

weekly **Worker**



**Redmond O'Neill and the
troglodyte world of the
Socialist Action sect**

- 'E' for equality
- STWC conference
- London ESF
- Iranian elections

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Towards a new workers' party

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PARTYnotes

‘E’ for equality

Last week *The Guardian* exposed the bloated “fat cat” lifestyle of Neil Greatrix and Michael Stevens - leaders of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (March 1). This officially registered trade union was born as a strike-breaking outfit in 1984 and was always more or less confined to the Nottingham area. Since the defeat of the miners in 1985 and the subsequent decimation of the coal industry it has not only been the National Union of Mineworkers that has virtually disappeared. The UDM now consists of just 1,431 members.

Despite its diminutive size Greatrix and Stevens have shown no compunction whatsoever in overseeing various dubious deals which have sent their incomes soaring. Greatrix (UDM president) now commands a basic salary of £100,250, while Stevens (vice-president) takes £91,313. On top of this the pair are on the receiving end of payments into a pension fund equivalent to a third of their salaries, plus subsidies for their mortgages, fuel, telephones, council tax and water bills for their homes and cars. According to the last available figures, in 2002, that gave Greatrix an extra £17,869 and Stevens £19,702. In total their annual cost to the UDM is estimated to be over £150,000 each.

Greatrix and Stevens are obviously rightwing trade union bureaucrats of a particularly revolting stripe. But they are far from alone. The new generation of leftwing officials, the so-called awkward squad, inherit salaries and perks which give them an elevated social position - one far removed from that of their rank and file members. Take Derek Simpson, leader of Amicus: he has a basic salary worth £90,000, to which another £40,000 is added in the form of benefits, such as pension contributions, etc.

Local and regional government, Westminster and Brussels are essentially the same. They are stuffed full of career politicians whose main concern is self-advancement and lining their own pocket. Members of the European parliament, for example, are set to get salaries of £72,000, which they can augment by all manner of means, fair and foul. Under these conditions workers’ representatives are vulnerable to conservative and backsliding pressures. Even the most determined militant can thereby be turned into their opposite. Not surprisingly *Socialist Worker* reports that young people often automatically presume that “deceit, spinning and personal ambition” are endemic amongst politicians (February 28).

And it is not only youth. Opinion polls routinely show that wide swathes of the population regard the entire political establishment with utter contempt. That contempt is well deserved. And who can blame the 30% or 40% who subsequently abstain in national elections. Clearly Britain’s parliamentary system is rotten and in historic decline. Real power and real decision-making exists elsewhere. Debates are farcical, the House of Lords is nothing but an unelected delaying mechanism, MPs are bleeped voting fodder and the whole institution is increasingly seen as remote, unaccountable, corrupt and self-serving.

The ‘e’ in Respect supposedly stands for ‘equality’ and could, if it were taken seriously and made con-

crete, have a profound impact on a working class that has grown sick and tired of Labourite politicians and their naked careerism. The Blairites are hated with a particular venom. It was surely an own goal then, when at the January 25 launch of Respect, the Socialist Workers Party used its majority to defeat a motion which would have committed all our elected representatives to take a personal salary equal to the average skilled worker.

For our part, to ensure that the ‘e’ in Respect is not dismissed as ‘enrichment’ we shall be asking each and every candidate to make a personal pledge: ‘If elected I will take an average skilled worker’s wage and promise to donate the balance to the movement.’

Obviously the SWP has landed itself in a hopeless mess over the question. Paul Holborrow, for instance, urged the Respect convention to vote down our motion because “Respect is not a socialist organisation” (*Weekly Worker* January 29). Quite frankly this is risible: limiting the pay of representatives is a principle which our tradition applies to *all* spheres of representation.

The 1871 Paris Commune - originally the equivalent of the Greater London Authority - guarded against the “inevitable” danger of the “transformation of the state and the organs of the state from servants of society into masters of society”. 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”. Furthermore all officials were paid “only the wages received by other workers”. In this way, said Fredrick Engels, “an effective barrier to place-hunting and careerism was set up” (K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 27, London 1990, p190). The Bolsheviks continued in these egalitarian footsteps. In Lenin’s celebrated ‘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).

Only three years ago the SWP had no problem voting for equality 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 - proclaimed that if elected they would be a workers’ MP on a worker’s wage. Tommy Sheridan and the Scottish Socialist Party made the same stand ... and won considerable esteem in the working class as a result. Today their six MSPs are on something like £23,000. Roughly half the official Holyrood salary.

The SA unproblematically extended the principle of equality to the entire labour movement. *People before profit* - the SA’s election manifesto - demands that trade union officials must be regularly elected, accountable and “receive the average wage of the workers they represent” (p7). Ditto a recent pamphlet penned by Martin Smith, the SWP’s industrial organiser. After slating the “astronomical” salaries enjoyed by the trade union bureaucracy, he promises 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 *The awkward squad* London 2003, p26).

Holding true to a principle in the

abstract is easy. Only when there is a price to pay - eg, a government ban, temporary unpopularity, loss of big names - do we discover what is authentic, serious and worthwhile and what is merely a cheap pose. Presumably the SWP calculated that sticking to a workers’ representative on a worker’s wage risked the departure of George Galloway. He 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”.

Top SWPers - crucially John Rees and Lindsey German - vociferously defend Galloway. He has done sterling work, has never claimed expenses, etc, etc. But our aim was never to single him out, or anybody else. We do say, however, that he and all Respect representatives should make available their accounts for inspection by the movement. They can then claim legitimate expenses and with good conscience.

Our intention in Respect is not to pauperise but to enlighten. In other words critical engagement with a view to winning a majority to the realisation that what is needed in Britain is not a populist election front nor some amorphous left party. Objectively the situation cries out for a Communist Party - a revolutionary combat party of the working class which is solidly based on an agreed Marxist programme.

Towards that end dismissing or boycotting Respect would be foolish indeed. There is a huge space on the left in British politics waiting to be filled. Respect is led by Britain’s largest revolutionary grouping, the SWP, and represents the continuation of the 2003 anti-war movement. Now in 2004 the advanced part of that mass movement is trying to organise itself into a political party. Undoubtedly Respect is attracting encouragingly large numbers to its meetings and rallies. There is also a not insignificant involvement by leading trade unionists.

Respect marks a step back from the SA politically. Its platform is minimalist in the extreme and prone to substitute empty platitudes for concrete demands in the attempt to be all things to all people (eg, the Muslim Association of Britain). Moreover, the SWP is moving sharply to the right. “Shibboleths” like equality are being sacrificed in the name of “making a difference”: ie, getting elected. This, of course, being the standard refrain of generations of Labourites - and we all know the sorry results.

People before profit was no revolutionary programme. It did, however, unite the groups and *practically* marked a shift to the left: from auto-Labourism to actually presenting the working class with an alternative. Criminally though, the SA was to all intents and purposes liquidated. The SWP was threatened by, feared and recoiled from the perspective of building a genuine party (necessarily with democracy, centralism, open criticism and the right to form permanent factions). Instead it irresponsibly treated the SA as an on-off “united front”, albeit of a “special kind”. And after the 2001 general election that meant off. The 2003 upsurge against the Iraq war confirmed the liquidation of the SA ... but posed the party question anew.

Following June 10 and super Thursday the danger is that SWP will do exactly the same thing again ●

Jack Conrad

LETTERS



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

Respecting SA

In Marcus Ström’s latest contribution to the debate about the Socialist Alliance, there is a reference to Lowestoft SA’s concerns regarding the debacle over standing down in local elections in favour of Respect (‘Show electors some Respect’ *Weekly Worker* February 26).

Firstly, the concerns expressed are my own without direct relation to Lowestoft SWP; secondly, I totally and unequivocally support Respect in standing in the Euro and GLA elections. I will work to get the very best vote for Respect in Lowestoft/Waveney. But my dilemma is how. My disagreement with the SA ‘task group’ proposal to subordinate all SA activity to getting the vote out for Respect concerns the ‘conveyor belt’ between my lived reality and the goal. I can see this ‘conveyor belt’ in big cities and conurbations, but in isolated smaller towns like Lowestoft (60,000 population), surrounded by villages, sea and sheep, where are the cogs to drive the conveyor belt?

Lowestoft has suffered and still suffers a rampage of closures and job cuts on the one hand, while our further education college has become a hideous joke. I was Stop the War Coalition convenor here from 2002 to 2003. While we got 150-plus from Lowestoft to the big February 15 2003 demo (with a further 50 from Yarmouth and up to 200 from the sticks), our biggest STWC meeting was just 20.

So in Lowestoft if we orientate around our STWC group, activists and contacts in terms of Respect, we’re looking at 50 people. Trouble is, these same 50 people were around the setting up of the SA in 2001 (where we had a meeting of 30-plus). There are few activists here - let alone contacts and socialists. My problem is ‘squaring the circle’ between local activity - stopping the British National Party, which won 15% in the recent Yoxford by-election, fighting council house sell-offs, problems in a local high school, helping to organise a fightback at Birds Eye (our last big workplace) and incredible cutbacks at our district town hall.

If these could be fed directly into the ‘conveyor belt’ of Respect, yes and yes again. But, well, I do understand that Respect is looking to the ‘big picture,’ sure - but how do we really connect anti-imperialism to these local struggles? Without some means, I humbly suggest the task group motion, in terms of towns like Lowestoft, places Respect in a bit of disRespect - as a conveyor belt without cogs.

Without socialist representation at the local elections I do not understand how the few socialists here can (a) connect the ‘dig where you stand’ struggles directly with Respect; (b) how socialists here can properly promote Respect without the ‘cogs’ for the ‘conveyor belt’; and (c) how, in the light of George Monbiot’s departure from Respect, we can bring Respect into our Green Party.

I have been at the forefront of struggles here since 1989. While no longer a member of the Socialist Workers Party, I am a wholehearted supporter. Now I’m entitled to Saga holidays it really is up to younger socialists than I to take a lead in Lowestoft and Waveney. I came into politics to build socialism from below and that’s where I stand. But in Respect there has to be the cogs of socialism from below which can drive forward the break from Labour.

More than this are the ‘what ifs’. The Green Party will undoubtedly stand in the Euro elections - perhaps even leaving the field at the local elections. I’m not sure about the BNP, given Yoxford: they may stand in some local wards. Given the small number of socialists, active trade unionists and STWC activists here, how does Respect ‘contest’ the BNP lo-

cally? Where are our efforts put?

The trouble is, Lowestoft SA has a small history (2000-2004). We got the SA to take on canvassing as opposed to leafleting. Are we now to go backwards for Respect and mass-leaflet? What of continuity?

Rupert Mallin
Lowestoft

Despair

The pretext for the walkout of CPGB members from the Democracy Platform of the Socialist Alliance is as ludicrous as it is self-serving. If the decision to withdraw from the DPSA is not reversed, then the primary damage that will be done will be to the CPGB’s own reputation amongst its ex-comrades.

The suggestion by Steve Cooke that the decision to allow non-SA members like myself to vote meant that the DPSA had effectively curtailed its position as a platform within the SA is nonsense (‘Moving to split away’, February 26). Since when is it a condition of becoming a platform that all members of an organisation are also members of the SA? Is that true of the SWP or the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty - or indeed the CPGB?

What makes Steve Cooke’s argument even more absurd is the article on the previous page by Marcus Ström, who writes that if the task group motion to prevent SA candidates standing in the local elections is passed, as it almost certainly will be, “the SA will effectively be liquidated in all but name”. Presumably, if comrade Cooke’s logic holds, then the DPSA will also be no more.

Socialists do not attach their primary loyalty to organisations but to the need to campaign and build for socialism. Of course the DPSA needs to prepare now for the fact that the SA is not going to exist other than in name. Of course, if it is really committed to building a workers’ party then it needs to have a membership independent of the SA. Indeed these things are so obvious that they scarcely need spelling out. If our experiences in the SA are not to be rendered nugatory, then it is crucial to try and keep together the best elements among independent socialists in the SA.

Not for one minute does anyone accept the pretexts that the CPGB has offered for its behaviour in walking out. It is clear to all that the CPGB, despite having been marginalised by the SWP, is desperate not to lose contact with this brightest of stars in the firmament. Like the International Socialist Group, they cannot conceive of life outside the SWP’s initiatives and, the more they are kicked in the teeth, the more they rationalise their own servility.

The behaviour of the CPGB in prioritising its needs and its demands over the need to regroup what is left of the SA is a classic example of sectarianism. As someone who is not a member of a small revolutionary sect, I have to say that the behaviour of the CPGB makes me despair that it will ever become possible to work honestly and openly with members of groups which have their own agenda. They will always find an excuse for splitting and resplitting. It is almost a pathological condition, born of years of isolation.

It is also clear that the DPSA, having quite correctly rejected the SWP’s quick fix, undemocratic populist front (Respect), has no alternative but to constitute itself as a separate but loose federal grouping and seek to work with similar minded groups such as the Alliance for Green Socialism.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Techno

Steve Cooke seems to be prioritising the technical, legalistic aspects of the constitution of a future workers’ state over the political content of the CPGB

programme (Letters, February 26). Admittedly, at present we have only a draft programme. Fast-forwarding ahead to when these problems have been rectified, perhaps it will be possible to come up with a form of words that will fully clarify the rights and interests of majority and minority working class views.

