

weekly  
**worker**



**The decline of Blairism,  
the Labour Party and the  
tasks of communists**

- Students fight on
- CPGB aggregate
- PCSU strike called off
- ESF and left unity

No 513

Thursday January 29 2004

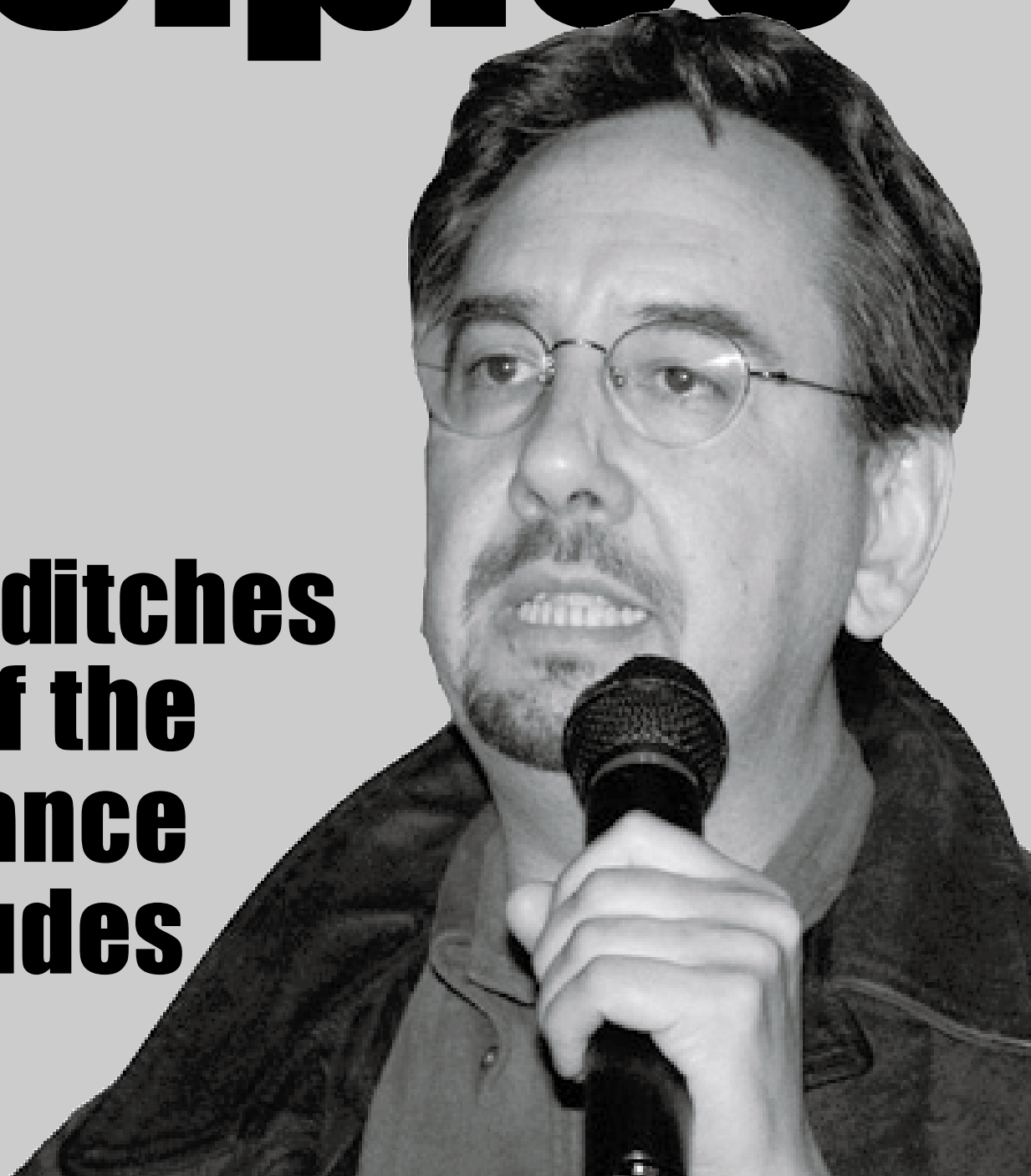
Towards a new workers' party

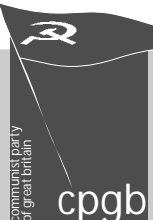
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# A bonfire of principles

● **John Rees ditches  
the politics of the  
Socialist Alliance  
for the platitudes  
of Respect**





## PARTYnotes

# No respect for equality

Ironically one of the 'shibboleths' voted down by the Socialist Workers Party majority at the January 25 convention was the second letter in the Respect acronym. 'E' supposedly stands for 'equality'. Sadly the brief motion, ably moved by Lesley Mahmood, which would have committed all our elected representatives to take a personal salary equal to the average skilled worker - the balance being donated to the movement - was overwhelmingly defeated.

Of course, this principle has a long and honourable history. Fredrick Engels famously highlighted two "infallible means" used by the 1871 Paris Commune to guard against the "inevitable" danger of the "transformation of the state and the organs of the state from servants of society into masters of society". Firstly, it filled all posts - administrative, judicial and educational - "by election on the basis of universal suffrage of all concerned, subject to the right of recall at any time by the same electors". And, secondly, all officials were paid "only the wages received by other workers". The highest salary paid to anyone was 6,000 francs. In this way "an effective barrier to place-hunting and careerism was set up" (K Marx and F Engels CW Vol 27, London 1990, p190).

The Bolsheviks upheld this democratic heritage. In Vladimir Lenin's so-called 'April thesis' we read: "The salaries of all officials, all of whom are elected and displaceable at any time, not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker" (VI Lenin CW Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p23). Later in *State and revolution* Lenin argued for the growing "equality of wages" as a step towards introducing labour certificates and finally realising a communist society, where need, not hours worked, determines consumption.

True, the Bolsheviks were forced to conduct a complete about-turn over 'bourgeois experts' in 1918. To dissuade them from going over to the whites in the erupting civil war and to get them to work diligently and effectively, engineers, agronomists, scientists, etc were generously bribed by the Soviet Republic. Nevertheless till the Stalinite counterrevolution within the revolution and the first five-year plan no Communist Party member was allowed to earn more than a skilled worker. SWP founder Tony Cliff rightly said that this provision was "of great importance" (T Cliff *State capitalism in Russia* London 1974, p68).

And only three years ago the SWP experienced no problem over this principle in the Socialist Alliance. Indeed there was unanimity amongst us. Every one of our 98 candidates in the 2001 general election - not least our chair, Dave Nellist, the former Coventry North East MP - proudly proclaimed that they were altogether different from the self-seeking career politicians who dominate the establishment parties. They would be a workers' representative on a worker's wage. Tommy Sheridan and the Scottish Socialist Party made the same pledge and won considerable esteem as a result. Today their six MSPs live on something like £23,000. Roughly half the official Holyrood salary.

This approach was unproblematically extended to the entire labour movement. *People before profit* - the SA's election manifesto - demands that trade union officials must be regu-

larly elected, accountable and "receive the average wage of the workers they represent" (p7). Ditto a recent pamphlet, jointly penned by Martin Smith, SWP industrial organiser, and Dave Hayes, a central committee member. After slating the "astronomical" salaries enjoyed by the trade union bureaucracy, they confidently promise that "a rank and file trade union official" would be expected to take home the "average wage of the workers he or she represents" (M Smith and D Hayes *The awkward squad* London 2003, p26).

Equality in the abstract is easy and can even pass for profundity. Eg, Alex Callinicos boldly says that to "demand equality is to propose revolution" (A Callinicos *Equality* Cambridge 2000, p128). However, it is only when there is a price to pay - eg, a government ban, temporary unpopularity, loss of big names - do we really discover who is genuine, serious and worthwhile and who is a mere poser.

The right and centre of the German Social Democratic Party showed their true colours in August 1914 by treacherously voting for the kaiser's war budget. The SWP did the same on January 25 2004. Its leaders like to parade themselves as committed Marxists in books and articles and at meetings. But they fail to practice what they preach. In the name of clever manoeuvring and furthering the real movement principles are casually sacrificed ... a course which if pursued to its logical conclusion must result in complete prostration before the existing order.

Even today, though, *Socialist Worker* reeks of hypocrisy when lambasting turncoats such as Charles Clarke, Diane Abbott and Nick Brown for betraying their principles (the same applies to International Socialist Group/Resistance leader Alan Thorne who suddenly reckons he no longer knows what an average skilled workers' wage means).

Presumably the SWP calculated that sticking to a workers' representative on a worker's wage might risk George Galloway storming out. He is the sitting MP for Kelvin Glasgow, and we are breezily informed will top Respect's list in London on 'super Thursday' - June 10. Galloway has publicly stated that he needs a minimum of £150,000 if he is "to function properly as a leading figure in a part of the British political system."

Prominent SWPers, crucially John Rees and Lindsey German, vociferously defended Galloway at the convention. He has done sterling work for the Stop the War Coalition, had never claimed expenses, etc, etc. But our intention was never to single out or attack Galloway. Unlike others we prioritise politics, not personalities. Comrade Mahmood did not even mention Galloway. Instead she simply explained why we should stay true to our principles. Without them our movement becomes nothing but an empty husk.

Meanwhile in Brussels the governments of France, Sweden and Austria backed Germany in torpedoing attempts to overhaul the system of MEPs' wages and their "lavish, no-questions-asked expenses", which sees them pocketing an extra £10,000 simply by flying on budget airlines (*The Guardian* January 27). Under the proposed reform British MEPs would

have got a 30% pay rise, from £55,000 to about £72,000. Maybe not enough for George, but a nice little earner nevertheless.

What is at stake is not just upholding the principle of equality, but the class orientation of Respect and, for that matter, its main component, the SWP. At first sight this may seem an exaggeration. Do not Galloway and Rees demand the repeal of Tory anti-trade union laws? Do they not oppose privatisation, discrimination, the occupation of Iraq and all imperialist wars? Do they not repeat again and again and again, in glowing language too, that they believe in socialism as a final goal.

All that is true. But the willingness, the *enthusiasm*, to trade away or abandon one principle after another and substitute platitudes for concrete demands is a slippery slope. Both Rees and Galloway appear to think that the less Respect has to say, the more it will attract votes. Hence principles which are solemnly proclaimed one year become merely matters of private belief, or taste, the next. The implication is clear: only by moving further and further to the right can the left garner votes - a caricature of what the SWP used to say about the sorry course plied by successive generations of Labourites.

Under the leadership of John Rees the SWP's craving for respectability is palpable. Increasingly elections are seen not as a means of making propaganda and enhancing class combativity; rather as an opportunity to say what you think people want to hear in a desperate bid to get yourself elected - the fond hope is that lucrative careers as councillors, GLA members, MPs and MEPs beckon.

To achieve that end Respect must be all things to all people. "What you want: we've got it," Galloway promises (*The Guardian* January 27). In other words Respect is a rainbow coalition within which any working class component finds itself listed alongside pensioners, students, muslims and other religious groups, ethnic minorities "and many others" who have been "deeply disappointed by the authoritarian social policies and profit-centred neoliberal economic strategy of the government".

This non-class approach is understandable from Galloway. His background lies in Stalinism, third worldism and left Labourism. But for Rees and the SWP it represents a *practical* collapse into populism, "a form of politics which emphasises the virtues of the uncorrupt and unsophisticated common people against the double-dealing and selfishness to be expected of professional politicians and their intellectual helpers. It can therefore manifest itself in left, right or centrist forms" (A Bullock, O Stallybrass and S Trombley [eds] *The Fontana dictionary of modern thought* London 1988, p668).

There can be no doubt that Respect, even with the addition of Mohammed Naseem of the Birmingham central mosque, is a manifestation of left populism. Nor can there be any doubt that the SWP leadership is nowadays consciously acting as a conduit for bringing petty bourgeois influences into the socialist and workers' movement - not least from their Stop the War Coalition reservoir ●

Jack Conrad

## LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

### Nasty mood

The mood of some Socialist Workers Party members leaving the Respect convention on Sunday was positively foul. Despite the standing ovations for George Galloway and the apparent overwhelming enthusiasm some of them were very touchy indeed.

My presence selling the *Weekly Worker* outside Friends Meeting House at the end of the meeting was enough to bring on an attack of petulance from long-time member Gareth Jenkins. He marched up to me and shouted angrily: "Anne, why don't you fuck off home and die!"

He was followed shortly by Elaine Heffernan, another experienced SWP member, who had spoken against the amendment to insert into the founding statement a call for the abolition of immigration controls. She had done so on the basis that she passionately believed in the need for open borders and had worked all her political life for this aim - but Respect should not campaign for it.

I pointed out to her that on the basis of her speech she should have voted for the amendment. She reacted hysterically, jabbing her finger in my face and shouting that she was trying to "make a difference". I responded that if that was the case she should stand up for what she believes in. This brought on an even more heightened reaction and she began screaming that I was a nutter!

This kind of reaction implies a sad lack of confidence in the new Respect turn. It seems that it was not a comfortable experience for some comrades to vote time and time again against principles that they have campaigned for all their political lives. Good.

Anne Mc Shane  
email

### Kilroy-Silk

In his article on the Robert Kilroy-Silk 'Arab-bashing' scandal, comrade Manny Neira makes the comment: "Crude, overt racism, of the kind Kilroy has foolishly betrayed, is one of the few things which is culturally simply unacceptable even in *reactionary* mainstream politics, but it is despised more for its *gaucheness* that for any real concern for the peoples of various ethnicities" (original emphasis, "What have the Arabs ever done for us?" *Weekly Worker* January 15).

I cannot entirely agree with this assessment - in so far as I understand it. Firstly, surely *by definition* "mainstream" politics (be it "reactionary" or not) is ideologically anti-racist/fascist: that is precisely what makes it mainstream. Conversely, to subscribe to a racist ideology, as things stand now in the post-World War II United Kingdom, is to loudly announce yourself as not part of the mainstream (ie, to be a "reactionary", so to speak).

With this in mind, comrade Neira's contention that "crude" racism is "one of the few things" which is "unacceptable even in reactionary mainstream" politics becomes a bit nonsensical. If you are moving in *genuinely* "reactionary" circles, then to be a racist could well be quite acceptable - though you might well tone it down on occasions for obvious tactical reasons. On the other hand, if you part of the authentic mainstream in UK politics, then there are *many* things which are "simply unacceptable", not just racism of course - eg, fascism, homophobia, religious fundamentalism, misogynistic sexism, child abuse, paedophilia, vulgar, tub-thumping jingoism, fox hunting(?), etc.

