. A lively election campaign - if conducted with the necessary resources available - can be an excellent way of building the Party.

This raises the most important question to confront. Why do revolutionary socialists stand in elections? We stand not because we think parliament will deliver socialism from above, but because the elections offer us the opportunity to talk to a wider layer of working class people. We need SLP candidates to stand on a revolutionary action programme which really addresses the needs of the working class today and maps out the road to socialism.

We should be aiming to build the Party using the most militant methods possible. The size of the vote the Party receives, while important for our credibility, is much less important than the campaign we fight. Can we convince workers that our ideas are right and New Labour's are wrong? Can we win new members to the party by having these arguments on the doorstep, by our candidates and members supporting and involving themselves in key working class struggles, by challenging Tory and Labour arguments in our paper, in street and estate meetings, at the factory gate?

This is why standing candidates where we have no base is useless and why it is a symptom of parliamentary cretinism to place the standing of candidates above the need to really build a party at the grass roots. If we have the money, and we are short enough of it in the localities, lets spend it on real campaigning, on local leaflets and bulletins, on intervening in real working class struggles not squandering thousands of pounds on empty shell campaigns which will leave nothing behind for the party after the election.

With politics firmly bedded in the class struggle, SLP branches have the potential to grow significantly around the election and start to become a factor in events locally, providing we focus our campaigns and resist squandering our resources. This way we will put the Party in an

excellent position to benefit from the disillusionment workers will feel soon after a Blair government is elected. In contrast the current policy of the NEC threatens the party with shipwreck.

An Appeal by 24 Party Members in the South West on the SLP Electoral Policy

'Like millions of our fellow citizens Socialist Labour hopes that the Tories are hated to such a degree that they will not be returned to power at the next election.'

Unfortunately the editorial from which this quote is taken, in the first edition of Socialist News, does not face up to the question of what the SLP will do, other than hope. If we recognise the need to remove the Tories, then we have to say how the working class can achieve it at the general election. Of course, we are not electoralists. We recognise that the chances of electoral defeat for the Tories would be improved by the success of working class struggles. Indeed we should condemn New Labour because their policy and strategy is undermining our chance of defeating the Tories as a result of their opposition to workers' struggles (the Post Office dispute, the Underground workers, their refusal to support the Liverpool dockers and so on). In neglecting their traditional base of support and offering nothing to the victims of the last 17 years, they may deepen the level of abstention. However, in the absence of an upsurge in mass struggles the working class will look to the general election to remove the Tories.

After 17 years of massive attacks on our unions and jobs, and big defeats, not unreasonably, working people consider the outcome of this election to be crucial. They will in their majority, vote for New Labour because they consider it the only means of defeating the Tories in the General Election. This is a realistic and rational judgement. The SLP is not a mass party and there is no sign that it will offer an electoral alternative to New Labour in the short term. The overwhelming majority of workers do not, as yet, recognise us as a credible alternative. We would wish it otherwise, but it is not so yet.

Even if the SLP were to stand 100 candidates (which we believe unlikely) what do we do in the other 500 odd constituencies? The silence of the editorial implies that we cannot vote for New Labour. Is this really the opinion of the NEC? We have to state a clear position on this. There are some comrades in the party who are opposed to a vote for New Labour even in those constituencies where the SLP will not stand. Such a position is in our view ultra-left. It is based on the superficial judgement that 'there is no difference between Labour and Tories'. However, to abstain is to fail to act on the basis of the immediate interests of the working class. The re-election of the Tories would be a disaster for the working class. It would deepen the demoralisation which exists throughout the labour movement. It would lead to the privatisation of the rest of the railways, a further attempt to privatise the Post Office, more anti-union legislation and so on.

If the SLP is seen to act against the interests of the working class by failing to follow an electoral policy based on the need to remove the Tories, this will serve to undermine our chances of recruiting opponents of Blair who have not joined us, but may well do so in the future.

So far as we are concerned, there is no contradiction in us calling for the return of a New Labour government whilst stressing that we are aiming to build a socialist alternative to it. If we understand that it is imperative to remove the Tories from office, then we are merely recognising the relationship of forces is not in our favour. We are recognising that the SLP cannot defeat the Tories at the next election. We are recognising that the chances of building the SLP as a credible alternative with a mass base of support will be improved by the removal of the Tories and retarded by their return to office.

Moreover, the test of a New Labour government in office will deepen the contradictions which emerged into the open at the TUC. The reality of a Blair government will sooner or later create a crisis deep in the heart of the labour movement as a result of the refusal of that government even to contemplate the minimal proposals of the TUC (right to secondary strike action, employment rights from day one, etc) and the test of what it does in office.

At our founding conference we did not discuss electoral policy. We are a new party, with a membership of diverse political origins. The NEC should organise a discussion amongst the entire membership on this question. We should not rush into generalised electoral activity without even considering the relationship between it and the class struggle, the type of party the SLP should be. Such an unconsidered course will drag us into an electoralist approach and will tend towards the creation of a sort of left wing version of the Labour Party. However, if the SLP is to develop into a genuine socialist alternative to New Labour it must make a conscious break from the methods and politics of social democracy which have dominated the Labour Party since it was founded. Electoral activity has its place, but we must not create illusions that the struggle for socialism is simply a question of the SLP winning an electoral majority and then implementing socialism through parliamentary bills.

We are asking for this statement to be circulated to the members for their consideration.

Signed by:
Brian Barber (Swindon branch)
Geoff Bar (Exeter branch)
Kevin Beazer (Bristol branch)
Harvey Brant (Bristol branch)
Ellen Bryan (Bristol branch)
Glen Burrows (Secretary, Somerset branch)
Dave Chapple (Organiser, Somerset branch)
Derek Debenham (Exeter branch)
Eileen George (Swindon branch)
Russell Lambert (Berkshire branch)
Pauline Liepens (Berkshire branch)
Clive Norris (Swindon branch)
Terry Pearce (Chair, Berkshire branch)
Val Pearce (Berkshire branch)
Ian Price (Chair, Somerset branch)
Tim Sedgwick-Jell (Swindon branch)
Michael Sell (Bristol branch)
Kevin Slocombe (Bristol branch)
Dave Taylor (Secretary, Berkshire branch)
David Vaughan (Swindon branch)
Rebecca Vaughan (Swindon branch)
Alan West (Bristol branch)
Martin Wicks (Secretary, Swindon branch)
Dave Wilshire (Bristol branch)

If you wish to sign this appeal or get further information contact:

Martin Wicks, 333 Helcome Avenue, Park North, Swindon SN3 2PF

Debating a Manifesto for Vauxhall constituency

by Kirstie Paton
Branch Secretary - Vauxhall CSLP, London.

