

issue one

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red ★ star

paper of the red party: for socialism, humanism, and democracy



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fahrenheit 9/11 immigration iraq
us labor against the war
spiderman 2 animal rights p j
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The British left is short of most things - activists, money, votes, and immediate prospects come to mind - but not of groups. **manny neira** of the newly formed Red Party - publishers of the *Red Star* - explains what party and paper aim to achieve.



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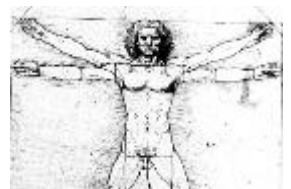
21 the other red star

Ours is not the only publication to go under the name of the *Red Star*. Our favourite amongst the others in the crimson constellation is an extraordinary graphic novel which clearly captured the imagination of **jeremy butler**.



22 socialism, humanism, and the fear of tofu

Socialists will persuade no-one and move nothing unless they recapture the politics of humanism, and reclaim the pursuit of human freedom and joy as their acknowledged aims, writes **darren williams**.



another bloody party



Have you ever done a psychometric test?

Psychometric tests are often used by employers. They involve asking people a series of questions such as “if you were a fruit, which fruit would you be?”, ignoring the answers as transparently meaningless, and then hiring whoever they’d planned to hire anyway, safe in the knowledge that this mysterious process will have convinced rejected candidates that they cannot complain of discrimination given the highly scientific selection technique.

However, confidential sources have leaked to me a simple test used by MI5 for far more sinister purposes. It is thought to be 100% reliable, and you can try it for yourself.

Look at the following sequence:

**sa sadp sp ssp spgb spgb cpbg cpb
ncp swp wp wrp isg ibt icfi cwi awl**

Did that mean anything to you?

If you saw (as any sane mind would) a meaningless jumble of letters, be glad. Turn your face towards the sun, feel the warmth on your skin, and be thankful to chance, fate, or the deity or secular hero of your choice that you are alive. You have a mind uncluttered by the preconceptions of the left groups.

You see, the merest flicker of recognition would have had the guardians of national security pulling your file before you could say “civil liberties”. To those who play an active part in any revolutionary socialist organisation, this apparently meaningless string of letters would have *instantly* and *involuntarily* resolved themselves into the following:

Socialist Alliance, Socialist Alliance Democracy Platform, Socialist Party, Scottish Socialist Party, Socialist Party of Great Britain, Communist Party of Great Britain, Communist Party of Britain, New Communist Party, Socialist Workers Party, Workers Power, Workers Revolutionary Party, International Socialist Group, International Bolshevik Tendency, International Committee for the Fourth International, Committee for a Workers International, and Alliance for Workers Liberty.

Note particularly that the inclusion of two SPGB’s is no mistake - there are, in fact, *two* of them. Any movement which requires a *collective term* for SPGB’s is clearly a movement in trouble.

The problem does not end there. Historically, socialist parties around the world have attempted to organise together, forming ‘internationals’. Their history is fascinating, but for the moment all you need to know that Karl Marx established the first in 1864, and Leon Trotsky the fourth (opposed to the undemocratic dictatorship of Stalin in the USSR) in 1938.

Now, whatever problems the first three had, there was at least (blessedly) only one of each, which you might have thought sensible for any ‘international’ worthy of the name. However, the fourth international split and split again, until now a bewildering array of groups claim to be its *true* inheritors. Two of them were in the list above. Did you spot them? Give yourself one point each for the Committee for a Workers International and the International Committee for the Fourth International. Note also that this latter group has two ‘internationals’ even in its name, which suggests a commitment to spanning national borders verging on the interplanetary.

Anyway, having lots of fourth internationals is plainly silly. One group has decided to get round this by starting the *fifth* international: and so far it has worked for them. There is, to date, only one fifth international. However, as most other people are in one or other of the fourth internationals, the fifth international is rather

small. Further, there is the problem that, at any time, any group jealous of the fifth international’s advanced status might choose to start a *sixth* international. There is a clear danger of *socialist international inflation*, which, should it rage unchecked, could cripple the left in reprinted stationary costs alone.

Of course, even without this, the number of internationals causes certain problems. There are, in fact, only so many socialists to go round: so how do all the internationals find members?

However, a solution to this problem has been found. Last year, an enterprising group of Ukrainian socialists... look, at this point this relatively straightforward account of the left may start to sound a little odd. I can only promise you that I am not making this up.

This group of Ukrainian socialists decided to join *lots* of internationals, thereby effectively recycling their membership to best support a thriving *community* of socialist internationals. However, they omitted to tell the various internationals that they’d joined more than one. An unfortunate scene therefore ensued when one unsuspecting British socialist was proudly showing another a photograph of some of the Ukrainian comrades in his international. The other immediately claimed they were in *his* international.

As it subsequently emerged that the Ukrainian comrades had been asking their relatively wealthier British comrades for money to help fund their work, harsh words were said about them. There was even talk of deception. It remains, though, the most immediately effective socialist international unity initiative yet attempted.

while traitors sneer...

Enough, already. You will have concluded from this that the revolutionary left is (a) barking mad and (b) unable to find its arse with both hands, but in fact my experience of socialists is that they are unusually bright, open, sane, and genuinely committed to fighting injustice.

Neither are their efforts ineffective. Many are union activists, practising what they preach by building real solidarity with the people they work with, and enjoying the confidence of fellow workers who elect them as representatives *even when they disagree with their politics*. Lots of the groups listed above were active giving real support to striking miners, not merely politically but also practically. For instance, they collected and distributed food to families struggling to survive on benefits (from which strike pay had been deducted even though the National Union of Mineworkers had no money to pay it). The Socialist Party played a key role in organising the protests which led to the fall of Thatcher as prime minister and the abolition of the hated poll tax, The Socialist Workers Party was central to the organisation of the historic anti-war demonstrations early in 2003, which saw one and a half million protestors, one in every 40 of the British population, in London opposing the invasion of Iraq. All of these stories are complicated, and there are plenty of criticisms to be made about mistakes made and opportunities missed, but the vast majority of the revolutionary left are neither fools nor dilettantes.

We remain, however, in chaotic disorder, and as a result our ultimate aim of organising with the mass of our fellow workers to throw off the profiteers and create a truly democratic society remains, at present, far beyond our reach.

There is no doubt about the reason, and this reason is expressed in one of the key words of the left’s private jargon: *sectarianism*. In everyday language it expresses a narrow minded clique mentality in any group of people, a tendency to be inward looking and suspicious or uncooperative to outsiders, or even overt hostility to anyone not in the sect. On the left, it essentially means putting the well-being of the group - measured in membership,

paper sales, or even a peculiar kind of 'prestige' - before the campaign for the socialist politics the group nominally exists for.

Some have taken this so far as to develop a 'market theory' of the left. This essentially argues that the left community is entirely enclosed and self-referential: it has little if any meaningful effect on society as a whole. Under the cover of opposing capitalism, the groups are actually *competing with each other*: for members, for the distribution of their papers, and for the dominance of their ideas within this community. Groups shape their opinions to appeal to particular constituencies or 'markets', and thus attract members. They argue with each other, trying to gain ascendancy not over their oppressor, but over the neighbouring group. They denounce each other, sell each other journals, and pinch each other comrades, in an ever spiralling frenzy of meaningless activity. It is a game played to rules determined by group psychology, and has long since lost touch with any commitment to changing the world.

It isn't true. It makes for good knocking copy, and it's an easy excuse for those who prefer to sit on their arses rather than do anything to solve the world's problems, but it isn't true. Look into the history of any of the rights we now take for granted - the right to vote (and the right of *women* to vote), free healthcare, education, and the welfare state, the right to legally organise political parties and unions - *any* of them - and you will find it was won by the serious struggle of working people: and at the centre of each struggle you will find the political leaderships squabbling and tripping over each other like a Frank Spencer dance troupe: but leading nevertheless.

So the left cannot simply be dismissed as irrelevant: and the attempt to do so is itself a method employed by our opponents to isolate us and keep us in check. At first this might sound like leftist paranoia, but consider: any serious prospect of winning social justice is a danger to precisely the wealthiest and most powerful in our *existing* society, and these are the very people best placed to manipulate our attitudes and understanding through lies. It has always been so. As the great old song has it, "though cowards flinch, and traitors sneer, we'll keep the red flag flying here".

However, like all great lies, the sneering is built on truth. Perhaps more than ever before, the modern British left is small, disorganised, and losing its way.

bread and butter socialism

The essence of socialism is simple. It is the fight for true democracy. Current British society allows us to determine the constitution of parliament by vote, and to express and organise around our political ideas, and these democratic reforms were hard won and remain important. However, they do not constitute democracy: not true 'government by the people'. The major political parties require the funding and support of those who control Britain's wealth - the corporations. Even the Labour Party in parliament, created by working people to represent their interests, was drawn into an intricate establishment web when it became clear that it would not be possible simply to crush it. New Labour is attempting to break even what remains of the connection between Labour and the people it was founded by and for.

And parliament is not the seat of true power. The unelected senior civil servants, the house of lords, and the monarchy, all exist to defend and perpetuate the basic shape of our society. And, behind them all, the corporations control our working lives, our conditions, and what is done with the things we make and the services we provide. This small minority of our population, wielding power in a dozen different and unaccountable ways, represent a ruling class.

Socialism aims to create real democracy, by bringing control and accountability to *every* aspect of our lives: the ownership and control of the factories and offices where we work, our schools and our hospitals, our means of transport and distribution, and our environment. Our vision is a society truly in the hands of the people who built it and live in it: democracy extended throughout society. Indeed, though these days the term 'social democrat' has a rather different meaning, it was originally used by Marxists to describe themselves, based on exactly this idea.

But it is naive to believe that the ruling class will yield power



willingly, as the result of a vote in parliament. Throughout the world and throughout history, minorities who hold power have shown how brutal they can be in defending it. Their opposition must be overcome. This is why true socialism is revolutionary.

Finally, we do not believe that society will change 'naturally', which is to say without a conscious struggle conducted by the majority who are denied power. We believe that to have a conscious struggle we need to build a leadership which brings together the militant trade unionists, the 'anti-capitalists', the peace protestors - in fact *all* of those who are actively trying to make our world truly human - into joint action to overthrow those who rule us. In short, we need a *workers party*.

This is the ABC of socialism, what you might call *bread and butter* socialism. Though it takes different forms, this analysis is common to the whole alphabet soup of left groups. It is a powerful and coherent vision. It does not merely condemn but actually *explains* the occurrence of war, poverty, and injustice. It is utterly different to all other political ideas and movements.

You might think, therefore, that socialists would focus on taking this argument to the many millions who are not socialists, but who are facing the injustices we oppose.

from principles to action

We don't.

Instead, we focus mainly on arguing with each other: not about the basic socialist case above, which we all recognise, but about how socialism can be won.

If the essence of socialism is simple, acting on it is not. The world is an intensely complicated and fast moving place, and determining how to apply our principles in order to change the world is a difficult business about which socialists honestly disagree. It is inevitable what we should.

At present, therefore, each group is built around a particular plan of action: again in the jargon of the left, a particular *programme*. We argue the merits and demerits of each, and each group does not merely describe the errors it perceives in the next programme as wrong, but - with a querulous disbelief and high rhetoric - denounces its author as a false socialist and even a defender of oppression.

Let us take an example. The problem of Palestine and Israel is violent and terrible. Palestinians live in poverty and oppression, expelled from their own lands and homes and kept in economic and political chaos by an Israeli state which fears them regathering their strength and organisation. On the other hand, generations of Israelis have now grown up knowing no other home, facing random violence and fearing the Arabs in their own population and in neighbouring states, and all the while (of course) oppressed by their own ruling class like any other workers. What should socialists do about

this?

The truth is, we just don't agree. Some view the formation of the state of Israel as a crime against the Palestinians, and will be satisfied with nothing less than its abolition and the restoration of a single state of Palestine. Some further insist that it should be secular, to allow Jews and Arabs to live freely there side by side. Others argue that though Israel should not have been founded, that crime is not the responsibility of modern Israeli workers, who now have the same rights as the Palestinians to their own state and security. They suggest a 'two state solution', with a restored Palestine bordering Israel. Some also demand the 'right of return' of Palestinians to their previous homes in Israel, others say that this is impractical, but Palestinians should be compensated for their expulsion. There are, in truth, as many views as groups.

The problem is not that the groups disagree - disagreements on such questions are natural and to be expected. It is that each accuses the others of an inhuman and oppressive policy. Some 'two statist' accuse 'one statist' of inherent anti-semitism. Some 'one statist' accuse 'two statist' of supporting imperialist aggression. And so the long editorials run on.

a bad solution

So, what should we do?

