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rae hancock describes her personal road to socialism, and a good deal more besides. Well worth reading, not least to learn a drastic but effective method to avoid being recruited by the Socialist Workers Party.



a non-sectarian sect



Recently, the *Weekly Worker*, paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain, mocked us as a “non-sectarian sect”. We’re warming to the description. Let’s face it, the label ‘sect’ is applied by every left group to every left group except itself: it’s like watching the residents of the *Big Brother* house accusing each other of attention-seeking. “I was so appalled at the self-publicising,” commented one contestant, “I was on the point of getting dressed and just *leaving*”.

The problem is not ‘the sects’, but *sectarianism*: so *why* not a sect for those who wish to fight it? Let’s fight gratuitous on-screen nudity with... at this point the analogy breaks down. Let’s fight fire with fire: we accept the title “non-sectarian sect” with pride – thank you, comrades.

Sure, we might have fought as individuals, but without organisation, money, website and paper, how could we be heard? And individuals are not immune to the disease: I recently heard of one disgruntled socialist who was so disgusted with what he saw as the isolationism of (in this case) the Socialist Party, he defiantly cried that he would “not join any alliance *they* were a part of”.

So next time you are in the company of assembled socialist groups, call “will those comrades not in sects please stand up”, and be amazed as almost everyone does. You might conclude “no sectarian problem here, then”, in which case I’d advise you to stop reading until you’ve sobered up. You might, more sensibly, seek out the (sadly small) group still sitting: we’ll tell you that the problem affects us *all*, and we won’t begin to solve it until we recognise that.

And the problem is real. Over the last couple of years, conditions have been so favourable to the British left that socialists have had to show an *extraordinary* level of skill and tenacity to avoid being successful.

At times, we have been faced with seemingly insuperable opportunities: the apparently unavoidable prospect of winning new comrades, gaining electoral success, and even beginning to build the party that we all acknowledge we need. “Surely,” many thought, “they cannot miss?”

But they underestimated us.

For instance, it was only last year that one and a half million marched through London against the invasion of Iraq: that is, one in every 40 of the British population. Many had never protested before. Formerly genuine believers in parliamentary democracy, they were bewildered to find the government acting against their wishes. Here was a truly mass movement, largely organised by our own comrades, and ready to hear socialist arguments.

As you might expect, we *sprang* into action.



weekly worker 2 september: a valued compliment

The first thing we did was to delay the conference of the Socialist Alliance - which brought together most of the socialist groups into a joint campaigning organisation. This was no time for cooperation – there was a war on!

There was still a danger, however, that an official SA speaker might address the crowds from the platform. Fortunately the Stop the War Coalition organising the event was dominated by members of the Socialist Workers Party: the largest group in the SA. After careful negotiation, they were able to ensure this didn’t happen. Some of them, as individual officers of the STWC, were forced to speak themselves, but they carefully avoided any mention of the SA, and any specifically socialist explanation of the war, or its remedy. *Political* speeches were left to the Greens, the Welsh nationalists, Charles Kennedy... *Charles Kennedy?*

When the SA conference finally took place, we were able to reflect with satisfaction on our carefully preserved obscurity, and a derisory national vote for the candidates we stood in the local elections following the demonstrations. We managed to deflect most of the protest votes towards the Liberal Democrats: a particularly impressive job, considering they had switched to *supporting* the war.

Or consider the unions which broke from Labour. For decades, the Labour Party acted as a constraint on the wider labour movement, safely absorbing working class militancy into deals with Labour governments (or prospective Labour governments) who, in turn, made deals with the corporations and the state.

New Labour was the logical conclusion of this process. New Labour was *openly* anti-working class. It didn’t shy away from abandoning even the pretence of socialism (as it symbolically dumped the famous Clause IV of its constitution) or calling unions “wreckers” for defending their members’ rights.

The more militant unions had had enough, and were finally prepared to break with New Labour and support socialist politicians. The Rail Maritime and Transport union backed the Scottish Socialist Party, and stood firm while Labour first threatened, then implemented, its disaffiliation. The Fire Brigades Union also disaffiliated. Both unions were driven to these moves by their own members pulling them to the left.

The SSP clearly hadn’t read the script. They won election to the Scottish parliament, and now had real labour movement backing. The contagion of socialist gains seemed sure to spread to the rest of the country. How could it be avoided?

The trick was to learn from what the Scottish socialists had got right, and do the opposite. In Scotland, their alliance of left groups had moved forward to form a socialist party. The SA in England and Wales was therefore closed down altogether: no point taking any chances. In its place was built the Respect Unity Coalition, which isn’t socialist, and isn’t a party. Revolutionaries from the Socialist Workers Party fought hard to ensure that important and popular radical demands were excluded from the programme of the coalition: like republicanism, and the promise that workers’ representatives would take only a worker’s wage.

It worked, and Respect avoided picking up union support.

Not all the left, though, supported Respect. Many of us remain outside it, jointly calling for the united, socialist, workers’ party we all acknowledge we need. Could it be that we are ready to finally give up the fight against success and accept the responsibility being thrust upon us?

Or is it possible that we were never seeking failure in the first place?

What is alarming is not simply the scale of our failure, but how easy it would be to believe that we *had* sought it. As a mass

movement formed against war, and union members rejected Labour in pursuit of political leadership which actually represented their interests, the left failed to unite, *or even to grow in size*. The brewery had been booked, the piss-up was about to begin, and we've spent the year since arguing about who forgot the bottle opener.

When a driver in a rally across a desert collides with the only tree within 50 miles of the route, one is staggered by the sheer perversity of the achievement. It is difficult not to feel something akin to admiration for the scale of the disaster achieved against such odds.

Indeed, each year "Darwin awards" are given, posthumously, to those who accidentally kill themselves in ways so monumentally foolish that they verge on artistry. The awards are named after the great evolutionist because they "commemorate those who improve our gene pool by removing themselves from it": like the man who broke into a dry ski slope centre, stole the protective padding around a pylon to use as a makeshift sledge, and died when he rode the sledge into the same, now unprotected, pylon. Does the left deserve the first *political* Darwin award?

The need to establish a party to represent the interests of working class people is now so obvious, and so *pressing*, that almost every left group outside Respect (and even a couple within it) now have something to say about it: though it is like listening to castaways on a raft after days at sea telling each other "OK, so *in principle* we're agreed: it might be an idea to set off one of these flare things. The question remains: *which colour?*"

The analogy is not entirely fair - there are real questions to settle about the new party, and this article is written as a contribution to that debate - but it is closer than you might imagine. The truth is that the different groups on the raft are still arguing about the agenda for the flare-colour debate, and each is proposing a different attendance list for the meeting, and trying to exclude their own particularly unloved colours from the agenda. We are already at the stage where we are arguing about the agendas of conferences organised to determine the nature of future conferences: it is only a matter of time before someone suggests that we have a conference to thrash out what should happen at the pre-conference conferences. Meanwhile, our raft drifts ever further from the shipping lanes: and it is hard to blame those who finally decide just to swim for it.

This intensity of political surrealism is not, and cannot, be driven by genuine differences of view: it is an outward manifestation of the sectional self-interest and bloody-mindedness which goes under the name *sectarianism*.

In the first issue of the *Red Star*, I argued that the problem with the left was not the number of groups, as it was inevitable that politically conscious workers should hold different views on the best way to achieve our common socialist aims, and form groups to represent them - outside or inside a united party. Instead, I laid the blame at the door of sectarianism - the demand of each group that unity be based on *its* programme and be formed by *its* initiative - and called on socialists to recognise and fight this disease of the left, so that we might be free to form the party we all agree is needed.

Many agreed, but complained that I hadn't explained *how* I thought such a party might be built: what position did I take on the controversies surrounding it? In this article, I plan to examine these: but I maintain they are secondary. The left groups are divided by less than they like to imagine. Remove the sectarian agendas, and the remaining issues can, and will, be quickly settled.

However, to say they are secondary is not to say they are unimportant. There seem to be three main questions dividing the left about the universally acclaimed workers' party.

1. What kind of party should it be? Do we want a single, unified organisation, or a joint campaign or alliance of the various socialist groups (in the jargon, a *united front*)?
2. If we want a single, unified party, should it allow organised minorities to form within it, with their own names, memberships, and papers: again in the jargon, should we allow *factions*?
3. Should the party be formed around a fight for left-wing reform, like renationalising rail, increasing health and education budgets, abolishing anti-union laws and so forth, or should it aim to change the entire basis of our society by abolishing class rule:

should it be *reformist* or *revolutionary*?

1 party or united front?

The first question, of course, is: what's the difference?

A party brings together socialists into organised cooperation. It must allow free discussion, but its policy can be democratically determined by the majority and, though minorities may freely argue for change, they must nevertheless implement the democratically taken decisions. It is the most developed form of solidarity: uniting people who are powerless alone into a force which can lead the fight to change society.

On the other hand, a united front brings together existing groups to fight for, well, as much as they can all agree on. If the groups agree on *A*, they can organise a united front to fight for *A*. However, even if the majority also agree on *B*, the minority is under no obligation to support *B* being added to the campaign; and if the majority attempt to include *B* in the campaign, the minority may simply leave.

Worse, the primary loyalty of each individual socialist in the united front remains to the group of which they are a member, rather than the front as a whole. The leadership of the front therefore has little real control over its activity: the real decisions are taken within the groups.

Imagine a train in which *every carriage* had its own engine and braking system and was controlled by its own driver. Then imagine that, while the drivers would have discussions with each other by intercom, they were only committed to supporting those decisions they personally agreed with. Further, imagine every driver *also* had to consult the passengers in their own carriage before braking or accelerating. Finally, imagine that each carriage could be decoupled the moment its occupants decided that, quite frankly, they didn't much like the way the train was being run.

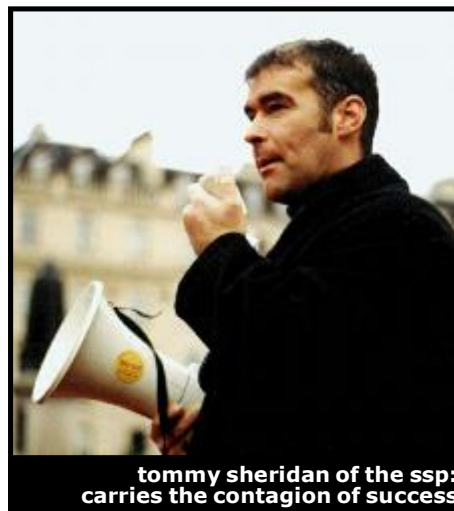
Welcome aboard the united front. It will be pulling into London Waterloo platforms four, seven, and nine, except for the rear three carriages which have, somewhat unexpectedly, turned up at Kings Cross.

At least, this is how they *can* behave. To be effective, they must campaign around defined or even individual policies, and usually for limited periods. After a time, they either break up, or develop into more unified structures.

An interesting example is the Socialist Alliance: the united front initially set up to jointly support socialist candidates at elections. The string of couplings and decouplings was bizarre, but the Socialist Alliance (given its structure) actually made extraordinary progress in putting together a joint electoral manifesto: *People before Profit*. The contradictions described above were all, however, sadly obvious: as was the pressure, also described above, to either move forward to form a party (as the Scottish Socialist Party did) or to fall apart. It fell apart.

The task of the workers' party is to provide leadership across all political issues, and organise the struggle for socialism until it is won. Ultimately, therefore, the workers' party must be just that: a party.

A more difficult question is raised by those who propose a united front as a stepping stone towards the formation of a party. Were such an approach attempted, it would clear-



tommy sheridan of the ssp:
carries the contagion of success



hundreds of thousands protest in hyde park: but how many were won to socialism?

ly be sectarian to remain outside it on the grounds that nothing short of a party would do. However, unless it progressed quickly, it might prove to be counterproductive. As explained above, while united fronts may be easier to form (requiring fewer commitments from their members), they are harder to keep together.

2 factions?

One attempt to unite the left was initiated earlier this year by a group of sacked Liverpool dockers and the 47 socialist councillors undemocratically expelled from Liverpool city council in 1987. They convened a series of meetings to discuss the name and constitution of a new “mass party of the working class”.

Depressingly, the project itself now seems to be on the verge of a split even before it gives birth to any new organisation. The dockers wish to form a party; the councillors a united front. My argument would seem to support the dockers.