But perhaps it will not. In which case we will have to rely on our interpretation of programme. The programme expresses our understanding of reality: it is the basis of a materialist morality and as such has a scientific purpose - namely the achievement of communism in the shortest possible time.

Maybe Steve has a view that the future Communist Party will be made up of the same rigid, self-obsessed sects that exist today. No, they are incapable of creating a Communist Party for programmatic reasons. For instance the SWP's democratic abuse of its majority position in the Socialist Alliance was not due to the fact that they won all the votes (that was their right and duty), but because they did not have a programme to create a Communist Party but only a 'programme' to recreate themselves.

The aim of the democratic form of the party is to break down rigid factional divisions and replace them with fluid internal relations that can separate, and thereby realise, the long-term, genuine needs of humanity. Democracy is not the answer, but provides the best possible platform for the scientific resolution of human need. Abuse it and we are in serious trouble.

There are a number of non-controversial reasons for replacing an elected representative, such as corruption and non-performance of their duties. A minority viewpoint may wish to replace someone they voted for because that person no longer holds their views. This should be their right, but perhaps the majority will welcome the change of view and come to that representative's rescue; that too is their right. I'm not sure why in a healthy party the majority would feel the need to persecute minority views even if they are troublesome. They are after all a minority.

This does not mean that there will never be any splits in the party of the future. The programme demands that we protect the long-term interests of humanity against sectional interests, which is a practical question to which there is no simple answer. Moreover, in the present situation - where we are engaged in a struggle to form a Communist Party from the debris of 'official communism' and Trotskyism - it is a problem that we are continually faced with. And this, I suspect, is the source of Steve's real concern.

Phil Kent
London

Primitivism

How is the left spitting vitriol at one another going to bring about high Marxist politics to the working class and rid us of small, terminally ill, sectarian parties?

All the left complains of lack of funds for their tightly knit milieu, so why not pool their resources under one paper with majority decisions but also serious minority viewpoints. Then those sectarians destined to retard the movement, and do more to help MI5 and the ruling class than further the workers' movement, can be left to their own sterile demise.

Respect will fail because it will take years to get off the ground; but the left waking up to sect primitivism is the best way forward.

F Kavanagh
email

Middle class

Jon Owen writes: "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?" (Letters, January 29).

It didn't seem to prevent Lenin or Trotsky from doing so.

Michael Little
Seattle

Raving

What on earth have you got against a strong state? ('Big people and the small state', January 8). As communists you should do your utmost to destroy democracy and all the liberal trash that goes with it. It is through the state that communists crush class enemies. Why is it that western socialists think it's obligatory to disown what happened in Russia, China, Cuba - ie, all the communists that have succeeded in capturing power - and applaud all the miserable failures like Trotsky and the POUM, as if you simply sympathise with losers!

You're as bad as those christian socialists that so infuriated Lenin when he visited London. What's the matter with you? You shouldn't have anything to do with religious believers. The moment communists seize power they must completely destroy religion through arbitrary and terroristic means.

As communists you ought to desire a world despotism, because despotisms have been shown to be far more egalitarian than any democracy!

Edmund West
East Anglia

Skin-deep

In the last edition of your paper you pictured a woman wearing a headscarf, while contradictorily painting her face with the words 'liberty' and 'equality'.

There is nothing 'liberal' or 'egalitarian' about the subordination of muslim women, be it 'voluntary' or not. How you can claim that such a depiction represented the 'values of the revolution' is truly beyond my comprehension. As Emma Goldman once said, if I can't dance then I won't join your revolution. Clearly you do not give a damn about the oppression of women, so yours is no revolution I want to be a part of.

I have long suspected that the little mention you make of women's rights in your propaganda is merely lip service and of a skin-deep nature. I no longer merely suspect: now I know. Thank you for at least letting me know where I stand.

Liz Hoskings
email

LCR and ban

As you said in the article, 'French left looks away', "a group of minority LCR militants" did support the February 14 demonstration against Chirac's bill outlawing religious symbols in schools (*Weekly Worker* February 26).

In fact we formed a small but visible contingent on the march. The opposition to the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire's policy of 'No to the headscarf, no the law' represented about 30% of the members of the LCR's leading body. To be fair to the majority, the minority has had its position publicised in *Rouge* (the party's weekly), and this text was distributed by LCR members on the march (we also wore LCR stickers to advertise our presence). Meetings to coordinate our action have been held at the LCR's headquarters, and representatives of the minority have joined the coordination organising activity against the law, along with muslims, anti-racists and even feminists. The LCR has decided to publish an internal discussion bulletin on the question (to which many opposition members contributed), although this has so far failed to appear. So it should be said that the tradition of internal democracy is very much alive within the LCR.

This is not to underestimate the difficulty of persuading French comrades

that they should defend the rights of muslim school students and others (such as civil servants or private sector workers) to wear the headscarf. There is a deeply ingrained prejudice within the French left against anything which smacks of 'communitarianism', and a serious underestimation of the effects of racism and oppression. The LCR, for example, frequently refers to itself as 'internationalist', 'ecologist' and 'feminist', but rarely, if ever, as 'anti-racist'. Many members are literally obsessed with the dangers of muslim fundamentalism, while rarely calling into question the fact that their own organisation has consistently failed to attract and to recruit members of minority groups (on the other hand, they have gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure equal representation of women comrades).

The majority, while opposing the bill on paper, have failed to organise any public initiatives against it, even refusing to attend meetings as observers - sometimes on the grounds that muslim (not even fundamentalist, but simply muslim) organisations would be present. And it is true that it is difficult, if not impossible, to effectively oppose the bill while saying, 'We are engaged in a struggle (*un combat*) against the headscarf as a symbol of women's oppression'.

For those who read French, the publication *Socialisme International*, produced by a group of LCR members who were previously associated with the SWP's sister organisation in France, has a special issue on religion, islam and Marxism which can be read on <http://www.anticapitalisme.org>. The paper edition can be ordered at colin.falconer@wanadoo.fr.

Colin Falconer
France

Informed

I found the article 'French left looks away' well informed and a good analysis (*Weekly Worker* February 26). Thanks.

Raymond Debord
Militant, France

Charity fraud

A report launched on the second anniversary of the horrific carnage in the Indian state of the Gujarat in 2002 presents alarming new evidence that, under the cloak of humanitarian charity, massive donations from the British public were sent to fascist-inspired hindu extremist groups in India.

Prepared by Awaaz - South Asia Watch Ltd, a London-based secular network - *In bad faith? British charity and hindu extremism* says UK organisations have been raising funds in the name of charity for natural disasters like earthquakes, and giving them to extremist organisations that preach hatred against muslims and christians.

The report demonstrates that the UK-based Sewa International sent £2 million for the devastating earthquake in Gujarat in 2001 to its Indian counterpart, Sewa Bharati, a front for the secretive, violent Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Money from the UK was given to RSS front organisations that are involved or implicated in serious violence. Much of the money was spent on schools that promote hatred and fanaticism.

The RSS, its closely allied family of organisations and their followers have been involved in the persecution or killing of thousands of muslims and christians in India over the past 15 years. They are known to have planned and executed anti-muslim pogroms in Gujarat in 2002, in which 2,000 people were killed and 200,000 displaced. The RSS considers religious minorities, especially muslims and christians, to be foreigners, aliens and polluters who have no right to be treated as equal citizens of India.

Awaaz
London

ACTION

Communist Forums



Lessons of the Miners Great Strike

In 1984-85, the NUM went to war. Dubbed "the enemy within" by Thatcher, for one year the miners and the women of the pit communities withstood everything the state could throw at them. Their fight inspired and mobilised masses of working people in this country and across the world. As the twentieth anniversary of this inspiring battle looms, what are the lessons? How do we ensure that the next strategic fight between our class and the bosses ends with a victory for the workers?

London: Sunday March 14, 5pm - Speaker: Dave Douglass, branch secretary, Hatfield NUM. Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW. Great Portland Street or Regents Park tube stn. Phone 07950 416 922 for details.

Cardiff: Tuesday March 23, 7.30pm - Speakers: Dave Nixon, ex-Hatfield NUM and Mark Fischer, CPGB. Dempsey's Pub, 15 Castle Street, Cardiff (5 min from Cardiff Central railway station). Phone 07816 480 679 for details.

Sheffield: Friday March 26, 7.30pm - Speaker: Dave Douglass, branch secretary, Hatfield NUM. Halifax Hall, Fiction Library, Endcliffe Vale Road, Sheffield S10. Phone 07855 279416 for details.

London Communist Forum

Sunday March 7, 5pm - 'Living philosophies and competing methods', using István Mészáros's *The power of ideology* as a study guide. Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW. Great Portland Street or Regents Park tube stn.

Solidarity with women in Iraq

Demonstration for secularism and equality - Friday March 5, 11am, outside 10 Downing Street (nearest tube: Westminster).

Solidarity rally - Saturday March 13, 6pm, Caxton House, 129 St John's Way, London N19 (nearest tube: Archway). Followed by food, drink and dancing. Events organised by Organisation of Women's Liberation in Iran. Sponsors include Communist Party of Great Britain, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Workers Power, Revolutionary Democratic Group, Worker-communist Parties of Iraq and Iran. 07956 883001; houzan73@yahoo.co.uk

Miners' Great Strike

Commemorative meeting, Friday March 12, 7pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speakers include Arthur Scargill (honorary president, National Union of Mineworkers), Mike Mansfield QC.

Organised by Socialist Labour Party, Kent area NUM.

Socialist Alliance

National conference, Saturday March 13, 10.30am to 4pm (registration from 10am). South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1 (10-minute walk from Euston station). Registration fee: £13 (£6 unwaged). Pooled fare contribution for London comrades: £10 (unwaged: £5 less own fare). Travelling expenses capped at discretion of conference arrangements committee.

No more lies

Demonstration outside Labour conference, Saturday March 13, Manchester

Al Richardson

Memorial meeting, Saturday March 13, 2.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

End the occupation

National demonstration, Saturday March 20. Assemble Hyde Park 12noon, march to Trafalgar Square.

Scottish Socialist Party

Annual conference, Saturday March 27, Sunday March 28, 9am to 5pm, Edinburgh University, theatre, George Square.

CPGB history

Exhibition: The story of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Ends 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

RDG

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

www.cpgb.org.uk/action

STOP THE WAR COALITION

Miners' websites Courageous class fighters

A few years ago, I remember hearing a story that some members of the Socialist Labour Party who were then close to its president, Arthur Scargill, initially resisted the setting up of a newspaper. Their argument ran along the lines of the SLP not needing a paper of its own, as it was very different from the rest of the sects. As it turned out, the organisation did get its deadly dull *Socialist News* on Scargill's own insistence.

Unfortunately, one can only assume that his belief in the need to publish does not extend to cyberspace, for King Arthur's other fiefdom, the National Union of Mineworkers (he remains honorary president), does not appear willing or able to put together even a simple website of its own - particularly surprising when you consider that next week sees the 20th anniversary of the miners' Great Strike. The nearest to an NUM site is a small page hosted by the TUC's search engine (www.worksmart.org.uk/union-finder). Here we have the NUM emblem, its address and phone number, and official membership figures (5,001). Yet the fields for email and website are empty. Not a promising start.

A simple search delivers some mining-related information, partially making up for the lack of an official union site. The first item turning up in my search was a very rough history of mining in Britain (www.spartacus.school-net.co.uk/TUminers.htm). This concentrates on the initial movement for the unionisation of the industry in the 19th century. Though purporting to be a page about the NUM, the postwar union only gets a mention in the final paragraph. Incredibly the strike does not get a look-in either. Instead we are blandly informed that "with the decline in the demand for coal, numbers in the industry continued to fall and by the early 1980s membership of the NUM was under 250,000". I guess it would be too much to expect better from a resource serving schools and colleges.

In every respect, the Coalfield Web Materials site (www.agor.org.uk/cwm) hosted by University of Wales, Swansea is better. The architecture is organised around five themes, 'Events', 'Life', 'Place', 'People', and 'Love and hate', with each linking to a page of short pieces concerning particular topic areas. The 'Life' link, for instance, organises pages around the women, politics, education, etc of the South Wales coalfield. The 'Events' page carries material concerning key battles and events in the 20th century. The account it gives of the 84-85 strike is pretty neutral, but does highlight the ballot issue. Nevertheless there

are suggestions for further reading. There is also a link to a broad outline of the NUM, but this is taken from a 1977 book, so do not expect anything on Scargill's behind-the-scenes shenanigans in the NUM (see *Weekly Worker* July 11 2002). Whilst on a South Wales theme, the *Gathering the jewels* Welsh cultural history website (www.gtj.org.uk/subjects.php?la-ng=en&s=2613) carries a number of branch and lodge banners.

In much the same vein, the Mining History Network (www.ex.ac.uk/~rburt/minhist-net/bibtoc.html) is basically a bibliography of scholarly books, theses and papers on nearly all aspects of mining in Britain, from the technological to the sociological.

The next item is a bland, text-based page from the *Wikipedia* online encyclopaedia (www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/national_union_of_mineworkers). Though the associated paragraph is worthless as regards information, there is an option for viewers to submit their own entry which could then be incorporated into the encyclopaedia.

