



# weekly **worker**

**School students and  
the anti-war party:  
youth in vanguard**

- Labour against war
- World against war
- Zimbabwe crisis
- March 22 demo

No 473

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Regime change begins at home

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# Conquerors not liberators

- **Victory to  
the people  
of Iraq**

- **Defeat  
UK-US  
imperialism**

- **Build for  
April 12  
demonstration**



# PARTYnotes

## Conquerors, not liberators



**H**awks and doves in the war party assured the public that US-UK forces would enjoy a swift victory. Days, not weeks, they predicted. It has not happened. Now sober military voices warn of months. Some many months.

Saddam Hussein's position was hopeless. He should scurry off into exile. His regular army was bound to disintegrate with the first wave of cruise missiles and smart bombs. So low was morale that surrender would come division by division. It has not happened. The army fights intact.

Take out Saddam Hussein and his inner circle, his bunker palaces, Ba'ath party headquarters and government buildings. Then the whole Iraqi state machine collapses. It has not happened. Saddam Hussein survives and still issues commands.

There might be civilian deaths, the assurances continued. They would though be very few in number and the result of accident, not design. The Shia population would rise in revolt. Myths of World War II clouding their brains, George Bush and Tony Blair told troops to expect to be greeted as liberators. It has not happened. No TV pictures of Iraqi people whooping for joy. The people of Basra do not appear to have rebelled. They do, however, lack food, water and sanitation. As the UN warns, a catastrophe is on the cards.

The Republican Guard and the Ba'ath party elite might admittedly put up some token resistance. To no effect. Overwhelming air power decides 21st century battles, insists Donald Rumsfeld. Again, as Basra, Nassiriya and Najaf show, it has not happened.

So things have not gone according to the stipulations of the Rumsfeld doctrine. Plans unravel. Good. Communists - in Britain and Iraq - loathe Saddam Hussein and his bureaucratic dictatorship. But this does not mean for a moment that we give any support to the drive by the US-UK coalition to re-impose neo-colonialism on the country. We prefer their *defeat* to their victory. We know that after Iraq it will be North Korea, Iran, Cuba and ...

Thus, Saddam remains the enemy of the peoples of Iraq - but now, with the imperialists over-running their land, not their main enemy. There must be tactical shifts in the struggle against his dictatorship. The goal remains to put power into the hands of the workers, peasants and urban poor - but the US-UK forces *must* now be sent packing.

In terms of hardware and sophistication Gulf War II must be one of the most unequal of wars in history. The sole 21st century superpower with a \$400 billion annual military budget versus an impoverished and wrecked 'rogue' state. Understandably then, unlike 1991, Iraq decided not to allow the US to conduct a turkey shoot. In Gulf War I Iraqi troop and armour concentrations were systematically destroyed out on the open ground. B52s and Warthog tank busters smashed to pieces 10 Iraqi divisions in a matter of a few days.

Current strategy is to hold Baghdad and its environs, defend other urban centres and harry the enemy's extended supply routes. The US army needs 500,000 tons of petrol daily for its front-line armour as well as other supplies. Tankers and lorries are vulnerable to attack by determined guerrilla forces.

The US military has recorded staggering progress. They are within 60 miles of Baghdad. Yet Saddam Hussein's forces - regular army units, Republican Guards and paramilitary fedayeen - remain holed up in Basra, Nassiriya and Najaf.

Unwilling to be drawn into the hell of urban warfare, US and UK forces have retreated or held back. Street fighting results in 30% to 70% casualty rates. In Basra air and artillery bombardment is deployed as a substitute for sending in the infantry. An extraordinarily blunt instrument which US-UK commanders know full well will cause mayhem amongst the civilian population. Surgical war turns into carnage.

Nor have the Iraqi people welcomed the US-UK forces as liberators. Blair and his ministers desperately explain away the unwillingness of the Iraqi people to rise. They dismiss Iraqi fighters as Ba'ath party fanatics and cowards because they choose not to be massacred out on the desert planes. Geoff Hoon brands them "Saddam Hussein's thugs".

US-UK forces as not liberators, but aggressors fighting an unjust war. The mass of the Iraqi population - Shia and Sunni - have no love of Saddam Hussein. But they hate the idea of being conquered more. Islam, Iraqi nationalism and pan-Arabism are therefore combining into a powerful ideology of resistance.

Under these circumstances communists in Iraq will surely not suspend their democratic struggle against Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. They will, though, we trust, bring to the fore the fight against the US-UK invasion force. Political independence should never be sacrificed, but the main blows should be directed at the main enemy.

When US armies arrive at the outskirts of Baghdad it is still possible that they will be met with capitulation. However, that seems increasingly improbable. The US-UK coalition therefore envisages surrounding the city in force and placing it under protracted siege. They will pound the capital with shells, bombs and missiles and hope to bludgeon it into submission. Civilian deaths would rapidly mount into the tens of thousands. Those who 'support our troops' might care to ponder their responsibilities for this pending crime against humanity.

Certainly the anti-war party must double and redouble propaganda and education efforts. Communists will certainly do their duty. The April 12 national demonstration in London provides another opportunity for us to take to the streets to show our undiminished strength. Meantime we must fight to bring the war home with political strikes, blacking military supplies, civil disobedience and parallel centres of authority. Our demands must go much further than 'Blair out'. To limit ourselves to that is to invite another presidential prime minister - a Gordon Brown or a Charles Clarke. We demand regime change. Out with the quasi-democratic constitutional monarchy. In with a fully democratic, federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales ●

**Jack Conrad**

## LETTERS



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

### Precedent

Now that the United States of America has decided to change international law and make it perfectly legal for one country to decide to attack another if it feels threatened by it, how can the American administration dare criticise if another country follows their lead?

For example, if Pakistan attacks India, because it feels threatened, that would surely be okay? Or if Russia blasts its way into Georgia, because it feels that they 'harbour terrorists', that is acceptable? No? Silly me! Of course not! For it is one rule for the USA, and another for any other country. The Americans and their followers have set a precedent that will no doubt come back to haunt them, and sadly the entire world.

**Julie Thomson**  
Fife

### Majority

All this talk of parliament not 'listening to the majority' and the UK government 'not reflecting the democratic choice of the people' is insulting nonsense.

The fact is the anti-war demos - as big as they were - did not represent the majority of people in the country. Two million on the streets is a lot of people, but there are over 59 million people in these isles. As the left is so fond of saying about pro-establishment events (royal death, hunting march, etc), what was more significant than the two million who attended was the 57 million who did not.

There is a large, vocal group who oppose the war, go on demonstrations, hold Socialist Workers Party placards and wear badges, but a simple glance at their numbers on the streets shows they are not the majority. Bleating about democracy and the people being ignored when the great mass of people clearly aren't with you is self-defeating and frankly hilarious.

**Hutch Hampton**  
email

### Ultra-left

I would like to comment on the front page headline, "Rather defeat for US-UK forces than their victory", in last week's *Weekly Worker* (March 20).

It was a bit ultra-left and could give the impression that communists support Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. It was nearly as bad as the headline "Victory to Iraq" in last week's Workers Revolutionary Party's *Newsline*. It reminds me of some of the ultra-left sects who called for the "sinking of the UK fleet" during the Falklands war.

I guess that the headline may have appealed only to a minority of last Saturday's anti-war demonstrators. It must have resulted in sales of last week's *Weekly Worker* being lower than would have been expected from such a favourable selling opportunity.

In contrast, a recent very good front page headline was "Regime change begins at home" (February 27). I suggest that the editor tries a bit harder to compose such headlines, which allow communists to be able to confidently sell copies of the *Weekly Worker* to the average man or woman in the street.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

### Leeds hunger

Thanks for carrying my report from Leeds (*Weekly Worker* March 20). But two things.

Firstly, no doubt for reasons of space, the editor omitted my final point, that Leeds Socialist Alliance was heavily involved in these activities and our banner even got shown on national news.

This was taking place on March 15 and confirmed for me that it was quite right for the SA to postpone its conference until May. Our place was on that demonstration. The *Weekly Worker's* line that the SA has been liquidated is gross exaggeration. There are deep weaknesses about the SA and uncertainties about its future, but the business about liquidation is premature and hysterical.

Secondly, anti-war events in Leeds have kept up at a high level. Monday saw the biggest meeting of the Leeds Coalition; Wednesday saw more protests by school students. Thursday saw a group of green direct actioners gridlock Leeds's traffic system by chaining themselves together at a vital junction. At lunchtime there were walkouts by council and university workers and students and a lively and exciting (many sit-downs on the way) demonstration of around 1,000 people, many of them school students. This was followed by a teatime demonstration of comparable size, which also included sit-down protests.

This Saturday Leeds held another demonstration - even bigger than the Thursday demos - at the same time as sending coaches both to the protest at Menwith Hill and the national demonstration. This demo also showed the hunger of people to hear arguments, as many more stayed for the speeches, instead of drifting away as soon as possible.

**Matthew Caygill**  
Leeds

### Underwhelmed

Matthew Caygill's report is right about much, but he is wrong about "Julie Waterson of the Socialist Workers Party". She spoke on behalf of the Anti-Nazi League.

Sally Kincaid spoke next but, although she is "of the Socialist Workers Party", she spoke as the recent victim of a fire-bomb attack attributed to Nazis. After that Anne-Marie Piso spoke - and was announced as speaking on behalf "of the Socialist Workers Party".

Not for the first time, and no doubt not for the last, I am underwhelmed by the SWP's conception of the united front tactic. Dave Nellist, who was the first speaker, also seemed less than impressed, as he was repeatedly interrupted by one of the organisers and didn't get a clear run at his slot of 10 minutes after presumably travelling to Leeds solely as an invited speaker.

**Paul Hubert**  
Leeds

### AWL sectarianism

It is tempting to dismiss Dave Spencer's letters as the grumblings of a disappointed old man. Why re-open an issue nearly two decades old (literally before some of our members were born)? There's a war on - haven't we got more important things to do? But it is precisely because of the war and the huge political ferment that has opened up, that we need to look closely at the issues.

Dave, I am sure, is genuine when he says: "My main point was that Workers Fight [the proto-Alliance for Worker's Liberty] prior to 1984 had a policy that all left groups should be in one organisation. There are no political differences which justify them being in separate groups. To me that is a non-sectarian or even anti-sectarian policy and I agree with it. In pursuit of this policy Workers Fight attempted to unite with several other left groups, which was a principled approach" (*Weekly Worker* February 20).

It's an approach that seems to me to be urgently needed. But Dave is allowing himself to be used as a cover for precisely the opposite political agenda. It is much the same role as he played in 1984. There's no nice way of saying it - a dupe

for those resolutely opposed to unity.

In response to my question about evidence of the AWL's sectarian degeneration since 1984, Dave says: "Let Gerry count the number of personal attacks in every one of the letters. To me personal abuse is a typically undemocratic and sectarian method and should be unacceptable in the socialist movement" (March 20). Dave, as far as I know, has not been accused by AWL members of 'logically' intending the genocide of 30 million mentally ill people. I think I win hands down as the target for virulent personal abuse, and the CPGB for dish-ing it.

"Another classic sectarian method is to distort what your opponent is saying" (Dave Spencer, March 20). But for real distortion we must turn to Salma Mackenzie: "In short, a large minority was undemocratically bumped out on their arses in 1984 simply because of ideological disagreements with *numero uno* Sean Matgamna" (Letters, March 20).

They were not expelled for their political views, still less for their disagreement with Sean Matgamna (if we expelled people for that we would simply have no members). Part of the resolution expelling them reads:

"The NC reaffirms its commitment to the democratic rights of political minorities in the WSL. Our objection to the faction is not its political views on various questions, but its disruption of the work of the League. Comrades within the WSL who disagree with the conference or NC majority have the right of access to the internal bulletin; to put their views in branch, area and committee meetings and in the forthcoming pre-conference discussion period; to form factions and tendencies; to propose alternative slates and nominations for the NC, to get representation on the NC in proportion to the strength of support for points of view, etc.

"All these rights have been exercised, and will continue to be available. The only limitation is that such internal debate should be conducted in such a way as not to disrupt the practical work of the organisation. We urge comrades who agree with the faction's politics yet are responsible about building the League to remain with the organisation on these terms" (March 31 1984).

And on Salma's four points of AWL sectarianism:

1. "Setting up the so-called 'Leeds incident' to inoculate AWL members against the CPGB". The Leeds incident was 'set up' by Ray Gaston, and secondarily Mark Fischer and John Bridge. Dummy that I am, I opposed the Leeds incident being given the prominence it was, both internally in the AWL and to the CPGB national organiser. MF gloated that he wanted to tell the AWL to "fuck right off" and that the joint day school should be totally devoted to 'Leeds'. So much for the CPGB's commitment to unity.
2. "Branding marching with muslims on February 15 a 'popular front'". This is a quite disgusting distortion. We have marched with muslims on every Stop the War demo. We have, where we've been able to organise it, had anti-fundamentalist, 'No to war, no to Saddam' contingents. What we will not do is concede to the small but politically organised islamist Muslim Association of Britain that they represent 'muslims'. And we have said clearly that islamists are our class enemies, and we would not want them co-sponsoring our marches. In this we have been consistent. It is the CPGB who have done an about-turn.
3. "Voting to close the Socialist Alliance". Martin Thomas voted, along with every other EC member bar Marcus Ström, to postpone the SA conference. Given the circumstances and the likely turnout, he felt he had no alternative. This is hardly closing the SA: rather a recognition of its failure (largely due to the SWP) to make any independent role for itself in the anti-war movement.