In our constituency we have been discussing the need for a local manifesto which we will use in our election campaign. Below is a copy of the manifesto I have submitted to my branch. It might be useful for other comrades in the party thinking about how we make our arguments for socialism link in with workers' immediate concerns as we fight the campaign.

For me the key issue for the SLP is to fight the general election with a revolutionary action programme. While the SLP policy document put forward very good demands on the minimum wage, nationalisation, taxation, Ireland etc., (which I have included in this draft manifesto) what the party remains silent on is how we think we can achieve socialism.

Of course we should be having the arguments about why New Labour has betrayed working class people in Vauxhall, how we are a party that fights the attacks on the welfare state, why we fight racism in all its forms etc. But we should also be using the elections to talk to working people about what we mean by socialism and why we need a real revolution in Britain to achieve it.

Our constituency encouraged members to submit draft manifestos and several did so. We are now in the process of democratically discussing them. The discussion has raised differences on how we use manifestos and propaganda in the election. My idea is that the manifesto should be given to people interested in joining the party in Vauxhall, people we get discussing with in the campaign. We also need to issue specific leaflets based on our manifesto during the campaign, say on racism and the Tories' Asylum Act which is a very big issue in our constituency.

During the debate on this, one comrade in debate argued that although we should adopt a manifesto we should not really use it! Comrade Alan Gibson moved a motion declaring:
"While we have established a majority platform of the branch, we recognise that Socialist Labour must present a united face to the electorate. Therefore in our public propaganda we will not use those elements of our platform which contradict national election policy."

I think this is wrong. Ours is a party still in formation - many of the positions in the SLP Policy Statements document haven't even been voted on by members at a national congress. Worse we have been denied the right by the NEC to have a national meeting to discuss our SLP election manifesto and our election work generally. Local constituencies clearly have to have their own debates and to put forward their local manifestos. Arthur Scargill after all was once very keen on emphasisng the independence and rights of constituencies in the SLP in contrast to New Labour's bureaucratic interventions in CLPs. Of course we must sell Socialist News and give out any national propaganda for

the party, but frankly these publications seem very few and far between at the moment.

Sometimes we will disagree with national policy. An important issue in Vauxhall, where we have a very multi-racial constituency, is state attacks on immigrants. The Asylum Act has increased the amount of harassment of the black community. The majority of comrades think SLP policy, which suggests we can have a non-racist set of immigration controls, is absolutely wrong. In a constituency that has many black people who have suffered at the hands of Britain's racist immigration legislation, we think it is important that we campaign clearly for a policy of being against all immigration controls.

I would welcome comments on this manifesto and I hope that we will be given the opportunity to debate our national election manifesto in the same way as we have started to do democratically in Vauxhall.

THE SOCIALIST LABOUR PARTY - VAUXHALL ELECTION MANIFESTO

What we stand for:
We are standing in Vauxhall because we believe that if New Labour forms a government after this election it will offer nothing to working people who have experienced declining public services, mass unemployment and growing poverty under the Tories. The SLP was formed by brothers and sisters in the Labour Party who would no longer put up with Tony Blair's attacks on everything Labour had stood for in the past.
The SLP in contrast is an unashamedly socialist party. We reject the idea of the "free market" -the capitalism system that produces poverty, injustice and war. The SLP is fighting for an alternative society, one that utilises the wealth created by workers to abolish class distinctions and meet human needs through a rational and democratic plan.
In the coming election we will fight for:

Jobs for all - for an end to unemployment
Millions of people are forced to live on poverty benefits while other workers are driven to work as much as 70 hours a week overtime. British wages are some of the lowest in Europe. Over the last 17 years, the Tories have turned Britain into a low wage economy, where workers are expected to live on wages as little as £3-4 a hour.
We need:
A massive programme of public spending on new factories, housing, schools, hospitals and public transport.
The SLP demands that everyone in Britain has the right to a minimum wage of £6.
The SLP will scrap the Job Seekers Allowance and replace it with state benefits at the level of the minimum wage.
For a four day working week with no loss of pay. Divide the necessary work between all those available to do it.

Squeeze the profiteers
Private industries have made billions in profit by exploiting workers and customers. The Tories have sold off state industries and utilities such as gas, water and electricity to their friends in the city at knock down prices. The gap between rich and poor is greater than ever - our bills increase while the fat cats get fatter. The SLP will take the utilities, the banks and industry back into the hands of working class people. We do not want state bureaucrats running these industries as they did in the past. All industry taken over by the state should be run by workers and for working people, according to need, not profit. The SLP would use any surpluses to slash charges and improve services.
Open the books of companies, like Ford, threatening thousands with the sack to inspection by the workforce.
Nationalise all companies declaring workers redundant and those that refuse to pay the minimum wage.
Nationalise all the banks and the major industries under workers control - without compensation.

Where will the money come from? Tax the Rich!
The Tories and Labour tell us they can't afford to spend money on the NHS or education. They say we have to 'tighten our belts' and accept poverty wages and unemployment to make Britain 'competitive'. They are liars. The bosses and their hangers on have millions in assets and bank accounts. To fund a programme for social change the SLP will implement a steeply progressive tax system.
Tax the rich, not the poor.
Abolish VAT and all indirect taxes.
For a steeply progressive income tax - high rates for the rich not for the better paid workers
For a steeply progressive wealth tax on the bosses property, land etc

Free education for all
Everyone should have the right to a free, decent education, no matter what age. The Tory and Labour councils have done nothing but cut back on education. Our schools are rundown and badly resourced while Tony Blair and Harriet Harman send their kids to the best selective schools. The introduction of the loan system and now tuition fees for university students is yet another attempt to exclude working class students from the right to education.