Implicit in the behaviour of most groups is the idea that as their ideas are right, by arguing them loudly enough and long enough their interpretation will prevail, and true socialists will be able to unite around a programme they all agree with. We will have unity and accord: and can turn our attention from ourselves to the world around us.

There is, however, a simple but important flaw in this argument. It is *nonsense*. It stands about as much chance of success as George Bush at a Mensa selection board. As an encore we could try something more constructive, like, say, nailing jelly to the ceiling. Trying to ideologically corral socialists in this way is like herding cats.

And long may it remain so! Socialism is the political expression of freedom and rebellion. How could it possibly be represented by ideological clones spouting a party line? Hasn't this sort of nonsense already brought the left into sufficient disrepute? As long as our movement continues to attract the most socially conscious and politically independent people, differences between us are inevitable: and attempts to suppress or eliminate them alienate the very people we are trying to reach.

In the meantime, the effort of each group to make its case loudly enough and long enough leaves us no time for anything more constructive. In 2004, the revolutionary left is perhaps smaller than it has ever been, with maybe 3,000 active comrades in a population of 60 million: and yet we spend most of our time trying to expose what we regard as the errors of those socialists who dissent from our own views.

The irony is, we actually *need* every dissenting voice, every difference of opinion, if we are to work out the right answers. The differences themselves are not a problem for the movement, they are potentially a source of strength and understanding.

Neither is it a problem that socialists with different views form into groups to make their case more effectively. This promotes the debate, and the debate must be open and unceasing.

The problem is that these groups refuse to cooperate to form the workers party we need until they have won the argument, *and in practise this means they refuse to form it at all.*

a better solution

It is time for each socialist to face some painful realities. Take a deep breath, clutch your favourite soft toy or volume of Lenin's philosophical writings, and repeat after me:

1. The workers party does not yet exist. None of the groups on the left, Red Party included, are it. No, comrade, not even yours. We are all merely groups representing particular arguments and points of view.

2. *You*, of course, are entirely right about everything. Sadly, your status as the sole representative of reason and reality is unlikely to be recognised until after your death, when you will be remembered as a hero and small statues of you will be distributed to schoolchildren on your birthday. Until then, you may have to accept that (a) other socialists are going to disagree with you, and (b) there is at least a theoretical possibility that you could be wrong.

3. The failure of others to instantly accept your argument that socialist principles *clearly and inevitably* require (a) a one state solution in Palestine, (b) a two state solution in Israel and Palestine, (c) radical changes to the off-side rule, does not necessarily make them *anti-socialists*. They could simply be socialists who have got it wrong. Or you could be (see 2).

4. Without bringing together all socialists, as opposed to merely those with whom you agree, and working together to provide political leadership in the world around us, we will fail.

Repeat the mantra every day at sun up and sun down and a new vision will emerge: a vision of a party in which every member and group is free to argue (and, if necessary, publish and organise around) their case. A party in which the majority will determine a plan of action democratically. A party in which the majority will respect and indeed treasure the right of minorities to disagree, while the minorities accept and unite in action around the decisions of the majority. A party bringing together those who would fight for a true revolution: a government of ordinary working people.

A workers party.

I wish I could claim credit for this idea, but the truth is that the principle of *freedom in debate and unity in action* is as old as the struggle for justice itself. It has its roots in the simple tactic of solidarity: we have no power unless we act together. When workers vote on whether to strike, and there is no shame in speaking or voting against. There is, though, in working once the strike is on, whether you voted for it or not.

The supreme irony is that this solution to the problem of organising people with a common aim who disagree about the means is well known to the left under the name of *democratic centralism*. Most groups claim to apply its principles: but their failure to do so is proven by the fact that, at a time when trade unions are militantly breaking with the Labour Party in defence of their workers rights, and millions opposed the murderous war in Iraq, the voice of socialism has no credible champion.

This failure is the true meaning of sectarianism.

the red party

The addition of 'another bloody party', the Red Party, to the array of left groups does not deepen that sectarianism: sectarianism is not proportional to the number of groups and can thrive in five or five hundred.

Our aim, rather, is to fight it: by making the case to all socialists, of whatever stamp, not for unity around our particular programme or theirs, but around the democratically decided programme of a united workers party.

We also hope to do another neglected job: to write about the left, and about society, in a way which is accessible to all, and not just those who understand the jargon-ridden language of the left. We have neglected the job of taking the case for socialism to those outside our movement.

If you are one of those not in the organised left, you may feel bewildered by its complexity and confusion: particularly as it has been highlighted in this account. Nothing is to be gained by hiding the problems we face. However, they conceal a wider agreement: the problems of oppression, war, and poverty are the result of a society organised for the pursuit of profit in the interests of a minority ruling class. Overthrowing them and putting power in the hands of ordinary people, of all humanity, is not one of a range of possible solutions, it is the only solution. Join us in our fight to achieve it.

On the other hand, if you are on the left, fight inside your own organisation for unity in action with your comrades throughout the movement. Oh, and you can put down the soft toy now ★

manny neira



hovis and a clip round the ear

since tony blair explained that lawlessness has its roots in the moral degeneracy of the sixties, **gerry byrne** has been wracked with guilt: this is her confession

I knew it had to be my fault somehow. One spliff too many, one careless sexual encounter too far and – whoops! – the end of civilisation as we know it.

“... the end of the 1960s liberal, social consensus on law and order. The 1960s saw a huge breakthrough in terms of freedom of expression, of lifestyle, of the individual’s right to live their own personal life in the way they choose...”

“...but with this change in the 1960s came something else, not necessarily because of it but alongside it. It was John Stuart Mill who articulated the modern concept that with freedom comes responsibility. But in the 1960’s revolution, that didn’t always happen.”

Like children who’ve made themselves sick on sweeties, we have only ourselves to blame. And Tony Blair, the stern nanny we never had, will give us nasty medicine for our own good.

Freedom didn’t *always* come with responsibility in the 1960s. Wow! Was there some time in history when it did? The 1980s? The 1890s? 635BC?

the price of nostalgia

The young have always been reckless, irresponsible and believed themselves immortal, just as they have always been innocent, idealistic and shocked by the corruption of their parents’ generation. It is the condition of youth.

Commentators have been taking Blair’s 5 Year Plan on Crime as an occasion for reliving their own memories of the 1960s. It’s good knock-about stuff, but who’s asking what is really behind this? Blair is not stupid. He’s survived crises in the last year that would have floored a less wily politician a dozen times over. If he is pushing a corny Hovis ad view of the past, where we could all leave our doors unlocked and nobody lived in fear, we’d do well to take note of the price tag.

Behind the *Dixon of Dock Green* image of wholesome neighbourliness, the Eden where anti-social behaviour programmes consisted of a clip round the ear, before we got so irresponsible, I remember things we didn’t even think of as crime at the time: paedophile priests and predatory relatives sexually abusing children who didn’t know they had a right to object; husbands beating wives as a normal part of married life; rape as a joke; unmarried mothers forcibly separated from their babies; queer-bashing (I don’t mean name-calling: one man was beaten to death by youths at a known cruising spot on Wimbledon Common, for a laugh). Nobody lived in fear, yeah right. And lets not forget the death penalty.

The mythical 1960s of free love and drugs on tap only existed for a tiny minority, as columnists are quick to point out, but what are the implications of that? We were the baby boomers, Tony and me, a demographic bulge. With apologies to *The Who*, “My Generation” no longer “hope I die before I get old”: we are now middle-aged and growing conservative (small ‘c’). And for the majority who missed out on the sex and drugs, the temptation to grass up those who seemed to have an unfair share of the fun is

great. Blair has tapped into a schoolyard vindictiveness, which he hopes will bring him the next general election. Behind the genial gestures and the astonishingly untarnishable persona, is a quite chillingly nasty calculation. It’s no laughing matter.

presumed guilty

“Law and order policy still focussed on the offender’s rights, protecting the innocent, understanding the social causes of their criminality. All through the 1970s and 1980s, under Labour and Conservative Governments, a key theme of legislation was around the prevention of miscarriages of justice.

“Meanwhile some took the freedom without the responsibility.”

Lets look at that in detail. “Offender’s rights”: note the casual removal of the assumption of innocence until proven guilty. This isn’t a slip of the tongue. Blair and Blunkett’s proposals contain a whole series of attacks on the rights of the accused *before* they are tried and found guilty of anything:

“We are shifting from tackling the offence to targeting the offender. There will be a massive increase in drug testing and drug treatment, with bail and the avoidance of prison being dependent on the offender’s co-operation. Sentencing and probation will likewise focus on the offender; and just paying the penalty will not be enough. For as long as they remain a danger, the most violent offenders will stay in custody...”

“Organised criminals will face not just the pre-emptive seizure of their assets, but will be forced to cooperate with investigations and will face trial without jury where there is any suggestion of intimidation of jurors. Abuse of court procedures, endless trial delays, the misuse of legal aid will no longer be tolerated.”

Just to be clear, the “offenders” they are talking about, who will be subjected to forcible drug testing, have not yet stood trial. They are faced with imprisonment, if they don’t co-operate *before* they’ve been found guilty of anything. Similarly, the ‘organised criminals’, whose assets will be *pre-emptively* seized, who will be denied a jury trial, or legal aid, have been deemed guilty before trial. It makes you wonder why they bother with a trial at all.

“Protecting the innocent”, understanding the social causes, preventing miscarriages of justice, who has time for all that?

It’s important to stress that this is not some careless formulation, or my alarmist construction. They are talking about dismantling the protections and presumption of innocence an accused person has had for centuries. Our politicians see fit to lecture other countries on human rights, while attempting to get shot of human rights at home. And in one area, anti-terrorism, they’ve already gone.

the excuse of terrorism

The Joint Committee on Human rights, a cross-party committee of MPs and peers, has called on David Blunkett to end the detention of foreign terror suspects without trial ‘as a matter of urgency’. It argues that the Terrorism Act, which came into force after the 11 September attacks on the US, is discriminatory and has been used disproportionately against Muslims.

Thirteen foreign terror suspects are currently being held without trial, at Belmarsh jail, some of whom have been in jail since December 2001. Ten have been given leave to appeal their detention, upheld by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC). This body of three High Court judges decides if the home secretary is right to order their detention under the 2001 Anti-Terrorism and Security Act. These men do not know what informa-



tony blair: tough on socialism, tough on the causes of socialism

tion is held about them. Nor are their lawyers allowed to know. They are deemed dangerous on the basis of secret intelligence reports. In the light of the Butler and Hutton enquiries, we know how accurate these are.

Lawyers are basing their appeals, in part, on the possibility that their treatment amounts to torture. It seems extraordinary, in the 21st century, that our government could sanction torture as a legitimate instrument of security. Yet recently released British detainees who spent 2 years in Guantanamo make detailed claims of torture, including by British interrogators.

Extraordinary times demand extraordinary measures. Ministers use the extraordinary threat of terrorism and the difficulty of obtaining information or convictions within the rules as an argument for changing the rules. That's a very bad argument. We should learn the lessons of those miscarriages of justice that Blair is so dismissive of – many cases of wrongful imprisonment, costing years of innocent people's lives, concerned our last 'terrorists', Irish men and women suspected of IRA bombings. In those cases too, the terrible carnage of pub bombings, the public fear, was used to justify to the indefensible: the abuse of suspects in custody, fabricated or coerced confessions, imprisonment without trial, no-jury trials, the criminalisation of a whole community, guilt by association. It was wrong then, it is wrong now. Then as now, the extraordinary shaded off into the ordinary. The erosion of the rights of even those accused of the most terrible things reduced the rights of all of us imperceptibly.

return of the hobgoblin

That's the what of Blair's speech, what about the why?

"On the statistics we are the first Government since the war to have crime lower than when we took office. But that's the statistics. *It's not what people feel...*

"But as fast as we act, as tough as it seems compared to the 1970s or 1980s, for the public it is not fast or tough enough. What we signal today is a step-change."

That's right. This 5 Year Plan is based not on any reality, but on what people, irrationally, feel, in defiance of the facts. This is wil-

fully ignorant populism. Worse, since people's beliefs are in part created by political gestures (such as ostentatious displays of 'security', tanks ringing Heathrow airport) it becomes a self-fuelling hysteria. Blair will get tough on crime because it's a popular measure because Blair has made crime an issue, and so on.