However, while the dockers wish to encourage members of the existing left groups to join, they wish to see the groups themselves dissolve within the first year of joining – indeed, they regard even this year’s grace as something of a concession.

At first sight, it might seem that the dockers are simply demanding real unity from the left groups: and we’re all in favour of that, surely?

However, I would urge a third option: that of a party with *factions*. Factions are groups of members within a party which are free to organise campaigns to change a party’s policies, and to pub-

lish their own papers with their own ideas. Such a party could allow the existing groups to join as factions, as well as allowing other members to form factions in the future.

At first sight, factions might seem to be simply a recipe for disunity and even disloyalty. If people wish to be a member of some other group, why join the party in the first place? This seems to be the view of the dockers themselves. Their comrade Terry Teague, wrote:

“Anyone who thinks they are being forced, browbeaten, or coerced into something that they are not fully committed to should be encouraged to remain within their own party, whilst we the dockers continue to work with those supporters who have both the conviction and passion needed for founding and developing a ‘New Movement’ that will in the course of time give those working class men and women who are looking for political change a real alternative.”

He is comradely, and emphasises that a warm welcome will be held open for those who choose to join at a later date, but his view is clear: if you are genuinely serious about the party, you will not seek to organise smaller groups within it.

But I believe he is profoundly wrong. Factions are not a device to allow people to join a wider party while their loyalties remain with a smaller group. Factions are essential if we serious about building a *democratic* party: one which allows the members a real chance to change things: but this takes a little explaining.

Imagine yourself standing at the rostrum before the annual conference of the new workers’ party. You are calling for change.

No, you are calling for change *brilliantly*. Your words have captivated everyone in the hall. Several attractive delegates (of a gender of your choice) have already swooned in response to the power of your rhetoric. As one, those still conscious stand to give you an ovation. The party leadership, tears of remorse clear in their eyes, renounce their policy and immediately pledge to implement your ideas. What happens next?

You wake up, of course.

This is a dream. Political differences are not settled in this way. If the party has established a position you disagree with, by careful and consistent argument, and over time, you *may* be able to win the support of a few comrades for your ideas.

Now here's the rub. What does the party say to your small group of dissenters? You can oppose, but you cannot organise your opposition? You can raise your individual voices, but you cannot speak in concert? In other words, you must stand alone against the only group allowed to organise around its ideas: the party leadership, elected by the majority?

And remember, as an individual speaker you can only reach people at a single meeting.

To be effective, your ideas must be *published*. The party majority, through its elected leadership, controls the party's paper, its leaflets, its website... its whole *machinery* of public argument. What can you do as an individual? Submit your opinions in the hope that the editor of the party's paper sees fit to publish them?

Real democracy implies a real right to oppose: to argue that the majority is *wrong*, and to argue for *change*. No individual can stand against a party majority and its elected leadership: not because the majority is undemocratic or because the leadership is tyrannical, but simply because the majority is *organised* and the individual is simply an individual. United the leadership will stand, divided the dissenters will fall. This is not a principle which should be new to any socialist or working class activist!

No - the right to dissent is a sham if it is not the right to *organise* dissent, and the right to organise dissent is the right to form *factions*. Factions enjoy no special rights to ignore the decisions of the majority, to break party rules, or to abstain from party work. They must act with their comrades, and be loyal to and seek to build the party of which they are a part. But they must be free to organise around their minority views, to demonstrate the strength of their support in order to build a case for representation in leadership and in the party's press, and to publish independently.

There is a second reason why a workers' party must allow faction rights. At present, each of the left groups is organised around its particular plan for socialism: in other words, it is brought together by a particular set of *ideas*. However, the aim of a workers' party is not to peddle this or that opinion, but to represent the interests of working people: and to bring together all the most politically conscious workers to do it. Naturally, it will include socialists with many different views on *how* to achieve socialism. Without the right to faction, to argue minority views, it will split, and the rump remaining become just another left group, peddling its own particular line, amongst so many.

3 reform or revolution?

You receive an invitation to dinner from friends. On arriving, you find dimmed lights and candles, but you were expecting those. No, what *really* catches your attention is the live goat strapped to the dinner table. Your friend welcomes you, resplendent in a black cloak and carrying a dagger, and offers you a glass of red wine with a somewhat heavy consistency.

"Um, yes, yes, the car's running fine... Look, you seem to be holding some kind of black mass."

"Oh yes, didn't we mention that? Well, we find it tends to put people off a bit."

Now, for all I know, dear reader, under such circumstances you might leap in joyfully screaming the names of the dark angels. I'm guessing, though, that you'd leave.

To put it simply, revolutionaries should not be dressing in reformist clothes because they believe workers 'might be put off'

"we are in danger of accepting the capitalist orthodoxy that revolution is outdated, ridiculous, or inhuman – political satanism. in fact a revolutionary socialist is simply a democrat *who means it*"

by revolutionary politics. First and foremost, it is a deceit. Fail to convince someone of the case for revolution today, and you may still be able to do so tomorrow. Convince them that you cannot be trusted to argue your politics openly and honestly today, and you may find you can never convince them of anything again.

But secondly, this approach indicates an appalling lack of confidence both in socialist politics, and in the understanding of working people. Do we believe in our own politics? And if we argue that society's problems are caused by the rule of a wealthy, corporation-owning minority, how can we argue that anything other than the overthrow of their rule will solve those problems? We are in danger of accepting the capitalist orthodoxy that talk of revolution is inherently outdated, ridiculous, or inhuman – political satanism. In fact a revolutionary socialist is simply a democrat *who means it*.

Socialism is *true*. Socialism *works*. Socialism has answers which make *sense*. It argues that society's problems and injustices are not merely avoidable mistakes in government: but the result of a society run by a minority class in the interest of profit. From this basic argument, only one conclusion can logically follow: to solve those problems, class rule must be overturned, and power finally put into the hands of all. Such a change would be revolutionary: it would change not merely how we are governed, but *who governs*.

The reason for the weakness of the left is not that this case is difficult to make – it is a reality which millions feel in the very nature of their daily lives – but in the failure of the left to actually make it! As in the example I gave earlier, revolutionaries spoke to the crowds in Hyde Park, but did not give a socialist explanation of the class basis of war, apparently fearing that they would alienate those in the anti-war movement who were not yet socialists! Unsurprisingly, over a year later, the movement has largely broken up, and socialists remain in their self-imposed isolation.

This is not to say, of course, that revolutionaries ignore the day to day struggles over wages, the defence of the health service, the rights of students to free education, and so forth: or that we should withdraw from standing in elections or fighting alongside those who are, at the moment, only seeking reforms. This mistake is called *ultra-leftism*, and ignores the connection between the fight working people are conducting in defence of themselves and their families now, and the broadening of that struggle into a struggle for power itself. We must fight for every penny and every democratic right we can squeeze out of capitalism. But it is our role to argue that, ultimately, we can win only temporary and precarious victories until society itself is under the control of us all.

It is possible, of course, that the initiative to form a new workers' party will come not from the revolutionary groups – such is our current paralysis – but from the wider labour movement. Perhaps a group breaking from Labour, supported by the disaffiliated unions, may yet form. If so, it will not begin with revolutionary politics. In such a situation, once again, it would be sectarian to stand back and demand a revolutionary party: socialists should join with their fellow working class politicians in support of their campaigns, but arguing the case for revolutionary change.

There is a difference between doing this, however, and *ourselves* seeking to establish a reformist party.

After all, if we do not argue the case for revolution, then who will? ★

manny neira

peace and circuses



before joining the reds, **rae hancock** was a candidate for the tiny, south east based peace party, which came within a few votes of humbling the mighty respect coalition in the european election: she compares these two very different children of the anti-war movement

Was it so long ago? Have we all forgotten?

It rolled in like the circus. It was all signing, all dancing, it promised us the world. Gorgeous George wore a top hat and turned the lions of principle into cowering pussycats. There were high fives, theme tunes and clowns in big shoes. Perhaps I'm lying about the clowns.

Maybe it wasn't as fun as the circus either: underneath all the razzmatazz there was division, conflict and betrayal.

Just to put you straight, I don't like circuses and I don't like Respect. While my reasons for disliking the big top stems from the clichéd childhood clown trauma, my reasons for disliking Respect come from my conscious mind and are very, very real. Respect - The Unity Coalition (George Galloway) began as a way for the Socialist Workers Party leadership to cash in on the anti-war movement. The anti-war movement drew thousands from all walks of life and united them around a single issue. Nobody seemed too concerned about people's reasons for opposing the war, as long as they did. This same sentiment seems to run through the veins of Respect. In its hurry to appeal to everyone, socialist principles have been cast aside.

This isn't, however, about Respect. Instead this is a tale of a much smaller band of performers. You probably won't have heard of them.

The European election on 10 June presented a chance for people to register their feelings of betrayal. Labour was lurching too far to the right for some but not far enough for others. UKIP became the obvious anti-Europe vote for those on the right. Though Respect attempted to present itself as the only option for the left, in actual fact the Liberal Democrats and the Greens seemed set to scoop most of the anti-war vote. In the run up to the European elections, the band of performers I talk of weren't covered by a single left paper, let alone the mainstream media. They weren't even slagged off, that's how little even the left knew of them. If anybody had paid any attention, June 10 could potentially have been very different. You can help me best illustrate my point by enjoying this short quiz:

Which party understood that a policy of open borders and an end to the penalisation of asylum seekers was a key step towards a peaceful world and said so as part of their election manifesto?

(a) Respect - The Unity Coalition (b) The Peace Party

Which party advocated a worker's wage for all their candidates should they be elected?

(a) Respect - The Unity Coalition (b) The Peace Party

Which party defined itself as a secular party working for a secular state and refused to alter their position to appeal to a particular religious group?

(a) Respect - The Unity Coalition (b) The Peace Party

The top candidate of which party recognised that the monarchy represents an unnatural balance of power and as such was unafraid to take a pro-republican stance in the election?

(a) Respect - The Unity Coalition (b) The Peace Party

Though this is fun and I could go on, I think you get my point. Without financial backing of SWP proportions (that's the kind that can put one's printing press in jeopardy) the Peace Party were only able to stand in the South East constituency, but were able to poll 12,572 votes, compared to the 13,426 gained by Respect.

The Peace Party didn't get everything right. I'm not going to pretend that they did. By gaining an elected official they truly hoped to be able to change the system in such a way to bring about peaceful co-existence. Capitalism is built on inequalities. Without continued oppression and division it cannot maintain its hold. Only by fighting for a real change of system can we hope to redress the many inequalities that perpetuate violence: whether it's the violence of one country against another or the anger and aggression between partners. Contesting elections is a valuable way of promoting your message and gaining support but if it is practised as an end unto itself, it will fail. Elections will always favour the business-backed, media-friendly, pro-capitalist parties. Important concessions can be fought for within the parliamentary system but they will always be just that: concessions.

The Peace Party has its roots in quaker activism; as such it has a heavy pacifist subtext. Pacifists are brave people who should never be underestimated. It is not an easy option to stand up and say, "the cycle of violence stops with me": to continue the cycle is the easy option. However, I would argue that ultimately pacifism supports the status quo, even where it does not intend it. As socialists we recognise that those in power will not give up that power without a fight, without bringing every force they have to bear on us. Appealing to the better nature of the ruling powers can never change the system.

The Peace Party made an important progressive step forward with its proposals of republicanism, open borders, secularism and a worker's wage for elected representatives: principles it focused on when Respect abandoned them. Learning from the realities of the war, and like much of the anti-war movement, it was moving rapidly left, though it had not yet consciously reached the explicit link between the causes of violence and war and the inherent inequalities within capitalism.

Respect, however, followed the opposite path. The Socialist Workers Party lurched to the right in founding Respect, abandoning policies - the very ones the Peace Party was adopting - in the fear that they would prove too radical, too socialist, for the anti-war movement; and particularly hoping to court the muslim vote by avoiding commitments on abortion, and downplaying the rights of women and gays. In the only constituency in which these approaches were directly tested against each other, the tiny Peace Party demonstrated that, not only were Respect's political compromises unprincipled, they were unnecessary: people were ready for real politics.