As for accounts of the Great Strike itself, these are thin on the ground. Staffordshire's Past Track project (www.search.staffs-pasttrack.org.uk) offers scenes from the struggle around Stoke-on-Trent, accompanied by short descriptions for each photo. The next item to come up is an analysis of the strike (www.fred-riley.org.uk/weblog/hamster.html). Reflecting on the excruciating Channel 4 'documentary' of a few weeks back (see *Weekly Worker* February 5), 'Fred' lays into the Nottingham miners who defied the strike and continued working: "Had they come out, the miners would have been in with an even chance of winning ... but they didn't strike, and are thus directly responsible for the defeat," he concludes.

Strangely it is down to Aslef, the train drivers' union, to provide a commemorative page. It lists a number of miners' meetings over the next year, and offers photos and a strike timeline. The most interesting feature is a *Guardian* (January 11) article by Dave Feickert, which looks at the issues of technology displacing miners' jobs. This shows how the restructuring/profitability issue was used as a smokescreen, and notes how NUM proposals to manage the decline in mining was rejected out of hand.

It is unfortunate there is no single comprehensive resource documenting the proud history of mining communities in Britain. At the very least there should be an online monument worthy of these courageous class fighters ●

Phil Hamilton

Rock against

It is just over a year since millions marched through London protesting against war with Iraq. **Manny Neira** argues that in its desperation to preserve the movement behind the Stop the War Coalition, the Socialist Workers' Party is actually holding it back

"We have proved that this is the *peace* generation, not the *Pepsi* generation."

These were the boldly meaningless words opening the third annual conference of the Stop the War Coalition in London on February 28. Around 500 of us listened to Andrew Murray, chair of the STWC and leading light of the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain, getting hip.

It would be unfair to say that the political level never rose above this - but not *terribly* unfair. As the day wore on, two political ideas did gradually emerge: war is bad, and Tony Blair must go. "We were lied to about weapons of mass destruction, and about the legal basis for the war. But Tony Blair says it is time to move on. I agree: it is time for Tony Blair to move on."

Compared to this, the revolutionary maxim of the sheep in George Orwell's *Animal farm*, "Four legs good, two legs bad", represented an impossibly lofty level of political sophistication. The animals had found, at least, a *class* analysis: they suffered because they were oppressed by parasitical humans. The STWC leadership would have campaigned around the slogan, 'Whips are bad, farmer Jones must go'. Any talk of 'animalism' (the name socialism took in Orwell's work) would have been rejected as divisive.

And this was, perhaps, the third and most important theme of the day. The STWC must not go beyond a broadly pacifist, anti-New Labour agenda or it might lose support - or even break up.

Lindsey German

If this sounds familiar, it should, of course: the same patronising, dumbed-down politics lie behind the Respect coalition, and derive from the same source: the desperate opportunism of the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party. Step forward leading SWP comrade, and convenor of the STWC, Lindsey German: "This was not only an illegal war; it was fought by illegal means. When you find out they bugged the secretary general of the United Nations, you have to ask, 'What is going on in the world?'"

You do indeed. So why didn't she? Instead of an analysis of the politics of capitalism which lay behind both the spying on Kofi Annan and the war effort it served, we were treated to another attack on the personal morality of Tony Blair: "What is the matter with Tony Blair, who not only took us into this war, but said he would do it again? Is there any question that this man is not fit to be our prime minister? None of the leaders who took us to war are fit to govern."

She closed on the warning that the STWC was still here, and this time it was *personal*: "I predict that our coalition will be around longer than Tony Blair."

Tony Benn

Andrew Murray then announced that the STWC steering committee was recommending the creation of the post of president, and nominating Tony Benn for the office. President Benn approached the microphone to cheers: "I'd like first to welcome those here from the CIA and MI5: I hope their recorders are working. It would be no bad



President Benn

thing to have our ideas accurately reported among their number."

Benn placed his faith in the defence of the UN. "Throughout our movement there have always been people who have stood in defence of international law ... the bugging of Kofi Annan shows that the real enemy in the mind of Bush is not Saddam, but the UN itself! This is the real nature of the long-term problem: Bush has no time for the UN."

He would not be the last speaker that day to express illusions in international law, but he was perhaps the clearest. A utopian dream emerged: "I was looking at the UN charter and, though the security council of the UN is controlled by veto, the general assembly isn't. We should demand the general assembly take control of the International Monetary Fund, the banks, the World Trade Organisation. Human rights, the minimum wage, healthcare rights must be enforced. It is a huge project."

Huge, and impossible. The United Nations is not a democratic assembly of the world's peoples, but a closed club of the world's ruling classes. 'International law' is the honour amongst thieves: and there is no honour amongst these thieves.

United Nations

Conference proceeded to discuss the first batch of motions submitted by branches and affiliated organisations. Most were unsurprising restatements of SWP/STWC orthodoxy, and passed overwhelmingly. An appeal from Australians Against the War to be included on the platform for the forthcoming demonstration on March 20 was opposed, "reluctantly", by Chris Nineham - the STWC had been "mobbed" by requests to speak - and was voted down.

The issue of the UN was raised again, though, in a motion from an organisation calling itself 'Action for UN Renewal'. This called on the STWC to "change the conduct of our own government and support efforts to bring real democracy into the actions of the UN by next year's 60th anniversary."

Their speaker argued that "the charter of the UN says it exists to end the scourge of war. Unfortunately, things go badly wrong on the security council from time to time, and so we must reform the UN to bring it into line with its own charter."

Badly wrong? From time to time? This contribution was bizarre, but

prompted an interesting reply from Alex Callinicos of the SWP. He criticised the UN as an institution established to "ensure US world dominance", but argued: "We must recognise that there are different attitudes to the UN in the STWC. Tony Benn has defended it, while George Galloway has called it a 'thieves' and beggars' kitchen'. Let's not divide the movement."

This argument was again reminiscent of those advanced during the Respect launch, where the SWP had expressed support for, but voted down, motions calling for open borders and republicanism in order not to scare off potential supporters who were presumably anti-immigration monarchists. Here, the SWP was arguing (quite correctly) that reform of the UN was no road to peace, but opposing the adoption of *any* formal position on this central question.

The STWC is being turned into a blind alley for anti-war protestors. Rather than acting as a forum in which they can discuss ideas and develop a *political* understanding of the reasons underlying the wars they oppose, it is deliberately refusing to draw those political conclusions for fear of alienating those who might not agree. Perversely, this self-censorship is being imposed not by bourgeois pacifist forces, but by the 'revolutionary' leadership of the SWP. In fear of its own politics, it has moved to the right not only of its own rank and file membership, but to the right of the mass of activists in the STWC. It is not reaching out to the anti-war movement in order to draw it on to socialist politics, it is standing *between* the movement and its natural political development to the left.

Party games

The conference moved on to discuss four motions on electoral policy. The steering committee encouraged support for all candidates who opposed the war in Iraq, and the current US-UK occupation. The proviso that "such candidates or parties share the coalition's founding values of support for civil liberties and opposition to racism" was added, presumably to rescue the STWC from the embarrassment of seeming to endorse the far-right British National Party, which supported neither the invasion nor the occupation.

This debate was given life by a motion from the Green Party which called on the coalition to demand of "party affiliates and any other organisations not to claim any particular or unique support from the coalition in any future elections". They were clearly angered by Respect, which publicly advertises itself as the political expression of the anti-war movement.

Chris Bambery of the SWP spoke against the Greens. "This is a gagging order. When people ask, 'How should we vote?', Jeremy Corbyn has the right to argue that they should work to win back the Labour Party, and George Galloway to support Respect. This resolution reminds me of that question which appeared on US visa application forms: 'Are you (or have you ever been) a supporter of the Communist Party?' To stop people answering these personal questions is going too far."

The position of the steering commit-

around
THEWEB

rocking the boat



Anti-war protesters: led into blind alley

tee was endorsed, and that of the Green Party rejected, by substantial majorities.

Secularism

Delegates now discussed the question of the US-UK occupation of Iraq.

The Communist Party of Great Britain had submitted a resolution on this subject: "The STWC commits itself to campaign in solidarity with the democratic, secular and socialist forces of resistance in Iraq." A much longer resolution from the Jewish Socialist Group laid stress on the same point, calling on the STWC to "build links with emergent progressive and democratic forces in Iraq and provide solidarity to defend them from attack from the occupation forces, the Iraqi puppet movements and from fundamentalist forces".

In short, it was not sufficient to give blanket, uncritical support to Iraqi 'resistance forces', when some of those forces were clearly reactionary, oppressive, and anti-working class. My mind was drawn back to meetings organised by the Worker-communist Party of Iraq in support for their campaign against the creeping imposition of sharia law and the erosion of the rights of women already well advanced in some regions. They accused the British left of being soft on political islam as an 'anti-imperialist' force: a diagnosis based on the politics of the largest left group, the SWP.

A speaker for the JSG addressed the issue: "To end the occupation and allow self-determination are vital demands, but on their own they remind me of those instructions on fireworks: 'Light the blue touch paper and run like hell'. We are not isolationist but internationalist. Self-determination means imperialism cannot impose a solution, but not that we have nothing to say about the society that emerges. There are democratic movements in Iraq that deserve our support; and in supporting them we support self-determination."

The steering committee opposed this view: "We want to make the STWC as inclusive as possible. We also took the decision to build the movement with the Muslim Association of Britain, and the JSG are asking us to build solidarity with some groups in Iraq but not others. We oppose that as much as we would oppose *muslims* asking us to support only *muslim* resistance."

So the STWC was simply being even-handed: between resistance based on fundamentalist political islam, and democratic, secular, working class forces. The opportunism of the SWP's leadership was again evident. They might favour

democratic politics themselves, but they would not alienate the MAB or possible islamic supporters of the coalition by allowing the STWC to do so.

Ian Donovan of the CPGB defended working class politics: "We are all aware of the immense suffering the war has caused. This situation brings opportunities and dangers for progressive forces. We are seeing mass working class mobilisation in parts of Iraq: we must support this. Imperialism has destroyed the infrastructure and welfare systems in Iraq, forcing people towards the churches as the only providers of welfare. We cannot present an undifferentiated anti-war movement. We must promote an independent working class agenda."

Both JSG and CPGB motions were voted down.

National council

The steering committee presented a proposal for a new body to be formed: a national council of the STWC, meeting two or three times a year in different areas of the country: "All national affiliates would be invited to send representatives." The steering committee would continue to meet every few weeks in London, as before (all members of the steering committee also being on the national council).

This proposal was passed by the conference. The CPGB, previously excluded from attending the steering committee even as observers despite being a national affiliate of the STWC, looks forward to receiving our invitation to the first meeting of the new national council, which will apparently be held in April or May.

Steering committee

The final business of the day was to approve the recommended nominations for the steering committee. The Green Party was not satisfied with its representation, and moved a resolution seeking to make Jean Lambert MEP a vice-president of the coalition.

Hugo Charlton put their case: "I don't understand why there can only be one Green representative. There are three from Labour, and four from the SWP - why not two Greens? It is very important not to promote any one political party."

Another green clearly felt we were not sufficiently alive to Jean's qualities as a human being: "I am asking that you make Jean Lambert a vice-president of the STWC. Why? She speaks for the Greens! She speaks with wit, and vivacity! She has fought for the rights of refu-

gees, and will continue to denounce this war! When the grassroots greens march, Jean is with us - she puts her head above the parapet! Make her a VP! There are loads of them - it doesn't make any difference! But it does to us!"

Evidently so, but even this impassioned plea brought only a handful of votes. Already aggravated by the formation of Respect, the Green Party is becoming clearly disaffected with the STWC - or, more specifically, the SWP's leadership.

Media and intelligence

There was then a discussion of the question, 'Who got it wrong? The BBC, intelligence service or Blair?'

Jeremy Dear, general secretary of the NUJ, parodied outrage: "I'm angry you should even be discussing this. Hasn't Lord Hutton already sorted it out? I know he has, because I read it in the introduction to his report - and in the *Sun*."

He mocked the criticism of the BBC: "So much intelligence information offered in support of the war was based on single sources: the government have some audacity in attacking journalists for relying on single sources, when they *took us to war* based on single sources."

The government's attacks on the BBC had a wider political meaning: "They are not just attacks on journalists; they are attacks on the public's right to know. We should be proud to say that our movement got it right! We are proud of it, and will fight on to the bitter end!"

A somewhat surprising visitor, ex-MI5 man David Shayler, defended the security service: "What I want to know is why MI5 isn't getting up and complaining. I don't think MI5 made claims they couldn't justify - the government built the claims up." He called for "better intelligence services, with better oversight in parliament" - a suggestion which won unthinking applause. Here at last was a suggestion less likely than a democratically controlled UN: a democratically controlled secret police.

George Galloway

Next up was George Galloway. "Just outside, I was asked by the BBC if David Blunkett would follow up the threat of putting Clare Short on trial for breaching the Official Secrets Act. I said, 'Make my day', remarked the member for Clintwood East.

"The idea that a jury would convict her is absurd. We have our criticisms of Clare Short, but if she's a loony (and that's the tone of the attack now), why did Blair have her in his war cabinet un-

til 12 months ago? She says that the transcripts of Kofi Annan's conversations were indeed circulated, but Blunkett says they weren't. So who are we to believe? I know who I believe. Not just because of their inherent plausibility: but because it is clear the government mounted a whole campaign of deception to drag us into this bloody war."

The focus was again on defeating Blair: "This week, with the revelations of Katherine Gunn and Clare Short, will be the week Tony Blair's fall began. On March 20 we'll be in London demanding Blair must go."