Therefore, it seems to me that it is a mistake to posit the idea, as comrade Neira appears to do, that the real reason

why Kilroy-Silk has upset the mainstream establishment is due to the fact that his daft article in the *Express on Sunday* has in some way inadvertently exposed the racist beast lurking behind the multicultural pieties of our leaders - or, as Manny phrases it, the errant daytime TV presenter is despised primarily for his "*gaucheness*" rather than for the actual ideas themselves.

Not so, I would contend. You can be quite confident that the British political establishment is very concerned about "the peoples of various ethnicities" who compose the UK population - that is, it wants to make sure that they identify with the British nation and its official values and ideologies. Official/bourgeois anti-racism exists for a material reason - to promote a culture of supplication and jobbery to the benign, Nazi-defeating UK state. (Want a new community centre? Just tick the correct ethnic box and the local government bosses will see what they can do.)

Secondly, I do not think it is the case that Robert Kilroy-Silk, odious though he is for all sorts of reasons, subscribes to "crude, overt racism" - indeed, to *any* form of racism at all, if we are to be serious about language. Anyone who has watched his show more than a few times should realise this. He rarely misses an opportunity to remind his viewers that his father died during World War II fighting fascism for the timeless values of democracy, decency, tolerance, etc. More to the point, Kilroy-Silk is ever keen to excoriate guests who espouse racist sentiments (or for that matter any communalist/separatist views at all) and *always* emphasise his belief that blacks, Asians, muslims, Jews, etc are as British as he is - so long as they accept the laws and customs of the land, which of course should be applied equally to all.

But it is here where we come to the rub. Kilroy-Silk's anti-racism is mediated through a sometimes quite aggressive *national chauvinism* - hence a consistent theme on his shows is the threat posed by having just *too* many 'outsiders' (eg, asylum-seekers, illegal immigrants, so-called health/benefit tourists, etc). For Kilroy-Silk - and you can bet your bottom dollar he believes this most sincerely - if the UK is 'flooded' by asylum-seekers/refugees, etc, it poses a threat to the delicate multiculturalist/anti-racist consensus which generations of respectable politicians, like himself, have struggled to build (in the face of resistance by high patricians like Enoch Powell and the rather more plebeian National Front). Naturally, such a message finds favour in tabloid land, as one of its primary functions is to install a permanent siege mentality amongst its readers.

So here, I think, we come to the rather less excitable truth about the Robert Kilroy-Silk affair. His role for the *Express on Sunday* is to act as a journalistic 'shock-jock', which means you get paid per (illiberal) outrage. This in essence requires chiming in to whatever is the prevailing prejudice, or fear, that is running wild in so-called 'Middle England', which - yes, you guessed it - is centred at the moment on the 'war against terrorism', Iraq and Saddam, fanatical muslims, etc. Being a bit shameless - and maybe even genuinely stupid about these matters: who knows? - Kilroy-Silk had no inhibitions about playing to the gallery and of course cashing the very handsome cheque.

We should always think at least twice before crying 'racism' and we need to put clear red water between *our* anti-racism and theirs.

Don Preston  
Bristol

### Fixes

It is never a very good idea to hang an argument on a snippet of a pub conversation. I refer to Manny Neira's article calling for improved accountability of the

Communist Party's Provisional Central Committee ('A modest proposal' *Weekly Worker* January 15). I am the unnamed "leading comrade" he mentions. According to comrade Neira, I said that regular distribution of minutes of PCC meetings and an agenda item on those minutes at members' aggregates would "prevent the leadership from acting". Further, I supposedly said the proposals reveal Manny to be an anti-communist and an anarchist. Blimey. What a bastard I must be.

Let us clear this up. Yes, I used the word "anarchist" in a pub kind of way. (By the way, I don't recall calling him anti-communist... but hey, we'd all had a few. I hear he called me a Stalinist over Christmas... but what's a few pejoratives between comrades.) But to what was I referring? Not to what Manny says. In the conversation, comrade Neira stated that the role of the PCC was merely to implement decisions of the aggregate. It is this that I said was anarchistic. His written formulation is somewhat different. He writes: "It is the role of the PCC to implement the programme and policy of the group as a whole." This is better, but I even have problems with this. The PCC has a duty to initiate action, switch tactics at a moment's notice, issue instructions, take and act on reports from members and committees. It must also develop the programme and policy of the group, not just implement it. It must develop theory. In fact, the PCC does not do enough of this work. Changes should, of course, be taken to the membership for thorough debate and voting.

To restrict the PCC to mere implementation of aggregate decisions would hobble the organisation. Due to time the aggregate usually only considers the most important strategic and tactical questions. It cannot and should not consider all the details and business of the organisation. While a member has the right to bring any of this up at its proceedings, it should not be the usual business. Not even week-long congresses of mass parties have the time for every detail. That is why we elect a leadership - to entrust it with the day-to-day running of the organisation.

Is this just nit-picking? I do not think so. At the heart of Manny's argument is the need for the organised distrust of the leadership. There seems to be a desire for technical solutions to possible political problems and deviations. What are the buggers up to? Is the leadership merely a minority, albeit a special one, given the authority to carry out the instructions of the membership? Or is it representative of the entire organisation with the duty to initiate activity in between aggregates? Is it a part or a whole? I think this is the main difference.

Now to Manny's proposals. On the first one, there is an open door. I think the PCC should distribute a report of its meeting to the membership. It is indispensable. I used to do this and was an initiator of the practice. Due to pressures of work it tended to be put down the 'to do' list until it eventually dropped off for a while. It is quite correct to demand its restitution. And PCC reports have now been restarted.

However, there is a difference between reports and minutes. Manny asks for minutes; I suggest reports. Minutes are a record of all decisions of a meeting. Some aspects of the PCC's work relating to the party's activities should be on a 'need to know' basis. I think this is uncontroversial. Such activities are the exception, of course. In a period of legality such as we find ourselves in, almost all of our work is in the public domain. This is a nuanced difference, but an important one.

I reject the notion that it is up to the aggregate to "formally approve" the minutes of the PCC. It is up to the PCC to approve its minutes, not some other meeting. How can people who were not there approve them as a true record?

The CPGB aggregate can take motions on any subject from members. It can recall individual members of the PCC or elect a new leadership. Its agenda is

proposed by the PCC, but is open to amendment by the aggregate itself. Aggregates meet, on average, about every six weeks. In general, we have time for two or three items of discussion.

I am sure people will accept that the minutes of the PCC are for the PCC to approve. However, I would oppose a permanent agenda item on 'What the PCC has been up to', which is essentially what Manny suggests. Not only would it take up time unnecessarily: it would build into the functioning of the organisation an incorrect culture regarding the relationship between the membership as a whole and the leadership. Given the nature of communist organisation, the leadership is entrusted to act as the whole between conferences or aggregates. It is not merely a 'part' of the organisation to be monitored by the membership, but the manifestation of its totality between aggregates. Yes, the PCC is accountable to the whole organisation, but to embed in this interaction an organised mistrust is to undermine effectiveness and morale.

Notwithstanding that, any action or decision of the PCC is open to criticism and review by the aggregate. It is the responsibility of the aggregate to pursue this, which is not achieved by putting a permanent item on the agenda calling the PCC to account. That should be an integral part of our culture - at cell meetings, in the press, at seminars and any other formal or informal party forum. There are no technical fixes when it comes to developing a strong critical culture.

**Marcus Ström**  
London

## Critical support

Before reading the article, 'A modest proposal', I was thinking of doing my bit for socialism and at least paying to be a supporter (*Weekly Worker* January 22). I won't be thinking about it now: I will be subscribing.

Being an ex-SWP member (twice now!), I support a lot of what they say, especially Tony Cliff's knowledge of Marxism. But I've been reading your web page for a while and I think at least you are more open than the SWP has become.

I think you are making a lot of mistakes like the far left used to do (like the Revolutionary Communist Party) and I will be very critical of the CPGB, but being a paid up supporter is at least better than do-

ing nothing.  
**Ex-SWP member**  
email

## No association

Mark Fischer asks, "Who is Mick O'Connell?" (Letters, January 22). He is correct that, although a frequent reader of the *Weekly Worker*, I have "had no association with the CPGB whatsoever".

The reason is that your organisation has little to offer militant, working class activists such as myself. We don't want paper sales and lengthy ideological debates, but effective activity amongst the class. If someone like me is put off joining, how do you hope to win over the working class at large?

**Mick O'Connell**  
email

## Principled

I attended the first meeting of Manchester Socialist Alliance Democracy Platform on January 14, called by Stockport SA. The top table consisted of Barry Biddulph (chair) and John Pearson.

Peter Money of the International Socialist League stated that if minimum demands were not passed by the Respect convention then the Democracy Platform should walk and the SA should do likewise. Bruce Robinson of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty said that Gallopy was a major problem and the AWL would not go into Respect.

Barry Biddulph launched into an attack on the CPGB, and particularly Marcus Ström, for the way he said we had latched onto the coat tails of the SWP. He accused the CPGB of abandoning the SA and liquidating ourselves into Respect. He was full of praise for the 'principled' stand of the AWL and ISL. The CPGB were the right wing of the DP and had to be watched!

**Will Cross**  
Rochdale

## Middle class

I am a member of the middle class, but I really believe in the things written under 'Immediate demands' in the Communist Party *Draft programme*, and on the CPGB website. But does my social status prevent me from joining the Communist Party?

**Jon Owen**  
email

## Fighting fund

## Best source

It really has been a week: another Mars landing, the foundation of Respect, Blair's narrow escape over tuition fees, the Hutton whitewash and, to cap it all, the transport chaos in the south of England that came with this year's first flurry of snow showers across the country. As things turned out, January has been an interesting month for our fighting fund too. To begin with, we were moving slow: far too slow... and now suddenly here we are in surplus. We have £520 in hand - and still with a couple of days left to go.

We got an excellent boost from PF, one of our many web readers, who paid through PayPal. The comrade says that the *Weekly Worker*, "for all its one-sidedness", is the "best source of information about what is going on in the left today - especially with the SWP and Respect and all that." Thanks for the compliment, comrade, and thanks for the £60 donation too. And can I assure you that none of us in the *Weekly Worker* team are complacent. We are well aware

that the range of issues we cover needs expanding. Nevertheless, what we do we try and do well. That was shown by our healthy sales at the Respect conference on January 25.

Another £50 came from ES, who calls himself a "lazy" supporter, and this week's fund was rounded off with £15 from comrade OG. She hopes her "little" contribution will help and adds that the flow of funds is "sure to pick up once January is over!" Naturally I share that optimism. But, as always, we do not rely on fate, luck or anything mystical... we rely, as ever, on you, our readers.

As is customary, just a few words on last week's circulation. We notched up 9,165 e-readers and that, plus our estimate of print-readers, keeps us just over the 10,000 mark. No fewer than 1,114 copies of *Weekly Worker* 512 were downloaded.

**Robbie Rix**

Ask for a bankers order form,  
or send cheques, payable to  
Weekly Worker

# ACTION

## London Communist Forum

Sunday February 1, 5pm: 'Marx-Engels versus de Tocqueville', part two, using August Nimtz's *Marx and Engels - their contribution to the democratic breakthrough* as a study guide.

Sunday February 8, 5pm: 'Moribund capitalism and George Bush's Mars mission'. Speaker: Jack Conrad.

Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 (nearest tubes: Regents Park, Great Portland Street).

## Europe-wide action on asylum

**Friday January 30**

*Picket of parliament*: 11am, St Stephens Gate. Release all detainees. For an unconditional 'Blunkett amnesty' for all asylum-seekers and migrants without status.

*Protest outside Daily Mail*: Derry Street (nearest tube: High Street Kensington), 5.30pm.

**Saturday January 31**

*Mass leafleting*: Waterloo station, 12 noon to 2pm, highlighting connection with Eurostar's reception centre for asylum-seekers.

*Demonstration*: No Fortress Europe - 2pm, Church Street (near the Podium), Liverpool.

*Noise demonstration*: Close down Lindholme removal/detention centre. Meet 12 noon, Tyrham Hall Hotel, South Yorkshire (on the A614, south of Hatfield Woodhouse).

## Labour left and trade unions

Debate, Sunday February 1, 2pm, Calthorpe Arms, Gray's Inn Road (corner Wren Street), London WC1. Speakers: Graham Bash, Labour Left Briefing; Pete Firmin, Workers Action; Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

Organised by Workers Action.

## Stop BNP

Open discussion meeting to develop a strategy to counter anti-working class politics of BNP. Open University Conference Centre, 344-354 Grays Inn Road (next to Lloyds bank), Kings Cross, London, Thursday February 5, 7pm. Speakers include Mark Metcalf (*Revolutions Per Minute*).

Organised by London Corresponding Committee.

## Embassy picket

Israel out of the occupied territories. Free the refuseniks. For a Palestinian state with the same rights as Israel. 5.30pm to 7pm, Monday February 9, Israeli embassy, Kensington High Street/Kensington Court (nearest tube: High Street Kensington).

Committee for Two States, P O Box 28124, London SE6 4WS; 07748 185553; outnow@actionforsolidarity.org.uk

## CPGB history

Conference and exhibition, People's History Museum, the Pump House, 1 Bridge Street, Manchester M3.

Conference: The CPGB and its history, Saturday February 2

Exhibition: The story of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Open until Sunday April 25, Tuesday-Sunday, 11am to 4.30pm. Entrance: £1; children and concessions: free. First Friday of the month: 'Bluffer's guide to CPGB' tour. 0161-839 6061; karenm@peopleshistorymuseum.org.uk

## Labour democracy

Campaign for Labour Party Democracy annual general meeting, Saturday February 21, 11am-4pm, Conway Hall. Speakers include Billy Hayes, general secretary CWU, and Alice Mahon MP.

## Stop the War Coalition

Annual conference, Saturday February 28, 10am (registration from 9am), Camden Centre, London (opposite Kings Cross station).

Up to four delegates from each local group, two from affiliates. National individual members may attend as observers. Register with STWC office no later than Saturday February 14. £10 per delegate/observer.