Just because a party or organisation professes to be socialist, or even just progressive, doesn't mean that it is. You know this. What you also know now is that there are genuine progressive elements out there, they just don't know it yet. A real socialist democratic party that stuck to its principles should be able to attract these people, the best, most courageous and honest people from the peace movement, those who are turned off by get-rich-quick opportunism.

We blew it last time. Next time lets try that approach, and not just settle for whoever shouts, "roll up, roll up" the loudest ★



their euro, our unity

the euro was created by bosses and for bosses, but then so was the modern working class. some socialists oppose its introduction to Britain, others wish to abstain in a referendum. **jeremy butler** calls for a "yes" vote to the euro

Britain has had a turbulent relationship with the rest of Europe. It is impossible to discuss Europe without considering the conflicts and rivalry that have led to millions of deaths on the battlefield, the disputes over territory and trade - and the annual exercise in mind-numbing boredom that is the *Eurovision Song Contest*. It is a discordant history, but it is a shared history. For thousands of years, the peoples of continental Europe have shaped the history of Britain as much as we have theirs. Despite that, however, there has been a tendency in Britain to believe that we are distinct from the rest of the continent. The channel, that narrow strip of water between us, no longer presents much in the way of a physical barrier, but to some it symbolises an immense political and cultural divide. Attitudes towards Europe vary widely. A vocal minority of 'eurosceptics' are overtly hostile to a closer relationship with Europe, and indeed some want to leave the European Union altogether. A smaller and less vocal minority of 'europhiles' want much closer integration. It is fair to say however, that the silent majority sit somewhere in the middle. Simply put, most people do not understand the European Union and tend to think there are other more important issues. For them, Europe is a confusing distraction.

Support for the eurosceptic campaign is growing, and it is gaining support from the mass of people who are confused by the issue of Europe. This is not surprising. Whenever Europe is discussed in the media, the arguments are presented in one of two ways.

The first way is when self-proclaimed 'experts,' economists, political commentators and the like, present bewildering arguments for or against this or that particular aspect of integration. Frankly, such 'experts' usually confuse the issues still further. Intent on demonstrating their own brilliance, they use jargon and present obscure and sophisticated cases. The result (as is largely intended) is that most people are left none the wiser.

The second way that Europe is discussed is in purely emotive terms. The eurosceptics are making much more headway than the europhiles in this arena. They clearly have much better propaganda writers. The best pro-Europe argument tends to amount to someone half-apologetically mumbling about closer and more harmonious relationships with the rest of Europe. The eurosceptics have catchy slogans, like "save the pound". They play on people's fears by asking whether they want to be "ruled by Brussels". They mutter darkly about how Napoleon and Hitler both tried to unite Europe, and

now the French and Germans are at it again, but this time by stealth.

At heart, the eurosceptic campaign relies on nationalism. It reinforces the little-Englander mentality, the idea that Britain really is Great, and we don't need Johnny Foreigner telling us what to do. Why do they want to save the pound? It is nothing to do with economic concerns; it is because it's British, and it's got the queen's head on it to prove it. They don't want to be dictated to by bureaucrats in Brussels, because they would prefer to be dictated to by bureaucrats in London.

Sadly, the sound and fury of the eurosceptic campaign is growing apace. There is widespread opposition to Britain dropping the pound and adopting the single European currency. Most of the rest of Europe adopted the euro from the beginning of 2002. Britain did not. Tony Blair was forced to promise that there would be a referendum before a decision was taken. There is still no sign of when that referendum will take place. Every opinion poll to date suggests that if it were to take place now, the result would be a resounding no.

The elections to the European parliament on 10 June this year demonstrated the strength of the opposition, not just to the euro, but also to Europe itself. The turnout was low, as it usually is in such elections, but the more eurosceptic parties did well. In particular, the UK Independence Party clearly established itself as the party of choice for the eurosceptics, taking 16% of the vote. It seems there are many people in Britain who would just like the whole issue of Europe to go away.

Europe is not going to go away though. The mainstream political parties recognise this. Their spokespeople perennially dodge the questions of the euro and of closer integration with the rest of Europe. They don't do this because they have not made their minds yet. They do it because they know that sooner or later Britain will

probably have to adopt the euro and move closer to Europe, but they also know that to say so will lose them votes. Certainly the Lib Dems are a bit softer on the euro, and the Tories slightly more opposed, and indeed there are divisions within each party; but overall each

of them is trying to sit on the fence. When Tony Blair came to power he pledged that he would lead us "into the heart of Europe". His ambitions have been somewhat derailed. This is in part due to the strength of euroscepticism at home, and partly because relationships are strained between him and the rest of Europe due to that unfortunate business with the invasion of Iraq. Much has been made of

Blair's own inflated self-esteem being the reason why he wants a closer relationship with the rest of Europe. Undeniably the man is an egomaniac who dreams of seeing his name go down in the history books, and being the prime minister who lead us into "the heart of Europe", as well as into Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq, might just do that. There is more to it than that though.

The interests of capitalism far outweigh the ambitions of any politician. If it will serve the interests of the ruling class for Britain to adopt euro and move closer towards the rest of Europe, then it will happen, regardless of whether working class people want it to happen or not. There is a certain logic built into capitalism that ensures that alliances such as the European Union come into being. Capitalism cannot stand still; its corporations need to constantly grow in order to create more and more profit and drive the economy





**heads of the 25 eu governments:
they are divided by capitalist competition, while their workers share a common interest**

forward. If a corporation stagnates, then it will quickly either be surpassed by another corporation or taken over. The largest corporations, like Microsoft or Wal-Mart or Exxon Mobil, are now so powerful that their wealth not only rivals that of countries, but in some cases exceeds them. Wal-Mart is now the single largest private employer in the US with higher gross earnings than the gross national product of 150 countries.

For these corporations, and by extension, capitalism, to continue to grow, they need more resources to exploit; and for that they need to have access to the natural resources and markets of other countries. In order to do this, however, they need the backing of nation states. Corporations cannot thrive in countries where the economy is unstable or the government is hostile to them: it is not good for business. By necessity, therefore, they need to turn to the governments of their own countries to defend their interests overseas, and create new markets to exploit.

Back when capitalism was in its infancy this was a much simpler task. The government would send an expeditionary force to conquer any recalcitrant country, and the businesses would go in behind the troops and start the money-making process. We have seen this process at work in Iraq, but Iraq represents a return to the old methods. They might purport to be making the world a safer place, but really they are making the world a safer and more profitable place for corporations to make money. Nowadays, the process of opening up new markets for corporations to exploit is usually far more subtle. They do not need to rely on military conquest to get their own way: they simply have to flex their economic muscles and make threats. Economic power, though still ultimately backed by strength of arms, lies behind modern economic exploitation: not the nominal 'international agreements' regulated by bodies such as the World Trade Organisation.

The European Union is just another such venture. It began as a trade organisation to enable corporations to operate across Europe more effectively. Ever more integrated trade necessitated political convergence, harmonising currency and trading regulations. Further impetus was provided by the need to compete with the sole remaining economic and military superpower: the US. It will make the lives of corporations much easier, and anything that is good for big business is good for the people who run the big businesses: the same people who ultimately run our country, and every other. For that reason therefore, it is likely that Britain will at some point not only adopt the euro but also integrate itself more fully into the EU.

Although the EU is designed to serve the interests of capitalism, it does not necessarily follow that closer integration will be bad for the working class, either in this country, or across Europe. Socialists are internationalists, both by necessity and as a point of

principle. We believe in unity amongst working people, not division. Ultimately, we believe that all humanity shares a common interest. In order to realise this aim, of a world not divided by race, or sex, or nationality, or any other distinction, it is necessary for socialists to break down such divisions. When it comes to Europe, the duty of socialists is clear: we must oppose nationalism and xenophobia, and therefore counter those who seek to portray the interests of British working people as being opposed to those of other Europeans. Our interests are not opposed to theirs, our interests are the same; our interests are opposed to our ruling class, just as theirs are. For example, all over Europe pensions and welfare rights are under attack, with governments driven by the same economic pressures to cut spending. In many cases, British workers face literally the same employer as their continental counterparts: 40% of privatised water companies are owned by continental companies.

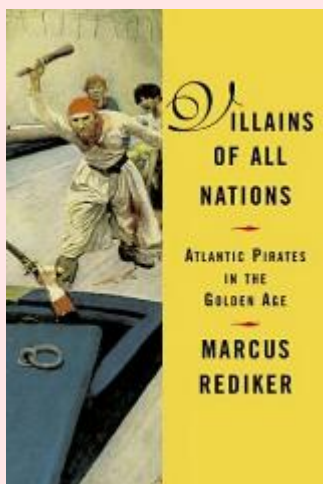
Where the ruling classes form alliances, as they have in the EU, we need to match them, and form our own alliances. Ultimately, our alliances will be stronger because they will be formed on genuine common interests, whereas an alliance of ruling classes will only last for as long as it is profitable: it is in the nature of capitalism to compete.

British socialists are divided on the issue of the euro. Understandably, some of them feel they are caught between a rock and a hard place. They are reluctant to side with the nationalist sentiment of the eurosceptics, but they are equally sceptical about voting for the euro, because they recognise that the euro has been created to further the interests of capitalism. As a result, most of the left is calling for a no vote or, in some instances, an abstention in any referendum on whether Britain should adopt the euro. The Red Party is calling for a yes vote. We are under no illusions as to why the euro has been created, but we believe that it will also have the effect of strengthening European, working-class solidarity. A single currency makes workers' common interest more transparent: wage levels become directly comparable, and it is harder for bosses to move to cut wage rates. Of course, capitalists want it to ease their trading relations, but it will also break down one of the barriers that divides British workers from our fellow Europeans.

This year the European Social Forum is being held in London, 14-17 October. It brings together socialists, anarchists, anti-globalisation protesters, peace activists and other progressives. It represents an opportunity for us to build and strengthen our relationships with our comrades from other countries. Together we need to work to create an alternative European Union, that exists not for the benefit of capitalism, but that unites the working class in the fight for a world that exists for the benefit of humanity ★



a pirate's life for me



villains of all nations

marcus rediker
verso 2004

review by
darren williams

On the afternoon of the 26 July 1726, William Fly walked the steps of the Boston gallows. Unlike his fellow condemned, Fly had shown no fear at his fate. The great and the good who had gathered to see the pirate die were uncomfortable: he was not playing his agreed part in the moral drama. But, as Fly neared the rope, their fears it seemed were unfounded. Fly became upset and animated, pointing to the noose and shouting at the executioner. *This* was more like it. Fly inspected the rope and the noose that would soon be around his neck, and with distress on his face he turned on the hangman and reproached him for "not understanding his trade". Luckily for the amateur, Fly was a sailor and knew his knots, and he offered to teach the officer of the court how to tie the noose properly. Then Fly, to the astonishment of the crowd, retied it to his own satisfaction and informed the crowd that he was not afraid to die, as he had wronged no man and was a brave fellow.

When the time arrived for the prisoners to address the crowd with their final words, Fly's three colleagues played their part: the condemned were expected to act as morality plays for the education of the unwashed. The unwritten agreement was that if the prisoners condemned alcohol and depravity, confessed their crimes, praised the church, and the courts, and the king, then there was always the slight possibility of a last minute reprieve. Fly's turn came and he didn't play along: no plea for forgiveness for him, no praise for court, or god, or king. Instead, the waterside crowd, packed with sailors and ships officers, was treated to a warning, that "all masters of vessels take warning at the fate of the captain he had murdered and to pay sailors their wages when due and to treat them better, saying that their barbarity turned so many pyrates."

I grew up fascinated by pirates. Wet Saturday and Sunday afternoons were saved by the promise of a Basil Rathbone or Errol Flynn swashbuckler. Westerns left me cold (at least until I discovered Sergio Leone far later on). But pirates just hit the spot. Not simply on film - *Treasure Island* and *Robinson Crusoe* were books that first spurred me to enjoy reading. As I grew up, though, reading and watching about my childhood heroes became increasingly difficult, as historians insisted on telling me that the pirates themselves were little more than brutes, and their commanders psychopathic blood-soaked loonies, guilty of all and every violent crime and fully deserving of their fate.