4. “Boycotting the March 12 People’s Assembly for Peace”. We didn’t boycott it. I was there. I was a delegate. We attempted to put a resolution, but were (predictably) carved out. As the person in the AWL who first raised the alarm about the People’s Assembly and argued that its lack of democracy was no way to build a working class-based anti-war movement, I should know. What we didn’t do is get carried away with hysteria about the people’s assemblies representing proto-soviets.

Gerry Byrne  
 AWL

### Degeneration

It is fascinating to see so many old comrades taking up arms again over the expulsions/split in Socialist Organiser, which occurred in 1984, so obviously I felt obliged to join in.

I was fortunate to work with Dave Spencer (unfortunately against Jim Denham and Gerry Byrne) in the struggle against the expulsions via the formation of the Democratic Centralist Faction (DCF) and subsequently in the formation of the Socialist Group and later the International Socialist Group. I am not convinced that the old SO was so bad in comparison to its competitors, but I drew the conclusion when the majority sent their envoy to our branch to announce ‘defusion’ - ie, mass expulsions of the majority of our trade unionists - that it was a waste of effort to try and build an organisation which was essentially a faction (albeit a faction without a viable host).

I think in the course of the faction fight the DCF produced some good material on democratic centralism (mostly written by John Lister and Pat Lally). We were at that time much influenced by Marcel Liebman and probably should have been more radical in our critique of Lenin as well as his epigones - that was, however, 19 years ago.

I had joined the proto-AWL, in fact the proto-Socialist Organiser, in 1975, when I had been expelled from the International Socialists as part of the Left Fraction (which I had largely been recruited to by reading Workers Fight material). I had

already experienced one ‘defusion’ under the Socialist Organiser regime which had caused me some misgivings, but where I rationalised my continued membership because of political agreement with the old WF policies. A second defusion was one too many for me.

If I was, with hindsight, to locate the point of WF/SO/AWL degeneration, I would not put it in 1984 when I left (it is common for old cynics to date the degeneration of things from the moment they hopped off the train), but in 1972, when WF failed to carry through the logic of its positions on the Fourth International and turned inwards.

Despite that I remain a better Matgamnaite (1971-74 version) than Sean himself.

Mick Woods  
 Denmark

### Aussie warning

A word of warning for the Socialist Alliance from down under. In last Saturday’s state election in New South Wales, the Australian Socialist Alliance received execrable results.

In the legislative council, the state’s upper house, it polled 5,029 votes out of 2,560,482 counted. For those of you without calculators that is 0.0196%. In four of the seven lower house seats it contested, the alliance got less than one percent. In two of the other three it got the ‘donkey vote’ by appearing at the top of the ballot paper. Its average vote where this did not happen was 0.68%.The alliance seems so embarrassed it has ‘disappeared’ the whole election from its website.

If anything, the SA in Australia has had a stronger ‘partyist’ trajectory. The largest component, the Democratic Socialist Party, was prepared to ‘do a Scotland’ and commit its resources and membership to the alliance *in toto*. This move was sabotaged by the International Socialist Organisation, the sister group of the Socialist Workers Party, and so the alliance is adrift. It has failed to take advantage of the strong anti-war feeling, which mostly went to the greens. They got 207,141 votes - or eight percent -

across the state in the upper house elections.

From what I have read, the Socialist Alliance in England risks equal humiliation at the polls in May. Postponing your annual conference at a time of heightened political activity against the war seems crazy to me. Why should the working class entrust its vote to an organisation that doesn’t even take itself seriously?

David Lee  
 Sydney

### St Petersburg members

We are glad to inform you that a revolutionary organisation of communists is established in the city of Lenin’s October revolution.

It has been decided to create an authentically revolutionary, realistically thinking organisation, since the current communist organisations in Russia are insufficiently revolutionary and international. This new organisation will fight for human rights, women, young people and minorities, and will take part in all elections for the propagating of our ideas and will organise actions of solidarity with revolutionaries from the whole world.

Lots of local council deputies, leaders of youth and women’s organisations and fighters for the protection of the environment have already expressed their desire to be members of the Communists of Petersburg. Many current members of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) will be admitted. The constituent conference of the Communists of Petersburg will take place on April 12 2003.

We hope to cooperate with your party in the future in the name of the triumph of socialist ideas, freedom and revolution.

Sergei Malinkovich  
 Chair, Communists of Petersburg

### Web fan

The new look of your website is great. I regularly visit the CPGB site and this new one is much easier on the eyes. Thanks!

John Trenton  
 New Jersey

## Iraqi ‘inhumanity’

The capture of several American troops by the defending Iraqi forces has produced outbursts of moral indignation from George W Bush and Tony Blair, along with their supporters and hangers-on. The fact that the Iraqis dared to show their captives on TV, and ask them questions in public, is denounced by the likes of Donald Rumsfeld as a breach of the Geneva Convention. Proof of the odious nature of Saddam Hussein’s regime and thereby supposedly justifying the war itself.

In any case, Rumsfeld’s complaints about Iraqi ‘inhumanity’ to US prisoners have something of the flavour of the complaints of the inhuman torturers of the Japanese military-imperial regime about American ‘inhumanity’ at the end of World War II. Rumsfeld is actually considerably worse than the people he is complaining about, a fact proven by the existence of that concentration/torture camp for islamic prisoners of war as Guantanamo Bay, which everyone knows was Rumsfeld’s personal initiative.

Rumsfeld defined Taliban prisoners of war taken in Afghanistan, fighters for the established government of that country - deeply reactionary but still the government - as “unlawful combatants”, and therefore openly stated they could be kept in cages in the open air, deprived of food and medical care, and subjected to both overt psychological and physical torture. His case for doing so was the

alleged lack of international legitimacy of the cause these islamists were fighting for.

Using Rumsfeld’s own criteria, it could be observed that, given the fact that even major world powers such as Germany, France and Russia, as well as UN general secretary Kofi Anan, have testified to the formal illegality of this war, then Iraq could be just as entitled as the United States to treat those who illegally attack its territory as unlawful combatants: ie, as terrorists. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, as they say.

The Iraqis in fact assert that they intend to abide by the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war, and it is quite likely that they will, if only for reasons of propaganda, make some effort to do so in the most general terms. Showing prisoners being questioned on

TV is not strictly consistent with that, but then the televised pictures issued earlier by the Americans of Iraqi prisoners being led away at gunpoint with hands on heads, or even barbarically trussed up with cable ties (shades of camp X-Ray) are not exactly very ‘humanitarian’ either, and are blatant breaches of the Geneva Convention also.

It is something of a shame that ordinary American troops have been put in this situation by the imperialist voracity of the people who sent them there in pursuit of Uncle Sam and imperialism. What a pity that Rumsfeld, Bush and Blair cannot be induced to take their places. But even in terms of this conflict Rumsfeld’s complaints are sickeningly hypocritical - in the context of camp X-Ray, they are beyond words ●

Ian Donovan



ACTION

**CPGB London anti-war forums**  
 Every Sunday, 5pm, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street (nearest tubes - Great Portland Street, Regents Park).  
 Sunday March 30: ‘Building the anti-war party’. If we are serious about not just stopping the war, but overthrowing the system that breeds war, we need to build a new democratic and centralised workers’ party. Speaker: Mark Fischer.

**Anti-war events**

**Friday March 28**  
**Lobby Margaret Beckett:** 4pm, TGWU office, 2a Wentworth, Vernongate, Derby. Organised by Derby Stop the War Coalition: info@stopwar-derby.org

**Saturday March 29**  
**Camden demo:** Assemble 12.30pm, Cobden Monument, Camden High St (opposite Camden Palace), near Mornington Crescent tube, NW1. March to BBC Broadcasting House, Portland Place, for rally, 2pm.  
 Organised by Camden Stop the War Coalition. camdenstopthewar@hotmail.com; 07989 578840.  
**All-Scotland demo:** Assemble 1pm, US consulate, Regent Terrace (off Regent Road), Edinburgh. Move off at 2pm.  
**March and rally:** Assemble Stoke Newington Common, London, 11.30am. March to London Fields.  
**South London marches:** Assembly points: Safeway, Walworth Road, 11am; Peckham Square, 11am; Camberwell Green, 11.30 am; Clapham clock tower, 12 noon. March to rally outside Ritzy Cinema, Brixton, 1pm.  
**Demonstration in Islington:** Assemble Islington Green, Upper Street, 12 noon. Organised by Islington Stop the War Coalition  
**Haringey march:** Assemble Manor House Gates, Finsbury Park, Green Lanes, 12 noon. March to Duckett’s Common, Turnpike Lane for rally and music.  
 Organised by Haringey Stop the War Coalition: haringey@stopwar.org.uk  
**Labour Against the War:** National delegate conference, 9.30am to 4.30pm, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1 (very close to Euston and Kings Cross stations).  
 Speakers include: Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Bob Crow (RMT), John Edmonds (GMB), Rozanne Foyer (Scottish TUC), George Galloway MP, Andy Gilchrist (FBU), Alice Mahon MP, Mark Seddon (NEC; editor Tribune), and Christine Shawcroft (NEC). Chair: Alan Simpson MP.  
 Advance registration: £5 per delegate/member (payable to Labour Against the War): LATW, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU; latw@gn.apc.org; fax: 020 8985 6785; www.labouragainsthewar.org.uk

**Sunday March 30**  
**Sit-down:** Parliament Square, London, 1pm.  
 Organised by Square on Sunday, squareonsunday@yahoo.co.uk  
**Mothers’ vigil:** Outside 10 Downing Street, 2pm to 3.30pm. mothersagainstwar@yahoo.co.uk  
**Balloons not bombs:** A celebration for peace on mothering Sunday, 1.30pm to 3.30pm, picnic area, Mary Stevens Park, Stourbridge. Picnic, face painting, music, etc. Organised by Stourbridge STWC.  
**Picnic for peace:** Hanley park, Stoke-on-Trent, 1pm. Includes live music, etc. Organised by North Staffs STWC.

**Tuesday April 1**  
**Rally:** Assembly Hall, Hackney, 7.30pm, with Diane Abbott MP, Jonathan Neale (STWC), Paul Embury (FBU), US anti-war activists.  
 Organised by Hackney STWC.  
**Public meeting:** With George Galloway, Lindsey German - Trades Club, Chadwick Street. Blackpool, 7.30pm.  
 Organised by Blackpool Wyre and Fylde STWC. blackpool@stopwar.org.uk

**Saturday April 5 and Sunday April 6**  
**Reclaim the bases:** International days of anti-war protest and direct action at military bases. email@reclaimthebases.org.uk; 07887-585721.

**Tuesday April 8**  
**Croydon rally:** 7.30pm, Cedar Hall, Ruskin House, 23 Coombe Road (corner of Park Lane), Croydon. Speakers: George Galloway MP, Billy Hayes (CWU), Kate Hudson (CND), Iraqi Democrats against War and Sanctions.  
 Organised by Croydon Stop the War Coalition.

**Defend asylum-seekers**  
 Demonstration - ‘Against Fortress Europe and racist immigration laws’, Saturday March 29, 1pm, Dover immigration removal centre, Western Heights. Organised by Kent Campaign to Defend Asylum-Seekers: 07890 939253; kran@actionnetwork.freemove.co.uk

**Mothers Day protest**  
 Don’t lock up asylum-seekers and their children - mothers day vigil, Dungavel detention centre, Sunday March 30, 1pm. 01563 570248; info@frea.org.uk

**London Labour Left**  
 Next meeting - Wednesday April 9, 7.30pm, Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Road (nearest tube: Kings Cross).

**Party wills**  
 The CPGB has forms available fore you to include the Party and the struggle for communism in your will. Write for details.

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

www.cpgb.org.uk/action

## ISO

Indymedia UK - <http://www.uk.indymedia.org>  
**Indispensable!**

**I** must admit to a certain amount of trepidation when approaching the Indymedia website. How could I possibly do this near-legendary resource any amount of justice in a short review column?

For readers unfamiliar with Indymedia, the mission statement succinctly lays out the objective of the project. It aims to provide a media platform for any progressive struggle against injustice, meaning in practice that anyone can upload text, photographs, audio and video reports.

The statement goes on to argue that this open-access approach "erodes the dividing line between reporters and reported, between active producers and passive audience: people are enabled to speak for themselves". The comrades quite rightly reject the capitalist media's bogus objectivity, making no apologies for the subjective and positional nature of the reports the site carries.

Because of their free-ranging nature, it will come as no surprise to see the complete dominance of anti-war reports. Other than one piece on the fallout of the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster, literally dozens of items cover actions from national to local levels. In the case of March 22 and the three high-profile actions at RAF Fairford, Menwith Hill and London, a series of 39 short reports give a blow-by-blow commentary, plus further demos in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Some contain extended reports in text and audio as well, and some readers have taken the opportunity presented by the website to post their own comments on the content.

In the short period between my visits the site had been updated several times, to include more reports of the actions of the last week.

One of these is a 'News from Iraq' feature, providing links to the recent video of captured US soldiers, pictures from the bombing of Baghdad, reports and diaries from Indymedia correspondents and 'human shields' in Iraq, and a link to [iraqbodycount.net](http://iraqbodycount.net), a site dedicated to the grisly task of cataloguing civilian casualties.