## RDG

To contact the Revolutionary Democratic Group, email rdgroup@yahoo.com

## Socialist Alliance

Creative House, 82-90 Queensland Road, London N7 7AS; 020-7609 2999; office@socialistalliance.net

## Convention of the Trade Union Left

Saturday February 7 2004, 11am to 5pm (registration from 10am), Friends Meeting House, Euston, London (nearest tubes: Euston, Euston Road). Union sponsors include: London region Unison; London region FBU; London Transport region RMT; London region GMB; Essex committee FBU; Cambridge and District Trade Union Council; Natfhe Western Region; Yorkshire and District Natfhe. Speakers include Bob Crow, general secretary RMT; Mark Serwotka, general secretary PCSU; Billy Hayes, general secretary CWU; Paul Mackney, general secretary Natfhe.

Organised by Socialist Alliance, tu-convention@yahoo.co.uk

## National conference

Saturday March 13, 10.30am to 4pm, London, venue to be confirmed.

Motions on two items only: (a) Socialist Alliance and Respect; (b) method of electing SA national executive. Deadline: Friday February 13. Submit to office@socialistalliance.net as attachment (limit for preamble to motions - 250 words). Deadline for amendments: Monday March 1.

Registration fee: £10 (£4 unwaged). Pooled fare contribution for London comrades: £10 (£3 unwaged). Travelling expenses capped at discretion of confer

## STUDENTS

Stop Fees Now -  
www.stopfeesnow.com

## Ways to protest

**T**ony Blair has sunk to new lows in trying to get his fees legislation onto the statute books. According to the *Daily Express* (January 27), this included outright blackmail of some backbenchers. It alleges that the MPs he forced to fly back from a junket in Australia will have their £600 expenses denied if they fail to vote the right way. What a dilemma it must have been for them, caught between the rock of principle and the hard place of losing cash.

Nevertheless Blair scraped home by the skin of his teeth, with just five votes in it. So now it is pretty certain that future students will face even more debt upon graduation - that is, unless militant action forces the government to think twice. A lot depends on what the National Union of Students decides to do next. If its campaigning anti-fees website is anything to go by, it does look as if the NUS is not planning to roll over. However, the kinds of campaigning pushed on www.stopfeesnow.com are unlikely to set the world alight.

In terms of design, the website can be safely filed under 'no frills'. Split into three columns, and moving right to left, the first item features a photo of Westminster, with an arrow poised above it. MPs concerned that the 'NUS here' legend is a coded call for an occupation of parliament by angry students should not worry. It is merely the gateway for an NUS-sponsored, face-to-face lobby of our elected 'representatives'. Next is a call to 'Write to your MP'. This page includes hints and tips on how to construct a letter that would make the MP (or rather their assistant) take note. There are also a number of paragraphs that can be downloaded and spliced into the letter, a search device to track down your own MP, and a model letter if you are a bit pressed for time. The next box links to a kind of 'how you can help' page. Instead of giving out addresses, lobby dates and demo details, it is geared toward online activism. For instance, letter writing crops up yet again, along with mailing list details, the facility to forward items to friends and the NUS 'plan of action'. Finally, the column concludes with an 'Apathy quiz' - a nice, irreverent touch.

Moving to the central column, it leads with the number of emails sent to MPs via the site. Once again, there is the option to fire off a letter of protest. The next box links to the site's weblog. The most recent item posted is a short interview with a mature student who under the existing fee payment scheme owes £20,000 and he argues that the incoming funding plan has not even taken mature students into consideration. There are also a few older items running back to the beginning of the year, with even more exhortations to write to your MP. The next item links to Mandy Telford's reply to Blair's plans, hosted by the NUS site. The last link here is yet another call to send off a protest letter (ever get the feeling that they are trying to channel anti-fees activism in a certain direction?).

The final column is the site navigation bar. The first page listed, 'Issues', is split into three subheadings. 'What's at stake?' sketches the provisions the new legislation will introduce, including the increased commodification of higher education. 'What we want' outlines the chief NUS demands, such as the remission of fees for undergraduate and postgraduate students, restoration of the grant, freezing loan interest rates and restoring benefits. The final part offers 20 key facts around the fees issue. The rest of the navigation bar links to already explored areas of the site, with the exception of the animation. This short clip, by Dr Parsons of *Tony and me* by George Bush fame is entitled 'Night of the living debt'. It has to be said that Charles Clarke does make a pretty convincing zombie, but with one important difference - his cartoon likeness is far more dynamic!

As a campaigning site, it is functional as far as it goes. But, reading between the lines, it appears that the NUS would like to keep protests against fees within certain definite limits, that despite Telford's tough talking. Students looking for a militant reply to Blair's fee offensive might find the odd useful nugget, but will ultimately have to look elsewhere for a strategy that can bury them ●

Phil Hamilton



Students: revolting

# Education for all, not the few

**T**ony Blair's fetish for high-risk politics reached its zenith on January 27, as Charles Clarke's highly controversial Higher Education Bill squeezed through its second reading by just five votes. This bill is still not statute, but it is now past the 'awkward' stage and its being carried represents a defeat for students. Watching Blair from the spectators' gallery as he arrogantly swaggered into parliament, I realised that the chance of this bill being defeated was remote. Weeks of behind-the-scenes arm-twisting, bribery and golden handshakes had proved enough, and Nick Brown's sudden change of heart had doubtless contributed to the broadness of Blair's grin.

Any remaining hopes were immediately dispelled by Clarke's speech on the bill. Pro-fees interventions were little more than staged set-ups by careerist sycophants attempting to justify the concessions that the government had made in order to make this bill slightly less unacceptable. Neither of the main opposition parties had much to contribute, and in many ways what could have been a grilling for the government degenerated into an opportunistic point-scoring exercise.

A few of the Labour rebels highlighted the problem of variability in the bill, and the fact that the government says it needs to charge students for education, while finding no problem in spending whatever it takes on the war and occupation of Iraq. To this Clarke predictably replied that there are scarce resources in this country, and 'national security' must have priority.

This question of spending highlights the false premise upon which Clarke's drive to charge tuition fees is based. Constantly in his speech he portrayed Britain as a poor country, in which someone "must pay" for the educated labour force which is necessary to compete with other countries in the world. Clarke, of course, wants the students to pay for their bog-standard higher education once they become exploitable wage slaves - only the bourgeoisie and upper middle classes will be able to afford the extra fees envisaged by the elite universities in 2008 or 2009.

Nowadays he could not even contemplate the idea that - just as with primary

and secondary education - perhaps the state should pay through raising corporation and other such taxes. Britain is the world's fourth richest country, and certainly has the resources necessary whereby a first rate further education can be the right of all, an integral part of becoming an adult human, instead of a commodified thing which is bought and sold.

Blair's drive to subordinate every public service to this kind of massively subsidised pseudo-market stems from the contradictions of state monopoly capitalism itself: on the one hand from an inability of anything run along purely capitalist lines to deliver universal provision without incurring astronomical and spiralling costs, and on the other the inevitable failure of bureaucratic controls to allocate in an efficient manner according to need. This exposes New Labour for what it is - the servant of a capitalism which long ago become exhausted and fit for nothing except the historical graveyard.

If only there had been somebody to put forward a working class alternative in parliament: the Tories want to freeze the number of university places, whereas the Liberal Democrats' posing is just another attempt to win votes - any leftist commitments or, dare it be said, principles that they claim to possess were exposed in their about-turn after the invasion of Iraq. Charles Kennedy was granted a place on the platform at the huge February 15 2003 demonstration - only to come out in support of 'our boys and girls' a few weeks later.

If the situation within parliament itself was depressing enough, so too was the action outside. A mere 400 or so showed up to demonstrate.

It must be obvious that we students are already having a rough time of it at the moment. Debt is the order of the day. Fees may be paid on behalf of poorer students (something which will largely remain the same under the new proposals) but this is but a small part of the equation. Students are often charged ludicrous amounts for cramped and run-down accommodation and have to take low-paid and menial employment, where union rights are non-existent. At the other end of the stick, we are exploited as consumers and stereotyped as debauched party-goers.

Even without top-up fees it is still the

case that the best education is mostly reserved for the privileged - look at the percentage of private school students in the top 10 universities, for example. Look at the 10 lowest ranked, and the results are somewhat different.

Clarke's Higher Education Bill will only exacerbate this dire situation. Sooner or later the top universities will be allowed to charge far above the £3,000 annual limit. Admittedly, after one of Clarke's concessions, this would now require further legislation, but, given the supine nature of most MPs and the swings and roundabouts of parliamentary majorities, this represents a minor problem.

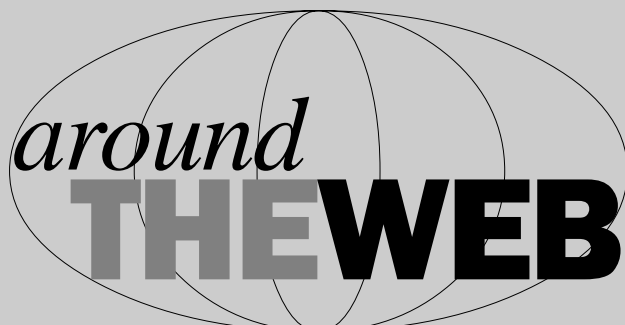
Australia is a good example - since the introduction of top-up fees in 1989, student applications for the most expensive (and thus the best) courses from working class students has fallen by nearly 40% (Sheffield Students Union leaflet.) It is thus evident that we may soon have a handful of well financed universities as a result of this, but these will be competitive only in a Harvard or Princeton sense - brilliant university education enjoyed only by those who come from a rich background and who confidently expect to be rich themselves.

The fragmentation of revolutionary youth into a plethora of sects again raises the question of how students, and indeed the wider workers' movement, should organise in order to resist these attacks. There is crying need for a revolutionary party. Most students are convinced of the objective necessity for change, yet the absence of a party only makes future attacks even more probable.

To counterattack and help rally students to the fight for a Communist Party we fight for:

- Education as a right, not a privilege.
- No tuition fees - tax the companies who will exploit tomorrow the labour of today's students.
- Students over the age of 16 to receive grants set at the level of the minimum wage.
- The right of every young person on leaving education to either a job, proper training or full benefits.
- The provision of low-cost housing/hostels for youth, including students, to enter of their own choice for longer or shorter periods ●

Ben Lewis



## CPGB AGGREGATE

# Labour and Respect

**A**n aggregate of CPGB members held on Saturday January 24 voted overwhelmingly to accept the theses on the Labour Party printed below. Comrades also discussed the prospects for the Respect coalition founding convention, which was held the following day. The discussions are linked, in that both concern the future direction of Party work.

Comrade John Bridge introduced the debate on the Labour Party theses. Labour has always served two masters: the trade union bureaucracy which set it up, and the imperialist ruling class - in the Blair era mainly the latter. But its history, finances and voting structure reflect its trade union roots, and in recent years the left has revived in the trade unions. Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party. The Socialist Party in England and Wales explicitly denies this. So does the Scottish Socialist Party. Comrade Bridge emphasised that he does not think the left could ever 'reclaim' the Labour Party for socialism - it was never in its entire history a vehicle for socialism. But like the trade unions, the Socialist Alliance, Scottish Socialist Party and Respect, the Labour Party is a legitimate area of intervention for communists. We certainly need to understand its internal politics far better.

Only the last sentence of this number 17 proved controversial in the debate. Comrade Lee Rock said it is absolutely untrue that our fight for a Communist Party is "inseparable" from work in the Labour Party. Our key task is not Labour Party entryism, and if it was we do not have the forces for it. Mike Macnair agreed that we do not have the resources to set up our own paper inside the Labour Party - we would have to collaborate with socialists already there. Anyone selling the *Weekly Worker* would be expelled. Marcus Ström reminded comrades that social change in Britain will come about fundamentally through the millions who vote Labour, not through the left. He suggested that our intervention should initially be mainly literary, rather than beavering away in ward Labour Parties. Comrade Stan Keable argued that writing about something from the outside

is not as effective as being part of it, and is not our tradition.

While agreeing that the Labour Party remains a bourgeois workers' party, comrade Ian Donovan said there is a qualitative difference between previous reformist Labour governments and the current government, which was elected on an overtly anti-working class and pro-war programme. It would never be correct to call for a vote for Blair. However, elements at the base of the Labour Party are starting to rebel against the delabourisation of Labour, which makes for an interesting situation.

All comrades agreed that we should keep our options open in the current fluid political climate, which means working in many spheres. As comrade Donovan put it, our perspectives are not clear because the situation is not clear. Comrade Macnair suggested that if the political cycle in Britain continues, the place to

be is in the Labour Party, to try to influence its left wing when the Blairites are replaced in office by the Tories. But if the two-party cycle has been broken in this unusual period of Blairism and the left reaction to it, then Respect should be the focus of our work.

Opening the debate on the Respect Coalition, comrade Ström outlined the factors which led up to it - principally the failure of the Socialist Alliance. It is an attempt by the Socialist Workers Party to cohere something political from the huge anti-war movement which sprung up in 2003. Some say that this means Respect is emerging from a success, unlike previous attempts to build an alternative to the Labour Party which resulted from failures - the Socialist Labour Party from the defeat of the miners' Great Strike 20 years ago, and the Socialist Alliance from the expulsion of the Militant Tendency from the Labour Party and the removal of clause four from its programme. Comrade Ström made the point that Respect also emerged from a defeat for the left - the virtual closing down of the SA during the anti-war upsurge.

It is impossible to predict what will happen up to June 10. But it is correct for us to join Respect, to fight inside it for democratic and socialist policies, and to report in the *Weekly Worker* on suc-

cesses and failures. And if Respect becomes a block on working class advance or a retrogressive retreat into non-class populism we should report on that too, said comrade Ström.

Comrade John Bridge described Respect as a crude attempt to transfer the success of the anti-war movement to the electoral field. The attempt to gain votes by endlessly diluting political principles cannot succeed, and will destabilise the SWP. When small groups encounter success, this can often be a prelude to their collapse if they are not armed with a correct Marxist programme. He agreed that we should work inside Respect, because our main political opponents, the SWP, are there, along with a (much reduced) range of other working class militants. As with the Labour Party, we shall seek not only to comment but to gather in the organised human material necessary to forge the revolutionary Communist Party the working class needs.