There is another aspect to the trashing of the 1960s as the root of irresponsibility, which is, in a way, the opposite of populist. The 1960s were the last time socialism was on the agenda. We sang about revolution. We marched against war, imperialism, global injustice. We believed we could re-make the world as a fairer, freer, more joyous place. Power to the people.

In the intervening decades, that hope became painfully thin, till it seemed the arcane preserve of isolated secretive sects. Socialism, which once every old Labour bureaucrat felt they had to offer at least Sunday observance to, became for New Labour an awkward drag on progress, to be excised. I think Blair thought he'd won that battle.

Then, last year, the spectre came back to haunt him. The

"erosion of the rights of even those accused of terrible things reduces the rights of us all"

frightful hobgoblin that Marx talked about 150 years ago refused to stay dead. When Blair sent the troops into Iraq and 14-year olds jumped the school walls to protest, I saw my 15-year old self marching barefoot against the Vietnam war. The dream refuses to die. I imagine there were a few old souls in 1968, who kept alive the flickering memory of 1917, who in turn held onto the name of the Commune, Paris 1871. And so on, stretching back

That is what Blair is so keen to extinguish. Far from a legacy of irresponsibility, the 1960s remind us of our history of social responsibility, of human solidarity, of struggling for a better world that we dare to believe, in the words of the *Internationale*, unites the human race ★



“just like michigan”

michael moore’s critique of bush’s ‘war or terror’ has spoken to more people, more powerfully, than any politician: improbable *red star* reviewer **tallulah kalashnikov** went to listen

Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* has certainly sparked a debate. Senior republicans trip over each other to trash it on Fox news, it receives the Golden Palm at Cannes, Tarentino loves it, but Britney thinks it’s seriously unpatriotic, and - on the top deck of my bus home - working class teenagers from south London debate the film’s merits, along with the motivation of capitalist governments and the Iraq war. To fill cinemas with young people eager to watch a documentary is a real feat, to leave them with a desire to discuss politics with total strangers on a bus is something socialists really need to learn from.

Moore has deliberately aimed this film not at middle class liberals, but at the American working class. His effort to make the film entertaining and understandable has appealed to the young people politicised by the war. Socialists do need to point out what’s missing and what’s wrong in this film; and I will. But we must remember that *Fahrenheit 9/11* isn’t just propaganda, it is intended to be interesting and entertaining. For the majority of the audience, the choice they made wasn’t to watch Moore’s film rather than read Trotsky, it was to watch *Fahrenheit 9/11* rather than *Spiderman 2*.

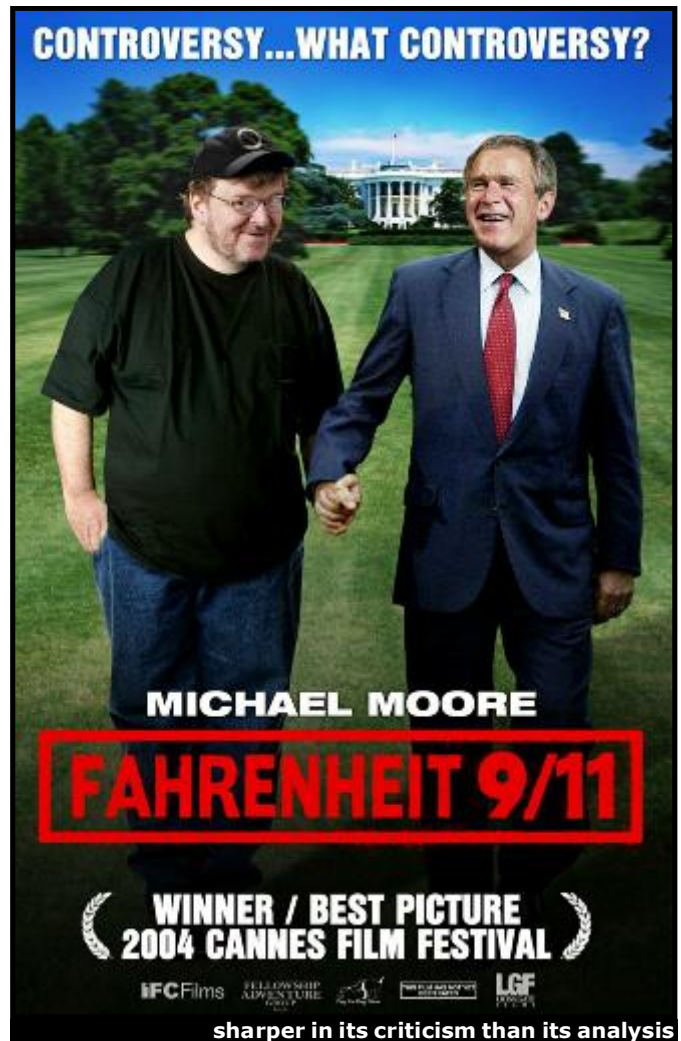
The film begins with the 2000 US election. Moore brings out the comedy already present in the farce that was the fudged election, and the Democrat reluctance to fight for themselves, or their supporters robbed of their votes.

The atrocities of September 11th are sensitively covered, but Moore’s handling of the build up and aftermath are confusing and inconsistent. He accuses the Bush administration of not doing enough to stop terrorism before September 11th, which is at odds with his later condemning of Bush’s anti-terror measures.

Moore is sometimes sharper in his criticisms than is in his analysis. I found his treatment of the Bush Bin Laden connection a little odd at times. I wondered whether he’d been forced to remove some material. His vague hints at conspiracy in this part of the film obscured the important message. What the Bushes and the Saudi ruling class, of which the Bin Laden’s are a part, realise - something the working class are yet to be fully convinced of - is that uniting with your own class is more important than national differences, especially in times of trouble.

As always, the area he excels in is showing ordinary working class Americans, both those blinded by biased media

“for the majority of the audience, the choice they made wasn’t to watch moore’s film rather than read trotsky, it was to watch *fahrenheit 9/11* rather than *spiderman 2*”



coverage and those awakened to the horror of war by personal tragedy. The most emotional moment of the film was when Moore is invited by the mother of a US soldier killed in Iraq to come with her to the White House, where she is accused by a passer-by of staging a stunt. When she explains her son was killed, the passer-by barks, “Where, when?” - still unconvinced of the authenticity of this mother’s grief. It is an awful reminder of the treatment people receive for standing up against Fox-fed public opinion.

I must mention what I thought was the most fabulous bit in the film: a guy from Moore’s home town is talking about when he saw pictures of Iraq on tv, about the burnt-out buildings, appalling living conditions and no clean water. He says, “That looks just like Michigan”. Army recruiters go to poor industrial areas and they pick on the poorest people. One guy is shown saying “I have just had a baby” – that’s the best reason to go, they reply. So poor black Americans are sent to Iraq, risking death to escape squalor, because Bush has declared war at home, on the American working class, as much as his war abroad. It was a message that wasn’t lost on my fellow bus passengers.

So see it, that way at least you’ll be able to join in the conversation on the bus. It made me laugh and cry, and had me sitting up half the night discussing it. And sadly, it ended my love affair with Britney ★

between reality and perception



jeremy butler examines the fears, and the facts, of immigration into britain

If you pick up any of the mainstream newspapers, or watch the news on television, there is a fairly good chance that one of the lead stories will be about immigration. Day after day there are stories about lazy immigrants coming to Britain to take advantage of our 'overly generous' benefits system - indeed, life here is made to sound so luxurious I sometimes wonder how I managed to miss out on the life of idle wealth on offer. If they are not scroungers, they are dangerous terrorists who have slipped through the net and are plotting death and destruction.

It goes without saying that the racist and deeply repellent British Nationalist Party not only gains from such fears, but goes out of its way to encourage them. They are not the only ones, though. The government is all too willing to blame asylum seekers when things go wrong, and the opposition parties are all too willing to score points by criticising the government for being too soft or too inefficient when it comes to immigration and asylum. The UK Independence Party defines itself by its narrow-minded, primarily English, nationalism. Even the Greens, well intentioned though they no doubt are, frequently repeat the claim that Britain is overcrowded and that there must be restrictions in order to protect the environment.

For journalists and politicians of all hues, immigration is the proverbial goose that lays the golden egg: it keeps on giving. Journalists will never be short of a story, and politicians never need to look far to find a scapegoat.

This constant bombardment from the media and politicians has created an atmosphere of fear and misinformation. As a consequence, ordinary people are deeply concerned about immigrants and asylum seekers. There is a real fear that we are being swamped by waves of foreigners and that, as a result, our health and education system is failing, crime is on the rise and our cultural identity is under threat.

Such fear is increased by the deliberate confusion by the powers that be. Immigrants and asylum seekers are talked about as if they are one and the same, the scare-mongering phrase 'bogus asylum seekers' has entered the vocabulary, and statistics are thrown about with wild abandon. Statistics, as a rule, are tricky things: they can be revealing and informative, but too often the studies that generate them are looking for particular answers. Even when they do not, it is easy to use them out of context to support a particular answer. The Conservative prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli (himself the descendent of immigrants) famously said, "there are lies, damn lies and statistics." It is perhaps an unduly harsh judgement, but it has a ring of truth to it. However, one statistic does have particular relevance to the argument. A recent MORI poll revealed that, when asked, people thought Britain took a huge 23% of the world's refugees. Actually, according to an UNHCR survey, the figure in 2003 was 2.8%: some 270,000 refugees, representing only 0.4% of the British population. This wild disparity between reality and perception suggests that at least some people are being strongly influenced by what they hear and what they read. We are constantly told that there are hordes of asylum seekers heading to our shores and, even if we do not believe the whole story, we believe at least part of it.

Without doubt there is a pervasive attitude of fear and hostility towards immigrants and asylum seekers. The causes behind it are

complex. It would be easy to blame the whole problem on reactionary politicians and journalists, but this is too simple an explanation. People are not stupid. People worried about immigration have real concerns. These are certainly exacerbated by politicians and the media, but they are often informed by personal experience as well. It is foolish in the extreme to pretend that all immigrants are hardworking, socially responsible, law-abiding individuals; any more than it would be to make that same claim of all indigenous British citizens.

There is a tendency, however, amongst left and liberal pundits to belittle the fears that people have. Rather than try and engage with people and explore their concerns, they are inclined to pretend that such fears are not real, and imply that people who hold them are intolerant or just plain stupid. Such liberalism exacerbates the problem rather than resolving it. People are forced to tread on eggshells due to political correctness and multiculturalism. These ideas are, at least in part, well intentioned, and supposed to celebrate diversity and promote tolerance and respect. In practise however, political correctness has resulted in changes in language and terminology, but has failed to challenge the social attitudes they express, or the underlying realities. Multiculturalism is intended to celebrate diversity: in practise it highlights difference, and increases divisions. What is needed is not to celebrate what divides us, but to focus on what unites us, our shared humanity.

Something that is too often ignored is the fact that Britain, and indeed all the developed world, is dependent on immigration. We always have been. Go far enough back, and everyone who lives here has an ancestor somewhere along the line who travelled here from somewhere else. We are now even more dependent on people coming to live and work here. We have a declining birth rate, and thus a shrinking work force. State pensions are under threat because, as things currently stand, there are not enough people working who can pay the taxes necessary to support the increasing numbers of retired people. Whole swathes of the job market are increasingly dependent on workers from overseas, who in turn contribute by paying taxes and providing services. The government goes out of its way to recruit teachers and healthcare professionals from other countries, and construction, manufacturing and cleaning firms rely on employing people who are new to the country and in need of a job. These jobs are essential, but the people doing them are as a rule badly paid and have poor working conditions.

Now, the right thing would be to make sure that they are rewarded appropriately, recognising both the skills and efforts that are needed, and the value that they have for society. Sadly, no one in our society is paid what they are worth: it is the gap between what they are paid and what they are worth from which *profit* is taken. Immigrants are exploited even more cynically than other workers. Firstly, they are scapegoated for problems created by capitalism itself. The fear and mistrust of immigrants is a useful distraction from the failures of our own society. And division among workers only plays into the hands of our exploiters. Secondly, the legal restriction of immigration guarantees a supply of illegal immigrants, fearful, desperate, and forced to accept wages and conditions so poor that organised workers would refuse them. This cheap, almost slave labour is, in truth, a vital but hidden part of our economy.