The website carries two sidebars that help navigate the bewildering array of current and archived material. The bar on the right is a summary of the Indymedia newswire, consisting

of upcoming events and selected news. The left-hand bar is more general. The first link on the list took me to a campaign calendar with enough room for the next five years' worth of events! Needless to say, this is indispensable viewing for all anti-war activists.

The next item gives the listing for Indymedia cinema screenings in central London. This is followed by the archive of *Offline* - a news-sheet comprising the best reports to have appeared on Indymedia in the preceding month or so. Unfortunately this publication can only be downloaded in pdf, though I'm sure a diligent examination of the site via the search engine would turn up some of the featured reports. The ongoing inquiry into the police beatings dished out to activists at one of the media centres covering the protests at the G8 meeting in Genoa is the next prominent feature. This takes the form of an appeal for footage and testimonies to expose the indiscriminate brutality of the police action.

Other items here include dozens of links to independent media centres around the globe, various ongoing projects, technology necessary for uploading material, and to the more analysis-oriented *Zmag* site. For the technophobic, contact and support details via snail mail are also given.

Finally, like the sites for Globalise Resistance and Scottish Socialist Youth, the links section is useful. It provides portals for 42 sites, encompassing anarchist video and audio sources, news and links sites, some campaigning resources and anti-capitalist websites (such as Reclaim the Streets). In keeping with Indymedia's anarchist ethos, party and organisational links are not listed. That said, the relative brevity of this section surprised me.

Despite Indymedia's ruling against party propagandising, the voice it gives activists facilitates unparalleled coverage of practically every action that has and will be taking place. For sheer news volume, not even the daily *Morning Star* can hope to compete, never mind the rest of the left press. Like all news sources the contents should be used critically, but as a resource it is a valuable weapon in the armoury of all communists ●

Phil Hamilton

# Zimbabwe hits crisis point

Last week Zimbabwe was thrown into turmoil as the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, in alliance with a section of the bourgeoisie, launched a two-day stayaway/lockout directed against the Zanu-PF regime of Robert Mugabe. **Munyaradzi Gwisai**, a leader of the International Socialist Organisation - sister organisation of the Socialist Workers Party in England and Wales - spoke to *Weekly Worker* editor Peter Manson

**T**he March 18-19 mass stayaway/lockout has taken us to crisis point. The regime was caught unawares by its success and has panicked. In the last few days there has been a savage wave of repression - mainly directed against the Movement for Democratic Change, but also against other groups and individuals - to try and instil fear into the opposition.

The MDC has issued an ultimatum, which expires on Monday March 31, putting forward a series of bourgeois democratic demands against the state, backed up by the threat of popular mass revolt. But here is the worrying thing: the stayaway was not owned by the working class. It was organised by the propertied classes. The working class were generally in support of it, but they were not the driving force, as in 1997-98. On the other hand the stayaway has restored the confidence of the working class to take on the regime, and even the reformists of the MDC.

It is now clear that the parliamentary road is finished. There will certainly be scores to settle on the streets. So the key challenge now is whether or not the working class will move to assert its own independence. If that does not happen, we are heading for very stormy waters.

The truth of the matter is that if the opposition movement remains controlled and organised by the middle classes and the bosses within and outside the MDC, we are likely to see a bloodbath. Mugabe has already warned: "If you are expecting a tea party, we've got news for you." He has ordered the state machine to crack down on the opposition, but specifically the MDC. Mugabe is looking to teach them an early lesson.

We are using my by-election campaign in Highfield constituency in Harare [caused by Munyaradzi's expulsion from the MDC and subsequent ejection from parliament - PM] to highlight the fundamental fact that the working class and progressive civic society must now move in a big way. Demands on Mugabe must include bread and butter and anti-neoliberal issues, and the objective of the stayaway must actually be the removal of the regime. The MDC at the moment is simply intent to use the stayaway as a lever to force Zanu-PF back to the negotiating table.

We were honestly surprised by the scale of the mass action. Remember, this has come in the wake of the failure of the last three stayaways - one called by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions at the end of last year, and two by the National Constitutional Assembly - which were complete flops. Last week's events were organised by the clique around MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai with the support of white liberals, but it did not really involve the extensive mobilisation of the MDC itself.

Our own assessment has been that the working class generally has become disillusioned with the leadership of the MDC and ZCTU and their failure to take on the

regime. Because of the weight of economic suffering workers have not been prepared to take risky actions which did not appear to have any chance of success - their assessment of the balance of forces was that the Mugabe regime had consolidated. That has been the mood amongst the working class over the last six months to a year.

But, looking at it now, the success of the stayaway came for two main reasons. Firstly, objectively the situation has been ripe for a long time, with the crisis reaching unprecedented levels. Secondly, last week the bosses moved in a big way. In some companies workers were instructed by their employers to hold meetings and they were told that if they went on stayaway nothing would be deducted from their salaries and that management would not mind.

Many workers in Harare and Bulawayo wanted to go to work, but the bosses locked up the factories. In Harare in particular, the MDC was able to organise unemployed youth, who were hired to paralysed the transport system. They also negotiated with certain sections of the transport authorities. Once a couple of buses had been stoned, the transport operators took their vehicles off the road.

To give you an example of the level of the bosses' organisation, at the end of the first day Zwakwana, a group of white neoliberal rightwingers, published a list of companies that had opened on the first day and said they were pro-Zanu-PF, inviting people to take them on.

So the main force involved was not the working class, but essentially the lumpen and unemployed township youth, organised and funded by the MDC in coalition with the bosses.

There is a real danger of a rightwing, counterrevolutionary movement if the working class does not stamp its authority. Recently in Venezuela, by and large the urban masses were opposed to the rightwing-led general strike. Here, the working masses still have illusions in the MDC - by far the largest party that has working class support. The other danger is that the working class could be thoroughly crushed by Mugabe. The masses might be moved to take action which is politically and ideologically not in their interest or for which they are unprepared.

Only two days ago, Zanu-PF mobilised thousands of people on the streets, so we are expecting mass confrontations in the coming days. Mugabe underesti-

mated the stayaway's potential success. He did not deploy his forces on the ground, as he had before. This in turn has caused some workers to have naive illusions in the possibilities of the next protest.

Our by-election has been affected by last week's events - after all, we were expelled from the MDC for calling for mass action. And now the rightwing MDC leaders have themselves made their own cynical move using the working masses. There had been growing disillusionment, even amongst the middle classes, in the MDC. Their media supporters had been writing them off. But the stayaway has re-ignited illusions and that will obviously affect our campaign.

We have organised a couple of industrial rallies and one or two within Highfield township itself. We have had a very good response, with hundreds of people attending. Workers are donating to our campaign. We believe we will get a good result in the March 29-30 by-election.

Without a doubt, we will take many votes off the MDC, especially from workers. We think we will still do well, despite the renewed interest in the MDC. The by-election has allowed us to re-establish and strengthen our links with workers in the industrial areas around Highfield, which will help us in the mass upheavals over the coming months.

We are standing under the name 'ISO - independent' on an anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist programme. We are also attempted to argue that the growing movement in this country can only move forward if it is linked to the global anti-war movement.

This by-election is also very important for the government. Zanu-PF have put on their most leftwing face. Their candidate was a leader of the farm and factory invasions in 2000. Zanu PF's support in Highfield has improved recently, because they can bribe voters with scarce commodities and food. They may pick up some support from women, whose votes may be bought over the issue of food. However, amongst workers, support is virtually non-existent.

In the last election Zanu-PF polled around 3,000 votes in a turnout of 20,000-21,000. Even before last week's mass action we thought it would be either the MDC or ourselves who won. We will see. The result will be announced on Monday March 31 ●

around  
**THEWEB**

The ISO Zimbabwe has issued an appeal for financial support. The comrades need to raise £300 for the Highfield by-election campaign.

## ISO bank details

**First Direct Bank, 40 Wakefield Road, Leeds LS98 1FO ■ Account Name: John Page ■ Account Number: 1118 54 89 ■ Sort Code: 40-47-78 ■ Please email details of deposits to [rosazulu@hotmail.com](mailto:rosazulu@hotmail.com)**

## LABOUR

# Left wing begins to stir

On Saturday March 29 the Labour left is holding a major gathering to organise opposition to Bush and Blair's war inside the party. Labour Against the War (Law) is holding a national delegate conference, billed as being for "Labour Parties, trade unions, affiliated organisations and individual Labour Party members to debate the international crisis and to consider strategies to reclaim the party for peace".

Speakers include Tony Benn and leading left parliamentary figures such as Jeremy Corbyn, George Galloway and Alice Mahon, more junior figures such as Mark Seddon of *Tribune* and Christine Shawcroft (NEC member), as well as prominent trade union leaders like Bob Crow (RMT), the CWU's Billy Hayes, and one-time rightwing stalwart John Edmonds of the GMB. Obviously in the context of the two massive parliamentary revolts by Labour MPs, when Blair gave them the chance of a formal vote on the Iraq conflict, and the events leading up to it, this conference could be of considerable political significance.

As witnessed by the fact that more than half of the Labour backbench voted against the government, and also of course the enormous pressure from Labour's social base, stirred to revolt by the widespread anti-war sentiment, there has been a significant reawakening of dissent within Labour after years of Blairite dominance. A new Labour left seems to be in the process of germination, and not just the old Bennite Campaign Group veterans. It is interesting to note, for instance, the rise to prominence of such figures as Peter Kilfoyle MP, who was once one of Kinnock's most trusted 'fixers' and manipulators during the witch-hunts against the Militant Tendency and the left in the 1980s and early 1990s.

A lot of water seems to have flowed under the bridge since those days: a lot of rightward motion at the top levels of the Labourite professional class and a lot of overtly Thatcherite attacks on the working class in the name of 'modernisation'. There has been a slow, molecular process of differentiation among the old, right-leaning apparatus types under pressure from below at the latter end of a long period of working class defeats and reaction. Now Kilfoyle sounds like one of the so-called 'dinosaurs' that Kinnock and his protégé and successor, Blair, delighted in holding up to scorn. Standing up to move the anti-war amendment that heralded the biggest parliamentary revolt in the entire history of the Labour Party, and on a question of war and peace, is not exactly what is expected of an old Kinnockite hack.

It is not easy to predict the future evolution of this new Labour left, if that is what is emerging, but one thing is for sure. As part of building a new working class party, a crucial ongoing project, of which the most recent expression is the Socialist Alliance, forces won from the Labour left will have to play a major role. The Labour Party is still *the* strategic obstacle to the formation of a party capable of leading the working class in Britain to its self-emancipation. We must engage with this new Labour left, as it arises in opposition to Blairism, or be condemned to sterility.

The conference itself is being organised by *Labour Briefing* and the Campaign Group of MPs, that club of old campaigners from the Bennite days. Labour Against the War was formed, in opposition to the so-called 'war against terrorism' declared by Bush after 9/11. Its founding statement proclaimed: "Labour Against the War believes that military action in response to the events of September 11 2001 will neither eradicate the threat of terrorism nor create a stable in-

ternational framework in which the rule of law will be observed. UK support for war is not in our name" ([www.labouragainsthewar.org.uk](http://www.labouragainsthewar.org.uk)).

This goes hand in hand with the belief that capitalism can be pressured to behave in a more rational manner over such questions, calling for the "British government to pursue non-military solutions to the war on terrorism, including diplomatic and political, to bring the alleged perpetrators of terrorism to justice, and bring real humanitarian aid to the people of the world" (*ibid*). Whether on the question of this war, or any other, what is essential is that we move beyond this kind of reformist view of the potentially pacific and remediable nature of capitalism, and realise its fundamentally bellicose and anti-democratic nature. In this new period of struggle, the opportunity exists for the Labour left, and its social base in the more progressive wing of the trade union movement and the traditional base of old Labour radicalism, to learn these kinds

of lessons through their own experience.

The stated aims of Law are to achieve some kind of visible Labour Party presence in the anti-war movement. Now that there has been the biggest vote against a government for over 100 years, this should be reflected in the constituency parties. Law does not want people to simply walk out of the party. In fact it wants people to join and reclaim Labour for the movement. It wants to establish an opposition within the party that can get rid of Blair and New Labour. According to this way of thinking, leaving is doing Blair's job for him.

It may be, of course, that in the event that this Labour left movement were to properly take off, there would be a dynamic - as there has on previous occasions when there has been left opposition - that would tend towards a split with the bourgeois pole of the party and the constitution of an alternative working class pole. However (and Iraq has at least given us a glimpse of this

possibility), it is also feasible that there could be a different outcome, with the Thatcherite/Blairite neoliberals being driven out of the party, with the proletarian pole of this bourgeois workers' party thus gaining a new potency - the Ramsay McBlair outcome. In any case, with the Labour Party rent on the question of war with Iraq, these struggles by Labour lefts take on a major political significance.

The conference will be discussing an anti-war statement based on the founding document, no doubt expanding on the latest developments in terms of the war with Iraq. They will also be discussing the struggle within the party; how to hold Labour representatives to account, calling for an emergency conference, and pushing for a further vote on the war in parliament. There may also be a number of motions, including one of no confidence in Blair. The organisers say they expect hundreds of party members to attend - some as delegates from constituency parties and some from

Law groups, as well as individual members.

If the Labour left can abandon fetishism of the Labour Party as it used to be viewed, as a party of piecemeal social reform, and instead place itself in the front rank of a political movement that fights militantly for the real interests of working people, against the Blair regime's wars abroad as much as its attacks on working people at home, then it can certainly play a germinating role in producing the party that our class really needs. That is, a working class party that will fight to destroy capitalism, to overthrow it and deprive the capitalist exploiters of their anti-democratic power, a party of social revolution, and of genuine internationalism, not of Labour imperialism, as in the past.