MAB

Despite the strenuous efforts of the SWP to meet the political wishes of the MAB, it must have been galling for them that there was no more a muslim contingent at the STWC conference than there had been at the Respect launch. The MAB restricted itself to a single speaker.

"One of the best things to have happened to the MAB in its history was this blessed alliance. We opposed the war, and we thought nothing would content Bush and Blair but the conquest of country after country: but now they wouldn't dare cross a border. The resistance they are facing in Iraq makes it impossible for them."

He said that Bush was waging a war on democracy in the name of democracy: "I have just come back from the Lebanon, where if you talk of democracy and human rights, they think you are a lackey of George W Bush."

Though clearly intended for his current audience, his closing statement was, incredibly, nominally to the left of most we had heard that day from SWP revolutionaries: "We will work together until imperialism is no more, until capitalism is no more and until we have a world of justice." The question remains, of course, what do we counter capitalism with: consistent democracy and secularism, or islam?

Jeremy Corbyn

Left Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn returned to the theme of the war's illegality. "There was no legal basis for the war, and that is why the trial of Katherine Gunn collapsed; and why the advice of the attorney general must be released."

Ranging widely, he spoke of the government's continuing attacks on civil liberties, of the struggle between Israel and Palestine - "a war of F16s against rifles and stones" - and of the prisoners held by the US in Guantanamo Bay.

"The STWC had a huge effect, be-

cause it united so many people. It is a movement which won't go away. We sometimes feel isolated and attacked by the media - as others in harder situations do around the world. But on March 20 we'll be standing together all around the world. We are stronger and more numerous than they are."

John Rees

The final speaker was John Rees. He spoke of the move to "privatise the world", and the way in which the interests of corporations were reinforced by the state, repeating the memorable phrase that "there can be no McDonalds without McDonnell Douglas".

He foresaw problems for the neo-conservatives, though: "When the *New York Times* said that there was a second superpower - the anti-capitalist movement - that was a vital admission." This quote seems to have gone to his head. Clearly speaking as leader of this newly identified super-power, comrade Rees lost himself in his own rhetoric: "We didn't stop the war, but the US is stuck in Iraq - the resistance of the people of Iraq is the hammer of the global anti-war movement."

As prematurely as Bush had done, he declared victory. "We have halted them. We are what stands between them and the next war. If we stop, they will regroup and reorganise." There was no stopping him now. Surely even the SWP cadre, hardened to this kind of thing, winced inwardly as John reached his crescendo: "Go back to your communities and tell them we have stopped the war machine! We are part of a movement as great as the Chartists, as great as the suffragettes, as great as the early trade union movement!"

As great as the early trade union movement: here at last the classless, apolitical dream of the SWP was laid bare. The organised working class was not the force which would change society and thus stop war: a new 'anti-capitalist' movement would replace it. It might include monarchists or those opposed to immigration (who must not be alienated from Respect), or political islamists (who must not be alienated from the STWC). It might be bourgeois reformist (working through the UN), or reactionary and anti-democratic (resisting the US occupation to establish sharia law in Iraq).

It might be anything - as long as it swelled the numbers on the demonstrations, got candidates elected to the European parliament and rescued the SWP from ever returning to the impotence and irrelevance of its sectarian past ●

ESF

Looking forward to success

There was a businesslike atmosphere at the February 29 organising committee. There is also growing confidence. The 2004 European Social Forum will be held in London and we expect it to be a resounding success: that will be the message going out to next weekend's European assembly.

It looks likely that the main venue - to be held over three days in mid-October - will be Alexandra Palace (with the possibility of overflow sites in Bloomsbury and/or Haringey). Chris Nineham of Globalise Resistance and the Socialist Workers Party described it as a "very non-corporate and sympathetic space", situated in Haringey, with its large Turkish and Cypriot communities.

The Alexandra Palace building itself could cater for 20,000 people, but a considerably larger number could be accommodated through the use of marquees, etc in its grounds. However, Dave Hillman of the Tobin Tax Network stressed that we had to raise at least £1 million, and that required a "solid business plan". Redmond O'Neill, the Greater London Authority's director of public affairs and transport, elaborated on this: the bottom line of 20,000 people at Alexandra Palace would cost £1.2 million, rising to an estimated £1.58 million for 40,000 people.

The additional cost would arise mainly from the provision of marquees. However, at the meeting of the smaller coordinating committee on March 3, comrade O'Neill reported that the venue "is even better than we thought": four more potential meeting rooms had been "discovered". This means we will have to hire fewer marquees and can accommodate more people in the main venue.

The clear consensus from the February 29 meeting was that we should aim to exceed the 52,000 visitors at last year's ESF in Paris: Alex Callinicos of Project K (and, of course, the SWP) said, considering "the breadth of the movement" in Britain, 50,000 was hardly an unrealistic aim. He reminded comrades that the organisers of the first ESF in Florence planned for 10,000 and got five times as many. Dave Timms from the World Development Movement NGO, suggested that the more ambitious we were, the more sponsorship we would get, since the extra plenaries and seminars would mean more speakers' slots could be allocated to sponsoring organisations.

Comrade O'Neill pointed out that, while he too hoped for large numbers attending, "When it comes to money, pessimism is the order of the day." It was pretty clear that a good deal of cash could be raised from advance bookings, but it was very difficult to persuade potential backers, particularly from the trade unions, to help finance it on that basis. The TUC had asked for "market research" on the expected numbers, but that was not exactly easy to provide. For example, in Paris over 70% of ESF visitors had paid on the day.

That is why, from the point of view of raising finance, it was better to err on the cautious side, said comrade O'Neill, and draw up our plans accordingly. After all, somebody was going to be "legally liable" and the GLA would not put in *any* money unless it was clear there would be sufficient from elsewhere.

In that respect the £50,000 agreed by London Unison is very welcome, but, as Fred Leplat from the union's regional committee stated, it only amounted to three percent of what is necessary. Nevertheless, Alex Gordon of the RMT was confident that the TUC would give its backing, and that would "unlock funds from other unions".

A major source of finance would come from registration fees collected from those attending the event, but Paris was not an example to follow, said comrade O'Neill. It introduced a complicated sliding scale of fees and on average just over €10 was charged per person, which brought in the equivalent of only £300,000. It was "out of the question" that London would charge so little. The overall proposal to be put to the European assembly must include a "realistic" registration charge.

SWP comrades in particular (around two dozen out of the 80 people present were SWP

Plans are now fast coming together for the European Social Forum in London. Unfortunately, although there is a growing air of confidence, some still fear criticism and want to see it stopped



Alex Callinicos:
exceed Paris

members) pushed strongly for substantial registration charges. However, a small minority demanded the fixing of token fees for unwaged people, especially refugees and asylum-seekers. An Iraqi comrade suggested £4 was the most they could be expected to pay, while Mariangela from Manchester SF claimed that high fees would not allow "space for networks" and were "not in the spirit of the ESF".

A young refugee worker started to shout down other speakers and stood on her chair

demanding rock-bottom charges for people like those she worked with. Eventually she stomped out in disgust. But Elaine Heffernan, an SWP comrade who also works with refugees, argued that there was no need for such low charges across the board. Refugees had proved they are perfectly capable of fundraising and what was needed was to integrate them into the class, not treat them as charity cases. She argued that there should be a solidarity fund to subsidise people with *no* income, but to call for an amount such as £4 for *all* students, pensioners, single parents, etc would be to make the whole project unviable.

As there was clearly no consensus on this question, the chair called for a "straw poll" (voting is not permitted in ESF bodies, but in this case we were asked to raise our hands). The overwhelming majority were in favour of comparatively high registration charges and comparatively small reductions for unwaged people. The standard fee that will be suggested to the European assembly will be £40 for three days, with £30 for unwaged. In addition delegations will pay £60 each.

However, the aim will be to raise as much cash as possible in advance, and so the above charges will all attract a £10 discount if booked beforehand. A commercially run website will be set up as soon as possible in order to facilitate this. However, Redmond O'Neill told the March 3 coordinating committee that, even if the chosen company started work on Monday morning after the assembly gives the go-ahead, "as it stands, the earliest finishing date would be May 5". As an interim solution, a temporary website will be put up by the GLA within the next few days.

A percentage of all registration fees will be set aside for the solidarity fund and there will also be a rate of £15 (£10 unwaged) for one day's attendance.

The same division was apparent over the question of affiliation fees - another source of necessary income. The same comrades who championed heavy subsidies for everybody on low income wanted the same treatment for themselves and were horrified at

being asked to pay a minimum of £250 (for organisations with under 1,000 members). However, it was agreed that the organising committee can allow lower rates "if necessary" and comrade O'Neill suggested that the minutes should read: "No-one will be turned away."

Once again SWP comrades were to the fore in urging, in the words of comrade Callinicos, a "significant commitment" from affiliates. And it must be said that they seem to be putting their money where their mouth is - several SWPers stated that they were speaking for an affiliated union branch or other organisation.

Clearly, in the words of comrade Gordon, we are moving towards the position where the London ESF will be "getting the green light". As Jonathan Neale of the SWP said, "We've had months and months of wrangling with each other. Now it's going to happen."

Programme

Another area of broad agreement was on the need for the ESF to host genuine debate rather than a whole series of set-piece speeches. Comrade Callinicos said (rather ironically, I felt, coming from an SWP leader): "We don't want platform speakers just saying how awful the world is." Comrade O'Neill was in favour of a "robust exchange of views" and cited one area of disagreement that he hoped would be brought out into the open - the ban on the hijab in France, over which many of our comrades across the Channel have such "backward" views.

Comrade Timms, reporting from the programme working group, proposed that there should be a much smaller number of platform speakers than we saw in Paris and Florence. There should be no platforms made up entirely of academics and neither should speakers be allocated purely and simply according to their country, as had occurred in 2003. In the programme group, comrade Timms has been arguing for a hybrid solution, where 50% of speakers would be selected according to a national quota and 50% by an international ESF programme group. His suggestion might be too complicated to be practical. However, in my view it is quite correct to insist that, while platforms should be representative in terms of nationality, it is absolutely essential that speakers should be chosen first and foremost in order to facilitate "robust debate".

The same consideration should also apply to the gender of speakers. Comrade Timms's proposal - that no plenary without at least one woman speaker would be permitted - was pretty minimalist, it is true, but comrade O'Neill's suggestion that 50-50 gender representation must be a *requirement* seemed rather at odds with the proposal to reduce the impact of quotas for participating countries. Of course we should *aim* for a roughly equal balance, but to enforce it smacks of bureaucratic formalism.

There was also general agreement that there should be a greater proportion of seminars *vis-à-vis* plenaries compared to previous ESFs. There should also be fewer platform speakers to allow more interventions from the floor.

Anne Mc Shane from the CPGB stressed the centrality of workshops, which should be held on site if at all possible. But comrade O'Neill said that booking rooms for workshops was "out of the question" - their organisers would have to do that themselves. However, several speakers argued that this was impractical: would we really be asking an environmental campaign from Poland or an anti-war group from Greece to arrange their own room in ULU or Friends House? Comrade Nineham said there was no choice but to book workshop sites centrally - "We book the spaces; the groups pay." In the coordinating committee he said that it would be "impossible" to host the workshops on site at Ally Pally: "There won't even be enough space for all the seminars." Various venues in Bloomsbury, as well as in Haringey, would have to be further investigated to provide "overflow capacity".

Another "straw poll" was taken over the

Fighting fund

Shortcomings

"Informative and provocative as usual" is how TJ describes last week's *Weekly Worker*. "I can almost forgive you for your carping attacks on the rest of the left." And to show that abolition has been granted, he encloses a cheque for £15.

It's good to know that we're appreciated, for all the criticisms you have, comrade. I can assure you, though, that our polemics are far from "carping". As we say every week, "Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists, anti-capitalists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party" ('What we fight for'). Through exposing shortcomings - not least the failure to grasp the necessity of that "central aim" - we strive to make it a reality.

Comrade TJ's donation demonstrates that he is at least on the way to learning this lesson - our paper's fight for left unity is concrete and we need hard cash to back it up. So we are grateful too to RH who sent £5, FD, BH and PL, who all sent in £10, and DS, who contributed £20. Thanks to all of them, our February fund finished on £514.

Going into March, and another £500 target, I wonder how many of our web readers will help us out. Last week 8,100 read us online, but no-one took advantage of our PayPal facility to send us a donation. Another shortcoming to be overcome! ●

Robbie Rix

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

question of the precise dates for the three days of the ESF. Should it be over the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of October 14-16? This would allow people from Europe to travel home on the Sunday. Alternatively Friday, Saturday and Sunday would be more likely to attract greater numbers of day visitors from Britain. The latter won the "poll" and seems likely to be declared the 'consensus' of the UK organising committee.

Richard Brenner of *Workers Power* emphasised the importance of allowing space for the Assembly of Social Movements. He pointed to the absurdity of the World Social Forum ban on decision-making, which meant that exactly the same organisations were forced to meet under a different name - the ASM - in order to agree to *act*. It was the assembly, not the ESF itself, that set the date for the historic international demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq on February 15 2003.

However, comrade Redmond pointed out that the TUC did not agree with last year's ASM statement. Therefore, if we wanted TUC funding, the assembly would have to be kept separate from the ESF itself. Nevertheless, the organising committee accepted that a space would be made for the ASM. At previous ESFs, the ASM took place on the Sunday morning. If our ESF lasts from Friday to Sunday, the obvious question is - when will the ASM take place? On Monday morning? Thursday night? In either case, the effect would be to sideline the ASM, which will not go down well with our European comrades. It was further agreed that a space would be kept for a demonstration on the Saturday.