At the end of the meeting comrade Manny Neira put forward a short motion on democratic centralism, calling for decisions of the Provisional Central Committee to be formally approved by aggregates as a matter of routine. In view of the lack of time for sufficient discussion this was not put to the vote ●

Mary Godwin

### New PCC

**Elections to the Provisional Central Committee, the Party's leadership body, took place during the aggregate. The existing full members were re-elected, and Tina Becker, after two years as a candidate member without voting rights, was also elected as a full member of the PCC. Ian Donovan and Peter Manson, editor of the *Weekly Worker*, were also elected as full members.**

## Theses on the Labour Party

**1. The Labour Party came onto the historical agenda only with the ending of Britain's industrial and commercial supremacy. Specifically the trade union bureaucracy turned towards building a Labour Party after the perceived failure of Lib-Labism. However tentative and flawed, in British conditions, the formation of the Labour Party marked a step forward for the real working class movement.**  
**2. Nevertheless the Labour Party was from its birth irredeemably reformist with a leadership militantly opposed to anything that smacked of revolutionary action by the working class. There was never a golden age. Even when the aim of 'socialism' was formally adopted in 1918, it was conceived as a cynical ploy to divert sympathy for the Russian Revolution into safe channels. Needless to say, the Labour Party's version of socialism was antithetical to working class self-liberation. Rather it was a version of state capitalism. Capital would be bureaucratically nationalised and the mass of the population remain exploited wage slaves.**  
**3. Historically - in terms of membership, finances and electoral base - the Labour Party has largely relied on the working class. Politically, however, the Labour Party acts in the spirit of the bourgeoisie and the interests of capital. This is ensured in no small measure by the intermediate social position occupied by the trade union bureaucracy which has a material interest in the continuation of the system of capital. Lenin correctly characterised the Labour Party as a "bourgeois workers' party".**  
**4. From its origins till recent times the Labour Party distinguished itself by championing the social democratic state - full employment, council housing, universal education, social security benefit, the national health service, etc. This 'social ransom' served capital as a**

**way of absorbing social unrest and putting off socialism. The social democratic state is a manifestation of the decline of the law of value and anticipates socialism, albeit negatively.**

**5. Throughout its existence the Labour Party has been rent by a left-right division. There is, however, a symbiotic relationship. The right gains coherence by the serious business of providing the system with a reliable government or, failing that, a responsible opposition. By contrast the left is generally in the business of gestures. It is therefore doomed never to secure any lasting or meaningful control over the Labour Party machine, let alone the commanding heights of the parliamentary Labour Party. Occasional victories are scored by the left - particularly at the annual conference. They serve to maintain the hopes and morale of activists, but do little else other than embarrass or inconvenience the dominant right wing.**

**6. Overcoming Labourism is a central task of communists in Britain. To bury oneself in the bowels of the Labour Party and subordinate everything to staying in there till the glorious day when the class struggle miraculously transforms it into an instrument of socialism is naive at best. At worst it is downright treachery. On the other hand to stand aloof from the Labour Party and its internal disputes and conflicts is as good as useless. It is a sectarian pose.**

**7. Unlike the Social Democratic Federation, the British Socialist Party - which succeeded it - sought and gained affiliation to the Labour Party. Its paper *The Call* constantly attacked Labour's social chauvinist leadership on a principled basis. Lenin urged the newly formed Communist Party of Great Britain - the BSP being the main component source - not only to seek affiliation but to work to put the Labour Party**

**into government. A short-term tactic, not a long-term strategy. Communists had to demand "complete freedom of criticism". Affiliation was therefore a two-pronged tactic. If the Labour leadership rejected CPGB affiliation, that would expose the utter falseness of its claimed commitment to socialism. Likewise putting Labour into office would expose it in practice in front of the whole of the working class.**

**8. Lenin recognised a mass Communist Party in Britain as a burning necessity. Socialism can only come through that revolutionary portal - not a reformed Labour Party nor a new Labour Representation Committee. Lenin knew, however, that a mass CPGB was impossible without the communist vanguard actively and closely cooperating with that broad section of the working class which possesses medium-level class consciousness. Namely the membership and base of the Labour Party.**

**9. Though successive Labour Party conferences rejected CPGB affiliation, communists maintained individual membership. In 1922 two CPGB members were elected as Labour MPs. That presented a constant reformist danger for the CPGB. But such a danger is inevitable when operating within mass organisations of the working class, especially in a country like Britain. The sectarian alternative offers unsullied purity - it is thought of the grave.**

**10. The CPGB was the main driving force behind the formation of the Left Wing Movement in the 1920s. Its *Sunday Worker*, edited by CPGB member William Paul, attained a 100,000 circulation. This was a creative application of the united front tactic advocated by the Communist International. Throughout the 1930s too, members of the CPGB successfully worked in the Labour Party, as did followers of Leon Trotsky - the weak forces of**

**Trotskyism developed the tactics of entryism. Amongst the Trotskyite epigones, especially those around Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe, the tactic of entry was incorrectly elevated to the level of a grand strategy.**

**11. British capitalism plumbed new levels of relative decline in the late 1960s. The contradictory gains of the social democratic state were put under threat. At the same time full employment and an intact social security system allowed key sections of the working class to go onto the offensive. Though it spilled over into other arenas on occasion, in the main this was largely confined to the economic terrain. Between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s there was a whole period of heightened class struggles. Stunning advances were made by the working class, but in the end the better organised power of the state and the capitalist class secured a series of solid victories culminating in the crushing of the miners over 1984-85. Britain now has the most oppressive anti-trade union laws in western Europe. Strikes in 2002 were at an all-time low.**

**12. Blairism is a continuation of the counter-reformation. 'Modernisation' of education, the NHS, the UK constitution and the Labour Party itself are integrally linked. It is an attempt to complement the bourgeois offensive - commonly known in Britain as Thatcherism - in the sphere of politics. Scottish and Welsh devolution, the GLA and regional mayors, PR in EU elections, etc go hand in hand with tilting the bourgeois and proletarian poles of Labourism to an extreme never witnessed before.**

**13. Under Blair the annual conference - always a powerless affair - has been further downgraded, constituency parties are shells of their former selves and big business financing has eclipsed in importance support from the trade**

**unions. A qualitative break could occur at any moment. Nevertheless, for the time being the Labour Party remains a bourgeois workers' party. That necessitates correct communist tactics.**

**14. This is especially so because far from the Labour left lying prostrate the opposite is now the case. The overall trend in the trade unions is to the left. A string of trade union lefts have been elected to top positions. That and mass protests against the Iraq war have fed into and revived the left in the Labour Party. Meanwhile the Socialist Alliance stagnates under Socialist Workers Party's sectarian misleadership.**

**15. A wilful refusal to differentiate between the Labour left and right when it comes to elections is commonly nowadays a manifestation of crass rightist sectarianism - of the kind exhibited by the Scottish Socialist Party, the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the dominant factions in the Socialist Alliance. Bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalists and sections of the mosque are projected as natural allies - elementary notions of class are thereby subsumed. Base electoral opportunism proves to be merely the opposite of auto-Labourism.**

**16. Communists by contrast seek to unite with Labour leftwing candidates and crucially their organised mass base of support. But through our political programme - even presented as a set of minimum demands - we seek to simultaneously challenge and offer an alternative.**

**17. Our overriding goal is to organise the advanced part of the working class into a Communist Party. Obviously that involves a whole series of stages and associated political struggles. The fight for a Communist Party is inseparable from conducting an organised intervention in the Labour Party ●**

## RESPECT LAUNCH

# Socialism: the final shibboleth

**Manny Neira** attended Sunday's Respect launch. He reflects on soul music, and soul selling

**"R**-e-s-p-e-c-t, find out what it means to me." Aretha's voice echoed from the hall speakers, as I took my seat for the launch of Respect on Sunday. She was asking the right question: what did it mean? The wonderful soul music played echoed my thoughts that morning. I mourned the on-off attitude of the Socialist Workers Party to the old Socialist Alliance listening to *Your love is like a see-saw. Everybody needs somebody*, but was it really George Galloway? I was working on the hidden politics of *Soulfinger* (was it being held up to democracy?) when SA chair Nick Wrack called the meeting to order.

About 1,500 had assembled, mainly SWP. "I'm told I can't welcome you all with a high five," began comrade Wrack, with all the youth cred of a high court judge. I winced the first of a thousand wincing that day, as comrades clearly old enough to know better cried "Wow!" and "Yeah!" The tone was set. This was not a conference, it was a revivalist rally: not youthful, merely retro.

Comrade Wrack introduced the dream of a Stop the War Coalition-made 'party': "This convention has been called because of a crisis of representation of ordinary working people. Who speaks for the millions who marched against the war last year? We have a message for those MPs who backed the war - we're coming after you!"

Linda Smith spoke on behalf of the convention arrangements committee, explaining where to find the agenda, resolutions and amendments before joining in the fun. "We need an electoral challenge that can unite us. I'm energised and excited. As we say in the FBU, unity is strength!"

We were asked to vote, but for what? I mean, she looked pretty energised and excited, but did we have to confirm this? A forest of SWP arms climbed into the air. Something had been carried "unanimously": we learned only later what this meant.

## Mark Serwotka

First up was Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union. His involvement is vital to Respect, helping to cover a yawning gap in the coalition: trade union support.



George Galloway: pays own expenses

Despite the anger which exists in the unions towards Blair and the overtly pro-bourgeois New Labour, his party retains the affiliation of the mass of organised workers.

While no credible alternative exists, this contradiction cannot be resolved, and Respect is not that alternative, nor likely to be. In this regard, it starts from a far weaker position than that older left-unity project, the Socialist Labour Party. Arthur Scargill's leadership, and the support of Mick Rix, Joe Marino and Bob Crow, gave the young SLP a far stronger union base. Furthermore, the SLP lost its support through 'control-freakery' and a lack of internal democracy, which Respect promises to exceed.

Comrade Serwotka asked two questions: "First, do we need an electoral alternative to the left of New Labour to represent working class people? Second, is it possible?" There followed a long and powerful attack on Blair's record, summed up with: "As long as society is based on profit and not need, there will always be poverty."

He felt such an alternative was possible. "If some doubt it, I ask this. Do we want only to offer a choice of Blair, Kennedy or Howard? And to those who speak of reclaiming Labour, I ask, do we wish to restrict the choice to Blair, or Blair without the smile: Gordon Brown?"

Tommy Sheridan and the Scottish Socialist Party have shown us the way. They have built a party with 3,000 members, hundreds of thousands of voters, and six MSPs."

Though the speech was carefully constructed to speak of possibilities, it was extremely positive in tone: easily enough to please an audience ready to hear only what it wanted. He did touch briefly, though, on a point of disagreement: "My union does not agree with the Respect declaration against the euro. But there will be differences. It is nonsense to say that because there are differences, we should stay out. There is more that unites us than divides us. In any democratic organisation - and this will have to be democratic - dissent must be nurtured, but dissent must be responsible."

Again, this was carefully judged. Comrade Serwotka supported the coalition, but argued that it would have to be democratic, not that it was or even would be. It would not have escaped him that the whole Respect project was defined by a self-selected elite making deals well before the 'launch', and that this stage-managed event would change nothing. He is known to be uncomfortable with the role being played by George Galloway, and may feel considerably less happy with Respect than the tone of his speech suggested - though some clues were there.

## Tommy Sheridan

Tommy Sheridan brought "solidarity and greetings" from the SSP. "We are organising the working class of Scotland around a fight for a society based on need and not profit. We thought: to unite them, we must start by uniting ourselves. Yes, there will be differences. But surely, we can organise ourselves around the 80% that unites us, rather than the 20% that divides."

This was ironic, as the 80-20 formulation was a founding notion of the SA, but is reversed in Respect. The coalition seeks to build unity around 20% agreement, simple opposition to the war, and to jettison the 80% common to the old SA.

Comrade Sheridan probably understands this, but, having won an agreement keeping Respect south of the border, is prepared to be generous. He even made a joking reference to this in his speech: "The *Herald* carried a report which worried me: 'Gorgeous George to conquer Glasgow'. I thought we had a deal - we'd work in Scotland; you'd work in England and Wales. But they were talking about George Clooney!"

## Vox pops

The agenda now allowed 50 minutes of

## SALMA YAQOOB STWC

Talking  
to *WW*

This is a wonderful turnout. People are genuinely enthused and excited about the idea of what we're looking to do - build a new alternative to take on New Labour.

to each attempt: the SLP, the SA and Respect. Unfortunately, they failed on the question of democracy, and because they claimed to be the alternative to New Labour. We want to build a party not of thousands, but hundreds of thousands; but to do that, it must have an open, collaborative approach - even to those who don't want to join now. We've been worried that we've only been involved in discussion in the last few days."

This was a reference to a meeting including comrade Sell herself and George Galloway, which finally took place in Coventry the Friday before the launch. The details have not yet been released, though the *Weekly Worker* understands that talks faltered over the question of the SP's wish to run its own candidates, using its own campaign materials, in certain constituencies in the GLA elections.

It also seems that this meeting was arranged at George Galloway's insistence, over SWP objections. He worked hard to win the Communist Party of Britain (and the *Morning Star*) to Respect and, considering the CPB's auto-Labourite politics, came surprisingly close to succeeding when their congress rejected affiliation by 60% to 40%. He may have seen the SP as another possible counterbalance to the SWP, making the idea of a coalition more credible. Without either, George is left figure-heading what in all probability will seen as merely another SWP front. The "collaboration" comrade Sell hints at is more likely now to be an electoral non-aggression pact than affiliation.

## HUGH KERR SSP press officer

Talking  
to *WW*

On one level this convention is very impressive. It's a good turnout, very disciplined, good speeches - Salma Yaqoob's speech I thought was excellent. It was different and clearly struck a chord.

But there is a question in my mind. I think it was Ken Loach who said, "Is it a historic day or is it a false dawn?" Many of those on the left as old as me have seen historic days that turned out to be false dawns. In 1998, when I was expelled by Labour, I was involved in trying to reform the unity of the left in London for the European elections in 1999. We abandoned that after a time, as you recall.

But we have shown in Scotland that it is possible to make a difference - to have unity, to allow diversity. We have not expelled or suspended anybody in the five years since the foundation of the Scottish Socialist Party.