For that purpose, we communists seek to engage with the Labour left as much as any other progressive-inclined layer among the masses ●

Ian Donovan

**Graham Bash** is on the editorial board of *Labour Left Briefing* and is one of the organisers of the March 29 London conference of Labour Against the War. He spoke in a personal capacity to Mark Fischer about his hopes for the conference

## Time to speak out

### How do you think Saturday's conference will go?

We are hoping for the rank and file Labour opposition to the war to become much more visible. Already, there has been an historic vote in parliament, with 140 Labour MPs, including the teller, opposing the government. That was the biggest parliamentary vote against the government in over a century.

Now the struggle moves outside parliament. It comes back to the people. There have been massive demonstrations. In particular, last Saturday, March 22, was simply magnificent. That so many came out after the *start* of a war is incredible and a tribute to the democratic impulses of the people of this country. However, what I think has been somewhat lacking is a labour movement *core* to this wonderfully broad and diverse movement. That is why Labour Against the War has been set up - to try to rectify that weakness.

It's not just about building huge demonstrations - critical though that is. It's also about finding an expression within the labour movement: the trade unions and the Labour Party. There is an enormous anti-war feeling in Labour: it is without doubt the majority opinion. What we are trying to do is build a conference with representative delegates from Labour branches and trade unions to express that strength of feeling.

At the same time, we are trying to prevent what could be a major haemorrhaging of Labour Party membership. If the Labour opponents of war are silent, it will be the green light for thousands - possibly tens of thousands - to tear up their party card.

That would be a disaster. It would be doing Blair's job for him. It would be destroying what is left of the Labour Party.

**Could you tell us something about what's been happening at a rank**

### and file level in the party?

Well, Oona King, for example, recently faced the reselection process like every MP has to. The vote wasn't whether to deselect her or not: it was whether to have what is called a 'trigger ballot', a ballot to deselect her. In fact, the majority of branches in her constituency voted in favour of the ballot, but they were defeated because a majority of affiliated organisations are counted and she was reselected.

So, despite that, there is pressure on her and other pro-war MPs precisely because of the substantial anti-war sentiment in most constituency parties.

### Is it realistic to talk about large numbers walking out of Labour? And where would they go?

I'm not saying it's inevitable, but it is a real danger. And it looms at the same time that there is a threat of disaffiliation from certain unions. Not so much because of the war on Iraq, but because of New Labour's *other* war - the attacks on trade unions and public services. Coming together, this makes for a very, very serious situation - a crisis of representation.

In the absence of any other viable alternative, it would mean the labour movement would have even less of a presence in political life. At least it can be argued that there are real representatives of the labour movement, certainly in the Campaign Group and in the revolt in parliament against the war. These MPs represent 'us' in that sense - the anti-war constituency.

I think now that members of parliament - and the Labour party itself - must see that two million on the streets are *our* constituency. We have to connect with it and help enrich the movement and in so doing help enrich the Labour Party. It's a two-way process.

So Saturday's conference is part of that process. The people have spoken: now is the time for the Labour Party to speak out.

### But we are told - sometimes by people who were embedded deep in Labour at one time - that there are now no avenues to challenge the leadership, no space for dissent in the party ...

I have to say that's clearly stupid when it is being said at a time of mammoth revolts in parliament and a huge strength of feeling at a rank and file level. However, the critical pressure now has got to come from the trade unions.

A number of union leaders have spoken out against the war. But often trade unions have one position, but then their representatives at the NEC or the national policy forums vote the opposite way! The trade unions with left leadership must ensure their reps in the party are accountable to the organisations that actually placed them where they are in the Labour Party.

The trade unions have got to start using their weight. They have done at recent conferences and it's been the constituency parties lagging behind. But on the war, there is an *enormous* opposition in the constituencies that could, paradoxically, help reinvigorate those constituency parties - if only people don't vote with their feet and walk away from the fight.

Things are on a knife edge. That is why it's important to have something visible for the anti-war elements in the Labour Party.

**I interviewed George Galloway MP recently and he spoke of the need for a challenge to Blair. Yet other Labour lefts - Corbyn, Benn and Simpson - have been very wary of 'personalising' the fight, saying instead they want a challenge to**

### policies, not personalities. How do you view this?

Speaking purely personally on this, I think it is absolutely *impossible* to separate the policy issues from the leadership issue. Blair has put his leadership on the line over this question - he understands that. He has breached international law, his actions over the war are totally against the party constitution. In *Briefing* in this issue, the heading is that he is a war criminal - that's how I regard him and don't see therefore how he can be a leader of the Labour Party.

I understand very well those who want as broad a coalition as possible. In order to do so, they have to build with people who are against the war but stop short of a challenge to Blair. But it's a wider question now - we have to relate to our constituency in those massive demonstrations on the streets. They - almost universally - are not only against this work. They also detest Labour's leadership. It is vital, in order to keep people in the party, and to give people a reason to join it, that there is a realistic challenge to the leader himself, not just the policies. Even if it can't be done tomorrow, we ought to lay down that marker of a challenge.

Blair can be the leader of the Labour Party or he can be the leader of the war party. But he can't be both. And I think he's made his choice. That's my personal position.

I saw an anti-war group from a college that had adopted a good slogan - 'For regime change everywhere'.

### Including in the Labour Party?

Absolutely! In fact, *starting* there would be a good idea ... ●



**Labour Left Briefing** [www.labourleftbriefing.org.uk](http://www.labourleftbriefing.org.uk)  
**Labour Against the War** [www.labouragainsthewar.org.uk](http://www.labouragainsthewar.org.uk)  
**Campaign Group** [www.poptel.org.uk/scgn](http://www.poptel.org.uk/scgn)



## STOP THE WAR

On Thursday March 20, the day war broke out, people poured on to the streets

# Opposition mobilised

### HACKNEY

## Proud parents

School students organised two separate marches from Hackney to Parliament Square on the day war broke out, leaving adults trailing breathless in their wake, and on Sunday Kurdish youth staged a demonstration with their own placards and slogans. Parents are proudly swapping emails regarding the activities of their sons and daughters on March 20 ●

Phil Kent

### WESTMINSTER

## Just beginning

An enthusiastic and militant crowd of around 7,000 to 8,000 anti-war protestors demonstrated in Parliament Square on the evening of March 20. The bombing and invasion of Iraq had started in the early hours of the morning, with the evidently unsuccessful attempt by the US imperialists to assassinate Saddam Hussein.

No doubt under instructions from that great 'democrat' Tony Blair, the police attempted blatantly to obstruct entry to the square by sealing it off from Westminster Bridge and Whitehall: many people eager to protest were thus prevented from joining the main body. Despite this, however, the rally was lively and effective in demonstrating that Blair does not have popular support for his criminal actions.

The very size of the crowd spoke for the fact that, despite the outbreak of war, the movement has not been swamped by a wave of chauvinism - there is mass opposition. Blair is still in deep trouble.

Speakers included school students who had walked out to join in protests earlier in the day. The rally was chaired by Andrew Murray of the Stop the War Coalition. He read out a list of union actions that had taken place up and down the country in response to the outbreak of war - from the railways to the national health service. Small-scale actions, obviously, and very limited in scope, but really a sign of the unprecedented growth of an increasingly militant anti-war sentiment - in previous wars waged by the Anglo-American gang, even token anti-war stoppages and industrial actions were unknown.

Paul Mackney of the lecturers' union Natfhe attacked the reactionary anti-French chauvinism being propagated by the government because Chirac (for his own imperialist reasons, of course) had spiked Blair's attempts to give this war the legal cover of a second UN resolution. Mackney led the crowd in naive but in some ways understandable chants of "Vive la France!" - as well as the more straightforward and to the point "Blair out! Blair out!", which was repeated with gusto at intervals through the rally. Jeremy Dear of the National Union of Journalists noted that a cartel of around 15 regional and local newspapers has been formed to deny publication to any anti-war articles or letters for the duration of Blair's war. So much for the 'war for freedom and democracy'.

The rally was also addressed by Lindsey German of the Socialist Workers Party and STWC, who loudly proclaimed that the anti-war movement had "only just begun" in terms of its impact on the government and its ability to prosecute the war. The importance of the March 22 demonstration, in seeking to underline that the government will not succeed in marginalising the anti-war movement, was emphasised by comrade German as well as Chris Nineham (SWP and Globalise Resistance), who noted that a "global movement" was on the march against this war, something



Anti-war party: undiminished

with enormous potential power, that had already delayed the war and forced Blair and Bush to try to get UN cover for their actions, and could do much more in terms of making such wars impossible.

All in all, this was a good showing for the day that war finally broke out, and augurs well for the continuing anti-war campaign ●

Kit Robinson

### CARDIFF

## Angry and confident

Around 800 protestors gathered in Cardiff city centre. Some sat down in the road, linking arms to form a human chain and causing disruption around the city. The core of this action centred around a group of university students, some of whom called themselves anarchists. On the whole, the demonstrators were confident and angry - the determination to find a channel for the outrage felt about the war was palpable.

After about two hours, the numbers fell to around 300, as people began to drift away. However, this demonstration was more forceful than any the capital has seen in many years. Protestors began to run to different areas of the city centre to intensify the disruption to traffic.

Generally, the police were restrained, but there were five arrests when protestors attempted to sit down for the third time in a pedestrianised area, an action that appeared meaningless. At this point, the 30 or so involved seemed to think that spontaneity was an end in itself.

There was very little evidence of an organised left with the partial exception of the Socialist Party who at the start of the evening appeared to be providing some lead ●

Ethan Grech

### SWANSEA

## Sit-down action

Around 600 people assembled in Swansea. The protestors marched through the city centre and initiated a number of small but effective

sit-downs, causing congestion to the city's main roads.

Although the left were present, many of those on the demonstration were students from the local university. They had attended this demonstration as a follow-up from an earlier one, which had been initiated by students at noon that day. Arrests had taken place after clashes with police over the right to march.

The Swansea STWC, which organised the march, is continuing to hold regular public meetings. It is unfortunate, however, that, despite a promising and enthusiastic initial local people's assembly two weeks ago, no recall seems to have been arranged ●

Bob Davies

### DUNDEE

## Grappling with democracy

Following the anti-war protests made by school students on Wednesday March 19, over 1,000 people, again mainly school students, walked out on Thursday March 20 and assembled at Dundee City Square. Teachers prevented many more from coming, although some joined their pupils in the walkout. Students from Dundee and Abertay universities and Dundee College showed up, as did a good number of workers.

Afterwards the rightwing local press tried to lay the blame for this demonstration and the 'destruction to the city centre' on the Scottish Socialist Party and in particular Harvey Duke, the party's candidate for Dundee East in the forthcoming Scottish parliamentary elections. The action was condemned as pupils 'bunking school in order to riot'. In reality they risked suspension and other disciplinary action and acted with bravery and compassion that will hopefully inspire many adults. The press failed to mention the police assaults on three pupils.

The vast majority of the school students protested noisily but peacefully against the war. Some students got into discussions with SSP members and firefighters. Those I spoke to were grappling with democratic ideas. One said: "I want to play my part in democracy and have my voice heard. After all I can't

**The very size of the crowd spoke for the fact that, despite the outbreak of war, the movement has not been swamped by a wave of chauvinism**

vote." The young people involved in the anti-war movement are becoming politicised very quickly and increasingly aware of the relationship between capitalism and war.

Many joined an all-day protest outside the Scottish Labour Party conference on Friday March 21, along with firefighters and other anti-war protestors. This culminated in a sit-down protest, stopping city centre traffic, during which several people were lifted.

On Saturday March 22 around 1,500 people marched against the war, including SSP supporters, school, university and college students, the Muslim Association of Britain and many others, and held a rally outside the Labour Party conference. The platform at the rally could have been more selective. Two Church of Scotland ministers spoke - the first an anti-war activist for over a decade, who gave a decent speech; the second a liberal type who urged demonstrators to go out and pray for the war to stop.

Two Scottish National Party speakers were also allowed to address the crowd. Given that the SNP would have been perfectly happy to see an attack on Iraq following a second UN resolution and it has done nothing to build the anti-war movement, their presence was purely opportunistic. Jim McFarlane spoke for the SSP and there were also two speakers from the mosque ●

Sarah McDonald

### BELFAST

## Ulterior motives

Crowds came from different schools to meet at the city hall. At my school, teachers lined up at the gates to stop people from walking out and most of my flyers were confiscated. Many juniors were frightened due to the teachers' intimidation. A group of us left anyway, but we were only about one-fifth of the crowd that originally walked to the lobby intending to leave.

When the demo began there was a great atmosphere. After an hour the SWP took the crowd to the American consulate to burn the flag. This gave the police, who were being very reasonable, the excuse to wade in. From then on "SS - RUC" shouts were unceasing, as some demonstrators turned sectarian. This was disgraceful, but we managed to stop widespread escalation of violence.

Typical Northern Ireland ulterior motives emerged and the police forcefully cleared the streets. One policeman commented to me: "Don't leave - we get good overtime for this." Most of the protest went very well and there was an impressive turnout. But the police got weary of the sectarian abuse; socialist and pacifist views subsided and a minority took the demo too far ●

Gary Wilson

### SURREY

## Eclectic protest

More than 100 people answered the call of the Surrey Stop the War Coalition to protest the start of the war in the 'conservative' county town of Guildford.