SWP comrades proposed that the central slogan of the ESF, 'Against war and neoliberalism', should be changed to something "more accessible": ie, 'Against war, privatisation and cuts'. They were also unhappy with 'Another Europe is possible', which they said sounded Eurocentric. They proposed 'Another world is possible'.

While, of course, we aim to change the world, we urgently need to organise concretely - here in Europe, against the European Union of the bosses. When the EU of capital adopts a constitution, incorporate new members and begins to take on state forms, how should we respond? By opting out? Surely, as well as demonstrating our commitment to global change in the interest of the working class and oppressed, our slogans must also reflect the tasks of the European left?

Weekly Worker

While, in contrast to previous meetings, the atmosphere at the organising committee was one of toleration (no enforcement of a predetermined agenda by the chair) and greater transparency ("Every affiliate should be entitled to minutes of all committees," said comrade O'Neill), there still seems to be something of a phobia when it comes to open reporting.

During his presentation on finance Redmond alleged that unspecified "inaccurate reports, particularly in the *Weekly Worker*, have put some unions off". In response Anne McShane said that the *Weekly Worker* was widely read, including by union officials, because it was often the only way people were kept informed. If we make mistakes, she said, they could easily be corrected.

Maureen O'Mara from Natfhe rejected this: "The TUC has held back to a watching brief because of those inaccuracies - on more than one occasion they were about to walk away." She also blamed the non-appearance of unnamed NGOs on our paper: "It's not good enough to say, 'We can apologise later.' You shouldn't do it in the first place."

This is the first time we have heard such allegations and they are very serious indeed. We have contacted Maureen to find out which organisations are supposedly not taking part in the process because of *Weekly Worker* coverage and what exactly they and the TUC have found so unacceptable. As we go to press, we have not had a reply from the comrade.

After the organising committee meeting I asked comrade O'Neill which *Weekly Worker* "inaccuracies" had jeopardised the London ESF. He did not elaborate on comrade O'Mara's remarks about the TUC, but told me that he had been emailed by a worried Alexandra Palace representative, wanting to know whether it was true there was "still no money in sight", apart from London Union's £50,000, to pay for the booking (*Weekly*

European criticism

The Greek Social Forum, in which over 200 organisations are involved, has issued a 'Letter to Europe' expressing concern about the "big problems" of the ESF process in Britain. The Greek Communist Party and the SWP's small Greek section are the only noteworthy forces not involved in the GSF.

In surprisingly blunt language, the GSF "acknowledge our mistake not to take into more serious account voices of criticism before the whole discussion for the ESF3". It goes on to criticise "exclusions and an attempt to close down information on economic issues. This worries us, not only because it is an attempt to ban transparency, but it is stupid." (As an aside, the comrades do not solely rely on "inaccuracies" they have read in the *Weekly Worker*, but say that they have also been informed by IndyMedia - the next one up for exclusion?)

They seem particularly worried about the role the GLA is playing: "Both Florence and Paris municipalities helped in logistics, providing space or even money. *But they didn't try to run it or interfere with political aspects*" (original emphasis). The London ESF has certainly taken on a qualitatively different character in the last few months. The ESFs in Florence and Paris have always been seen as the "property of all the European movements", with major decisions generally being made at the European assemblies.

Redmond O'Neill seems to have a different formula in mind. For example, in a discussion at the coordinating committee on March 3 about how the website would be run, he reported that "the French want a European committee to run it. That is a problem, because this would hand control over to people who are not putting up the finances ... The people who spend £1 million will decide on the organisation of the event. The Europeans can either say 'Yes, we want this event' or they can go somewhere else."

Tina Becker

Worker February 19). A link to that edition was provided by the Ally Pally rep.

Taken out of context, it is "inaccurate" to say that there is no money "in sight". But our reports have always made clear the substantial financial offer coming from the GLA and the likelihood that several big unions, and the TUC itself, would provide funds in the near future. So in reality our reports have been spot on.

Of course, it is not alleged "inaccuracies", but our exposure of control-freakery and the danger that the ESF could be turned into a Livingstone jamboree that annoys comrade O'Neill and causes him acute embarrassment. Nor presumably does he like his political affiliations discussed. Certainly the SWP hates our coverage of its somewhat dubious role. But the anti-capitalist movement ought to know all about these things ... just like it ought to know about what is going on in the UN and between governments.

Comrade O'Neill was at pains to deny that he wanted to suppress criticism. He told me that meetings such as those of the organising committee should not be reported at all, since they were "work in progress". And, though censorship and bans has been rejected by all the ESF committees, comrade O'Neill - as self-appointed judge and jury - informed me that if the *Weekly Worker* continued to 'endanger' the ESF, "we'll exclude you". In truth it is not the *Weekly Worker*, but such bureaucratic shenanigans and high-handed threats that endanger the ESF. After all, if they get rid of the *Weekly Worker* who will be next?

The ESF is not a conspiracy. There should be nothing to hide, nothing to be ashamed of. Only those who are conspiring to use the ESF for their own narrow purposes, only those who have something to hide, only those who have something to be ashamed of fear publicity ●

Peter Manson

Respect conventions and rallies

Wandsworth and Merton: Convention - Friday March 5, 7pm, Tooting Leisure Centre, Garratt Lane.

East Midlands: Convention - Saturday March 6, 3.30pm, Comfort Hotel, George Street, Nottingham.

Eastern Region: Convention - Saturday March 6, 3pm, Friends Meeting House, Jesus Lane, Cambridge (note changed venue).

West Midlands: Convention - Saturday March 6, 1pm, Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham City Centre.

London region: Convention - Sunday March 7, 11am, Hammersmith Town Hall, King Street, Hammersmith W6.

North West Region: Convention - Sunday March 7, 4pm, Philharmonic Hall, Hope Street, Liverpool.

Yorkshire and Humber: Convention - Sunday March 7, 12.30pm, Conference Auditorium, Leeds University.

Bristol: Organising meeting - Monday March 8, 7pm, Bristol Centre for the Deaf, 16-18 Kings Square.

City and East London: Convention - Tuesday March 9, 7pm, East Ham Town Hall, Barking Road, East Ham.

Oxford: Launch meeting - Tuesday March 9, 7.30pm, Asian Cultural Centre, Manzil Way (off Cowley Rd), Oxford.

Bath: Launch meeting - Wednesday March 10, 7.30pm, Percy Community Centre, New King Street.

South East: Convention - Sunday March 14, 3pm, Friends Meeting House, Ship Street (off the Lanes), Brighton.

Canterbury: Meeting - Thursday March 18, 7.30pm, Westgate Hall, off Pound Lane, Canterbury CT1 2BT.

Lewisham and Greenwich: Rally - Friday March 19, 7.30pm, Christchurch Forum, Trafalgar Road Greenwich.

North East London: Convention - Tuesday March 23, time and venue to be announced.

South West: Convention - Sunday March 28, 12.30pm, St Werburghs Community Centre, Horley Rd, Bristol BS2 9TJ.

Northampton: Meeting - Tuesday March 30, 7.30pm, The Guildhall, St. Giles Square.

Luton: Launch rally - Thursday April 1, 7.30pm, Large Auditorium, Luton University.

Communist Party books



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LEFT

Positions of influence

Some of Ken Livingstone's key advisors are members of Socialist Action, a small and secretive Stalinoid sect of Trotskyist origins. The position of leading member Redmond O'Neill in the Greater London Authority has given him an important role in the organisation of the European Social Forum. **Mike Macnair** looks at the group's history and practice

Socialist Action has recently achieved some prominence as a result of the role of its members, ex-members or supporters among Ken Livingstone's salaried political advisers at the Greater London Authority, and the resulting central role of GLA official and SA leader Redmond O'Neill in organising the London European Social Forum. Perhaps less welcome to SA were the allegations by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament ex-officer Jimmy Barnes that SA, together with the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, had "taken over" CND as a base from which to exercise influence in the Stop the War Coalition (*The Guardian* December 1 2003).

In addition to SA's practical prominence in the organisational preparations for the ESF, its evolution should serve as a warning to Socialist Workers Party members and supporters and, especially, to those of the International Socialist Group/*Resistance*. The policy these trends are now pursuing in Respect is identical to the policy of SA at an earlier stage in its history. Their destiny, if they do not draw back, is to end up like Socialist Action. The warning should be particularly clear to ISG members since their organisation was founded at least in part by a split from Socialist Action animated by its evolution.

The political ideas of Socialist Action are not easy to discover or decipher. It publishes - or published until 1999 - an occasional magazine, *Socialist Action Review*, and runs - if you could call it that - a website (last updated in March 2003, with the text of a pamphlet about the Iraq war). SA also runs the left-Labour monthly *Socialist Campaign Group News*, but this is almost purely a platform for elements of the left in the Parliamentary Labour Party and in the trade union bureaucracies. Similarly, SA members or sympathisers have acquired a series of posts in longstanding campaigns (CND, the National Abortion Campaign, and so on) and in trade union officialdom. In the National Union of Students they have become the primary force animating the Broad Left, which in the 1970s united the old Eurocommunists with Labour elements to control the NUS. Now much smaller, the NUS Broad Left was still able to get one of its members elected to the executive in 2003.

SA supporters' route to positions

of influence has had two elements. In the first place, they are commonly efficient administrators and do not openly differentiate themselves politically from the mainstream opinions in the bureaucracies in which they work. Secondly, they provide the left Labourites and other bureaucrats whom they support with a 'striking force' of operators well-versed in the techniques of sectarianism and bureaucratic manipulation and committed to oppose any extension of the influence of the far left. This is a role similar to that of the Stalinists who formed the core of the old semi-secret 'Operation Icepick' which drove supporters of the Militant Tendency out of the National Organisation of Labour Students in the 1970s (the name is a reference to the weapon used to assassinate Trotsky). SA gives to the Livingstones, etc "plausible deniability": they can assert their own democratic character against the far left, the anti-democratic manipulations used in their interest being blamed on SA today, on the 'official' Communist Party in the 1970s.

The practices described above are SA's *operative* politics - the part which has practical consequences in the real world. *Socialist Action Review* gave through the 1990s an image of SA's *political ideology* - the general political ideas by which it justifies its practices to itself and its contacts. The low practical significance of these ideas to SA is illustrated by the fact that - so far as can be seen from its website - *SA Review* appeared only annually between 1997 and 1999 and approximately twice a year in 1991-96.

Socialist Action has its origins in the Socialist League (formerly the International Marxist Group),



Leon Trotsky: not his method

between the late 1960s and mid-1980s the British section of (the Unified Secretariat of) the Fourth International, the major Trotskyist 'international'. The Socialist League published a paper called *Socialist Action*.

Naturally, with this background, much of *SA Review* was devoted to analysis of the international situation. The core of this analysis is that the fall of the Soviet Union was a major defeat for the working class. *Therefore*, it is argued, the task of the left internationally is to regroup on a much more limited basis, bringing together all those who "stand for the interests of the working class" - by which is meant those who "actually" oppose the concrete attacks of the bourgeoisie.

This turns out to be (mainly) the official left leaders in the imperialist heartlands, the elements of the 'official' communist parties that have not suffered complete political collapse everywhere, and "anti-imperialist fighters" - from general Aideed in Somalia, to the "Serbian people" (ie, the supporters of the Milosevic regime) and so on. *SA Review* has also provided enthusiastic backing for the various attempt of the 'official communist' movement to regroup itself internationally.

In British politics, this general policy has two distinctive features. Firstly, *SA Review* has insisted on opposition to any policy which could separate the hard-core left in the Labour Party from the 'soft left' (who, of course,

shade into semi-dissident Blairites). The main danger, it argues, is that of isolation. This policy was presumably behind SA's 1996-98 intervention into the faction fight in the *Morning Star*-CPB between the Hicks-Rosser group, then in control, and the Griffiths-Haylett faction which replaced them. SA backed the losing side.

Secondly, is the concept of a "hegemonic policy". Drawn (in the terms used) from Gramsci, this starts from the correct understanding that the working class cannot simply fight on economic issues, but has to aim to take power away from the capitalist class and hence to offer a policy for the whole of society. When, however, this is coupled with the previous idea that "those who actually fight" amount to the class movement or the left, the result is a collapse into the identity politics beloved of the Eurocommunists in the 1980s. The 'actual fighters' - ie, the feminist groups and the black caucuses in NUS and, more recently, the "community organisations" of, for example, muslims - are to have the right to determine policy. The "hegemonic policy" of the workers' movement is then merely to *support* the demands raised by these movements.

SA's analysis that the practical consequences of the fall of the USSR amounted to a defeat for the workers' movement in its existing form was perfectly correct and has been borne out by the increasingly open attacks of the capitalists on the working class internationally over the last 15 years. The question of the class character of the Stalinist regimes does not (with all due respect to Alliance for Workers' Liberty comrades) have any bearing on this: whatever their class character, too much of the strategy, policy and organisations of the workers' movement internationally had been built round the idea of these regimes as the 'socialist rearguard' for them to fall without severe adverse consequences for the workers' movement.