Ultimately, we have nothing to fear from opening our borders to immigrants. Like all workers they produce more than they consume. As Britain's population ages, we need the injection of young, motivated people, contributing their energy and new ideas, to ensure our prosperity. But ultimately, the idea that immigrants do not enjoy the right to flee persecution, fear, or poverty, is a denial of our common humanity ★



all in good faith?

tony blair is claiming that his differences with the anti-war movement arose from a "genuine difference in judgement": **gerry byrne** examines the argument that the invasion was in the interest of the iraqi people - and who it might have served if not them

The anti-war movement has a new champion. Remember how virtually the whole of the press, at the start of the war, jumped behind Tony Blair's war effort, and claimed we cared nothing for the fate of the Iraqis, we were Saddam's stooges? Little did it profit us to argue that we'd been against Saddam for decades, that the US/UK governments came a little late to supporting the rights of the Iraqi peoples. Now, at last, our good faith is recognised.

Listen to this:

"I know some will disagree with this. There are those who were opposed to the war and remain so now. I only hope that now, people will not disrespect the other's point of view but will accept that those that agree and those that disagree with the war in Iraq, hold their views not because they are war-mongers on the one hand or closet supporters of Saddam on the other, but because of a genuine difference of judgement as to the right thing to have done.

"There was no conspiracy. There was no impropriety. The essential judgement and truth, as usual, does not lie in extremes."

(Tony Blair on the Butler Report)

So there was an honest disagreement as to the right thing to do. It's now 18 months later. It should be becoming clearer who was right and who was wrong on this. Did we go to war for a lie? And indeed is it right to still maintain thousands of occupying troops in Iraq?

So let us, in the interest of truth and avoiding extremes, take a balance sheet of the war and the occupation. We need to look at the intangibles, such as democracy, freedom, human rights, as well as the material and financial aspects.

democracy

Democracy was high on the list of the purported benefits of the war. So how has it fared for the peoples of Iraq – and of the US/UK?

Iraq under Saddam Hussein was a police state with patently rigged elections, enforced by a bloody terroristic state machine. Iraq now has an unelected government, backed by hundreds of thousands of foreign troops and mercenaries, whom the majority of the population want removed. Its unelected Prime minister, Iyad Alawi, a former Baathist, personally executed prisoners in Baghdad's central jail, just weeks before the 'hand-over', to demonstrate his 'strong man' credentials. Familiar? Hmm.

In the UK, 1-2 million people marched against the war only weeks before the troops went in. All the ostensible reasons for going to war – stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, an immediate threat to British lives, 45-minute readiness, Saddam's links with Al-Qaeda – have been shown to be false. The conclusion is inescapable: for the British people the war was a travesty of democ-



bush on the deck of the uss lincoln declaring the war over on may day 2003: the war goes on still

racy.

In the US, a president widely believed to have stolen the election, by disenfranchising thousands of mainly black working class voters, has probably been strengthened by the war. Not the finest hour of American democracy, but the voters may yet take revenge. More on this later.

human rights

Saddam's regime was notorious for its inhumanity and depraved viciousness (which didn't stop the US/UK/EU countries arming and supporting him for decades). The occupiers would have to go some to catch up. They are making a start, though, with the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, the arbitrary arrests, the shooting and shelling of civilians, the bloodbath at Fallujah, Najaf...

Women's equality was enshrined in the pre-Saddam constitution, and Iraq was the most secular country in the region. At the beginning of this year, Islamists on the Interim Governing Council were set to revoke the secular family code and replace it with shari'a law. The then governor Paul Bremer only acted to prevent this when the proposal caused uproar both in Iraq and internationally. The occupation has immeasurably strengthened the reactionary Islamist forces. Women are effectively imprisoned in their homes by fear of abduction and assault. Saddam had 'rape rooms' for the opponents of his regime; now rape is used as revenge against former Baathists and a punishment for 'immoral' (i.e. unveiled) women. The leader of the Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq lives under permanent death threat for her campaigning against these abuses.

Workers' organisations were persecuted under Saddam.

Strikes were illegal in the public sector (most of the Iraqi economy). Independent trade unions were banned.

The occupying powers have tried to maintain Saddam's anti-union law, have harassed and resisted the newly emerging independent unions, and tried to re-impose Baathist managers against the wish of workers in the oil and power industries. They have forced the fastest privatisation in history, opening up Iraq's assets to wholesale foreign acquisition. Iraq is being sold off, while 70% of its population are unemployed and destitute.

In the occupiers' home countries, the war against terror has been the excuse for the greatest assault on civil rights in decades. Arbitrary arrest, imprisonment without trial, refusal of independent legal representation, even maltreatment and torture of suspects, have been justified as necessary in this war. Workers in dispute – longshoremen (dockers) in the US, firefighters in Britain – have been threatened with legal strike bans, and sending in the troops on the employers' side.

security

The war was necessary to beat the terrorist threat, so the argument ran. The invasion effectively smashed Saddam's state, the army and the police, but failed to put anything in its place for ordinary Iraqis. The occupiers entrench themselves in Saddam's old palaces, in barbed wired compounds. Foreign mercenaries protect the foreign companies. But at street level, security is in the hands of the armed militias, violently anti-secular and opposed to personal freedoms they see as 'Western corruption'. Insecurity, the inability to walk safely in the street, to go about one's normal business, is the biggest

single problem cited by Iraqis in all opinion polls. Terrorist bombings, gangsterism and abduction, and trigger-happy troops, make life unbearable for ordinary Iraqis.

Internationally, the world is a less safe place. Al-Qaeda, and other fanatic reactionaries, have used the invasion and occupation as prime recruiting material. The horrible bombing in Spain earlier this year, the continued state of high-alert, show that, far from stemming the threat, the war has vastly increased it.

living standards

Under UN sanctions, in the latter part of Saddam Hussein's regime, the majority of the population were dependent on rations. Half a million children are reckoned to have died in that period from preventable causes, due to malnutrition and lack of medicines – "The price you pay", as Madeleine Albright, then the US Secretary of State, so succinctly put it. Saddam amassed obscene personal wealth, while the people faced starvation.

Now, unemployment stands at between 60 and 70%, according to the UN and the Iraq Labour ministry. Electricity supplies, clean water and sewage have still not been fully restored. Raw sewage runs down the streets in Sadr City, a poor suburb of Baghdad. "Hepatitis is everywhere. It is unbelievable that standing water still causes such outbreaks a year after the US-led invasion of Iraq" – Omar Mekki, medical officer, World Health Organisation.

"It's definitely worse now than before the war. Even at the height of the sanctions when things were miserable, it wasn't as bad as this." – Eman Asim, Iraq Ministry of Health.

Of the \$18 billion Bush requested from Congress for "recon-

donald rumsfeld knocking iraq down for friend and business partner george shultz to put it up again



“this year the US will spend on war ten times the real wealth produced by every man, woman, and child in Iraq”

structing Iraq”, less than 5% had been spent by the end of April, and of that fraction most did not go to Iraqis but to foreign companies and the occupying authorities. The *Washington Post* reported that occupation officials had re-assigned \$184 million appropriated for drinking water projects to fund the US Embassy after the so-called hand-over.

the cost

The benefits in terms of democracy, human rights, improved living standards and security are not evident. So what of the costs? The cost of the war is dizzying. In September 2003, Bush requested an additional \$89 billion on top of the original \$79 billion already approved for the war and its aftermath (or twice what Britain spends on our entire National Health Service in a year). In other words, the US is planning to spend on war ten times the real wealth produced by every man, woman, and child in Iraq this year. If that makes your head spin, it's not because the maths are hard, it really is insane.

Geoff Hoon reckoned the occupation is costing Britain £125 million a month.

who benefits?

Someone must be better off for this nearly \$200 billion. Guess who? Bush's business buddies. US Labor Against the War has compiled a dossier, *The Corporate Invasion of Iraq* which details the billions of dollars worth of Iraq contracts handed to US companies with close links with the Bush administration and violently anti-union histories. Just to give you a small flavour of the report:

★ Halliburton, and its subsidiary Kellogg, Brown & Root (KBR). Its former CEO is Dick Cheney, currently US Vice President. It was awarded a two-year contract to fight oil fires worth up to \$7 billion, without competitive bidding. It also won a ten-year exclusive contract for logistics for the US Army worldwide, without a price cap, despite criminal investigations into price fraud, and a Government Accounting Office investigation into cost overruns in the Balkans. This contract has already earned them \$800 million.

★ Bechtel's former company president, and current board member, is George Shultz, chairman of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, and friend and business partner of Donald Rumsfeld, US Secretary of Defence. Bechtel was awarded the 'plum' of the post-war contracts, for rebuilding, power, water and sewage systems, airport facilities and upgrading the deep-water port of Umm Qasr.

★ Stevedoring Services of America (SSA). In the lead up to the war, SSA was the most intransigent of the West Coast port employers, the Pacific Maritime Association, in their dispute with the ILWU (International Longshore & Warehouse Union). The US government intervened and threatened the dockers with the Taft Hartley Act, a 1947 anti-strike law. SSA won contracts to repair and manage Iraqi ports, including Umm Qasr. In June 2003, the British military authorities handed over control of Umm Qasr to SSA. John Walsh, SSA spokesman said "I am excited about humanitarian aid, but I am more excited about the commercial opportunities."

★ Amec, the British construction company that made such a success of railway privatisation, has been awarded a joint contract with Fluor worth \$1.6 billion in for water, sewage and electricity, despite being convicted of fraud on three federal projects and banned from US government work in 2002. Fluor is currently being sued for abuses in apartheid-era South Africa, where it is alleged workers were subject to "slave-like" conditions and violently attacked with dogs when they went on legal strike. Some workers were killed and all of the workers were sacked.

Bush is running for re-election this year. All of the companies

awarded major contracts listed in the report are serious contributors to the Republican campaign. Some are under suspicion of fraud, favouritism, and overcharging. In other words, robbing the American taxpayer of money that could have gone to healthcare, housing and social goods.

banks

The Paris Club sounds like a saucy entertainment venue, but it's the name of the group of major creditors who are trying to saddle Iraq with over \$40 billion debt run up by Saddam Hussein. This includes, for example, one million euros owed for base chemicals used in the production of mustard gas in 1985, supplied by the Dutch company Melchemie. The Paris Club will only consider reducing the debt if Iraq complies with strict IMF privatisation policies. The US wants its share of any debt write-off to be paid for from the Iraq reconstruction budget.

Iraq also faces demands for war reparations from its neighbours. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are still pushing for payment. "Iraq has the ability and the means to compensate for all of the damages it inflicted on the claimant countries" – Saudi's Turki bin Nasser bin Abdulaziz declared. Kuwait's Khaled Ahmad Al-Mudafsa'id insisted, "there should be no delay or interruption in the receipt of funds."

The Iraqi banks are in effect bankrupt. Their total assets, according to the US Treasury only amount to \$2 billion. That may seem a lot to you or me but it's nothing compared to the creditors' demands. Three foreign banks have been given licence to operate in Iraq, including HSBC, essentially to buy up Iraq's finance sector at knockdown prices. HSBC also owns 46% of the British Arab Commercial Bank, which is trying to claw back \$100 million of Saddam's debts. And who should be a director of HSBC and advisor to Marsh and McLennan, the world's biggest insurance broker, which advises businesses investing in Iraq? None other than Lord Butler of Brockwell. Yes, that Lord Butler. The one who found no one had lied, no one had misled anyone, and there was no suggestion of bad faith, in the enquiry into WMDs.

so who was right then?

Which brings us neatly back to our starting point, Tony Blair's comments on that very report. He acted in good faith. He didn't try to mislead anyone. He honestly believed he was doing the right thing for democracy, human rights and the good of the Iraqi people. Which makes him more of a fool than even George W Bush. Unless he's not telling the truth... ★

occupation related websites

US Labor Against the War:
www.uslaboragainstar.org

Iraq Occupation Focus:
www.iraqoccupationfocus.org.uk

Iraq Federation of Trade Unions:
www.iraqitradeunions.org

Jubilee Iraq - campaigning round Iraqi debt:
www.jubileeiraq.org

Iraq body count:
www.iraqbodycount.net

Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq:
www.equalityiniraq.com

Federation of Workers Councils and Unions of Iraq:
www.uiraq.org

bush's war at home



bush is facing resistance to the u.s. occupation of iraq not only from the iraqis, but from his own working class: **gene bruskin** of u.s. labor against the war spoke to the *red star*

Stupid White Men, Michael Moore's description of America's rulers, is sometimes arrogantly taken by us Brits to apply to all Americans. Didn't they follow Dumbo into war? Doesn't that make them Dumber? What's less well-known is the American anti-war movement, and the role the labour movement has taken in opposing Bush's war at home and abroad. U.S. Labor Against the War brings together this labour movement opposition. One of its first acts was to circulate an anti-war appeal to labour movements around the world. It was signed by more than 200 labour federations and union in 53 countries, representing more than 130 million workers.