Assembling in the town centre, they were addressed by John Morris, acting chair of the county STWC, Robert Cotton, vicar of the local Holy Trinity church, and a student from the Royal Grammar school. This eclectic mix was also reflected in the demonstration - Christians, a few young 'anarchists', unaffiliated local people, as well as supporters of the CPGB

and the SWP.

Protestors slowed traffic, using a crossing controlled by traffic lights to march back and forth across the road to hoots of support from drivers. One, Joyce Kirkpatrick, was struck by a taxi, which fled the scene before it could be identified. Holding her hurt arm, she refused to leave, and hoped only that the incident might attract some publicity to the campaign.

The group was joined by Sue Darling, who travelled from Guildford to Iraq on January 25 to join the ‘human shield’, before being forced to return last week. She complained of the bias the BBC showed in coverage of her group’s efforts. Contrary to reports that this initiative had collapsed, she explained that, as she spoke, 50 or 60 western campaigners were facing, with the innocent people of Iraq, the prospect of their own government’s aggression.

The event was covered by local press and radio, on which John Morris of the Pacifist Party argued that the case against the war remained the same as it had before it began, expressing concern about civilian deaths abroad and anti-muslim racism at home ●

**David Berlin**

## MENWITH Lessons learnt

Meeting at the main gate of the communications centre, well over a thousand people of all ages, carrying foil kites, balloons, wind funnels, banners and placards, marched and danced to the sounds of the Sheffield Samba Band.

We made our way around to the Nessfield gate, where calls were made to invade the base. People approached the fences, challenging the police presence. The atmosphere changed, as more people moved forward, pushing at them, testing them. The police numbers increased too, but that did not seem to matter. Police attitudes began to change, and, safely behind the wired fence, intelligence teams started to film protestors. They were filmed back by activists.

At the Steeplebush gate, with the samba band in full flow, some people again surged towards the gates, decorating them with foil to sabotage the communications equipment. Scuffles broke out, as the police tried to intimidate and bully protestors. Police in a heavy-handed manner tried to force people away from the gates. A cheer went up as a police helmet soared into the air.

Groups got through gaps in the outer small fences and ditches. There was a mass trespass, as people surged through trees and bushes towards the base. This was met by police with dogs, and at least eight were arrested, although most were released later.

Police clad in riot gear, blue helmets and the full gear, appeared from inside the base and some violence began. Some people were clubbed and kicked. Young women and men were dragged face down through bushes, mud, and trees and then ejected over fences - On the road people shouted, “Shame on you” at the police overreaction.

As I left, I could still see people undeterred, breaking through to reach the fences and the war machine beyond. It was a wonderful, inspiring day, where people of all ages showed their determination to oppose this war.

Lessons have been learnt. We will be back ●

**Edited from Indymedia**

## NORTH EAST Challenge root cause

The North East has seen major demonstrations of public opposition to the war in the last week. Spontaneous protests were held in several of the region’s towns and cities on March 20.

On Saturday March 22 nearly 1,000 anti-war demonstrators attempted to march through Newcastle city centre, but were prevented from reaching their destination by heavy-

handed policing tactics. The same day Tees-side Against the War organised a magnificent go-slow motor cavalcade. An estimated 300 vehicles, adorned with anti-war slogans and most carrying several passengers, joined the convoy, which travelled at a snail’s pace from Middlesbrough’s Riverside Stadium to a former pit village in Tony Blair’s Sedgfield constituency.

Hundreds of pedestrians and motorists voiced their support for the demonstrators, as the parade passed through the towns and villages on its 25-mile route. The demonstration culminated with a packed rally in Fishburn Miners’ Welfare Hall, addressed by veteran peace campaigner Pat McIntyre, Teesside Against the War’s chair Pete Smith and Yunus Bakhsh of Unison and the SWP.

Also on Saturday morning 100 people gathered outside Trimdon Labour Club, where Blair’s Constituency Labour Party was holding a meeting.

On Monday March 24 around 400 people attended a public meeting in Middlesbrough town hall. Many speakers from the floor pointed out how war is inextricably linked with capitalism and will continue for as long as our current ruling class remains in power. Guest speaker John Rees (Stop the War Coalition and SWP) received a standing ovation when he called on protestors not to give up the struggle just because the conflict had started. Now it is more important than ever that we stand together and build this movement into something that can challenge the root causes of imperialism ●

**Steve Cooke**

## STOKE-ON-TRENT Noisy start

Around 200 people attended a noisy vigil-cum-demo outside Hanley town hall. Organised at short notice by North Staffs Stop the War, the event attracted an audience far beyond the ‘usual suspects’, and it was heartening to see that around half those present were under 25.

The assembled crowd heard a number of speeches by leading figures in the local anti-war movement. Jim Cessford (Socialist Party) reported on anti-war strike action by 50 Manchester council workers, and praised a walk-out by pupils at nearby Wolstanton High School. He also thanked half a dozen activists for flyposting the event along the main approaches to the city centre in the hours following the initial attack. Other speakers included Peter Lawrence of the AUT lecturers’ union, who denounced Bush and his oil junta and reported on actions at Keele University. Jason Hill (CND) gave an angry and militant speech on Blair’s hypocrisy, and Andy Bentley (SP) called for more workplace action against the war.

The crowd eagerly snapped up papers and leaflets, signifying a hunger for the ideas capable of challenging the humanitarian gloss given to the war by the Blairite lie machine ●

**Neil Lloyd**

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# Turning the world upside down

The worldwide movement against the US-UK war against Iraq put on a show of strength and militancy to mark the beginning of the conflict. Within hours of the first cruise missiles slamming into Baghdad, tens of thousands of anti-war protestors were on the streets in cities around the world.

The first reported demonstrations were in Australia, where upwards of 100,000 people clogged Melbourne’s streets and brought the city to a standstill. A similar scene was to be found in San Francisco, where activists blockaded bridges and streets, and closed off large sections of the city to anyone other than protestors and local workers. Over 2,000 arrests were made by police.

Throughout Europe and Asia, workers downed tools and took to the streets to protest the invasion. In Greece, the national trade union federation called a three-hour strike in opposition to the war. In Italy, a two-hour strike followed a morning of mass demonstrations in all major cities. From Jordan to Pakistan, workers spontaneously walked off the job and joined anti-war protests.

Following the lead of unions in Italy and Britain, the Canadian dockers’ union on

the east coast, the International Longshoremen’s Association, issued a “hot cargo edict” barring any union member from loading or unloading ships carrying war materials. The Canadian Union of Public Employees issued a call for all members to join demonstrations and show “massive workers’ resistance”.

In New York City, site of the September 11 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, tens of thousands began demonstrating on the afternoon following the first bombs falling on Iraq. On March 22, close to half a million marched through Manhattan, effectively closing down the city. Throughout the weekend, police and demonstrators clashed, as peaceful protest gave way to anger, and working people openly expressed their views - in word and deed.

Trade unions in Australia are continuing their anti-war actions. According to Kevin Reynolds, spokesman for the UnionsWA federation, the two aims of the strikes are to “bring the troops home and kick [Australian PM] Howard out”. Unions in South Korea are also poised to strike if the newly elected government of Roh Moo-hyun supports the US-UK action ●

**Martin Schreader**

## TEXAS Police brutality

It seems like there is a media blackout on Austin, Texas.

All day nearly 2,000 people expressed their opposition to the war on Iraq by blocking traffic, then, beginning at rush hour, marched very slowly, holding die-ins at intersections, to the main tourist bridge. There were signs that read “Iraq is Arabic for Poland”, “Iraqi lives are sacred too”, “Draft the twins” (a reference to Bush’s daughters) and “Not in my name”.

Dozens of riot police with no names and no badge numbers waited for night to fall and then began ‘clearing’ the street of protestors. About 20 or so people decided to sit in the street in an act of peaceful civil disobedience and be arrested, and the rest of us stayed on the sidewalks as witnesses.

With absolutely no cause a policeman approached those of us on the sidewalk and squirted us in the face with pepper spray. When we complained that it was uncalled for and that the sidewalk is public property, we were told, “Tonight it’s not”, and “We’re about to spray you again if you don’t leave.” We began walking with the police behind us and they started to walk faster and hitting us in the back with their batons, screaming “Move”. We screamed that we *were* walking and they had no cause or right to hit us, but they kept doing it.

As soon we were pushed far enough away so as to block our view of those who were sitting in the street, they began the arrests. The chants of “This is what democracy looks like” quickly turned to “This is what a police state looks like”.

As we were pushed along off the sidewalk and into an intersection, one of the riot police grabbed a young man (right in front of me) who was chanting peacefully, just like the hundreds of us who remained, and slammed him onto the concrete. At the same time another cop sprayed a woman at close range directly in the eyes with pepper spray. The rest started running toward us to push us far away, so we could not see what was happening with the young man who was on the ground.

All of this was completely, utterly unprovoked. It actually seemed as if they were trying to cause a riot so that they could become even more violent. It was clear that this group of police had a sense that they were accountable to no one and/or that they could do absolutely anything and that they would be protected. There were several television cameras but to our knowledge nothing was shown on the news.

We are meeting with Latino community leaders, city council people and the mayor about these deplorable actions against peaceful people. There are actions planned every day while there is war.

**Annette d’Armata**

## CAPE TOWN Youth take centre stage

On March 20, across the Cape metropolis, about 8,000 mainly school pupils took to the streets in Guguletu, Langa, Athlone, Maitland and Salt River. Among them were increasing numbers of workers. The 24-hour continuous picket at the US embassy was supported by about 200 people and at this very moment there are shifts of 50 people manning it.

This marks a historic phase in the anti-war movement, as it is the first time that the youth have taken centre stage in the post-apartheid struggles - and on a directly political issue at that. There are also the first signs that members of Cosatu unions are starting to come out in bigger and bigger numbers.

History in South Africa has shown that when the youth start to take the stage a period of decisive struggles against the capitalists is dawning. This is just the start and we encourage all schools and workplaces to set up Anti-War Coalition structures, to adopt days on the picket at the US embassy, and to put their shoulder to the wheel in the broad anti-war resistance.

In the light of the illegitimate war being waged by the US and UK forces, the political pressure is mounting on the South African government to shut down the US and UK embassies. All eyes are on the government to see if they will cancel its contracts with the US and UK militaries ●

**Shaheed Mahomed**

## STOP THE WAR

# Youth in the vanguard of

**O**ver the last few weeks young people, school students in particular, have played a leading role in the anti-war party. February 15 introduced a new generation to direct political struggle. School students learnt quickly. Not least from their own debates and experiences inside and outside the classroom. In turn they inspired the People's Assembly for Peace on March 12. Eloquent, passionate ... and on strike.

The Saturday after war broke out - March 22 in London - saw the biggest wartime protest in British history. The 400,000-strong march is notable for another reason - the very high proportion and prominent role played by young people. Youth have been at the forefront in the rash of regional and local demonstrations too. From being on the fringe of the anti-war party they are now rapidly growing into hard-core activists.

Predictably, once the slaughter actually started, support for the war surged. Tony Blair and George Bush had lost the intellectual argument. Only those who wanted to be convinced were convinced. Government-made dupes - and they dimly knew it. There are no links between Baghdad and bin Laden, no stockpiles of anthrax or nuclear weapons. The

Ba'ath regime poses no threat to Britain or the US, etc. Furthermore, the US is indisputably the world's sole superpower. True, Saddam Hussein is a brutal murderer of communists, Shia muslims and Kurds. But Iraq is a half-starved and beleaguered wreck of a country.

Patriotism is the last resort. People are told by the Bush and Blair axis to back our brave servicemen and women. Supposedly this makes an unjust war a just war. Cutting through the patriotic cant, our paper carried the appropriate headline in reply: "Rather defeat for US-UK forces than their victory". An uncompromising message, instinctively disliked by converts to liberal imperialism. Eg, David Aaronovitch, Christopher Hitchens, Clare Short. Not young people though.

Led by Charles Kennedy and the *Daily Mirror* - the former bourgeois wing of the anti-war party - the soggy middle ground has drained away into the pro-war camp. 'Supporting our troops' excuses surrender. Most of the former 'don't knows' and those who claimed that they would support an invasion *only* in the event of a second UN security council resolution are now found unhappily and uncomfortably approving of the war. Tony Blair's popularity has partially recovered as a result.

**It is natural that youth should be so numerous in the anti-war party**

Proportionally the anti-war party has therefore undergone a definite shrinkage. From a 52% high last month, today the figure is down to 30%. However, in absolute terms, in terms of real numbers, we have been largely unaffected. Society polarises. The centre has collapsed. Not the anti-war party. Moreover, amongst the 18 to 24 age group opposition to the war still stands "well above 50%" (*The Guardian* March 25). And if ICM had deigned to poll those between 12 to 18, everything suggests that the figure for this age cohort would be well over 60%. Put another way, the young have not succumbed to the patriotic plague that has infected their elders. The carefully accreted collective myths, lies and stupidities of nationhood have not fooled them.

It is natural that youth should be so numerous in the anti-war party. The anti-war party is global in scope. And youth are internationalist. They identify with and feel for the people in Iraq. The anti-war party stands for direct action. Young people are not, as the government insultingly suggests, 'apathetic' and 'apolitical'. They are eager for struggle and eager to learn. They will not sit slumped in front of the TV screen during the war in sad resignation. The anti-war party highlights the unrepresentative nature of parliament and how Blair could have simply used the royal prerogative to launch the war. Young people loathe parliamentary phrasemongering and pomposity. Young people are

republicans, not monarchists. The anti-war party looks towards a world without war. The anti-war party is the party of the future, and, yes, the future belongs to youth.