The bosses tell us they can't afford to fund schools properly, and yet they throw millions into private schools for the rich like Eton and Harrow.
We fight for:
No course or school or college closures
A fully funded free state education system run under the control of teachers students and parents.
An end to the privileges of the rich - abolish all public schools
A living grant for all students at the level of the minimum wage.

Defend and extend the NHS
The Tories are trying to introduce the 'market' into the NHS. They want to create a two tier health system - where those than can pay get the best treatment. The SLP is committed to:
Stop all closures of hospitals, wards and clinics
A free NHS available at the time of need and free of all charges including prescriptions, dental care etc. Nationalise the drug companies, take-over the private hospitals and end NHS waiting lists.
The abolition of all private healthcare.

A Secure future for all
The Tories have robbed the state pension scheme, earnings related pensions are a thing of the past. Now they want to force us into private pension schemes. And New Labour says the same! Remember Robert Maxwell who plundered workers pensions for private gain. Why should workers be forced to rely on the roller coaster of the stock market to give them a decent pension. The SLP will:
Nationalise all pension schemes into a single state scheme under trade union control.
Fix pensions at full working wages.
Allow voluntary retirement at 55.

Stop the war against youth
Youth are being targeted by both the Tories and Labour as a "problem". Both parties want to introduce repressive laws that deny youth their basic democratic rights. The SLP will take up the struggle for youth rights:
Votes at 16.
Restore rights to benefits for 16-18 year olds.
Repeal the CJA; stop bans on raves and festivals.
Legalise all drugs; for a massive campaign of education amongst the youth giving full information about the effects of drugs.

Restore workers rights
The SLP stands in solidarity with workers in struggle against the bosses. We support the actions of the Liverpool dockers who have been on strike for over a year to defend jobs on the Mersey docks. We support the actions of workers at Glacier in Glasgow who occupied their engineering plant when the bosses threatened to sack the workers. Their determination paid off - the bosses caved in and reinstated the workforce. The SLP think this is the best way workers can defend their jobs and conditions.
We will:
Guarantee recognition of trade unions.
Abolish the Anti-trade union laws - for the right for workers to strike and picket.
Support all strikes and occupations to fight job losses and cuts.

Racism
Britain is a racist country. Black people suffer discrimination in housing, education, jobs and pay. At the same time they suffer harassment and violence from the police. The London Metropolitan police are racist to the core. In the last two years they have murdered two local black men, Brian Douglas and Wayne Douglas. The officers involved have not been prosecuted. The SLP will fight racism on all fronts:
Bring the killers of Brian Douglas and Wayne Douglas to justice
End discrimination in housing, education, jobs and pay.
Stop all deportations. Repeal the Asylum laws
Abolish all immigration controls.
For the right of black defence against racist violence.

Women's Equality

Despite making up 50% of the workforce in Britain, the majority of women are in part-time low paid work. Women still take most of the burden of child care and are denied equal access to all aspects of life because of this. The SLP will fight sexism on all fronts:
Equal pay for equal work.
Maternity leave on full pay up to 12 months to be taken by either parent
Free 24 hour child care, for a massive extension of high quality state provided creches and nurseries.
Free abortion on demand

For Lesbian and Gay Rights
Lesbian and Gay people suffer discrimination under the law, at work. The SLP fights for:
For equality before the law including equal ages of consent, custody of children, work and housing.
Abolish Section 28 of the Local Government Act which restricts education about gay sexuality

Environment
In their thirst for a quick buck, the bosses threaten the very existence of our planet; forests are destroyed, rivers and seas polluted, chemicals poured into the atmosphere and onto the land. Most of the pollution goes unchecked and without our knowledge. The SLP recognises that the only way to ensure that we protect our environment is to take production into the hands of the majority so that we can plan production with a view to the future of our planet.
Public enquiries based on workers and community representatives into unsafe factories, polluting industries and projects that threaten the environment.
Closure of dangerous plants and the re-employment of the workforce by the state in like work at full rates of pay.

Democracy
Our rulers love to spout about the marvels of the "Westminster model" of democracy. In fact we live a country with one of the most limited democracies in Europe. The Monarch and the hereditary aristocrats in the House of Lords still have a powerful role in deciding our laws. Our "first past the post" system of election scandalously discriminates against small parties. The Judges who are drawn almost exclusively from ruling class families have enormous powers to "create" new case law are appointed by the Lord Chancellor and have little sympathy for the workers and their organisations. The SLP will:
Abolish the House of Lords
Abolish the Monarchy
Introduce proportional representation in elections by party list
Institute the election all judges

Local Democracy
The Tories have systematically undermined local democracy. The GLC and other metropolitan councils have been abolished. Local authorities have been attacked and local councillors removed if they defended public services. Their funding has been slashed. Hospitals, Colleges and other public bodies are now run by unelected boards, "Quangoes", committed to a "business ethos". Many Schools and some council estates have been removed from local authority control. We will
Restore the grants withheld by the Tories since 1979.
Abolish the council tax and replace it with a steeply progressive local income tax and wealth tax.
Cancel the interest charges paid to the banks by local councils.
Release all money from council house sales, stop selling council houses and start building them.
Abolish all quangoes and replace them by elected bodies accountable to the community, the workers in the area and the users

Self determination for Scotland and Wales
We believe the people of Scotland and Wales have the right to decide their own future, whether they want independence or autonomy within the UK. The Scots already voted for an Assembly in 1979 but were denied it by Westminster, the Welsh voted against. The best way

to remain a united working class is to remove any fear that the Scots and Welsh will be denied national democratic rights under an SLP government.
For a sovereign Scottish Assembly with the right to decide its relationship with the UK.
For a referendum in Wales to determination the views of the Welsh on this question.
For a united socialist Britain.

Internationalism
Capitalism is a system that exploits people all over the world. Countries like Britain have dominated the world economy and exploited its resources for centuries. When their domination is threatened, as during the Gulf War for oil, they do not hesitate to use massive military force to smash resistance to their continued power. The SLP stands in solidarity with workers and peasants across the globe fighting imperialist domination. The SLP fights for:
Cancellation of the 'third world' debt
Withdrawal of British troops from overseas
Not a penny, not a person for this system, we will vote against all so called "defence" spending.