Marcus Rediker is a fan of pirates too, but he is also a historian of the 18th century Atlantic. He shows that this 'history', as it is ped-

dled, is nothing more than the repetition of the propaganda of the 18th century ruling class in its war of extermination against the last and greatest of the pirate brotherhoods, of what he describes as the "Golden Age Of Piracy". Marcus reclaims the reputation of my pirate heroes: Calico Jack Rackam, Blackbeard, black Bart Roberts, Mary Read and Anne Bonny - who, in a brief ten years from 1716 to 1726, shook the new British Empire to its blood-soaked core - and shows a real history that puts all the stories of Hollywood in the shade.

As long as maritime trade routes have existed, there have been pirates; the ancient Greeks considered piracy as a valid option for merchants down on their luck and did not place any moral weight to the term. The Romans, however, used 'piracy' at sea in much the same way as they employed the term 'barbarian' on land. A pirate was anyone on the 'Roman' sea who wasn't Roman. In their determination to dominate and control their world, they created a policy, describing the pirates as *hostes humani generis*, the common enemies of mankind, that the rulers of the later emerging British empire would employ to justify its campaign of extermination of the Atlantic pirates.

The British experience of piracy began as a wing of semi-official government policy. In perpetual war against the mighty catholic empires of Spain and Portugal, protestant England granted letters of mark to private adventurers to explore, trade and prey upon the treasure ships of the enemy as they sailed back to Europe packed with silver and gold from the Spanish and Portuguese American territories. Drake, Grenville, Raleigh and Morgan cut themselves a page in history and folklore as they carved England a

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slice of the New World out of the control of the 'Dons'.

The end of the War of Spanish Succession saw the end of the need for these 'privateers'. Britain gained the *assiento*, the right to import slaves to the Spanish colonies and so began the trade that would provide the spur and capital for the industrial revolution. As Karl Marx would later note, capitalism was born in blood and filth: the middle passage, from the African coast to the slave markets of Havana and Virginia, saw the bloody birth of a brutal age.

The end of the war created two conditions that provided a bonanza for the London and Bristol merchants. The opening up of the slave trade and the demobilization of tens of thousands of sailors meant that even the massive expansion of trade failed to exhaust the surplus of labour. This meant that the employers could force down wages, and worsen onboard conditions to unbearable levels, in the drive for greater profits. Life aboard was never easy and a navy ship was no place for the weak, but the sailors could remember that life had never been as bad as it was now. The brutality of the slave ships was not only visited on the 'cargo' - with the crew facing mortality rates of 30% or higher in a voyage. The master's treatment of the crew reflected that every slave lost was a loss of potential profit, whilst every sailor lost was a saving in wages. As well as the constant threat of drowning, sailors faced disease, made worse by malnutrition and non-existent sanitation, and the constant threat of violence at the whim of the ships' masters, who ruled their ships as god, judge, jury and often executioner. A sailor's life was nasty brutal short and miserable.

Just as capitalism in all its brutality was born in this filthy trade, so also were the sailors the first to develop resistance to its effects. Work stoppages, go-slows, sabotage and strikes were all invented by sailors in their class war with the masters and ships captains. In fact, the strike was invented by sailors in 1768 in London, when sailors went from ship to ship cutting down - 'striking' - the sails to prevent the masters setting sail.

These conditions were what led many to find the alternative of rising in mutiny and becoming pirates an attractive option. For men who faced the threat of death and mutilation on a daily basis, the certainty of an eventual date with the hangman's noose was no deterrent. The pirate laughed in the face of Death and proclaimed *a short life and a merry one!*

The sailors who became pirates did not do so only because of their suffering - of the tens of thousands of sailors employed on the Atlantic trade, only a minority (no more than 4000) ever became pirates - but also because of the vision of freedom that becoming a pirate provided.

Each mutiny followed a similar pattern: once the ship's officers and any loyalist seamen were overpowered, the rebels organised a meeting involving the entire crew. At this, 'articles', the rules of the ship, were drawn up, and officers elected. The articles followed certain common rules:

★ Providing for the care of those injured on board, or in combat

(One of the most audacious acts of notorious pirate captain Edward Teach, also known as Blackbeard, was the blockade of Charleston Harbour: not as one might suppose for grog or gold but to obtain medicine for sick crewmates);

★ Limiting the powers of the elected officers: the captain only had control of the ship whilst in storm or combat, at all other times power rested in the hands of the ship's council, made up of all the 'full' pirates on board - new recruits were denied representation until they had proved themselves, usually in combat.

When pirates attacked a merchant ship their first act would be to raise the 'Jolly Roger', the pirates' flag. This would begin the psychological assault, informing the seamen that to oppose them would mean death. So many ships' captains would be prevented from mounting a bloody defence by the rest of the crew simply folding its arms and refusing to fight that parliament decreed that to refuse to fight pirates was a crime punishable by death. For all their violent reputation, the pirates themselves would rather not to fight at all, and the chance of taking a ship cleanly was much preferred.

Once aboard, the crew of the ship were gathered together and their officers paraded before them. The crew were invited to speak out either in favour or against the captain and his staff: their testimony would decide the fate of the captain and his ship. Good or kind captains would find themselves not only still alive but often still in command of their ships at the end of the pirate attack and with the bulk of the cargo intact, minus any alcohol, fresh food, or gold and silver.

A bad or violent captain would, however, be lucky to escape with his life and what the pirates couldn't take or use would be burned with his ship.

The final act before the pirates departed was to appeal for volunteers. Hardly a ship could be found without one or more potential pirates.

For the pirate the aim was for a short life, but a merry one, and the pirates found what comfort they could when they could. The hunt for alcohol was a constant one. Although merchant and navy ships were not known for their sobriety - Nelson's ships have been described as asylums of chronic alcoholics - the pirates' appetites sometimes got them into real trouble. More than one ship was wrecked on reefs or captured by the authorities because the crew were too drunk to sail or to fight.

The privateers of the 17th century had followed a practice of *matelotage*, a relationship of shared property and responsibility between two men, and the pirates carried on this liberated attitude toward homosexuality. Whereas the Royal Navy at the time has been described as being run by 'Rum, Sodomy and The Lash', homosexuality was punishable by death on navy ships. On board a pirate vessel love was accepted wherever it could be found.

Women played a very minor part in this extremely masculine world, but Rediker, who tells the stories of the famous female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read, challenges the bourgeois his-



There have been a number of different explanations of the origin of the most famous of the pirates' flags, the 'skull and cross bones'. In the book *Socialism For Beginners*, Anna Paczuska declared that, despite pirates' flags being almost exclusively black, the term Jolly Roger was a perversion of the French *jolie rougier* (red and beautiful). This may have some basis in fact as the navy flag signal for mutiny was a red flag.

The Jolly Roger flown by the Atlantic pirates, however, was black and either showed a skeleton or a skull and bones. Marcus Rediker provides a more convincing explanation of its origin.

The flying of the Jolly Roger was a part of the psychological war waged by the pirate band and was designed to strike terror into the hearts of those who saw it. The skull and crossed bones device was commonly used by a ship's captain in his log, as a sign that a seaman had lost his life on voyage. As such it would be a universally recognised symbol of death. The colour of the flag indicated 'no quarter' and ordered the victims not to resist. Finally, Rediker argues that the name is taken from 18th century slang for sex (as in 'a good rogering'). Quite simply, if the captain of a fat merchantman were to look out, and see through his telescope the Jolly Roger flying, then he could be sure that he was well and truly fucked.

torian's view that women were only victims or whores. He shows that, on one ship at least, 'the molestation of unwilling women' was banned by the articles and punishable by death.

Although most pirates had served on the middle passage and thus had been a part of the slave trade, the pirates displayed remarkably little of the racial prejudice that was being developed at that time in order to justify the trade. Whilst pirates were known to take, and sell on, slave cargos, black former slaves made up a considerable portion of pirate crews (over 40% of Blackbeard's crew were black). Pirates would often describe themselves as Maroons, copying the name adopted by the escaped Jamaican slave gangs. On one occasion, Marcus relates, the captain found himself handed back control of his slave ship only after the pirates had released all the chains and provided the slaves with a knife each. That the captain and his 'cargo' would be able to discuss their respective situations on a more equal basis would have appealed to the pirates' sense of justice.

It was the threat that the pirates made upon the profits of the slave trade that determined their fate. The seaboard coasts of both Africa and the Americas were swamped with navy ships; the pirates were hunted down and hanged by the dozen. The pirates themselves responded to state terror with a terror of their own. More merchantmen were burnt; towns that hanged pirates were blockaded. The pirates themselves declared "No surrender" and vowed to blow themselves and their ships to kingdom come rather than be captured. But the writing was on the wall, and the dwindling bands of pirates either dispersed or died fighting, or upon the scaffold.

Marcus Rediker has done us a great service: he has written an account of those who, facing a world full of horror and brutality, rebelled and challenged the conventions of class, race and gender. Laughing in the face of authority as they laughed in the face of

death, the pirates' rebellion created an alternative to the dour hypocrisy of our 'betters', which has given hope and inspiration for over 300 years ★



<http://www.marcusrediker.com/>

branding the revolution



On millions of T-shirts all over the West, Che has become the face of rebellion. Some have complained that a man who fought against capitalism should himself become such a marketable commodity, his iconic image printed on everything from Zippo lighters to 'Revolution' cola. The use of Che's image to generate profit is perhaps no more inappropriate than the use of his name as a synonym for the struggle for liberation. While he is seen as the icon of disenchantment with capitalist society, few who wear a T-shirt with his face on know of his stalinist politics. It's hard to believe many of Che's disciples really agree with the notion of "the natural selection of those who are destined to march in the vanguard and who dispense rewards and punishments" - a chilling apology for dictatorship, under the guise of "pointing out to the Latin American masses the road to full freedom".

The recent film *The Motorcycle Diaries* (*Los Diarios de Motocicleta*) portrays the transition of Che from middle-class medical student in Peron's Argentina to communist guerrilla fighter. Based on his diaries, the movie demonstrates his political development, as he wanders further from his Buenos Aires home and sees the very worst of capitalism. He states, "Something has changed me. Such injustice." He meets the poorest of farmers, turfed off their land by the landlords, "indigenous people homeless in their own country", and workers who have been forced to flee just because they are communists. Riding up the west coast of South America on 'the Mighty One', a rusty 1939 Norton motorcycle, Che and his friend Alberto discover the reality of life for the mass of the people, outside his middle-class haven.

The young Guevara also works at a leper colony, where the Amazon divides the homes of the healthy from the ill. Symbolically, he swims across just to be with the disadvantaged. Here is Guevara the philanthropist - surely not the same man who purged the army and banned the Trotskyists. One gets the impression that this version of the young insurrectionist, immortalized in his own work, is a little false. It is at least ironic that the young revolutionary, shown asking whether a farmer was "organised with others to fight back", would go on to play a key role in founding a new dictatorship over working people: this time, a stalinist one.

The Cuban regime has been praised by some, including MP George Galloway, for its very strong record in terms of public serv-

ices (life expectancy is the highest in Latin America) in a region where poverty is rampant. However, Galloway's assessment "I don't believe that Fidel Castro is a dictator... He's the most magnificent human being I've ever met" is self-confessedly based on the charisma of the state's ruler rather than an analysis of the reality of Cuban society. Ordinary Cubans do not hold power. While some Castroites might think that a guaranteed wage and free public services of decent quality make a socialist society, they are inadequate in themselves. The essence of socialism is democracy, the right of people to govern themselves. The iconic status of Guevara, the charisma of Castro, the heroic resistance against US economic and military aggression, the red flags and the revolutionary rhetoric: none of these things can replace genuine workers' power, though they can and do deceive many on the left.

One must place Guevara's revolutionary politics in their real historical context. He was an implacable anti-capitalist, but he was a stalinist. He once said, "I have sworn before a picture of the old and mourned comrade Stalin that I won't rest until I see these capitalist octopuses annihilated".

But the roots of the Cuban revolution lay not in an attempt to recreate Stalin's USSR, but in a somewhat confused Latin American nationalism. In the film, Che proposes a toast to a "United [Latin] America" and argues that, "We are one *mestizo* race, from Mexico to the Magellan Straits". However, his acceptance of the idea of 'command socialism' is evident in his work *Man and Socialism in Cuba* - "the initiative generally comes from Fidel or the high command of the revolution; it is explained to the people, who make it their own." So that's all right then.