In June 2004, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), with 1.6 million members, voted unanimously to support USLAW's policy of an end to the occupation and Troops Out Now. That same month, the annual convention of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) called on Bush "to bring our troops home from Iraq now". In July, the California Federation of Labor, representing 2 million members, voted overwhelmingly to "demand an immediate end to the US occupation of Iraq" and to affiliate to USLAW.

How did USLAW come into being?

USLAW was created on January 11th 2003, at the onset of the US attack on Iraq. It was created in response to the national grassroots movement in the labour movement among locals and central labour councils and labour bodies all over the country. Separately and unrelated to each other, taking positions against the war in Iraq, against the aggressive policies of the Bush administration, and the waste of needed social resources on military spending. This was happening in a lot of places. USLAW started when we called these people together, all those who had already come out against the war, to Chicago, and created a common agenda to oppose the war and set up a network that began to inspire and encourage more and more labour organisations to come out

You put a lot of stress on ending the occupation immediately. Can you explain why?

In the US, there's a clear sense that the agenda of the Bush administration with this war is to establish a permanent military base in Iraq, and also to establish a permanent political and economic base, and to use Iraq as a model to undermine and manipulate the rest of the Middle East. Of course, oil being the centre-piece of it. But it's actually broader than just oil. So, for example, to create a pro-Israel base in Iraq. And to create a model free market economy that eliminates nationalisation, and allows for the full import and export and control of the economy from foreign governments and foreign companies. So we believe that every day the military occupation continues it creates more problems. It doesn't solve them. We need to be



anti-war demonstrators in california

on the record right now that the problem is the occupation and it has to end and it has to end now.

What do you say to the argument that pulling out the troops now will lead to even more chaos?

It's hard to see how much more chaos you can have. We seem to have created more and more and more chaos. We've been in there for one year. And when we first went in and threw out Hussein, I feel like the attitude of the Iraqis was "Thank you very much, see you later." They were glad but they weren't interested in us replacing him.

They did appreciate it up to a certain point. Then once it became clear to them that we intended to impose our will, increasingly, at all different levels, people became disenchanted. One year later, they have less electricity, less water, they have less security, less jobs, less everything.

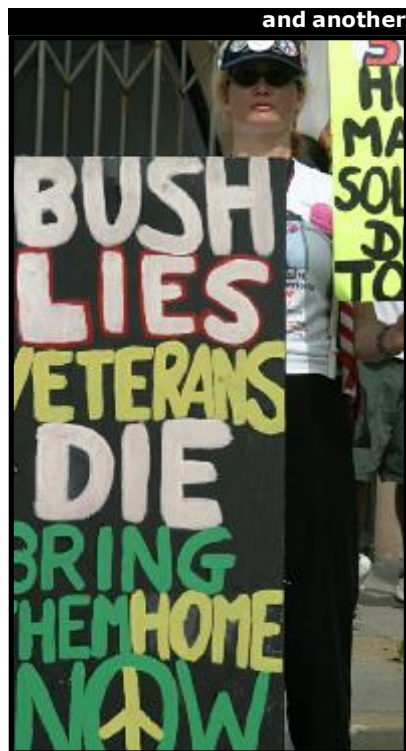
There obviously needs to be considerable support for the transition. For example, we need to give them that \$18 billion that Congress allotted that we haven't spent yet. We've only spent 2% of it. The Iraqis need to have that money. They have a right to have support and training and assistance for the development of their own security force. That does not have to be done by Americans,

who will arrest anyone who disagrees with them. Why can't the Swedes help? What about the Swiss? What about the Nigerians? There are ways of doing it through the UN or through some other co-ordination. But it should not be controlled by the United States. To the degree that it is, we believe that things will get worse, that the future of Iraq will be determined in a negative way for Iraqis.

You describe the history of the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations], mainly backing the government and taking a patriotic stand in various wars in the 20th century. What do you think is different this time?

One of the most significant things is that you have probably the most anti-union President that we've had in many decades, certainly since before Roosevelt, since the 30s. You have a basis among the working class, in the labour movement, of hating the President. And on the other hand, you have the pull among the working class towards patriotism, supporting the troops. "My son's over there dying, and I have to believe he's doing the right thing, otherwise it's too painful. If I criticise the policy, it feels like I'm criticising my son." That's the pull. On the other hand, "I know this guy Bush is a bastard and a liar and destroying our livelihood." So there's a tension. And we have been able to get in there, and help a lot of people see that it is not in fact a betrayal of your son or your daughter, in order to oppose this policy. In fact this policy is against your family and your children in every way. We have to understand that there is a link between the war at home and the war abroad. We're trying to make those links.

And because of the hatred of Bush, and because of the anti-globalisation, the anti-multinational movement, the free trade movement, people have seen that the foreign policy of the US follows our economic policy. One of the most vivid examples was last year, in the winter, FTAA (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas), an attempt by the US to impose a NAFTA-type of agreement on the whole of Central and South America, which would open it up to unregulated investment in all of their industries. We could take over their insurance companies, their banks and the financial institutions. There was a meeting to solidify that agreement. So there was a massive effort by the peace and social justice and anti-globalisation movements and the labour movement to demonstrate. When we arrived we saw a police presence that seemed, in every way, if you've ever seen any of the footage, it looked like Iraq. This was in



and another

Miami. A month before, when the allocation of the \$18 billion and the \$87 billion for the war in Iraq came up, \$7.5 million was inserted in there, to pay for the military operation against the demonstration in Miami. It was seen by them as the same thing, and every worker that came down there saw it. The AFL-CIO, in its attempts to try and see the best side of this thing and in some ways political naiveté, negotiated for 6 months with the authorities down there in order to figure out a route that was acceptable, and a way to make sure that those people who were going to run through the streets and break the windows were not identified with the same

people who were 70-year old retirees and who'd been a garment worker all their life. They thought they could make that separation. In the police eyes, anybody down there to protest was the same as those who threw rocks through the window: they were against the state. They were like terrorists. And that's what the police chief called them. So the AFL-CIO and the workers and the retired people were physically attacked – brutalised, arrested, gassed, randomly and without cause, by this military operation funded by the Iraq budget. You can't draw it any clearer. It was all there.

They saw the two wings of the war, the war at home the war abroad, hello!

There was \$18 billion allocated to reconstructing Iraq. Of that \$18 billion, only \$3 -400 million, 2%, has been spent on Iraqi reconstruction. Of that \$400 million, the 2%, all but a fraction was spent on security and administration. The number of jobs created by that \$200 billion war effort in the past year or so is in the 10 – 20,000 range, for Iraqis. 10 – 20,000 out of a workforce of approximately 7 million, a huge majority of them unemployed as a result of the war. We could have just taken that money and handed it out to them every week and they would probably have appreciated it more than all our elaborate reconstruction plans with Bechtel. Give me my \$25 a week, at least I'd see the care that I don't starve.

You've got elections coming up. Clearly the labour movement is interested in getting rid of Bush. Does it have any programme beyond that?

The labour movement programme is really a mirror of the Democrats.

They are not willing to have a programme that goes beyond that. So for example, our health care system is the most inadequate and expensive in the world. We spend 15% of our entire Gross National Product, that's 15 cents out of every dollar of every piece of goods or services in the US, goes to pay for health care, but in any given year, 80 million people in the US at some point do not have health care – that's a government figure, from the census bureau. If that's not an irrational system – it's all because of the profit system. The labour movement is one of the ways you get health care at work: you organise and you renegotiate health care benefits. However, the escalating cost, so much that every time I come to negotiate a new contract the boss says - my health care costs have gone up 15%, I can't give you a raise.

So the labour movement wants to see major reforms of the health care system, but major reforms are absolutely impossible without taking on the insurance industry and the healthcare industry and the Democrats aren't willing to do it. So, while the labour movement is shouting from the rooftops "Universal health care", "Health care is a right" and the Democrats are reflecting that in their rhetoric, their plan in fact won't touch the problem.

The one distinction is that the labour movement wants to reform the right to organise. Our laws are some of the worst in the world. If the Iraqis were to have a labour code based on ours, they'd be better



us anti-war demonstrator

off having no labour code. It is a code that is established to fundamentally deny you the right to organise. The labour movement has a programme to fundamentally reform the labour code, which they're trying to push through Congress. That is separate from the Democratic agenda. Interestingly enough, they would not ask John Kerry to make that part of his programme. They would meet with him and say "John, when you get in, I want to be sure you're going to support this." But they won't ask him to say anything. John Kerry will speak in front of a union audience and talk about labour rights and unions and all that, but if you were to do a study of every speech that John Kerry gives in this campaign, and put it into a search on your computer, and look for the word "union", you probably wouldn't find a mention, because the calculation is that's not a popular thing to run to. We are all trying to get the undecided voters in the middle, and they're not into unions, so I won't say anything.

What is the prospect for any electoral politics that reflects workers' interests?

I don't think they're good. But on the other hand, the defeat of Bush is extremely significant. While it will not ensure a government that is an advocate in that way that we want, it will ensure that we eliminate a government that is fundamentally at war with our interests. The Bush administration is determined to destroy the labour movement. A Kerry administration, even if he doesn't help us, he will not be out to destroy us. We then have an opportunity to gain some space to work our programmes, to get some sympathetic people elected to the Labour Department. To get some judges appointed who don't hate workers and people of colour and women. You can get that kind of stuff with a Democratic president. It's not insignificant, it's just not adequate.

Is there anything you'd like to say in conclusion?

The one thing I'd like to emphasise, what we are doing in USLAW and which the British labour movement is trying to do, is, in very concrete ways, to support the working class and the organised trade unions in Iraq. It is the most significant progressive, working class, pro-women force that exists in Iraq today. It is one thing to demonstrate and say Blair is a liar, Bush is a liar, and even say Troops Out and we're against this or that, but at the same time we need to support the progressive forces that are there, on the ground, who are trying to resist the powers of the Baathists and the radical Islamists

"the one thing i'd like to emphasise, what we are doing in uslaw and which the british labour movement is trying to do, is, in very concrete ways, to support the working class and the organised trade unions in iraq. it is the most significant progressive, working class, pro-women force that exists in iraq today. it is one thing to demonstrate and say blair is a liar, bush is a liar, and even say troops out and we're against this or that, but at the same time we need to support the progressive forces that are there, on the ground, who are trying to resist the powers of the baathists and the radical islamists who have a lot of advantages there"

who have a lot of advantages there.

If we are anti-war, we must also be pro-labour. And concretely we need to do work educating people on this, raising funds and resources, so that we are not just doing something symbolic, we also have a chance to do something real ★



rod paige: u.s. secretary of education

"terrorist" teachers

in a bizarre footnote to this interview, gene bruskin told a story which provided an insight into the mentality of the 'war against terror'

US Secretary of Education Rod Paige has labelled the National Education Association "a terrorist organisation". The NEA is a union representing some 2.7 million teachers, kindergarten and day care workers, mainly in the smaller towns and cities of the US.

When challenged to defend his somewhat improbable accusation, he blustered "Well, I just mean the way they behave."

Gene argued that they had done no more than be militantly independent of the Bush administration, and since Bush has divided the world into "us" and "them", the NEA are decidedly "them" – and so, incredibly, are effectively "terrorists".

At their convention this summer, American kindergarten teachers are now defiantly sporting badges reading "Proud to be a terrorist. National Education Association".

You couldn't make it up.



crime fighting and pizza delivery

spiderman 2
certificate pg

This summer's blockbuster, *Spiderman 2*, is the latest in a series of films that have brought comic-book superheroes to the big screen. Some commentators have suggested that the increase in popularity of superheroes is in response to the terrible events of September 11th. The argument is that in the wake of that terrible tragedy the cinema-going public, particularly in the US of course, welcomes the clear-cut line between good and evil that is present in such stories. Without a doubt there is some truth in that theory; but there is more to it than that. Stories about heroes and villains have always been popular, and always will be. On the surface, such stories are about larger-than-life people having larger-than-life adventures. That aspect of them makes for good entertainment. However, although the stories are fantastic, they are, nonetheless, echoes of our more humdrum lives. Stories about heroes are also stories about what it means to be human - the choices that we make and the difficulties that we face. Spiderman in particular has always been as much about making difficult decisions as it is about snappy dialogue and melodramatic villains.