I hope this is the beginning of something new, but there are still question marks as to whether the SWP are indeed willing to let go control in the same way that the comrades in Scottish Militant Labour allowed a hundred flowers to flourish in Scotland. Today was very well orchestrated by the SWP - they had somebody ready to oppose every dissident amendment and so on.

However, two things in particular struck me this morning. Firstly, people were talking about the need for democracy and pluralist participation. The coded message was that they don't want the imposition of a line by some kind of democratic centralist structure. That was a hopeful sign.

Secondly, the dissident amendment that got the most votes was of course the worker's wage. Clearly this does appeal to people - it is certainly an extremely popular policy in the SSP. I'm sure there was a three-line whip by the SWP against this, but I suspect that without the whip it would have gone through.

Those things are indicative that maybe underneath there is the possibility of building such an organisation in England. To be truthful, I think a lot of people didn't come today because they were a bit cynical about moves to unify the left, but, if it does take off, if it is allowed to flourish, if the SWP are open and let go control, it could succeed.

As a socialist I am an eternal optimist. If you are going to change society, you can begin by changing the behaviour of people on the left. That's what we've done in Scotland, so let's hope we can do it in England.



Hannah Sell: Tommy Sheridan and Mark Serwotka look on



Mark Serjotta: call for democracy

## Declaration

We moved on to discuss the Respect 'founding declaration'. The hard won agreement for the SA's meaningful 20-page socialist manifesto *People before profit* was being abandoned, for a simple bullet list.

The self-appointed 'steering' committee provided one version, and had invited alternatives. Three had been submitted. To debate the four declarations and determine the *politics* of the new coalition we had *half an hour*. We would hear four speakers, with no interventions from the floor.

Lindsey German moved the original declaration. "To those who ask, why is it not more socialist, I say: because it is built on the anti-war movement, and because there are large muslim communities, and we want to reach out to them as well as the traditional left. If they'd wanted to join the Socialist Alliance, they'd have joined it by now." Comrade German, leading SWP member and edi-



Ghayasuddin Siddiqui: big step

## DR GHAYASUDDIN SIDDIQUI Muslim Parliament of Britain

Talking to WW

It's a great day. We have taken a big step towards bringing about change in this society, in order to make it more democratic, more representative, more accountable and more transparent.

When people work together, there will always be issues where they do not agree. But what is important is to concentrate on the 80% where we all do agree - that should be in the forefront of our minds.

Obviously it's just the beginning. The big challenge still lies ahead. But it's a fresh start - something, at least in my lifetime, new and exciting.

tor of *Socialist Review*, was telling us that the working class had not supported the SA because it was *too socialist*. Somewhere, Tony Cliff was turning in his grave.

Steve Freeman of the Revolutionary Democratic Group moved *Britain at the crossroads*: "It is dangerous to think that a broad movement with the right figurehead is enough to gain support. We must have policies." It was no use citing the democratic deficit without explaining how it would be closed. "Many now think voting is a waste of time. The anti-war movement was significant because it challenged the concentration of power: it was implicitly about democracy. We need a mass republican democratic movement. Why republican? Because a republic is about the rule of the people. We are not *liberal* democrats. We are *republican* democrats."

In an excellent intervention, Mark Hoskisson moved Workers Power's *Anti-capitalist challenge for New Labour*: "Lindsey German is wrong. She argues that people have had ample time to join the Socialist Alliance, and they haven't, so socialism can't be the answer..." At this point, he was briefly drowned out by jeering, but pressed on.

"We have a declaration here which *doesn't mention socialism!* She thinks we will win by limiting our horizons, but we must win by widening them. We have to be ready to answer the questions on the doors. Why is there war? We can't just answer 'because of Blair': we have to say it's because of *capitalism*. We are a socialist alternative. Waging war on poverty means waging war on capitalism. What's the problem? We all agree with that!"

He wasn't against compromise. "Yes, we'll all have to leave something at the door: but until we've tried to build a workers' party, why must we leave our *principles* behind?"

It was announced that the original declaration would be voted on first and, if it was passed, the others would fall. We

protested: people should be allowed to express their support for specific politics, and not merely opposition to the platform.

Nick Wrack allowed no discussion. As the 'arrangements committee' report in the morning had been 'passed', he argued that this procedure had been agreed. "Happy?" he enquired. The cry came back "Let us vote on whether we're happy." He didn't smile, calling: "All those in favour?" A forest of arms rose. "Anyone against?" he said, clearly finding the idea faintly ridiculous. "Overwhelmingly carried".

And that was it. The new fighting force for democracy was born, after 30 minutes of debate split across four declarations and one vote. I've seen synchronised swimming more sloppily choreographed.

## Ken Loach

Film director Ken Loach argued that we should discuss principles, but that wasn't why the convention was called: "The purpose of today is to found Respect. We must end the day with Respect *in existence*." Now this is what I call setting yourself an achievable target.

"The committee will get us through the election, but it must be replaced by one based on election by branches. Those with a history on the left know - democracy is central."

## Gennaro Migliore

The Italian Rifondazione Comunista sent international secretary Gennaro Migliore to speak: "Being here gives me great satisfaction. You are building a new left - part of a new movement in every part of the world, saying that a new world is possible."

His speech was a moving and imaginative call to action, though his emphasis on civil disobedience rather than organised class action was perhaps questionable. I forgave much, though, for his reminder of the beautiful words of Pablo Neruda on our enemies: "They can cut the flowers, but they cannot stop the spring."

## Unreal amendments

The morning closed with the sublime, but the afternoon found us back in the ridiculous.

Linda Smith explained further decisions of the 'arrangements committee', this time concerning 22 amendments proposed to the declaration. Five were not "real amendments", and would not be discussed. Nick Wrack immediately called for a vote. There was a disbelieving cry of "Aren't we even going to be allowed to speak?" He apologised for failing to allow objections. It was probably an honest mistake, but somehow caught the stage-managed rhythm of the day. Dissent was lauded in the abstract, but out of order in reality.

One comrade argued that this conference represented the only chance we would have to challenge the "declara-

**'The 80-20 formulation was a founding notion of the SA, but is reversed in Respect. The coalition seeks to build unity around 20% agreement, simple opposition to the war, and to jettison 80%**

## ALEC MCFADDEN Merseyside TUC president ex-CPGB, ex-NCP, ex-SLP

Talking to WW

This is a big step forward, which I find quite exciting. I do a lot of work with students and they are just heartily fucking sick of politicians. So this has come at the right time. From the trade union point of view the policies of Respect - opposition to privatisation, taking the railways back into public ownership, the repeal of anti-trades union laws - are brilliant.

I think it's going to help us particularly in the north-west, where we've got a very bad problem with the BNP, and without Respect the BNP in my view could fill a vacuum and get certainly at least one European MP elected. I would hope the Greens would come in and that the Communist Party of Britain would reconsider their position, and at least look to work with the coalition - maybe as individuals some could become candidates. We must bring in students, the churches and the mosques - muslims have far more influence than the catholics or protestants.

We've got to make sure that the organisation is democratic - I've already said to the SWP I don't want an organisation run by one political party. In Merseyside I expect to become the chair because I want to democratise it. I think that will happen, because George Galloway is very different to Arthur Scargill. Arthur - love him though I do - he's a control freak. He doesn't believe in any democracy whatsoever, because if Arthur says it, it's right - it's as simple as that.

If trades unionists come in - which I think they will do, in droves - they will not put up, under any circumstances, with one political party running everything. To be honest, the SWP have come a long way: they've learned quite a bit. Certainly I've had no problems with them in Merseyside.

tion" before we were expected to argue it on the doorsteps. Another wanted to know how the candidates would be chosen: a good question.

## AWL

The last objection was from Sean Matgamna of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. As soon as he announced his name the whistling started: the AWL is notorious for its anti-Gallowayism and its motion calling on Respect to "break its links" with its figurehead was one of those declared out of order. "George Galloway is a known publicist for the old Iraqi regime. He has accepted money from Saudi Arabia..." The SWP howled;

## GREG TUCKER ISG/RMT militant

Talking to WW

I think this is about a project for the long term - I would like to see Respect take on party forms.

The dynamic that's been engaged with today is for it to develop into a political party. That's partly in the hands of some of the main players here, but also actually about how things pan out in the real world, but I think the logic of forming Respect today is about forming a new political party. So I hope we don't set our sights too high and think we've got to have major electoral victories in June and therefore go away in July in despair.

The possibility does exist to build a movement, even in the time before June, which could have some electoral success, but it's not the defining factor as far as I'm concerned. Obviously what's important is that you are bringing together in this room people who have a broad range of political views on the left, and we have to find a way of working together.

Clearly politically it's pitched at a slightly different level than the Socialist Alliance, and it has the potential to be much broader, attracting in particular people from the anti-war movement who weren't prepared to fight to broaden the alliance. The SA made some mistakes in the way we played it to the anti-war movement, and that can be dealt with in Respect.

Building a left alternative relies on us learning to work together, and that means we've all got to examine how we've operated over the last few years and operate differently. People have got to decide what they're priorities are. They've got to put Respect first and, while arguing their positions, not seek their advantage. That's what's important is building a new party.

a slow hand-clap started. It was no longer possible to hear his words: even the few cries of "let him speak", which I joined, were drowned out by the noise.

To heckle an opponent is one thing. To shout until he cannot be heard is another. As someone once said, democracy is about more than two wolves and a lamb voting on who's for dinner. It involves defending the right of minorities and free debate. Our attitude to dissent is shown most truly in the attitude we adopt to those we disagree with violently.

Earlier, I had spoken to Martin Thomas (also AWL). He criticised the CPGB for supporting a movement with George Galloway's politics. I explained that we were there because Respect contains the SWP, brought together others on the left and could not simply be ignored if we were serious about building a party: but that we would engage *critically*, on the basis of *our* politics. Weren't the AWL there to do the same? Comrade Thomas explained that if their call to break with George Galloway was rejected, the AWL would leave.

The fate of the AWL marks a huge drop in democratic standards between the SA and Respect. At the last SA conference, the SWP tried to exclude the AWL from the executive. Marcus Ström of the CPGB mobilised enough support to prevent this undemocratic manoeuvre. The AWL was both heard and represented. Today, the SWP steamroller ran unchecked. The arrangements were passed by another "overwhelming majority, comrades".

## MAB

The convention then heard a representative of the Muslim Association of Britain, who brought congratulations to Respect "on this great day":

"The leaders of the STWC have been our partners for a year or more, and we have grown closer and closer over that time. The defence of education, health and the environment are of concern to all of us, especially while resources are being squandered on an illegal war in Iraq. We hope to cooperate with Respect, and that it will maintain a position which will prolong that cooperation. We know that on some issues we take different stands: that is why it is important to keep the door open."

The SWP has, of course, sought accommodation with the 'muslim community' by seeking to play down the importance of women's and gay rights, these being the "different stands" mentioned here. Lindsey German called them "shibboleths", but the forthright exposure of this opportunism in the *Weekly Worker* made this route impossible to pursue. The "right to self-determination of every individual in relation to their... sexual choices" is now embodied in the Respect declaration and, as a result, the SWP did not succeed in bringing the MAB on board.

# RESPECT LAUNCH

**KEN LOACH**  
film-maker

Talking  
to *WW*

It seems very open. People have come together with a really strong intention to make it happen, rather than to be divisive, so, although inevitably we may have some false starts on different points, I think it's very encouraging.

Eventually, we will have to have a leadership democratically elected by delegates, but this is incremental. We've just got to move in stages. We've got to get a basic organisation in place.

## Republicanism: no

Amendments were now discussed. One from the SA on the minimum wage, and several from the SWP calling for redistributive taxation, support for the people of Palestine, and the defence of civil liberties, were passed in short order.

Marcus Ström then moved a CPGB amendment, arguing that the 'R' in 'Respect' should stand for 'republicanism'. He said that the anti-war movement had highlighted the democratic deficit mentioned in the Respect declaration, and the creaking, corrupt system of monarchy, patronage, the House of Lords and the judiciary. "We must look at the democratic deficit, and the nature of the state which lies behind it. In poll after poll, 30% to 40% oppose the monarchy; that is a source of support we should tap into. This amendment costs us nothing. We all agree with this - well, if there are any monarchists here, I apologise, comrades."

The amendment was opposed: "I'm no monarchist," proclaimed Joe Cardwell of the SWP, "but I don't think that not having a monarchy takes you forward. Look at the republics: the US in Iraq, and France banning the hijab. The majority here are republicans, but to make it part of our declaration would *distort the coalition which founded Respect*. We must leave our baggage behind." The argument was plain. Respect had to capture the entire anti-war movement. There may have been monarchists on the marches, and we must not alarm them. So we are republicans, but we vote against republicanism. Or perhaps it was a case of knee-jerk opposition to anything proposed by the CPGB.

The amendment gained only 50 or so votes, and was lost.

## Worker's wage: no

Leslie Mahmood moved an amendment calling for workers' representatives to take a worker's wage. This time, it was not the sensibilities of the monarchists the SWP were protecting, but those of George Galloway. Though they had supported this principle in the SA, it now had to be dropped: Galloway's own estimate was that he needed £150,000 a year to "function" politically. Well, don't we all.

Comrade Mahmood's argument was simple: "We are not asking representatives to live in poverty, but on a fairly calculated workers' wage, passing the rest of their income back to the movement."

Her SWP opponent Paul Holborow began by supporting the politics: "I don't believe that there is anyone here who would not aspire to the principle of a worker's pay for MPs, but Respect is not a socialist organisation. This would be exclusive of the people we might otherwise attract. What are we to say to George Galloway? Are we to say that it is a condition that he takes a worker's wage?" (There was only one answer to that, and a number of us took up the shout: "Yes!") "That is to misconstrue our purpose. In time to come, we shall debate this again, but for now the main challenge is to defeat Blair and the warmongers!"

At all costs, it seems, we must not be diverted from the struggle against Blair by the little matter of principle. Vote

against it, no matter how much you 'support' it. The amendment was lost.

## Open borders: no

Martin Ralph moved the shortest amendment of all: "The unity coalition fights for freedom of movement, open borders and an end to immigration laws." His argument was simple: "We aren't half-hearted about speaking against the war, or calling for 'troops out', so what is different about this principle?"

The SWP opponent, Elaine Heffernan, was troubled: "It makes me sad to vote against something I agree with." So why do it? "In principle, I'm in favour. But even the most dedicated activists don't agree on every point, and we have to win votes. We have a real, concrete position which, in practice, means open borders anyway. But if we pass this, we'll have to face down arguments from people who don't understand."