On March 22 the internationalism, optimism and militancy of young people was truly inspiring. Particularly impressive was the taking up of the symbols of protest, revolution and communism and making them their own. Leftwing leaflets were willingly taken and papers such as the *Weekly Worker* brought. Those of us, like myself, who first came to political activity during the 1960s - in my case as a school student - were surely watching the influx into the movement of a generation that will in the years to come gradually replace us, as we come to the end of our useful lives.

Many thought it was a pity that more of the 15 or 17-year-olds who had been on strike on March 12 or March 20 were not given a platform in Hyde Park. Their ideas and ideals are certainly more candid and often considerably in advance of the naive Labourites, soppy Liberal Democrats and UN-infatuated CND peaceniks. The parliamentary road of securing peace failed abysmally. Tony Blair had the country against him. Yet he won a thumping majority for war in the House of Commons. The UN was from the start a den of thieves. Yet now, due to Bush and Blair, it is an irrelevant den of thieves. Nor has the numbers strategy worked. Two million marched on February 15. Yet nightly Baghdad is being pounded from the air and American and British troops are turning Basra, Nassiriya and southern Iraq to rubble. Evidently, more is needed. Communists say: take a leaf from the school students.

When the US-UK forces began their war of conquest against Iraq on March 20, school students staged countless strikes. Organised spontaneously - by text-messaging, by rumour and by budding agitators - they braved teachers and threats of suspension and expulsion. While many were thwarted and kept imprisoned in school grounds, tens of thousands escaped to the streets. As directed by the Stop the War Coalition, they made their way to the town centres. In London - Parliament Square. Slogans were joyous, constant and defiant: 'You make war, we break the law'. Often they had to walk five or six miles. Police

tried to block routes and constantly harassed them. Without success. They marched on.

No one is suggesting that school strikes can by themselves stop the war. Nor that school students constitute the most potent social element in the anti-war party. School students can, however, act as a signal for wider forces - crucially their parents - who make up that section of society which can bring about the decisive change necessary to put an end to not only this squalid war, but the capitalist system which by its very nature engenders wars - that force, that section of society is, of course, the working class. When the working class finally moves in all its mass and might, then regime change goes from an abstract slogan and becomes a graspable reality. Meanwhile school students are doing what trade union leaders such as Bob Crow, Mick Rix and Billy Hayes can still only talk about.

Government ministers, the establishment media, police and school heads united to condemn and belittle the school students' strikes. They were dismissed as naughty, out-of-control minors - school *children*, not school *students*. "Treat it as normal truancy and take appropriate action," advised the Secondary Heads Association (*Guardian Education* March 25). Translated, these euphemisms mean suspensions, coralling parents as watchdogs and tighter security in schools. The authoritarians want schools transformed from open prisons into closed prisons. Liberals in the education bureaucracy prefer another approach. The velvet glove, not the iron fist. Instead of locking up school students, they want to channel their anger into carefully supervised discussions and away from the streets.

As will have been gathered, communists defy conventional wisdom. People do not suddenly become fully rounded individuals and independent human beings at an arbitrarily set age. There is a huge difference between the average nine-year-old and someone who has reached the age of 15. That is why we do not divide the population neatly into adults and children. There is a transition from childhood (dependence) to adulthood (independence). The category 'youth' has been used by the left for this self-making transitional period of maturation.

Communists are confident that young people will have learnt infinitely more from taking strike action against the war on March 20 and joining city centre protests than by following the set curriculum, attending some supervised discussion or enduring one of the government's gruesome citizenship courses. That does not mean that we are against schools or education in general. On the contrary communists have always stressed the necessity of learning and the ongoing, lifelong nature of that process.

Without exception people want to discover how various things about them work. Human beings are naturally curious. That is what education should be about and facilitate. The problem is obvious. Those in control of the education system are not those who are interested in helping the new generation to develop to the full. Whatever the Head Teachers Association and the government say, the education system is in the last analysis designed to serve the vampirish appetites of capital and profit. Not people and their constantly expanding needs. The education system is primarily concerned with producing labour power for the benefit of big business and the state machine. That is true for secondary schools, as it is for the new universities.

Consequently schools and colleges in Britain do not provide anything like a decent education for the mass of the population. Not only are they endemically cash-strapped, but the staff, including the teaching staff, are in constant short supply and woefully underpaid. So classes are too big and facilities are generally very poor. More than that, the exam system selects for conformity, not constructive thinking about social change. Schools, their teachers and students are judged by the gov-

## School strikes and demos - a user's guide

**T**here are a number of important things to remember if a strike or a demonstration is going to be effective.

**First, make sure that there are a lot of other school students who are angry about the war - preferably teachers too. Make sure everybody is well informed about recent events and background issues. Use the school notice board, school magazine, Stop the War Coalition leaflets and stickers and leftwing papers. Get posters from the local STWC. Make your own posters and banners. Work out slogans. Talk to teachers whom you trust. Talk to other school students during breaks. Talk to your parents. But do not bank on their active support.**

**You must be prepared for the worst. You must be prepared to be punished. You must be prepared for the local and national media - papers, TV and radio - to distort the facts and denigrate you and what you have done. You must be prepared for some of your friends to give in when parents and the head teacher bully them.**

**A demonstration does not need to be a walkout. Its form depends on what you want to achieve. You could refuse to go to the lessons of a ranting, pro-war teacher who will not permit debate or you could stage a protest meeting during break time. Remember, though, by staying in school you and your friends, especially the younger ones, can more easily be intimidated by teachers. Whatever protest you stage, do not be put off by threats. Work out your demands in consultation with others: eg, an assembly addressed by a STWC speaker or the right to display anti-war posters. Stand up for what you believe. Be clear about what you want. Be polite but firm. Show courage.**

**After a demonstration, if anyone is singled out for having initiated the action, support them. Be loyal. Go with them if they are to be told off or punished. Go to the press and media. Produce your own leaflets after any protest or strike. Put out a statement for the establishment and leftwing media. Phone or email the STWC or the *Weekly Worker* if you need help.**

**Make sure that promises made during your strike or demonstration are delivered after it is over. Write down what was said and by whom. Do not believe all the offers or fall for the flattery. Welcome those teachers who say they are willing to discuss. Remember though that people should be judged by what they do, not what they say. This applies to teachers and school students alike •**

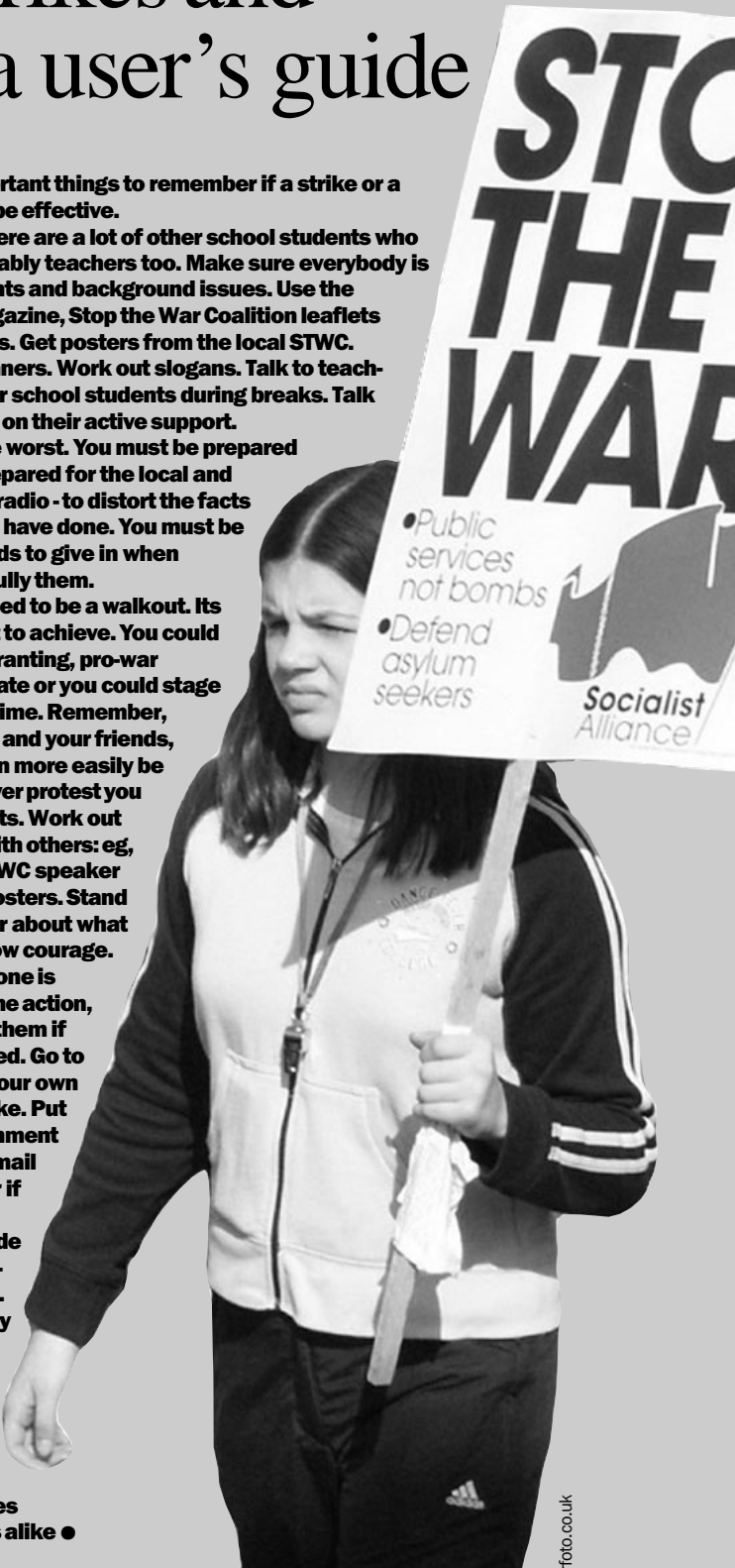


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# anti-war party



School students clash with police outside parliament

eminent according to exam passes - the sorry result is closer to a sausage factory than a life-enhancing place of learning.

Some teachers strongly object to this system. However, most believe that they have a duty to force their students to obey school rules and jump through an endless series of exam loops. Their final point of reference is not those seated before them. Rather it is the syllabus set from above. No wonder so many find school utterly boring, utterly frustrating, utterly pointless. Being forced to learn for the sake of exams is often a torture. Bunking off a widespread response.

The inevitable response from Charles Clarke, minister of education, is more police patrols, more truancy officers and more draconian powers. Parents are even imprisoned because their offspring hate the small-minded and stultifying atmosphere of school life.

Communists have a very different approach to the problem of boredom and frustration - democracy. There should be school councils, made up of students, teachers and people from

the local community with real powers - and school students over 16 should be able to freely elect and recall their representatives. Above all there should be a fully rounded and responsive education system that helps to develop the human potential and talents of all.

Democracy is never given to the weak: it has to be won by the strong. Democracy comes from below. Schools students can and must contribute to their own liberation. For that to happen they must build their own trade union-type organisations. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Schools Action Union and the National Union of School Students enjoyed a spectacular, if brief, existence. Widespread strikes and protests occurred over a whole number of issues - from objections to compulsory school uniforms to demands for the abolition of corporal punishment. Leftwing teachers and youth groups provided valuable support and advice. Today would be no different.

We would also argue as a matter of urgency that young people establish their own national

organisation in the anti-war party. Young people are in by far the best position to understand the problems and requirements of other young people. Eg, the need for Marxist political education. An anti-war youth network - with its own unrestricted democratic debates, elected and recallable officers, paper and finances - would be much better placed to harness the anger and energy of their peers than the middle-aged comrades who at present run the Stop the War Coalition and who often do not have a clue about how to relate to young people.

Youth, by definition, comes to politics, and must necessarily operate, in a different way from their parents and grandparents. That is why communists favour the complete organisational independence of a youth network - not only because well known control freaks fear such independence - but because without that complete independence the youth will never prepare themselves properly for the future ●

Jack Conrad

## Our programme

The CPGB's 'Draft programme' includes the following section on youth

**Y**outh are at the sharp end of Britain's capitalist decline. Young workers are in general not protected by trade union membership. Homelessness and unemployment are greatly disproportionate amongst the young. Training on official schemes is notoriously mediocre, designed more to massage government statistics than equip youth with the skills of the future. In the drive to cut costs basic education is under constant attack, with the standard of university education woefully diluted.

Youth are contradictorily fawned upon by advertisers, exploited as cheap labour and blamed for social decay. The system is in fact only interested in youth in terms of the cash register. Every ideal, every artistic talent is judged purely in terms of its ability to generate artificial needs in others. There are many who reject the twisted values of the system. But in despair they often turn to nihilism - itself turned into a commodity by capital-

ism.