Che fought against capitalism in every arena, his theory being that a tiny armed minority could seize and exercise power on behalf of the oppressed. Insofar as the oppressed had a role to play in their own liberation, he saw that role being played by peasants rather than industrial workers, a view well reflected by the film. The Socialist Workers Party's description of him as an "inspiration to anti-capitalists everywhere" perhaps says as much about anti-capitalism as about Che himself. Guevara was certainly an anti-capitalist, but his passionate fight against the undemocratic rule of the privileged property-owning class succeeded only in replacing it with the undemocratic rule of a bureaucratic caste. Anti-capitalism is a natural reaction to the injustices of a society geared for profit, but no society can be built merely on a rejection of the old: no *better* society, that is.

On his ride across the continent, Che came to realize the worst of capitalism, a shock to a middle-class boy living above the masses in society. However, his struggle did not liberate: emancipation could never have come through replacing the rule of the wealthy with the rule of generals and bureaucrats. Young people certainly do oppose the world order and oppression, and it is natural that they should adopt the symbols of rebellion. If capitalism has turned Che into a meaningless brand, divorced from history and scrubbed clean of politics, the answer is not, as the SWP has sought to do, to reclaim the brand in an equally unhistorical way. Images and personality cults aim to hypnotise youthful rebellion into mindless consumerism: the trick doesn't work the other way round.

Perhaps this is the trick Galloway was trying for when he argued in the *Independent on Sunday*, "I don't think many readers consider Castro or Guevara a rogue. These people are heroes". Even if he was an anti-capitalist, that does not make Guevara a socialist. Even if Guevara was daring, young and handsome, that does not make him a model to follow. Socialism without workers' councils, democratic accountability and public control of the means of production, is no socialism at all ★

david broder

an icon on everything from t-shirts to architecture





spoiling your ballot

A truly great electoral battle deserves a truly great political commentator, but we're stuck with the 2004 US presidential election and are therefore recommending Woody Allen:

"More than any other time in our history, mankind stands at a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us hope we have the wisdom to choose correctly."

That he wasn't writing about the election is merely testament to his prescience.

The job of most powerful sentient being on the planet is open once again. To anyone who contests the socialist argument that true democracy is impossible under capitalism and the consequent power of a ruling class, we might point out that the currently elected holder of this office is the Republican George W Bush. His challenger is Democrat John Kerry. The first step in understanding the presidential election is telling them apart, so the *Red Star* has developed this handy guide:

1. George W Bush is the silver haired, suited figure, surrounded by acres of red, white and blue bunting, in the pocket of the US corporations and defending the occupation of Iraq.

2. So is Kerry.

There is a difference, of course, in the fact that Bush was the president who actually ordered the invasion, and for this murderous policy much of the US left and anti-war movement is itching to see him defeated: not to mention sent alone, without armed protection, and if possible naked, into some quiet corner of Baghdad to discuss the outcome of his policy with those he bombed into freedom to live under military occupation. Who can blame them? The truth is, if Bush is kicked out of office by the American people, I'll happily sink a few beers with my comrades in satisfaction.

However, there are dangers in personalising politics in this way. After all Bush is, and let's be fair to the man, an idiot. If US foreign policy was truly his own initiative, sheer geographic ignorance might have limited it to somewhat unexpected military action against Narnia. Identifying the war with his presidency (and indeed the premiership of Tony Blair, as the British Stop the War Coalition has increasingly done) neglects its true cause.

Wars are fought to establish the control of powerful capitalist states over weaker states. That control, in turn, ensures access to foreign markets, and the supply of foreign resources, to the corporate ruling classes of the dominant states. In the days of the British Empire, military conquest paved the way for economic exploitation. In modern times, US power has been largely asserted through economic dominance and merely the implied threat posed by the sheer size and capacity of the US military: but where

that military *threat* has been insufficient to maintain American power, military *action* has replaced it. In some ways, the Iraq war is a return to an older colonialist model: but the action of capitalism abroad, imperialism, remains constant, whatever the mechanism.

A surprisingly frank exposition of this policy can be found at the website of the Project for a New American Century: www.newamericancentury.org. There you can read a document called *Rebuilding America's Defences: Strategy, Forces and Resources For a New Century*. This argues "...the United States must be prudent in how it exercises its power. But we cannot safely avoid the responsibilities of global leadership or the costs that are associated with its exercise. America has a vital role in maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. *If we shirk our responsibilities, we invite challenges to our fundamental interests.* [Our emphasis] The history of the 20th century should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire. The history of the past century should have taught us to embrace the cause of American leadership." A crank right wing think tank? The PNAC was established in 1997 and counts Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz as former members.

Kerry is not about to challenge the "fundamental interests" highlighted by the PNAC. He knows he need merely stand one millimetre to the left of Bush to win the votes of those who have no other choice. Bush and Kerry, the only candidates who stand any chance of election, are creatures of corporate America. Kerry will not withdraw US forces from Iraq, or hesitate to use them elsewhere. His kinder politics manifest themselves only in a marginally less violent rhetoric: but softer words cover the same policy.

If support for Kerry can be understood on the grounds that he might, at least, achieve a symbolic defeat for Bush, support for the leading 'third candidate' (all candidates in US elections other than those of the main parties are, somewhat illogically, third candidates) cannot. So what can we say to the comrades of Socialist Alternative, the US sister group to the Socialist Party in Britain, who are enthusiastically and uncritically campaigning for Ralph Nader? Nader has previously stood as a candidate for the Greens, and is now standing as an independent. He wishes to withdraw US troops from Iraq, but only to replace them with UN troops: Iraqis would notice little change except in the colour of the berets. Why compromise socialist politics in support of a liberal candidate who stands no chance of being elected, and would achieve little if he were? Sell your soul if you must, but get a *return*. I now offer a compliment so weak it would fail to win a smile from even a US presi-

bush and kerry: a millimetre apart



dential nominee: perhaps the best that can be said for Nader is that his liberal domestic policy is preferable to Bush's - but then, whose isn't?

Three parties with 'socialist' in their name are standing presidential candidates: the 'Castroite' Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Equality Party (sister to the British party of the same name, one product of the explosive splits in the old and infamous Workers Revolutionary Party), and the Socialist Party USA. Of these, only the SPUSA offers any prospect of leadership towards the mass party of labour American workers need.

It is descended from the Socialist Party of America, for which Eugene Debs stood as a presidential candidate early last century, in 1920 winning a creditable 919,799 votes. Originally a Democrat and union activist, he became president of the American Railway Union in 1893, and was imprisoned for 'contempt of court' during a strike the next year. He became a socialist, and founded

first the Social Democratic Party, and then split from that to form the SPA.

His name is honoured by the Debs Tendency, a revolutionary socialist faction formed last year within the SPUSA. They call for the formation of a "single, unified multi-tendency revolutionary democratic socialist party", and publish an excellent summary of their politics in the form of 19 "Points of Unity" - which we strongly endorse - on their website (www.debstendency.org) and in their recently launched paper, *Appeal to Reason*.

The SPUSA presidential candidate in 2004 is Walt Brown, though he only appears on the ballot in a small minority of states. To those American readers who are offered a chance to vote for him, we urge you to do so. To those who aren't, we urge you to vote for him anyway. It'll spoil your ballot, but no more than any other vote would ★

manny neira

ben burgis, of the debs tendency of the socialist party usa, comments for the *red star* on the issues faced by socialists in the forthcoming election:

I would never, ever, consider advocating that anyone boycott an election. The right to suffrage - no less than unionisation rights, the minimum wage, and so forth - is a gain for our class, a concession won in bitter struggle. To paraphrase right-winger Charlton Heston's tag-line about guns, "you'll pry my ballot from my cold, dead hands". Even if there were no left-wing candidates on the ballot, I would still rather run a write-in campaign than urge people not to vote.

The field of options is, unfortunately, rather limited. There are the usual-suspect 'campaigns' by the Socialist Workers Party (no relation to the British group of the same name), the Workers World Party, and the Socialist Equality Party. To the best of my knowledge, none of these three parties even attempted to get their candidates on the ballot where I live, which is particularly absurd in the case of the SEP, since this where the international headquarters of not only their group but their whole, and tiny, 'Fourth International' is. This is revealing: their lack of ballot access does not trouble these groups, since they see the campaigns as purely token efforts. They have no ambition to win even a hundredth of a percent of the vote, and see the campaigns as merely convenient vehicles to recruit a few more people into their sects. This may sound harsh, but I think that it would be difficult for any one to dispute the facts.

Its impossible to talk about the options of the far left in 2004 without at least mentioning Nader, since he is - after all - the only third-party candidate who any significant number of Americans have even heard of. One could perhaps construct a case for critically supporting him on the classic model, but that is not (generally speaking) what pro-Nader socialists are doing: instead, they veer towards entirely uncritical support. He truly does have all of the flaws, including a real lack of clarity as to whether he wants to build an alternative to the twin parties of capital, or merely pressure them into being more 'progressive'.

The Green Party, having spurned Nader this time around, is running David Cobb. Cobb is a folksy Texan lawyer who spouts more or less typical Nader-like populist reformism, albeit in his case with some surprisingly radical rhetoric in the mix. I had lunch with him recently in Kalamazoo, and he praised the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists of the 1930s and advocated nationalising companies that attempt to engage in 'capital flight' in search of cheaper labour south of the border. At the same time, Cobb has a major flaw that has resulted in the odd fact that, although many socialist groups support Nader, who is politically similar but uses less radical rhetoric, to the best of my knowledge not a single socialist group in the US supports Cobb. This flaw is

the 'safe states strategy', with which he is closely associated. This essentially amounts to campaigning hard in so-called 'safe states', like solidly Republican Texas or solidly Democratic California, where his campaign is unlikely to make a difference, but backing off from advocating that people vote for him in 'swing states' like Michigan. This strategy is designed to both "grow the Green Party" and "ensure that George W Bush is defeated" by the somewhat less evil Democrats. It is unclear how consistent he is in this - after all, he did come to Michigan - but it is clearly part of his strategy, and is a lot more than I, or any politically affiliated socialist I know, can stomach.

For those committed to building a revolutionary democratic socialist party of the working class, rather than some sort of 'classless' progressive populist formation of 'the people', it is unclear how supporting Nader or Cobb would advance this goal even without 'safe states'. Given that, what's a red to do? Support the sterile party-building 'campaigns' of the various confessional micro-sects mentioned above? As a member of the Debs Tendency of the SPUSA, I have many political criticisms of our presidential candidate comrade Walt Brown, who clearly represents the more moderate wing of our party, but still feel that by far the best option is to vote Brown. He has been working hard on getting on the ballot all around the country. In some states where petition requirements are too prohibitive to get the SPUSA on the ballot, he has been 'borrowing' the ballot lines of some of the same state-wide third parties (the United Citizens Party of North Carolina, the Mountain Party of West Virginia, etc.) that Ralph Nader occupied in 2000. And, while he's hardly offering the kind of clear revolutionary platform that some of the other contenders for the SPUSA nomination would have offered, he is at least talking about the need for socialism as opposed to the Naderite solution of more regulation, trust-busting, and the like. As his predecessor in 2000, our then-Presidential candidate David McReynolds put it at the time:

"The reasons for supporting Mary Cal Hollis and myself are that we want a social revolution. We want socialism and the deep revolutionary extension of democracy, achieved through peaceful means. If you want reform, vote Green. If you want to go beyond reform, vote Socialist. And meanwhile, even as Nader and I campaign, our targets are not each other - but a racist, violent, and corrupt corporate system which oppresses all of us. The points both of us raise are important and should be heard. Let us cooperate in making sure that the debates are opened to all minor parties, both red and green."



**spusa candidate
walt brown**



an ugly logic

"There are some things which happen amongst human kind which are almost inexplicable according to any basic moral norms - Nazism was and this is. This is almost beyond belief, that any group of human beings could conceivably have thought that any cause whatsoever could be advanced by taking hostage these innocent, young children and subjecting them to this kind of terror and then ensuring the death of so many of them."

Jack Straw, speaking of the Beslan massacre.

Some things are so unspeakable that the mind recoils from too close a consideration of them. The deliberate taking of children hostage and their massacre at Beslan must be among them. Jack Straw's comment speaks to that natural human revulsion. We might be tempted to agree with him that it is "almost tasteless and it is disrespectful to the dead and the dying and their relatives" to focus now on repression in Chechnya and the political implications of the siege. The people who did this must be beyond all humanity, insane, senseless.