Ireland
Ireland is Britain's oldest colony. Today the Tories refuse to allow the Irish people as a whole to determine their own future free from British interference. Today in Northern Ireland there is an army of occupation, the British army which is defending the existence of a sectarian state that oppresses the nationalist community. The SLP stands with the Irish fighting British Imperialism.
Immediate withdrawal of all British Troops
Release all republican prisoners
No exclusion of Sinn Fein from peace talks
Repeal the PTA and all other repressive legislation.
Dissolve the RUC
Self determination for the Irish people as a whole

Stop State Repression
The Tories have spent the last 17 years giving more power to the repressive state apparatus. They suggest this is necessary to fight crime. In reality greater police powers have been used to smash our picket lines, evict families, attack workers demonstrations. The SLP will:
Withdraw CS gas, batons, riot gear and firearms from the police
Abolish the CJA and police and criminal evidence act
Abolish MI5, MI6 and all secret intelligence units

For a Socialist United states of Europe
Across Europe workers are fighting back against attempts by the bosses to make us pay for their single currency and European market. The SLP supports these struggles. But we do not line up with the little Englanders, the "Euro Sceptics", who want to defend British "sovereignty". Inside Europe or outside of it the workers will continue to be exploited by capitalism. We have another solution to the mass unemployment of the bosses Europe or a Britain outside the EU. We fight to build a socialist united states of Europe .
Tear up the Maastricht Treaty - reject the capitalists austerity drive against European workers
No to import controls and protectionist measures
No to fortress Europe and its attacks on immigrants and political refugees.
Down with the Council of Ministers and the bureaucrats' European Commission.
For a sovereign constituent assembly, for a workers government in a Socialist United States of Europe.

Socialist Labour's answer to the crisis
The SLP is fighting this election to give a voice to millions of workers who are sickened by the betrayals of New Labour. Many workers have had enough of politicians and their promises. The SLP is not just another party that spouts off, but delivers nothing. We are party that believes in action. Change will only come about if we get organised. That is why our members are active in the trade unions fighting for action to defend jobs and wages, active in campaigns against racism, active in the fight against the Job Seekers allowance.

That is why our MP, if elected, will receive the average wage of an industrial worker, and donate the rest of an MPs state salary to the workers movement to further its struggle.

Workers make everything. There are millions of us, without our work nothing would function - from the tube to the supermarkets. And yet the bosses control our lives. We can't change anything unless we take control of our work and of our society.

The SLP thinks working people are a force capable of running society. We stand for workers control at every level of society from the office, factory and school to the fight for a workers government. It is in this way, through workers councils, that workers themselves could control and plan production through the fullest workers democracy.

Revolution

In the fight to achieve all these demands we can expect the Tories, the bosses and New Labour to stand in our way. The bosses will use the courts, the police and the armed services to defend their interests. The experience of every major struggle by workers from the Miners in 1984/5 to the Liverpool dockers today has shown that the bosses will mobilise the state forces to smash workers resistance.

The SLP does not believe that we can take over and reform parliament, the police, the army - the capitalist state - to act in the interests of working class people. That is because real power lies outside parliament with big business who decide what is produced and by whom. It lies with unelected judges who make the laws up as they go along and the police and army to enforce their laws and defend the bosses state.

Any SLP government that tries to take away the wealth of the bosses will meet with violent resistance from this unelected state. In Chile in the 1970s a left government came to power that believed it could use parliament to shift power to the workers. Salvador Allende's government was destroyed by the army and tens of thousands of workers were killed, imprisoned and tortured under the brutal Pinochet dictatorship. We do not intend to repeat that mistake.

To abolish capitalism and carry out our programme of socialist transformation will require the forcible dissolution of the capitalist state machine by mass action and its replacement with a workers state based on workers councils of elected delegates. The bosses will fight tooth and nail to prevent any real socialist change which threatens their property. Just as the bosses have their armed power, their army and police forces, so we will we need to build our own armed workers defence organisations to challenge the power of the bosses and defend our workers councils and our workers government. In that struggle it is only by revolutionary means that we can secure a socialist future for ourselves and our children. Join us.

A Critique of the Draft Youth Charter of Comrades Duke, Lenk and Parkin

by Marcus Austin-Seal, Trafford SLP

In the process of trying to set up a youth section, there has been some discussion among comrades who might be involved in such a project about the need for an SLP Youth Charter. This is a very welcome development, since it means we can begin a discussion about what sort of programme we need for youth in Britain. There have been a number of documents proposed, including at least two versions of a Youth Charter approved by the NEC, and one put forward by three members in London, comrades Duke, Lenk and Parkin. I want to make some criticisms of the latter.

There are many demands in the document I agree with and think we should include in our SLP youth charter. One example is the call for an end to age of consent laws (which do nothing to protect children from abuse but ban consensual sex between young people). Another is the decriminalisation of drugs, though even clearer would be the explicit call for their legalisation, which would increase information and reduce risk for users, while weakening the hold of the gangsters over sale and distribution. I also fully agree with the abolition of all immigration controls. These are all areas which have caused considerable controversy inside the party and which we should fight to make SLP policy.

In my opinion, the problem with the programme is not so much what it contains as what it leaves out. If SLP is going to build a genuine youth section then it should do so on a clear revolutionary basis. As it stands this programme does not do that.

Ireland

For example, in the part of the document dealing with Ireland, it says:
" . . . we are opposed to forcible reunification."
What does this mean? Are the authors against the rights of the Irish people as a whole, north and south, to determine whether they want a united Ireland?
Revolutionary socialists have always been very clear on this question. It is a basic democratic right to allow the Irish people as a whole, in elections across all of the 32 counties in Ireland, to decide on the future of their country. To argue that a "majority" in the Northern Ireland state should be allowed the obstruct national unity means accepting the gerrymandered state that Britain created, which gives a veto to the Loyalists. It means accepting the partition of Ireland and the Tories' whole argument.

In 1921, the British imposed the partition of Ireland by force of arms. The Orange state was set up with the express aim of maintaining the privileges of the Protestants and the continued domination by Britain over its oldest colony. The border excluded three of Ulster's nine historic counties, revealing its real purpose: to create a completely artificial majority for the Protestant Loyalists, whose support for union with Britain has been maintained by granting them privileges over the

Catholics in every sphere - jobs, housing civil rights. Since then the nationalist community have fought a heroic battle against those who defend this sectarian state - the Loyalists, the British government, the RUC and the British Army.