The SWP view was clear. The SA balloon never got in the air because of all the ideological ballast it was carrying: they had tried to jettison the rights of women and gays, but minorities within the SA, not least the *Weekly Worker*, had made this impossible. Respect was going to do it properly, but each principle was paid a warm tribute before being thrown over the side.

## Foundation

The vote on the amended declaration was moved by Salma Yaqoob, who called for us to work in "respect, democracy, and accountability". "It is not what we do on this stage that matters; it is what we do in the real world."

The vote was called. This posed a problem. The declaration contained little which we opposed, and so we could not vote against. On the other hand, the debates had made it clear that it was *designed* to exclude much of fundamental importance: political demands for republicanism, the right of people to move freely over open borders, and the principle that workers' representatives should take a worker's wage. We could not support an opportunist attempt to water down socialism, and abstained.

Of course, the vote was carried overwhelmingly. Nick Wrack mustered every ounce of gravitas and announced: "Respect, the Unity Coalition, is founded." This statement got a standing ovation.

## Executive

It remained only to elect an executive. The organisers had circulated a slate of 16 names, headed by George Galloway,

**PAUL FOOT**  
SWP veteran

Talking  
to *WW*

You'll misquote us, whatever we say. But it's been a wonderful morning and a tremendous occasion. There is much enthusiasm for the organisation, and all socialists should be in it, including you.

**Elaine Heffernan:**  
voting against open borders



**'The SWP view was clear. The SA balloon never got in the air because of all its ideological ballast: Respect was going to drop it, but each principle was paid a warm tribute before being thrown over the side'**

but dominated by members and close sympathisers of the SWP. It also included Dr Mohammed Naseem, head of the Birmingham Central Mosque. As communists, we defend the right of the individual to practise their faith, providing it does not infringe the rights of others, but this was a taste of the non-socialist alliances that Respect hopes to build, and which lay behind the political compromises it had been making all day.

The CPGB proposed an alternative slate which added the names of Marcus Ström, our representative on the SA executive, and Declan O'Neil, like comrade Ström a supporter of the SA Democracy Platform and a co-founder of the SA.

The original slate was proposed by Nick Wrack: "I'm calling for support of a slate of those people who had a part in building Respect. We recognise there are deficiencies, but initiative has to come from somewhere, and not everyone can be involved in the same way. It is a temporary executive, elected until a conference in the autumn. We know there aren't enough women, pensioners, students and so forth, so we are proposing the power to coopt. They will say that we are trying to stifle debate, but we already have people from the Socialist Alliance: two more would be too many."

Lee Rock of the CPGB defended the alternative slate. "In 20 years this is the strangest convention I have attended. All day, I've listened to comrades speaking in favour of things, and asking us to vote against them. Workers' representatives on a worker's wage? Yes, but vote against. Republicanism? Yes, but vote against. Open borders? Yes, but vote against. Dissent? Yes, but vote against the alternative slate. You can't applaud speeches calling for the rights of dissent and then vote against the means."

When called, the vote "overwhelmingly" endorsed the original

**Jo Cardwell:**  
voting against republicanism



Leslie Mahmood: fair

slate - an executive designed to keep out critical voices.

## John Rees

John Rees of the SWP was stung by demands for democracy and socialism. "This has been a remarkable convention. We have done something never done before. We have brought together the socialist left, muslims, the STWC activists, trade unionists. Whatever went before was not as strong as this. We fought for the declaration and voted against the things we believed in, because, while the people here are important, they are not as important as the millions out there. We are reaching to the people locked out of politics. We voted for what *they* want."

This was the most honest statement I had yet heard from the SWP. Comrade Rees had found the confidence to fully develop the political thesis which lay behind the setting up of Respect. Gone was the pretence, so indignantly propounded in the SA, that the new coalition was socialist. Socialism puts people off: it chases away potentially powerful allies. The appetite for a coalition unfettered by principle was clear.

Without socialist politics, the only unifying force remaining is the hunger for electoral success, and an unreflective opposition to New Labour. It was on this point that he finished: "They are fearful. They are right to be fearful. Respect is coming." The SWP faithful rewarded him with another standing ovation.

## George Galloway

Lindsey German then introduced George Galloway as our final speaker, but, like a society hostess keen to apologise to her valued guest for her children's rudeness, began: "I want to disassociate from the attacks that have been made. George speaks at meetings all over the country, and seldom asks for expenses. If those criticising him did a 100th of the work he did, it would be good."

He still seemed rather put out. "There are hundreds in this room who've organised meetings I've spoken at. I've paid fares. I've paid for hotels, where necessary." In the last nine days, he had spoken at nine meetings and over the last two years more than 500, without once asking for expenses.

The solution is simple. George: stop being heroic. Rather than forking out from your own pocket, let us pay. Take your worker's wage, and return us anything left over. From the sound of things, you

would be better off - and it's much easier to budget with a regular, fixed income, eh?

"If only half the protestors who marched on February 15 take a shorter walk on June 10 to vote for us, they will be talking of nothing else on TV or radio the next day but the new force which has been born. I was the first to predict a million marchers on the anti-war demonstration, and some comrades raised their eyebrows: but we doubled this. Getting a million votes is not beyond us, and will knock them off their chairs."

His bravado reminded me irresistibly of a similar speech I heard a long time ago. Surely he was not going to say ... "I'm not going to say, 'Go back to your constituencies and prepare for government'. But if we win seats everywhere, we will change Britain's political life everywhere, and for the better."

## George Monbiot

One speaker I cannot report on is George Monbiot, as he was not there. He was one of Respect's founders, and his absence was remarked upon by many but never mentioned from the platform. The *Weekly Worker* contacted him, and his assistant, Sandy Kennedy, informed us that "George didn't attend the conference because he's in India."

Our questions about his continuing involvement in Respect remain unanswered. However, we understand that he may have withdrawn over the failure of Respect to win the support of the Green Party, and await his comments.

**MICHAEL LAVALETTE**  
SA councillor

Talking  
to *WW*

I think the numbers are fantastic. The spirit, the speeches have all been very positive, and if you take that spirit from today, and start to build Respect, then we'll at least put ourselves in a position where we can think about challenging New Labour.

We're probably still under-represented when it comes to the muslim population - I know, for example, that there are no muslims here from Preston. One of the reasons for that is that the imam and several members of the mosque committee stayed behind to attend a large civil rights meeting.

I think it's too early to say what will happen to the Socialist Alliance, which is an integral part of Respect.



**GORDON MCLENNAN**  
former general secretary of the CPGB

Talking  
to *WW*

This is a very important development in which people on the left can come together to express their views and opinions and try to find common ground for campaigning. An alternative policy to that being put forward by the government on so many issues is needed - I believe that in a proportional representation system it might be possible to win a voice in the European parliament and the Greater London Assembly, similar to the voice that Tommy Sheridan and the Scottish Socialist Party now have.

My own view is that it's going to take a long time to develop a political party that is credible in British circumstances to contest elections under the first-past-the-post system. But in the final analysis it is not elections that will determine what Britain does, but mass struggle of working people on all the great issues. And today is a contribution towards developing the kind of unity needed for that struggle.

I don't think the circumstances exist, or will exist for quite a long time, for a party similar to the Communist Party of Great Britain, of which I was proud to be the general secretary. But political discussions of this nature lay the basis for that possibility - not necessarily a Communist Party, but a party to the left of Labour that will increasingly and seriously put forward the kind of policies needed by our country.

**Respect prospects**

After decades of rainy paper sales, and tired local meetings with the same old faces, the SWP leadership had its head turned by the STWC, a wonderfully successful campaigning organisation. At last the SWP found itself at the centre of a truly mass protest. Unlike other fronts, the STWC captured and coordinated a huge national movement. STWC leaders were appearing on television, and its events were headlined in the bourgeois press.

Lack of a coherent programme meant that these events thoroughly disorientated SWP leaders. They have no compass. Now nothing must be done or said that might scare anyone off. Like a junkie hooked by their first taste of a drug, they became addicted to the feeling that they finally mattered. The thought of slowly and painstakingly building out of the limelight is unbearable.

Nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of the big time. Thousands of muslims had marched to Hyde Park: they must not be alienated by "shibboleths" such as the rights for women and gays. While SA speakers were not allowed on SWTC platforms, Charles Kennedy was welcome. SWP speakers defined themselves purely as STWC officers, and stuck to broad pacifism. So tight was this self-discipline that various green and left reformist speakers adopted positions far to the left of SWP revolutionaries.

The Socialist Alliance, which ought to have been well placed to capitalise on the upsurge, but was instead put into cold storage by the SWP, failed to get results. SA percentage votes were often lower than the proportion of the *entire population* which had marched on February 15. How could this be? It must be the politics of the SA, not the fact that the alliance had effectively been closed down. As Lindsey German said, "If people had wanted to join the SA, they would have done it by now." A new political inheritor of the STWC must be built: broad, non-socialist, non-toxic to monarchists, supporters of the Countryside Alliance and representatives unwilling to live on a workers' wage - its name is Respect.

Sunday saw a lack of democracy that makes the SA seem positively utopian, and above all a bonfire of principle. So, 'We support this, this and this: but we will vote against it all.' The membership of the SWP is being persuaded to go along with this. It is temporary; it will be reviewed. Respect will win votes to power, goes the argument,

**'More likely, though, Respect will fail to improve on SA results, because socialism was never the problem. The SA needed to go forward, not back. Instead of moving on from a socialist alliance to a socialist party, as the SSP did, the SWP has moved back from a socialist alliance to a non-socialist alliance'**

and then we'll win Respect to socialism.

The SWP is selling its soul and getting little in return. The unions have ignored Respect, the *Morning Star's* CPB has rejected it, the SP will not come to terms and the MAB retains its own (clearer) agenda. Whatever George Galloway's strengths and weaknesses, he is a political liability in the arena the SWP seeks to enter: if the media get a hint that this 'far left' coalition may be successful, they will tear him to shreds, and clips of his speech to Saddam Hussein will rival snooker for television time.

More likely, though, Respect will fail to improve on SA results, because socialism was never the problem. The SA needed to go forward, not back. Instead of moving on from a socialist alliance to a socialist party, as the SSP did, the SWP has moved back from a socialist alliance to a non-socialist alliance.

Non-socialist? Well, perhaps a *bit* socialist. Aretha had it again: "Just a little bit, uhuh, just a little bit..."

# John Rees airbrushes out history

For the "first time in decades", there will be a progressive "electoral alternative" in June's elections to the European parliament and Greater London Assembly. This is the newspeak of Respect and the words come from none other than John Rees, leader of the Socialist Workers Party, and self-anointed number one candidate for the West Midlands.

In his closing speech at the Respect convention, comrade Rees effectively airbrushed out of history all the left electoral interventions of recent years, including those by the Socialist Labour Party, Socialist Party/Militant Labour, Communist Party of Great Britain and, last but not least, the Socialist Alliance itself, on whose executive comrade Rees sits. His speech, while full of Panglossian optimism about the big time for the left (read, for the SWP), was actually an epitaph for the SA. While perhaps not killed off, the Socialist Alliance is being cryogenically frozen, as Respect takes over its role as an electoral front - but held in reserve just in case the new coalition fails too. Yet, like Austin Powers, the danger is the SA could be hopelessly out of date and not at all groovy, baby, once brought back to life.

This speaks volumes about the SWP's attitude to electoral activity and to the unity of the socialist left. The SWP treats such adventures lightly. Rather than providing serious, long-term engagement with the working class along principled socialist lines; rather than a means to unite the whole left around a coherent Marxist programme in order to forge the weapon needed by our class (ie, a Communist Party); the SWP views elections as just its opportunity to break into the mainstream. To that end any principle can be junked. Parliamentary cretinism *par excellence*.

We saw in reports of the SWP's closed annual conference that the new coalition was intended to leave "the sectarians" behind (*Weekly Worker* November 6 2003) This is clearly code for barring the critical voices in the Socialist Alliance from Respect.

The SWP dare not say the SA has been a failure. Yet the truth is, if the SWP had taken the bit between its teeth and fought for consistent partyist unity; if the SA had been at the forefront of the anti-war movement; then there would be no need for something as bland, amorphous and unappetising as Respect.

Comrade Rees had the temerity to declare that Respect not only brought in new layers from the anti-war movement, but actually united "the majority of the socialist left". To adapt a phrase from the front page of last week's *Socialist Worker*, 'Unity? My arse!'

The overwhelming majority of those attending the Alice in Wonderland event last Sunday were members and sympathisers of the SWP. The "majority of the socialist left"? Where was the Labour left, the trade union awkward squad, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain? Where was Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party? What about the smaller groups: Workers Power, Alliance for Workers' Liberty and so on? They were either not there or have quickly departed. Perhaps that was the aim of the SWP after all. Relaunch the SA without the left and without the politics.

Toby Abse, a supporter of *Socialist Resistance*, quipped after the conference,

that what we saw was the SWP unite with itself. Comrade Abse is one of many SA independents and *Resistance* supporters who are now unwilling to have anything to do with Respect.

The Socialist Alliance is to play no role in the new formation - other than keeping quiet. Attempts by leading independents to affiliate the SA to Respect got short shrift from the SWP. At the SA executive committee meeting on January 3, SWP members, including Rob Hoveman, Jeannie Robinson and Simon Joyce, argued against any direct affiliation. Comrade Hoveman said that the SA "did not have enough coherence to act inside the coalition". Comrade Will McMahon and his friends in a newly launched Pro-Respect platform want the SA to be the "socialist current" within the "left coalition"; the SWP clearly has other ideas.

In perhaps the most awful speech of the day, Paul Holborrow, Lambeth SA and long-term SWP hack, spoke against the need for elected Respect representatives to take a worker's wage. He said that Respect was not a socialist organisation, nor should it be; thus to have 'socialist principles' in its declaration from the start would be a mistake. He said that Respect could not be socialist in the way that, say, the SWP was. In other words, it is the SWP's job to be the socialist current in the new populist movement.