Spiderman's creator, Stan Lee (who was executive producer for the film), gave him the motto, "with great power comes great responsibility." Director Sam Raimi develops this as the main theme of *Spiderman 2*. In the first film, a radioactive spider bit ordinary teenager Peter Parker. That bite gave him superhuman strength and agility and the ability to shoot webs, and he chose to use his new found powers to fight crime as a costumed superhero. The second film takes up a year or so after the first. Peter Parker is struggling with his college course, trying to hold down a job as a pizza delivery boy, freelancing for the local newspaper, and fighting crime. His personal life is not much better: he's drifting apart from his Aunt May, his friend Harry and the love of his life, Mary Jane. He is torn between trying to lead the life that he wants and trying to do the right thing. Life gets even more complicated when kindly physicist Otto Octavius is turned into villainous Doctor Octopus by a failed experiment, and threatens the safety

of the city.

The plot is nothing special. It is predictable even to those not familiar with the original comic. However this is not too much of a drawback, when compared with all the positives. While the plot is lacking, the script and the directing make the film a success. It is over-the-top in just the right way, treading a fine balance between melodrama and farce; at times it evokes real pathos; there's a touching romantic plot between Peter and Mary Jane, and, with Doctor Octopus, some scary moments. The real appeal of the film though is

Spidey himself. Tobey Maguire plays Peter Parker as a very sympathetic character. It is impossible not to feel for him when things start to go wrong and he agonises over what he should do. Alfred Molina does a similarly great job portraying Doctor Octopus as a sympathetic villain. While lauding the actors, I feel special mention should go to J. K. Simmons who plays Peter's hilariously tyrannical newspaper editor J. Jonah Jameson. The film looks simply stunning: it really does look



...and off



spidey on duty...

like a comic book brought to life. The computer-generated special effects are seamless, and the action is never too fast to follow (a problem with many action films).

And, without spoiling the surprise, there is a scene on a train that is the best cinematic depiction of solidarity and camaraderie that I have seen since the end of *Spartacus*.

There are plenty of clever little things to watch out for. There are cameos both by real people: Stan Lee himself, and Bruce Campbell (star of Raimi's *Evil Dead* films) as an obnoxious usher; and by fictional characters from the comics (I noticed two who later turn into the Lizard and Man-Wolf respectively). Also, the play which Mary Jane is starring in is Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest* - alluding to the crisis Peter finds himself in due to his secret identity; and there is a busker who comically mangles the theme tune from the old television series.

Spiderman 2 is a great piece of light entertainment. It will not go down in the annals as a great film, but if you have some spare time and want to watch something light-hearted you could do a lot worse than going to see it. It looks great, it is a lot of fun, but, more than that, at its heart it has a nice idea that everyone can relate to: that it is important to try and do the right thing ★

jeremy butler

human duties, not animal rights



david broder is a school student once active in the animal rights movement before becoming a socialist: he discusses the question of rights, their relationship to the society in which we live, and the realities of our treatment of animals in the pursuit of profit

In Western society, the extent of the mistreatment of animals is often underplayed. While there is great public objection to fox-hunting and the veal industry, issues such as the everyday transportation of live animals and factory farming do not receive so many column inches. The truth about the meat industry does not fit with the seductive image which corporations wish to present, so the matter is ignored by our media. The government does not tolerate protests against the animal testing industry, and brands dissenting voices as extremists, even barring them from campaigning.

The ethical objections to battery farms are actually exploited as a *sales tool* by big business. Supermarkets offer 'free-range' items, but this is a meaningless marketing ploy. The European Union sets only the most basic standards for an animal product to qualify as 'free-range'. A phrase like 'free range hens' conveys a certain ideal, a twee farm where dainty chickens roam around serenely, as a benevolent farmer gently scatters corn on the ground. In fact, you can keep an incredible 13 chickens for every square metre of indoor space – imagine them all standing on the floor of an average telephone box – and still call them 'free range'. The European Council of Ministers, which votes on the proposals of unelected civil servants, sets the standards for animal welfare, and the rules are extremely lax. In recent months, the council voted against tightening live transportation laws, meaning that it is still legal to transfer animals across Europe.

Most of us seeing meat products in supermarkets from Italy or Spain would imagine that the animals are slaughtered in the country of origin, and then the meat exported. This would seem to be the most obvious and least cruel system. In fact, it is cheaper to import live animals into the UK than meat, so the producers pack the livestock into trucks and drive them across Europe. The EU approach to this is woeful – in a journey of up to 90 hours,

nearly four days, the producers only have to allow 3 hours' rest, and don't even need to let the animals off the trucks during this 'break'. Those involved in this process do nothing more than they need to keep the animals alive.

Some would say that cost-cutting by the meat industry conflicts with welfare so much that it constitutes a breach of 'animal rights'. I would argue that animals do not have rights, as they cannot take part in social relations. Indeed, this is what separates us from them. Humans are able to recognise each others' rights, such as the right to life, the right to have an abortion or to enter into marriages without the consent of third parties. Animals, unlike us, can not help but compete in a system of predation, in struggle with one another for survival – they cannot break from the 'eat or be eaten' process, they are not capable of respecting other animals' lives. They cannot understand the concept that they are 'owed' anything – far from it. However, while animals by their nature lack rights, humans are *denied* fundamental rights by governments – indeed, most people in the world have none of the rights I mentioned earlier. And where they conflict with profit or power, the ruling class does not recognise human rights at all.

For example, last week, when a group of Iraqi families went to the High Court to demand that there was an inquiry into their sons' deaths in Basra, the MOD denied that British troops had a duty to uphold the European human rights convention, since this would mean "war would have to be fought as never before". The real meaning of this statement is that it was not worth their while to ensure that innocent civilians were not accidentally killed.

The ruling class has granted some legal rights, but sees them as just a temporary concessions to those who struggled to win them in defence of themselves and others. Legal rights in capitalist society are always at the mercy of those in power – if these rights conflict with the interests of capital, then they cease to be recognised. Socialist societies would have a different approach to rights, not only recognising additional rights (such as that for homosexuals to marry) but also upholding those which capitalist governments *claim* to accept, but do not practice, as in the case of the Iraqis. Unlike humans, however, animals are unable to either demand to be treated fairly or to overthrow the ruling class, so it will always be up to society to dictate their legal entitlements. Although animals are separate from humans, we have to define certain codes of conduct in treating them, for the sake of our own humanity.

Corporations use terms such as 'free-range' and 'freedom food' as a cynical tactic to exploit people's disgust at animal cruelty. The British and European parliaments go along with this and refuse to pass restrictions on the meat production process – after all, this is a multi-billion euro business. The abuses of animal welfare, in live transport, factory farming and overcrowded slaughterhouses, are the result of capi-



talist production: the drive to *make profit*. As in the case of the war in Iraq, the respect for rights has a price limit. There is no pressure from any direction on meat producers to act in a responsible manner: big EU subsidies act as a ‘pat on the back’ – live transport fulfils the EU dream of free trade across the continent. One real problem for the exploiters of animals could be mass public resentment towards them, if people demanded products which were ethically farmed, or cosmetics not tested on animals. However, such is the extent of the industry that the government has intervened to save it from the threat of animal rights protesters.

The New Labour government and the media have branded the campaigners as ‘extremists’, just because a *minority* have used violent tactics – by the same logic, everyone who likes football is a racist hooligan, since some racist hooligans go to football matches. The ban on protests outside laboratories under construction is to stifle the campaigners, outlawing their most successful tactic to ensure that their political message is undermined. The ‘right to free speech’ is, yet again, conditional on not threatening the powerful commercial interests. That said, the protesters are driven to increasingly desperate measures, relying on threats, because a single-issue protest movement is not strong enough alone to take on the corporations, backed by the full force of the state. The root cause of this cruelty is the profit system, and without profit would no longer be worthwhile. For these protesters, it is vital that they ally with the labour movement, which not only has the interest but the ability to take on the system.

While the introduction of ‘free-range’ produce has served to fool many into thinking that this food is farmed ethically, it is disproportionately overpriced. This is not only to meet the (limited) extra costs, but also to take advantage of those who do want to treat animals well: people’s ethics are exploited like every other marketing opportunity. The corporate message is not only to claim that they care about animals, but to guarantee that public confidence remains in their industry. Indeed, during the BSE crisis, the government spent billions of taxpayers’ money to promote an export business worth a few hundred million, such is their cosiness with their wealthy allies in meat production. Every attempt is made to minimise public knowledge of malpractice and health scares in animal usage.

“‘free range hens’ suggests a twee farm where chickens roam around serenely. in fact, you can keep an incredible 13 chickens for every square metre of indoor space – imagine them all standing on the floor of an average telephone box – and still call them ‘free range’”

Since animals’ welfare in capitalist society is constrained by holding down costs, we have to ask how a socialist society should treat them. Animals will never be able to stand up for themselves, and will always be at the whim of humans. We have to be able to give them humane conditions, which will obviously be easier when the interest of profit is removed. To treat animals badly without the need to cut costs would be decidedly immoral, inflicting great suffering on them for little human gain. Not to do this would mean us neglecting the responsibility of a species able to make moral judgments.

It is often claimed that since humans are animals, we should treat animals as we do humans. Conversely, some argue that humans have no need to respect animals, since animals do not treat each other with any respect – a fox will kill far more chickens than



animal rights protestors: fighting the symptoms, not the disease?

he needs. We are the top predators in nature, and are in a privileged position where we can do what we wish to other species. However, the opposite is true: humans are not the same as other animals, since we have higher consciousness. It is the fact that humans can take moral decisions which means that the attitudes we hold towards animals must be based on compassionate ethics. If we do not use our ability to treat animals with respect, we undermine our humanity, failing to meet our potential as the most advanced species. The fact that we demand rights for ourselves as individuals means that we have to respect others’, and similarly, we must use the same conscience to treat animals considerately. This does not give animals fundamental rights, however. For example, we would not condemn a fox which killed a cat, since it cannot understand social relations, but we would expect that the same cat would not be killed by a human: we would condemn the human as acting in a manner no more advanced than a fox, failing to be humane.

How far, however, must we go with the process of sympathetic treatment? Surely the greatest level of human advancement would be if we could fulfil our nutritional needs without having to inflict any pain on animals. Of course, even human liberation and the removal of profit might not guarantee this, since the selfish wish to satisfy the tastebuds at an animal’s expense would still exist. However, the ability to synthetically reproduce animal products, to an identical level, is currently too costly, but the advancement of science, not conducted for the sake of profit, would alter this. Hypothetically, it seems plausible that given a choice between meat carved from a dead animal, or that created by cell research and reproduction, we would choose the latter. If we lived in a society which upheld the rights that humans deserve, we would recover our humanity, and treat animals in a responsible manner. Socialism will hugely improve treatment of animals, since it will not only remove the social conditions for cost-cutting, but also allow humans to realise our potential, using our consciousness to respect our obligation to behave in an ethical fashion.

What prohibits humans from ethical treatment of animals has always been the drive to cut costs, in the interests of profit. Animals cannot fight for legal ‘rights’, but it is nevertheless up to humans to treat them with respect, and avoid inflicting suffering. Humans represent a clear and defined evolutionary leap, and our consciousness enables us to fight for what we deserve, to demand liberties under law. This ability is however a responsibility – we must do all in our power to uphold the tenets of compassionate treatment, so that we can fulfil our human potential. In so far as we continue to allow the strong to prey on the weak in human society, we fall short of the full realisation of humanity and remain a step closer to animals. If we were just the same as animals, we would merit no rights and have no responsibility to be compassionate: the fact that we can acknowledge our own rights means that we must also be humane to them ★

primal undercurrent



p j harvey
uh huh her
(island def jam)



Polly Jean Harvey creeps into your life. Just when you choose to welcome her in, you find that she's been there already for a long while. You may think that, despite *Uh Huh Her* being her seventh album, that you've never heard of her before. Outside of music she has starred as May Magdalene in Hal Hartley's end of days movie *The Book of Life*, cameo-ed in dark comedy *Six Feet Under* and exhibited her sculpture and poetry widely on both sides of the Atlantic. She managed to find time to duet with ex-boyfriend Nick Cave on his *Murder Ballads* album, with trip-hop artist Tricky on his *Nearly God* EP and most recently collaborated with Josh Homme (Queens of the Stone Age) as part of the Desert Sessions. You may even have been lucky enough to witness her legendary Glastonbury debut (the one with the pink pvc catsuit - see you do remember). For someone who shies away from press attention, her face is remarkably familiar when you first see it, as is her voice. She's been in your life a lot longer than you thought.

Uh Huh Her is the follow up album to PJ Harvey's Mercury Music Prize-winning *Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea*. Released two years ago, *Stories* seemed to herald a new, happier side to Harvey, it was sufficiently perky to appear mainstream and accessible. It never quite sat right with me I have to admit: something was missing, it just wasn't PJ enough. With *Uh Huh Her* however, I'm right back on familiar terms.