Despite sounding terribly "democratic", Duke, Lenk and Parkin's position is nothing of the sort. It upholds the "right" of the Loyalists to preserve their privileges and the sectarian state that defends them. If the majority of Irish people voted for a united Ireland, but a section of Loyalists decide to act against this democratic mandate and launch an armed defence of the sectarian state, would the SLP have to defend their "right" to resist "forcible" re-unification?

It is our task as socialists in Britain to stand with the anti-unionists in their struggle for national self-determination and a united Ireland. That is why we must unconditionally support the IRA against the British army. But this in no way obliges us to adopt the nationalist politics or programme of Sinn Fein. We should advocate a socialist campaign to unite workers, Catholic and Protestant. This can be done by challenging the Loyalist politicians' domination of the Protestant working class community, by fighting for a minimum wage, for a massive programme of public works to eradicate unemployment and so on. At the same time socialists will have to say plainly to workers influenced by Loyalism that there will be no lasting working class unity while they defend discrimination against their Catholic brothers and sisters, and while they oppose the fight to get the troops out of Ireland now and allow the Irish people as a whole the right to determine their own future.

This draft achieves the opposite by guaranteeing the Loyalists that British "socialists" would defend their "right" to privileges. This will obstruct the very class unity that the draft's authors say they we should be fighting for.

Stalinism

In the section headed "International Workers Solidarity", the document says:

"The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the triumph of counterrevolution in the USSR represented a massive defeat for workers around the world. We defend Cuba, China, Vietnam and North Korea against imperialist aggression and capitalist restoration. Only successful workers' political revolutions in those states can open the road to socialism."

It is absolutely correct that the collapse of these states, in which capitalism had been abolished and planned economies existed, was a big defeat for the working class. Defending such states from capitalism is also entirely correct.

But as millions of workers in Britain and around the world are perfectly aware, these were also states in which there were no democratic rights for the working class. Workers could not strike, form their own parties, produce oppositional literature or vote in real elections. They had no control over the economic plan itself.

The reason for this was that the transition to socialism had been blocked. The isolation of the USSR in the 1920s led to the rise of a caste of conservative bureaucrats who ruled over the working class and secured vast privileges for themselves. There was therefore nothing "socialist" about these states. It is crucial to clarify this if we are to win over youth who have been told that socialism means a totalitarian dictatorship like the former USSR.

The Duke, Lenk & Parkin document avoids mentioning this. Its call for political revolution is therefore not explained. Indeed there is no explicit criticism of the bureaucratic regimes. The word "Stalinism" seems to be deliberately avoided. Perhaps they are afraid of offending comrades who identify strongly with these states: i.e. the Stalinists in the party. I think this sort of diplomatic tact is pointless. Stalinism is a reactionary world view that needs to be politically challenged, defeated and rooted out of the labour movement, including the SLP. How can we avoid saying that openly?

Worse still, in the section on nationalisation, the draft fails to call for state-owned industries to be under workers' control. This is another adaptation to Stalinism and "command planning". It is also a cowardly refusal to challenge the views of Arthur Scargill, who has long opposed the slogan of workers' control. But the slogan is essential, both to ensure that nationalised industries are run in the interests of the working class, and to make clear that the SLP does not want to repeat the failed nationalisations of past Labour governments and of the Stalinist states, but wants to go forward to democratic planning and socialism.

Bureaucracy

Not content with adapting to Stalinist ideas, a further serious omission in the draft seems designed to accommodate to the reformist trade union officials in the party.

In the section on the unions, the draft speaks of the need for democracy, "the right of election and immediate recall of all officers." So far, so good. But it is not just a question of getting rid of the odd right-wing union official. The unions are run by a caste of bureaucrats whose actual material interests are radically different from the workers they claim to represent.

This explains why sell-outs are so common. The bureaucrats have massive privileges which are drawn from their role as negotiators, middle-men, or "labour brokers", as Phil Woolas of the GMB recently admitted in a rare moment of honesty. Democracy, elections and recallability are vitally necessary, but to destroy the bureaucracy as a caste a further demand is needed: that all union officials should earn no more than the average wage of the workers they represent. In addition to SLP fractions in the unions, we should therefore fight for the building of a rank and file movement uniting all those trade unionists opposed to the bureaucratic caste.

Sectarianism
There is, I think, a serious mistake in the demand "No vote to Labour". I agree with the arguments put forward by Bernie McAdam in Issue No1 of the SLA bulletin and the Appeal Statement on SLP electoral policy signed by comrades from Swindon, Bristol and Exeter. I won't repeat them here.

Revolution or "Struggle on the Streets"?
In the last section, "Forward to a Working Class Government", the document says:
"Parliament is a corrupt talking shop. The SLP stands candidates to raise the issues and fight for socialism. But the real battle for workers' power will take place in the workplace and on the streets."

There is no clear statement about what this means. Does it mean that it will be necessary to have a revolution? Or does this merely mean that an elected SLP government could just implement socialism from above through parliament, with the "real battles" in the workplaces and streets deciding whether the government was successful or not. This seems to be a deliberately ambiguous statement intended to please both the revolutionaries and the reformists in the party. The problem is that ambiguity for the sake of unity does not solve anything: it just creates paralysis in the party when the issue is forced to a head by events.

Point 4 of the document reads:
"No reliance on Capitalist Courts or Cops. The police and the army are the armed fist of the bosses". This is perfectly correct: the huge unelected state machine of armed forces and police officers, judges and top civil servants, exist to defend the property of the capitalists. Their upper echelons are recruited from among the bosses' class, and share their outlook and interests. It is for this reason that the workers' movement cannot rely on these to defend their democratic rights and class interests, but must rely on the strength of their own unions, parties and other fighting organisations.

It is also for this reason that socialism can never come peacefully through parliament. As the fate of the Allende government in Chile in 1973 tragically showed, any elected socialist government which tries to force through a programme which attacks the bosses' property and profits will find itself sabotaged by its own state machine and then overthrown violently if it doesn't step into line. In Chile, the failed attempt to "bring socialism through parliament" resulted in a right-wing military coup with the deaths of more than fifty thousand workers and socialists.