The following demands are of crucial importance for youth:

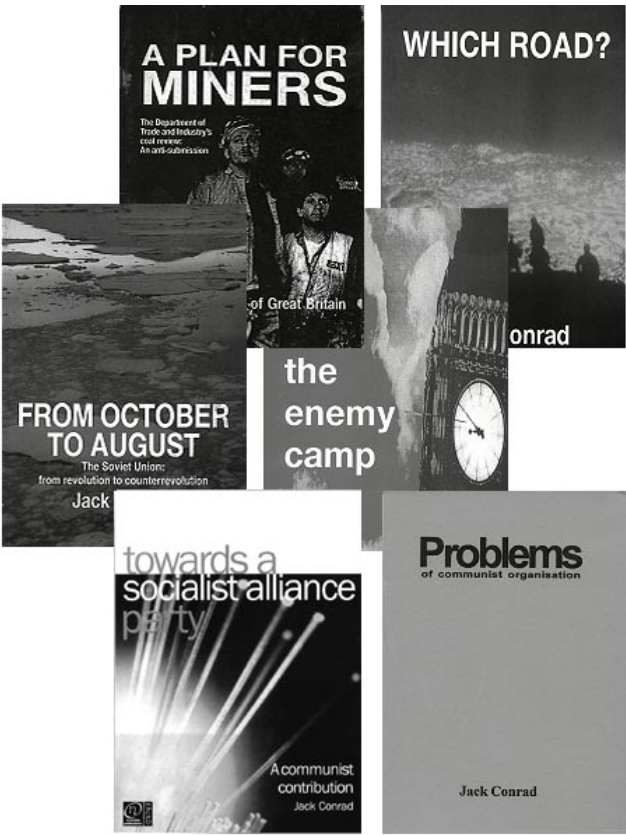
- The provision of housing/hostels for youth to enter of their own choice for longer or shorter periods when they lose their parents or choose to leave them.
- Compulsory education up until the age of 16 and from then on within a fully democratic system. Education should be free and of a polytechnical nature: that is, rounded to include technical skills, as well as academic.
- No religious schools, no private schools.
- Students over the age of 16 should receive grants set at the level of the minimum wage.
- The right of every young person on leaving education to either a job, proper training or full benefits.
- Remove all obstacles to the participation of youth in social life. Votes and the

right to be elected from the age of 16.

- The provision of a broad range of sports and cultural centres under the control of elected representatives of youth.
- The abolition of age-of-consent laws. We recognise the right of individuals to enter into the sexual relations they choose, provided this does not conflict with the rights of others. Alternative legislation to protect children from sexual abuse.
- The extensive provision of education and counselling facilities on all sexual matters, free from moralistic judgement, is an essential prerequisite to enable youth to develop themselves in all areas of sexuality and reproduction ●

CPGB 'Draft programme' - 50p; bulk orders - 10 copies for £4; from CPGB address. Or see our website.

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## STOP THE WAR

# Leadership lags behind

**Manny Neira** was among the hundreds of thousands who listened to the speeches in Hyde Park after last weekend's great anti-war march in London



Quick call, mass response

Photo.co.uk

**I was a little apprehensive as my train pulled into Waterloo on March 22. The demonstration had been called quickly, and inevitably some of those who had come out before would fall silent now British soldiers were under fire. If attendance was low, would we hand a propaganda**

**gift to our enemy? It is a tribute to the two million who demonstrated in London on February 15 that mere tens of thousands might be portrayed as a withering anti-war movement, but still a worry. I have never been happier to be wrong. Police estimated 200,000**

**and the Stop the War Coalition 750,000 protestors, despite Blair's attempts to rally the population behind the troops. As Samuel Johnson observed, patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel, and that particular scoundrel must have felt a chill as he realised that even**

**this refuge might not protect him from crisis and defeat. Just as February's demonstration had been the largest in peacetime, this was the largest in wartime: but the numbers do not tell all. To be there was to have an inkling of what a confident people can achieve.**

**Independent thought in the face of propaganda, and independent action when all three main parties now support 'our boys'. This was not a celebrity radicals bash, or a gathering of the left's 'usual suspects', but the voice of a people who would not be gagged with the union flag.**

**S**ome 30 speakers addressed the gathering for three hours. At least an hour must have been taken up with the repetition of slogans they could read on the placards and T-shirts facing them: a vast human autocue. The trouble the speakers had even matching the mood of the demonstrators, let alone adding something new, indicated that once again in our movement, the leadership is lagging behind the led.

**Jean Lambert**, a Green Party MEP, began with a "welcome to old Europe": the first of four cries of "*Vive la France*" to be heard that afternoon. Before praising the French government, we should remember the arms deals and commercial interests they negotiated with Saddam's dictatorship. They are squabbling with a competing imperialist, not defending the oppressed.

Though the greens already consider themselves leftwing for advocating economic stagnation to save the earth, there was a definite shift to the left in their adoption of socialist rhetoric, as they position themselves to capitalise on the anti-war feeling.

**Diane Abbott**, Labour MP for Hackney North, condemned the war as "illegal and immoral". Would she think it moral if it were 'legal'? 'International law' is a dangerous illusion when no force exists which can impose it on the US. At best the UN is a cartel run by imperialists to avoid wasting energy against each other, while preventing the emergence of any opposition from the nations they oppress. Like all agreements between thieves, it is largely ignored. No court can limit George Bush, and only the American working class can defeat those he represents.

**Dr Daud Abdullah**, assistant secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, warned the US president that, having started this war, "Bush cannot guarantee when it will end, or how". True as far as it goes but, while the fight of the Arab peoples against US imperialism is to be supported, it is ultimately the power of the American working class which must defeat them.

Abdullah highlighted the hypocrisy of claiming the support of a UN resolution for war against Iraq, while resolutions on Palest-

tine were ignored - the first of many references to Palestine that day. No communist would deny the bloody injustice done to the Palestinians, but class war, and not holy war, must be our aim.

Representing the school students whose protests have been so admirable, speakers from **Camden School** echoed the articulacy, radicalism and clarity of mind which so many young people have brought to the movement. They urged against despair, as there is "another innocent children in Iraq died, despite the police brutality they experienced in Parliament Square.

The raising of the consciousness of the young must be one of the most alarming aspects of this campaign for the government. Some have spoken lightly of the school student protests. They are wrong. Naturally, their political understanding is undeveloped, and they will not change society of themselves, but this first experience of struggle will always remain with them. It is a quick and effective teacher, and may protect them from the patronising nonsense of armchair socialists.

**Alice Mahon**, Labour MP for Halifax, said that the government had "lost the right to speak for us". It was a right they never had to begin with, but that is to quibble: she is right. She urged against despair, as there is "another America", and quoted a senator who "wept for his country". This was a timely reminder when some feel undifferentiated anti-Americanism. We would argue that the other America lies not in liberal senators, but the untapped power of their working class. She also gave voice to the dubious cry of "*Vive la France*".

A protestor from **Iraqi Kurdistan** said that the war was about neither Saddam nor terrorism, but "to pave the way for the bloody new world order", and demanded Bush and Blair be tried for their crimes against humanity: "They represent death and destruction: we represent life, happiness, and humanity."

**Jeremy Elsbey**, assistant general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, worried about the creation of a world ruled by force and not by law. He is dreaming. The oppressed peoples of the world know that imperialism has never been governed by law

- and certainly not by law that favours them.

Next up was **Adam Price**, Plaid Cymru MP for Carmarthen East. Like the greens, Plaid Cymru regards itself as leftwing, but, under pressure from the Welsh people, its rhetoric at least has been pushed yet further left. Plaid Cymru's base was once in the more Welsh-speaking north, but they have been making progress in the previously solidly Labour south: progress which should have fallen to the Welsh Socialist Alliance. An organisation which appears only at election time can expect the contempt of the working class.

Price naturally added a dash of nationalist green to his red flag, saying that "small countries around the world are united against this imperialist war". Whether he was claiming that the mere smallness of a country raised its consciousness (difficult to accept, given the protests in London, Paris, Berlin and even New York), or was seriously comparing the oppression of undeveloped capitalist countries with the position of Wales as part of imperialist Britain, is hard to say.

He rightly said that the Iraqis will end up paying both for the war which will kill so many of them, and the 'reconstruction' - with their own blood as well as with their oil. The US corporate vultures are hovering over Iraq, and contracts are already been awarded even as the bombs fall.

**Paul Mackney**, general secretary of Natfhe, the lecturers' union, began with a few questions: "Tony, who's the terrorist now? Jack, do you have enough evidence of weapons of mass destruction yet? Clare, is there enough reconstruction for you to do yet?" He saluted school students, the "people of the new generation", and added to the increasingly long list of accolades for imperialist France.

Mackney told the

**... all three main parties now support 'our boys'**

crowd: "You should strike. The TUC should be organising that!" After an hour and a half of talk, this was the first direct call for coordinated, working class action.

**Mandy Telford**, president of the national Union of Students, commended the students who had protested, and pointed out that the war was being funded while students were in poverty.

Next one of the many **Palestinian activists** present spoke, arguing Israel, and not Iraq, was the 'rogue state' in the Middle East - with more weapons of mass destruction and broken UN resolutions. He predicted Sharon intended to "liquidate the Palestine problem under the cover of war".

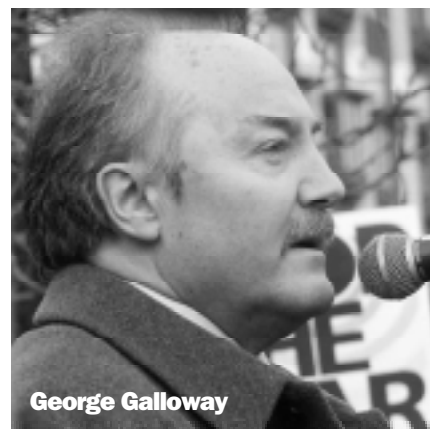
A young woman, aged 16, then spoke on behalf of the youth of the **Muslim Association of Britain**. She grew up in Iraq and wanted to return - "but not via the American route". She denounced the war as a crime, pointing out: "The people Bush and Blair claim to be defending are dying under their bombs." She wondered why such suffering was being visited on Iraq, asking: "Is our blood a different colour?" Ironically, this echoed the words of Shakespeare's Jewish character, Shylock: "If you prick us, do we not bleed?"

She quoted US secretary of state Madeleine Albright, who, on being asked whether sanctions against Iraq were worth 500,000 child deaths, replied: "Yes, I think they are." But for the US, she said, "we'd have overthrown Saddam long ago".

**Bruce Kent**, vice-president of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, claimed that we have a new weapon in the International Criminal Court. But this is fantasy: no undefeated imperialist power will allow its leaders or even ex-leaders to be tried.

He called for a "new world with new structures, where people come before profit". I remember speaking at CND-run meetings where my arguments for social change as a cure to war were howled down as politically divisive to the 'broadness' of the CND campaign, alienating Liberals and the odd peacenik Conservative. How times change.

**Jeremy Dear**, general secretary of the National Union of Journalists, led on censorship: through selective state broadcasting as well



George Galloway

# the led

as through the political bias forced on private media by its owners. Even the Oscars had tried to ban anti-war speeches. “They don’t want you to know that bombs hit hospitals, that two fell in Iran, and that the coalition of the willing was simply the coalition of those who had been bribed by the US.”

He would accept no lectures on the Iraq regime, as “we marched against Saddam while *they* armed him”. He called for our aim not merely to be against war but for a better world based on the needs of the many rather than the profit of the few.

Another **Iraqi exile** argued that there was no case for the war: “The more war, the more reconstruction; the more reconstruction, the more profit: this is the logic of capitalism and imperialism.”

He left us with the day’s second memorable quote from a US politician. Being questioned on the bombing campaign, and with no trace of irony, US secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld said: “A lot of humanity goes into targeting.”

By now we had been listening to speeches for two hours, and it was time for a little light relief. **Donnachadh McCarthy**, deputy chair of the Liberal Democrats, duly took the platform. “To those who call the Lib Dems traitors,” he began - and we assumed he was talking to us, the demonstrators who had endured Charles Kennedy on February 15, only to have him now ‘supporting the troops’ - “we say the most patriotic thing is not to put our soldiers into an illegal war.”

“And now I’m going to say something which may be controversial.” It is difficult to describe the effect this promise had on the mood of an audience already slightly stunned. “We are all part of the oil economy. When you drive your car, you are part of the oil economy. Don’t drive your car when you don’t need it. Turn your lights off at home. This will undermine the power of the oil economy for Bush and Cheney.”

It seems that under the intense pressure of having to make their minds up, the Lib Dems have simply gone barking mad.

**Jeremy Corbyn**, Labour MP for Islington North, said that “ordinary people are not prepared to support this war”, and had a warning for his boss: “I’ve heard Tony Blair and Jack Straw worry that young people are not sufficiently interested in politics. When they blocked Parliament Square it seems they were, and Tony Blair should reflect that young people are not going to forget this experience.”

A speaker from the **Kurdish Society** spoke on behalf of the Kurdish community in Britain, pointing out that, though in 1985 the government had banned military exports to Iran, in 1987 licenses were still being granted for exports to Iraq. It seemed that under neither the Conservatives then nor Labour now could the Kurds expect justice.

**Tariq Ali** called on the UN not to be a “cleaning company” for the US. Demands on the UN have no value. The US can veto its decisions and ignore its censure. It is a talking shop for imperialism and used to give a veneer of legality to oppression (though the latter is clearly no longer considered necessary, it seems).

He was another to lead the thoughtless chorus of “*Vive la France*”.

**Mark Serwotka**, general secretary of the Public and Civil Service Union, repeated the statement that the government had no democratic mandate for war, and in reply to Blair’s call for ‘unity’ said that if the war was barbaric when planned, it was barbaric when fought. He declared himself proud to be leader of a union whose members walked out on March 20 in protest at the start of war, and closed with a cry of “We can stop it!” He is right - both about the need to mobilise workers, and about the power they hold.