It is an understandable reaction, but it is also unhelpful and I suspect, in Jack Straw's case, deeply cynical. Refusal to attempt to understand the roots of the horror and to seek a political solution is more disrespectful of the dead, because it is a way of guaranteeing a repetition of a similar horror. When an accident or natural disaster occurs, every effort is made to understand the causes, however complex. It is part of the process of recovery, almost an obligation laid on us by the dead to prevent a recurrence.

Because this catastrophe is of human making, the product of conscious calculation (however much accident may have contributed to the final death toll) it seems almost to play into the hands of the terrorists to look to the roots of the conflict in Russia's treatment of Chechnya. Far easier and more comfortable to talk of evil or the morally inexplicable.

To say such acts are evil, morally indefensible, utterly inhumane – all of which in my opinion are true – adds nothing to an understanding of why those 30-odd human beings, who demonstrated some forethought and planning, and, in a twisted way, moral awareness, could come to do the unspeakable.

Chechen rebel leader, Shamil Basayev, has now claimed responsibility for the Beslan school siege, in which 350, mainly children, died; along with a bus-stop bombing, a metro bombing and the destruction by suicide bombers of two passenger aeroplanes in Russia last month. More than 400 people were killed in the other attacks. He said he had personally trained the 33 hostage-takers in the woods 12 miles from Beslan.

Already there is talk of reprisal by Beslan residents against their Ingush and Chechen neighbours. On a human level this is

"to say such acts are evil, morally indefensible, utterly inhumane – all of which in my opinion are true – adds nothing to an understanding of why those people could come to do the unspeakable"



drawings by the traumatised children of chechnya

understandable. To see your children herded together by gunmen, denied food and water, terrorised, shot and blown to pieces, must be enough to unbalance even the most rational person. But a moment's thought would reveal that this is the answer to the previous question: what could move the hostage-takers to put aside their humanity to such a degree that they were capable of such an outrage? That a similar atrocity had been visited on them, their neighbours, their children.

The brutality of Russian troops in Chechnya - atrocities committed against men, women and children - are well documented. A joint statement by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, and Memorial, says this:

"The October 2003 presidential elections in the Chechen Republic, hailed by the Russian government as a major step toward normalization there, have not broken the cycle of violence and abuse in the region. Enforced 'disappearances', rape, torture and extra-judicial executions by federal troops and Chechen fighters are everyday occurrences in Chechnya. Similar violence is on the increase in Ingushetia." (8 April 2004)



terrorists and children inside the beslan school

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Chechnya declared independence. In 1994, Putin's predecessor, Yeltsin, sent in the troops:

"Ten years ago Chechnya had a population of 2 million. Today it is 800,000, and Vladimir Putin has an army of what we estimate to be up to 300,000 Russian soldiers in Chechnya inflicting a regime of terror. Many Chechens are refugees and many others have simply disappeared, often in the night. At least 200,000 Chechen civilians have been killed by Russian soldiers, including 35,000 children." This claim, in the *Guardian*, by Ahmed Zakaev, representative of Chechnya's unrecognised 'elected president', Aslan Maskhadov (as opposed to the Russian placeman), begins to make sense of the 'senseless'.

What drives people to behave inhumanely is to be treated inhumanely. This is in no way to justify the actions of the terrorists at Beslan. They were evil, but it is an evil created by evils perpetrated on them. Jack Straw knows of these evils, and they are likely to feature in the government's own *Human Rights Report*. However, the Foreign Office has announced publication of the report will be delayed as "inappropriate" following Beslan. Straw does not want these connections made.

Straw's remarks are prompted not so much by despair at human depravity, as by political realities. It is in the interest of the British government, somewhat isolated internationally by its craven tailing of Bush on Iraq, to echo Putin's claims that Beslan is about international terrorism and nothing to do with his policies in Chechnya. "Just imagine that people who shoot children in the back came to power anywhere on our planet. Just ask yourself that, and you will have no more questions about our policy in Chechnya," Putin has said. "In war there are ugly processes that have their own logic."

Indeed there is an ugly logic. The man whose troops are responsible for the deaths of 35,000 Chechen children, excuses his own atrocities, while claiming the moral high ground for the atrocity against the children of Beslan.

"Why don't you meet Osama bin Laden, invite him to Brussels or to the White

House and engage in talks, ask him what he wants and give it to him so he leaves you in peace? Why don't you do that?" he asked. "You find it possible to set some limitations in your dealings with these bastards, so why should we talk to people who are childkillers? No one has a moral right to tell us to talk to childkillers."

Atrocities can not provide a solution to political problems. Terrorism rests on the assumption that your opponent cares about civilian casualties, particularly children – it is a game of 'chicken' to see whose moral sensibilities crack first. Apart from being morally repugnant, this shows up its irrationality. If the terrorists' case is that their opponent, in this case Putin, is indifferent to the devastation visited on their people, why should they expect he be bothered when the roles are reversed?

Perhaps they think he is more susceptible to pressure from his own people? That is a case of projecting their own nationalism onto him. Putin is only marginally more concerned for the mass of Russian people, or Ossetians, than he is for Chechens. The fatally bungled 'rescue' of the hostages in the Dubrovka Theatre in 2002, which resulted in the deaths of over 120 hostages, should have shown that he is more interested in acting tough than in minimising loss of life.

The terrorists' logic is the same as that behind the policy of sanctions to undermine the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq – or the projected sanctions against Sudan. Make life unbearable enough for the people and they will rise up and throw off their tyrannous rulers and force a change of policy. Or not. The problem with this, aside from being hideously inhumane, is that it credits these rulers with more humanity than they in fact possess. Its logic is fatally flawed. And it is the ordinary Russian or Iraqi or Sudanese who suffers for their rulers' crimes.

It goes without saying that the actions in Beslan were indefensible: a crime against humanity. But that should not remove the necessity to understand what lay behind them. Nor should Putin be allowed to cover himself in stolen moral sympathy. Blair and Bush are prepared to turn a blind eye to his atrocities in Chechnya, in order to present a common front in the 'war on terror'. Their unity is less, or only partly, the common human revulsion against an act of

appalling inhumanity and more the solidarity that the rulers of the world feel against their troublesome opponents, including among their own peoples.

The struggle of the Chechen people against Russian oppression is a just one. The fact that some of its proponents employ indefensible means does not detract from that. Their politics are hideously wrong, not least in believing Putin and others of the Russian ruling class will be moved by sympathy for Russian workers.

It is not that, as individuals, Straw or Blair or Putin, lack moral qualms, but these feelings will always be overridden by political necessity. They have demonstrated their solidarity as rulers. It is our common humanity that makes us feel for the people of Beslan, and condemn the outrage, but it is that which sets us against our rulers, and makes us call for justice for the people of Chechnya, not mindless vengeance ★

gerry byrne



soldiers and families carry children who escaped alive



nothing on the menu

david broder introduces the candidates standing in the hartlepool by-election to replace peter mandelson mp on 30 september

In a bad day for the people of Britain, the beloved Peter Mandelson has decided no longer to take his seat in the House of Commons. Apparently, being an EU commissioner appeals more to the notoriously spendthrift member for Hartlepool, given that he'll be earning £100,000 or so more than beforehand. Despite his famous "I am a fighter not a quitter" speech, it seems that the brain behind New Labour was happy enough to accept a job in Brussels, which avoids the politician's traditional confrontation with obstacles such as democratic accountability and media scrutiny.

All the major political parties have started their campaigns for the by-election, scheduled to take place on 30 September. There are 11 other candidates including: Respect the Unity Coalition, led by George Galloway MP; Arthur Scargill's rump Socialist Labour Party; and the rabidly anti-European UK Independence Party. Hartlepool ought to be a reasonably safe seat for the government, as the last (2001) General Election's results show:

2001 general election results in hartlepool

Peter Mandelson	Labour	22,506	59.1%
Gus Robinson	Conservative	7,935	20.9%
Nigel Boddy	Liberal Democrat	5,717	15.0%
Arthur Scargill	Socialist Labour	912	2.4%
Ian Cameron	Independent	557	1.5%
John Booth	Independent	424	1.1%

labour

Labour Party support would have to suffer a major collapse to lose this seat, since their lead is so strong in the constituency. Their candidate, Iain Wright, has little to recommend him, other than not being Peter Mandelson. Mandelson's high-living reputation can hardly have helped his party's credibility in an overwhelmingly working class area – very much Old Labour territory. Wright plays the 'local' card strongly: "I live in Hartlepool and I use our local public services. Tory cuts would spell failure." Wright is forced to focus on local issues, given the government's national unpopularity over both domestic and foreign policy.

Labour has been embarrassed before in Hartlepool, when the monkey-suited mascot of Hartlepool United Football Club was elected mayor. Rivals call the club the "monkey hangers", echoing a legend from the Napoleonic wars, when the townspeople thought a monkey was a Frenchman and executed it. The 'man behind the monkey', though, Stuart Drummond, has taken the job seriously (wearing a normal suit in the council chamber) and has proved particularly popular. His election must be seen as a reaction to Labour's move so far to the right as to outflank the Tories, leaving working class voters no recourse but to cast protest votes for inde-

pendent candidates.

As it's a safe Labour seat, their candidate Iain Wright is a hand-picked Blairite. His politics are almost invisible – except for his keenness for cracking down on crime: "Hartlepool needs an MP who will stand up against the yobs and the criminals. A Lib Dem MP would oppose the tough action Hartlepool needs. Lib Dems voted against Labour's tough anti-social behaviour laws, and a Tory MP would vote to slash Home Office spending, taking police off the streets and giving criminals a free hand." Wright manages the almost impossible feat of making the Tories look soft.

ukip

The UKIP may be hoping for a revival of the anti-European sentiment displayed by the monkey-hanging mob. They were intending to run their own monkey-hanger, the sacked chat show host Robert Kilroy-Silk, before it became clear that the other parties would select near-unknown local candidates. With a particularly strong showing in the East Midlands in June's European Elections, winning around a fifth of the vote, and disenchantment with the Conservatives, the nationalist lobby hope to be in with a strong chance.

conservatives

Having waited until September to select their candidate, the Tories are not really taking this election seriously. They have a bad record in the area, as shown by poor by-election results in July, and a surge of support for UKIP. Still, Labour clearly see them as a threat: their website claims "research reveals that Michael Howard's plan... would mean cuts in Hartlepool equivalent to 51 fewer nurses and 50 fewer teachers in the town."

liberal democrats

Some see a strong chance for the Liberal Democrats, who gained a swing of over 25% in both the Birmingham and Leicester by-elections two months ago. They benefited from anti-war sentiment in those seats, reminding voters they opposed the war - at least till the bombing started! This appeal was particularly strong in areas with a large muslim population, but is not nearly as prominent in an area with an ethnic make-up like Hartlepool's: only 0.4% of voters there are muslim.

respect

Respect is even more reliant on the muslim vote. They hoped to attract support from the Muslim Association of Britain, and previously tailored much of their propaganda so as not to offend their religious sentiment, downplaying support for the rights of women and gays. So it is odd that, unlike in most of the country, Respect stood candidates in some Hartlepool wards in the local elections – just 199 voted for them, with a miserable tally of 266 in the European Election. Hardly impressive, when Arthur Scargill's SLP had about four times as much support in the General Election, even allowing for a higher turnout.

While islamic candidates, such as Oliur Rahman (elected councillor in Tower Hamlets) and Yvonne Ridley (who won 13% of the vote in Leicester), have done well for Respect, in Hartlepool they opted for a man they hoped was a better bet for this very different constituency. Indeed, John Bloom is promoted as a "local campaigner" who has fought against a nuclear power station being built in the town. Interestingly, unlike in the various elections over the



summer, the anti-war policy has been shifted down Respect's agenda. Bloom has fought his campaign more on the 'Old Labour' issues of the NHS and pensions, hoping to pick up the voters who have traditionally made this a safe Labour seat. Unfortunately for him, the Liberal Democrats have adopted a similar strategy, particularly focusing on their promise to increase pensions to win over the 'grey vote'.