This is clearly the SWP's perspective. Yet this stands in sharp contradiction to the claims of SWP and its allies within the alliance. The SWP's Rob Hoveman has insisted Respect is "absolutely" socialist. SA chair Nick Wrack declares its founding document to be "implicitly" socialist, while comrade Alan Thornett (International Socialist Group) thinks it is "essentially" socialist (comrade Thornett's effusive participation in the SWP-led standing ovation at the close of the convention was embarrassing to witness).

This is the two-faced nature of opportunism. Talk left, act right. It's already socialist, that's why we should have absolutely no socialist principle in it! Leave the socialist principle to the SWP and its recruitment machine.

At the CPGB aggregate the day before the Respect jamboree one comrade mused that even the SWP would find it difficult to muster much enthusiasm for the Respect project. At the close of the convention, amid the whoops and hollers more akin to a christian revivalist sect, that was shown to be completely untrue. Perhaps it is appropriate that in Nick Wrack's email report to SA members he inadvertently called the new organisation "Resect".

The SWP will go through the motions with the Socialist Alliance. Yet clearly SA branch meetings will now be considered an unnecessary diversion in the lead-up to the June's vital elections. The SA's annual conference on March 13 will only consider motions on the Respect coalition and methods of election to the executive. Chances are the whole day will be a charade. The SWP will ensure that. We shall, of course, strive to coordinate with those individual socialists who remain in the SA. But communists have no wish to haggle over a corpse.

We shall energetically work in Respect and seek a wider audience there for what is needed: a mass working class alternative to both Labourism and the non-class politics of populism ●

Marcus Ström

**GEORGE GALLOWAY**

Talking  
to *WW*

I think that today has been a fantastic success. The numbers attending, the breadth of the crowd that's here - demographically, in all senses - age, race, religion, geography, and also I think politically. It's very impressive. As good as we could have hoped for and on a very wintry day, when trains are cancelled and so on. We have achieved a great platform, I think, for the Unity express, which leaves the station today, and its first stop is the European and GLA elections on the June 10.

By the way, I wish *Weekly Worker* reporters would stop falsifying the accounts of the meetings that they are attending. The description of the meeting in Cardiff in last week's paper is a caricature of what actually happened and in fact reflects the fact that the journalist was not called to speak. It was a petty and vindictive account, which is unworthy of the *Weekly Worker* - a paper that I read avidly, as I said at the meeting.



Paul Holborrow: awful

## RESPECT LAUNCH

# Neither fish nor fowl

The unity coalition does not know whether it wants to be a movement or a party, argues **Steve Freeman** of the Revolutionary Democratic Group

**W**hen Superman comes flying to the rescue, characters often ask, "Is it a bird? Is it a plane?" and the answer is, of course: "No, it's Superman". This more or less summarises the rather restricted debate on the nature of the Respect coalition at Convention of the Left. Certainly Mark Hoskisson of Workers Power felt a bird was needed. To make it fly it should be called a revolutionary party. I argued on behalf of the Socialist Alliance Democracy Platform that in effect we needed a plane to take us from where we are today to where we need to be if a new workers' party is to be formed.

However, the Socialist Workers Party and its allies had the winning argument. They had Superman on their side and that is all that counts. In truth the convention was almost a rerun of developments inside the Socialist Alliance. The Socialist Party was there to remind us its comrades used to be in the SA until the SWP roughed them up. The SWP with the International Socialist Group were there as the majority bloc that controls the SA. Since the SWP 'forgot' to include Alan Thornett (ISG) on its Respect leadership slate, we might guess that relations have become a little strained. But he got added in later, so he is nearly, but not quite, yesterday's man.

Then there was Workers Power representing all those who ran away from the SA because they had no stomach for a fight with the SWP. WP has now returned for a last hurrah. Finally we had the SA 'awkward squad' who had formed themselves into the Democracy Platform. The DP was itself divided between those who seem intent on joining (CPGB), the 'wait and see' group (Revolutionary Democratic Group and others) and the 'no way, José' of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty *et al.*

It was therefore a major feat for the Democracy Platform to unite. The majority of the Democracy Platform committee agreed a policy of constructive engagement. We were able to unite around our submission, 'Britain at the crossroads', and in support of our amendments to the main proposal on the questions of republicanism, immigration controls and a workers' wage. We even managed a degree of unity with the AWL. The AWL was prepared to support our agreed positions, whilst conducting their own separate campaign against Respect and George Galloway, which the rest of us did not support.

The SA Democracy Platform was born in the autumn 2003 from the crisis enveloping the SA. So this was our first public intervention. Against overwhelming odds, it was absolutely certain we would lose all the votes. It is important to say quite clearly that we lost. But what did we gain? The most important thing is that we were able to intervene with a clear set of policies and put down a marker for an alternative direction. In 'Britain at the crossroads' the SA Democracy Platform defended the programme of the Socialist Alliance and applied it to the new situation. By doing this, we established ourselves publicly as the SA minority prepared to unite and fight the liquidation of the SA and its policies by the SWP.

Let us review the relative merits of the

three alternatives - proposed by the SWP-Galloway, Workers Power and the SA Democracy Platform. It is worth remembering that any position can carry the day with thousands of votes, but collapse shortly afterwards under the weight of its own internal contradictions. Equally a strong position can be overwhelmingly outvoted and remain rock-solid. So the question is not whether the SA Democracy Platform lost the vote. It is whether it has a credible position, which will pass the test of time and put us in a position to challenge our opponents in the future.

Certainly the winning ticket in the lottery, the Superman option, is held by the SWP. It entitles you to a free shot at the elections on June 10. George Galloway explained that the aim was to raise £1 million and secure one million votes, by tapping into the anti-war sentiments that put around one and a half million people on the streets on February 15 2003. Supporters spoke about the need for an "electoral challenge" and an "electoral coalition". The main weapon in this election campaign will of course be George Galloway himself. With a rebel MP at our head surely the votes will roll in?

What is completely lacking here is any vision about where we are heading or what the purpose of this exercise is (apart from the obvious - getting votes). This is one reason why organisations like the Socialist Party and the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain have not signed up. Added to this is the 'short-termism' of the SWP, which expresses its well known (except to SWP members) weakness: the SWP does not have a programme and does not care very much about such things. It prefers to respond to spontaneous movement. So when it comes to an election campaign, policies are not high on the agenda. In the SWP mindset, we do not want any policies that could put people off, because we want Muslims and anti-war people to vote for George.

This is of course electoralism. As a political method it is no different from the method of Blair's New Labour, which jettisoned all sorts of socialist policies in pursuit of votes. Jack Conrad was absolutely right to say that in the hands of the SWP "elections become not about making propaganda and enhancing class combativity, but rather saying what you think people want to hear in a desperate bid to get elected - almost for its own sake" (*Weekly Worker* January 22). After saying for decades that elections were irrelevant, the SWP has now arrived at the point where votes are the be-all-and-end-all. This shows once again how the SWP's worship of spontaneity leads to the opportunism of voting to maintain immigration controls and keeping the queen in Buckingham Palace!

The second option proposed by Workers Power was that Respect should become a workers' party and adopt a revolutionary programme. Many comrades agree with the need for a workers' party, including all those in the SA Democracy Platform. But Workers Power has reduced this to a dogma. This becomes even clearer when we understand that they mean a revolutionary party. The Respect coalition is the political ex-



George Galloway: Superman?

tension of a popular, cross-class Stop the War Coalition. The idea that these forces could form a revolutionary party simply does not fit with reality. We might as well call on the TGWU to form itself into a Bolshevik party. Abstract propaganda point, yes. Real world politics, no.

Mark Hoskisson of WP made a good speech pressing all the right buttons. He condemned capitalism and imperialism, praising socialism as the only answer, and the need for a revolutionary party. Every SWP member in the audience could relate to this, thinking to themselves that just such a party, together with such politics, already exists. It is called the SWP. They could at the same time feel the warm glow of self-satisfaction. Workers Power is only tiny. There is no chance of Respect forming a revolutionary party either before or after June 10, regardless of the result.

If it is not a bird, could it be a plane? The third option, put forward by the SA Democracy Platform (albeit in the name of the RDG), was set out in 'Britain at the crossroads' (see *Weekly Worker* January 22). This starts from the anti-war movement itself. It basically says we need to rebuild the anti-war movement by transforming it into a pro-democracy movement. This is not something to be artificially imposed on that movement from the outside, but is within its own logic. There is a democracy movement waiting to be born. We are merely its midwife.

The focal point for a movement is not elections. It must be on the streets, in the workplaces and in the communities. Our model could be the anti-poll tax movement, the Stop the War Coalition, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the suffragette movement or the Chartist movement. The proper role for elections would therefore be to build the movement. A successful election campaign is one that produces growth and a strengthening of the movement.

A movement is very different from a party. A movement can bring together a range of parties, along with trade unions and community organisations and campaigns. But a party can grow out of a movement as the experience of the anti-poll tax movement and the Scottish Socialist Party has shown. Therefore in advocating the building of a mass movement, we have not abandoned the need to build a new workers' party. On the contrary, we are proposing to take concrete steps towards a new party by the best route presented to us - the crisis of the Iraq war. Not the abstract propaganda for partyism, but moving to a workers' party in the world as it is.

How does this differ from electoral-

ism? In building a democratic movement, the tactic of standing candidates may be very useful. But the purpose of standing in elections is not about harvesting votes, but using the opportunity of the election to build the movement and raise consciousness about what the working class needs to do. Elections are subordinated to the needs of the movement and the interests of the working class.

'Britain at the crossroads' takes seriously that task by focusing on key issues which are facing the British people today and which any movement must get right if it is to succeed. Unless we can correctly identify these issues, we will be unable to intervene in mass politics. The SA Democracy Platform picks out the issues of democracy, equality, Europe and social justice. On each issue, the British people face real choices about the future direction of the country.

The Respect conference reproduced a range of views we find in the country as a whole. On democracy, for example a minority of Respect were in favour of a republic, but the vast majority were not. That is true of England as a whole. When Tommy Sheridan spoke, we were reminded that the SSP supports Scottish independence, to which George Galloway is opposed. Most people, even in Scotland, do not want a break up of Britain. Mark Serwotka made clear the fact that his union, the PCSU, was in favour of the euro, whereas the Respect majority opposed it. This again mirrors wider social attitudes.

Of course the Respect coalition does take up the question of democracy. This proves my earlier point that the issue of democracy reflects a real strand within the anti-war movement. The draft says: "There is a crisis of representation, a democratic deficit, at the heart of politics in Britain. We aim to offer a solution to this crisis." Unfortunately the statement does not really explain what the crisis of representation is. It does not explain the democratic deficit. It does not say how we can solve the democratic deficit. It claims to "offer a solution to this crisis" but then fails completely to say what that solution is. This is not serious politics. Respect's opponents could justifiably say that there is a "democratic deficit" at the heart of the coalition's politics.

The Labour government took Britain into an illegal war on false pretences over weapons of mass destruction. The real aim was to install a pro-US government in Baghdad. The WMD fiasco showed very clearly what socialists have known for a long time. Britain is not a democratic country. We do not have a democratic system of government. Under the constitution of the crown, power is concen-

trated in the hands of the prime minister and his close aids, top civil servants, security chiefs, etc. It is the power that Blair used to take Britain to war, to slavishly follow the foreign policies of US imperialism and to privatise our public services. This is the power that parliament is unable to challenge or check.

On the one hand we find the concentration of power in the hands of the executive and on the other hand a weak and feeble parliament and bankrupt constitution. Many ordinary people think, with justification, that voting is a waste of time, because nothing changes. It is this same alienation that can turn people to fascism and the BNP.

The massive anti-war demonstrations were significant precisely because they sought to challenge that concentration of power. In doing so these demonstrations were implicitly and sometimes explicitly about the failure of democracy and how Britain is governed. 'Britain at the crossroads' identifies this as its point of departure and the seeds of the future. Our task as socialists is to complete the transformation of the anti-war protests into a new democracy movement.

A broad movement for democracy would have to have solutions to what Respect calls "the crisis of representation" and the "democratic deficit". The SA programme *People before profit* provides democratic answers. Real democracy must be republican. We are not about reforming the crown. We aim to abolish it. Republicanism is about the sovereignty of the people in all matters. We are republican democrats, not Liberal Democrats, who think the answer to the democratic deficit is proportional representation. Republican democracy should not be separated from its social roots. It must address the question of poverty and wealth, as it impacts on health, education, pensions and housing, etc.

Now we come to the vexed question of socialism. Is Respect a socialist organisation or not? There are quite divergent views on this. But the more interesting question is whether it needs to be socialist. In my personal view a mass democratic movement has to be republican, but it does not have to be socialist. The anti-poll tax movement was not socialist; nor was the anti-war movement or the trade union movement. Yet socialism has an absolutely vital role guiding any democratic republican movements. On the other hand, a workers' party has to be socialist. There is no point in seeking to build a non-socialist party.

The Socialist Alliance has in *People before profit* a clear set of policies - on the democratic republic, equality, social justice, Europe and internationalism - which Respect needs to take on board. The SA Democracy Platform did a great service for the Socialist Alliance by defending its own programme against overwhelming odds.

So what is Respect? Is it an attempt to building a mass democratic republican and social movement? I have never yet heard of a republican movement that opposes the abolition of the monarchy. So the answer is obviously no. Perhaps it is the beginnings of a new workers' party, whose MPs are paid on a worker's wage? Given the politics, programme and its declared aims, it is not that either. It is neither fish nor fowl. It may have got a thousand votes at the rally, but until it sorts out whether it is trying to build a movement or a workers' party, it will have a thousand problems.

Still, these are interesting times. Let us begin a discussion inside the Democracy Platform to see what our next steps should be ●

UNIONS

# Climbdown on strike

A marginal increase in the derisory offer made to civil servants working in the department of work and pensions (DWP) turned out to be enough for the Socialist Party-led executive of the Public and Commercial Services Union to pull the plug on the two-day strike called for January 29-30.

The action was to have been part of a co-ordinated 48-hour walkout, involving PCSU members employed in five separate civil service departments, over pay claims lodged almost a year ago. The settlement date was supposed to be July 1 2003, but meaningful negotiations were delayed when management claimed inadequate funding from the treasury. Finally offers were made in early autumn of last year.