However, the conclusion SA draws does not logically follow from this analy-

sis. This can be seen transparently from the fact that SA was *already* arguing for the recomposition of the workers' movement based on "those who fight" *before* the fall of the Stalinist regimes and in periods when it considered the working class to be on the offensive (around the Nicaraguan revolution and the South African movement in the early 1980s); the tendency from which SA originates - the faction led by John Ross in the old IMG - was pursuing the basic elements of its current policy, under different names, when *everyone* considered the working class to be on the offensive (in 1973-75).

Conversely, when a project goes badly wrong, it is normal to try and work out *why* in order to avoid making the same mistake in future. The fall of the USSR is a pretty clear example of a project which failed catastrophically. The subsequent fates of semi-Stalinoid nationalisms (Yugoslavia, Iraq) rather confirms the obvious conclusion that bureaucratic dictatorship, nationalism and autarkic economic projects are not a strategic route to defeating imperialism. *SA Review's* strategic response - "unify everyone who actually fights" - precisely proposes unity *on the terms of those people who refuse to draw any lessons, but want to go on in the old way as if the USSR had never fallen*.

Within Britain, the effect of *SA Review's* policy (were SA's advice taken) in the Labour Party would be to give the 'soft left' a veto over the actions and arguments of revolutionaries. Since the soft left is precisely defined by unwillingness to make a sharp break with the Blairites, that in turn would give the Blairites a veto over what are acceptable terms of opposition in the Labour Party, and let them set the terms of the political agenda. Within the Gramscian terms of which SA is so fond, this is a "corporative" strategy - one that merely opposes - rather than a potentially "hegemonic" one - one that puts forward an alternative.

Rather similar problems affect *SA Re-*



Redmond O'Neill

view's "hegemonic policy" in relation to identity politics. The problem with identity politics, as became transparent to almost everyone in the course of the 1980s, is that the common experience of oppression (as a woman, as a black person, as a gay man or lesbian, as a Jew) does not in fact and cannot produce a potentially "hegemonic" policy. On the contrary, all the groups of the oppressed are *divided* - by class and political and religious choices, and by the cross-cutting effects of other personal oppressions (black women and white women have different experiences, and so on to an infinity of particulars which ends with every individual being able to speak only for themselves). It is only class politics which has the *potential* to construct a "hegemonic" alternative which can draw together the oppressed. In the 1980s this became apparent in the rise of Cosatu in South Africa, in the Brazilian Workers Party, in the Korean trade union movement, and in Britain - for a brief moment - in the mass mobilisation round the 1984-85 miners' strike.

SA therefore *cannot* construct a "hegemonic" policy out of unifying "those who fight". What it has elected to do instead is to privilege the race question and to characterise as racist any criticism of the dominant political-religious trends among people of colour. SA has thus become a true ideological inheritor of the 'anti-imperialist' Maoism of the 1970s student movement.

Ideologies are distinct from scientific theory in two ways. The first is that ideologies persist after they have been clearly falsified by evidence. The second, which explains why they do so, is that ideologies are not guides to action. They are *justifications* of the types of action the ideology-users are already pursuing for other reasons. Multiple ideologies may

therefore back the same course of action: "The accursed power that stands on Privilege And goes with women, and champagne, and Bridge Broke: and Democracy resumed her reign Which goes with Bridge, and women, and champagne" (Edgell Rickword).

In the case of SA this is exemplified by way the Ross faction argued in 1973-75, on grounds connected with the powerful offensive of the class, for a "priority united-front axis towards the left social democratic organising cadre of the class" - ie, tailing the Labour lefts and the 'official' Communist Party. In the 1980s and 90s we find the same tendency arguing, on the basis of serious defeat of the class, for "recomposing the left" on the minimal basis of "those who fight": ie, tailing the less radical element of the Labour lefts and the *Morning Star's* CPB.

What therefore fails to be explained is the Ross faction/SA's orientation *in practice*, as opposed to its formal ideology. Where did the practice of gaining "influence" by playing the role of organisers and hit-men for various bureaucrats, left social-democrats and Stalinists come from?

SA originated as a faction (misleadingly called a 'tendency' in Fourth-International-speak) in the old IMG. This organisation was characterised by two sharp internal contradictions in its ideas and those of the Fourth International of which it was part.

First, it was committed to programmatic documents based more or less directly on the *Transitional programme* written by Trotsky and adopted as the founding programme of the Fourth International in 1938. Large chunks of this programme were until the 1980s routinely repeated in programmatic documents

issued by the world congresses of the Fourth International. In particular, the struggle for *workers' democracy* against both Stalinist bureaucracy and its Trotskyist imitators was a constant theme of IMG propaganda and of its limited agitation in the trade unions, etc. However, the actual overthrows of capitalism by Stalinist parties had led the Fourth International *in practice* to the conclusion that its programme was not actually necessary to achieve a revolutionary policy. The Cuban revolution in particular had led to a 'refoundation' of the Fourth International on the basis of critical support to Castro and hostility to those Trotskyists, etc who rejected this approach. The same attitude was to be adopted in relation to the Vietnamese Communist Party, the 'cultural revolution' in China, and so on.

Secondly and relatedly, the IMG had been from its beginnings in the 1960s a group which advocated regroupment of the far left - initially within the Labour Party and from 1967-68 outside it. But the actually existing far left groups in Britain did not share the Fourth International/IMG's attitude to Cuba, Vietnam, and so on. Paradoxically, they also objected to the IMG's 'democratism' and its willingness to support the movements of black people, women and lesbians, and gay men, which began to emerge in the 1960s. Regroupment was thus a seriously tough problem. This, of course, remains true, even if the particular issues have shifted.

These contradictions crystallised in 1973-76 into two approaches to the IMG's political work. To simplify grossly, the majority led by John Ross argued for a "priority united-front axis towards the left social democratic organising cadre of the class" round "punctual" initiatives (single demonstrations, local and na-

tional conferences, etc). Getting the official lefts onside would make possible broad mobilisations. Since the class was moving forward, these broad mobilisations would allow the IMG to recruit directly from newly radicalising militants and thus outgrow the rest of the far left. The principal minority faction, which had a rather more diffuse leadership, argued for building long-term structured lefts in the unions and campaigns, based on fighting initially for united action of the far left, which could draw in the official lefts more on the far left's terms; these processes would set in motion a dynamic towards regroupment.

In 1975-76 it became clear that the official lefts would no longer play ball. In 1976-79 the IMG experimented with the minority's perspective, with some limited success in the trade unions and campaigns, but none on the electoral front. This failure, together with international developments, drove successive 'turns' - first sending militants to work in factories, then full entry in the Labour Party. Within Labour, in the early 1980s the old Rossite perspective of 'first get the official lefts on board, then recruit' resurfaced as the orientation to the so-called "Benn-Scargill-Livingstone tendency". It is from this approach that today's SA descends. In other words, the core practices of SA developed out of a *concept of the united front* substantially identical to that currently used by the SWP.

There is also a social basis to this practice. The Ross tendency always had its main voting base in the IMG/Socialist League's student work. Its leaders mainly were drawn 'upwards' by cooption of successful student union activists, who thus passed from full-time student union posts to full-time posts for the IMG-SL. They had their political training - and the same is true of the large

majority of the leaders of today's SWP and AWL - in the deeply cynical and manipulative world of NUS politics.

The NUS is *not a trade union*. Students, after all, normally cease to be students and pass on to managerial or professional employment. They are engaged in student politics usually for at most two and a half years. A new generation follows them. The result is that student politics has three marked features. The first is that mistakes do not matter. They will be forgotten and repeated, as new generations enter student politics. The second, and related, is that in student politics it is really true that a group leadership can take the view that 'the membership has failed us: we must elect a new membership'. The third is that since the 1960s student politics has been a principal training ground for professional bourgeois politics: old Broad Left and Labour Student activists become MPs. In their NUS politics they are learning to play the parliamentary game. Since the 1980s former student politicians have also furnished an increasing part of the supply of trade union full-time officials. Careerism is thus *normal*, and so is cynical manipulations of procedural rules for slight advantages.

It is thus natural for a tendency whose leaders are drawn from student activists and which has for any length of time recruited mainly from student politics to acquire a bureaucrat's eye view of the world. But this is in flat contradiction with the traditional programmatic ideas of the far left about 'socialism from below', workers' democracy and so on. One aspect or another of the politics must give. Socialist Action, with its overt collapse into Stalinist politics, is merely an extreme example of political ideas adapting themselves to the leadership's bureaucracy ●

Unite Against Fascism launch Against fascism. For what?



Lee Jasper: a big up for the mayor

On February 26 Unite Against Fascism was launched at the Astoria in London's Charing Cross Road.

The campaign is an uneasy combination of Anti-Nazi League platitudes and Ken Livingstone's City Hall anti-racism. Lee Jasper and Livingstone himself were on the stage, while fittingly Socialist Workers Party members manned the stalls. Many trade union officials and a string of MEPs and MPs have lent their backing. Indeed the list of initial UAF supporters looks like the type of *Who's who* that the ANL used to boast of in its heyday.

The UAF's publicity material states that the BNP is "poised to field candidates in the 2004 European parliament elections, local government elections and the next general election, in what they hope will be the greatest electoral assault by the far right in this country". It goes on to assert that "this dangerous situation requires a new and united response from all those dedicated to freedom and democracy ... against this common threat".

The campaign appears to be particularly aimed at getting the youth vote out. But the 'Don't vote Nazi' slogan is taken to an extreme that I have certainly never witnessed before. One of the first speakers to take the stage, *Eastenders* actor Bindya Solanki, shouted: "The way we are going to get the BNP is by voting and I don't care who you vote for - just don't vote BNP!" This was repeated by many others in the course of the evening. For example, Labour MEP Glyn Ford advised us to "get out and vote - otherwise you are going to see Nick

Griffin on *Newsnight*!"

The BNP were presented as the main threat (not to the working class, but to British society) and *any* vote - even presumably one for Michael Howard's xenophobic Tory Party - would be the way to stop "the fascists". Never mind the stinking policies of the current government.

Ken Livingstone said that the BNP "represent the same strain of fascism and racism as that which sent Jews to concentration camps. Underneath their contemporary politics are swastikas." He said that nobody should be in any doubt but that they presented the same kind of danger as German fascism in the 1930s. His fear was that they could win a member in the Greater London Assembly unless there was a high turnout. Brendan Barber, TUC general secretary, added to the hysteria: "There is nothing more crucial than the need to defeat the BNP. Hope conquers hatred; respect destroys racism."

Lee Jasper tried hard to show his cool credentials. It was all "Give it up for Brendan Barber!" or "A big up for the mayor!" But his attempts to drum up some enthusiasm with chants of 'Smash the fash' and 'No to the BNP' met with a lukewarm response from the audience. Never mind: he hoped everybody would "warm up later in the night when they've had a few drinks".

There were many musical acts, including So Solid Crew and Bigga Fish. As the evening went on, the number of young, mainly black people increased significantly and the middle-aged white lefties started to drift away.

Even if the majority of those young people had come mainly for the music, it was very positive that they were open to political ideas. The shame of course was the politics that they were presented with from the stage.

In its present state UAF cannot achieve anything - except perhaps as a *de facto* election campaign for the Labour Party. While Livingstone made criticisms of Labour policy on asylum-seekers, there was little else from the platform except scaremongering and platitudes. There is no blame laid at the door of the mainstream parties for peddling anti-asylum-seeker propaganda and then denouncing the BNP for doing essentially the same thing. Working class people who have turned in their alienation and desperation to the BNP are denounced as much as the BNP itself.

It is popular frontist cynicism at its worst. Young people are patronised and herded to the ballot box where they are meant to vote for one of the establishment's trusted parties, or maybe even Respect, on the basis of apocalyptic warnings that a German-type fascism is about to sweep the country. Meanwhile Tony Blair and New Labour uphold the system of monarchy and capital, take us to war on the basis of lies, help US imperialism occupy Iraq, maintain the Tories' anti-trade union laws, hound illegal migrants in the name of multicultural Britain and pass all manner of draconian 'anti-terrorist' laws.

Of course, the BNP is a bunch of Nazi thugs in suits. But the New Labour government is surely the main enemy ●

Anne Mc Shane

POLITICAL ISLAM

Iran: mullahs in crisis

Victory for the ultra-right in the Iranian elections, far from strengthening the theocracy, has only served to expose its fragility. Addressing the CPGB's London Communist Forum on February 29, **Mehdi Kia** of the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran looked at the elections and the forces for change

The Iranian regime has two quite distinct structures. One is the theocracy - the 'caliphate' - on top of which sits the supreme leader, who has absolute and complete, almost divine power over *all* aspects of society. He is the direct interpreter of the word of god. In addition there exists a quasi-parliamentary structure - quasi-parliamentary because the theocracy controls the entire electoral process and vets the delegates to the *majlis* (parliament). The electorate is comprised of people over the age of 15, including women, but their choice is very much limited by the fact that the theocratic structure determines who can stand and therefore who can be elected. And even then all laws passed by parliament have to be accepted by a body called the Council of Guardians, which itself is appointed predominantly by the 'supreme leader'.

One might ask, what is the point of having elections to a parliament which has no power whatsoever? In fact the regime needs elections for one very important reason: to allow it to claim popular legitimacy. That is why it can get everyone to vote - either by telling them it is a religious duty, or threatening that they will lose their right to university or a passport and so forth. Voting may not be compulsory, but there is enormous pressure and the numbers game is crucial. After the February 20 election, supreme leader Khomeini said 50% of the people voted, which demonstrated that the regime is legitimate.