Given that the candidates for the major parties and Respect are predominantly local politicians or campaigners, it seems apparent that the by-

election will largely be fought on local issues. This will be a disadvantage for Respect, since if the prominent issues are in fact threats to the local hospital, abandonment of shipwrecks or EU fishing quotas (obviously affecting a coastal town), their favoured anti-war message will have less persuasive power. While these mid-term by-elections can allow the emergence of a protest vote, the European election results indicate that the protest is more likely to be against the European Union than the war.

In a radical change of thinking, therefore, Respect has come up with a previously untested manner of winning working-class votes – referring to themselves as socialists. One press release even said that they were presenting a “radical socialist alternative”!

For instance, John Bloom has committed to taking only a worker's wage if elected. The outside observer may have thought that the Socialist Workers Party, at the heart of Respect, would have adopted such a policy before, but at their founding conference the SWP majority, on the direction of their leadership, voted down the inclusion of 'workers' representation on a worker's wage' in Respect's programme. And while John Bloom takes a personally principled stand on this issue, he sees it as just that - a personal choice - and does not want it to be the policy of all Respect candidates.

But most disturbingly, another issue he sees as one of personal choice is abortion. He has strong 'pro-life' views: at a Respect election meeting in Middlesbrough he explained he had “real problems with abortion, not from a religious point of view but a philosophical angle”, and, shockingly, “one day people will come to regard abortion as a holocaust”. He is entitled to his views, but as an elected representative, socialists should not support his 'conscience vote' on an issue that will restrict the freedom of women to control their own bodies.

Respect should feel shame at having compromised the traditional socialist defence of a woman's right to control her own life and her own body - a compromise made in deference to the MAB, to the religious sensibilities of George Galloway, and now in Hartlepool. Every individual does indeed have the right of conscience, which is why politicians like John Bloom should not be voting to deny it to ordinary women.

Respect doesn't expect to do well in Hartlepool. In an interview with the BBC, its figurehead George Galloway MP explained the coalition's pessimism: “Obviously it wasn't a particular stronghold of the Stop the War movement. It is an overwhelmingly white non-muslim constituency.” Respect's muslim communalist (rather than working class) politics are ever clearer. However, temporarily rebranding themselves as socialist in Hartlepool, while denying a woman's right to choose, may serve Respect little better than opportunistically dropping socialism elsewhere has done.

socialist labour

Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party has collapsed since a

strong start in 1996. The SLP won 77,000 votes nationwide in the 1999 European Election, but after a series of purges is a shadow of its former self. If the party has any hope of winning votes, it is in an area such as this that it will do so. The very fact that Scargill himself was the candidate in Hartlepool in 2001 demonstrates how important they see it as. This is Old Labour territory, the SLP's natural constituency, and disillusionment with New Labour may serve them well. Their candidate for Hartlepool is Chris Herriot, a former miner who is now a UNISON shop steward.

The SLP falls into appealing to a kind of reactionary populism. In Chris Herriot's post-selection statement, he describes the ways in which the young are “succumbing to the drugs culture which has claimed the lives of so many”. This view that all drugs are immoral, as if they were simply some sort of 'evil', wanders far from the concept that social conditions cause people's problems. The Socialist Labour Party is trying to win working-class votes by attracting those who already hold reactionary ideas, a campaign akin to Frank Maloney's bid to become mayor of London for UKIP. You could hardly fail to notice the similarity to Maloney's own “Kids on playing fields, not on crack” ticket.

This *Daily Mail*-style agitation has its lighter side: “Rip-off Britain is all too familiar too us as we strive to improve our living standards and conditions. If we buy a new washing machine, tv or hi-fi we are often faced with massive repair bills (or massive warranty charges) when they break down. We believe all such goods should come with a 5 year all parts and labour guarantee at no extra cost to the consumer.”

But, in essence, the SLP is invoking loyalty to Old Labour, as shown by the use of terms such as “pre-1979 levels” (of student grants) in Herriot's programme, or Scargill's attacks on New Labour rather than its predecessor. It didn't work in Leicester, where the vote of 263 only just edged out the Monster Raving Loonies.

little choice

Naturally we will not support any capitalist party – progressive reactionary or monkey hanging – Lib Dem, Tory or UKIP. Despite New Labour's anti-working class politics, there *are* long-standing Labour activists who remain socialists and working class politicians: but Iain Wright is not one of them.

Of the remaining candidates, Respect is increasingly degenerating into unprincipled compromise, despite the involvement of many sincere socialists, not least in the rank and file of SWP. The SLP is in terminal decline, and it is now a shell, offering no prospect of working class leadership.

In fact, no selection of candidates could more graphically illustrate the crisis in working class representation. There's nothing on the menu worth choosing - so we have no vote to recommend. The people of Hartlepool and the people of Britain deserve better: a real workers' party ★

candidates standing in hartlepool by-election 30 september

Conservative	Jeremy Middleton
English Democrats	Edward Abrams
Fathers 4 Justice	Paul Watson
Green	Iris Ryder
Independent	Philip Beriman
Independent	Ronnie Carroll
Labour	Iain Wright
Liberal Democrat	Jody Dunn
Monster Raving Loony	Alan Hope
National Front	James Starkey
Respect Unity Coalition	John Bloom
Socialist Labour	Christopher Herriot
The Common Good	Richard Rodgers
UK Independence	Stephen Allison



how much is too much?

gerry byrne reports on the continuing occupation of iraq, and argues against reliance on, or illusions in, either the occupying troops or the islamic resistance forces as defenders of the interests of the working class

How much is too much? 1,000 dead? \$100 billion? 8 September saw US deaths in Iraq top the thousand mark. Ten times that number of Iraqi civilians have been killed since the invasion – according to Iraq Body Count the figure is between 12,755 and 14,791. (In the course of writing this, I've had to add 100 to update the totals – The Guardian puts the number of dead, military and civilians, as 250 in a week!)

Foreign aid agencies are discussing pulling out entirely in response to hostage-taking and execution of foreigners. Recent cases are of two Italian aid workers, Simona Pari and Simona Torretta, and their two Iraqi colleagues, Ra'ad Ali Abdul Azziz and Mahnoaz Bassam, kidnapped on Tuesday 7 September. They are members of *Un Ponte Per Baghdad* (A Bridge to Baghdad), an independent Italian humanitarian organization that has been working in Iraq since 1992, and INTERSOS, an aid organisation promoted by the three Italian trade union confederations CGIL, CISL and UIL. Their abduction has led to demonstrations in Baghdad by children who have been involved in Bridges to Baghdad projects, and mass protests in Rome by the Italian peace and labour movements.

Most mainstream news sources don't mention the kidnapped Iraqi workers. As one Iraqi woman blogger puts it, there's a double standard operating:

"Is there sympathy with all these abductees? There is. We hate seeing them looking frightened on television. We hate thinking of the fact that they have families and friends who worry about them in distant countries and wonder how in the world they managed to end up in the hell that is now Iraq... but for every foreigner abducted, there are probably 10 Iraqis being abducted and while we have to be here because it is home, truck drivers, security personnel for foreign companies and contractors do not. Sympathy has its limits in the Iraqi summer heat. Dozens of Iraqis are dying on a daily basis in places like Falloojeh and Najaf and everyone is mysteriously silent-

one Brit, American or Pakistani dies and the world is in an uproar- it is getting tiresome."

(From River Bend - <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com>)

This blogger, in common with many Iraqis, welcomed the toppling of Saddam Hussein and cautiously observed the invasion, prepared to give the occupation the benefit of the doubt. 16 months on, with a nominal Iraqi-run government, her sympathy is running out.

The Iraq invasion and occupation is the most costly military action since the Second World War. Yet basic amenities are still lacking. A hundred billion dollars has already been spent and still the power is only on half the time in Baghdad and sewage runs through the street! Third world conditions with a first world price tag. This is irrationality on a mind-numbing scale.

The occupiers started out with a degree of political capital by ousting the hated tyrant, Saddam Hussein. They have the material resources to dramatically improve everyday life for the majority of Iraqis, in terms of both political freedoms and living standards. Instead Iraq is a more violent, less secure, more impoverished place for their presence. If the goal was, as the apologists of the war proclaimed, to bring liberation and a better life for Iraqis, that could have been achieved. Humanitarian agencies, with an infinitesimal fraction of the budget and personnel the mighty US state has expended on 'pacifying' Iraq, have achieved radical improvements in the living conditions of populations in similar states. Even under the sanctions and the dictatorship they managed some real improvements in health and child welfare. One mother on the demonstration in Baghdad said of *Un Ponte Per Baghdad*, "My son has been sick since he was four years old, and through the long years of the embargo they were the only people supplying medicines and thereby keeping him alive. Now we are here because we are deeply moved and are praying that their lives will be saved."

But that was never the aim of the invasion. The inescapable conclusion is that the occupiers are at best indifferent to the fate of Iraqis, at worst see them as the undifferentiated 'enemy'. There is a logic to being an occupying army. Young men and women, often 'economic conscripts', shipped half way across the world to a place they don't understand, for reasons never honestly explained, lied to by politicians, hyped up and scared - an astonishing number of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein was linked to Al-Qaeda and thus to the attack on the World Trade Centre - confront a population who never asked them to be there. When they come under attack, they cannot distinguish the 'terrorists' from the people: they *all* look like terrorists. The media demonisation, in their home countries, of Arabs, muslims, people who look different, helps to cloud their perception. Fear, isolation from the occupied population, and orders from above, all conspire to dehumanise them. Soon, the shooting of unarmed civilians, the shelling of residential districts, the arbitrary arrests and all-pervading suspicion, the rape, the torture, the abuse of children, women and men – all the atrocities they came to 'liberate' the people from – become normalised, all that these 'inhuman others' deserve. 'Liberators' turn torturers.

The 'resistance', too, has committed atrocities, targeting innocent workers. The 25 foreigners kidnapped and killed in Iraq since March 2003 were not in the main consciously part of the occupation. Like the twelve Nepalese and three Turkish migrant workers killed in four days, they may not even have known they were in Iraq. (According to the ICFTU - International Confederation of Free Trade Unions - the Nepalese migrant workers initially believed that they were to work in Jordan and were smuggled into Iraq to work as cooks and cleaners for a Jordanian firm.) Or the Iraqis, amid 70% unemployment, who work for the occupiers, such as the young women cleaners gunned down at a bus-stop. Or those blown up



al-sadr supporters

while queuing for work. Often flamboyant and 'exotic' – beheading hostages, displaying mutilated corpses – these atrocities are used as evidence that 'they are not like us'. But it is hard to see any qualitative difference between that and videoing the rape and torture of prisoners, or displaying the battered bodies of Saddam's dead sons. When it's 'us' the incidents are exceptional, or justified by particular circumstances; when it's 'them' they are characteristic of their savagery.

A similar case can be made in relation to political repression. The independent news station, al-Jazeera, has now been shut indefinitely after failing to submit to the occupation. Quoted in the *New York Times*, Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt said in April in Baghdad, "My solution is to change the channel to a legitimate, authoritative, honest news station. The stations that are showing Americans intentionally killing women and children are not legitimate news sources."

It is the hallmark of tyrannies that they define "legitimate news sources", and suppress those they define as illegitimate, on the basis of how well they are shown up, rather than any relation to the truth. If this were some 'third world' general speaking about a politically independent news channel, there would be cries of 'military dictatorship'. But because it is a US Brigadier General, it becomes responsible news management.

And it is not only Al-Jazeera. The International Federation of Journalists says that since the invasion of Iraq last year, 13 journalists and media staff have been killed in incidents that have not been satisfactorily explained. Most recently, Mazen Al-Tomaizi, a television journalist, was killed when a United States helicopter fired on a crowd in Baghdad. "Once again, a working journalist, carrying nothing more dangerous than a microphone is shot dead in the streets without any satisfactory explanation," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "This tragedy reinforces our demands for justice for journalists who have been killed in Iraq by so-called 'friendly-fire'."

So too with arbitrary imprisonment. Amnesty International reveals, "Thousands of men, women and children are still held without charge or trial in detention facilities in Iraq, including Abu Ghraib, after the official end of the occupation on 28 June 2004". What sort of 'liberation' is this?

Against this, it is argued that the islamists, Moqtada Al-Sadr's Mahdi Army and the like, are so backward and anti-democratic that even the occupation is preferable. Or that it is only the presence of occupation troops that stops Iraq sliding into sectarian civil war and an Iranian-style theocratic state.