Whereas in pre-Thatcher days negotiations were carried out for the civil service as a whole, they are now done departmentally. For example, in the DWP, the PCSU represents 90,000 union members out of 145,000 staff. The offer here was between 3.5% and 3.7%, taken as an overall package, but with a good number of members receiving as little as 2.6%. It was to be a two-stage deal - the first rise backdated to July 1 and the second to be paid on April 1 2004. But many staff would not even receive a second-stage payment. The tiny increases now on offer are to be offset by delaying the stage two payment until May 1.

In the DWP, which accounts for around 30% of all civil servants, we voted in November to reject management's offer. Armed with this mandate, the executive decided to wait until the new year to ballot for industrial action. This time in a 43% turnout we voted by 22,000 to 14,000 for strike action; and by 29,000 to 6,000 to take action short of a strike - work to rules, overtime bans, etc.

The home office, prison service and department of constitutional affairs also won their ballots. The home office turnout was lower (around 30%), while in the other two, much smaller, departments the percentage



voting was in the 40s. The tiny treasury solicitors office, with only around 120 members, also voted to strike. Anyway quite obviously the key department is the DWP. So the last-minute retreat has left the smaller sections high and dry.

The PCSU represents something like 290,000 out of a total of half a million civil servants employed in 173 departments and agencies. Although the coordination across five sections was welcome, it only affected about a third of the union's membership. Big departments like inland revenue and the ministry of defence either accepted their offers or are on different pay cycles.

Despite the ballot results with their clear majorities it cannot be denied that there were relatively small turnouts (only a minority of all PCSU members actually voted for action and management has predictably made much of this). Nevertheless there was a lot of coverage in terms of TV and radio and this seemed to lift morale. At first we thought that we would have our work cut out to mobilise support, since attendance at branch meetings had not generally been good. But members really began to feel they were part of something. They were certainly angry about the derisory offer and we started to notice a good deal of enthusiasm for the action - not only among union reps, but among the rank and

file too.

The high-profile role of general secretary Mark Serwotka has also been important in building confidence. He is regarded by the ordinary members as being serious about pursuing the claim. In fact membership has gone up over recent weeks as a result of the union calling for action. Which makes it all the more regrettable that the leadership decided to suspend the DWP strike.

The PCSU executive is controlled by Left Unity - as is the DWP group executive. Left Unity is dominated by the Socialist Party, but also contains Socialist Workers Party, Scottish Socialist Party and other such comrades. Left Unity sometimes does deals on the executive - standing joint slates, etc - with a smaller group, known as PCS Democrats, made up largely of Labour Party members who are perhaps slightly to the left of Blair (the pro-Reamsbottom right wing is very much a declining force). However, while the executive as a whole has moved to the left, many of the individuals involved have been pulled by the hard realities of bureaucratic office in the opposite direction. The smaller Socialist Caucus grouping, of which I am a member, effectively acts as the left opposition ●

**Lee Rock**  
London regional organiser, PCSU

## Your financial support needed

This is a call to readers, supporters and sympathisers for increased financial support. Over recent months, our Party has come under considerable financial pressure, as political demands have increased, while other sources of income, such as our printshop, have remained static or even suffered a decline because of our inability to stump up the required capital needed to re-equip.

We are certainly not in crisis yet. But we are going through a very lean period. Our monthly income just covers our absolutely minimum outgoings, leaving us no flexibility to meet new demands or take advantage of opportunities as they develop. However, as with many things in and around our ranks, there is considerable under-utilised money-making potential out there amongst you, our comrades. Over the next month, we will be:

- Contacting those who regularly give money now - including comrades with standing orders for the *Weekly Worker*. You will be encouraged to give more.
- Reaching out to the hundreds of comrades who have sent us one-off donations over the in the recent period. These are always welcome, but really we need regular contributions - ideally through standing orders - which allow us to plan our finances with a degree of confidence.
- Encouraging supporters and sympathisers to take money-making initiatives. This will mean that many of these comrades will need to be drawn into a more organised relationship with us - not easy, given the numerical weakness of our cadre around the country, but something we must be constantly striving to achieve.

Now, as many know, the Communist Party has a reputation in the movement for being good at raising money. True, we are. But this is not simply some technical ability we have been fortunate to pick up. No, it is all a question of what type of *politics* we have and

the levels of commitment and hard work we are able to win because of it.

Take the printshop we run. The story of its birth is instructive. I have had comrades from rival left groups confidently tell me that it is "impossible" for a political organisation the size of ours run a financially viable business like this. Indeed, getting the cash together for the equipment in the first place would be beyond us. There were only two realistic options, I was told.

First, that - conveniently - we would happen to *recruit* a printer, complete with an up and running business. Or second, more likely in some comrades' view, the mega-rich sugar daddy at the heart of our organisation would simply use his spare cash to buy a print business for the organisation to play with.

Not even close, comrades. In fact, the organisation decided that a printshop was a *political* necessity for our group in the aftermath of the liquidation congress of the opportunists of the 'official' CPGB in late 1991. To underline our message that the CPGB had *not* died with the hara-kiri of the opportunists - to help disassociate communism in Britain from these degenerate political trends - we decided to stand in the 1992 general election. However, we did not approach the campaign by first totting up 'spare' resources to determine if it was *possible*. We identified a political *necessity* - conducting a nationally focused, genuinely communist electoral intervention around our four candidates in England, Scotland and Wales - and then found the means to make it happen.

Quite apart from other items of propaganda, a serious campaign would require 250,000 individual election addresses. Commercial printing was prohibitively expensive. To meet the political challenge, we clearly needed an organisational leap. The money for the machine was raised through a financial appeal and some generous loans. But print machines don't just run themselves ...

A comrade - then a lowly civil servant - was approached to take on the task. He gave up his job and burned the midnight oil to quickly learn the trade before he was plunged into the work. He didn't get further than the basics. He learned how to print through screamingly frustrating hours of trial and error. The comrade worked gargantuan shifts to hit the delivery deadlines for our election material. At the end of one shift, he would often sleep beside the machine - amid small mountains of paper stacked on pallets - in order to get a quick start on the next batch of work. And he did it. Only just, but he did it.

That is where our Party printshop actually comes from, that is why we had a viable printing business for over a decade and that is how we have been able to print our Party's newspaper, books and other propaganda. So politics come first, followed by a little bit of healthy Leninist fanaticism. Works wonders.

Politics today are very different, but no less challenging. We are not just asking comrades to put their hands in their pockets for our organisation to stand still; we must move ahead once again. We need to dramatically expand the readership of our press; to re-equip our office and our Party businesses; to consolidate the new contacts we have round the country in a more cohesive national structure; to publish more books and pamphlets in 2004; to improve our web presence, which despite a large number of hits remains extremely amateur and lacking in imagination - all these initiatives are immediate priorities and all need money.

The next meeting of our Provisional Central Committee will discuss the details of the campaign and soon after that we will be contacting comrades individually and in groups.

We are confident that once again our comrades will rise to the challenge ●  
**Ian Mahoney**

## What we fight for

■ **Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists, anti-capitalists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.**

■ **The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.**

■ **Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.**

■ **Communists oppose the neo-conservative war plans of the Project for the New American Century and all imperialist wars but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.**

■ **Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.**

■ **The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.**

■ **Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.**

■ **Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.**

■ **The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be readied to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.**

■ **Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.**

■ **We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.**

■ **Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.**

■ **Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.**

■ **Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.**

■ **Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.**

■ **All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.**

### Become a **Communist Party** supporter

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## Make European Social Forum common property

# Setting another agenda

**O**ur first UK assembly, held on January 24 to plan for the European Social Forum coming to London, was a mixed bag. True, it was a bureaucratic stitch-up, which presented the meeting with a number of back-room deals and *faits accomplis*. But, on a positive note, there can be no doubt now that the ESF will definitely take place in London later in the year in one form or another.

It remains to be seen though if it can become a forum that can purposefully bring together organisations, groups and movements across Europe - and not just be another Ken Livingstone show, similar to his annual Respect festival. London's mayor has got his fingers deep in the ESF pot and undoubtedly sees this as a god-sent gift: An ideal opportunity to put himself forward as *real* Labour, in contrast to both the increasingly discredited Blairites and the passé old Labourites. And - who knows? - perhaps the publicity will enhance his prospects of becoming prime minister somewhere along the line.

So far, all those involved have concentrated solely on the organisational rough edges - establishing accountable structures, finance and political support for the forum. But our main task is to make sure that this third ESF will be remembered for mobilising the people of London and at the same time uniting the left and progressive move-

ments of Europe on a higher political and organisational level. Livingstone and his chums in Socialist Action, we can be sure, will seek to mould the whole event to suit their own narrow needs and wishes. Not least rebooting Ken's image.

Readers of the *Weekly Worker* will know that this UK assembly was put together in a non-democratic way: a group of about 40 volunteers were supposed to draw up an agenda and propose chairs. The group was also supposed to draw up a text which, once it was ratified by the assembly, was to be used to sign up groups to the ESF process. But the volunteers group never met, thanks to pressure from Livingstone.

However, two days before the assembly, Dave Holland (Livingstone's appointee in charge of the GLA's European and international affairs) distributed a document entitled 'For a UK organising committee to host the European Social Forum in London'. Our three-hour-long assembly ended up only discussing this proposal, and reports from the working groups and proposals for European days of action fell off the agenda.

As could be expected, the assembly was not exactly a harmonious affair. Throughout, there were heckles and counter-heckles. An anarchist comrade, Hamish Campbell, chose to protest

against the undemocratic organisation of the meeting by, well, behaving in a rather undemocratic way: he hijacked the microphone and, when a slightly hysterical Socialist Workers Party comrade grabbed it back, he pulled a chair up next to the top table and accompanied speeches not to his liking with rude hand gestures. No doubt the GLA-SWP bloc will use such silly behaviour to justify the need for closed meetings ...

Alex Gordon, representing the RMT, introduced the GLA document which has been signed by the national executives of Amicus, RMT, CWU, NUJ, Natfhe, Unison northern region, and the South East Region TUC (Sertuc), comrade Gordon reported. It calls for a UK organising committee to "establish such bodies, legal entities, staffing arrangements, website and other practical steps necessary to assemble support for and organise the ESF in London". This body would meet monthly and is to be made up of one representative from each affiliated organisation.

While some people criticised the suggested affiliation fee (which start at £50), most critical voices focused on the underhand way of proceeding. For a while it seemed that no amendments would be accepted - after all, a number of big organisations had already signed up to it. Some were understandably upset about this. Their complaints were answered somewhat pathetically by two female SWP comrades. In their contributions, Florence and Nancy told the critics that they should be "ashamed" to talk about such minor things, "while there are thousands of children starving in Africa".

There was much huffing and puffing from both sides. However, it was finally agreed that the text would serve as the basis for affiliation. There is only one real problem with it - the things that are missing. What is happening to the working groups, which have been meeting since December. Are they to be disbanded and re-established under the guidance of the UK organising committee? Nobody would tell.

Comrade Gordon said that the GLA document was based simply on a translation of the French structure. However, when the comrades prepared for last year's ESF in Paris, they also established a smaller group of around 40 people. This secretariat met weekly (and in the

end daily) to make all the crucial decisions. This omission from our UK proposal is certainly no accident. CPGB comrades put forward an amendment, which suggested committing "all ESF structures to meet in public, publish their agendas and discussion documents in public well in advance of meetings and make available full minutes". But, like all other amendments, it was referred back to the UK organising committee.

The assembly fizzled out, without announcing a date or venue for the first meeting of the organising committee. That despite the fact that two people told me during the assembly - independently of each other - that it had in fact already been arranged for the coming Thursday night. However, the invitation was only emailed out on Wednesday morning. Such bad practice certainly does not help to overcome the bad feelings and the high level of mistrust.

However, this was the first meeting which gave the distinct impression that the London ESF will actually take place, although a date has still to be confirmed. The GLA is committed to giving £250,000, while Unison is in the process of committing £100,000 and no doubt the other trade unions will also dig deep.

So it has taken months to set up a - still imperfect - structure to get the ball rolling. But the tasks ahead are incomparably larger. While our Italian comrades were able to put together the first ESF in Florence in only six months, they had at their disposal a massive and well organised Italian working class movement and the militants of Rifondazione Comunista. French comrades had over two years to plan the second ESF in Paris - with thousands of volunteers, most of them members of the Communist Party of France and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire.

In Britain, though, the situation is a lot different. Not only do we have just nine months left to organise a massive four-day-long conference/festival for 50,000 people, but there is also no hegemonic political force that can authoritatively take a lead. There is a real danger that the ESF London will be a GLA-led bureaucratic affair, aided and abetted by a few hundred foot-soldiers from the SWP and the trade union movement.

Undoubtedly, both the GLA and the trade union bureaucracy have their own

agenda. Communists and revolutionary socialists likewise need to urgently start discussing how we can make a real impact on the ESF. For example, in Florence and particularly in Paris, the question of building functioning networks across Europe was completely neglected. Comrades came together for four days, had some fun, listened to debates - and then they went home again, mostly not to see or even contact each other again for another year.

This is not good enough. We need to start organising now to make sure that European-wide networks can emerge from the ESF. For too long, European unity has been left to the bourgeoisie with their bastardised and thoroughly undemocratic version of the European Union. If we are serious about challenging the EU, we need to build our own structures. Our disunity is epitomised by the inability of communist and left socialist organisations to field a single list of candidates for the June 10 European parliament elections. Rifondazione Comunista has opted to stand on a slate with the 'official' communist parties and it looks rather doubtful whether the Scottish Socialist Party, Izquierda Unida in Portugal, etc can get their act together to run joint contests.

The building of European left unity will require a lot of patience and hard work. And we could make a useful beginning by getting our own house in order. The British left is notoriously disunited and sectarian. Of course the ESF cannot substitute for something like the Socialist Alliance but it does give us the opportunity to bring together groups, organisations and grassroots alliances that have often never even spoken to each other.

We need to discuss now how we can involve as many local cultural, political and working class groups and activists as possible, as well as those from across Britain and Europe. We need to make sure that there will be opportunities for all such groups - for example, through the organisation of smaller workshops near the main venue (which in all likelihood will be Alexandra Palace) - to come together and make the London ESF their own property ●

Tina Becker

## Hutton Report protest, January 28



The Stop the War Coalition mobilised 150 people to protest outside parliament on the morning of the Hutton Report's publication. George Galloway told the crowd that "in years to come, we will have a full enquiry - not just into one man's death - but the 1000s of men, women and children killed in Iraq. The anti-war movement is after you, Mr Blair!"

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