One might further ask, if parliament has no real power and all its actions are subject to the approval of the Council of Guardians, then why bother to vet the candidates? The reason is that parliament is the open forum for factional infighting - the place where the relative strength of the various factions is determined. Therefore it is quite important for each faction to try and get as many of its own people in as possible. The regime has always had factions and always will have. The simple reason for this is that it consists of an array of mullahs who believe they are interpreting the word of god. When such individual interpretations are translated into real-life policy, they inevitably result in the formation of factions. Whenever economic or political decisions relating to such matters as foreign policy have to be made, these factions also come into play.

Parliament, therefore, has essentially two main functions. First, through elections, it acts as a legitimiser of the regime. Secondly, the balance of the various factions within it determines who will fill certain positions and influence the policies to be pursued and so on. So, even in a parliament that really has no rights in terms of producing laws, it is still important that one's own supporters are represented. The ultra-rightwing faction made sure it won control this time round by excluding 2,000 candidates, including 87 who had seats in the previous parliament. It was clear to most people that the right would see to it their own supporters were returned.

We can usefully look at the official figures for turnout in the seven parliamentary elections that have been contested since the islamists came to power. In the first election, 52% voted - quite low, but this was at a time when parts of Iran were almost outside the control of the regime: for example, Kurdistan. In subsequent elections, the respective turnouts were



President Khatami, failed reformist, presides over unfree and unfair elections

64%, 60%, 57%, 71% and 67%. The last of these (the sixth election) was the occasion when the reformists got in and took over almost the entire parliament. This time, however, the turnout dropped markedly to 50.5% - the lowest ever.

It is interesting to focus on the figures for the big cities. For those living in a small town or village it is very difficult not to vote: they can cast a blank vote, but actually not to vote at all would be obvious to everyone. Remember that the Iranian revolution was essentially an urban revolution and that the urban population represents some 70% of the population as a whole. Taking this into account, let us compare turnout figures in the seven parliamentary elections for the country as a whole with those for Tehran: 61%, 60%, 43%, 39%, 55%, 47% and, this time, just 28% - a dramatic drop. Or take Isfahan: 61%, 69%, 60%, 49%, 67%, 60% and now down to 32%. In places like Kurdistan the turnout was as low as 18%.

It is clear, however, that, particularly in the smaller towns, there was a degree of ballot-rigging, so that even this 50% overall turnout was inflated, as in previous elections. Furthermore, the number of blank votes must be taken into account. Even the interior ministry concedes that some 15% of all ballot papers were blank and that in Tehran this figure reached 25%. The effect of all this can be illustrated by the fact that in the capital (population: 13-14 million) the best placed candidate actually won just 12.8% of all those entitled to vote - he was elected by one out of every eight of the population.

Although the reformists did not formally favour a boycott until their candidates were barred, the whole country had known since last year's municipal elections that there would be a boycott this time too. In effect, the reformists jumped on the bandwagon. They did not dare support the boycott until the regime itself gave them a pretext. The regime does retain a base of around four to five million people, on whom they have consistently been able to rely in elections, added to which are those whom they can bully, coerce or bribe.

The fact that the elections were, like



last year's municipal polls, effectively boycotted demonstrates the complete and utter bankruptcy of the reformist movement. People have just given up. In 1997 they elected a reformist in president Khatami, together with a parliament where the vast majority were reformists. The legislation they passed, although lukewarm, was blocked by the Council of Guardians. Not a single piece got through. So why vote for the reformists? They now say they want to go back to the grassroots, but I cannot see people falling for that, given their record.

It is important to understand that in Iran there is no such thing as a political party in the way that people in Britain would understand it. It is more appropriate to think of groupings or gatherings of politicians. They are not distinct entities: more circles that intermingle with one another. The edges are blurred.

There are, though, three major blocs. First, the arch-conservative or ultra-right bloc, which has its hands on not just all the unelected powers of the state, but also now all the elected powers. It controls the army, the Revolutionary Guards and the judiciary - in fact everything. Secondly, there are the reformists, who work within the structures of the Islamic Republic. They want to reform these structures, to reduce the power of this or that organ, but they nonetheless accept the overall constitution. I want to reiterate that these two blocs are not separate entities. They actually overlap with each other. Thirdly, there is the movement which stands outside the official structures, the movement that wants to go beyond the Islamic Republic and establish a secular state.

It is essential not to think of these things as rigid, but as a dynamic process, in which people can and do move between the different blocs and back again, depending on the power structure, policies and so on.

Looking beyond this to the broader political picture, there are, for example, some 500 NGOs, dealing with issues such as women and children, ecology and what have you, which have formally been recognised. Then there are thousands and thousands of circles that have developed over the last 10-20 years, but

more especially during the last six or seven years - people gathering together for education, political discussion or whatever. Huge, very fluid gatherings, whose real nature is sometimes intangible. Then you have the nationalities, who are also forming their own structures, some with highly chauvinistic and nationalistic agendas. There are some inklings of working class organisation - again very fluid and often primitive.

Then there is the external opposition. The monarchists, which contains a number of different tendencies, ranging from those favouring autocracy to those wishing for a constitutional monarchy, are relatively strong. The right republicans are essentially people who would like a state based on the western model, while the left republicans, consisting of a wide range of groupings and individuals, seek a form of democracy from below.

But perhaps a better way of looking at both those inside and outside the country is in terms of particular policies. In this respect it is possible to identify three large groups. One clearly views the Iranian people as backward, and the country as not amenable to any kind of internal reform. What is required is an outside force, capable of establishing a new order - essentially a colonial solution, as in Iraq or Afghanistan. Supporters of this model are quite clear - they want the US to intervene and take control. This group contains some of the monarchists, but also some republicans, illustrating how the complex divisions between monarchist and republican, religious and secularist, fall down when it comes to actual policy.

A second strand believes in a kind of liberal democracy. Its proponents would like some separation of religion and state, although they probably not averse to retaining some religious laws - on inheritance and so on - and allowing religion a certain privileged position, as in Britain, for example. They would like to repeal some, but not all, of the repressive laws, and set up a top-down parliamentary democracy, as in the west.

You can see two tendencies within

this second strand. One thinks that the only problem is that there is no leadership. People are ready for this kind of model, but there is nobody to enforce it, so they too look towards America, Israel and the western countries to help them out. But they also have criticisms of these countries and cannot be viewed as simple stooges. The other tendency is slightly more radical. It models itself on Poland. It would like to see a popular movement, but one that is controlled in such a way that it will deliver a conventional parliamentary democracy.

Finally, there are those who want to create real grassroots democracy: self-organisation and control from below, both politically and in production and distribution, together with respect for diversity and the rights of the individual, alongside the rights of the group. Of course, this desire to stimulate the self-activity of the people at grassroots level must find articulation in concrete policies. It certainly means accepting plurality, both in terms of ideas and of society itself. Of course, creating this voluntary solidarity within a country will not make sense unless it is seen on a global scale of voluntary solidarity among people struggling for that same self-government.

The victory of the right has ramifications when it comes to relations with the US and the question of the so-called 'axis of evil'. There is no doubt that the ultra-conservative leadership wants to deal directly with the Americans on such questions as nuclear capability. The clumsy effort to end the duality of the regime should perhaps best viewed in this light. In an effort to persuade the USA and Europe to deal with it, the regime has already been very helpful as regards Iraq (where it has promised millions towards reconstruction) and even more so as regards Afghanistan, where it has held back its clients in the west of the country. But the fact is that an Islamic state, however pliable, does not correspond to the requirements of the neo-cons, if their intention is to create political hegemony in the region.

The ultra-conservatives in power model themselves essentially on the Chinese model: a certain amount of liberalisation, allowing foreign capital more scope to operate, but with everything remaining under a very tight grip. But, whereas China has the party, Iran lacks unitary political forms, and is handicapped by its fractional structures, so that any attempt to liberalise the economy along the Chinese model would surely weaken the hold of the existing regime.

Despite its victory in the elections, the regime is becoming more and more fragile. This does not mean that it is going to quickly fall, but I do not think it can survive in the long term. The regime rests on two pillars. Although it claims authority from god, it was born out of a revolution, and must therefore constantly seek to create the appearance of popular authority too. So the 'democratic' side is as vital to the regime as the religious side. The very fact that elections have been shown to be a sham and that there has been an effective boycott following the collapse of reformism weakens the regime. Effectively one pillar has been taken away.

The regime is hobbling on one leg and must inevitably fall. The issue, for the left, is who will push it over ●

REVIEW

Sect illusions

Workers Power/League for the Fifth International *From protest to power*
- manifesto for world revolution London, 2003, pp59, £1.50

Last spring the Trotskyist grouping known as the League for a Revolutionary Communist International, led by the smallish British Workers Power group, took what for it was a momentous decision (though for those whose lives do not revolve around the subtleties of sectarian nomenclature it was rather less so). It changed its name to the ‘League for the Fifth International’.

This has a certain significance in the arcane world of orthodox Trotskyism: in brief, it comes from the desire to claim continuity with the original Fourth International of Leon Trotsky. This was an international revolutionary organisation founded in 1938, to reassert the politics of communism against social democracy and the by then degenerate and anti-revolutionary ‘official communist’ parties.

The ‘Fourth International’ itself claimed to be the successor to the first two international organisations founded under the influence of Marx and Engels, and the Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky. Yet, unlike these earlier internationals, Trotsky’s Fourth International was not founded upon any mass organisations. Not only that, but it also was established on a very narrow ideological basis: primarily on agreement with Trotsky’s own highly problematic view of the nature of the Soviet Union under Stalinism - despite the destruction of all semblance of working class power and the erection of a monstrous bureaucratic tyranny over the working class, nevertheless for Trotsky the Stalinised USSR remained a degenerated form of a working class state. Therefore it supposedly was the duty of socialists to take its side - not only in wars against the capitalist world, but also against its own population, should any movement arise that appeared prepared to abandon the ‘planned economy’.

There were, of course, several other theoretical approaches among socialists and communist opponents of Stalinism that claimed to explain the degeneration of the Soviet Union - they came to rather different conclusions about the attitude socialists should take to the USSR in international or domestic conflicts.

There was the theory of state capitalism, which held that the USSR had been transformed, though the destruction of all forms of working class control, into a giant, state-owned capitalist enterprise in its own right, which was therefore just as imperialistic and exploitative in its domestic and international role as the more traditional capitalist powers.

There was also bureaucratic collectivism, a theory which held in essence that the USSR was a new form of class society, based on totalitarian slavery, that appeared destined to replace capitalism as the predominant form of exploitation across the globe. This latter understanding had a tendency to lead its adherents to embrace ‘democratic’ capitalist imperialism as the lesser evil compared to this new class despotism, as happened with one of its best known adherents, Max Shachtman.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to recognise the flaws and one-sided aspects of all these theories. The thesis of the ‘proletarian’ USSR was never really able to rationalise away the complete lack of any proletarian political influence in the USSR - workers in general actually had more right to self-organisation in the imperialist west. Nor could it explain the subsequent creation of replicas of the USSR in China, Vietnam, Cuba, Yugoslavia (not to mention the entire east European ‘buffer zone’) without the kind of independent class organisations (soviets, etc) that were the driving force of the 1917 revolution in Russia.

Conversely, both the theories of state capitalist and bureaucratic collectivism were falsified by historical reality - the idea that the USSR was run on capitalist lines was exposed as a joke: the massive inefficiency and technological backwardness of its economy was above all a product of the fact that it was *not* run according to the goal of maximising the yield of monetary reward above investment (aka profit). Rather essentially, non-market eco-

nomic and social forms were the means by which a social layer of bureaucratic oligarchs maintained a privileged existence on top of the working masses. The eastern bloc was able to compete militarily for a while with the capitalist powers, but it was not able, because of a fundamentally different ethos in economic organisation, to compete economically, and it was the contradictions of attempting to maintain the former competition along with the latter non-competition that eventually brought the system crashing down between 1989 and 1991. Of course, the same reality also disproved the ‘bureaucratic collectivist’ thesis that Stalinism was a new stage of class society, which was supposedly more dangerous and more dynamic than capitalism.

It is useful to draw out a synthesis of these various flawed theories. The bureaucratic collectivists were closest to the truth, in that they postulated that Stalinism was some new kind of exploitative society, neither socialist nor capitalist. But they erred in believing that it therefore had to be historically viable, that it could not in turn be defeated by the further development of capitalism. Stalinism was a freak, ectopic form of class society, an evolutionary dead end. It resulted from the creation within an isolated backward country of a socialised economy in material conditions where the productive forces were qualitatively insufficient to bring about anything other than equality in dire poverty (which is simply a recipe for “all the old crap” of exploitation and inequality resurfacing, as Marx put it in his *Critique of the Gotha programme*). This is in my view a correct synthesis of the various partial, one-sided theorisations of the nature of Stalinism attempted by (among others) Trotsky, Shachtman and Tony Cliff.

One key weakness of Trotsky’s Fourth International - and indeed its precursor organisations such as the International Communist League, Movement for the Fourth International and the like - was that it organised almost exclusively around agreement with Trotsky’s own analysis of the USSR under Stalinism. This despite the fact that the nature of the USSR was a highly contentious and problematic question for revolutionary opponents of Stalinism. In fact, there was no real consensus on this question among those broadly referred to as ‘Trotskyists’; despite Trotsky’s own attempts to brand positions other than his own ‘degenerate workers’ state’ as “petty bourgeois” deviations (see *In defence of Marxism* 1940).