**Dr Azam Tamimi** spoke for the MAB. He argued against, but predicted, “a thousand bin Ladens, more brutal and more savage than bin Laden ever was”.

The original bin Laden served only to alienate the American working class, the only

force with the potential to defeat US imperialism once and for all. Once the US working class is stirred into action, Bush will fear it more than even “a thousand bin Ladens” - the answer is class war and not holy war.

**Keith Sonnet**, deputy general secretary of Unison, said that if the US and UK wanted to “save the world” they would not have supported Saddam or sold arms to Sharon in Israel, and would have supported the formation of a state of Palestine.

**Mary Compton**, junior vice-president of the NUT, spoke “as a teacher” of the problems of explaining the war to children even here, let alone in Iraq. How could she teach the importance of truth, when the government called oppression ‘liberation’; or of democracy when the people of Britain were ignored? Finally, how could she condemn bullying as the US attacked an innocent people?

Journalist **Yvonne Ridley**, once held by the Taliban in Afghanistan, called the war an attack on all our liberties, and demanded we rescue our democracy from “the thieves in parliament”. The answer was “civil disobedience”. This is as far as individual radicals - without revolutionary politics rooted in an understanding of the power of the working class - can go.

A speaker for the **Muslim Women Society**, a doctor, had seen child deaths caused by sanctions - which the Iraqi people wanted no more than war itself.

**Billy Hayes**, general secretary of the Communication Workers Union, jibed that the government wanted to ban firefighters’ strikes and seemed in favour only of air strikes.

**Blanca Jagger** is one of those self-appointed ambassadors of human niceness who move with the media spotlight from issue to issue, visiting ‘trouble spots’, addressing the United Nations - and achieving nothing. She demanded the war stop to allow the UN to administer humanitarian aid: a pointless individual making a futile demand of a corrupt organisation.

**Ken Livingstone**, the mayor of London, reminded the gathering of Churchill’s gassing of the Iraqis when they opposed the imperialist rule he had established to secure British oil supplies.

Apparently Ken has been on the phone to Jesse Jackson, and they agreed to hold a conference to plan a “new society in which power is not concentrated in a few hands”. While applauding these aims, one wonders again at the supreme confidence which underlies this rather substantial project. Perhaps he could win back the tube with and for its workers and passengers before reordering society.

**Lindsey German** is editor of the Socialist Workers Party’s *Socialist Review* and convener of the STWC. She equated attacking a nation where half the population is under 16 as equivalent to “bombing a playground”.

She promised that she will “continue to demonstrate as long as it takes”, but if that is *all* she does she may be demonstrating long after the US has occupied, set up their puppet government and left. The SWP claims to be a revolutionary party, seeing wars like this one as symptomatic of the imperialist rule of the few, and only reversible by the action of the working class: and in this we agree. Why not a word of this to the thousands listening to her?

**Tony Benn** called the war a “massive terrorist attack”. He described the US policy of ‘full spectrum dominance’ - by space, air, sea, land and, above all, information - and accused the US and UK of using misinformation as a weapon. He declared: “Only the peoples of the world are entitled to run the world.” We agree, but, having worked all his life to achieve this through parliament and finally left in disgust, how does he propose to achieve this now?

And finally, **George Galloway**, Labour MP for Glasgow Kelvin, stood forward. He denounced the BBC for marginalising the views of the majority, and argued that any opposition to protesting against a war on the grounds of ‘my country right or wrong’ belonged in the 19th century, along with the current gunboat diplomacy. He was not anti-soldier, seeing British troops as “lions led by donkeys”.

He said that the idea that Iraqis have been waiting for foreigners to liberate them by killing them was “racist nonsense”, and would be exposed as they resisted the US in every town and city.

This drew the loudest cheer of the day. Communists will know that arguing the case for the defeat of the imperialist actions of one’s own country can be a challenge, as the government wraps itself in the flag. Here, though, the idea that this imperialist adventure might earn the US and UK a beating was popular. Rather defeat for US-UK forces than their victory.

The most telling speech of the day, though, was the one the Socialist Alliance failed to deliver. Like a café owner closing for lunch, the SA postponed its conference until ‘after the war’ - only the CPGB and a single independent opposing this move. As the greens, Plaid Cymru and even the Lib Dems position themselves to reap fresh support, the SA is silent ●

## Fighting fund

# Anti-war boost

Once again I am grateful to anti-war protestors for helping to boost our fighting fund. While selling our paper on Saturday’s brilliant demonstration in London, I personally experienced the generosity of several *Weekly Worker* supporters.

A comrade from Turkey that I had never seen before surprised me by offering a £5 note and refusing the change - that’s £4.50 extra, to go with the dozens of 50 pences that people offering a £1 coin decided to forego. At the latest count I have £44 in donations just from the London demo - I’m still waiting for contributions collected elsewhere across the country to come in.

It’s just as well that demonstrators are helping to keep us in the black,

because postal gifts have again been somewhat lacking over the last week. Exceptions have been HJ, PT and FJ, who all sent me £20, and JD, who came up with a tenner. Altogether we have £464 towards our monthly target of £500 - but with just four days left. The March fund closes at noon on Monday March 31.

How about more of you internet punters putting your hands in your pocket? Last week 7,085 read us on the CPGB website - help fund the voice of communism we provide ●

Robbie Rix

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

# What we fight for

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

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

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

■ Communists are fully committed to building the anti-war movement but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Firefighters  
grapple with  
pay and Iraq

FBU in turmoil

Last week’s Fire Brigades Union conference overwhelmingly rejected the executive’s attempt to end their long-running dispute because of the war. London regional officer **Matt Wrack** discusses the new situation

The March 19 conference had been called to discuss the employers’ ‘final offer’. This had come out of the process agreed to by the union leadership that ended after four weeks of talks.

Branches across the country had discussed this offer, which the FBU executive council had recommended be rejected (but which was in fact amended within three days in favour of a second ‘final offer’ - a few words were changed).

Of particular concern were the strings attached. These were to end all current national agreements on hours of work and duty systems and give the right to individual fire brigades to introduce their own duty systems at each separate location, if they so choose. This would include an obligation on individual fire-fighters to work anywhere, at any time, on any duty within their competence, as determined by the fire authority. There was to be complete flexibility of the workforce.

No details were specified - we were to sign up only to the employers’ right to make these changes. This would allow the watch system to be ended, although the employers denied that would necessarily be the case. Their position is that the best person, for example, to decide the most suitable duty system for the London fire brigade is the London fire brigade chief officer rather than the national employers.

There was to be no provision for negotiations. Under the current disputes procedure, with its status quo provision and so on, there is some protection, but now they were proposing that both sides would have to agree before the disputes procedure could operate - effectively a veto. So it is not about negotiation: it is about the employers’ right to implement. These were big sticking points for the membership - and originally for the EC, which had said they was completely unacceptable.

Every brigade in the country went to the conference with a clear mandate to reject that offer. The day before, London held a regional meeting to confirm our rejection, but, an hour or so later, we received an EC report that there had been another, third, ‘final offer’, which the executive was now recommending be accepted.

The changes concern things like duty systems, where it is stated that there should be the aim of seeking consensus. New duty systems should *take account of* individual needs and be family-friendly. There should be “consultation” (not negotiation) between the employer and the trade union, and the national joint council joint secretaries and the ‘independent’ chair would be available to provide advice on implementation. The language had been made less threatening, but there was no fundamental change. Still the right to impose duty systems at local level unilaterally. Still the bilateral disputes procedure that would give the employers a

veto, and so on.

Our regional committee, like most conference delegates, were taken aback that the EC were now recommending this. It turned out that the executive in its meeting on the eve of conference had decided to do so by 12 votes to six. Andy Gilchrist himself had introduced the motion for acceptance. The EC also decided to cancel the strike due for March 20. They did not wait for the conference to discuss this, but took the decision to call it off themselves.

The conference, had it been given the chance, may well have voted for the strike to go ahead, although it was not that clear-cut - there is a layer of people who oppose the deal, but who are in favour of suspending action during the war.

There was a lot of discussion that evening and the following morning. It was rather unfortunate, however, that the first time most delegates got a copy of the new document was when they sat in their seats at the conference. We were told that there had been problems getting sufficient photocopies done before then, even though the conference hotel had its own business centre.

London had by this time drafted an emergency motion which simply said that the recommendation to members should be the opposite - for rejection. Other brigades had also drafted motions. But when conference opened we were immediately told that the standing orders committee would not be in session and that therefore no further motions could be taken.

There was a challenge to the chair in view of the fact that the situation had clearly changed: there was a new offer which had just been presented and we obviously had the right to consider it and to submit emergency motions in the light of that new offer. The challenge to standing orders was won with just four votes against out of about 250. This was a sign of the mood of conference.

We then adjourned for the whole of the morning - nobody could understand why. When we resumed, there were several emergency motions putting various positions. Firstly West Midlands, supported by Strathclyde, proposed that immediately following the EC statement the conference should close and reconvene after members had been consulted. The effect of this would have been to prevent all the other motions being taken (the president ruled that the West Midlands proposal should be taken first). A number of delegates said that this was undemocratic and an attempt to stifle debate, but fortunately this motion was overwhelmingly rejected.

There were then four key opposition motions. Greater Manchester called for rejection of the offer and for the strike to go ahead the following day. This was soon withdrawn. Derbyshire’s motion simply stated that conference rejects the deal, while Essex called for strike action

at the earliest possible opportunity. London called for conference to recommend that the *members* should reject the deal.

The thinking of our region was that the strike that had been called off would be illegal if it was reinstated - we could possibly have succeeded, but it would have been hard at a day’s notice to reverse the EC decision.

Our motion did not directly call for more strikes, but that was certainly implicit in it. We were prepared to support the other three motions, but we thought that tactically we would be in the strongest position if the recalled conference were to take the decision for renewed action.

The press will be saying, ‘This is a new deal - let your members discuss it.’ The recommendation for the members to reject the offer at a future conference was aimed at winning over brigades who were perhaps coming from a different perspective.

Andy Gilchrist’s argument was that the new document contained significant improvements. We had come a long way and he did not think that in the current political climate we could make any further progress. He stated that a number of members were reluctant to strike during the war and there was a concern that public support would be lost.

He said there had been very few calls for escalation and that seemed to demonstrate to him that the members were not enthusiastic for continuing the fight. But this is a lot of nonsense. He had not even stuck to his own strategy of discontinuous strikes - there have only been 15 days of industrial action since November. True, the members have not been calling for all-out action: they have been saying, ‘Stop cancelling the strikes.’

The EC struggled to find a seconder for the recommendation in favour of acceptance. There was one region that was prepared to do so in the end, but the proposal won almost no support. Although the motions from Derbyshire

and Essex were defeated, the London motion was carried.

I have no doubt that the members are prepared to take further strike action. Certainly in London some people have been talking about being prepared to continue the dispute for the next year. I attended a branch meeting last night that unanimously rejected the latest offer. There were about 40 people attending, which would be about two-thirds of the branch. Another branch unanimously rejected it today. I think this is typical. It is not easy to continue the fight when your own leadership does not want to, but in London at least there will be an overwhelming rejection - again.

Andy Gilchrist has disappointed a lot of members. Many people have seen through him. At all the FBU branch meetings I have been to since the conference, a recurring theme has been how we get rid of the leadership. I have never before been in a branch meeting where 40 people have been discussing how to get rid of the general secretary and the whole executive council - quite an unusual situation to be in.

Members were debating whether it was tactically best to wait until the dispute was over before trying to change the leadership. But others were asking, if we do not move now, how can we get a grip on the dispute? To let the same people carry on does not seem sustainable. It is a question of arriving at a consensus amongst activists as to the best way of getting control.

There are a number of other problems, the biggest being the war. Firstly the leadership has never addressed this issue properly. Andy Gilchrist has never gone out and campaigned, to explain to people why we should carry on with the strike action regardless and that has obviously undermined confidence.

Secondly, if there had been a programme of strike action already in place when the war started, we would have been in a very strong position to carry on. Even in the branch which voted unanimously for rejection, the mood had

shifted very much against taking strike action during the war.

As the conference is not until April 15, so the simple logistics are that it would be at least seven days after that before a strike could take place, so we are talking about another four weeks. That is not how we would like it, but there is a get-out in that the political situation could have changed dramatically and the war could be over.

My own brigade committee had a very long and honest debate and voted by 12 votes to seven that we should carry on in the case of a war. That reflects the differences.

It is clearly not ideal when there are seven delegates who felt they had to vote against. This feeling will have increased, firstly because strike action has not been taking place, and secondly because the war has now started. The mood will have shifted against striking during the war, but I do not know to what extent.

We have encouraged members to participate in anti-war action. Whereas previously we had lost the vote to affiliate to Labour Against the War, our regional committee did recently agree to affiliate to the Stop the War Coalition. We publicised widely the February 15 demonstration and there was a big FBU contingent.

The idea that the union should lead a political strike against the war cannot be sustained. There is a danger that left-wing activists could appear to want to use the dispute for that purpose. We have thought about making a video of ex-service firefighters arguing the case for striking during the war.

The point is, if the labour movement were to call political strikes against the war, that would be one thing. But our members have not taken that decision. That is different from saying that we should accept a truce in the ‘national interest’ while the war is on. There are no good reasons for us to call off our dispute because of a war over which we have no control ●

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