It's probably easier to explain what this album isn't, so you won't get frightened off when I try to explain what it is (which I

know is the more conventional approach of a music review).

It isn't pop. There are no one-size-fits-all chirpy lyrics, there are no dance steps or opportunities to validate your transition from soap star to 'musician'.

It isn't dance. The tracks don't go on and on seamlessly merging with each other until all you're left with is seventy minutes of car alarms and microwaves.

It isn't metal, nu or old. There are no hate filled rants about how the world doesn't understand you, growled out by thirtysomething men with girlfriends and mortgages.

It isn't something for the 'fifty quid man'. If you can't go into a shop and buy just one cd, or you want something to play in the background at dinner parties, stop reading: go away, you'll only miss the point.

so what is it?

Uh Huh Her is the story of the breakdown of a relationship told in very real terms. Harvey explores the rawness of each stage in great detail. There are tracks fuelled by anger and resentment such as 'The Life and Death of Mr Badmouth' and 'Who the Fuck?', then those which contemplate the return of something familiar, 'The Darker Days of Me and Him'. I'm not suggesting in any way that this is an album by a woman for women - far from it. The music of Harvey has always had a very primal undercurrent: it's very hard to dance to it without feeling that there should be a fire, painted woad and a lot less clothing. It is because of this skill that the emotion portrayed is loss and so belongs to anyone who has felt loss. With the exception of the percussion, everything on the album is written, played, recorded, mixed and produced by Harvey. This all results in *Uh Huh Her* having a very human quality: it feels natural to listen and relate to. It provides a welcome haven from the current trends in popular music, even those which are marketed as 'heavily over-produced but original talent'. To prove this, ask yourself, "do I know of any current artist who can turn the act of writing a letter into an intensely erotic experience?"

There is only one answer: PJ Harvey in 'The Letter'. Listen to it. I doubt you'll ever want to use email again ★

rae hancock





not taking it any more

David Broder explores the themes of the film *Taxi Driver*

Taxi Driver, directed by Martin Scorsese, is not only one of the most enduring film classics of the 1970s, but is a highly political movie. The film depicts the alienation of Travis Bickle, a Vietnam veteran played by Robert De Niro, from New York's society. De Niro's character is the lowest in the US social order, living in a cramped, dirty apartment and driving his taxi "between 6pm and 8am" for "6 days a week, sometimes 7". This film is about disaffection, and how politicians can't be expected to deliver social change.

Apparently freshly returned from Vietnam, Bickle is struggling to engage with others. However, they are hardly co-operative: when he asks a woman at a kiosk what her name is, she ignores him and calls the manager. Bickle feels that there must be something wrong with society that rejects him so bluntly - except for a presidential candidate's campaign worker, Betsy: "she appeared like an angel, out of this filthy mass". This becomes his obsession: he parks his cab outside the campaign office to stare at her, feeling that this is his chance to engage with people. However, when he takes her to a 'dirty movie', she quickly breaks off ties with him. He is an outcast, and cannot mix with the population, whom he sees as part of the problem, alienated by their insular nature - even his beloved Betsy is just the same, "one of them".

The problem for De Niro's character is that because of his 'white trash' image, not only ill-educated but xenophobic and frequenting adult cinemas, he appears repulsive to everyone else - they want no involvement with him. Despite having fought in Vietnam, he is no hero at home. So instead of trying to become part of society, he decides that he wants to change it. Around him, Bickle sees the signs of urban decay. He is disgusted by 'the scum', pushers, pimps and prostitutes who line the streets of the city, as well as using his taxi. The first approach is to expect politicians, such as the candidate, Charles Palantine, to change things: "I don't know exactly what his policies are, but I know he'd be a good president".

Indeed, this is central to the film's political lesson. Palantine feigns leftist politics, using the slogan "We are the people", and speaks of how he wants the people to rule for themselves. However, when he is in Bickle's cab, and asks him what he would like to change, the answer leaves him mortified - he can't be expected to follow what the people want if the task is to stop decay in working class districts. Bickle's views are seen to be irrelevant because he is beneath the candidate's social standing, so he is again rejected. It is clear that when he talks of stopping "Wars fought by the many for the benefit of the few", he is referring to the middle class sacrificing itself to aid the super-rich. The message of Palantine's speech on "The people's suffering from crime" is mere-

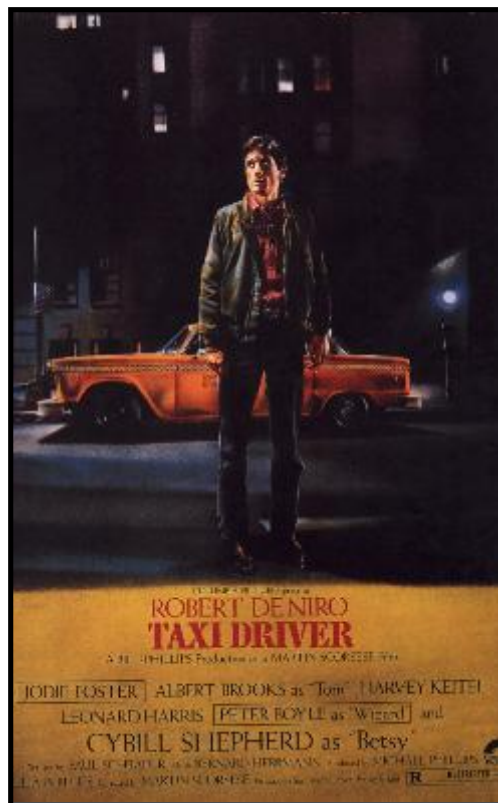
ly sloganeering to deceive the people into voting for his centre-right party.

Bickle complains to a colleague that he wants to "go out there and really do something", since he has realised that he is going to have to make change by himself if he wants it to happen. In contrast, his colleague says that the fact that he does not own a taxi after years of driving shows that he "mustn't want to do so". This marks the divide between the complacent, who believe that they already have the conditions they deserve, and the combative, taking their own initiative to remove society's ills. The super-exploited Bickle cannot engage with his workmates, due to their difference of experience, and is unable to identify a shared class consciousness with them. When they speak to him, he just ignores them: his extreme poverty and terrible conditions mean that they share no affinity. The fact that his colleague is so content to keep what he has means that Bickle fails to see him as an ally in class struggle. He feels so alienated by all aspects of society that he sees his fight as an individual and feels that he has to act alone: a costly misunderstanding.

What De Niro's character does is to train himself up as a vigilante, so that he can rescue a 12 year old prostitute, played by Jodie Foster. However, when he comes to take her away, she does not appreciate it, since she doesn't believe that she has been exploited. Despite an incident where the pimp seized her from Bickle's cab early in the film, she insists that she is in fact free: "I can leave whenever I want". Bickle cannot merely appeal to her to run away, but has to confront her oppressors with violence. In a bloody shoot-out with the pimps, he wins a small victory, her liberation, at great cost - he is shot twice in the confrontation. Since he is unable to join with others in this crusade, however, his war is essentially lost - he merely dents the prostitution network, since he is taking on a huge opponent alone. Bickle feels unity only with the young prostitute, whom he recognises as similarly super-exploited: but even together

they are no real opposition to the thousands of pimps in the city.

Throughout the film, Travis Bickle realises that society is doing nothing to confront exploitation, so he is forced to fight himself - he has met no-one who empathises with his cause, since he is so downtrodden in comparison to even his fellow taxi drivers. He despises everyone else for not trying to make the social changes which he sees as absolutely necessary. Indeed, he proudly states "Here is a man who would not take it any more, a defiant personal stance. His realisation, and message to the audience, is that it is not reasonable to expect politicians to act on your behalf, to remove problems for you - they are equally part of the oppressor class. What makes a difference is not to be subsumed within the existing social order, but to train and plan, to fight rather than sit back and hope for the best. Nevertheless, a one-man struggle against a business run by thousands is doomed, since unity among workers is necessary to face exploitation, not individual action. The tactic should have been to ally with his fellow workers against the problems they jointly faced, instead of waging a personal vigilante campaign ★



the other red star



the red star collected edition

If there are any amongst our readers who picked this publication up hoping to read more of the continuing adventures of Maya Antares, Makita and the rest of the crew of the Skyfurnace R.S.S. Konstantinov: please accept our apologies. It was not our intent to deceive you. For those of you who do not understand what I'm babbling about: read on, and all will become clearer. The *Red Star* is not only the name of the humble periodical that you hold in your hands. It is also the name of a rather splendid comic book.

When one of us (I cannot remember who) suggested that we called our paper the *Red Star*, I pointed out that there was a comic of the same name. We decided to stick with the name, though, because we liked it, and hoped that there would not be too much confusion as a result. As an aside, the 'Red Star' is also the name of a football club, an 'exotic' aviation company (whatever that means), a company that sells yeast and an online anti-Blair research group, and I'm sure a great deal more besides. I guess it only goes to show that other people think it is a good name too. On the off chance that someone is reading this hoping it will be about yeast or whatever, then I can only apologise again, and hope that you are not too disappointed. Anyway, on with the review...

There has been a tendency in recent years to call comic books 'graphic novels.' It seems to me that this a transparent and ineffectual attempt to gain credibility for an often-derided medium by sim-

alternative, science-fantasy world where technology and magic coexist. The series takes its name from the once mighty empire in which it is set, the United Republics of the Red Star, an analogue of the old Soviet Union. The action takes us from war in Al'Istann (Afghanistan) to Nokgorka (a rebel state akin to Chechnya). The protagonists are the soldiers and crew of a giant sky ship called a 'skyfurnace', the R.S.S. Konstantinov, in particular Sorceress-Major Maya Antares, and a young Nokgorkan rebel called Makita. Over the course of the story the characters discover that they have been lied to. The URRS is not the worker's paradise that they have been brought up to believe in. Through the mysterious Red Woman, an immortal agent of Pravda the goddess of truth, they find out that Imbohl, their country's leader, is an evil necromancer who has enslaved the ghosts of the dead and made them work in forced labour camps. They mutiny and set off in the Konstantinov to liberate the dead and save the true spirit of the revolution.

Christian Gossett, creator of the *Red Star*, and the rest of his team have created a genuine piece of art. The *Red Star* combines action, romance fantasy and spirituality. The artwork is cutting edge, using computer graphics to create 3D images (I'm not sure what that means, but it looks very good). What is truly refreshing, though, is their portrayal of the former Soviet Union, and the lessons that can be learnt from it. Almost without exception, in literature and films, the Soviet Union is portrayed as communism in practise, and either as a monolithic 'evil empire' or as a well-intentioned, but fundamentally naïve experiment that was doomed to failure because of human nature. In contrast the *Red Star* suggests that what went



ply changing its name, rather than actually challenging any false impressions that people may have. Normally I reject this term as pretentious: a comic book is a comic book. However, periodically, one comes along that stands so far above the crowd that it is in league of its own, and to simply call it a comic seems an inadequate

description. The *Red Star* is an excellent example of such. First published in 2000 as the beginning of a series of comics, the first ten issues are now available in a soft backed collected edition of 312 pages.

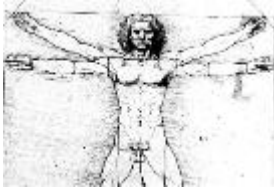
The *Red Star* defies easy definition. It is set on an

wrong was that the revolution was subverted and abused by a corrupt leader, and that all leaders, whether they claim to be communist or democratic or anything else, are all as bad as each other. As Maya says in the comic, "All the leaders of the world...they are all liars. Petty lords with petty schemes..." Maya and her comrades rebel, but they do so not to restore the old order or to bring about capitalism: they choose to stay true to the original spirit of the revolution.

The *Red Star* may be about a fictional analogue of a fallen empire, but it is also about the here and now. The message is both of hope, and a call to action. Only when little people like Maya Antares, and you and I, stand up for ourselves can we truly create the world we deserve. The *Red Star* poses the question, "would you fight your nation to save it?" A comic book it may be, but the *Red Star* is also a work of art, and a very timely one at that ★

jeremy butler

"christian gossett has created a genuine piece of art"



socialism, humanism, and the fear of tofu

darren williams argues that without rediscovering its human heart, socialism will become a means without an end, and finally not even a means

The *heart* of all socialist politics is humanism. Simply put, this means that the interests of human beings, their needs and their concerns, are central to our politics.

There are many other forms of politics whose advocates would claim to be centrally concerned with the well being of humanity, but all, bar the socialist, make concessions in their 'humanism' to 'greater' interests – the state, the race, God, the national interest or even Prudence!