Unfortunately, Duke, Lenk and Parkin do not draw the obvious conclusion from this: that, to bring about socialism, the working class will have to smash the armed apparatus of the bourgeois state and seize power. It will have to establish its own armed apparatus, a workers' militia, to fight the army and split it, bringing as many working-class soldiers as possible over to the side of the workers. It will have to set up its own state, based on the armed people and democratic councils of

workers' delegates like the Russian soviets in 1917. In a word, it will mean revolution.

This is not a matter of putting strong words on paper and trying to look tough. It is the key question of how the SLP will fight for socialism. If the party decides that it is to be done through the present capitalist state, by being elected through parliament, then the party will follow that path of failure and bloody defeat that we have seen too many times in the past. That is why we have to challenge this reformist idea of how socialism will be achieved. We have to explain to youth how socialism can only be achieved through revolution. Duke, Lenk and Parkin's Youth Charter fails to do it. It is a *centrist* programme: an unhappy hybrid between reform and revolution.

Socialist Labour Youth Charter

Discussion draft put forward by members of the interim youth steering committee, Barbara Duke, Christoph Lenk & Nathan Parkin.

Without a vigourous youth movement there can be no successful fight for socialism. As workers, students and unemployed youth, we are an integral part of the struggle of the whole working class against the capitalist system. Our task is to connect the immediate struggles and aspirations of working-class youth to the necessity for overturning the whole system of profit-driven capitalist irrationality and replacing it with a planned, collectively-owned socialist economy.

Young people have the right to be economically, politically and socially independent. Capitalist society restricts this independence through the legal and education systems and by enforcing dependence on the family, which as an institution helps to maintain the oppression of women, children and youth, often leading to domestic violence and child abuse.

1. Jobs for All – End Unemployment

- For a minimum wage at the level of the current median male wage, linked to the real cost of living. Fight all redundancies.
- End unemployment through a shorter working week with no loss of pay.
- Unemployment benefit and student grants should be the equivalent of the minimum wage. Restore unemployment benefit for all 16 and 17 year olds, grants for all students over 16, and housing benefit for all those in need. No JSA or workfare schemes.
- Equal pay for equal work: an end to all discriminatory wage differentials.

2. Social Services for All

- Free, quality secular education – from nurseries to post-graduate.
- Abolish private medicine – free, quality healthcare for all. Extend the NHS through a massive investment in the healthcare system.
- No age of consent laws. Comprehensive sex education and contraceptive advice in schools. Contraception should be free and available to all, regardless of age, including at centres for young people. Free abortion on demand. Free, quality, 24-hour childcare.
- End homelessness through a massive public works program to construct (and reclaim) sufficient housing to ensure quality accommodation for all.
- Build a well-financed national youth centre network.

3. Fight Racial and Sexual Oppression

- We oppose all forms of social oppression, including those based on gender, sexual orientation, colour, ethnicity, national origin, age, religion and disability.
- Scrap the Asylum Bill and other immigration laws – no deportations! Full citizenship rights for all immigrants, including the right to education and all state services in the language of their choice.
- For organised defence guards, based on trade unions, youth and minority groups, to smash racist and fascist attacks! Fascists must not be allowed to march, speak in public or distribute propaganda.

4. No Reliance on Capitalist Courts or Cops

- The police and the army are the armed fist of the bosses – cops, prison guards and volunteer soldiers do not belong in the unions or the workers movement. Free all class-war prisoners! For the right of workers and oppressed communities to organised self-defence!
- For the repeal of the stop and search laws and the decriminalisation of all drugs. Drug abuse is a health problem, not a crime – we need free needle exchange and free medical advice and rehabilitation facilities.
- Repeal the Criminal Justice Act. Defend the right to party without police harassment.

5. Socialism in the British Isles

- The occupation of Northern Ireland by British troops is one of the most brutal expressions of British imperialism. We call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the troops. British and Irish capitalists can play no part in assuring peace and social justice for the working class of these islands. We have no illusions that these politicians can solve the problems that they have created. Only united working-class struggle can make fundamental progressive social change possible.
- We give our support to the resistance of the oppressed Irish Catholics against the British state. We call for the release of the Republican prisoners and the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The British state is the biggest terrorist in Ireland. However, we are opposed to a forcible unification. In fighting the oppression of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland we also seek to promote measures that promote the unity of Catholic and Protestant workers in the struggle against a system that is based on oppression and exploitation.
- We defend the right of Scotland and Wales to self-determination, ie, to establish their own separate state if they so choose. We seek to unite the British and Irish working class in common struggle and in a voluntary union of workers republics.

6. International Workers Solidarity

- We absolutely oppose the military interventions of Britain and its imperialist partners in Bosnia, Iraq and another other non-imperialist countries, including when carried out in the name of the United Nations. We defend the right of self-determination for all nations.
- The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the triumph of counterrevolution in the USSR represented a massive defeat for workers around the world. We defend Cuba, China, Vietnam and North Korea against imperialist aggression and capitalist restoration. Only successful workers' political revolutions in those states can open the road to socialism.
- We reject both the Maastricht plan for a European imperialist super-state and the Tory Eurosceptics' alternative, which points to an autarkic, protectionist Britain. We must prepare for aggressive resistance to all capitalist attacks on wages, living standards and social services, whether these are advanced on the grounds of promoting European integration, safeguarding British sovereignty or simply making British industry "competitive". We seek to support in every possible way the struggles of workers across Europe against similar attacks by their bosses. Workers' struggle across national lines – not nationalist poison – must be our reply to capitalist attacks.

7. Build a Class-struggle Leadership in the Unions

- Defend the unions and the right to organise. Oppose any state interference in the workers' movement.
- The unions were created through defiance of the anti-trade union laws of the 19th century – to preserve the gains of the past we must be prepared to defy the anti-trade union laws of today. We will fight any restrictions on the right to strike, including political and solidarity strikes. Labour and the Tories plan further attacks on trade union rights – we want to scrap all anti-union laws.
- We will fight to increase youth participation in the trade unions and to build youth wings of the unions. We need democracy in the unions, and the right of election and immediate recall of all officers. Workers' solidarity means honour picket lines!
- We need to build SLP support groups in the unions as part of building a new, class-struggle leadership committed to the struggle for socialism.