Even among the heroic Bolshevik-Leninist oppositionists held in Stalin’s labour camps there were deep divisions on the class nature of the USSR, with significant numbers holding ‘state capitalist’ or ‘bureaucratic collectivist’ views. The great flaw of the ‘Fourth International’ current is that, particularly after the 1939-40 fight against Shachtmanism, but indeed implicitly long before, it was effectively organised as a mono-ideological sect around Trotsky’s views - mainly on the USSR, but by extension afterwards around sterile ‘orthodox’ views on many other questions as well.

Workers Power thinks it has given itself fresh dynamism with its supposedly new perspective of fighting for the ‘Fifth International’. In reality, the change is a somewhat pedantic one, a nuance among ‘orthodox’ disciples of Trotsky when he was in his position of greatest isolation and lacking real, equal collaborators - in other words, when his vulnerability to fateful and disorienting mistakes was the greatest. The debates between Workers Power and other, politically close and somewhat like-minded sects about whether to call for the ‘rebirth’ of the Fourth International or a ‘Fifth International’ are tragicomic and sterile. What these comrades are in fact disputing is which precise formulation, which particu-

lar interpretation of Trotskyist ‘continuity’, will suffice to re-enact Trotsky’s own mistakes in this respect.

There is much material in *From protest to power* that is positive and of merit. It is certainly revolutionary in its intentions - that shines out from virtually every page. Yet what it is ultimately about is creating a mono-ideological sect around a particular interpretation of a tradition that is itself restricting and mistaken. Thus the unintended irony of the introduction: “We appeal to activists and organisations working within the working class, anti-capitalist, youth and peasant movements to consider this programme and, where necessary, propose changes and amendments to it.”

The big problem with this proposal, of course, is that it would seem to presuppose an ethos of public, open debate. But that is not exactly the strong point of Trotskyist organisations such as Workers Power. Any of their own members who differ from the majority view are generally forbidden from publicly expressing differences in public - indeed one curious feature of Workers Power’s political life over the past decade or so is the defeat of one majority position on the nature of Stalinism and its replacement by another. The new minority thus took over from the old one the privilege of being publicly gagged and prevented from expressing, still less publishing, its disagreements - a privilege the current majority previously ‘enjoyed’ for a couple of decades or so. How such “changes and amendments” are to be debated out with the broad masses will rightly be seen as something of a moot point.

Thus the whole political framework of this programme is wrong. It is also not the first time the LRCI/LFI current has published its own updated version of Trotsky’s programme. One remembers the launch in 1989 of *The Trotskyist manifesto* - which embodied the politics of the then WP majority around the late Dave Hughes, the remnants of which today form the minority. Now we have the other grouping’s interpretation. Despite the differences between them, both embody the same illusions.

Fundamentally these were the illusions of the original *Transitional programme* itself: that a narrow, ideologically based sect could, through a programme of ‘transitional demands’ whose core focus is ‘radical’ economic questions that contradict the logic of capitalism itself, win leadership of the mass of the proletariat by means of a catastrophic process of exposure of the existing leaderships of the workers. In reality, this particular form of ‘transitional politics’ understates struggles around the vital question of democracy, as well as underestimating the complexity of building a *party* of the working class.

It is certainly true that, in order for a genuinely revolutionary party to take root among the masses, a consistently Marxist current must come into being and prove, in theory and practice, its ability to provide revolutionary leadership to the working class and its allies in struggle.

But, at the same time, a party is not a sect organised around the ideas of a particular current. A genuine revolutionary party embodies the advanced, militant and class-conscious *section* of the class. The consistent revolutionary current will win its authority in the advanced section of the class by political struggle, including against flawed political currents within the party itself, openly and in front of the class. Only in that manner can a real party be built - a party worthy of the traditions of Russian Bolshevism that was built according to these principles of polemical openness, even in conditions of illegality.

Despite its many correct points, and its revolutionary aspirations, this new version of WP’s *Transitional programme* is, because of the sect illusions at the heart of its politics, fatally flawed on this central question ●

Ian Donovan

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 ready 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.**

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Abolish MI5 and the secret state

Short lifts the curtain

Imperialism's Iraq adventure is turning more and more sour. Just ask the residents of Kabbala. But you can also ask Tony Blair as well. Instead of basking in the post-war adulation which he no doubt thinks he deserves, Blair is coming under increasing pressure. Robin Cook and Clare Short resign from his cabinet. No WMDs ready for launch at 45 minutes notice found. A Hutton enquiry which is instantly dismissed in the popular mind as a mere whitewash. Michael Howard's boycott of Butler, etc, etc. Try as hard as he might to shift the agenda, Iraq just will not go away.

This was dramatically emphasised by last week's revelations about the grubby spying activities of the UK state in the run-up to the Iraq war. Harold Macmillan once said that any public discussion of 'national security' was "dangerous and bad". There can be little doubt that Tony Blair and Jack Straw share the fundamentally anti-democratic instincts of the former Tory prime minister. The ruled must not know what the rulers are doing - even if it is all done in their name. Hush-hush, old chap.

So we have the story of Katherine Gunn, a former employee at the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) in Cheltenham, the UK's premier 'listening base' (ie, spy and surveillance centre). Gunn - whose central duty was translating Mandarin Chinese into English - was arrested nearly a year ago and charged eight months later under the 1989 Official Secrets Act. Her crime had been to pass on to a journalist friend a top-secret memo from a member of the US National Security Agency (NSA), Frank Koza, asking the UK to help mount a "surge" operation and gather intelligence about the voting intentions of the six 'swing' states on the United Nations security council. US imperialism and its junior but loyal partner, the UK state, were going to war and nothing or no one was going to get in their way.

In the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, these 'swing' states - Angola, Cameroon, Guinea, Pakistan, Mexico, Chile - were the focus of intense activity, not all of it entirely diplomatic. In his leaked email, Koza asked for "the whole gamut of information that could give US policymakers an edge in obtaining results favourable to US goals or to head off surprises". Gunn was outraged when she read the email, believing it to be in violation of international law, especially the Vienna Convention, which theoretically forbids such spying operations on diplomats.

However, the case against Gunn was suddenly dropped - with the prosecution announcing that there was no "realistic prospect" of convicting her. The real reason, of course, was that the prosecution team did not want to disclose the fact that the very legality of the Iraq war itself had been questioned by the entire foreign office law team - so much so indeed, as we now know, that the team's deputy head, Elizabeth Wilmshurst, resigned at the time because she was unhappy with the legal advice proffered up by the attorney general, Lord Jerry Goldsmith.

This brings us to the interventions by former cabinet minister Clare Short. You could almost hear the establishment jaws dropping to the ground when Short casually mentioned on the BBC's *Today* programme that the British intelligence



Sent jaws dropping

services had been bugging the office of Kofi Annan, the UN secretary general - why, she had even read the transcripts of his 'private' telephone conversations. Furthermore, and potentially more damaging for the Blairite/pro-war camp, Short had been informed at the time that the British armed forces "would not move without the attorney general's authorisation" - which is why she found something "smelly, fishy" about Goldsmith's legal advice. Blair needs a legal fig leaf for his imperialist war - and, lo and behold, his old buddy and flat-mate, who just happens to be the attorney-general, provides him with one. Nothing sleazy or corrupt about this, of course.

Only a few days later, Short compounded her treachery by appearing on the *Jonathan Dimbleby* TV programme and reading out a "threatening" letter from cabinet secretary Sir Andrew Turnbull, the UK's most senior civil servant. Hinting that she might be kicked out of the privy council - or worse - Turnbull sternly warned: "I hope that you will take no further part in interviews on this issue. I also reserve the right of the crown to take further action as necessary. I have to admit to being extremely disappointed at your behaviour. I very much regret that you've seen fit to make claims which damage the interests of the United Kingdom."

Here is Short's real misdemeanour in the eyes of the British establishment - to damage the 'national interests' of the UK state. In their pursuit the agents of the state have virtual *carte blanche* to indulge in whatever dirty tricks are deemed necessary. In many ways this licence to bug and burgle is codified by the Official Secrets Act - which all servants of the crown have to sign.

First introduced in 1911, it was heavily revised in 1989, following a succession of incidents involving whistleblowers, most notably Clive Ponting. A ministry of defence civil servant, Ponting was prosecuted for leaking information about the sinking of the Belgrano in 1982 to the Labour MP, Tam Dalyell. The trial judge torpedoed Ponting's defence by ruling that the interests of the state were *whatever ministers decided they were* - and hence directed the jury to convict. How-

ever, the jury spurned the good judge's advice and acquitted Ponting.

Unsurprisingly, the establishment took fright at this example of popular justice - and as a result the 1989 act makes it an offence to publish *any* material encountered in the course of your work, even if the information does no specific harm to the intelligence services. There is no longer any public interest defence. All that remains is a 'defence of necessity' - whereby the accused claims to have been forced to reveal such material "to avoid imminent peril of danger to life or serious injury to himself or towards individuals for whom he reasonably regarded himself as responsible". Of course, this was the defence claimed by ex-MI5 agent David Shayler - and Katherine Gunn too.

Disturbed by this outbreak of openness, No10 announced that the 1989 act would be "reviewed" in the wake of the Gunn case. However, the authoritarian Blairites are all too aware that, no matter how oppressive a law they frame and enact, at the end of a day a sympathetic jury might well acquit the miscreant whistleblower anyway, regardless of the exact legal niceties. No wonder David Blunkett is hatching plans to curtail the right to a jury trial.

Communists, on the other hand, un-

ambiguously and militantly defend the right to jury trial and call for the abolition of the Official Secrets Act - and, indeed, demand the end of *all* state secrets and the abolition of the secret intelligence services. There should be transparency and accountability in all state transactions.

For communists and socialists last week's bugging scandals serve to expose the true nature of the UK state - rotten and secretive to the core. We entertain absolutely no illusions about bourgeois state power and the ruthless lengths it will go to in order to defend itself from popular-democratic incursions and challenges. For the bourgeoisie and its agents, the ends *always* justify the means - and virtually any means at that.

Take GCHQ or, for that matter, the NSA at Forde Meade, Maryland. The surveillance operations carried out by the latter are so vast that its computers have to be measured by the acres they occupy. The NSA's mission statement is to essentially vacuum the entire electromagnetic spectrum, homing in on any 'key words' (anti-war, peace march, protest, socialism, etc) which might indicate to any vigilant officer that subversive skulduggery is afoot. Every 60 minutes they intercept *millions* of telephone calls, emails and faxes. Talk about full spectrum dominance - US imperialism's ultimate dream. The Forde Meade base costs at least \$3.5 billion a year to run and directly employs 20,000 officers - and that is not counting the 100,000 servicemen and civilians the world over whom it 'controls' in some way or another.

The NSA's junior partner in crime in Cheltenham has similar ambitions - with 6,500 staff and 'sister' monitoring stations in Cyprus, Germany and Australia and elsewhere. Significantly, a large part of GCHQ's £300 million budget is funded by the US in return for the right of the NSA to run listening stations in Britain - Chicksands, Bedfordshire; Edzell, Scotland; Mentworth Hill, Harrogate; Brawdy, Wales - and on British territories and dominions throughout the world. Farcically, until 1983 the UK government refused to even reveal what GCHQ's real role was - we were all supposed to collaborate in the elaborate pretence that it was just another 'ordinary' civil service department.

Needless to say, anything which casts even a minuscule ray of light on the work-

ings of the special services or which damages them in some way can only be good from the point of view of our movement. So we communists are grateful for Clare Short and her slightly buffoonish vendetta against Tony Blair - she has helped lift the curtain on the tensions and frantic manoeuvrings of the UK state, as it prepared and agitated for war against Iraq. We say to hell with Andrew Turnbull and the Official Secrets Act: she should tell more and tell everything.

The truth can only cause Blair and the warmongers more and worse difficulties. No wonder Short is already the object of so much venom at the moment. She is "irresponsible", "Calamity Clare", etc, and, as Blair said at his monthly press conference, those who attack the work the intelligence services are doing "undermine the security of the country. It is wrong and it should not happen - it is as simple as that."

Not that Short herself is any sort of consistent anti-imperialist. She has remained faithful - for all her outbursts and wobbles - to the UK state and its concerns, as she sees them. Short supported imperialist intervention in ex-Yugoslavia and - after much moralistic dilly-dallying - ended up backing what she now terms Blair's "reckless" Iraq war.

Communists and revolutionary socialists will do their utmost to exacerbate Blair's present difficulties - we must keep up the pressure. The Stop the War Coalition has taken up the call for a people's tribunal to cut through the fog of lies and misinformation surrounding the Iraq war. Meanwhile, on Saturday March 20 tens of thousands of demonstrators are set to take to the streets of London, demanding an end to the occupation of Iraq.

And it has been this, the unprecedented mass movement of 2003, and its continuation into 2004 which breathed courage and defiance into Labour's once docile backbenches. The rebels no longer just include the usual suspects like John McDonnell, Jeremy Corbyn and the rest of the Campaign Group of MPs. Indeed to bring the parliamentary Labour Party and mavericks such as Clare Short to heel the Blairite machine has been making dark threats. There is talk of formal warnings, suspensions, expulsions and even prosecution before the courts.

George Galloway could be just the first of many ●

Eddie Ford

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