Socialists accept that there is no interest greater than the common good of human beings. We never concede any argument that 'The price of saving, or improving, a life is too high'. Nor, for us, is any one life of greater or lesser 'value' than any other.

Socialists share with the Greens the conviction that modern, capitalist society is destroying our environment and treats animals as pure commodities. For the capitalist, animals are useful so long as they can be torn apart in order to reap the greatest profit. We differ with our comrades in the green movement, who, although they often agree with us over many of the ills that affect our world (and on some cases may even share our vision of a better fairer society.), still place the interests of nature or the environment above those of people. Socialists believe that humans are different from the rest of nature - we can conceive of the need to treat the rest of nature with respect, which no other animal can do, and thus we are compelled by our humanity to do so.

Socialists are fundamentalist humanists, extremist humanists.

We are committed to creating a world where human beings are free: free from want, free from hunger, free from the threat of war, of disease and poverty; and control the world around themselves collectively and truly democratically.

In that state of freedom people will be able to develop their full potential as human beings. They will develop mentally and artistically, learn and invent new skills, both physical and philosophical, be able to relate to themselves and others as full and complete humans for the first time ever, without prejudice or discrimination.

Talking in these terms can be embarrassing to many socialists: "Such hippy-dippy tofu-wearing tie-dyed clap-trap is all very well but has no place in the struggles of the Working Class," they mutter into their real ale.

This attitude is one of the reasons that we believe that the socialist movement has lost its way. By focusing on the day-to-day struggles of the working class, or rather a mythical idealised version of the class, they have forgotten the goal, which is the emancipation of all humanity.

Thus socialist newspapers have become full of justified rage and anger against the injustice and brutality of the system, but, because they have lost the *hope* of a positive alternative, cannot inspire and provide the leadership that they so long to do.

There are thousands of people, however, who stand outside of the organised revolutionary parties and groups, people who loathe the inequity and vicious nature of the 'free market', who oppose globalisation, war, racism and all the ways in which we are exhorted to hate those who are 'different', and who dream of the same sort of just, fair world as we do. They inhabit the radical greenish anti-globalisation, anti-war movements. These are the people whom any socialist party would have to attract before it could make any attempt to change society.

They have been repelled, however, by the experience of the left in reality, put off by its language, its obsession with the minutiae of the miniscule differences between the different groups, the centralism, lack of democracy and dogmatic repetition of old tracts without any concept of how these relate to real peoples experience and problems in the first few years of the 21st century.

Many have, in their rejection of these sterile sects, come to reject the socialist groups' concentration upon the working class: "Surely this shows that the socialists are just like all the other political movements placing an abstract concept ahead of the interests of real people. Won't this just result in the rule of yet another privileged group?"

This is a mistake. The working class is important not in itself (although today the working class makes up the majority of people who populate the world, and no humanist worthy of the name could ignore them) but as the agency through whom we can liberate all humanity.

All class societies have seen a division between those who produce the wealth of that society and those who control that wealth. What makes modern society, capitalism, different is that that division has never before been so stark. A tiny minority control all the means of producing wealth: all the mines, all the factories, all the resources needed and all the means of distributing and exchanging the goods produced. The vast majority produce all the wealth in society whilst having no control over how that wealth is used.

The minority, the ruling class, are not united; they are like a clan of feuding brothers, constantly competing in the struggle for higher profits and finite markets. In doing so they constantly strive to force down the living standards of the majority, the working class.

The working class is therefore compelled to fight back in order to survive. As our rulers have control of the state and its police, courts and armies, workers are forced to use the only power available to them and organise collectively at the workplace, where they can hurt the one thing that our rulers care most about - profit.

It is this compulsion to resist and ability to organise collectively which provides the possibility of overthrowing the rule of capitalism and, because the working class own and control no property of their own and thus exploit no one else, provides the possibility of ending class rule altogether.

In freeing themselves they free all of humanity.

How is it that the socialists have fixated on the means and forgotten the end? And the radical greenish left has kept hold of the dream whilst losing the means of achieving it?

So long as class society has existed there have been men and women who have dreamed, and fought, for a better world free of oppression and exploitation.

Modern socialism was born in the aftermath of the French revolution. This revolution, which saw the victory of modern capitalist society over its predecessor, feudalism, was fought under the slogans of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'

**"socialists are
fundamentalist humanists,
extremist humanists"**

and the 'Rights Of Man'.

The reality of capitalist rule, and the horrendous effects of the industrial revolution, which was beginning in the cities of Britain, repelled people who were inspired by the slogans and ideas of the revolution. Thus they sought a means of applying those principles without the corruption of capitalism.

Some, such as Babeuf and Blanqui, strived to purify the revolution by their own revolutionary zeal forming small, courageous groups to overthrow the new order. Others like Saint-Simon and Fourier developed grand schemes, based on reason and justice, that they tried to convince the rulers of different nations to adopt.

Some others like Britain's Robert Owen tried to create new ideal communities free from the horrors and indignities of class rule.

These brave men and women have become known as the 'utopian socialists', and this has become a term of abuse. This is unfair: the schemes and plans that they made were built on their true commitment to the liberation of mankind, but they had no means of putting their plans into reality.

Karl Marx shared with the utopians anger at the betrayal of the ideals of the French revolution and their dream of a just and fair society in which humanity could achieve its full potential. His analysis of the nature of the new economics of capitalism showed him that the workers, far from being simply the victims of the "dark satanic mills" of the industrial revolution, were instead the source of all the wealth being produced by this new society and held the key to the liberation of all mankind. For Marx, humanism, the liberation of all humanity, was the starting point and the end point of everything that he did.

By the beginning of the 20th century, socialism had become a mass phenomenon: large parties, containing tens of thousands of members, attracting millions of votes, and organising trades unions, educational and sporting associations, were in place across all of Western Europe and North America.

These parties were organised into an international association, the 2nd (or socialist) International (the first international was formed by British and other European socialists and trades unionists in the 1860s, and had Karl Marx on its general council), and grew in the brief period of peace and prosperity in Europe that lasted from the 1880s through to 1914.

This peaceful prosperity was, however, built upon the riches stolen from the rest of the world, as the rulers of Europe indulged in a blood-soaked orgy of imperial competition that was eventually to end in the blood and trenches of Flanders.

The socialists at the time developed theories that forgot the essential human element to Marx's socialist vision. Because Marx had argued that workers would inevitably fight back against exploitation, they argued this meant that the revolution itself was inevitable, and therefore, all they had to do was carry on their legal and electoral work, and wait for the 'glorious day'.

This mechanical view of socialism robbed it of any relation to humanism, and the banner and dream was kept alive by just a few revolutionaries, who grouped themselves in anarchist and syndicalist groups, disgusted with the timidity and formalism of the official parties.

The world of these 'socialists' collapsed when the First World War broke out. Socialist leaders, who had invoked the brotherhood of man and pledged to overthrow any government that tried to send

them to war, now trumpeted the glories of 'the nation' and fed millions into the slaughter factories of the Western Front.

The challenge to these charlatans came from Russia. The socialists there kept alive the central belief in the revolutionary potential of the working class and the goal of human liberation. They were able to do so because the conditions of illegality in which they worked never allowed them the comfortable offices, and those equally comfortable theories to justify them, of their western colleagues.

But the conditions that the Russians faced were horrendous: 3 years of butchery in war was followed by civil war, foreign invasion, blockade, starvation and disease. In these circumstances humanistic impulses and ideals became submerged in the brutal struggle simply to survive.

Later when the surviving revolutionaries found themselves isolated in a shattered country, and the expected rebellions in the rest of Europe had been defeated, 'the temporary measures' carried out in the struggle to survive increasingly became enshrined as principles.

The revolution itself became increasingly bureaucratized, the democratic organs, the Soviets (workers councils) were replaced with unaccountable officials.

These officials began to develop interests of their own separate from the working class, a process that became identified with the first amongst the new bureaucrats, Stalin, the general secretary of the communist party.

Stalin's rule saw the crushing of all the gains to humanity achieved by the revolution. There was a massive forced drive to industrialisation as the Stalinists sought to compete with the capitalist powers on their own terms. Anybody who argued for democracy or human rights found themselves in the *gulag* - Stalin's slave camps.

The left today has still not recovered from this catastrophe. The resistance to Stalinism was too scattered and too much of the Stalinist method was absorbed by those who sought to oppose it. There is party discipline without free discussion, centralism without democracy; committed socialists are making huge sacrifices for organisations that have lost the dream that inspired those social-

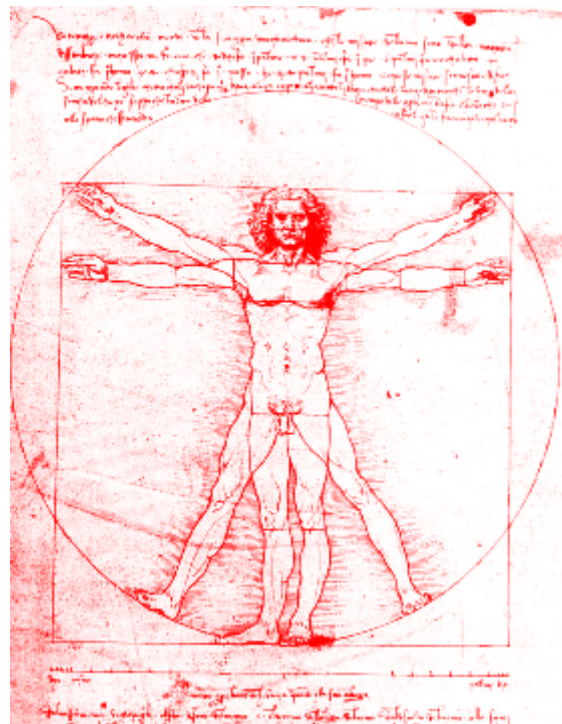
ists in the first place.

Humanism is not just a vision for the future, an ideal to be brought about only after the 'glorious day'. Humanism is a guide for action today. This everyday humanism means treating everybody with respect, taking the real problems and concerns of ordinary people seriously and offering solutions that keep to our principles, but which can, hopefully, make real improvements to their lives.

Everyday humanism applies to the way socialists organise themselves, as well. The socialist party aims to create a truly humanistic society, and cannot do so unless the party itself acts in a humanistic way towards its members, which must mean full democratic control of the members over the organisation.

This must also mean that socialists treat each other in a friendly, comradely way, recognising that political differences over detail or tactics should not hide our common aims.

We are all the product of our own, and our society's, history. "The muck of past ages hangs heavy upon us all". We cannot, this side of the Revolution, free ourselves of the prejudices of capitalism, but we can try, whilst struggling to achieve it, to make our party the best advert possible for that future ★



red ★ star

paper of the red party: for socialism, humanism, and democracy



about the red party

Thank you for reading the Red Star. We hope it has been of interest. The Red Star is published by the Red Party.

We are socialists, and say that the world's problems arise not from weaknesses in particular governments or laws, but because society is organised to produce profit for the few, rather than meet the needs of all.

We are humanists, and say that the freedom and happiness of human beings should be the measure of all politics: not money, nations, races, or gods.

We are democrats, and say that once power is wielded by all humanity and not just a small ruling class, ordinary people can solve their own problems by governing themselves.

The ruling class will not give up their power willingly: they must be overthrown. The strength to do this lies in the hands of the ordinary working people: but only if we are conscious of that strength, and act together.

We need a party to create that awareness, and organise the struggle to exercise that strength. The Red Party is not that party: merely a handful of people who aim to help build it.

The left has lost its way. Groups have turned socialism into an arcane scriptural discipline, and fought amongst themselves over the purity of their understanding. They speak a language no-one else understands, in a voice no-one else can hear.

The left is forgetting its principles. Groups suppress internal dissent and place great personal pressures on their own comrades. We must not only fight for democracy and humanism in the future, we must apply them in our own organisations.

We recognise comradeship with all socialists in every organisation and in none: we call on them to work together to build a party which represents not some particular 'version' of socialism, but represents the working class itself. It must be democratic to allow the debate we need if we are to make the right decisions, and united in acting on those decisions if we are to change the world.

The Red Party was formed on July 18, 2004, and is very small and very new. We hope our paper will grow in the the breadth of its contributors and circulation as we do. We have prepared a simple statement of our politics, affectionately known as the tiny red book. It is available from our website. Read it. If you support its politics, join us, and if you don't, tell us why.

contact us

If you have something to ask, or something to say, don't hesitate to contact us. The Red Party can be reached by...

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