8. A Real Workers Party

- The working class and the capitalist class have nothing in common. We need our own organisations, separate from and politically counterposed to those of the capitalists.
- Tony Blair's "New Labour" proposes to rationalise the existing system of wage slavery and exploitation – we want to lead a struggle to uproot it once and for all. Break with the "New Labour" traitors!
- No vote to Labour! Build a SOCIALIST Labour Party!

9. Forward to a Working Class Government

- Lower the voting age to 16. Youth should have the right to full participation in political life.
- Abolish the monarchy, the state church and the House of Lords.
- Parliament is a corrupt talking shop. The SLP stands candidates to raise the issues and fight for socialism. But the real battles for workers' power will take place in the workplace and on the streets.
- Take the economy into common ownership. For nationalisation without compensation of all essential industries and utilities – expropriate The City!
- We fight for working class rule, based on democratic workers' organisations at all levels from the workplace to government, committed to the replacement of production for profit with a socialist system based on production for human need.

British Nationalism is no answer to the Euro-Bosses

A reply to Bob Crow.

by Chris Boylan

Leicester SLP

In issue three of *Socialist News*, Bob Crow takes up the argument about the European Union (EU). He says we should "get out of the European Union as soon as possible". This is in line with SLP policy documents. I believe comrade Crow is wrong and the party's policy should be changed.

The EU is a bosses' club and the Maastricht Treaty is the basis for a series of further attacks on European workers. Comrade Crow states this, and I agree with him. What he does not point out is that a Britain outside the EU would be just as much of a bosses' club. After all, before Britain went into the Common Market (the forerunner of the EU) in 1973, the country was hardly an island of socialism. As Bob Crow probably remembers, Beeching didn't need any order from Brussels when he slashed the country's railways in the 1960s!

We only have to look at the forces lined up against Europe in the Tory Party - Redwood, Portillo, Teresa Gorman and the rest of the hard right - to realise what a "sovereign Britain" would look like. Blocked from free entry to the major capitalist markets of Europe, with the massive loss of exports and profits that this would result in, any capitalist government, Tory or Labour, would have to attack the working class even more viciously than today just to be able to compete in the world market.

Bob Crow blames Europe for running down "our steel industry" and for helping to "butcher our coal industry". Does he really think that Margaret Thatcher needed the help of the EU to attack steel workers and miners? Has he never heard of the "Ridley Plan" (Ridley was a Tory MP) drawn up in Britain, by a British Tory who was profoundly anti-European (Ridley had to make a public apology for insulting Germans). This plan outlined the attacks on the steel workers and miners, and many other sections of workers, that were needed to help Britain's bosses become more profitable.

Thatcher's complaint was that the French and German governments did not do the same to their own workers quickly enough. To "blame Europe" in this way is to sow illusions in our own bosses. And this can lead directly to lining up with them against Europe.

The EUs fisheries' policy has, according to comrade Crow, "devastated our fishing industry, even though the majority of fish stocks are within Britain's waters". Firstly, it is not "our" fishing industry. It belongs to the bosses. What have the big fishing bosses

being doing? Laying up small boats to claim EU compensation while launching bigger boats to *increase* the overall fish catches. Every other big fishing company in Europe has been doing the same. Within ten years, if left uncontrolled, this short sighted search for quick profit will lead to fished out waters and laid off workers.

Our answer to this should be, nationalise the fishing industry across Europe under control of the workers. Only a socialist policy of planned sustainable fishing in European waters, based not on profit but need, can offer long term employment to the workers in the industry. Bob Crow's answer is to suggest we side with the British fishing bosses, to protect "our waters" from the nasty Spanish and French boats. This is a recipe for little England nationalism, setting worker against worker in a scrap over ever dwindling resources.

Bob Crow was a long time member of the Communist Party. They, together with various "left" Labour MPs, used to support the "Alternative Economic Strategy" (AES) for Britain. This is where many of the ideas he has put forward in *Socialist News* come from.

At the heart of the AES was the idea that the British economy could insulate itself from international competition by putting up tariff barriers and adopting import controls. For example, cheap coal imports, from Brazil, Poland and South Africa, would be prevented by widespread import controls, thus allowing the British coal industry a free run in the British market.

There are two problems with this. First, the AES did not propose taking industry out of the hands of the bosses. It was an "alternative strategy" for capitalism, not a socialist alternative to it. This means that import controls or not, the coal industry in Britain would face job cuts so long as it remained unprofitable. And as the AES was to be implemented in a "mixed economy", i.e. a capitalist Britain, workers buying the coal would paying part of the extra costs of more expensive coal out of their pay packets or via higher taxes.

Secondly, import controls undermine the international unity of the working class. British jobs would be "protected" at the expense of workers in Brazil, Poland or South Africa.

I think we should have a totally different perspective on Europe. One that does not encourage workers of different European nations to succumb to nationalism, to line up with sections of their own bosses against one another.

The SLP should say clearly that inside or outside the EU the capitalists will remain in charge unless we overthrow them. We should not participate in any withdrawal campaigns and we should abstain on any bosses' referendums on the question. Instead we must put forward our own strategy for a workers' Europe.

The SLP, and its supporters in unions like the RMT, should help build European workers' organisations that unite us in the fight against Europe's bosses. Organisations like the the European Trade

Union Confederation (ETUC) are dominated by the "tops" of the trade unions. Bob Crow is absolutely right when he lambasts the TUC for supporting Maastricht. At a European level the ETUC limits itself to being a polite lobbying organisation at the European Commission.

We need different types of European workers' organisations, built around struggles and based on the rank and file workers. When Ford Europe threatens to sack thousands of workers at Ford Halewood and transfer jobs to Spanish and German plants we need a Ford Combine that can deliver strike action across Europe against any job cuts. We need to show the bosses that European workers will fight together and not be divided against one another.

When the French Rail and transport workers strike in defence of social security the first thing Bob Crow should be fighting for is Europe-wide workers' solidarity. A European rail workers' combine could bring the whole European network to a halt. Other transport workers should aim to build an organisation that can do likewise. Let's start with the lorry drivers, the French, Greek and Spanish drivers have shown the way.