This ignores the role of the occupation in creating the base of support for the islamists (by 'islamists', of course, we mean not sincere muslims, but those using the faith as a cover for the pursuit of power). The invasion smashed the Baathist state machine, encouraged looting and lawlessness, and, for a year, failed to provide any replacement security for the Iraqi populations, as opposed to the occupiers. That social vacuum was filled by the Islamist militias. The totalitarian stability and bare subsistence of Saddam Hussein's regime gave way to gangsterism and anti-democratic Islamic thug-



u.s. army public relations: giving out t-shirts

gery. So called 'Islamic' norms are violently imposed; women are de facto prisoners in their homes. In Al-Sadr's base of support, the festering slums of Baghdad, the occupation has brought no material improvement. Billions of dollars worth of Iraq contracts are preferentially awarded to Bush's business associates (see *Red Star* 1) while Sadr City lacks clean water and unemployment is up to 70%. In this situation, the mass of the dispossessed will turn to whoever seems to offer a solution, however extreme.

The labour movement, persecuted under Saddam (the Baathist trade union headquarters doubled as a torture chamber) has made an astonishing recovery. Only now are we learning about the underground trade union organisation that was maintained under the direst repression. But the working class and secular forces on which a democratic Iraq depends are weak compared to the reactionary mass movements of the so-called 'resistance'. This has led some to conclude that the occupation is preferable to an Islamist take-over, or to white-wash the occupation-supported Interim Government, conferring on it a legitimacy it does not deserve:

"The invitation to the interim Iraqi prime minister Ayad Allawi to address the Labour party conference is an opportunity for those who honourably opposed the war to extend support to Iraqi democrats who are trying, in the most difficult circumstances, to construct a vibrant civil society. Allawi is criticised for having been a Ba'athist but many decent people joined the Ba'ath party - and he was nearly assassinated by Saddam's agents in Britain. The Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions strongly supports the current process to prepare the ground for democratic elections. His presence at Labour's conference is an excellent opportunity for a real dialogue with him."

(Abdullah Muhsin, British representative of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions, in a letter published in the *Guardian* 18 August)

The IFTU is a bona fide trade union federation representing Iraqi workers (though not the only one). It has to operate in the conditions that exist, which includes negotiating with and making demands on the occupation authorities and their puppet government. That's entirely appropriate, representing the interests of the



motion on iraq carried, almost unanimously, by the tuc at its 2004 congress

Congress reaffirms its opposition to the occupation of Iraq, condemns the abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners by the coalition forces, and calls for an accurate audit of the actual cost of the invasion and occupation.

Congress believes it is now more vital than ever to support the new independent trade union movement as an essential force in the creation of a secular, democratic Iraq, free from fundamentalism and Saddam's Baathism.

Congress thus calls for the speedy withdrawal of the coalition forces and the dismantling of their military bases in favour of the Iraqi people being left free to build their country's infrastructure, public services and education system, with assistance from international agencies if required.

Congress notes in particular the role women (who constitute over 50 per cent of the population in Iraq and account for 35 per cent of the productive workforce) are playing in the reconstruction of Iraq.

Congress deplores the suppression of trade union activity by the occupying forces, and the physical destruction of the headquarters of the fledgling trade union organisation.

Congress urges the General Council to maintain and strengthen contact with Iraqi trade unionists, in particular the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), by:

- i) initiating, together with affiliated trade unions, a solidarity committee to liaise with, and give practical support to, the trade union movement in Iraq, including the delivery of a structured education programme on the TUC model, and assistance with the provision of IT and other office equipment;
 - ii) facilitating visits and twinning arrangements between Iraqi and British trade unionists; and
 - iii) ensuring that links are made between Iraqi women trade unionists and their British counterparts.
- iv) working with the ICFTU and the ILO to press for the maximum involvement of Iraqi trade unionists in the drafting of new labour laws which conform with the core Conventions of the ILO.

Proposed NATFHE - The University and College Lecturers' Union.

Amended by Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians, and Transport Salaried Staffs' Association.



the humiliation of occupation

the aid of the Iraqi workers. There is one force that Bush and his allies fear more than Al-Qaeda: a force which has the power to bring the mightiest military machine on the planet grinding to a halt.

That force is the international working class movement. Insofar as we can mobilise a movement in the occupying countries against both the occupation and the reactionary elements of the 'resistance', we can influence the outcome and prospects for the Iraqi labour movement.

There are signs that it is beginning to move in defence of our Iraqi brothers and sisters. Since our report in the last issue of *Red Star* on US Labor Against the War, we have received this report:

"On Tuesday, August 31st, 1400 delegates to the Communications Workers of America annual convention in Anaheim, CA voted nearly unanimously in favor a resolution that calls upon George W. Bush to abandon his policy of pre-emptive war and to support U.S. troops by 'bringing them home safely now.' CWA joins the Service Employees (SEIU), Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Postal Workers (APWU), Mail Handlers (a division of the Laborers' Union - LIUNA), and the California, Washington, and Maryland/DC Federations of Labor in adopting strong antiwar resolutions this year."

The Trades Union Congress has just passed a similar motion (see box). The TUC is not noted for energetically putting its words into practice. That will take real effort by the rank and file. USLAW gives us an example we should follow over here. We need a militant *grass roots* labour movement campaign against the occupation, for the immediate withdrawal of the troops, and in solidarity with the Iraqi workers', women's and unemployed movements. Workers the world over can only rely on their own strength and solidarity. But that strength when it is mobilised can stop the mightiest war machine. Berthold Brecht said it 60 years ago:

"general, your tank is a
powerful vehicle
it smashes down a forest, it
crushes a hundred persons
but it has one defect
it needs a driver
... general, man is very useful
he can fly, and he can kill.
but he has one defect.
he can think"

workers. Where it becomes a problem is where it shades over into *political* support for those forces.

There are those who opposed the invasion but will not call for immediate withdrawal of the occupation troops, on the pragmatic grounds that the space vacated will be seized by the islamists and that would be a disaster for the working class and secular forces in Iraq. This reliance on the military machine of the most powerful ruling class on the globe to defend democracy, secularism and workers' rights makes no sense. The occupiers have no interest in defending those rights. Their support for and arming of Saddam Hussein for decades, their continuing support for dictatorships round the world, show us this. How can we expect Bush's or Blair's troops in Iraq to defend the very rights they are busy attacking at home?

The Iraqi labour movement has made a valiant recovery from the decades of repression, but it is still weak compared to other social forces. Does this mean it should be reliant on other forces, either the occupation or the reactionary islamist 'resistance' – both of whom are irreconcilably opposed to democracy, human rights and workers' interests? There is a 'third force' which can come to

drinking guinness through a straw



buffy: seen them all

You're in a pub; a woman sits down in front of you and says:

"Hi, I'm Rae. I pick my nose and eat the bogies. I wear stripy toe socks with sandals. I own every single *Buffy* and *Angel* video. I fancy Tom Baker (Doctor Who). I drink Guinness through a straw. Oh, and I'm a socialist, sorry."

Then a bell rings, she wanders off and another one sits in her place. Let's hope this one is better. Welcome to the world of speed dating, which takes the time out of meeting someone by placing the meat market on a conveyer belt. A little like

Yo!Sushi. This is one of the many reasons I hate the idea of speed dating: it would just turn into a three minute confessional. We're not speed dating, but I think I am confessing. Indulge me, you might even get a drink out of it.

Back when I was a little person, Trade Justice was fun. I don't mean that the movement was fun and it isn't now, but that my experience of Trade Justice was fun. My parents were Traidcraft reps for the churches in our area. Products would be delivered to our house, my brother and I would then practice our numbers by pricing them all up before they were boxed up and sent to be sold at church coffee mornings. Doesn't sound much fun, sounds a bit like my parents were running a mini sweatshop in the heart of Surrey. Except that our reward for all this was to be allowed to pile up the left over packing material at the bottom of the stairs and ride down in the empty boxes into it. If there were boxes big enough, I'd still be doing it now. Apart from a lack of concern for our own safety, my brother and I were brought up knowing that there was great injustice in the world, injustice that needed to be rectified in some way. This thought is still with me and I hope I never lose sight of it.

Aside from involvement with the Jubilee 2000 Debt Campaign and a local campaign to keep a much-needed school open, my experience of politics was limited to discussions with friends.

A good few years ago, a friend and I wandered off from a school trip in London and joined a mini demonstration for a decent minimum wage outside the Department of Trade and Industry. At some point during this heady mix of placards and chants, I found a pen in my hand. I didn't mean to do it, honest, the big kids made me do it and ran away. Before I knew it I'd put my details on a contact list. A moment of weakness cost me months of distress: I'd willingly given my contact details to the Socialist Workers Party and was about to embark on months of being groomed for revolutionary stardom from afar. The phone calls started a week later and went on once a week for what seemed like forever: "You seem like you care, would you like to set up a group at your college? We could send someone down to talk to you and your friends". It quickly got beyond a joke, but I just couldn't get them to leave me alone, no matter how much I pointed out that I really needed to concentrate on my studies. Eventually, one weary evening as I heard the familiar voice at the end of the phone, I caved in. In a moment I lost all sense of moral decency. I was trapped and I began to chew my own leg off. Putting on my best frail girly voice I said, "Look I'm really sorry that I won't be able to help you. I've been ill, you see and, well, won't be around for much longer." I earned so many negative karma points for that one...

I didn't dabble much in politics after that, save for a few youthfully anarchic stunts in the sixth form.

Most people that I have spoken to say that they became active or reactivated around the time of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent bombing of Afghanistan. I was there, I knew it was wrong but my activism was based on a gut reaction. I helped build the Surrey Stop the War Coalition, organised vigils and demos, wrote and distributed leaflets but it all seemed like damage limitation. I had no direction, all I could do was say "this is wrong, don't ask me why or how to make it better, it's just wrong". It could have carried on like that, signing petitions, writing letters, fighting for concessions.

It's sad but usually true that something bad has to happen to ourselves before we can truly acknowledge that it can and does happen to others. Despite what you might hear, I'm not stupid: I'm blonde but not stupid. I had a fair grasp of what was going on the world. I could look around and see violence, oppression and inequality everywhere. Intellectually I knew it, but somehow emotionally it didn't touch me. Then the system kicked me in the stomach. Whenever I've worked, I've joined a union. That's what you do, work, join a union and then they protect you. Yeah right. For six months I was subjected to harassment at work by a co-worker. I was stalked, threatened and physically assaulted. Despite bringing it to the attention of my line managers, nothing was done. Everything came to a head when I was attacked by my harasser on the shop floor, during work hours, in plain sight of the managers. Right or wrong, I defended myself. Instant suspension, followed by dismissal. The best piece of advice my union representative gave me was: "When you go into your hearing, wear a suit". Great, thanks. I was alone. Call me self-indulgent if you like, I don't care. This world sucks and suddenly it was personal.

It wasn't really an epiphany, but from then on I began to find my thinking joining up. My oppression is the world's oppression, my struggle is the world's struggle, and we're in it together. Still, I was a lefty not a socialist.

All through the war in Iraq I remained a lefty. I preferred small independent actions to joining a big party (OK, I know big is a relative term in the left). I desperately tried to hang onto my sense of individuality, concerned that I would lose it as soon as I got a membership card. Eventually I realised that there is strength through unity: we cannot act alone but equally we mustn't sacrifice who we are. Our lives are controlled by corporations and institutions, some of which we don't even know are there. They are powerful and will do their very best to keep us weak. Until we join together we remain weak. Each of us brings a unique quality to the struggle: quite often it's the act of joining together that brings the best out of us. However, we cannot expect those in power to roll over and give up. We are going to have to fight every step of the way, but we are fighting for true equality, true democracy. I want to be part of this fight. I want to bring others to the fight. This is what makes me a socialist. Socialism is human: it's vibrant and alive. As a socialist I'm in the best position to be me, who I want to be. It's going to be a really rough ride but it's definitely going to be one hell of an adventure.

So let's try again: "Hi, I'm Rae. I pick my nose and eat the bogies. I wear stripy toe socks with sandals. I own every single *Buffy* and *Angel* video. I fancy Tom Baker (Doctor Who). I drink Guinness through a straw. Oh, and I'm a socialist, and damned proud of it" ★

rae hancock



baker: fancied

red ★ star

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



about the red party

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

contact us

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