There is a crying need for a united movement against the unemployment that stems from the capitalist drive for a single currency. European workers must give a united response - "No single currency at our expense!" Let's use the forthcoming Euromarch that we support to build a united and massive European workers' movement against unemployment. Not with tired old slogans about import controls but by demanding that multinationals like Ford be nationalised under workers' control if they insist on throwing workers onto the streets.

If they say they cannot afford to keep the workers on, that there is no market, profits are falling etc. We say "open the books!" Let a workers' commission look at how much profits are paid out to shareholders in the USA and Europe. Let's look at the massive salaries of top managers, the huge subsidies paid by the European states out of our taxes. Let's expose all this to the workers and show that it is the profit motive that leads to mass sackings and closures.

Bob Crow finishes his article by saying:

"Personally, I want people to rule the earth. People are divided into nations; we want the self determination of nations. This is nothing more than the expression of democracy which the British people must have if we are to seek to play our part internationally."

Comrade Crow forgets that workers are divided into nations by the bosses, that nationalism in imperialist countries like Britain, France, Germany leads to war, the enslavement of whole nations, genocide and racism. Britain's right to self-determination stands in sharp contrast to its denial of that right to the peoples in its colonies in Ireland, India, large parts of Africa and Asia.

Being in the EU has not deprived Britain of its self determination. In Ireland today the right of self determination is blocked by an occupying British army on the streets of Belfast and Derry. All true democrats will support the call for self determination for Ireland and for any other country similarly oppressed by imperialism. But to suggest Britain suffers a comparable problem, as Bob Crow does, is to fall into "little Englander" nationalism. It says that Britain's problem is Europe. It isn't. Britain's problem is the rule of the bosses. In or out of the EU, so long as those bosses remain in power exploitation, poverty and every other ailment typical of capitalism will remain with us.

Bob Crow is right when he says that trying to reform the EU is "ludicrous". The same is true of British capitalism. It is ludicrous to suggest that it can be reformed out of existence. But just as we fight for reforms that improve the position of the working class under capitalism (the minimum wage, for example) so we can fight against the EU's undemocratic institutions without pretending that this will transform it into a socialist Europe. We can fight to abolish the unelected European Commission and to replace the powerless European Parliament with a Europe wide assembly elected on a democratic basis and with real powers.

But these struggles are only part of the fight for what we really want - a Europe ruled by the working class, through its own democratically elected councils. Not works' councils with the bosses, but workers' councils to overthrow them. Not referendums on whether to stay in or out, but revolutions across Europe to drive the bosses out.

The bosses want to unite Europe to boost their profits. Workers should fight to unite Europe as part of the international struggle against the profit system. Instead of calling for withdrawal from the EU we should be fighting for a Socialist United States of Europe.

Crystal Clear Opportunism: A reply to Alfonso Gianni's article in *Socialist News* No. 3

by Bernie McAdam (Birmingham SLP)

Socialist Labour's search for international friends and allies is to be welcomed but not at any price. Certainly not at the price of supporting parties that prop up anti-working class governments. Unfortunately that seems to be exactly what our "Italian sister party", the Rifondazione Comunista (PRC - Party of Communist Refoundation), is doing.

In *Socialist News* No.3, Alfonso Gianni was given a platform to explain why the PRC gives what he calls "external support" for the current Italian government. Carrying this article uncritically in our paper means we are effectively endorsing Gianni's view. The party's 35 parliamentary seats have been crucial to keeping the present "Olive Tree" coalition government of Prodi in power.

Although PRC have made it "crystal clear" that they want to defend the welfare state and fight unemployment, the Prodi government have made it equally clear that they want the opposite. In fact Prodi has already promised that 18 months of sacrifices lie ahead for Italian workers as the price for compliance with the Maastricht criteria on public deficits. Italy's budget deficit is £48 billion and Prodi will slash state spending to offset this.

It really is quite disingenuous for Gianni to argue that "unfortunately, these pressures [i.e. from capitalists, international markets etc - BM] are also finding an echo among the moderate elements in the government" in seeking to attack workers. As if the government were being forced to attack the working class! PRC are peddling a dangerous illusion amongst workers that the coalition would be all right but for the pressure of the capitalists. But remember - the government is a coalition of the Party for Democratic Socialism (the party PRC broke from for being reformist) and elements of the former Christian Democrats. It has always been committed to making the Maastricht criteria work. It is a capitalist government.

The Finance Minister in the government is Ciampi, who in 1993 was responsible for abolishing the indexing of Italian wages to inflation - the scala mobile. True to form, he is now proposing massive budget cuts. A major new attack on the pension system is under way.

Will PRC give its "critical" or even "external" support to this? Without PRC's votes, it won't be passed - the government could then fall.

Doubtless we will soon be hearing the argument that by keeping the government in, the right is kept out, and that PRC will win concessions from the government in return for its support. These are false and dangerous reasons for backing anti-working class policies.

Socialists must accept no responsibility whatsoever for capitalist austerity budgets or capitalist governments. It is a matter of principle to vote against them in parliament. The choice for us is not austerity measures or a right-wing government. In reality the Olive -Tree coalition's attacks on the working class will only allow the right , especially the far-right leader Fini, to pose as defenders of the poor and tap into working class anger!

Supporting the centre-left government now will therefore do nothing to "stop the Right". It will only confuse, demoralise and divide the working class, weakening its ability to resist all attacks, wherever they come from. Instead the PRC should be calling on the workers' movement to fight the austerity package with mass strikes and demonstrations, just as they defeated the last right-wing government. In this way the PRC could grow as a party of working class opposition.

Gianni expects us to believe that "the whole purpose of Rifondazione Comunista's external support for this government is to get it to undertake a real defence of the welfare state and launch a serious fight against unemployment." In fact the PRC has been giving support to a government which is attacking the welfare state and jobs. How on earth does the PRC's approach help beat off the government's attacks?

Of course Socialist Labour needs international links. They should be based on bonds of solidarity but also of open and frank criticism and exchanges of views. In particular we need to be critical of the PRC's shameful backing of the government and of the reformist approach this reveals. Otherwise we will be offering the Italian government - and its austerity package - our very own "external support".